

**An exploration of Teaching Assistants' views on how they support
children during unstructured times and analysis of TA-pupil interactions
on the playground**

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STUDENT DECLARATION

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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ABSTRACT

This small-scale, exploratory study used semi-structured interviews to investigate the perceptions and experiences of seven TAs in two mainstream primary schools regarding their role, with a particular focus on their support of children on the playground. This study also explored the nature of three of the TAs' interactions with pupils on the playground via audio-recordings and field note observations. A separate thematic analysis of both sets of data was conducted before comparisons were made between them.

Findings showed that TAs used an intuitive graduated approach to support a wide range of children on the playground, which was presented in a model called the graduated response model (GRM-R). This included the support of children's peer interactions, in particular regarding play and conflict, as well as support relating to behaviour, safety, injury, illness and procedural matters. Their interactions with children relating to these categories were often more than supervisory, involving sensitive responsiveness to children's needs within the situation, as a result of their relationships with them.

This suggests encouraging possibilities for a distinctive non-pedagogical role for TAs, built through their relationships with children and others in the school system and placing them in a unique position to support children's emotional wellbeing across a range of contexts including in the playground.

TAs also highlighted a need for flexibility across their role, driven by their relationships with others in the school system. However, this very flexibility also made it difficult for expectations of their practice to be formalised in a range of contexts including the playground.

This study provides a distinct, original and significant contribution to the field regarding TAs' non-pedagogical role in the playground, particularly regarding the potential of the revised graduated response model for informing future research and practice. It also highlights the role of TAs in the inclusion agenda, particularly in relation to facilitating the social inclusion of pupils with SEND.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Current research context

Teaching Assistant (TA) numbers have been steadily increasing year on year since the 1990's (DfE, 2016a). The most recent data available suggested that there were 263,000 full time equivalent TAs working in the UK in November 2015, an overall increase of 3.1% since 2014. However a differing trend arose between primary and secondary schools with TA numbers increasing in primary schools by 5% but decreasing by 3% in secondary schools. This is likely to be related to varying pupil numbers nationally which have been steadily increasing at primary level but declining at secondary level between 2004 and 2015 (DfE, 2016a).

Research suggests that TA deployment is determined by school factors, such as school organisation, management and culture (Symes & Humphrey, 2011) which increasingly require TAs to take a pedagogical role with little training and support (Brown & Devecchi, 2013; Fletcher-Campbell, 2010; Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin & Russell, 2010b).

Yet there has recently been considerable debate about the appropriateness of a pedagogical role for TAs, fuelled by growing research on their deployment and effectiveness (DfE, 2016a; Saddler, 2014). Mounting evidence suggests that prevalent models of TA deployment in pedagogical roles are an ineffective means of supporting pupils academically, for example where they are used as a tool for the inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) through being assigned to work 1:1 or with small groups of them (Baxter, 2014; Blatchford, Russell & Webster, 2012; Saddler, 2014).

The historical trend towards the inclusion of children with SEND into mainstream schools followed the Warnock Report in the 1970's (DES, 1978). Initially children with SEND were integrated into mainstream classrooms with an expectation that they should adapt to this environment. However during the 1980's a shift towards inclusion took place where, according to the social model of disability (Oliver, 2013), reasonable adjustments were instead expected to be made to the environment to accommodate the child with SEND. This ideology

was supported with Government funding as well as legislation (DfE 2001; UNICEF 1989).

However, research suggests there remains a gap between the practical implementation of inclusion and its ideology (Rouse, 2017). For example the frequent use of models mentioned above, where TA deployment is a means for implementing inclusion, have been described as a 'weak' form of inclusion (Evans & Lunt, 2002; Webster & Blatchford 2013). This gap is likely to be due to debate about the meaning and definition of inclusion leading to a lack of clarity on the subject (Nilholm & Göransson, 2017) and vague descriptions of what inclusion should look like in practice (Evans & Lunt, 2002).

As a result of research describing the negative academic consequences of the use of TAs in this way, there have been recent reforms in the identification and provision of support for children and young people with SEND which place responsibility back in the hands of the teacher and advocate a greater focus on outcomes (DfE & DoH, 2015). Reforms promoted a message that quality rather than quantity of provision should be valued by schools and parents, signifying a move away from 'velcro' TA support as a mechanism for the inclusion of children with SEND (Webster, 2014).

While the reforms challenge long established anecdotal discourses that the inclusion of children with SEND in mainstream schools are best achieved via high levels of TA support, they provide little clarity about what an alternative approach might look like practically and how it might be achieved (Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2012; Webster 2014). Change to satisfy the reforms is further hampered by a climate of political and economic austerity, placing increasing financial pressure on Local Authority services including schools.

It is difficult to predict the future of TAs' role, for example whether the factors above will lead to a reduction in TA numbers over the next few years. However, undoubtedly, in order for appropriate decisions to be made about the future of TAs, there needs to be a full understanding of the nature and effectiveness of their current role across all contexts in which they are deployed including how they facilitate the social inclusion of children with SEND. It is of particular

importance to learn how TAs support children socially, especially as the children to whom they are often assigned can have difficulties with social interaction as part of the characteristics of their needs (Causton-Theoharris & Malmgren, 2005).

Yet research to date has generally focussed on deployment and effectiveness in relation to TA support of children's academic development (Blatchford et al., 2009b; Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2012; Farrell, Alborz, Howes & Pearson, 2010), overlooking other areas of TAs' role that might offer viable alternatives or additions to a pedagogical one.

The Government has recently withdrawn a set of professional standards for TAs commissioned by the Department for Education in 2014, instead releasing a statement placing the responsibility on schools to decide on the deployment of TAs. This has been viewed by the TA community as a denial of their professionalism (Scott, 2015). Although representatives from the organisations who helped to devise the standards published them as non-statutory (UNISON, 2016), these and other guidance documents (Sharples, Webster & Blatchford, 2015) do not include any standards for TAs' role in non-academic support such as on the playground. While specific qualifications remain not requisite for the role, guidance on TA career development only suggest vocational qualifications that cover support of children's play as an 'add on' module (UNISON, 2015).

1.2 Theoretical gaps in research

Due to the lack of research outside TAs' pedagogical role and support of academic development, TA support of children's peer interactions has largely been ignored (Saddler, 2014). However, issues that have been highlighted in research exploring TAs' impact on children's academic achievement, such as separation from the teacher and overdependence, have also been predicted by a small number of studies to reduce opportunities for children's peer interactions in the classroom (Webster & Blatchford, 2013). Existing research focuses primarily on a potential negative impact of TA support on peer interactions (Giangreco et al., 2010; Webster & Blatchford, 2013) and a surprisingly small amount of evidence suggesting a positive role for TAs in this area (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, Martin, Russell, Webster &

Rubie-Davies, 2009a; Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell & Webster, 2009b) has largely been ignored in subsequent research.

Furthermore, research to date does not explore in detail exactly how TAs might support or hinder peer interactions naturalistically and implicitly, particularly through their talk (Baxter, 2014). Some research has begun to investigate how TAs carry out their pedagogical role through analysis of their talk with children in the classroom (Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou & Bassett, 2010; Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, Blatchford & Rubie-Davies, 2014). However, there has not been investigation of this kind exploring TAs' support of children's peer interactions. Research to date also fails to explore the factors that may be influencing their support (Baxter, 2014). There is also little investigation of how TAs apply structured interventions to support peer interactions (Webster & Blatchford, 2015).

Furthermore, despite TAs' varied role, due to the disproportionate focus in the literature on investigating their impact on academic outcomes the majority of research tends to investigate TA support in structured, formal contexts such as the classroom (Saddler, 2014). Research often does not explicitly distinguish between or consider differences in approaches used to support in structured and unstructured contexts (Baxter, 2014).

1.3 Methodological gaps in research

Some of the above theoretical gaps in research may have come about as a result of the methodologies used by studies to date. A more general focus on wider TA roles rather than exploring specific aspects of their role has resulted in a lack of detail regarding exactly how TAs carry out different parts of their role and a focus on negative consequences of their support, possibly due to the way qualitative methods have been used in studies. This has failed to fully establish an accurate descriptive picture of TA support or their impact in this area. The frequent lack of distinction between contexts in research may have occurred as a result of the methods used by studies that have considered TAs role in this area. For example, much of the literature discussing the impact of TA support on social factors have arisen incidentally through qualitative interviews, case studies and observations within a broader area of research, often within

discussions of TA roles and responsibilities (Blatchford et al., 2009a; Downing et al., 2000; Giangreco 2010; Tews & Lupart, 2008) or disability and inclusion best practice debates (Carter & Pesko, 2008; Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Hall & Macvean, 1997; Hemmingsson, Borell & Gustavsson, 2003). The incidental nature of much of the findings prevents studies from using methodologies that precisely select and examine differences in TA support between contexts.

Furthermore, a small number of studies have designed and implemented structured training interventions for TAs to support peer interactions without first exploring the interventions or implicit strategies that might already be in use by TAs. Many of the studies investigating this area have small sample sizes and have been conducted in the US or Europe, limiting the generalisability of findings. There is also a lack of consensus in research on the type of social factor being investigated.

1.4 Summary and aims

It is hoped that the current small-scale, exploratory study may contribute to and build on evidence to date through beginning to unpick TAs current role in the support of peer interactions through exploring how a small sample of TAs in two primary schools perceive their role, including in the support of peer interactions in unstructured contexts and how they currently support peer interactions through their talk with children in the playground. The aim of the study was to gather information on existing good practice and draw up some recommendations that can be used by education professionals to support TAs to develop this area of their role.

This research is therefore relevant to the Educational Psychologist (EP) role as they are well placed to work collaboratively and systemically within schools (Wagner, 2000) to advise on the effective deployment of TAs for the achievement and social inclusion of children. EPs are in a good position to promote recommendations from the current study in a complimentary way to recommendations from research that they already use in their advice to schools regarding TAs pedagogical role (Webster, 2014). This is compatible with EPs role in promoting and harnessing learning, achievement and social, emotional

and mental health due to the association between positive interactions with peers and other areas of children's development.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter explores the wider contextual literature with consideration to the current political and social context followed by a critique of key studies relevant to the current study. Gaps in the literature are discussed throughout and the current study's research questions are presented. This chapter will discuss research on TAs' role in the support of children's peer interactions as well as research on their impact. It is important to consider research on TAs' role before discussing their impact because these two concepts are inevitably interrelated and both have been under-researched.

2.2 Terminology used in the current research

For the purpose of this research, the term TA is used to describe any member of school support staff in classrooms including Learning Support Assistant, Classroom Assistant, Paraprofessional and Special Needs Assistant. However, it must be acknowledged that collapsing these terms may hide differences between the roles.

The term Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is defined in the SEN code of practice as;

'A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her. A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she:

- has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or*
- has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions' (DfE & DoH, 2015 p.15-16).*

As discussed in the introduction there has been a specific focus in previous research on TAs' pedagogical role meaning that research addressing how TAs support children's social development is scarce. As a result, this study initially chose to identify and examine the ways in which TAs support a specific aspect of children's social development, their peer interactions, within the playground

context for reasons that are described below. However, due to the exploratory nature of the study, some additional findings emerged during the research journey concerning TAs own interactions and relationships with children in addition to the findings concerning TAs support of children's peer interactions.

This literature review upholds the original intention and focus of this study in order to demonstrate the progression during the research process to include findings on TA-pupil relationships in addition to findings related to the original focus of the study. As a result, the originally identified term peer interactions will remain key within this literature review, allowing literature related to the additional findings around adult-child interactions and relationships to be considered within the discussion.

Peer interactions have been described as:

'The sequence of physical or verbal exchanges that occur between members of a friendship or peer group' (Ladd, 2005, p.6).

Peer interactions rather than peer relationships were chosen because peer interactions are short-lived encounters that occur in isolation. Conversely, peer relationships consist of many interactions with the same peers that extend over time (Ladd, 2005). Rubin et al., (2007) suggest that peer interactions are the simplest of three successive levels of children's experiences with one another, leading to relationships and groups. Thus it is more likely that peer relationships are influenced over time by other variables (Ladd, 2005).

The terms '*peer interaction*' and '*social interaction*' are often used interchangeably in research. However, the term peer interaction refers specifically to a social interaction that involves peers (Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, 2007). Due to this study's initial specific interest in TA support of children's social interactions with one another, the term 'peer interaction' will therefore be used within this literature review due to its focus on the involvement of peers. Discussion of extant research on adult mediation of peer interactions will occur in a later section of this literature review.

2.3 What is meant by effective peer interactions?

Interactions are described as 'didactic behaviour' where each participant's action is a response to and also a stimulus for another participant's. An example of this is turn taking in conversations (Rubin et al., 2007). Bruce, Hansson and Williams (2011) suggest effective peer interactions include providing coherence through topic continuation and responsiveness to the other's turns but also assertiveness in contributing through one's own turns. They also describe the importance of a mutual influence on the topic and context.

There is a developmental trajectory to peer interactions, where developmental differences and other factors such as the size of peer group and setting change the nature of interactions over time (Rubin et al., 2007). Peer interactions start at pre-verbal developmental levels and are considered a prerequisite to language, social and cognitive development. However language and communication skills are also a predictor of successful peer interactions (Bruce & Hansson, 2011). At the earliest stage, peer interactions appear exploratory in nature, often based around objects or involve intense watching or reciprocal glances (Bruce & Hansson, 2011). They often start to develop through games (Blatchford, Pellegrini & Baines, 2016).

Interactions can be positive or negative based on behaviours that move toward, move against, or move away from other children (Blatchford et al., 2016). Understanding of how to vary responses in order to fit the context, specific goals, other peer's thoughts and feelings and previous interactions has been described as social competence (Blatchford et al., 2016).

This study chose to explore peer interactions rather than any other social phenomena because, as described earlier, they are a prerequisite to developing other more complex social skills and relationships (Bruce & Hansson, 2011). Children, particularly those with difficulties in this area, therefore need opportunities for a variety of peer interactions to practice the skills involved in order to develop higher-level social skills and peer relationships (Bruce &

Hansson, 2011). This highlights the importance of research exploring early proactive intervention strategies to support children's peer interactions.

2.4 Systematic literature search

In October 2015 a systematic literature search was carried out to review the available research about the present topic. Follow up and additional searches were carried out periodically between January 2016 and May 2017. Due to the limited research to date, combinations of wide variety of search terms were used to give a general overview of the topic. For example 'naturalistic', 'paraprofessional', 'teaching assistant', 'training', 'intervention', 'faciliate', 'peer interaction', 'interaction', 'talk', 'peer engagement', 'social', 'playground', 'breaktime', 'recess', 'unstructured', 'natural', 'school', 'child', 'pupil' within the following databases: PsychInfo: ETHOS: Eric: Web of Knowledge and Google Scholar. Studies from outside the UK and journals that were not peer reviewed were included in the searches. Further references were harvested from the journals found.

2.5 TAs' non-pedagogical role

Despite the significance of peer interactions on children's overall development and wellbeing (Black-Hawkins, 2010; Hartup, 1996; Malmgren, Causton-Theoharis, & Trezek, 2005), TAs' role in support of this area remains under researched (Saddler, 2014). Research that has been conducted is largely qualitative and tends to focus on TAs supporting a child 1:1 rather than the full range of TA roles. It also tends to look more broadly at peer relationships or social inclusion rather than at peer interactions specifically.

For example, conflicting evidence has arisen between qualitative studies as a result of mixed accounts from pupils themselves. Some commented on their TA being a valued protector, filling the gaps in their social relationships (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008) while others highlighted that TA proximity prevented the development of friendships (Broer, Doyle & Giangreco, 2005). Some described being viewed as 'a package deal' with their TA (Giangreco et al., 1997) causing

their social inclusion to be influenced by the whether the TA they were allotted was liked or not by peers (Tews & Lupart, 2008).

Conflicting evidence has also occurred within studies. For example case studies within the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project, a five year longitudinal study, found that TAs may have a negative effect on peer relations in the classroom by creating isolation and dependency. However for year 9 children only TAs were reported to have a positive impact on independence and relationships with peers (Blatchford et al., 2009a; Blatchford, et al., 2009b). Although these particular findings were based solely on teacher ratings, they suggested that in some circumstances, TA support may facilitate peer relationships and autonomy in the classroom (Blatchford et al., 2009a; 2009b; Downing, Ryndak & Clarke, 2000). It was not uncovered exactly how TAs facilitated peer relationships and independence in that age group or the underlying factors behind such conflicting evidence.

There is clearly a need for further detailed investigation of the possible positive role of TAs in the support of peer interactions. Research to date that has specifically explored peer interactions has focussed on the possible negative effect of TAs on this aspect of their support (Giangreco, 2010). Such research gathered via observation and interviews suggests that the excessive close proximity of TAs (Bang & Lamb, 1996; Broer et al., 2005; Causton-Theoharris & Malmgren, 2005; Giangreco, 2010; Tews & Lupart, 2008) creates a barrier between the child and their peers, reducing opportunities for peer interaction (Kim, 2005; Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin & Russell, 2010a; Webster & Blatchford 2015). TAs are also argued to further isolate children they support by dominating and interrupting interactions that do occur with peers (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997) often creating an exclusive relationship replacing that of peer relationships (Tews & Lupart, 2008).

Research also suggests that pupils being supported by a TA can become stigmatised by classmates through making them appear different (Giangreco 2010; Salend & Duhaney, 1999). This difference is highlighted through nature of TA deployment, where supported children are separated physically from

classmates by being withdrawn from class or seated separately, and are given different tasks to other children (Causton-Theoharris & Malmgren, 2005b; Giangreco et al., 2010; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Blatchford et al., 2009b). It is argued that this separation can lead to the loss of a sense of belonging for children with SEND and to feelings of disenfranchisement (Baxter, 2014; Broer et al., 2005). There is also evidence that TAs can encourage dependence through being overly supportive (Giangreco et al., 1997; Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009) and contributes to negative discourse surrounding SEND (Baxter, 2014).

2.6 Contextual factors influencing TA support of peer interactions

2.6.1 Relating to the environmental context

The research described above which explores the role of TAs in support of peer interactions either focuses specifically on the classroom, a structured, formal context, or does not explicitly distinguish between the different contexts in which TAs support children, including unstructured non-instructional contexts. This is surprising as research suggests that different environmental contexts impact on the peer interactions of children with SEND in different ways, for example children with ASD experience social isolation and low social engagement more in unstructured contexts (Hochman, Carter, Bottema-Beutel, Harvey, & Gustafson, 2015; Koegel, Vernon, Koegel, Koegel, & Paullin, 2012).

More generally, opportunities for peer interactions will vary according to the context children are in (Kendrick, Hernandez-Reif, Hudson, Jeon & Horton, 2012). For example, there is evidence that fewer peer interactions are observed in highly structured environments, defined as teachers providing guidance, rules, modelling and feedback (Kendrick et al., 2012). In contrast, unstructured non-instructional contexts are highly social with rich opportunities for peer interactions (Hochman et al., 2015) and are defined as having little teacher praise or feedback and more novel and innovative or imaginative play (Kendrick et al., 2012).

Despite evidence that access to free play time is vital for children's development, the importance of peer interactions in school has been underestimated until recently, particularly in unstructured school contexts

(Blatchford et al., 2016). Little is known about interactions between adult supervisors and pupils on the playground (Blatchford & Sharp, 2005; Blatchford et al., 2016). This may be because research on adult-pupil interactions has generally been considered separately from research on peer interactions in the literature, however neither occurs in a vacuum and have been described as complementary (Blatchford et al., 2016). Relevant research that does exist will be discussed below:

The two studies found that explored TA support on the playground focussed on the negative impact of TAs blocking peer interactions. The findings of both studies were limited to comparisons of TA versus no TA support, which arose incidentally as a result of research exploring social skills of children with ASD. Kasari, Locke, Gulsrud, and Rotheram-Fuller (2011) suggested that children with ASD supported by a TA were less engaged with peers on playground than those without. These findings arose via qualitative notes from observations rather than being specifically measured within the research design.

The other study used an observation schedule to measure interactions of children with ASD with adults and peers. Findings suggested that TAs engaged in compensatory and 'policing' interactions that reduced opportunities for interactions with peers (Anderson, Moore, Godfrey, & Fletcher-Flinn, 2004). However the authors acknowledged individual differences in how TAs interacted with children on the playground, highlighting that two TAs in the sample of eight tried to facilitate rather than compensate for interactions with peers and that this was associated with increased peer interactions. Yet TAs who facilitated interactions were written off as exceptions rather than considered exemplary of the possible role TAs could play for peer interactions in this context. Furthermore, the observational instrument used did not include details of the characteristics of how TAs facilitated interactions and was not sensitive enough to capture subtle qualitative differences in the interactions. Possibilities were highlighted for future research comparing facilitative versus compensatory support, which have not yet been pursued.

Literature searches on TA support in other unstructured contexts such as during transitions and school trips returned no relevant results. The small amount of

research exploring TAs' role in PE is not included within this review due to this study's focus on unstructured contexts.

In summary, future research investigating the role and impact of TAs must distinguish between unstructured and structured contexts. In particular more research is needed on non-instructional contexts due to increased and richer opportunities for peer interactions at these times and a disproportionate lack of research in these contexts.

2.6.2 Relating to the TA or child themselves

In addition to the environmental context, it is likely that TAs' role in facilitating peer interactions is also influenced by other contextual factors that have not been fully explored or described. Factors relating to the TA and the child have recently been considered using an adapted model of social skill development for children with ASD (Baxter, 2014). This was the only model of TA support of peer interactions looking at school aged children that could be found during literature searches and was based on Humphrey and Symes (2011) model of factors potentially influencing social skill development in children with ASD, the 'reciprocal effects peer interaction model' (REPIM).

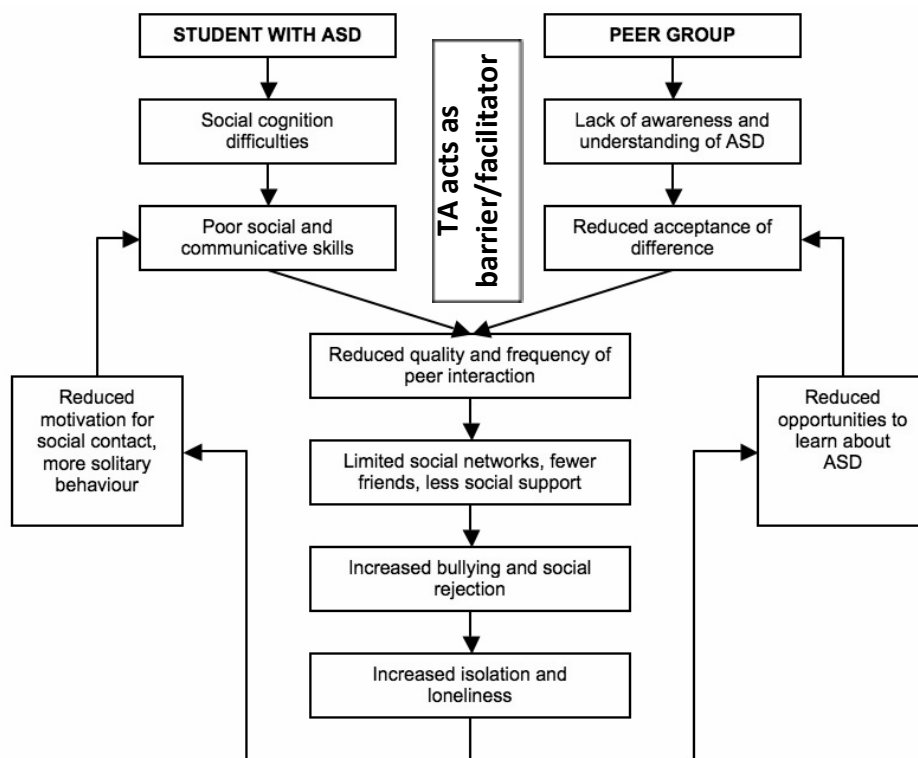
In the same way as the REPIM, Baxter's (2014) revised model (figure. 2.1) highlights a circular pattern of difficulties with peer interactions for children with ASD, where they experience reduced opportunities for peer interactions due to factors already potentially influencing their social skills as part of the nature of their SEND. It also acknowledges the influence of peers' awareness and acceptance of difference on opportunities for peer interactions. These factors are suggested to influence motivation for social contact in children with ASD, potentially further reducing their opportunities for interacting with peers and also reducing opportunities for peers to learn about children with ASD.

Baxter's model also highlights the role of the TA in either supporting or hindering the pattern of interactions between children with ASD and their peers. Baxter (2014) suggests that TAs are ideally positioned to support the development of peer interaction skills for children with ASD but highlights training as a contextual factor defining the effectiveness of their support. This

would also suggest that knowledge of children's social needs is an important factor contributing to the success of TA support in this area.

Unfortunately the only adjustment Baxter made to the original REPIM was the positioning of the TA in the centre, meaning that the model continues to show only the difficulties children with ASD face in this area rather than adding any additional modifications to show how TAs could facilitate interactions. This is likely to be because little is currently known about this topic due to the focus in research on pedagogical areas of TAs role.

Figure 2.1 *The adjusted reciprocal effects peer interaction model*



Although this model refers specifically to children with ASD, it has been included within this literature review due to its recognition of the interaction between contextual factors already influencing children's peer interactions and the factors influencing the effectiveness of TA support. It also highlights that research on TAs' facilitation of peer interactions for children with ASD is particularly pertinent due to the nature of their needs. As the only model found that describes factors influencing TA support of peer interactions, it also highlights the absence of other models looking at how TAs support the

interactions of children with a wider range of SEN and those without SEN, and therefore the importance of shedding light on this topic.

2.7 The importance of TAs' role in the facilitation of peer interactions

Providing further evidence for the argument that research in this area should focus on a wider range of SEN than just ASD, research suggests that peer interactions are less likely to happen spontaneously for children with SEND through simply being positioned in mainstream contexts (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). This is because social communication skills are required to gain access to peer interactions but are also enhanced in peer interactions (Bruce & Hansson, 2011).

Saddler (2014) and Hochman et al. (2015) thus suggest that the limited opportunity for practice of social skills, rather than social skills deficits, create barriers to interaction for children with SEND. Although the nature of this relationship is likely to be more complex (Blatchford et al., 2016), it must be acknowledged that children with SEND can experience a negative cycle of peer interaction difficulties (Bruce & Hansson, 2011) linking to research specifically describing this effect for children with ASD. The extent of the barrier to social interaction is likely to depend on the severity and nature of SEND and also the age of the child. This suggests that mainstream settings need to consider how to include children with SEND appropriately via specifically planned appropriate opportunities for interaction and social skill development (Salend & Duhaney, 1999).

Nabors, Willoughby, Leff, & McMenamin (2001) argue that children with SEND need support to interact with peers on the playground effectively due to the fast paced unstructured nature of play. They propose that adults can be reluctant to intervene didactically in free play situations and conclude that teachers should support children with SEND on the playground by organising the environment and providing incidental and coincidental teaching. They also raised the possibility of a role for TAs in this area. TAs are perfectly positioned to facilitate children with SEND's peer interactions on the playground due to their frequent

proximity to students with SEND, their familiarity with other students and with different contexts (Roesseti & Goesling, 2010; Saddler, 2014).

However, the implementation of such interventions needs to be carefully considered and researched. Promoting peer interactions in didactic ways poses difficulties as adult intervention in a peer interaction changes the nature of that interaction (Bruce & Hansson, 2011). Therefore, although TAs may well be appropriately positioned to facilitate peer interactions, their practice needs to be carefully considered (Saddler, 2014). This suggests a need for TAs to develop specific skills in line with their emerging role (Causton-Theoharris & Malmgren, 2005; Feldman & Matos, 2013; Rossetti & Goessling, 2010).

However, there is a lack of clarity on TAs' current role in facilitation of peer interactions demonstrated by conflicting views on this in research. In some research TAs did not list facilitation of peer interactions within their responsibilities or training requirements (Brown & Devecchi, 2013). However, other studies report that some TAs have listed facilitation as part of their role and this has been highlighted as an area 'in which TAs can take particular pride' (Chilton, 2012). Studies also highlighted a lack of training in this and other areas (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000).

This lack of clarity or consensus on the role of TAs in this area dilutes their effectiveness and prevents the development of commonly held, widely agreed and monitored expectations of their practice.

2.8 How TAs facilitate peer interactions; Intervention approaches

Although TAs are clearly well placed in their current role to facilitate peer interactions, as discussed earlier, there is little research on their current implementation of any interventions they may already carry out as part of their role. This is due to a lack of focus in research on the possible positive impact of TAs on peer interactions.

As a result, this literature review will first discuss research on interventions for social skills more broadly, relating this to TA practice. Then specific interventions for TA support of peer interactions will be explored.

2.8.1 Research on social skills interventions; Implications for TAs

A full review of the social skills intervention research is beyond the scope of this literature review. However metaanalyses of current social skills interventions suggest that the success and social validity of interventions relies on the context within which they are implemented (Carter & Pesko, 2008; Kretzmann, Shih & Kasari, 2015). Evidence appears strongest for interventions conducted in the context within which skills are to be applied (Bellini, Peters, Benner & Hopf, 2007; Gresham, Sugai & Horner, 2001; Holloway, Healy, Dwyer, & Lydon, 2014). This provides support for the use of naturalistic interventions rather than explicit, structured interventions, conducted in a separate environment (Walker & Smith, 2015).

Naturalistic approaches are described as unstructured, child led, indirect approaches used during interventions. Naturalistic interventions can be described as those conducted in natural settings within normal routines and naturally occurring activities, in contexts meaningful to the child (Schreibman, Dawson, Stahmer, Landa, Rogers, McGee & Halladay, 2015). Research suggests that naturalistic approaches used in a naturalistic intervention are most successful (Hochman et al., 2015; Kasari, Dean, Kretzmann, Shih, Orlich, Whitney, Landa, Lord & King, 2016; Kasari, Rotheram-Fuller, Locke & Gulsrud, 2012).

This has implications for TA practice, suggesting it is more effective to address social skills in real world environments where those skills would naturally occur such as during play times at school (Kasari et al., 2016). TAs' support of this area should therefore be non-intrusive, integrated into their role (Baxter, 2014) and incorporated as an expectation of their practice rather than carried out via decontextualised structured interventions.

However, there is particularly little investigation of how TAs support peer interactions naturalistically and TAs appear less aware of their skills in this area compared to their knowledge of specific structured social skills interventions (Webster & Blatchford, 2015). Furthermore, despite evidence that naturalistic interventions are effective, schools can be reluctant to use them as they can be

perceived to be hard to establish and maintain (Koegel et al., 2012). There is a paucity of research on the practicalities of individualising naturalistic interventions in educational environments and the capabilities, skills and confidence levels of TAs rather than other adults to implement these (Baxter, 2014). This is due to a lack of consistency in research around who takes the role of the intervention ‘facilitator’, most often therapist or teacher led (Screibman et al., 2015; Sowden, Perkins, & Clegg, 2011). This ignores the value of using a TA who is already appropriately positioned to carry out such an intervention (Rossetti & Goessling, 2010) and highlights the need to investigate the role of the TA in implementing interventions designed to support peer interactions.

2.8.2 Research using TAs to deliver naturalistic social skills interventions

A search in the literature for studies that used TAs to deliver naturalistic social skills interventions returned 11 studies, (Baxter, 2014; Causton-Theoharris & Malmgren, 2005; Malmgren, Causton-Theoharris & Trezek, 2005; Chung & Carter, 2013; Chung & Douglas, 2015; Feldman & Matos, 2013; Koegel, Kim & Koegel, 2014; Kretzmann et al., 2015; Licciardello, Harchik, & Luiselli, 2008; Mazurik-Charles & Stefano, 2010; Robinson, 2011). One of these studies was excluded from further discussion due to its inclusion of two other intervention factors, making it impossible to determine which factors were responsible for any changes observed (Chung & Carter, 2013).

All but one of the remaining ten selected studies (Baxter, 2014) were conducted in the USA, limiting the generalisability of findings to UK contexts. Furthermore, eight of the ten studies focussed specifically on children with ASD, limiting the generalisation of these studies to other categories of SEND or children with no SEND (Baxter, 2014; Chung & Douglas, 2015; Feldman & Matos, 2013; Koegel et al., 2014; Kretzmann et al., 2015; Licciardello et al., 2008; Mazurik-Charles & Stefano, 2010; Robinson, 2011). Six of the selected studies looked at an alternative social factor rather than peer interactions such as peer engagement (Feldman & Matos, 2013; Koegel et al., 2014; Kretzmann et al., 2015) responsiveness (Mazurik-Charles & Stefano, 2010) use of a speech generated device (Chung & Douglas, 2015) or an individualised social communication

target for the child's needs (Robinson, 2011). Studies exploring a range of alternative factors to the focus of this study will therefore be discussed briefly first before the studies specifically exploring peer interactions are critiqued.

Overall, findings from these studies suggested that the social factors being measured and TA implementation fidelity increased following targeted training. However inconsistencies emerged between studies regarding maintenance of these effects over time due to methodological issues, which also limit the generalisability of results. The studies also had small sample sizes.

Three of these studies measured maintenance effects effectively. Two used a Pivotal Response Training (PRT) intervention for TAs supporting a child with ASD and also measured generalisation (Feldman & Matos, 2013; Robinson, 2011). Both measured levels of TA involvement and the social factor being targeted via structured observations and found that an overall increase in both measures maintained at follow up and generalised to different students in an untrained activity. However, although both studies measured social validity using a questionnaire at the end of the study, they demonstrated issues with implementation fidelity.

The other study found that although increased social engagement was maintained at follow up, TA implementation of the intervention was not. This was suggested to relate to TA motivation. This study also had a larger sample size of 24 participants, used a randomised waitlist controlled design and carried out structured observation of social engagement using an instrument already in existence (Kretzmann et al., 2015), factors which increased the reliability of the study.

In summary, studies measuring TA implementation of interventions have found a positive effect on a range of social measures showing that TAs can be trained to support peer interactions effectively. However methodological issues, particularly regarding generalisation and maintenance over time, in addition to a lack of consensus on the social factor being studied limit their generalisability.

A summary of the four most relevant studies that specifically measured peer interactions follows. These all found increases in the peer interactions of the

target child following intervention (Baxter, 2014; Causton-Theoharris & Malmgren, 2005; Licciardello et al., 2008; Malmgren, Causton-Theoharris & Tresek, 2005). However, only one was conducted in the UK; a recently published thesis that developed two US interventions (Causton-Theoharris & Malmgren, 2005; Malmgren et al., 2005) into a training programme named 'Better Together' for TAs assigned to work 1:1 with children with ASD (Baxter, 2014). The study found larger gains in facilitative behaviours of TAs during intervention and at follow up than the US study it was based on (Causton-Theoharris & Malmgren, 2005). However, this study used a mixed sequential dominant status design in one school with a small sample of three TA pupil pairings, limiting its generalisability. This was proposed to be an appropriate design due to the study's asserted purpose of reviewing the process of a pilot intervention rather than its efficacy.

The studies had other methodological issues, for example two did not measure maintenance effects or generalisation (Licciardello et al., 2008; Malmgren et al., 2005). Baxter (2014) measured maintenance effects at three data collection points, however data was only collected on two out of three TA-pupil pairs at follow up after one school term. Causton-Theoharris and Malmgren (2005) measured positive maintenance effects for all participants staggered between five to eight weeks. However, social validity data was not collected. Methodological issues regarding the observation instruments used in these and other studies who measured TA facilitation strategies will be critiqued in the next section.

Furthermore, three out of the four studies looking specifically at peer interactions collected data only during lessons in the classroom (Baxter, 2014; Causton-Theoharris & Malmgren, 2005; Malmgren et al., 2005). There was no information provided on any possible generalisation of the skills TAs learned or the increases in peer interactions from classroom environments to other more informal contexts (Baxter, 2014), limiting their relevance to this study. By focussing on interactions in the classroom, these studies ignore the rich social environment of the playground or other unstructured contexts where there are more opportunities for peer interactions (Blatchford et al., 2016) and where

children with SEND are more likely to struggle with peer interactions (Koegel et al., 2012).

The only study that implemented their intervention for children with ASD on the playground used structured observations to measure peer interactions in terms of initiations and responses rather than reciprocal interactions, and found increases in both measures following TA training (Licciardello et al., 2008). However, the findings are limited as minimal inter-observer agreement was calculated and social validity or implementation fidelity were not considered. Instead, the authors provide a vague description of the type of facilitative behaviour that the TA was trained in and expected to deliver, which were not formally measured.

None of the above studies investigated possibilities for the TAs creating negative interactions as well as positive ones (Baxter, 2014). In addition, the TAs in the studies discussed above chose to participate, therefore the effectiveness of the interventions that were implemented cannot be identified for TAs who may be less motivated to receive additional training (Feldman & Matos, 2013).

The small number of studies exploring this particular area of research and the limitations of these studies highlights a gap in the literature. Although there are a range of methodological issues present in much of the research to date, generally findings suggest that in the right circumstances it is likely that TAs are able to support children's peer interactions and other social skills in the classroom when given short-term targeted training in this area. This suggests that there is exciting potential for TAs to be able to offer support for this in other contexts such as the playground.

2.8.3 Facilitative skills discussed in the intervention research

The previous intervention research discussed above highlighted that TAs can facilitate peer interactions or other social skills when offered training in this area. However the facilitative skills and the observation instruments used to measure them were not described in great detail. They also do not describe the

facilitative skills that TAs may already be using without training, in particular the oral techniques they might use naturally to facilitate peer interactions.

In their intervention study described earlier Causton-Theoharris and Malmgren defined facilitative behaviours as:

‘Any purposeful behavior intended to cause the target student to interact with another student in the classroom’ (2005 p.435)

They provided a list of examples of facilitative behaviours such as ‘increasing physical proximity’; ‘highlighting similarities’; ‘teaching a skill directly’; ‘modelling’ ‘interpreting’ and ‘moving students together’. The authors included these categories within the Peer Interaction and Paraprofessional Facilitative Behavior Observation Instrument (PIOI), which they developed based on the Educational Assessment of Social Interaction (EASI) observation instrument (Beckstead & Goetz, 1990).

However the categories of facilitative behaviour used were not present in the EASI, which focused on the interactions of the target child, and there was no further information provided on where the categories of facilitative skills were gathered from in the literature. The researchers also acknowledged that the PIOI may not have been sensitive enough to detect additional changes in TA behaviour following intervention, namely facilitative techniques that may not have been included in the schedule itself.

Baxter (2014) used the PIOI developed by Causton-Theoharris and Malmgren (2005) but modified it by grouping the skills within umbrella categories, ‘adult fade back’, ‘prompt to be social’ and ‘connect with peers’ mentioned in Rosetti and Goesling’s (2010) review, which is critiqued below.

Rosetti and Goesling (2010) made recommendations for TA facilitation techniques in a review study concerning the support of older students peer interactions. Fading assistance techniques were highlighted, where the type and level of support is systematically reduced to encourage independence and interdependence with peers. They suggested TAs fade back by strategically backing away from a child, for example through creating a fictional task that

they must attend to or through preparing the child in advance for peer interactions. They also described simultaneous adult fading with the recruitment of a peer, giving examples of how a TA could phrase this. The importance of providing prompts to be social and to connect with peers was highlighted.

The authors stressed the importance of TAs understanding certain factors before they would be able to facilitate, for example having an awareness of their own influence on social interactions and recognising that the pupil wants to have a friend. They also highlighted the importance of using specific social times during the school day as opportunities for facilitation. Although the techniques suggested were claimed to be based on previous observations and interviews, these (as well as their impact) were not further described or specifically cited in their paper, limiting credibility and relevance for this study.

Feldman and Matos (2013) based TA facilitation strategies for peer engagement in their intervention on the ASD literature, such as 'providing child choice', 'offering 'natural rewards', offering 'clear instructions' by using a least-to-most prompting hierarchy and 'contingent responsivity,' described as prompting children if they do not respond within 3 seconds. They also highlighted 'fading' as a facilitation strategy as well as 'appropriate physical proximity'. They suggested that TAs should only engage in 'appropriate communication' and defined this as communicating only to facilitate interaction between peers. Again, it was not made clear where in the literature these or the categories for paraprofessional involvement came from, including 'active hovering', 'passive hovering', 'non-involvement', 'social facilitation' and 'monitoring'. They did not describe the types of strategies and how they were used in enough detail. Similarly, Robinson (2011) described 'implementing' the categories described above to prompt the target behaviour but this was described in no further detail.

Koegel et al., (2014) used a measure of appropriate TA proximity, defining this as being attentive while standing approximately six feet away, a distance far enough to prevent hovering but close enough to be within earshot of the student. Yet the research evidence behind this measure was not described.

Other measures in the study for the TA facilitation of peer engagement were taken from previous literature exploring children with ASD's social skills, such as incorporation of pupils' preferred interests in social games or activities.

Mazurik-Charles and Stefanou (2010) also provided no detailed information on the facilitative skills taught to TAs in the intervention and their implementation was not measured apart from during implementation fidelity observations, for which the study also provided little information. Chung and Douglas (2015) explored the frequency of TA prompts to initiate inter-pupil interaction. Additionally, they used contextual variables to indirectly monitor any other facilitative behaviors such as encouraging the pupil's proximity with peers. They did not provide detailed descriptions of how these contextual variables were measured, what these might look like in practice or what facilitative behaviours were actually observed.

In summary, the frequent use of vague descriptions of TA facilitation strategies in current intervention research and a lack of clarity about where in the literature these categories originated highlights that sparse research has been conducted to explore what TAs may already be doing to facilitate interaction in unstructured contexts. Without research in this area, any strategies that TAs are already using naturalistically cannot be described effectively.

This may explain the frequent focus in the small number of existing intervention studies on 'fading assistance' techniques and 'appropriate proximity' as key facilitation techniques, which possibly have derived from previous research highlighting negative consequences of TA proximity on children's peer interactions and inclusion in classroom contexts. Furthermore, much of the research interventions exploring TA facilitation of peer interactions were focused on results for children with ASD rather than looking at children more broadly with or without SEND. The effectiveness of facilitation techniques gathered from the ASD literature may be limited to that population.

Thus before further training interventions to inform TA practice are developed, there is a need for more detailed investigation of what TAs are actually currently doing on the playground regarding children's interactions and how they do this

via inductive methodologies. This is because the structured training interventions described do not address potential naturalistic strategies for social facilitation applied by TAs intuitively, namely strategies that occur without specific training in this area. These could be used to compliment training in targeted specialist interventions (Downing et al., 2000; Hemmingsson et al., 2003; Rossetti, 2012).

2.8.4 Implicit naturalistic strategies used by TAs to support peer interactions

As highlighted above, there is a paucity of research on adult's intuitive naturalistic strategies for supporting peer interactions. The research that does exist has been conducted outside the UK and has tended not to focus specifically on TAs.

For example a US study conducted in the 1990s investigated naturalistic strategies being used by teachers for inclusion of students with disabilities within the classroom (Salisbury, Gallucci, Palombaro & Peck, 1995). The study used semi structured interviews followed by three hours direct unstructured observation of ten teachers in two different schools, followed by focus group interviews to discuss emerging themes and to give opportunities for further strategies to be shared.

Although the sample size and geographical location of the research limits its generalisability, the study found that teachers actively facilitated social interactions and provided some helpful ideas for how adults could do this. Yet there has been a lack of research building on this. Furthermore, the focus of this research on teachers in the classroom context ignores the role of the TA and the rich and more plentiful opportunities to support peer interactions in unstructured contexts (Rossetti & Goessling, 2010).

A recent European qualitative study compared the naturalistic strategies intuitively used by six teachers and six TAs to facilitate six children with Down Syndrome's peer interactions across contexts including academic activities, self-chosen activities and during breaks (Dolva, Gustavsson, Borell, & Hemmingsson, 2011). The study found that teachers and TAs facilitated peer interactions in different ways. Teaching assistants used a 'here and now'

approach to support the pupil during breaks, described as responding ‘in the moment’ to a situation. Teachers were found to plan support in advance, for example through group activities or providing planned peer education. Furthermore, TAs supported through inviting peers and guiding the target child, mainly in support of their understanding of interaction situations, a role labeled the ‘supported ego’ (Dolva et al., 2011). The study suggested that TAs struggled with balancing their proximity, raising questions about how their support impacts pupil’s agency and self-determination (Dolva et al., 2011).

Although differences between TAs and teachers were described, differences specific to each group that may have occurred across contexts were not outlined. The study used qualitative semi-structured interviews with TAs and teachers alongside field observations to record descriptive and reflective information, which were all carried out by the same researcher over a period of four months. As the field observations were written up post observation, this could lead to a lack of detail or missed information in addition to the possibility of bias due to subjective interpretations or selections. Furthermore the sample size was small, limiting the generalisability of findings. There was also no detail provided on the frequency of peer interactions or the quality of facilitative strategies for example through examining the characteristics of what was said. No detailed information was provided on how data were coded or the wording of interview questions. It was not clear which type of data was collected first, which needed to be acknowledged as the order in which data was collected could prompt participants to behave differently.

Although both studies discussed cannot be generalised to UK contexts as a result of population variances and vague methodological procedures, they provide examples regarding the extent to which and in what ways TAs support peer interactions naturalistically that can be drawn on in order to fill the gaps in UK research. Further research in UK contexts will create possibilities for harnessing emerging naturalistic and intuitive strategies and using these in practice to compliment targeted and specialist interventions (Saddler, 2014).

2.9 Relevant research from the early years literature

In line with research on school age children, research from the early years literature suggests naturalistic interventions to support peer interactions are most effective (Burriss, Kemple, Duncan, & Strangis, 2002; Kemple, David, & Hysmith, 1997).

Relevant research from early years literature tends to refer to 'social scaffolding' when discussing adult facilitation of peer interactions. However, there is limited research exploring this outside laboratory conditions (Williams et al., 2010). The limited studies that do exist focus on teacher rather than TA scaffolding strategies in early years settings.

Findings suggest that teachers rarely intervene in peer interactions and when they do their interventions have tended to be related to classroom management, are adult led, direct, restrictive, punitive or rule based (Kemple et al., 1997; Williams et al., 2010). Kemple et al. (1997) highlighted that attempts to facilitate preschool children's peer interaction included helping children interpret behaviour and promoting communication. This study highlighted the importance of staff to child ratios in effective adult support, stating that types of restrictive or disruptive intervention were lower when there was a high staff to child ratio.

Williams et al. (2010) found a negative relationship between children who experienced above average amounts of adult-centred or child-centred scaffolding and social measures such as peer sociability or peer refusal at six month follow up. However, no information was provided for whether existing social difficulties or levels of social competence were controlled for. Therefore results may instead suggest that adults supported children with existing social difficulties more often than other children.

In summary, within both preschool and school age literature, there is little direct or detailed investigation of adults' roles in facilitating peer interactions, which explains the lack of good practice recommendations for this area (Williams et al., 2010).

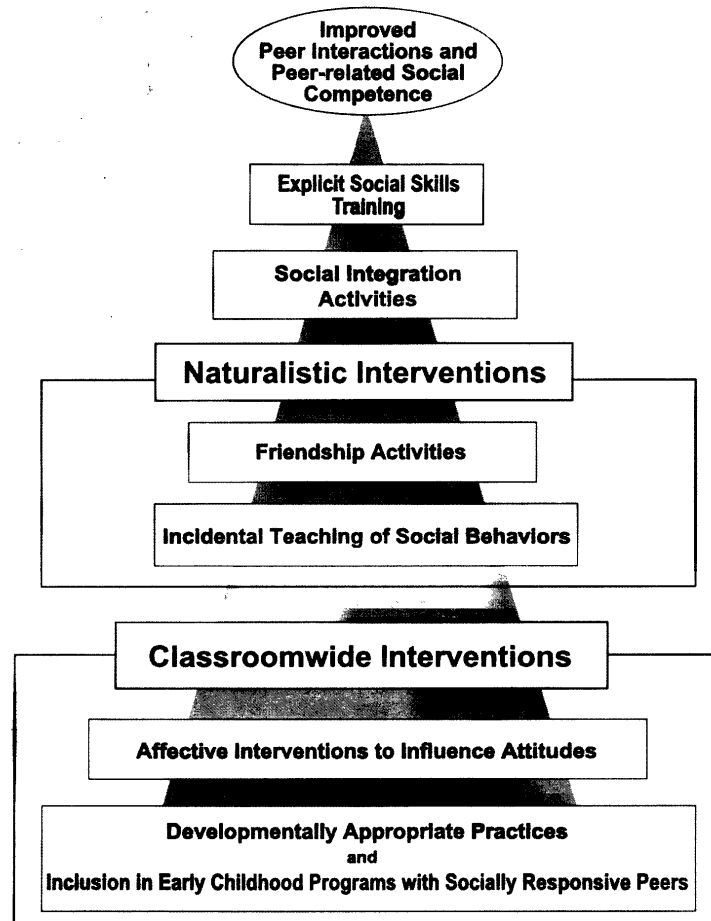
However, a study from the Netherlands developed some recommendations for the adult support of children's development more broadly, based on a review of early years literature called the Caregiver Interaction Profile Scales (Helmerhorst, Riksen-Walraven, Vermeer, Fukkink, & Tavecchio, 2014). These included fostering positive peer interactions in addition to a number of other factors such as 'sensitive responsiveness to emotional needs, respect for autonomy, structuring and limit setting, verbal communication-frequency, quality of interactions between caregiver and children and developmental stimulation.' Although originally intended for the early years age range, the authors suggested that adult facilitation across these areas may be applicable to older children with SEND (Helmerhorst et al., 2014).

Williams et al. (2010) also argue that adult centred scaffolding of peer interactions is not always necessary for school age children but may still be appropriate for children with SEND if the type of scaffolding used has been tailored to fit the child's needs (Kemple et al., 1997). Contradictorily Bruce et al. (2011) warned that children can become too dependent on adult scaffolding to interpret what the child is saying.

2.9.1 Models of peer interaction support from the early years literature

Brown, Odom and Conroy, (2001) have developed a conceptual framework for early education teachers supporting peer interactions based on early years research (Figure 2.2). The hierarchy includes incidental teaching of social behaviour, friendship activities, social integration activities and explicit teaching of social skills. It suggests that interventions should be arranged in a hierarchy starting at the least intrusive before moving on to more complex intensive and structured interventions (Rubin et al., 2007). While this cannot be directly applied to school age children due to evidence for a changing developmental trajectory in peer interactions, a literature search returned no results for models of TA support of peer interactions for school aged children aside from Baxter's (2014) adjusted REPIM model discussed earlier. This model could instead be used as a starting point to consider the application of interventions for school aged children.

Figure 2.2 Hierarchy for promoting young children's peer interactions (Brown et al., 2001)



Other theories and models of TA support focus on academic achievement (Cremin, Thomas & Vincett, 2005; Radford, et al., 2014) or organisational factors that impact on the effectiveness of TA deployment (Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin & Russell, 2011). These do not directly address the social developmental needs of children and how they can be supported or obstructed by TAs, including how they could support or facilitate peer interactions.

TA practice would benefit from a model of good practice for the support of peer interactions and the application of interventions. An aim of the current small-scale, exploratory research is that it will contribute in some way to the development of such a model to provide a framework for TA practice in this area. In order for this to be developed, there is a need for research

investigating TAs current role in supporting peer interactions already going on between children in the playground as well as facilitating new interactions between peers, through exploring the processes and mechanisms involved and the factors influencing their practice.

2.10 Research Questions

- 1 How do TAs view their role and does this include the support and/or facilitation of peer interactions on the playground?
- 2 What kinds of TA-pupil talk goes on to support and/or facilitate peer interactions on the playground?
- 3 What factors do TAs feel influence the effectiveness of their support on the playground as well as more generally in their role?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the qualitative design of the current small-scale, exploratory study including the theoretical perspective of the researcher and the rationale for the use of the chosen research methods. The measures used are described as well as the sampling strategy, process of data collection, analysis and ethical considerations.

3.2 Philosophical stance

The researcher acknowledges that personal assumptions regarding their view of the world and how they attempt to gain knowledge about it influences the research process from beginning to end. Ontology offers a conceptual framework for this. Ontology is the philosophy about the extent and nature of reality, and epistemology refers to how that reality can be known (Maxwell, 2011). The current study took a critical realist position. This fits with the role of the EP as a 'scientist-practitioner' and lies between the two key ontological paradigms; positivism, which suggests that there are discoverable 'facts' that can be accessed through the measurement and manipulation of variables, and relativism, which suggests that universal truths do not exist and reality is instead socially constructed.

Critical realism acknowledges the complex and layered nature of reality (Easton, 2010). It suggests that the social context influences people's perceptions of their experiences within the boundaries of an independent reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Taking this position enabled the researcher to explore the possible realities within a situation while acknowledging that principles and ideas generated should be considered in relation to the inevitable influence of the social context (Easton, 2010) and therefore generalised with caution.

Due to the gaps in research on this area to date, this study took an exploratory approach, adopting a qualitative methodology in order to capture the psychological processes and mechanisms taking place within specific TA-pupil interactions and within the specific context of the playground, informed by participants subjective interpretations (Searle, 2002). Via a critical realist

position, uncovering of such processes and perspectives within the local context of the research permitted the possibility for tentative explanations or recommendations at the wider level (Robson, 2011).

3.3 Rationale for research design

The current research was a small-scale, exploratory study using a non-experimental comparison of qualitative data from two sources. This enabled an in depth analysis of the data collected in order to gather a rich understanding of teaching assistants role during unstructured times (Yardley, 2000). In line with the researcher's philosophical stance, the use of qualitative methods allowed acknowledgement of subjectivity both within the data and in how it was interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The focus of qualitative approaches on context and process rather than outcomes was considered appropriate to allow this study to connect with TAs' experiences regarding their role across different contexts and to explore the mechanisms and psychological processes behind what they do in the unique context of the playground (Maxwell, 2011). Due to their flexibility, qualitative approaches also allow unanticipated findings to be unearthed that can improve existing practice (Maxwell, 2011) which is a long term aim of this research.

In order to address research question 1 and 3, individual semi-structured interviews with seven participants were conducted to explore their perspective on their talk with pupils, the strategies they use naturalistically and the structured interventions they may use. This allowed exploration of meaning from the perspective of the participant including how they make sense of their experiences and how this impacts on their behaviour (Maxwell, 2011). To address research question 2 and 3, three participants who took part in the interviews were audio-recorded in the playground whilst field note observations were carried out to gain a view of their talk with pupils and their practice in this context. The use of a systematic observation schedule was considered inappropriate as it may have limited the richness of the naturalistic data and would prevent it from being analysed in an exploratory manner. As a result, predefined categories were not used during the data collection stage.

The data were analysed by comparing the unique contribution from each

method (Robson, 2011) to address the research questions. The perspective of TAs on their role gathered from the interviews and the interactions between TAs and children gathered from the observations were both analysed separately using thematic analysis.

The researcher acknowledged themselves as a participant in the research due to their subjective views and perspectives which were likely to influence throughout the process of the research, known as researcher bias (Robson, 2011). This is discussed further in section 3.7.3. Issues regarding respondent bias and reactivity are considered during discussion of the measures used.

3.4 Sample

The participants were selected through an opportunistic sample (Searle, 2002) by contacting Headteachers of primary schools in Hertfordshire via email with an outline of the research and criteria for participants and through directly contacting Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) with whom the researcher had a working relationship with. The target population were TAs in primary schools due to the larger percentage of TAs working in this context (DfE, 2016a). Mainstream schools were selected based on findings in the literature review that the deployment of TAs can often be used as a mechanism for inclusion in mainstream schools (Baxter, 2014; Saddler, 2014). The sample for the second phase of data collection was also opportunistic in that participants from the interview stage self-selected to take part in this phase.

3.4.1 Research setting

Two primary maintained schools in the same borough of outer London took part in the research. School A was a two form entry setting with 330 enrolled pupils and school B was a one form entry setting apart from a two form entry year 5 class with 244 enrolled pupils (school Ofsted reports 2014: 2016). Both were rated 'good' by Ofsted. The schools were situated just 2.5 miles apart but had significantly different school catchment areas. In school A proportions of pupils with EAL, SEND or in receipt of pupil premium were below the National average (school Ofsted report, 2014). Contrastingly, school B had above average proportions of pupils from ethnic minority groups and those with English as an

Additional Language (EAL). There was also a high level of pupil mobility. Pupils in receipt of pupil premium and pupils with SEND were also above the National average (school Ofsted report, 2016).

3.4.2 Selecting the participants

The decision was made to focus on TAs working in any primary year group and to allow both class TAs and those assigned to an individual child with any Special Educational Need to participate. Within each school TAs self-selected (Searle, 2000) to take part in both phases of the research. The table below gives a summary of the TAs from each school.

Table 3.1. Characteristics of participating TAs

School	Pseudonym	Gender	Role	Key Stage	Experience	Background	Data
A	Pippa	Female	PP	1 and 2	1 year	Degree	I
	Catherine	Female	Class	2 (year 6)	1 year	Degree	I
	Diane	Female	1:1	2 (year 3)	1 year	Parent	I
	Naomi	Female	Class	2 (year 4)	+4 years	Parent	I
B	Billie	Female	1:1	2 (year 5)	+4 years	TEFL+Parent	I & O
	Michelle	Female	1:1	1 (year 1)	+4 years	Parent	I & O
	Jennifer	Female	1:1	2 (year 4)	+4 years	Parent	I & O

PP=pupil premium

I=interview

O=observation

TEFL=Teaching English as a Foreign Language

As can be seen from table 3.1, two TAs were assigned to a whole class and four were assigned to an individual child. The three TAs who were observed were all assigned a pupil 1:1. One TA had a different role; Pippa was employed to deliver interventions to children in receipt of pupil premium funding across all year groups. When she wasn't delivering interventions she worked in a range of classrooms mostly supporting the children in receipt of pupil premium. She also spent the least amount of time on the playground; just one breaktime a week. The other TAs spent every break and lunchtime on the playground each week apart from Billie who spent every lunchtime but only one breaktime a week on the playground.

3.5 Measures

3.5.1 Semi structured interviews

Semi structured interviews were chosen due to their flexibility, allowing for interesting points to be followed up and for any possible underlying motivations that may emerge during the interview to be pursued (Robson, 2011). They also allow comparisons to be drawn between participants' responses (Searle, 2002). The interview schedule was developed using findings from the literature review and research questions, starting with general rapport building questions about their role and moving on to more specific questions about the playground context. Prompts were added for questions where the researcher required an extended response (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Prior to the start of the interview, TAs understanding of the term peer interactions was clarified and explained where necessary. Face to face interviews were chosen to allow the researcher to develop rapport with the participants and also to observe non-verbal cues (Robson, 2011). However the use of semi-structured interviews can increase the possibility for leading questions and differences in interpretation may occur between participants due to the wording possibly being altered across the interviews (Searle, 2002). The researcher therefore ensured that questioning responses and non-verbal cues considered this.

Furthermore, responses from participants may have been influenced by perceived power dynamics, due to the researcher previously having met or worked with a number of the TAs in the sample in their role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). Given their relative positions (BPS, 2008) participants may have found it challenging to be completely open and honest with the researcher, and may have sought to present what they felt the researcher wanted to see. Efforts to reduce respondent bias were made by endeavouring to build a rapport with TAs (Robson, 2011) prior to conducting the interview and during the interview. Participants were also made aware that their responses would be anonymised which, given the small number of participants and the inclusion of only two schools in the sample, may not have been reassuring enough to allow them to be completely authentic. There was also the possibility that the participants may not have been able to accurately

recollect or provide examples of their experiences during the interview, as has been the case in other research highlighted in the literature review (Webster & Blatchford, 2015). This highlights the importance of comparison with observation data to capture any lost detail.

3.5.2 Observations

Observational methods were used alongside semi-structured interviews to '*obtain evidence about behaviour in a real life setting*' (Searle, 2002). However it was acknowledged that the process of data collection and analysis has been influenced by the researcher's subjective viewpoint. Audio-recorded observations were chosen as the preferred method as they allowed detailed analysis through direct access to TA talk with children that could be compared with self-reported information.

The use of video-recording was rejected because although its benefits include allowing rich data to be gathered on the context of the interactions including body language and other details about the immediate environment, these were outweighed by its disadvantages in the circumstances of this research. The first disadvantage related to the concept of reactivity; that the presence of an obvious video camera being operated by an unfamiliar observer would have an influence particularly on the behaviour of children within the playground but also on the behaviour of TAs in the study (Robson, 2011). The second disadvantage was the practical difficulties around gathering consent for all children who would be present on the school playground during video-recordings and where to place those children whose parents did not consent during the observations. The third disadvantage was the technical difficulties in gathering good quality sound recording using a video-recording device within budget constraints.

The use of audio-recordings were chosen because it was anticipated that the use of a small Dictaphone device kept in the pocket of the TA and a small lapel microphone attached to the jacket of the TA would be more discrete, would create less distraction and would ensure that the interactions captured during playtime were as natural as possible. The use of a lapel microphone also ensured good quality recordings of TAs' voices. To reduce loss of contextual

information that could not be gathered via the method chosen, the researcher was present during the audio-recordings to take field notes on the context including the TAs' positioning, immediate environment, number of children they were talking to and their body language.

The observations were therefore viewed as 'participant observations' (Searle, 2002). This is because, although the researcher did not join in directly, they were accepted into the context as an observer. This may influence the situation being studied and make it difficult to remain objective. However, through using audio-recordings to capture the interactions in detail, the researcher was able to step back to reduce the impact of their presence and participants' awareness of being observed.

The researcher was also aware that because TAs were interviewed first, they may also change their behaviour by showing what they expect the researcher may want to see following the interview, particularly due to their 'dual' role as TEP for the schools (Robson, 2011). The researcher clearly explained the reasons for the research including the importance of gaining the voice of TAs and the aim of exploring good practice in certain contexts that had not yet been fully investigated. Furthermore, there was a gap of 11 weeks between the final interview and the first observation and the questions used during the interview explored the TA role broadly before asking more specific questions about their role on the playground. Additionally, due to the focus of the study, any talk which uncovers good practice will still inform the research.

A literature search on coding systems for TA talk returned no results directly relevant or applicable to the current study because the limited previous research on this topic focuses on TAs' pedagogical role and interactions in the classroom (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Due to this and therefore the exploratory nature of the research, unstructured observations were used so as not to impose predefined categories on the data. Thus the current research categorised interactions by pinpointing the codes through an iterative process from the data. This allowed the researcher to explore the nature of talk inductively, where the themes decided on by the researcher are based on the data rather than any prior theoretical interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.5.3 Pilot

A pilot study was carried out to trial the process of data collection in order to ensure that the measures used were appropriate and would generate the thick description required. The procedure for the pilot phase is outlined below:

Phase one: First, interview questions were examined by a TA separate to the sample who was working in the same geographical area and some minor changes were made to the interview schedule following her feedback. Then a pilot semi-structured interview was conducted with one of the TAs from the sample and some further minor changes were made to the interview schedule based on feedback regarding the wording of a small number of questions and additional prompts (appendix A). The interview schedule did not change significantly between the pilot and further data collection, therefore data from the pilot was included in the overall data analysis.

Phase two: A pilot audio-recorded observation was also conducted with one of the TAs from the sample in phase two to test the Dictaphone sound quality and the approach to taking field notes. This was transcribed and initial coding was carried out. Following this process, the observation approach remained the same and data from the pilot was therefore included in the overall analysis.

3.5.4 Data collection procedure

The procedure for collecting the data for phase one and two are outlined below:

Phase one: Seven participants were interviewed separately in a quiet room in the school. The interview procedure was explained and the consent form signed before a Dictaphone was used to record the interviews. At the end of the interview, opportunities were given for debriefing through asking TAs if they had any questions or needed any further information.

Phase two: The observations were carried out. For each of the three TAs who volunteered for this phase of the research, two 15 minute break times were audio-recorded using a Dictaphone and a lapel microphone alongside field notes that were taken by the researcher during the recording. Breaktimes were

chosen rather than lunchtimes because information from the interview data suggested that TAs role was most similar across the sample at breaktimes.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was gained through the university ethics committee. Written consent was sought for all teaching assistant participants in both phase one and phase two of the research. Consent forms included an information sheet specifying full details of the research to ensure the participants were fully aware of the research aims (appendix B). They were also given the option of additional face-to-face discussions when they attended interview although none of the TAs requested this. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any point during the study. Consent was not gathered from children's parents because audio-recordings were used and although they may capture children's voices, the focus of this study was on the TAs initiations and responses to children rather than any child's interaction itself. Additionally, individual children were not identifiable on the recording unless their name was used and names were anonymised during transcription.

The data were saved onto a password-protected computer and then deleted from the Dictaphone recorder. All information stored was anonymised to protect the identities of the participants.

Findings of the research were offered to the schools and participants via a written summary of the key findings. The researcher offered a training session to both participating schools based on the study findings and the literature review, with the possibility of extending this to other schools in the Local Authority.

3.7 Data analysis procedure

Phase one: Thematic analysis was used to analyse interview data because it is an accessible, flexible, method that can produce complex and rich results (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It allows themes and patterns to be selected inductively based on the data set itself which can then be compared to the research questions and literature review. This allows 'unanticipated insights' to be gained from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this research, thematic analysis

was conceived as a specific qualitative method in itself rather than a process to be used across different methods within other analytic traditions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researcher acknowledged their active role in the process of the analysis because themes were selected and reported based on their interest to the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase two: Due to the researcher's interest in the nature of TA talk on the playground, the analysis was required to explore the language used in interactions captured in the data. Although conversation analysis provides a systematic analysis of everyday talk, capturing the fine detail of what actually takes place (Mercer, 2010; Seedhouse, 2005), it is time-consuming and difficult to use with large datasets. It also places focus on interpreting sequences in the structure of turn taking in conversation (Hayes, 2000), whereas the focus of this phase of research was on TA initiations and responses directed towards children, rather than the turns taken. Thus, thematic analysis was deemed appropriate to capture the richness of TA interactions.

3.7.1 Criteria for selection

Phase one: All of the interview data were analysed in meaningful chunks using thematic analysis. Codes were identified within these extracts and themes were developed from these. This inductive method ensured that judgements about categories weren't made too early and reduced possibilities for prior assumptions to influence the data, although cherry-picking can still occur (Mercer, 2010).

Phase two: Observation data were analysed line by line. All incidents of TA-pupil talk were coded and then organised into broader categories. These categories were then arranged into themes so that links could be drawn between these and the interview themes and subthemes. In addition, the codes and the categories that were developed were reported as frequencies. Rather than to quantify or to provide replicable, generalisable results, this offered a detailed means of comparing the prevalence of codes across participants within the data and provided some insight into the percentage of time TAs in this study spent interacting with children regarding their peer interactions in comparison to

other interactions.

The data from both methods were compared (Yardley, 2000) which allowed a rich picture to be gathered to enhance the trustworthiness of the research. This allowed thematic links to be drawn between data sets and to the previous literature.

3.7.2 Process of thematic analysis

The analysis of interview data and observation data were carried out separately and then compared. However the process of each analysis was carried out in the same way and will therefore be described simultaneously below.

Half of the interview data and all of the observation data were transcribed verbatim by the researcher due to time constraints. Data not transcribed by the researcher were checked against the recordings for accuracy. Following transcription, the data corpus were read through (interviews and observation separately) many times in order to immerse the researcher fully in the data, to allow for familiarisation with the text and initial noticing of possible codes. Thoughts and ideas were written down and reviewed across the whole process of analysis. The same amount of attention was given to each item in the data, irrespective of whether it related to the research questions.

Subsequently each data item within the individual interviews were highlighted and coded systematically (examples in appendix C & D). Individual data extracts that had been identified and coded across all the items in the data set were cut up and placed into groups where patterns had been found in the data (appendix E). This formed the basis of the initial draft thematic maps. Themes were then reviewed by looking back through each group of data extracts and checking the coding and how it linked to the themes. Themes were then considered while keeping codes that had arisen across the whole data set in mind. It was at this point that the researcher realised that the current analysis had, in part, focused on a descriptive account and themed some of the codes from the interview data into the original interview schedule questions. This led to a complete review of the codes and themes for the interview data, where codes were regrouped into different patterns and the themes were defined and

named according to the codes within each one (appendix F). Draft thematic maps were then created individually for each theme and for an overall picture showing how the themes interlink (appendix G).

Once the themes were finalised, extract examples were selected for representation in the findings section and less important extracts were relegated and eventually excluded from the final write up. One quote was used to present each point made within a subtheme due to word count limitations. The coding process was 'thorough, inclusive and comprehensive' (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and broadly fits the six phases of Thematic Analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) and the seven phases presented by Hayes (2000).

3.7.4 Trustworthiness

The research process is personal to the researcher meaning that a different researcher might arrange the data into different themes and subthemes (Maxwell, 2011). The use of reflective notetaking allowed the influence of personal experiences to be considered throughout the process, for example past experience of working as a TA and working with TAs in my role. This is discussed in relation to the findings where relevant and within a section on reflexivity (see appendix H).

During each phase of data collection, initial codes and themes were discussed during supervision. Furthermore one full interview and observation transcript were peer audited to explore transparency and consistency of codes from the raw data to the overarching themes. A TEP colleague read through and coded a sample transcript of interview and observation data which were discussed in the context of themes and subthemes in order to reflect on alternative interpretations of the data. This ensured that multiple perspectives were sought to gain insight into possible reality (Maxwell, 2011) from a critical realist position (Easton, 2010). The researcher also looked for conflicting evidence via negative case analysis (Robson, 2011) and included conflicting accounts within the findings.

In order to further support the credibility of findings the researcher checked initial findings with TAs from one of the schools via the SENCO (Long &

Johnson, 2000), who all felt that the themes reflected what they talked about in the interviews.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study carried out semi-structured interviews with seven TAs as well as six audio-recordings of three TAs carrying out their role on the playground alongside field observations. Similar themes came up separately from both interview and observation data. These are summarised in table 4.1 under the superordinate theme to demonstrate the common themes across both data sets. Interview and observation data are then presented in turn under separate headings and links are drawn between them in the observation section. Key findings from the study will be discussed in the context of their distinct original and significant contribution to the field of study, the research questions and previous literature in the discussion section.

Table 4.1 Themes and subthemes from interview data and observation data

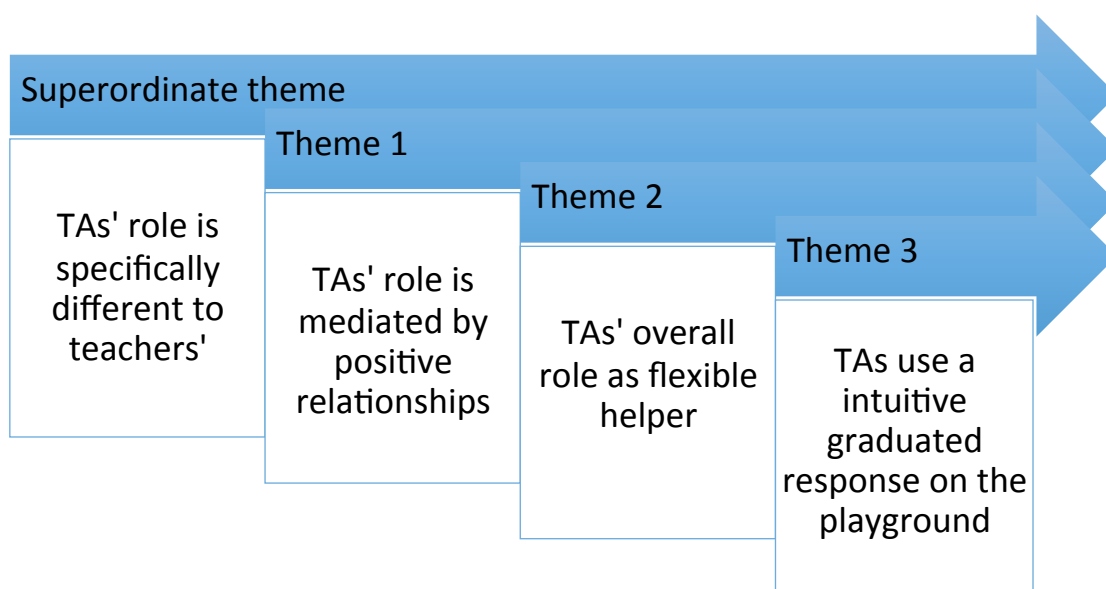
Superordinate theme: TAs' role is specifically different to teachers'			
Interview data		Observation data	
Theme	Subtheme	Theme	Subtheme
1. TAs' role is mediated by positive relationships	1. TAs' relationships with children develop awareness of their needs and are also required in response to their needs 2. TAs' relationships with teachers occur in the context of a perceived hierarchy within the school system 3. TAs' relationships with line managers develops trust and freedom within the role but at the cost of clear expectations or guidance 4. TAs' relationships with parents provides a link with school and reassurance	1. Relationships with children	1. Demonstrating interest 2. TAs demonstrate an awareness of children's needs through fading back their support
2. TAs' overall role as flexible helper	1. Necessary due to the nature of school life 2. The value of flexibility 3. The challenges of flexibility		
3. TAs use an intuitive graduated response on the playground	1. TA monitors playground 2. TA decides to get involved in a peer interaction 3. TA uses moment-by-moment approach tailored to situation 4. TA implements more structured approach	2. TAs use graduated and flexible approach	1. TA monitors playground 2. TA decides to get involved in a peer interaction 3. TA uses moment-by-moment approach tailored to situation

4.1 Interview findings

The TA interviews were transcribed as described in the methodology section. One superordinate and three main themes were decided upon through the process of thematic analysis, which all appear to relate to one another as

shown in the thematic map presented in figure 4.1. Subthemes for each theme are presented in the figures later in the text. All subthemes contained extracts from at least three TAs.

Figure 4.1 Thematic Map



4.2 Superordinate Theme: TAs' role is specifically different to teachers'

During the interviews, TAs shared a perspective that they offer something different to the teacher, most evident in terms of offering support for children's wellbeing. In particular, throughout discussions about their role, TAs appeared to perceive their role as different to teachers in how they interact with children. TAs also perceived that their role offers something different for the staff and general school system because their responsiveness allowed them to be flexible and to prioritise others' needs above their own immediate tasks.

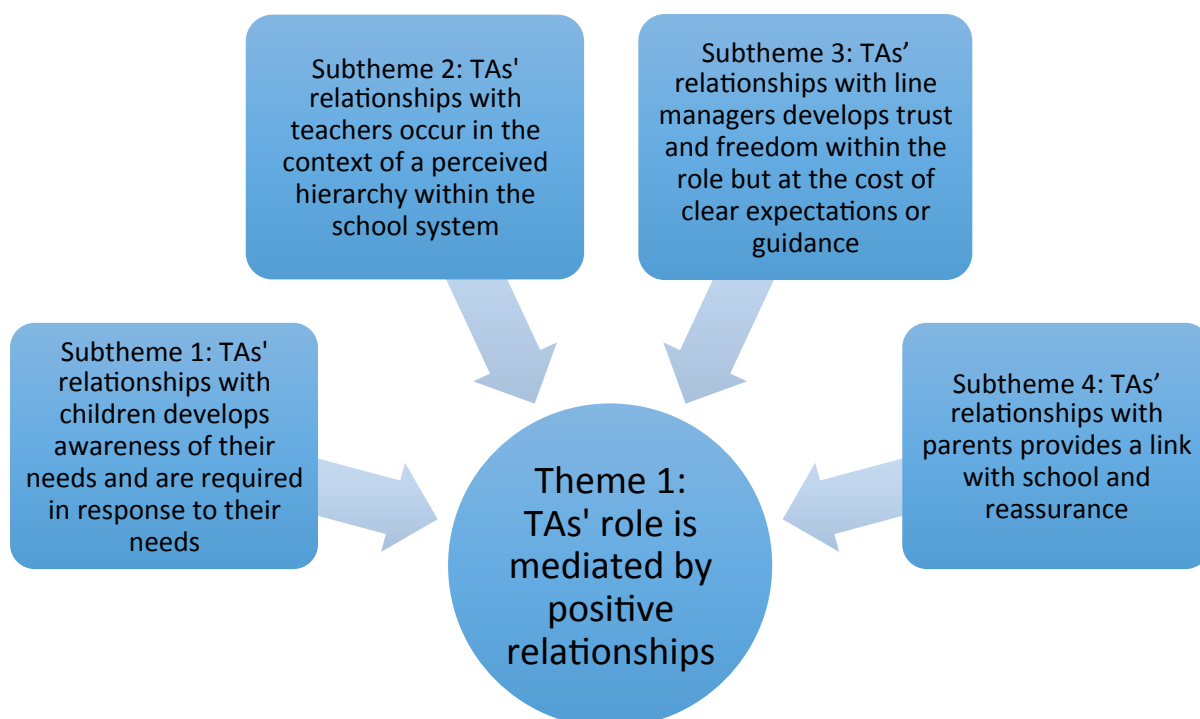
Their role also appeared different in their descriptions around their access to supervision from management and support from external agencies, which some perceived to be limited compared to teachers. TAs frequently referred to a process of learning through watching or talking to others informally. The specific points raised about TAs' support as different to the teachers' will be discussed within the relevant themes and subthemes below.

4.3 Theme 1. TAs' role is mediated by positive relationships

TAs were asked initial broad questions during the interview to ascertain what part of the role they wanted to discuss first, and all seven talked about their role in the support of children's academic development. This included 1:1 support of children in the classroom, support of lower ability groups, carrying out administrative work for the teacher or class and planning and delivering their own academic interventions.

However as the interviews continued and TAs were asked questions around aspects of the role they particularly enjoy, their priorities, how their support is most effective and what children, teachers and parents value about their role, they frequently discussed the significance and value of their relationships with others in the school system, including relationships with children, teachers, other staff and parents. The way that TAs described their relationships with others, particularly children, teachers and line managers, appeared to heavily influence the way in which they carry out their overall role, hence why this theme is presented first and depicted as feeding into the other themes.

Figure 4.2 Subthemes for theme one



4.3.1 Subtheme 1. TAs' relationships with children develops awareness of their needs and are required in response to their needs

TAs talked about how their relationships with children colour their role in a number of ways. Firstly they perceived that their relationships with children made their support more effective. They also spoke about feeling directly responsible for children's wellbeing and highlighted this as being a specific and key element of their role. This was perceived by TAs as valued by children and their parents. These points will be discussed further below.

Six TAs talked about the importance of the relationship they develop with children they work with to inform their awareness of children's individual needs.

Jennifer: *I always get to know the child and what works best for them. So I work with each child, because it's not all the same, is it? So whatever works for one child doesn't work for another.*

They said that the awareness of needs gained from knowing children well allowed them to respond to individual children's needs effectively and flexibly, which feeds into theme two discussed later on. Knowing their 1:1 children and other children well was raised as a factor that allowed them to preempt and intervene in certain situations, for example according to how specific contexts or a child's mood on a particular day will cause them to react.

Michelle: *Yes, you have to feel what (child) is feeling and see how he is. His parents obviously let us know what he has been up to, so if he has been up all night and hasn't slept so today is not going to be a good day. Fine, we will just keep it calm and keep it quieter.*

Three TAs also talked about being responsive and reflective in the level of support they offer in the classroom in order to promote their 1:1 child's independence, both according to the immediate context and according to the child's changing needs over time. This was also discussed in relation to the playground, which will be summarised in theme 3.

Billie: *But also I think there was a period in year four where I was, perhaps, still doing what I was doing in year three and being too attentive. He was telling me "I want you"- He was basically like "I want" So, then we sat down and I said "what do you want me to do? How do you want me to change what I'm doing?" Because I could tell. He said*

“I want some space” and so in response to that I am trying to give him some space.

Two class TAs also highlighted that knowing children well allowed them to notice and address changes in children’s social and emotional needs over time. For example changes in behaviour, emotional maturity or friendship complexity.

Pippa: *Like I know all the children pretty much in the school, so being there for them as well and one of my biggest things, if someone is misbehaving in class, is everything okay? Because if their behaviour is worse, something has happened.*

In summary, the quotes above illustrate that TAs’ relationships with children allowed to them develop an understanding of their needs and allow for more informed and more effective behaviour management and learning support.

In addition, six TAs comments seemed to suggest that they felt a responsibility to support children’s wellbeing in their role. This was inferred through labelling part of their role as pastoral; involving the support of children’s emotions, building trust and providing consistency which are described further below. This sense of responsibility was not described as stemming from expectations of their role from teachers or line managers but instead appeared to be influenced by TA perceptions of children’s social and emotional needs formulated through their relationships with them. On reflection, the researcher recalled that this was also an aspect of their role within their own experiences as a TA.

Feeding into the superordinate theme, this responsibility was viewed as a role specific to TAs, separate from the teacher’s job description and also necessary in order to fill gaps left by teachers in this area due to time constraints and the teacher’s role as an authority figure.

Naomi: *You have a big pastoral role to play because I personally see it as a role that I take on first before the teacher. I really think it's important they have somebody like that in class because I just feel strongly the teacher needs to get on with doing the job. It's such a tough job now and they've got so much to do all the time and I need to buffer that. I need to be this in between person. She has to have an authority as well.*

Similarly, three TAs described being less prescriptive, more relaxed and positive in comparison to teachers or other adults. They described this almost

as an attempt to counter other, possibly less positive or relaxed types of interaction that children may have with other adults at school or at home.

Billie: *I'm not very teacher-y in there; I like to be a bit more relaxed. It's lunchtime and they just need a responsible, responsive adult; they don't need: "Sit on your chair properly and hold your pen properly." I just don't think they need it; they've had enough of that. That's maybe why they're coming.*

Four TAs appeared to attach importance to building trust with children in their role. They explained that developing trust through their relationships with children made it more likely for children to approach them and ask for help. This highlighted a sense of responsibility for 'being there' when children needed emotional support and showed they had considered the factors that made it more likely for children to open up to them.

Diane: *That they, cos they know me they've built up a relationship they know they've got someone that they can go to, erm that they can trust.*

Four TAs perceived that there was a lack of support for social and emotional wellbeing in children's home life, which appeared to impact their own sense of responsibility for supporting children's wellbeing. All of the TAs who talked about this worked in the same school with a particularly socially disadvantaged catchment area.

Naomi: *this particular school cohort is an area where I think they do have social issues that I'm not privy to, but I believe they have issues at home; maybe single parents, lack of money, parenting styles. We've got quite a lot of angry children in this school, and upset and they don't necessarily get the support that they could have or should have at home.*

Two of these TAs also talked about the importance of making children feel valued through taking an interest in them, for example noticing and remembering important things about their lives or previous conversations and providing opportunities to talk.

Pippa: *I care about all the children but I have to take almost a special interest in my lot and just make a point of noticing them when they're doing something well...If they've said to me, "This that and the other", make a point of asking them about it, remembering what they told me,*

just to make sure that they know that I care, and that I want them to do well.

Furthermore, four TAs perceived that children valued the relationship they had with them, in particular their availability to talk or help, providing a sense of safety, being positive, having fun and sharing in their achievements. One TA described children's relationships with TAs as the most important aspect of their role.

Naomi: *I think probably for them the most important thing is the relationship we have with them.*

Three TAs also raised the reliability and continuity provided through their relationships with children as being valued by them and by children's parents, particularly during transitions between year groups.

Jennifer: *Because a few times we've had the parents coming and saying, "Oh, you are moving up with them, aren't you?" And I'm like: "Well, I don't know." And they're like: "Oh, there will be a nightmare if you don't." And they have said it's really helped them settle in more.*

Two TAs from the same school with a socially disadvantaged catchment area also believed that parents specifically valued their ability to meet their children's day-to-day needs in school through their relationships with them.

Naomi: *Sometimes they'll come in and speak to me if they're worried about something or the child is upset about something.*

Furthermore two TAs perceived the awareness they gained about children's needs as valued by children in terms of allowing them to take a non-judgemental approach to situations or trying to understand the function behind behaviour.

Michelle: *It is not the finger pointing person, I don't instantly come, "What have you done today? What have you done? Is it you? Why have you done..?" It is not that and it is trying to find out what has happened.*

In summary, the quotes above demonstrate the sense of responsibility that TAs felt for supporting children's wellbeing due to children's particular circumstances

and the specific role they play in ensuring the emotional welfare of the children, which was valued by them and their parents.

4.3.2 Subtheme 2. TAs' relationships with teachers occur in the context of a perceived hierarchy within the school system

TAs perceived that their relationships with teachers were also pivotal to how they carry out their role. Five TAs talked about how this contributed to the effectiveness of their role. For example they appeared to perceive teamwork with the teacher and knowing one another well as important in order for them to predict each other's needs as well as providing opportunities for learning from one another. These factors were described as contributing to their effectiveness.

Billie: *I think you work as a team, but then you pick up stuff from teachers that work.*

However, relationships with teachers appeared to be perceived by all of the TAs in the context of them sitting at the bottom of the school hierarchy, with the teacher as their boss or as having more important needs.

Naomi: *Sometimes they laugh at me if I say, "You're my boss," kind of thing, but they are in charge and if I think something and they don't, that's the way it goes. I mean, they are in charge, it's their job. They manage me.*

For example two TAs shared that they deliberately prioritised teachers' needs above the immediate requirements of other areas of their role.

Catherine: *the admin is usually marking the books or helping the teacher with her admin rather than your own.*

This suggests a perception of TAs as different to or less important than teachers. One TA directly expressed this, suggesting it lead to division between groups within the school system. She and other TAs described their positive relationships with teachers as occurring by chance depending on who they were placed with.

Diane: *There is a big, big divide and....I'm lucky with the teacher I've got now, I don't feel it with her, erm....it kind of, feels like they look down upon you.*

Class TAs also described limited access to information about children, particularly regarding input from external specialist professionals, which one related to their position in the school hierarchy. TAs assigned a child 1:1 described having regular direct access to specialists.

Catherine: *So a bit more of a preparation or just have a bit more of awareness of what's really going on to be honest, that would really help, I think it is all down to this kind of school hierarchy. Erm, so even though you're kind of at the bottom of the ladder, you are, you do have to deal with, you know, a lot of it.*

In summary, TAs relationships with teachers were highlighted as key factors in the day-to-day execution of their role, with good relationships enabling teamwork and knowledge sharing whilst poorer relationships might limit effectiveness and feelings of self-worth.

4.3.3 Subtheme 3. TAs' relationships with line managers develops trust and freedom within the role but at the cost of clear expectations or guidance

The following section will discuss how TAs relationships with their line managers appeared to impact on their role in positive and negative ways. For example three TAs described their managers as approachable and supportive, suggesting that they had a positive relationship. Two of these TAs also talked about feeling comfortable and able to ask managers questions about their practice informally which also implies a good relationship with them.

Jennifer: *So I make it easier for both of us and then go and ask for help and say, "This is what happened today. Could I have dealt with it differently?" And then they will tell me.*

Furthermore, three TAs talked about managers as being open to ideas, leading to more freedom within their role and opportunities for developing aspects of the role they were interested in.

Billie: *Yes, they sort of give me advice, but I think it's really, sort of, "Come to us with ideas, and we'll take them on board and we'll go that way if it's a good idea." They're quite flexible.*

These circumstances suggest a sense of trust between TAs and their line managers and a positive outcome of the relationship. However, trust was alluded to as a reason that TAs were not given more guidance or expectations by line managers, not only in their support of peer interactions at play time but their support more generally.

Diane: No, no really cos I think she knows me, she knows how I work and stuff so I don't think she, she doesn't need to say, say it.

Input from management about their day-to-day role, particularly regarding non-academic support, was generally described as 'hands off'. This suggests a possible negative outcome of the relationship leading to the absence of clear guidelines for practice and has implications for TAs' role in the support of non-academic development on the playground as well as their pedagogical one.

For example although all TAs mentioned that they negotiated their own targets with their line manager in their appraisal for the year, any targets they agreed for supporting children's development tended to be related to the support of children's academic achievement. Interestingly, one TA expressed doubt about how a personal target for social support of a child could run for a year.

Naomi: But I don't really see that could last for a whole year because our targets run from this time out through to July..So..I don't know because they tend to be more academic because then you can monitor it and see that there's progress made.

Furthermore the four TAs who talked about shorter-term individual Education Plan (IEP) targets developed for individual children said that their implementation were generally left down to the TA. These were described as only occasionally including a social target, apart from one TA who discussed the inclusion of general social targets.

Michelle: I have had my appraisals and we go through what I am supposed to be doing with him or my goals for his IEPs and things. I know what I am aiming for..Just life skills and social skills, there is loads of stuff that I need to be working to. It is however I can get that in. I don't have to follow that in that sense, it is just tweaking it and making sure it works for (child) and me.

TAs also cited line managers' confidence or trust in them as the reason why they had not received training for how to support peer interactions on the playground. Line managers did however provide TAs access to a range of other types of training opportunities, generally after they had been in the role for some time. Having late access to relevant information for the role resonated with the researcher's experiences as a TA. However, two TAs described receiving specific social skills training for a structured intervention they implemented. Furthermore, three TAs talked about accessing a whole school behaviour management course delivered by the Local Authority using a restorative approach.

4.3.4 Subtheme 4. TAs' relationships with parents provides a link with school and reassurance

Six TAs talked about how their relationship with parents created more opportunities for communication with the school, as the understanding between them made this less intimidating for parents.

***Diane:** I think because they've built up a, kind of relationship with me, they know me they feel more confident to talk to me.*

Three TAs said that parents valued the reassurance they could provide about their child or parenting. TAs suggested that this was because they could relate to them as a parent themselves.

***Diane:** They know that I've got a little girl as well so they know I'm a mum, so I think sometimes that they can relate so that, and because I've got a daughter the same age ...it's, like you know ..I know what they're going through.*

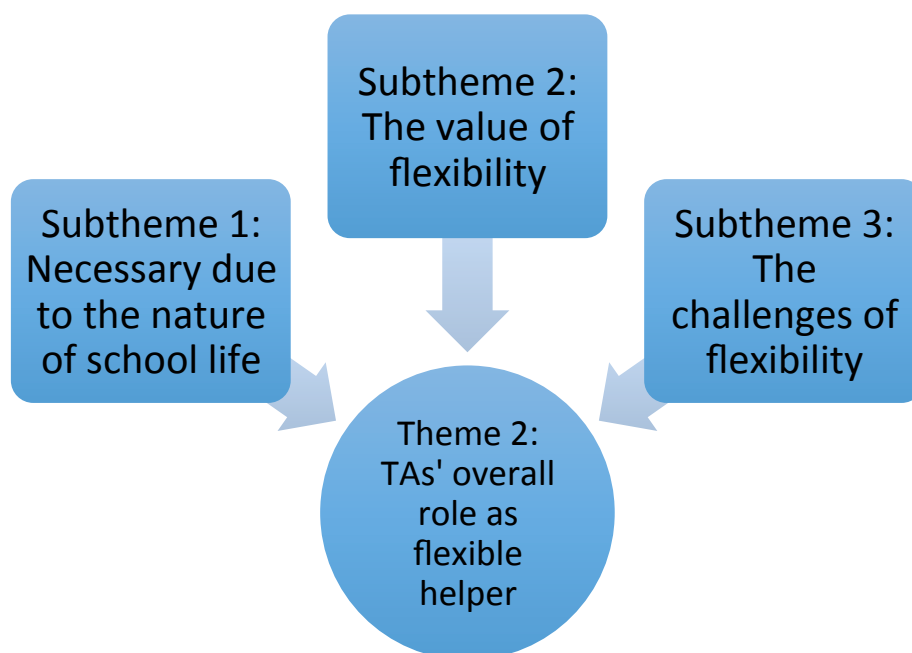
In summary TAs appeared to feel that they could build good relationships with parents because they were an approachable, relatable and reassuring member of staff that parents could identify with and therefore felt confident to talk to.

4.4 Theme 2: TAs' overall role as flexible helper

All TAs appeared to perceive their role as flexible, requiring responsiveness to different factors within the school system at a whole school level, a whole class level and an individual level. This became a key theme both across the data items and also within data items. This aspect of the role was also described as

valued by the TAs and by many teachers. However, challenges regarding flexibility in the role were also highlighted by a number of TAs. Flexibility and responsiveness in the playground context will be described separately in theme 3.

Figure 4.3 Subthemes for theme two



4.4.1 Subtheme 1: Necessary due to the nature of school life

As described above, TAs framed their flexibility as necessary at an individual, class and whole school level across a range of contexts. TAs' flexibility at an individual level has already been described within theme 1 subtheme 1 in the context of the TA-child relationship.

At the class level, all seven TAs talked about being flexible in their role in response to teacher's needs as a way to help the teacher fill the gaps in their own role for example by providing an 'extra pair of hands' when and where needed. This links back to theme 1, subtheme 2 regarding the relationship needed between the TA and the teacher for teamwork and developing awareness of what the teacher needs.

Pippa: *I think they appreciate having an extra adult in the class a lot of the time, because hardly any classes are easy. I also get to do some of the stuff that they want to do but don't have time, so I would say, yes, just being there and helping.*

Three TAs saw part of their role as predicting what the teacher might want or need before they ask for it and highlighted the need for adaptability and using their own initiative to do this.

Jennifer: *Well, I use my initiative. And if I see jobs that need doing in the classroom, I'll just say, "Can I do this?"*

At a whole school level, four TAs referred to a need for flexibility in their role in order to respond to different situations or unexpected demands around the school. This was described as needed due to frequent changes and unpredictability occurring as a normal part of school life.

Naomi: *And generally just have to be aware that things can change from day to day in school. We have to be quite adaptable.... I know that certain TAs are asked to maybe cover reception for the morning or year two in the afternoon, so basically staff redeployment, as and when.*

The need for flexibility was also raised by one TA as necessary within her role as a result of inefficient communication from other members of staff making last minute changes more likely.

Naomi: *Or I did come in one day and they said, "Actually, you're on a course today, did you know?"*

In summary TAs perceived their role as requiring flexibility throughout the different layers of the school system due to the circumstances of their deployment.

4.4.2 Subtheme 2: The value of flexibility

Six TAs discussed the value of flexibility in their role, either in terms of how it benefits teachers and the wider school system or how it benefits them individually. For example they described how teachers valued their adaptability and availability within the role.

Billie: *Just support in the classroom with children that need help, talking things through, doing stuff, like getting things laminated. Just being around to support them, I think.*

Three TAs also felt that flexibility made them more effective in their role, enabling them to respond to the changing nature of the school context and

adapt to the immediate needs of the school or classroom, sometimes using their own initiative and sometimes under the instruction of others.

Pippa: *But I just try and help out where I can. But yes, not being around stationary in one class all the time is really, really useful.*

Three TAs said that they enjoyed how the flexibility provided a wide variety of work and said that not knowing what to expect kept the role interesting.

Michelle: *Because every day is not the same, which makes it more interesting for me.*

Two TAs also described the benefits of the freedom and trust they were given within their role in return for or as a result of the flexibility they offer. This allowed them to pursue an idea of interest to them within their role and to gain a wider range of experience.

Billie: *I'm writing a funding application at the moment to get funds for the space... They just went with it and I was like, "Okay, brilliant. Now I've got to sort it out." I really enjoy that: flexibility.*

4.4.3 Subtheme 3. The challenges of flexibility

Six TAs also described some challenges created by the flexibility within their role, in particular its interference with other work. Four TAs talked about the challenges of time pressures created by the need to juggle additional jobs, the needs of other staff and unexpected situations. Frequent prioritising of other demands was described as leading to the neglect of certain areas of their role.

Naomi: *We do a lot of jobs that are asked by the teacher. You don't really always get the interventions done because some of that comes up instead. You just have to do what you can when you can.*

Two TAs highlighted the challenges created by uncertainties about what they might need to respond to next.

Jennifer: *So if you get a child you're not used or you're just put into a situation you're not generally doing all the time...*

Furthermore, two TAs described the flexibility required within their role as tiring.

Diane: *It can get very tiring it's a very tiring job and I know people sometimes think and I get that with teachers as well, "oh it's a 9-3 job." It's not a 9-3 job. I've worked harder in this job than any other job.*

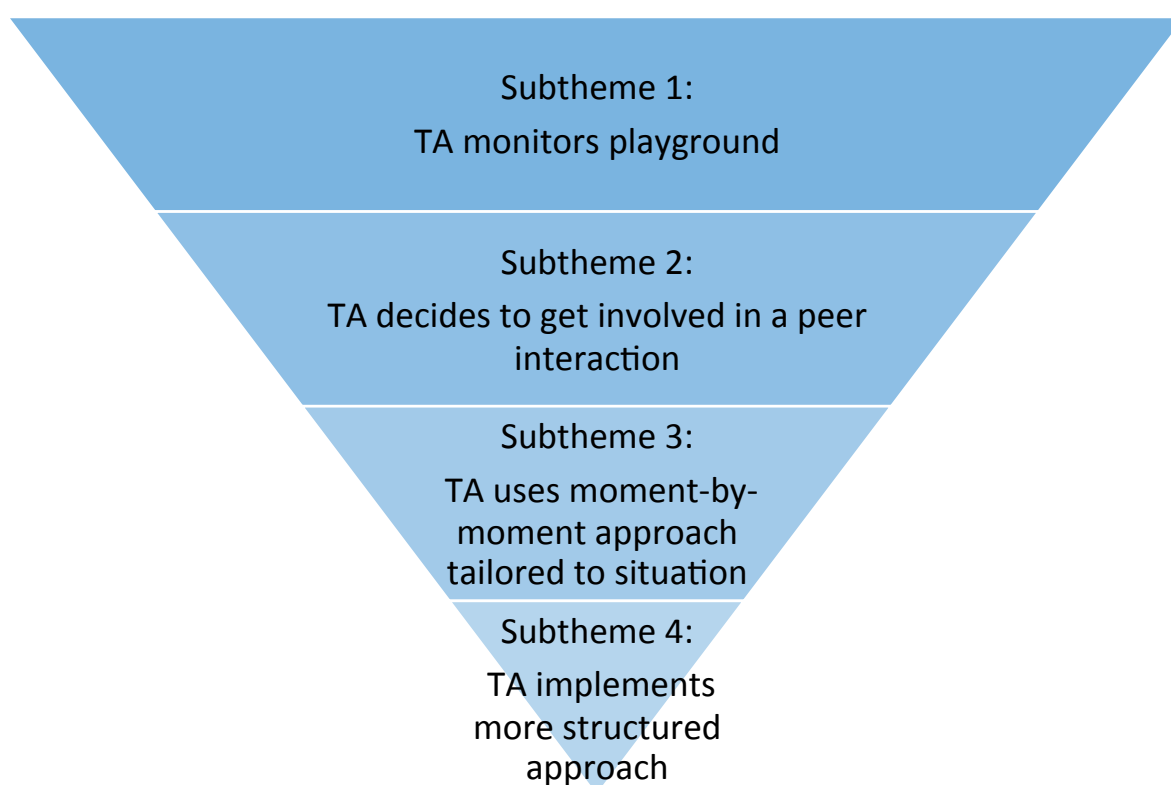
It also appeared that the flexibility within their role made it difficult for four TAs to explain in detail what they do, particularly during discussions about their role on the playground.

Jennifer: *I know, I'm just going to tell you what I do out there. Because when you ask me, I'm like "I don't know what I do" But when I'm out there I just do it.*

This paragraph summarises both the value and challenges of TAs' flexibility. While their flexibility benefitted the wider school system, TAs felt that the juggling required tended to interfere with certain aspects of their role and also led to uncertainty and fatigue. Nevertheless, this was a factor that increased their enjoyment of their role and could also lead to career development.

4.5 Theme 3. TAs use an intuitive graduated response on the playground

Figure 4.4. Subthemes for the graduated response model:



When TAs were asked initial broad questions during the interview, four TAs talked first about their support in other areas of their role before highlighting their support of children at break or lunchtime. They were able to expand on this when prompted. Three TAs needed prompting to talk about this area of their role.

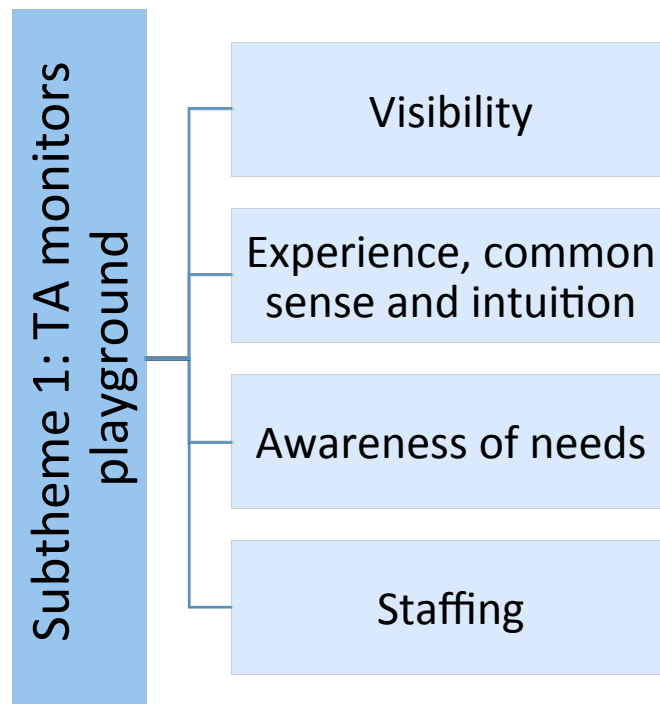
TAs' description of their approach to supporting on the playground showed that they were unintentionally implementing a graduated response to children's needs, the subthemes for which are presented in figure 4.4. The term 'graduated' has been used because the responses described were applied successively in a particular order according to levels or stages, with each stage leading on to the next. For example TAs revealed that first they monitored children in the playground from a distance. As a result of this, they might then decide to get directly involved in a specific peer interaction based on a number of factors that are presented in figure 4.5. Once involved, TAs then described tailoring their support in the moment to this specific situation, shown in figure 4.6. TAs also discussed more infrequent use of a more planned and structured approach for some children, set out in figure 4.7, as a result of repeated unsuccessful previous interventions in the other three stages or as a result of advice given by external professionals. The term graduated is likely to be familiar to school staff due to its use in the SEN code of practice (DfE & DoH, 2015).

4.5.1 Subtheme 1. TA monitors playground

All seven TAs talked about monitoring the playground through watching children from a distance and saw this as the main part of their playtime role. TAs discussed a range of factors influencing this (figure 4.5).

Billie: *I'll watch it first, because it's like with the acting: you're often giving directions before you even know if the child's got any idea of what they're doing, so I try and sit back and just watch.*

Figure 4.5 Factors influencing how TAs monitor the playground



4.5.1.1 Visibility

Five TAs talked about making themselves accessible to children while they were monitoring the playground. Three TAs talked about considering how they position themselves on the playground in order to do this. For example:

Billie: *So I'll just walk round, talk to the children, sort out issues, have a chat with people, just get a feel of what's going on. It's quite relaxed. We'll be positioned in certain places so that ... children can access a grown-up near where they are.*

Five TAs also said that they monitored the playground by greeting children they pass as they walk around. Three TAs talked about using this strategy to offer subtle support so as not to single particular children out, overwhelm or embarrass them. They described using open questions to engage children to make it appear that they came across them in passing.

Jennifer: *I don't make them feel that I'm coming over to them directly. I'm just passing, kind of thing. Because I'm always doing it, they just go, "Yes," or they go, "Well, no." And I'm like: "Oh, can I help you?" And then if they say, "No," I'm like: "But are you okay?" And then I'll just walk away, because I don't want them to feel pressured.*

4.5.1.2 Experience, common sense and intuition

Six TAs said that they used their previous experience including from other roles, their current role or as parents to support what they were looking for while monitoring the playground.

Jennifer: *I guess it's just the nannying, it just comes naturally to me.*

Michelle: *It is just lots of years of being on the playground fast thinking I think and being a mum.*

Three TAs said that the skills used to monitor the playground were drawn from intuition and common sense and were also informed by the school rules.

Billie: *I think it's just common. It's what you do as a grown-up, isn't it? You just see a couple of children and think, "They could really do with taking turns," or, "They could really do with, perhaps, a different game."*

However one TA acknowledged that the school rules were not specific enough to include details about how to support peer interactions or other social skills.

Catherine: *Usually the, expectations um, are the golden expectations that the school follow, erm ...so we are safe we are kind, that kind of thing, but they are not very, specific to, kind of friendship ..skills or anything like that.*

4.5.1.3 Awareness of children's needs

Three TAs talked about how their approach to monitoring the playground is also influenced by children's individual needs. For example, one TA talked about adjusting her support to respond to particular children with specific needs in the 'break out space' that she runs during lunch time.

Billie: *We've got children with cerebral palsy, mild, and I've got a child with reasonably, I'd say at least moderate, ASD – they just need a bit more space, in my view. So, if they come in...I'll reduce the numbers so that it is calm– it's a bit loud, so I just like to tone it down for them.*

The other two TAs discussed responding to the needs of their 1:1 child by monitoring them on the playground from a distance and offering the least intrusive support in order to build their independence, in a similar way to earlier

discussions in theme 1 subtheme 1 about offering adaptable support for independence in class.

Jennifer: *I back off a bit in the playground now. I used to watch him, but, as he has matured, I just keep an eye from afar. I don't want him to feel that he is constantly being watched, and I didn't want him to feel that somebody was always going to be there doing something for him.*

They talked about achieving this by adapting to the needs of their 1:1 child on a particular day and their changing needs as they develop over time. As a result of this, TAs generally described their role on the playground as more of a general TA, not often interacting with their 1:1 child if they had one, as long as the child was safe.

Michelle: *I am an MSA [Midday Supervisory Assistant] at lunchtime just doing MSA duties, so I am not really with (child) but I am around for him if he needs. It is just a case of keeping an eye on him when he is at play at break and lunch. Making sure he is not causing a danger to himself or children.*

4.5.1.4 Staffing

Three TAs also said monitoring from a distance allowed them to work effectively within limited staffing levels. For example supporting children only in response to a particular situation that warranted involvement, or as a result of being approached directly by children for help.

Naomi: *We used to have quite a lot of staff out there and you could say, "Today I'm going to help so-and-so, this child," but with two of us out there you can't do that, you just can't: No. I mean, you'd be constantly interrupted.*

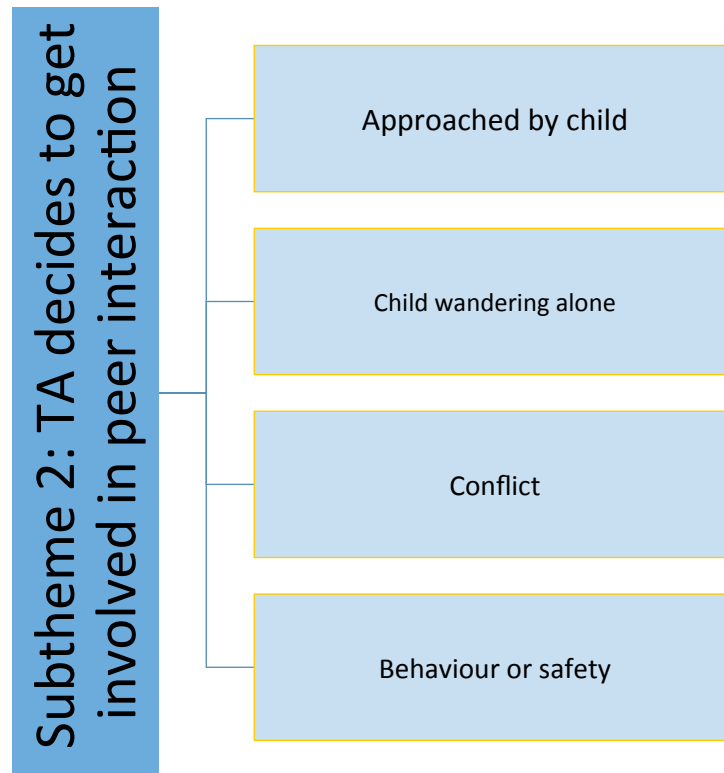
In summary, subtheme 1 describes the first step that TAs implemented within the graduated response model. This involved the monitoring of children from a distance in response to circumstances; utilising their visibility, previous experience, common sense, intuition, their awareness of children's needs while taking into account staffing levels.

4.5.2 Subtheme 2. TA decides to get involved in a peer interaction

According to the circumstances described in subtheme 1, TAs would then decide whether to intervene in a peer interaction. This was the second step in

the graduated response model. The most common reasons TAs gave to describe when they would do this are set out in figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6 Subtheme 2: Factors influencing TAs decision-making



4.5.2.1 Approached by child

Seven TAs said that they might become involved in a peer interaction when directly approached by a child. A number of common reasons for being approached were described, for example difficulties with interacting with peers, most often resulting from conflict in games or difficulties initiating contact with peers.

Billie: *Maybe the football has gone wrong in terms of rules and regs; some of the girls might be upset because they feel they're being talked about.*

Diane: *Or they're not playing with their friends.*

Other reasons for being sought out were for adult attention or if there was an injury. One TA said they were approached for children to seek information.

4.5.2.2 Child wandering alone

Six TAs said that they choose to intervene when a child is wandering on their own or standing by them rather than playing with peers.

Jennifer: *So if a child is with me and I say, "Hi, are you okay?" and they're just like, "Hmm," and they're just hanging around, after a few minutes of chatting I'll say, "Who are your friends? Whom do you play with? Do you want to play with somebody? You don't want to be hanging around with me all lunchtime." "That is boring."*

However three TAs also discussed the importance of balancing their concern with the possibility that the child may want to be alone and two raised the importance of monitoring children's body language in helping them to decide.

Billie: *I think it's about are they happy playing on their own or do they want to speak? Do they want to get involved in a group? "Who are your friends? Who do you like to play with?" Things like that, just to check where they are, but it's no secret that a lot of children like just to run about for a minute on their own.*

4.5.2.3 Conflict

Five TAs said that they choose to intervene when they witness conflict in a peer interaction. This was discussed more broadly in terms of squabbles, flights and friendship difficulties but also more specifically in terms of altercations between their 1:1 child and peers or specific issues that cause conflict such as sharing.

Naomi: *Then we have inevitable squabbles, fights. "They're being mean to me," "He's being unkind to me and won't give me the ball."*

4.5.2.4 Behaviour or safety

Five TAs said that they would intervene if there were behaviour or safety concerns between peers for example rough play, dangerous, violent or verbally hostile behaviour.

Naomi: *We need to make sure that their behaviour is on track, that there are no issues as regards bullying, unkindness, physical violence, hitting, climbing trees, using sticks.*

In summary, subtheme 2 sets out the circumstances under which TAs described intervening in a peer interaction. This forms the second step in the

graduated response model. Factors included being approached by a child for a number of reasons, approaching a child who was wandering alone and conflict, behaviour or safety concerns.

4.5.3 Subtheme 3. TA uses moment-by-moment approach tailored to situation

Six TAs said that after they had decided to intervene in a peer interaction their approach to supporting children needed to occur ad hoc and tailored to the specific situation due to the unpredictable nature of events on the playground. This was the third step in the graduated response model.

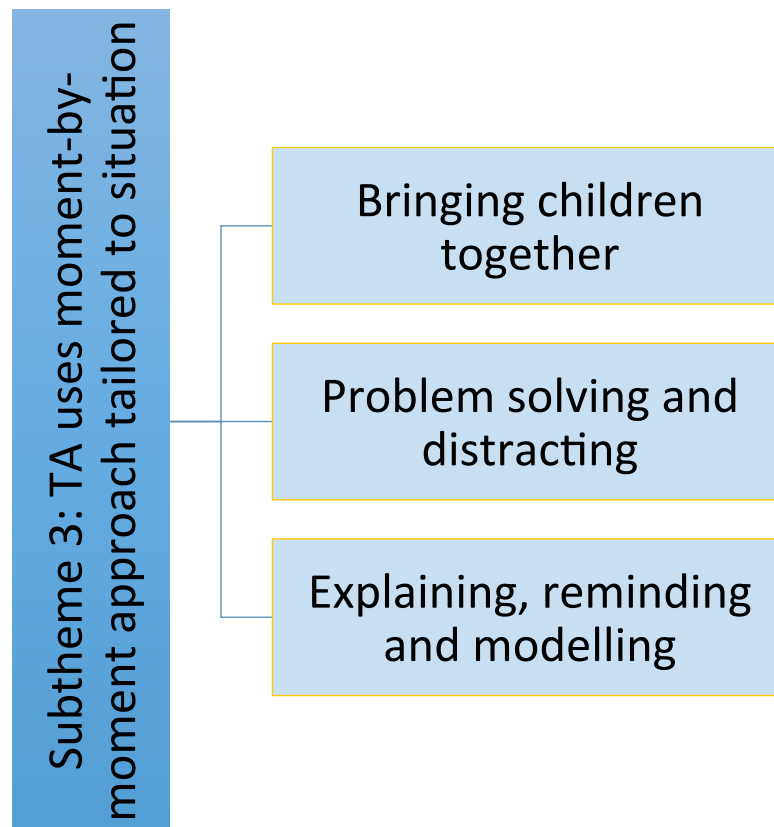
Jennifer: *Oh, it's as and when....Because every day is different, isn't it? It depends...on the situation.*

Contrastingly, one TA in the sample suggested that her role on the playground involved feeding back information to teachers rather than intervening directly herself. She attributed this to stretched staffing levels.

Naomi: *If a child was upset- in fact because I do lunchtime duty as well, I did say to one of the teachers that a certain child is having friendship issues outside.*

The six TAs who talked about their moment-by-moment support of peer interactions on the playground described a range of approaches as presented in figure 4.7.

Figure 4.7 Subtheme 3: Details of the approaches used



4.5.3.1 Bringing children together

Six TAs said that their moment-by-moment support involved bringing children together by introducing peers to one another in a range of ways for example through providing ideas for play, through suggesting who to play with or suggesting what to play.

Billie: *There'll be a child who's playing a game quite ably but could do with a friend, so I might take someone and chat with someone who's reading or looking a bit lost: "Would you like to play?"*

Three of the TAs said that they did this by remembering what the child played before and with whom. For example:

Catherine: *I noticed that he was playing a certain game with another boy, so I scanned the playground and found him and then I kind of brought the boy who was on his own over to the little group and introduced them and you know "you were playing this game with him the other day and how about you play this together now?"*

Two TAs talked on two occasions each about sometimes needing to be more directive about the games children can play in order to encourage interaction, for example:

Catherine: *“how about if you’re playing house she could be this role and you can play this role together”, that kind of thing.*

Two TAs talked about selecting a specific peer that they know is able to interact well and directly asking them to approach the child instead.

Pippa: *Grab someone else that I know I could trust and then just be like “Can you do me a favour, why don’t you ask so and so if they want to go and play because they look a bit sad?”*

In addition, five TAs talked about using their own personality and ideas as a resource to bring children together, both for 1:1 and children more generally. This included drawing children in by modelling games and using play equipment themselves.

Jennifer: *And I’ll say “shall I show you my skipping? Because my skipping is rubbish.” ...And that usually attracts other people.*

Two TAs said that they would actively try to step back once interaction between the children had started.

Michelle: *We will do that for a bit and then I will try and introduce some other children in it, maybe and I can step back and let him get on with it with the other kids.*

Two TAs talked about bringing children together by initiating a conversation, for example raising a topic that children have in common, joking, asking about their life or about a game they were playing. They also talked about gradually stepping back once interaction between the children had started.

Jennifer: *I always start the conversation. I’m usually the silly billy-make them both laugh and- Yes, it’s the icebreaker, and just finding something they have in common together and just letting them then have the conversation with each other. Yes, and I stand back but am still involved and then slowly...Get further away.*

4.5.3.2 Problem solving and distracting

Six TAs talked about how they help children to interact with peers during conflict by asking questions to help them to talk it through and to provide opportunities for explanations of both sides of the argument. They described using questions that help children to acknowledge each other's feelings rather than putting words in children's mouths or telling them off directly.

Pippa: *So just trying to get them to figure it out themselves and think about each other, rather than what's happened, think about how the other one is feeling because you can't ever argue with someone's feelings*

Two TAs also talked about encouraging the children themselves to lead the situation and think of their own solution through asking restorative prompting questions about how to solve the problem.

Billie: *"how can we fix it?" Getting them to sort it out so that they've got their own solution that they can use next time, but that is a long process and it's something you have to do with nearly every child, actually, before it all comes together.*

Three TAs suggested more directive approaches towards supporting peer interactions during conflict. For example warning children about what might have to happen next or offering children some alternatives for what they could do to resolve the conflict.

Pippa: *And if they can't work it out themselves I'll just be like, "Right, well no one is doing it now, we're not playing that game. If you can't play nicely and you can't work it out then go and play something else."*

Michelle: *"Maybe we can help rebuild the tower, would you like to do that?"*

Two TAs talked about using distraction to diffuse conflict. This included asking children to find another activity, providing praise for positive aspects of the interaction and highlighting the positives about a situation or what they might be missing out on.

Jennifer *Yes. And I said, "You're spending so much time arguing and discussing, you're losing your football time."*

4.5.3.3 Explaining, reminding and modelling

Four TAs said that they help children to interact by explaining individual differences and suggesting how to react or respond to an interaction or situation. This included explaining to a child with needs how to respond to peers, highlighting social rules and nuances or explaining why other children behave in certain ways.

Billie: *I'll explain at the time – not in front of loads of people; I explain in his ear: "We're not going to do thumbs down now, because people are finding that hurtful, so we're not going to do it. Nobody's doing that now."*

One TA said on two occasions that she also explained to peers about how to respond to a child with specific needs.

Michelle: *They have had it explained over the years ... "If he fidgets in the line just ignore him" and they do tend to quite happily ignore him. "If he is touching or poking you move away. Ask him to stop, just move away a little bit or come and tell a teacher" by all the class teachers and everybody and they do understand that.*

Four TAs talked about reminding children about how to interact positively with peers. For example reminding children to take turns or to think about the manner in which they talk or behave towards one another during on-going peer interactions but also reminding children about including peers who are on their own in future peer interactions.

Catherine: *Yeah, I think it's important to remind the other peers who are all playing nicely together that there are other people who are on their own as well and the ones that erm, find it easier to empathise with others often then run over to see if they're ok so I think it's just a reminder they need, it's not a purposely leaving them out sometimes.*

Additionally, three TAs said that they modelled social skills or rules such as taking turns, apologising or asking peers to play.

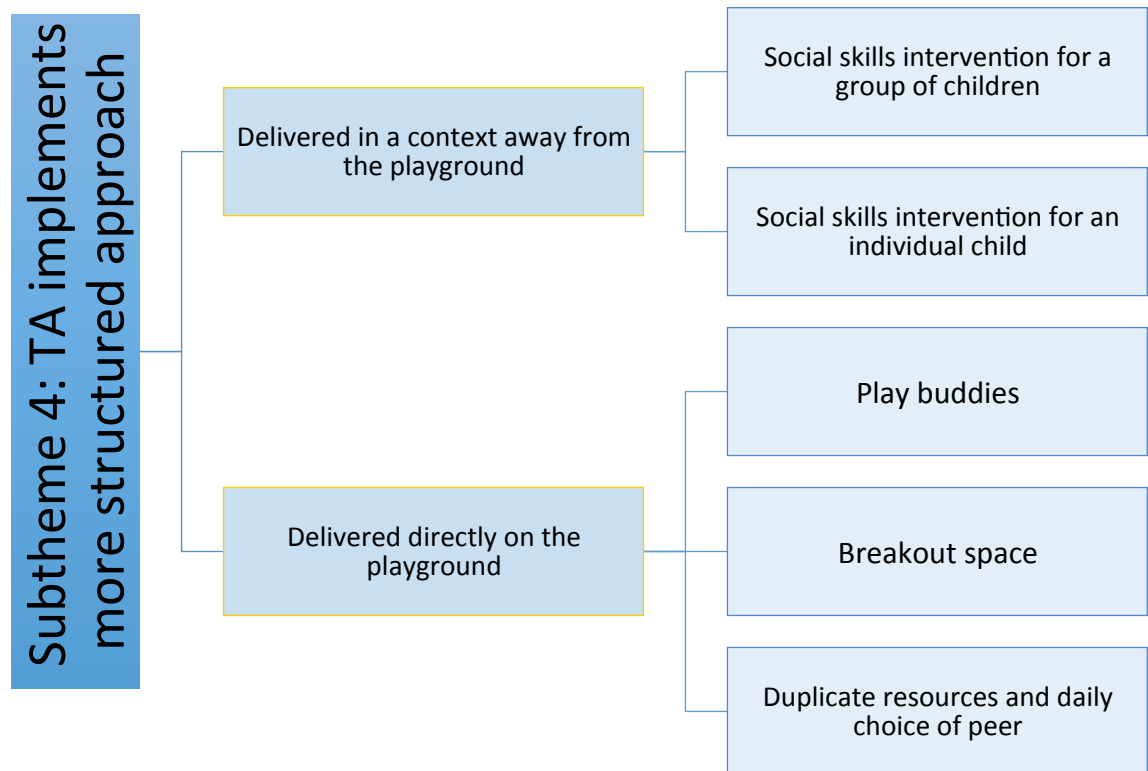
Catherine: *and then we would, erm...what's it called not mirror, but you'd show him how to- "this is how you do, this is how you play", or "this is how you go and ask somebody.. if you want to join in."*

In summary, TAs talked about different ways they would provide in the moment support for children's peer interactions, which formed step three in the graduated response model. Discussion mostly focussed on the different ways that they support children's play or deescalate conflict and concentrated on the support of children more generally rather than on a specific child assigned to them.

4.5.4 Subtheme 4: TA implements more structured approach

Subtheme 4 sets out the final step in the graduated response model; the use of more structured and pre-planned support. This approach was used less frequently and sometimes led to intervention in contexts other than the playground. Specific interventions were sometimes introduced as a result of an external factor, for example advice from professionals outside of the school system or were introduced as a result of the TA noticing a specific situation or need on repeated occasions. TAs use of specific structured approaches in the playground were on two occasions based on the TAs own ideas. See figure 4.8 for further detail.

Figure 4.8 Subtheme 4: Details of the structured approaches used



4.5.4.1 Delivered in a context away from the playground

Overall five TAs said that they sometimes implemented a more structured approach to supporting interactions away from the playground. For example, three said that advice from external professionals led to the implementation of a social skills intervention in a small group context to support a particular child's interactions with peers. Two of the TAs said that this was implemented to support their 1:1 child. The third TA implemented a small group intervention for a child with ASD that she was not assigned 1:1 in her class. However, this intervention fed directly into the child's interactions on the playground because sessions involved the collaborative planning and/or reviewing of ideas for peer support on the playground between the child and his peers.

Catherine: *once a week we'd meet up, we'd discuss what went really well that week, some things that maybe didn't go so well, and then .. a mini plan or targets for each pupil to work on for the following week and we went on and on and on and then we did that until the end of term, and the boy turned out to be much more confident with his peers, just confident in himself as well, and he felt more confident in the playground.*

Additionally two TAs (one class and one pupil premium) talked about their involvement in running a nurture group intervention. This involved a small group of children being withdrawn from the classroom to support their social and emotional development and to provide them with the prerequisite skills for interacting appropriately with peers.

Jennifer: *It's all about good sharing, taking turns and communicating. Then it's snack time. So it's all sitting around the table, good manners, sitting nicely....*

4.5.4.2. Delivered on the playground

Two TAs independently devised and implemented an intervention for peer interactions on the playground. One implemented a play buddy intervention where she selected and pre-prepared volunteers before each break-time to support younger children on the playground.

Catherine: *I've also set up a play buddy scheme, where year 6's. I've chosen like er three a day I've put on a rota so they'll go onto the infants playground um and I'll make sure that they um play with the little ones anybody that, it just helps the erm make sure that there are nobody, nobody's playing on their own.*

The same TA also talked about implementing a structured play scenario on the playground for a particular child who was struggling to share. She described duplicating a resource so that other children could have access to it and encouraged the child to choose a daily peer to play with the duplicate resource.

Catherine: *once he got used to playing with the ball on his own we said "right every day you can choose one person who you share the ball with."*

The other TA talked about her development and implementation of a quiet enclosed space in the playground for children to have access to more structured activities. She talked about the importance of increasing access for the children who have particular difficulties on the playground as well as offering a space for all children.

Billie: *I wrote a proposal for the breakout space at the start of this half term, and it's already up and running....It's set up to help children have an area where they can have some time to calm themselves, reflect, be*

with their friends in a small group and focus on particular activities, like maybe it's reading, or playing a board game, or colouring, or doing craft, without: "You can't do that in the playground."

In summary some TAs implemented a fourth step in the graduated response model where they intervened with more structured approaches for peer interaction support, both on the playground and in other contexts. Some TAs had used their initiative to devise their own, more structured approaches according to a need that they had identified.

4.6 Observation findings

TA observations were transcribed and analysed as described in the methodology section. First, each line of TA interaction was coded and codes were then sorted into broader categories. The frequencies of codes within each category are presented in table 4.2, organised by each TA. Table 4.3 presents the themes linking to the interview data that were then developed from the categories.

Table 4.2 Frequency of each category of interaction by TA

TA	Category of interaction									
	Demonstrating interest	Behaviour/safety	Mediate conflict	Mediate play/interaction	Information share	Injury/illness	Open greeting	Help	Procedural/other	Total
Billie	87	8	46	12	26	20	22	5	4	230
Jennifer	121	7	38	19	8	12	8	0	3	216
Michelle	69	85	0	42	13	14	8	27	24	282
Total	277	100	84	73	47	46	38	32	31	728
Percentage	38	13.7	11.5	10	6.4	6.3	5	4.3	4.2	

Table 4.3 Themes from observation data and their links to interview data

Theme	Subtheme	Descriptor	Link to interviews
1. Relationships with children	Demonstrating interest		Theme 1 Subtheme 1
	TAs demonstrate an awareness of children's needs through fading back their support		Theme 1 Subtheme 1
2. Graduated and flexible response	TA monitors playground	Visibility	Theme 3 Subtheme 1
	TA decides to get involved in an interaction	Approached by a child	Theme 3 subtheme 2
		Child wandering alone	✓
		Conflict	✓
		Behaviour or safety	✓
	TA uses moment-by-moment approach tailored to situation	Resolving conflict	Theme 3 subtheme 3
		Extending children's play and peer interactions	✓
		Information share	✓
		Injury/illness	✓
		Help child	
		Procedural/other	

4.7 Theme 1. Relationships with children

4.7.1 Subtheme 1. Demonstrating interest

During both observations of all three TAs, they engaged in a surprisingly high number of interactions with children where they took an interest in what they were doing or their lives (n=277), accounting for 38 percent of all their interactions with children. The types of interaction observed link directly to TAs' talk during the interviews about their role in supporting children's wellbeing and making them feel valued through making themselves available and taking an

interest in their lives or play (captured in theme 1 subtheme 1 from the interview data). Interestingly the TAs who took part in the observations talked less about this topic during the interviews than the TAs from the other school with a socially disadvantaged catchment area, showing that even though they might not be as aware of this as a key part of their role, they are still engaging in a high percentage of these types of interactions in their day to day role on the playground.

Jennifer engaged in the highest average frequency of this type of interaction (n=60.5), followed by Billie (n=43.5) then Michelle (n=34.5). The most frequent type of interaction within this theme was making an affirming comment in response to a child's comment or play (n=88). This type of interaction was also the most frequent type of interaction across all themes. Two TAs did this more than 12 times during each playtime and Jennifer made a particularly high number (n=33) of affirming comments during one playtime, many in response to the same child.

Jennifer: *They are aren't they?*

Billie: *Whay! (Pause 5 sec) Oh wow...*

These simple comments bear significance due to their frequency, acknowledgement of children and positive affect.

The following most frequent types of interaction both within this theme but also across all the themes were showing an interest in children through asking questions (n=52) or making attentive comments (n=38) about their home life, school life or play.

Jennifer: *He's going to be a lovely dog when he's fully trained.*

Michelle: *Oh, what was that? (Laughs) Backward, that was a backwards somersault? Can you do another one?*

TAs also demonstrated interest in children through laughing in response to their play (n=32) and repeating their words (n=30). Each TA repeated a child words on average 5 times during the course of the observation.

They offered positive praise through comments or gesture, for example high five, in response to children's interactions with them (n=14).

In addition, field notes showed that all TAs used open and interested facial expressions when greeting children. In particular, Jennifer frequently used quite overt open and interested body language during more extended interactions with children, for example crouching down slightly or leaning forward to listen while making eye contact. Two children demonstrated affection towards Jennifer by hugging her and she gave them an affirming pat on the head. She and Billie also looked in the direction a child pointed in, demonstrating interest in what they were sharing. At one point Michelle knelt down to console a boy who was lying on the floor.

4.7.2 Subtheme 2. TAs demonstrate an awareness of children's needs through fading back their support

One of the TAs in the sample, Michelle, had extended input into the play, interactions and behaviour of her 1:1 child. Field note observations showed that Michelle's proximity to her 1:1 child was generally approximately between one to six metres, however she only came within one metre of him when she was directly intervening in an interaction and tended to deliberately walk away from or step back afterwards. Field notes demonstrated that she usually talked to her 1:1 child together with one or more peers. She was furthest away from her 1:1 child when she was helping other children. When her 1:1 had gone out of sight, after a short time she looked for him and walked closer towards him in order to keep within a six-metre proximity of him.

One of the other TAs interacted with her 1:1 child only once to bring him into a game and once at the end of play where he informed her that he wasn't feeling well. The other TA had no interactions at all with her 1:1 child during play. These findings link to theme 1 subtheme 1 in the interview data, where TAs described how they deliberately tried to step back from their 1:1 child to develop their independence and therefore did not tend to have extended input with them. This appeared to allow them to support a wider range of children.

All three TAs appeared to try and give children space at certain points and encourage them to go off and play (n=5), highlighting their awareness of the importance of children's independence.

Billie: *All right, I'll let you get on with it, sounds fun!*

4.8 Theme 2. A graduated and flexible response

During the observations TAs demonstrated a graduated and flexible response to supporting children on the playground in a way that was similar to what they described in the interviews.

4.8.1 Subtheme 1. TA monitors playground

Field note observations showed that TAs generally walked to different areas of the playground and monitored children from a distance, and audio-recordings revealed that they only intervened in response to a number of factors similar to those raised in the interviews. For example all three greeted children as they came across them with open questions (n=38) linking to TAs' talk in interviews about greeting children as they walked around while monitoring the playground (theme 3, subtheme 1).

Michelle: *You alright child6?*

At the start of play, field notes showed that all three TAs tended to position themselves near where children first entered the playground. When they weren't interacting with individual children Jennifer and Billie walked around to different parts of the playground, either led by a child with a need or monitoring more generally. This allowed them to greet children along the way. Michelle tended to stay in the central part of the playground where both lengths of the playground could be seen, greeting children when they passed or approached her. When not interacting with children she tended to watch the child she supports 1:1 from a short distance.

TAs also approached and greeted children as a result of information received from another child for example if a child was sad, or conversely greeted them when they were approached by children themselves (n=5).

All three TAs rarely interacted with other adults in the playground and positioned themselves at a distance from one another.

4.8.2 Subtheme 2. TA decides to get involved in a peer interaction

TAs became directly involved in an interaction with a child for similar reasons to those described in the interviews. For example, TAs were approached by children to resolve difficulties in interacting with peers, for adult attention, if another child had an injury/illness or to seek information. TAs were also approached for additional reasons that were not raised in the interviews, for example for help or to seek an answer to a procedural question.

TAs also decided to interact with a child for other reasons that were described in the interviews. For example a child wandering alone, concerns about behaviour and safety, as a result of conflict, after witnessing an injury and to engage in, extend or mediate play or other peer interactions. TAs also interacted with children for reasons that were not raised in the interviews; to spontaneously share information or to ask a procedural question. These will be discussed in the section below.

4.8.3 Subtheme 3. TA uses moment-by-moment approach tailored to situation

TAs approach to supporting children in the playground demonstrated some clear similarities with how TAs described this in the interviews, which will be highlighted throughout this section.

4.8.3.1 Resolving conflict

Two TAs took part in a high level of interactions where they were mediating conflict within peer interactions (n=84). One TA did a high level of mediation across both observations (n=46) and the other TA engaged in high numbers of mediating interactions during only one observation (n=38). The other TA working in the key stage 1 (KS1) playground did not engage in interactions of this type. The two TAs who were approached by a child about a conflict started their interactions with children by asking clarification questions, for example about the location, who and why (n=13).

Jennifer: *Do you know why he's sad and crying?*

They also used short open comments such as 'yes' to encourage children to continue speaking (n=7). Once they were aware of the details of the conflict, they brought children together for group discussion through calling relevant children over or taking the child to find relevant children (n=10). TAs gave some direct instructions to children about how to resolve the conflict in a matter of fact manner, including regarding the process of the conflict resolution for example asking children to listen to each other (n=8).

Billie: *let's try it then, if you step away from it, you have a go and then let's see if it's ok?*

Direct questions (n=5) were also asked, mostly by one TA during one observation, in order to understand the details of a conflict.

Jennifer: *So did you stamp you're feet and was you cross?*

However the TAs did not 'accuse' children, instead taking a non-judgemental, neutral approach. Furthermore, field notes showed that Billie used open body language when trying to resolve a conflict. In addition to direct instructions and questions, they also gave more open instructions (n=8) to children and asked open questions (n=7) which tended to be positively phrased.

Jennifer: *Hello my lovvie what's happened?*

They also spoke on behalf of a particular child, explaining or asking their peers for them (n=7).

Billie: *I understand that you had a bump with child22 and he bumped into the hedge, the fence and he fell over and bumped his chin.*

They also demonstrated impartiality and gave children a voice in the conflict by asking them to explain to each other how they feel or to share their side of the story (n=3).

Jennifer: *Can you explain to child5 why you are sad with him?*

On two occasions the TAs acknowledged the emotions of children involved, focusing on how the situation made each child feel.

Billie: *It seems that both of you are feeling a bit..like..it's not quite going your way.. yeah. All of you are.*

This relates clearly to TAs talk about helping children to problem solve in the interview data, where they discussed asking children open questions to help them to talk it through and hear both sides of the argument with a focus on how it made them feel rather than putting words in children's mouths or chastising them directly.

They also distracted children by highlighting something else about playtime (n=3), which was also raised as a technique during the interviews.

Jennifer: *We haven't got too much long left of playtime.*

Sometimes they picked up on a glimpse of agreement between children and pointed this out or provided praise (n=2), which also appeared to be used as a distraction technique.

Billie: *Oh, it's OK, I think that's working fine, don't you?*

Field notes showed that Billie checked on a group of peers from a distance after she had faded back from a conflict. Jennifer directly checked on a child after a conflict by asking a question.

Jennifer: *So child3, where's child4 now? Are you not playing with child4 now?*

4.8.3.2 Extending children's play and peer interactions

All of the TAs also mediated children's interactions regarding their play (n=73). They offered ideas to scaffold children's play in different ways for example they each asked questions (n=17) and made comments (n=7) to extend or provide ideas for children's play during at least one of the observations.

Jennifer: *Do you want to balance on there?*

Billie: *Boys..have you tried a chest pass? Like that that we did in PE?*

Michelle: *Alright, how many times can we spin?*

The TA working in the KS1 playground gave a high level of direct instructions to provide ideas for play, mostly during one of the observations and towards the

child she was assigned 1:1 (n=16). Only one other TA gave two direct instructions for play.

Michelle: *You should have a race to see who, how fast you can clear all the ice.*

The TA working in the KS1 playground also gave direct instructions to two girls about how to interact with a peer who was struggling to interact appropriately through expressing his point of view and explaining how they could support him (n=5).

Michelle: *I know but he doesn't remember every day, so you need to tell him at the beginning of every day, or the beginning of... break time and say child 19, please don't chase us, ok? And then if he keeps chasing you, then you can come and tell a teacher. Alright? But you two need to stop chasing him as well, cos I know you lot chase him as well. So that just, he thinks that it's ok because you chase him, alright?*

As discussed in the interviews, all the TAs tried to introduce children into another's play on at least one occasion, often through asking a question. Two TAs tried to bring their 1:1 child into other children's play and one of these TAs also tried to bring a peer into their 1:1 child's play. Two TAs tried to bring a child into a peers play. However this occurred far less often (n=4) than TAs' interactions to extend play already that was going on between children.

Billie: *Child 5, pass here sweetie. Oh wow. 1:1 child, ready?*

Michelle: *You do your own one, do one with erm, child7.*

During one observation one TA also asked a child on their own some questions to check if they needed support to initiate an interaction or if they were happily alone.

Jennifer: *Are you happy to be on your own?*

During both observations she also asked a child who spent time beside her questions to prompt them to find peers to interact with. She also reassured the child that they could stay with her if they wanted to.

Jennifer: *OK, I'm quite happy for you to stay with me! But I'm a bit boring aren't I? I can't play the friends, I can't play the games your friends play.*

The language used by this TA links closely with how she and another TA described the language they use when speaking to a child wandering alone in theme 3 subtheme 2 of the interview data.

TA talk that facilitated interactions during conflict or play comprised 21 percent of all TA interactions on the playground.

4.8.3.3 Information Share

All three TAs shared information with children during the observation, either in response to a child's comment or question or spontaneously (n=47). This links to a comment by one TA during the interview in theme 1 subtheme 2 about children approaching her in order to seek information. The same TA engaged in the highest level of spontaneous (n=11) and other information sharing interactions, usually to remind children about the 'break out space' at lunchtime.

Billie: *Can I have a quick chat sweetheart. Do you know we are cleaning up break out today don't you? You're not doing it with me, but I'm gonna do it...So it's nice for next term OK.*

4.8.3.4 Injury or illness

All three TAs were involved in interactions related to injury or illness during at least one observation (n=46), which was raised by two TAs during the interviews. Their most frequent interaction in this theme was asking clarification questions about who, the location and the circumstances (n=22).

Jennifer: *Who's this, my love?..And where is he now?*

Open questions were used by two TAs (n=6) to check the child was ok and to help the child problem solve.

Billie: *Oh ok, I think it's probably, what do you want to do, where do you want to go, now?*

All three TAs also made comments to reassure children during at least one observation of them (n=5).

Michelle: Yeah...you'll be alright. No blood!

One TA enlisted peer support for the injured child on one occasion during each observation of her.

Billie: *but would you..child23? Would you accompany child22.. to erm, the medical room, 'cos I think child22 might need a cold press on that chin.*

4.8.3.5 Behaviour or safety

Although table 4.2 suggests that a high level of TA interactions with children appeared to have been focused on behaviour and safety (n=100), these were mostly made by one TA monitoring the KS1 playground (n=85). She used a higher number of open questions, instructions or comments (n=48) when compared with direct ones (n=20) while interacting with children about their behaviour.

Michelle: *Guys don't walk, don't step on there please, cos...what will happen? (child4) what will happen if you walk on that? What is it? Is it all...*

Field notes showed that she also physically stepped between her 1:1 and a peer at one point to discourage boisterous behaviour. She also gave simple explanations to children about why they needed to change their behaviour (n=9).

Michelle: *Cos you're going to hurt his neck.*

Five TAs mentioned that they intervened in interactions related to behaviour during the interviews. However, how they did this and the circumstances were not described in detail meaning that direct comparisons could not be drawn between interview and observation data in this section.

4.8.3.6 Help

The TA in the KS1 playground engaged in the most interactions involving helping children, usually with procedural needs such as putting gloves on (n=29). The other TAs were involved in helping on five occasions combined. The highest number of interactions that the TA in the KS1 playground engaged

in related to helping were making a comment (n=17). She also asked a question to prompt independence in two occasions.

Michelle: *Are you going to go home and practice child16?*

4.8.3.7 Procedural/other

All TAs engaged in procedural interactions (n=31); either direct questions (n=16) or instructions (n=15) during at least one observation. The TA supporting the KS1 playground engaged in procedural interactions more frequently (n=24) than the other TAs combined (n=7). Procedural interactions were usually related to clothing (n=18), the whistle (n=2) snack/milk (n=7) or the toilet (n=4).

Michelle: *Child1, you having milk today?*

4.9 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the themes and subthemes that were identified from the interview and observation data, which were analysed separately. Themes in the observation section generally concurred with those from the interview data. For example theme 1 in the observation data showed a high number of interactions related to the building of relationships with children, linking to theme 1 in the interview data. This was particularly evident in interactions where they demonstrated interest in children. These findings highlight the role of TAs in the support of children's emotional wellbeing.

Theme 2 in the observation data showed TAs used a graduated response to intervention, linking to theme 3 in the interview data. This study's formulation of a model to describe TAs behaviour on the playground provides an original and defined way of viewing TAs role in this context, which may be useful in the future for the purpose of informing research and practice. Observation data suggested that TAs engaged in interactions related to a range of factors, which varied based on the key stage of the children. Some interactions were procedural; related to the routine or helping children with procedural needs. This was only mentioned by one TA in the interviews in terms of being approached by children for procedural and other information. Other interactions were related to behaviour, safety, injury or illness, which were mentioned in the interviews.

A fairly high proportion of interactions involved checking in with children and supporting peer interactions during conflict or play, as described in the interviews. However, although TAs offered ideas for children's play, they generally did not appear to use their own character and qualities to draw children towards peers as described in the interviews. Neither did they explicitly refer to children's preferred play activities to try to engage them with peers. They also did not explicitly arrange games that promote cooperation and interaction. Interactions related to play generally involved extending play between children already interacting with one another or in a group rather than introducing a new peer, with the exception of four occasions where this was the TAs aim. One TA used herself as a resource in this situation, passing a ball to her 1:1 child after peers had passed to her in order to include him. These findings highlight the role of the TA in the inclusion agenda, particularly in relation to facilitating the social inclusion of pupils with SEND.

Chapter five will provide a further examination of the themes set out in the context of the research questions as well as a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the research, the implications for practice and future research directions.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter addresses the main findings of the current study with reference to previous literature. First the contribution of the current research to existing literature is summarised, then the themes set out in chapter four are discussed in relation to the research questions. The strengths and limitations of the study are considered, future directions of research are suggested and the chapter concludes with a summary of recommendations for school and EP practice.

5.1 Contribution to the literature

This study identified the need for clarification of TAs' role particularly regarding their support of children's peer interactions on the playground, due to a tendency in previous research to focus on TAs' impact on academic measures within classroom contexts.

This small-scale, exploratory study's comparison between interview and observation data has contributed to an understanding of the fine detail of what the TAs in this study do on the playground and how they do this as well as factors influencing their practice, areas which were identified as gaps in previous research literature, along with some unexpected findings that will be discussed below. Through acknowledging good practice in contexts other than the classroom, this study highlights that TAs could be supported to use the skills they have in other ways than solely the support of academic achievement. The findings led to the creation of a model describing how TAs support peer interactions intuitively and implicitly, including their application of structured non-academic interventions, which offers a distinct, original and significant contribution to the field of the study, in terms of its potential for informing research and practice.

5.2 Key findings

While the original focus of the study and therefore the main term explored in the literature review, TA support of peer interactions, did feature within the findings of the study, further findings in relation to TA support of children's emotional wellbeing via their own interactions and relationships with children also became a key theme within both the observation and interview data in the study. Both of

these findings suggest a new way of thinking about the TA role, different to a more reluctant and ineffective pedagogical role previously described.

It is acknowledged that due to the original focus of the study, little mention was made in the literature review of the interactions between TAs and children, aside from those relating to their support and/or facilitation of peer interactions. However the literature review did identify that little is known about the nature of interactions between children and TAs or other adult supervisors in this context due to a lack of previous research in this area (Blatchford & Sharp, 2005; Blatchford et al., 2016). Limited research that does exist was mentioned, such as the study by Anderson, Moore, Godfrey, and Fletcher-Flinn (2004), which suggested that TAs engaged in compensatory or 'policing' interactions with children.

Furthermore, the literature review did not explore relationships between TAs and children due to its original focus on peer interactions. However, a search following the findings of the study revealed that there is also a paucity of research exploring TA-pupil relationships, although one study was identified whose findings investigated this in the context of the inclusion of children with SEMH (Groom & Rose, 2005). Relationships can be described as a series of component interactions occurring over time between individuals known to each other while interactions are short lived and consist of individual initiations and responses (Hinde, 1976). In the current study TAs demonstrated interest during their interactions with children. The frequent opportunities that TAs are likely to have for repeated interactions of this kind could lead to the development of a good relationship with children, which TAs directly referred to in the interview data. These findings will be discussed in relation to research question 1.

Another key finding was that TAs spontaneously talked about differences between their role and that of the teacher's. For example their non-pedagogical support of children's emotional wellbeing as an aspect of their role that was different and offered something additional to that of the teacher's. In this way the TAs in this study positioned themselves as having a distinctive contribution to the teacher that is not pedagogical but instead based on the building of relationships with children that comes out in their interactions with them. TAs

also perceived their role as responsive and flexible in order to prioritise others' needs above their own immediate tasks and felt that this was also different to the teacher's role. They perceived their relationships with others within the school system to ameliorate these aspects of their role, such as their flexibility and responsiveness to others' needs. This also provided a non-threatening and reassuring link with parents to the school. These key findings demonstrate a profoundly positive message about the TA role as offering something uniquely helpful not only to children but also to the school and will be explained in relation to research questions 1 and 2.

Linking to the original focus of the study, the TAs also played a role in the support of children's peer interactions on the playground via their interactions with children, particularly their play and conflict. They spontaneously used a graduated response to children's needs that was flexible as a result of a good awareness of their needs, possibly built on the foundations of their positive relationships with them. Surprisingly, compared to previous research on TAs pedagogical role, the TAs in this study who were assigned to a child 1:1 did not support only their 1:1 child in the playground and when they did, they showed an awareness of their own proximity and a requirement to fade back and engage the child with peers. This vastly different role that came out in the current research is likely to be explained by the study's focus on the unique context of the playground.

These findings offer a distinct, original and significant contribution to the field of the study, in particular in relation to the role of TAs through facilitating children's social inclusion.

5.3 Research question 1: How do TAs view their role and does this include the support and/or facilitation of peer interactions on the playground?

The superordinate theme and themes 1 to 3 that were set out at the start of the findings section interlink across school contexts. This section will discuss the findings from the interview data in relation to TAs' perceptions of their role at a whole school, class and individual level.

5.3.1 At the individual level

5.3.1.1 Relationships with children

Theme 1, TAs discussions about their relationships with children when broadly describing their role during the interviews was an unanticipated finding, in that the original focus of the study was TA support of peer interactions. Additionally, a marked difference arose between how TAs first started to describe their role compared to how they described this later on. This may suggest that TAs' perception of their role clashes with how they believe others view or value their role. For example TAs first started to describe their role as a supporter of academic work, carrying out administrative work for the teacher or class and implementing their own academic interventions, all of which link to previous research evidence (Webster et al., 2010b). However, later on they engaged in talk about the key importance of their role in directly supporting children's social and emotional needs across a range of contexts in school due to their relationships with children.

'Social and emotional well-being refers to a state of positive mental health and wellness. It involves a sense of optimism, confidence, happiness, clarity, vitality, self-worth, achievement, having a meaning and purpose, engagement, having supportive and satisfying relationships with others and understanding oneself, and responding effectively to one's own emotions' (Weare, 2015 p.3).

Furthermore, the way that some TAs in this study described noticing changes in the behaviour of children they know well has been highlighted in previous research as key to successful adult-child interactions.

'Fundamental to any adult-child interaction is the ability of an adult to accurately read a child's social and emotional cues, respond to a child's signals appropriately, and offer emotional support or limits when needed' (Sabol & Painta, 2012 p.222).

TAs' emphasis of their responsibility for supporting children to feel happy and secure before engaging them in learning links to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1970). This theory suggests that children and adults require their physiological, safety and security, social and self-esteem needs to be met, in that order, before they can achieve their full potential. Although this theory

stems from the 1970's, its application remains relevant to the school context because it is a framework that continues to be widely used in EP practice.

This theory highlights that emotional and other basic needs underpin academic and social development. Indeed, there is research to suggest that children's emotional development is a precursor to academic achievement (Weare, 2015). Being able to share feelings safely and confidentially has been highlighted as important by children in previous research (Burton, 2008). This highlights the need for schools as well as family contexts to provide experiences that meet children's basic and higher level needs and provide spaces for children to share their feelings. TAs' discussions in this study about their relationships with children suggests they may be well placed to address children's needs in order to ready them for learning. As highlighted by the TAs in one school within the study, this may be particularly important for children with socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds because the link between social and emotional needs and socio-economic disadvantage are well documented (Weare, 2015).

5.3.1.2 A secondary attachment role for TAs?

It is likely that the reliable, positive and non-judgemental relationship TAs had with children which came out strongly during the interviews may offer some kind of secondary attachment bond for children. Research shows that secondary attachment figures have a role to play in providing emotional containment and a secure base from which children can safely explore the world and seek comfort when distressed (Bomber, 2007).

Primary attachment refers to the relational bond between the primary caregiver and the child, formed while the child is an infant and maintained as they develop. This relationship creates a template or 'internal working model' for how they perceive other relationships and supports the development of emotional self-regulation (Bradley, Atkinson, Tomasino, Rees & Galvin, 2009).

Secondary attachment refers to the relational bond between the child and another familiar adult in their life. Previous research has suggested that teachers can offer temporary secondary attachment relationships (Cassidy, 2008; Zajac & Kobak, 2006), which was highlighted to be particularly important for younger children less capable of self-regulation. However it has been

argued that the teacher-child relationship is not 'exclusive or durable' and that teachers' ability to offer caregiving support is restricted because their primary role is instructional (Verschuere & Koomen, 2012). This links to TAs' comments in this study regarding the difference between TA and teacher support, in that they felt teachers were less well placed than TAs to support children's emotional needs due to other demands in teachers' role. This is likely to be related to systems level elements in the current political and economic climate impacting on teachers' ability to carry out the full range of duties in their role. For example a lack of time and less value being placed on teachers forming meaningful relationships with children as a result of an overemphasis on testing.

TAs' current role working closely with children in individual and small group contexts as well as their availability during unstructured times puts them in a good position to utilise the time that they spend with children to strengthen their relationships. However it is important to highlight that this should occur in a complimentary fashion rather than at the cost of limiting or ignoring the teacher attachment role, which has been argued to offer opportunities to reshape children's 'internal working models', to improve academic achievement and buffer difficult early life experiences (Sabol & Pianta, 2012).

Although TAs have highlighted their role in social and emotional support in previous research (Groom and Rose, 2005), there has usually been a focus on the detrimental effects of a close relationship between TAs and pupils mostly in the context of the classroom and without providing much detail on the ways in which social and emotional support was offered (Webster & Blatchford, 2015). One of the explanations for the lack of detail was that TAs were themselves unable to articulate their pastoral role in depth (Webster & Blatchford, 2015). Certainly within the current study, although TAs could articulate their support of social and emotional wellbeing, some found it much more difficult to describe exactly what they did in their role in more unstructured contexts. This links to previous research suggesting that TAs are less aware of their intuitive skills than their skills in structured situations (Webster & Blatchford, 2015).

5.3.1.3 TAs' role on the playground

This section continues to consider the TA role at the individual level but with a focus on the playground. During the interviews some TAs mentioned their role on the playground after other areas of their role or needed to be prompted. This suggests that they might consider other aspects of their role as more relevant and place less emphasis on their role in the playground, or they might believe that other people perceive this area of their role as less important. As described in the previous section it may be because TAs are less aware of their intuitive skills, in addition to a lack of formal expectations or guidelines about this area of their role. Certainly, when prompted, TAs showed implicit understanding of supporting peer interactions and some discussed implementation of more structured support or interventions such as peer buddy systems, social skills and nurture groups.

When explaining their role on the playground TAs all described using a flexible approach to supporting children's needs, presented in theme 3. In the way TAs described their support, it became apparent that they were implementing a graduated response to children's needs on the playground that they said was not influenced by line managers expectations in their role but rather happening naturally, as a result of their past experiences, common sense and intuition. Three of the TAs mentioned that staffing levels on the playground influenced their use of a graduated response. This links to previous research suggesting that good staff-to-child ratios make intervention effective in addition to ensuring children's safety (Kemple et al., 1997; Nabors et al., 2001).

The way that TAs described their support concurs with a US study's recommendations about TAs support of children with ASD's peer interactions. Feldman and Matos (2013) suggested that TAs offer instructions for children with ASD's peer interactions from least to most and respond contingently. Similarly, the TAs in this study first described monitoring on the playground before deciding to get involved using ad hoc strategies that fit the situation.

The moment-by-moment approach described also concurs with a previous European study comparing teacher and TA support across structured and unstructured contexts. The TAs were described as using a 'here and now'

approach, responding to the immediate requirements of the situation, contrasting with teachers' more pre-planned approach (Dolva et al., 2011). This was the only study identified via literature searches that compared the differences between TAs and teachers in a non-pedagogical context and aligns with TAs descriptions about providing different support to that of the teacher in the current study. TAs' use of a moment-by-moment approach has also been suggested to be highly appropriate in research exploring TA-pupil interactions during academic activities due to the relationships that TAs have with students (Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, & Blatchford, 2015).

However it has been noted that being on hand to offer support in this way may increase TA proximity (Dolva et al., 2011) which has been found in a number of studies to obstruct peer and other interactions (Blatchford, et al., 2009a: Blatchford et al., 2009b; Tews & Lupart, 2008; Kim, 2005). Although findings from the interview data did not support previous suggestions that TAs reduce opportunities for and interrupt peer interactions, we know from previous research that leaving TAs to decide unaided how to support children can lead to a gap between the realities of what TAs can offer based on their knowledge and experience and the best support for children (Webster & Blatchford, 2015). Thus, although this approach is likely to be assisted by TAs' relationships with children and the resulting awareness of their needs, children who are less well known to them or those who have complex needs may not always receive appropriate support.

Expectations of how a graduated approach is implemented should therefore be formally integrated into TAs role alongside the appropriate provision of support from line managers and others in the school system or supervision from professionals with expertise in this area (Baxter, 2014).

In the current study, further discussion regarding TAs moment-by-moment approach showed that they were supporting a range of peer interactions that were already ongoing in their role on the playground, particularly those involving conflict or play. TAs' talk of their use of modelling or specifically explaining social rules and ways to interact appropriately in their support of children already interacting corresponds with previous research recommending modelling and teaching a skill directly (Causton-Theoharris & Malmgren, 2005).

TAs' talk about explaining why other children behave in certain ways was also highlighted in previous recommendations, described as 'helping to interpret' (Causton-Theoharris & Malmgren (2005). TAs also talked about facilitating new interactions, for example by reminding children about peers on their own and bringing children together in other ways. This links to recommendations from previous research on the topic of ASD, that TAs should be offering children prompts to be social and to connect with peers (Rosetti & Goessling, 2010). TAs talk about using their personality to bring children together links to research suggesting that the negative or positive impact on a child being supported by a TA was dependent on the likeability of that TA (Broyer et al., 2005). TAs also said that they remembered and used children's preferred play activities or interests to facilitate interactions and tried to arrange games that promote cooperation and interaction, which were both recommended in previous research on TA support of children with ASD in the playground (Koegel et al., 2014).

TAs during their interviews discussed the importance of fading back, both to encourage independence for their 1:1 child but also when supporting children more generally with their peer interactions, meaning that concerns raised in a previous study (Dolva et al., 2011) about the negative impact of moment-by-moment support was acknowledged and addressed by the TAs in this study. Fading back was highlighted in previous research recommendations as a strategy that should be used by TAs to encourage independence (Causton Theoharris & Malmgren 2005; Feldman & Matos, 2013; Rosetti & Goessling, 2010). TAs in this study talked about fading their support once they had drawn in a peer to have conversation, which is also mentioned in previous recommendations (Rosetti & Goessling, 2010).

TAs' descriptions of moment-by-moment mediation of naturally occurring peer interaction is supported by evidence that interventions are most effective when carried out in the context that skills will be applied (Bellini et al., 2007; Holloway et al., 2014). In this study structured approaches appeared to be much less commonly used for peer interaction support than more spontaneous approaches. Although naturalistic rather than explicit structured interventions carried out in the natural context are likely to have the best results (Kretzmann

et al., 2015), the initiative taken by two TAs to independently devise and implement more structured approaches delivered on the playground, for example play buddies, 'break out space' and daily choice of peer, is also supported by some research (Kasari et al., 2016). Other structured approaches were mainly recommended by external advice from professionals and primarily involved social skills groups carried out in a different context, although one of these directly generalised to the playground.

Such profoundly different and positive findings compared to previous research literature are likely to be related to this study's focus on the playground rather than the classroom context and its exploratory, qualitative design. This allowed a different perspective from that which has traditionally focussed on the role of the TA in relation to an individual child and lead to findings that within this context TAs supported a wider range of children than their 1:1 child alone.

5.3.2 At the class and whole school level

TAs appeared to also feel a key and different part of their role compared to teachers was to offer flexibility to facilitate the prioritisation of the teachers' or whole school needs first and foremost before other areas of their role, as summarised within theme 2. This was described as creating both challenges and opportunities for their practice. TAs related effective flexibility to their relationships with teachers and line managers, once again highlighting the importance of relationships with others within TAs role. However, TAs' talk of filling gaps left by teachers has in previous research been described as poor practice (Webster & Blatchford, 2015). It is also likely to lead to a clash within TAs' role, where they are torn between offering the types of support that they perceive their teacher and line managers need or expect at a whole school or class level and also meeting the immediate needs of the children they interact with at an individual level.

5.4 Research Question 2: What kinds of TA-pupil talk goes on to support and/or facilitate peer interactions on the playground?

This research question was answered by the observation data. Findings from the observation data linked to theme 1 and 3 in interview findings. The observation findings also linked implicitly with theme 2 in the interview findings because each of the themes in the interview data were interrelated. For example Theme 2 highlighted flexibility across the TA role, which then fed into theme 3 describing flexibility within the specific context of the playground.

5.4.1 Interactions for emotional wellbeing

The unanticipated finding in the interview data regarding TAs' key role in developing relationships with children to support their emotional wellbeing was also demonstrated within the observation findings, both of which were analysed separately. Interestingly, the particular TAs participating in the observation phase of data collection had talked on fewer occasions about their support of this area during the interviews compared to the TAs from the other school with a more socially disadvantaged catchment area. This shows that even TAs who may be less consciously aware of the significance of their role in the support of emotional wellbeing may still engage in these types of interactions. In fact, interactions that were categorised under the theme 'relationships with children' comprised the highest number of interactions with children across all observations, labelled under the subtheme 'demonstrating interest'. This counters previous findings looking at adult support of early years children during unstructured times, the only research directly focussed on such a topic, where teachers were found to engage in restrictive and rule bound intervention most often (Kemple et al., 1997; Williams et al., 2010). It also counters a small amount of previous research exploring TA talk in classrooms (Radford, Blatchford & Webster, 2011). Possible explanations for this difference may be that TAs are more relaxed in the playground and freed of perceptions that they have to act in a pedagogical role.

TAs interactions in the current study relate well to the psychological concept of attunement, which can be described as providing a series of positive responses to a child's initiatives (Kennedy, 2011). The first level of response in this series

is 'being attentive', which includes showing interest through posture, providing space and time for the other, wondering about the other person and enjoying watching the other. This level of response was demonstrated in TAs' positive and open body language as described in field note observations, their questions about children's lives and amused response to children's play. These interactions showed that they were interested and that they were enjoying watching the child. The next level is 'encouraging initiatives', which includes waiting, listening actively, showing warmth and playfulness through intonation, saying what you are doing and looking for initiatives. This level of response was also demonstrated by TAs when they greeted children openly, asked questions about play or offered information. The next level is 'receiving initiatives', which includes showing you have heard, receiving with body language, being friendly or playful, returning eye contact, smiling, nodding, repeating using the others words or phrases (Kennedy, 2011). TAs also did this often during observation. The final level is 'developing attuned interactions' which includes receiving and responding, checking the other understands you, waiting attentively for your turn, having fun, giving and taking short turns, contributing to interaction equally and cooperating. This level of interaction was demonstrated less during the observations as generally there was less opportunity for these types of extended interactions. However, one TA in particular engaged in this type of extended cooperative turn taking interaction with a specific child who wanted to spend time beside her.

During interactions related to conflict and injury, some TAs also appeared to demonstrate containment of children's emotions on a handful of occasions. They tentatively labelled children's emotions and reassured children as a secondary attachment figure might. This provides children with mutual regulation and a sense of feeling understood (Siegel, 2012). The concept of attunement also resonates with TAs' description during the interviews of noticing changes in the behaviour of children they know well, mentioned earlier in section 5.3.1.1.

The concepts of attunement and attachment are interrelated in that a successful attachment relationship will be fostered via successful attunement for example, being aware of and responsive to another. Thus TAs, through their attunement

with children, lay the foundations for the development of successful attachments between them which they discussed in the interview data in terms of the building of relationships with children.

This finding is surprising because it conflicts with previous research evidence carried out in classroom contexts suggesting that TA-child interactions are focussed on task completion, involve lower quality closed questioning and supplying of answers or inaccurate information (Radford et al., 2011). This difference is likely to be due to focus in this research on the playground versus the classroom context. TAs might feel freer to interact with children more naturally in this context, being led by their past experiences, common sense and intuition.

5.4.2 An intuitive graduated response

In addition to the unanticipated findings discussed above, findings concerning the original focus of research question 2 are summarised below. Observation findings showed that TAs were offering children the types of support they described in the interview data. For example, TAs engaged in a fairly high number of interactions to support peer interactions already happening between peers relating to conflict (11.5%). Some of these interactions also linked to previous research, for example findings in the early years literature that adult support of children's conflict included interactions such as 'give directives and distract, incorporate child in peer group and communicate about peers' (Williams et al., 2010). They also engaged in a fairly high number of interactions supporting play already happening between peers (10%). Observations suggested that, as their support was offered via moment-by-moment interactions, TAs attempts to engage peers or extend play were generally achieved via subtle comments or open questions made in passing. Therefore, TAs talk in the interviews around facilitating new peer interactions via arranging games related to preferred play activities or interests based on prior knowledge or using their own character or qualities to draw children together were not observed. This demonstrates a difference between TAs perceptions and the realities of their support captured during the observations, suggesting

that TAs are largely supporting peer interactions that are already ongoing rather than facilitating new ones.

Observation data largely confirmed TAs descriptions of stepping back from or not working directly with their 1:1 child on the playground. Fading back ensures the promotion of the interaction between peers rather than between the TA and peers. This is important because it has been argued that any intervention by an adult in a peer interaction means that it can no longer be defined as a peer interaction (Bruce & Hansson, 2011). Additionally, an interesting difference emerged within the observation data according to the key stage of children the TAs were working with. The TA in the KS1 playground interacted directly with her 1:1 child more than the other two TAs working in the KS2 playground while still showing an awareness of the potential impact of her proximity on his interactions by stepping back when not interacting with him.

The findings from this study suggesting that the TAs are intuitively using a graduated response to supporting children's peer interactions on the playground link in some ways to models from the early years literature proposing a least to most approach or hierarchy to supporting peer interactions, starting with naturalistic interventions, then incidental teaching followed by more structured teaching (Brown et al., 2001)

Although previous research on adult support of children's peer interactions or other social skills has suggested that adults should only interact with children with the intention to facilitate communication between peers (Feldman & Matos, 2013), results from the current study suggest that adult interaction involves a wider range of input than only supporting interactions between peers, including the development and maintenance of relationships with children as well as other more procedural interactions such as those concerning snacks or the bell.

However, the graduated response described by TAs in the interviews does not explicitly include their support of children's emotional wellbeing, a key finding in this study. This was because emotional support was described quite separately to support on the playground as a more universal feature of their role.

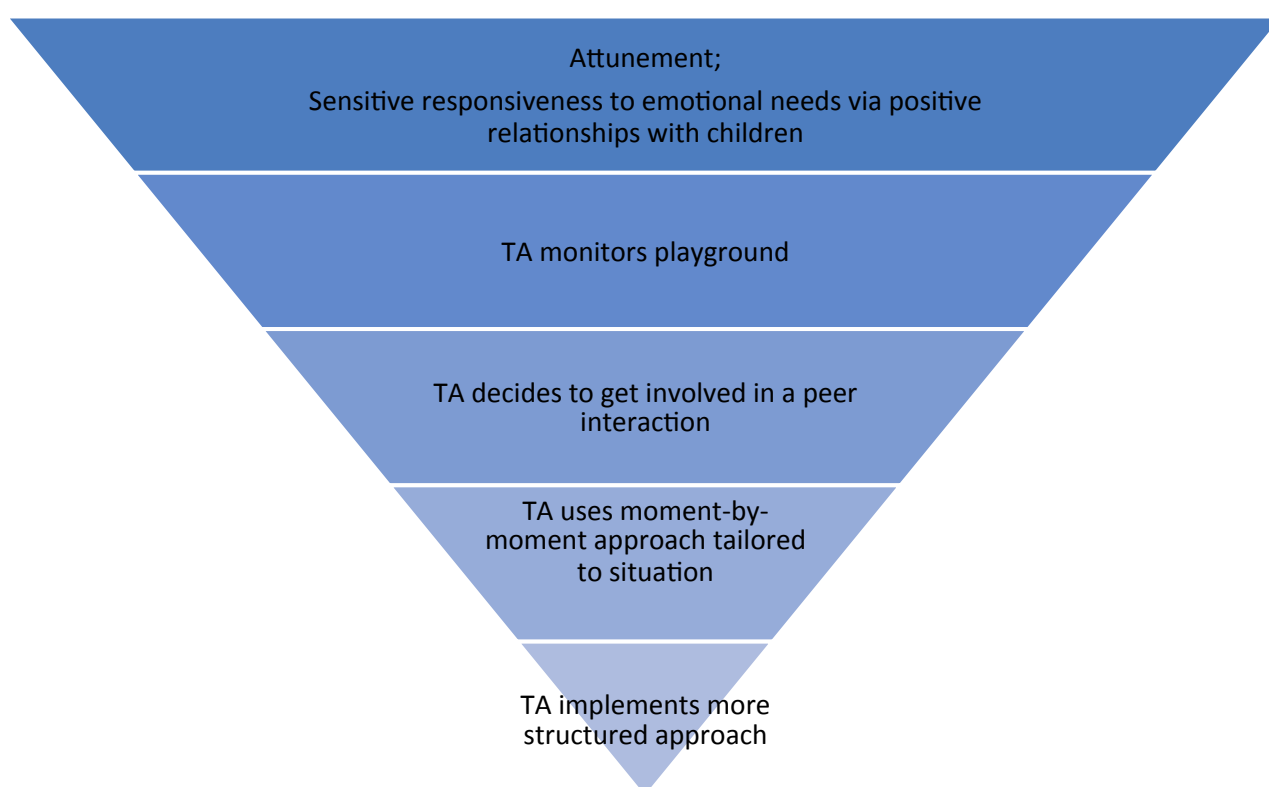
Although not directly aimed at school aged children or TAs specifically, the 'response to intervention' pyramid model for preschool children acknowledges

the importance of universal promotion of nurturing and responsive caregiving relationships and high quality supportive environments, before targeted social and emotional support or intensive interventions (Fox et al., 2010). Furthermore, sensitive responsiveness to emotional needs, respect for independence and aiming to foster positive peer interactions have all been highlighted as important skills for the support of early years children within the Caregiver Interaction Profile Scales (CIPS) (Helmerhorst et al., 2014).

Contrary to previous research suggesting that support of children's peer interactions is unnecessary for school age children but may be for children with SEND (Williams et al., 2010), the findings from this research suggests that TAs working with school age children are using skills similar to those within the (CIPS) both universally and for their support of 1:1 children. In the current study TAs supported the play, interactions and wellbeing of a number of children on the playground, not just children with SEND. Furthermore, children without SEND may need help to know how to interact with a child who does struggle with peer interactions (Nabors et al., 2001). This suggests the value of a role for TAs in the support of school aged children with and without SEND in the playground that may not have been identified previously.

Thus, social and emotional support could be included at the base of the graduated response model that TAs are implementing intuitively to demonstrate the need for a foundation of strong relationships before support can be individualised or delivered impromptu.

Figure 5.1 Revised Graduated Response Model



5.5 Research question 3: What factors do TAs feel influence the effectiveness of their support on the playground as well as more generally in their role?

5.5.1 Awareness of children's needs

Across the three themes that were decided upon, TAs' awareness of children's needs appeared to increase the effectiveness of their support in a number of contexts, and was included within a number of subthemes. For example TAs' description of their frequent moment-by-moment support on the playground and in other areas of their role implies an awareness of children's needs in order to do this effectively. This has also been raised in a previous study as a possible contextual factor related to the effectiveness of TA support of peer interactions for children with ASD (Baxter, 2014).

Furthermore TAs demonstrated an awareness of not just the needs of the child they were assigned 1:1 (if they had one) but the wider needs of children across the class or school and talked about how this supported their ability to be

flexible in their role. TAs highlighted both specific SEND and also more general social and emotional needs as areas where children needed their support.

This contrasts in some ways with evidence previously found, stating that there were gaps in TAs knowledge regarding meeting the needs of pupils with SEND (Webster & Blatchford, 2015). However it is impossible to determine the extent of TAs' knowledge in this study because it did not directly investigate the specific needs of the children they discussed. Furthermore, having an awareness of needs may not always indicate awareness of how to meet these needs.

Previous research has warned against TAs being positioned as the 'expert' with the most knowledge about a child with SEND (Webster, 2014). The general level of training that TAs may or may not receive suggests that they should not hold responsibility for any area of children's development without appropriate supervision and support.

A previous study looking at the quality of TA-pupil talk during academic tasks made suggestions that in order for the TA to implement the different aspects of their role appropriately, they must be able to identify when a child is in difficulty, have some knowledge of the negative consequence of correcting children and the positive consequence of prompting (Radford et al., 2015). In the same way, within the playground context TAs must be able to identify when a child is having difficulties with peer interactions and some awareness of their own impact on social interactions (Rosetti & Goessling, 2010). In this study, TAs who supported a child 1:1 appeared very aware of their impact on peer interactions and the need to promote independence, suggesting that research highlighting the possibility of TAs creating dependency (Blatchford et al, 2009a; Blatchford et al, 2009b) and subsequent advice (Sharples et al., 2015) for how to prevent this may have trickled down into TA practice, for example via advice from external professionals, other members of staff in the school or media coverage.

Although TA's awareness of the impact of overdependence on the children they support is promising, research suggests that children with SEND will have difficulties with interacting with peers during unstructured times and will need

support to do this (Nabors et al., 2001). This means that although increased separation between a child with SEND and the TA they are assigned may be a positive step for developing independence, they are still likely to require support with peer interactions. In addition to adult support, this could be done through adapting the environment, for example providing access to mutually-operated toys and enclosed areas that promote increased peer proximity (Nabors et al., 2001).

Finally, observations discussed in relation to research question 2 that the TA in KS1 interacted in different ways with children on the playground compared to the TAs in KS2 suggests that there may be more subtle differences in the nature of TA support according to children's age. This was also mentioned in the interview data and may represent a factor influencing TA support.

5.5.2 Guidance and expectations

It was highlighted within chapter 2 that non-statutory guidance for TA practice (UNISON, 2016) did not set expectations for TAs supporting play or peer interactions. However, guidelines do set expectations for working with others and highlight the importance of safeguarding children, linking to the unexpected findings in this study regarding the importance of TAs relationships with others in the school system. However these guidelines are non-mandatory and may not be applied by school leadership teams.

Certainly, the importance of relationships in TAs' role was not described as something that was formally expected from line managers; occurring instead as a result of their own perceptions of how to meet children's needs. Although line managers appeared to acknowledge two TAs' abilities to support emotional development by involving them in specific nurture group interventions supporting social and emotional needs, this was in more structured ways.

As well as representing a factor that might increase their effectiveness, TAs' ability to be responsive and flexible, as described in theme 2, is also likely to be contributing to the lack of clear expectations of practice from line managers that became apparent during discussions in interviews. One TA's talk about using the school rules to guide her practice in place of having specific expectations for this from management links to a study suggesting that teachers used statement

of rules as a means to intervene in early years children's peer interactions during 'free play' (Kemple et al., 1997). The researcher conducted an internet search for both school's rules in the current study which were found to be similar. Neither provided much detail or clarity about what adults should actually do to support peer interactions or emotional needs, instead focussing on how children should conduct themselves. This means that although these may prove useful when supporting peer interactions related to conflict due to their behavioural focus, they are unlikely to offer any guidance for how to support other types of peer interactions.

TAs generally described a lack of non-academic targets for children's development and when there were, their implementation was often left down to the TA. This supports previous research suggesting the playground is an underused resource due to a lack of targets for children's play in this context (Nabors et al., 2001).

There was one way in which training appeared to provide guidance for TAs role in the support of peer interactions. Three TAs referred to a whole school training on restorative approaches during the interviews, a method used to resolve conflict in peer interactions which explores the emotions behind the conflict and aims to build positive affect (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). During interactions involving conflict, TAs in this study appeared to do this as well as support children's problem solving via questioning. This supports Baxter's (2014) suggestion that appropriate training may be a possible contextual factor related to the effectiveness of TA support. However, the focus on conflict within this training rather than more general aspects of peer interactions limits its application to other circumstances on the playground.

Interestingly despite being raised in previous research as a possible factor relating to the effectiveness of TA support (Baxter, 2014), confidence levels were not raised as an issue regarding support on the playground. This is surprising given the lack of clear guidance for their role in this context. Nevertheless, this does not negate the importance of considering the practicalities of how TAs support children on the playground and how they are supported to do this.

5.6 Limitations of the study and future research directions

Sample; as with many of the other studies that have investigated TA facilitation of peer interactions, this study had a small sample size of seven TAs from two primary schools at phase one and three TAs at phase two. All of the participants were women of different ages, broadly reflecting the large demographic proportion of female TAs (DfE, 2016a). Due to the size, representativeness and the geographical location of the sample in a particular area of outer London, the generalisability of findings from this study are clearly limited. Furthermore, the seven TAs in the study chose to participate, meaning that their interest and willingness to reflect on their role may not represent the views and behaviour of other TAs (Feldman & Matos, 2013). However, this small-scale exploratory study's aim was not to produce quantifiable significant results or to widely generalise findings. Its aim was instead to increase understanding of the TA role, in particular their support of peer interactions on the playground, to contribute to the limited research base available and to provide some examples of good practice with the intention of stimulating future research in this area.

Furthermore the findings section presenting the observation data and subsequent discussions around research question two were inevitably shorter than the interview findings section. This was because observations focussed on the specific nature of TA support within a particular context whereas the interviews focussed on TAs role more generally with a particular interest in their role on the playground. Future research comparing interview and observation data of a larger sample of TAs with a higher number of observations per TA over a longer period would provide more opportunity for comparison within and between TAs. Furthermore, only TAs assigned to a child 1:1 were observed when the interview data also included class TAs. Future research could compare similarities and differences in the support of non-academic areas of children's development between different TA positions.

Measures; although this study explored the perceptions of TAs on their role as well as the nature of TA interactions with children on the playground, information about their actual impact on children's peer interactions was not gathered. This is because the aim of this study was to first gather information

about what TAs actually broadly do in their role on the playground before making any assumptions about their impact.

Furthermore, information on the proximity of TAs was gathered via informal field notes which did not allow for any detailed analysis that could lead to accurate comparison between TAs. Future research could therefore further explore TA proximity as well as the impact of TA involvement on peer interactions.

Due to the sample size, particularly of the observation data, it was difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions about the impact of children's developmental level or the nature of SEND on who or how TAs support. Further research exploring and comparing different age ranges as well categories of SEND is needed to shed light on this.

In line with the current study's findings, there also needs to be more of a focus in future research on how TAs interact with children more generally rather than in response to particular children, as has often been the primary focus of previous research. Findings from this study clearly conflicted with prior research (Feldman & Matos, 2013; Baxter, 2014; Dolva et al. 2011) in that 1:1 support wasn't the only role of the TA assigned to an individual child in every school context. These new findings are likely to have come out as a result of the particular context being studied, as previous research has tended to focus on classroom contexts.

Therefore, as well as research further exploring the positive and distinct role of TAs in the playground context, future research could also explore and compare TA support in other contexts that haven't yet been explored such as during transitions, school trips and PE.

Another limitation of the present study was that video-recorded data was not gathered. Given the unexpected finding that TAs demonstrated attunement in their interactions with children in this study, detailed information on TAs non-verbal communication may have added further weight to this. Research highlights the importance of non-verbal communication for successful attunement (Kennedy, 2011). This includes body language (posture, body movements and gestures), facial expression, and also how language is used

including tone, intensity, inflection, spacing of words, emphases, pauses, silences and fluency (Egan, 1994). Although some of this information was collected via field notes which did add context regarding body language and TA positioning in the playground, further research could explore in more detail the frequency of different types of TA-child interaction during unstructured times including non-verbal interactions.

Additionally research comparing TAs' and teachers' approaches to the support of peer interactions and also their quality of relationships with children could shed further light on the perceived differences between their roles that TAs in this study highlighted. This might confirm or contradict TAs' perceptions in this study that this is something that they do far more of and would give findings a comparative rather than just descriptive element.

Although the findings of this study suggested that line managers did not tend to get involved in how TAs carry out their day-to-day role including their support of children in the playground, the views and opinions of line managers themselves were not sought. Future research should be carried out to investigate line manager's views on TA deployment in this context as well as their views on the opportunities and challenges for naturalistic interventions in comparison to more structured approaches. This would be valuable because previous research has suggested that schools tend to be reluctant to use naturalistic interventions due to perceived issues with implementation and monitoring (Baxter, 2015).

For the same reasons, future research should seek out pupil views regarding TA support, particularly as this is an area where there has also been little exploration (Giangreco et al., 2010). This could explore children and young people's views about the TA role in different contexts and the factors perceived to be influencing the effectiveness of their practice.

5.7 Implications for practice

5.7.1 Recommendations for schools

This study was conducted at a time of considerable flux in the education system, both nationally and locally, as a result of recent reforms of SEND as well as financial pressures impacting on school and other Local Authority service budgets.

In this context of economic cut backs in addition to research questioning the effectiveness of their pedagogical role, this points to the possibility of a reduction in numbers of TAs in response. It therefore becomes increasingly important to note the possible positive contribution of TAs in a wider area of their role than just their increasingly criticised pedagogical one. For example schools should consider the contribution of the TA role to the support of children's social and emotional well-being and how they carry out their role in other contexts outside the classroom.

5.7.1.1 Support of emotional wellbeing

This research contributes to the evidence base of the role of TAs in relation to emotional support and social inclusion. This study suggests that this occurs through their attunement with children, with their presence across contexts placing them in a unique position for building key relationships with them. This is particularly pertinent given the links between emotional regulation and learning (Weare, 2015) and points to benefits of a role for TAs in this area rather than necessarily in a pedagogical one.

These findings are timely given that schools are currently taking their role in social and emotional aspects of learning ever more seriously and engaging with a wider range of evidence informed approaches and interventions to promote this, integrating universal and more targeted approaches (Weare, 2015).

Recent Government advice states that:

'School should be a safe and affirming place for children where they can develop a sense of belonging and feel able to trust and talk openly with adults about their problems' (DfE, 2016b p8).

Schools could be utilising TAs' positive relationships with children they work with to meet this requirement in addition to providing a supportive ethos across the school. The advice also recommends at least one member of staff knows each child well to spot changes in behaviour which have been pointed out as key preventative measures for mental health (DfE, 2016b). In the current study, TAs' relationships with children they work with supported their understandings of the functions behind children's behaviour and helped them to notice when behaviour changed.

However, TA support alone should not be used in place of other approaches or interventions that have been recommended. Instead, TAs' relationships with children could be used to complement other universal and targeted approaches known to effectively support social and emotional wellbeing being used in schools, such as peer buddying and conflict resolution (Weare, 2015).

Furthermore, TAs relatability and reassuring interactions with parents allowing them to more easily form relationships could also offer a way in for integrated home-school intervention. Working with parents and carers to develop good relationships has been highlighted as an effective way to improve children's social and emotional wellbeing (DfE, 2016b).

5.7.1.2 Support of peer interactions

Schools should embrace the rich opportunities for support of peer interactions in the playground context, more effectively using those members of staff who currently supervise on the playground. Findings from this research suggests that TAs were intuitively facilitating peer interactions and other needs on the playground using a graduated response. In order to develop TAs' emerging role in this area, schools need to carefully consider how they provide support and guidance to TAs, for example via continuous professional development. This will be challenging in the absence of Government guidelines for TA deployment as well as expectations of non-pedagogical TA support being overlooked in non-statutory guidelines.

It is important for guidance and expectations to be provided for TAs non-pedagogical (as well as pedagogical) role because, while it is positive that TAs

in this study were offering their own ideas for supporting at playtime which were freely accepted by management, this doesn't account for the possibility that some TAs may be less well prepared to support without receiving guidance themselves. In some cases this may lead to a mismatch between TAs knowledge and experience and appropriate support for children (Webster & Blatchford, 2015), particularly given the complexity of balancing in the moment support with proximity (Dolva et al., 2011). Some TAs may be unaware of the importance of peer interactions, let alone how to facilitate them.

The tendency for some TAs in this study to fade back to the point where they were very rarely interacting with their 1:1 child on the playground points to the need for training for all playtime staff and information sharing to develop knowledge of children with SEND and how to support them in order to maintain consistency of approach. If TAs are not commonly facilitating the peer interactions of the children they are assigned 1:1, support for these children to interact in the playground context must be reconsidered.

TAs in this study appeared to be coming up with their own ideas for how to support children with particular needs in the playground retrospectively. While TAs have the least professional knowledge in the area, they offer strong relationships with and direct access to children across a range of contexts. Schools can consider how their skills can be harnessed further through collaborative planning to include a pre-emptive element so that children are not left to struggle before support is put in place. TAs need to be supported to consider and capitalise on their ability to spot isolated children and prompt new interactions between peers as well as extend the play of children already interacting.

Schools need to address any possible reasons for a reluctance to implement interventions in the playground, for example relating to the practicalities of the 'large unorganised space' and 'fast paced nature of play', limited supervision due to staffing or financial pressures or a reluctance to be directive in a 'free play' context (Nabors et al., 2001). Efforts to address this may involve consideration of staff-child ratios and the environment as well as the deployment of TA support on the playground and the creation and implementation of clear targets for children in this context.

5.7.2 Recommendations for EPs

This research provided a unique contribution to the field of Educational Psychology and the research on TAs' role in schools.

This study's relevance to EP practice will be discussed at the individual level of the child, at the level of the whole school, at the level of local policy and in relation to the current legislative context.

5.7.2.1 Individual level

EPs have a role in supporting the social inclusion of children in mainstream schools (DfEE, 2000). The findings from this research could be used by EPs and schools to think about how to improve the social inclusion of children during unstructured times, where children with SEND tend to struggle most with their peer interactions. For example EPs could use the findings to consider how children with SEND are supported during unstructured times and how TAs might be used to do this effectively.

EPs could also play a role in encouraging TAs to make the transition from their support of peer interactions at an apparently intuitive level to applying it at a more conscious level by raising their awareness about what they do and the importance of this for children's development, particularly on the playground. For example, at an individual level, EPs could use their video based skills (Bryant, 2017) for instance in Video Interactive Guidance (Kennedy, 2011) to highlight and celebrate the attunement that TAs may already demonstrate intuitively in their interactions with children and to support them to reflect on the types of support that work best.

5.7.2.2 Whole school level

Government cuts have left many EP services stretched which, combined with increases in statutory work as a result of SEND reforms, reduces time available for EPs to undertake individual or long term work. EPs can counter this through developing a role in providing training and supervision for staff within schools to deliver support themselves (Pugh, 2010).

Thus, EPs could become involved in this area at the systems level through providing training on TAs' role during unstructured times, including to support

their awareness about ways in which adults might enhance children's peer interactions. Furthermore, EPs could support management to consider and set expectations for this area of TAs' role. This could provide clarity on what they should be doing to ensure that all TAs within the school system are considering their support on the playground and applying the same approach. EPs could support the integration of expectations into policy that include non-pedagogical roles in TAs' job descriptions and appraisals. In this way, EPs can help schools to think more systemically about how they view, prepare and deploy their TAs (Webster & Blatchford, 2015).

EPs can also support schools in harnessing action research to build an evidence base and formalise TAs role on the playground and their support of social and emotional needs via new models of TA support.

5.7.2.3 Local context

Findings from this study that suggest TAs may have a unique role in the support of children's emotional wellbeing through their relationships with them demonstrates the possibility for using TAs to build capacity in schools to meet the needs of children with more complex emotional needs. Recognition of TAs' role in this area may provide them with personal and professional development opportunities (Mann, 2014). This could be done via the implementation of Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs); TAs that are given the tools to support emotional wellbeing in more targeted ways via training and group supervision with Educational Psychologists (Osborne & Burton, 2014). The current study suggests that the use of TAs in this way is likely to play to and build on their strengths. Research findings have suggested that ELSA training made TAs feel more appreciated, prepared and their role more defined (Osborne & Burton, 2014).

Burton (2008) also suggests that TAs are in a good position to reinforce targeted support with informal support, as their flexible role working with children across contexts promotes approachability. This also allows them to provide support to generalise skills learned in interventions to the playground and other contexts. The ELSA supervision model would also provide regular opportunities for TAs to discuss their support on the playground.

This potential role of TAs in the support of social and emotional wellbeing is exciting, particularly as the support of children's mental health in school is recently being pushed as a priority by the Government (DfE, 2016b).

5.7.2.4 Legislative context

EPs can play a role in raising the importance of effective TA deployment and supporting schools with how to do this, in the context of the profoundly positive non-pedagogical role that the current study has suggested. EPs have a responsibility to support evidence based practice and to promote social, emotional wellbeing in schools and achievement for all children (HCPC, 2015). Therefore EPs can acknowledge and take forward the contributions of this study to the evidence base for the role of TAs in supporting social and emotional wellbeing.

5.8 Reflections

This section is completed in the first person, to allow the researcher to more readily acknowledge and reflect on their impact throughout the research process.

I have developed interest in this topic of research due to my own experiences of working as a TA in a number of primary schools. When I first started in the role, I was surprised at the limited input from management about specific expectations for my deployment and the lack of training provided initially, particularly due to my limited prior experience in this area. As has been reported in previous research, I became responsible for the planning, differentiation and delivery of learning tasks for an individual child and for planning and delivering support for his social skills. This problem solving aspect to the role was something I particularly enjoyed and I relished finding ways to adapt a task so that the child could access it independently.

While I was observed termly by the senior leadership team, I was generally left to my own devices day-to-day. Much of my expertise was gathered from research that I completed in my own time and I voluntarily began arriving earlier in school than my contracted time in order to create resources. Although I received direct access to specialists such as outreach workers and Speech and Language Therapists, this only occurred after I had been working as a TA for

some time and was not monitored between visits. I enjoyed extending the skills learned from outreach workers to other situations.

I found working as a TA a very rewarding and eye opening experience and learned a lot about how to support children's needs 'on the job'. Through this experience I developed a sense of the key importance of my role in developing the independence and social skills of children with SEN and an interest in exploring why this was not considered a formal and key part of mine or other TAs' role.

Although my own experience of a role lacking clear guidelines was a positive and developmental one, this may have been influenced by my interest in psychology and may not be experienced in the same way by someone with a different background. Later, research suggesting that TAs deployed in traditional ways create a barrier to children's interactions with peers further ignited my interest in this area, particularly due to effective inclusion being a current personal and professional core value. I became interested in the ways that TAs can be deployed that complement their existing skills and experience. I was also keen that TAs were not depleted in number as my feeling was that, anecdotally, they are viewed positively by teachers in terms of a reduction in workload and stress. Given the pressures I believe schools and teachers face in the current political and economic context, I was keen that any resource viewed positively by the school workforce is preserved and strengthened.

This eventually led to an interest in exploring other contexts other than the classroom. While in my own experience, TAs were generally seen as having a supervisory role on the playground and this time was often seen as a break from the classroom for staff as well as children, I was aware that this could become a rich environment for more complex support of children's needs.

Throughout the process of this research, I reflected back on my values and past experiences, comparing these to the findings from the TAs in this study. While it is impossible to carry out research without being influenced by personal beliefs, I made every effort to ensure that the process by which I carried out the research was as impartial as possible. This was supported by the use of a semi-structured interview schedule and consideration of my verbal and non-

verbal cues. I also considered the whole data set before arranging data into themes and subthemes, attending to conflicting explanations and views.

Reflecting on the findings of this study, TAs' discussions of relationships reminded me of an area of my role which I had previously overlooked. I developed strong bonds with the children in the classes I worked in during my time as a TA, who often came to me for emotional support. Yet I brushed this off as a by-product of the less formal role of the TA making it easier to form relationships rather than being a key and uniquely helpful part of the role itself. This finding was rewarding to reflect on, as I remembered the faces of the children I worked with and the warm emotions I felt when they made progress.

This research has had a great impact on my EP practice. Through conducting a wide literature review on TAs role more generally as well as on the playground, I developed greater knowledge and awareness of the pedagogical role of the TA and its pitfalls, which allowed me to advise on this following classroom observations. The findings have also ignited my interest in more systemic work, supporting school leadership teams to develop confidence in the effective deployment of TAs and to consider a wider range of formal roles for TAs.

5.9 Conclusions

This research offered a distinct contribution to research to date exploring TAs role through its examination of the playground rather than the classroom context. A key and surprising finding was the emergence of a distinctive TA role that came out via their interactions with children. TAs intuitively used a graduated response in their interactions with children on the playground. This was based on a foundation of their positive relationships and attunement with children to meet their emotional needs and led to support of peer interactions related to play and conflict on a moment-by-moment basis. This highlights the importance of TAs role on the playground for the inclusion agenda, particularly in relation to facilitating the social inclusion of pupils with SEND, and in this way offers a distinct contribution to the field.

Not only were TAs' relationships with children key in their support of children on the playground, but these were also highlighted as key across their role, as well as their relationships with adults in the school system. TAs described a need

for flexibility in their role to respond to and prioritise informal expectations from others in the school system due to their perception of TAs' position in the school hierarchy. This appeared to clash with their distinctive role in support of children's individual needs. Similar to previous research, TAs perceived that they had little guidance or expectations from line management about their role on the playground.

This study has reinforced recommendations from previous research that schools need to be supported to deploy TAs effectively but has provided a new perspective on how this can be done. For example, the graduated response model (revised) has the potential for informing future research and practice (e.g. via training). Initially, it is hoped that this research will inform the deployment of TAs in the schools where the research was conducted through training and may lead to further research exploring TAs role in non-pedagogical support. Furthermore, this study has enhanced the researcher's expertise in supporting the deployment of TAs in individual schools, and highlighted possibilities for systemic work on this topic at a local level.

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CHAPTER 6: APPENDICES

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Appendix A Interview schedule

Topic from research literature	Interview Question	Further prompt
<p>Introduction</p> <p>RQ 1: TA views on their responsibilities (Brown & Devicchi, 2013; Blatchford & Webster, 2011)</p>	<p>1. Could you tell me why you became a teaching assistant?</p> <p>2. Could you tell me what your current role is as a teaching assistant?</p> <p>3. Are there any aspects of the role you particularly enjoy?</p>	<p><i>2.a Could you explain how you are deployed? E.g. 1:1 support, small group work? Roughly how many hours?</i></p> <p><i>2.b Anything else?</i></p> <p><i>2.c Could you tell me your job responsibilities over the last week?</i></p> <p><i>2.d School trips, interventions, clubs, between lessons or PE? Lunchtimes / breaktimes? What does that support involve? How is your role different during those times compared to in the classroom?</i></p> <p><i>2.e Interventions- how often, where carried out, how apply, do you use any of the skills learned from the interventions in any other areas/ at other times? Do you use any specific interventions for social interaction with peers?</i></p> <p>3.a Anything else?</p>
<p>RQ 3: Confidence levels (Baxter, 2014)</p>	<p>4. How confident do you feel in supporting children in class?</p>	<p>4.a Why do you think that is/what helps you to be confident?</p> <p><i>4.b What about in the playground? Interventions? Clubs?</i></p> <p><i>4.c How do you know what to do?</i></p> <p>5.a Anything else?</p>

<p>RQ3: Awareness of skills specific to playground context (Webster & Blatchford 2015)</p>	<p>15. In what situations in your opinion, do you think children struggle most with peer interactions?</p> <p>16. What helps children's interactions with each other?</p> <p>17. What makes it harder for children to interact with each other?</p> <p>18. What do children value about your role on the playground?</p> <p>19. How often would you say that you get involved with children on the playground?</p>	<p><i>playground to be with a specific child.</i></p> <p>14.b What do you do to support children at these times?</p> <p>14.c Apart from the areas we have talked about, do you support children out of class at any other times or in any other situations?</p> <p>14.d What about between activities?</p> <p>15.a Rephrase-interacting with other children</p> <p>19.a When and why do they seek you out?</p> <p>19.b What kinds of interactions do you get involved in? What situations?</p> <p>19.c What is the purpose of your interactions? What about in class?</p> <p>19d.c Specific child /different children?</p>
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<p>RQ 1: Decision making (Baxter, 2014; Brown, Odom & Conroy, 2001)</p> <p>Strategies and scenarios (Bowles, 2015; Causton Theoharris & Malmgren, 2005)</p>	<p>20. How do you decide to start interacting with a student?</p> <p>21. Why do you decide to start interacting with a student?</p> <p>22. Do you ever help them socially/interact with peers during those times?</p> <p>23. Can you think of examples when you have encouraged a child to interact with another child?</p> <p>24. What sorts of things help you to support the child you work with to interact with other children?</p> <p>25. Is there anything that gets in the way of helping the child you support with their interactions with peers?</p>	<p><i>21.a What informs the decisions?</i></p> <p><i>21.b Training/experience/ talking to other staff members?</i></p> <p>22.a Are there any other things you do?</p> <p>22.b Are there particular strategies used?</p> <p>22.c Resources, methods, techniques?</p> <p><i>22.d How are these planned?</i></p> <p>23.a What kind of things do you say or do to support a child to interact with peers? For example child who has misunderstood what another child is saying/ is unaware of how to begin a conversation with a peer, or having trouble turn taking when they are playing games on the playground?</p> <p>23.b Anything else? How does it help the children?</p> <p><i>24.a What helps/ works/ opportunities/ resources are there when supporting the child you work with to interact with peers?</i></p> <p><i>25.a What could be put in place to support children in the playground?</i></p>
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<p>RQ 1: Interventions- Naturalistic versus structured (Baxter, 2014; Downing et al., 2000; Hemmingsson et al., 2003; Rossetti, 2012; Evans, Salisbury, Palombaro & Berryman, 1995; Dolva, Gustavsson, Borell & Hemmingsson, 2011)</p>	<p>26. Can we talk about the interventions that you deliver to support children?</p>	<p><i>26.a What do they involve? How carried out, how often, where?</i></p> <p><i>26.b How do you apply these?</i></p> <p><i>26.c Do you use any of the skills learned from these in other areas?</i></p> <p><i>26.d Do you use any specific interventions for social development/ interactions with peers?</i></p>
<p>RQ 3: Awareness of child's needs (Baxter 2014; Symes & Humphrey, 2011)</p> <p>Inclusion in school culture, sense of belonging Interactions unlikely to happen spontaneously (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Saddler, 2014)</p> <p>How encourage active participation (Farrell, et al 2010; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Sfard, 1998)</p>	<p>27. What do you think are the main needs of the child/children you support?</p> <p>28. More generally what challenges do you think children with SEN struggle with in school</p> <p>29. How are children with SEN / the child you support helped to participate in different areas of school life?</p> <p>30. What does inclusion mean to you?</p>	<p><i>27.a How do you help him with that? What kinds of things do you do or say?</i></p> <p><i>27.b What about other areas, so maybe not so academic but maybe more socially</i></p> <p><i>27.c How do you help him with that? What kinds of things do you do or say?</i></p> <p><i>27.d What do you think about the interactions that the child you support has with other children?</i></p> <p><i>28.a What do you think they need extra help with in this area? How can they be helped with this?</i></p> <p><i>29.a In class/ in the playground / during school clubs/academically/ non academically</i></p> <p><i>29.b Are there any barriers that you help them to overcome?</i></p> <p><i>30.a Is this something your school talks about?</i></p>

<p>RQ 3: Training (Baxter, 2014)</p>	<p>31. Could you tell me what, if any training have you had for your role?</p> <p>32. How did you receive training?</p> <p>33. How long was the training?</p> <p>34. Is there anything you would have liked training on that you haven't had yet?</p> <p>35. How many years experience?</p> <p>36. Other qualifications?</p>	<p><i>31.a e.g. H+S, CP</i></p> <p><i>31.b Have you had training for anything else?</i></p> <p><i>31.c Training for how to support in the playground?</i></p> <p><i>31.d Interventions for children's interactions/social skills?</i></p> <p><i>31.e For how and when to apply interventions?</i></p> <p><i>32.a Employer in service</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>One to one from professional</i> • <i>Workshops</i> • <i>Seminars</i> • <i>Correspondence course</i> • <i>University course</i>
	<p>37. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?</p> <p>38. Any questions?</p>	
<p>Questions in bold represent those where the wording was slightly changed following initial discussion with a TA not included in the sample or following the pilot.</p>		

Appendix B Information and consent forms for TAs

Institute of Education



Dear participant,

Your school kindly agreed to take part in a research project aiming to investigate teaching assistants (TAs) role in different school contexts.

Background

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist on a doctoral programme at the Institute of Education and I currently work in XX in the XX Team. As part of my ongoing doctoral thesis, I am conducting the second phase of exploratory research in the borough.

Aims

My research aims to explore how teaching assistants in mainstream primary schools perceive their role and how they support children during unstructured times. Phase one of the study explored teaching assistants own views about their role. In phase two I am interested in finding out about good practice in your role as a teaching assistant.

What does it involve?

This second phase of the study will explore the interactions between teaching assistants and pupils during unstructured times in order to contribute to a better understanding of what happens on the playground and identify incidences of good practices. This information sheet relates to phase two only. Two playtimes that you supervise during will be observed and audio recorded with your permission.

What can I expect when taking part?

- Your participation is voluntary and consent will be given via your signing of the attached consent form
- You can withdraw at any time including after the observation has taken place without stating a reason. All data will be destroyed upon request and will not be included in the study
- Your data will remain anonymous. Care will be taken not include any quotations in the write up of the thesis which could identify particular individuals
- At the end of the research a summary of the borough wide research findings will be sent to your school, however no information that would identify particular schools or individuals will be made available. Please be assured that all data collected will be kept strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Contact details

Nicole Salisbury
XXX
XXX

UCL Institute of Education

20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL
+44 (0)20 7612 6000 | enquiries@ioe.ac.uk | www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe

Dear participant,

Your school kindly agreed to take part in a research project aiming to investigate teaching assistants (TAs) role in different school contexts.

Background

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist on a doctoral programme at the Institute of Education and I currently work in XX in the XX Team. As part of my ongoing doctoral thesis, I am conducting some exploratory research in the borough.

Aims

My research aims to explore how teaching assistants in mainstream primary schools perceive their role and how they support children during times outside of the classroom. I am therefore interested in finding out your own views on your role as a teaching assistant.

What does it involve?

- For phase 1 of the research, I will be conducting individual interviews, which you are invited to take part in. I will be asking you questions about your role as a teaching assistant. The interview will be audio recorded with your permission and should take approximately half an hour. All information will be treated with confidentiality and you have the right to refrain from answering any questions which you do not wish to answer.
- If you are also interested in taking part in a second phase of the research, this will involve observations of your role as a teaching assistant outside of the classroom, looking for examples of good practice.

What does phase two involve?

This second phase of the study will explore the interactions between teaching assistants and pupils during unstructured times in order to contribute to a better understanding of TA practice outside of the classroom. For example, a playtime that you supervise will be observed and audio recorded with your permission.

What can I expect when taking part?

- Your participation is voluntary and consent will be given via your signing of the attached consent form
- You can withdraw at any time including after the interview has taken place without stating a reason. All data will be destroyed upon request and will not be included in the study
- You may refrain from answering any questions you are not comfortable with
- Your data will remain anonymous. Care will be taken not include any quotations in the write up of the thesis which could identify particular individuals
- At the end of the research a summary of the research findings will be sent to your school, however no information that would identify particular schools or individuals will be made available. Please be assured that all data collected will be kept strictly confidential in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

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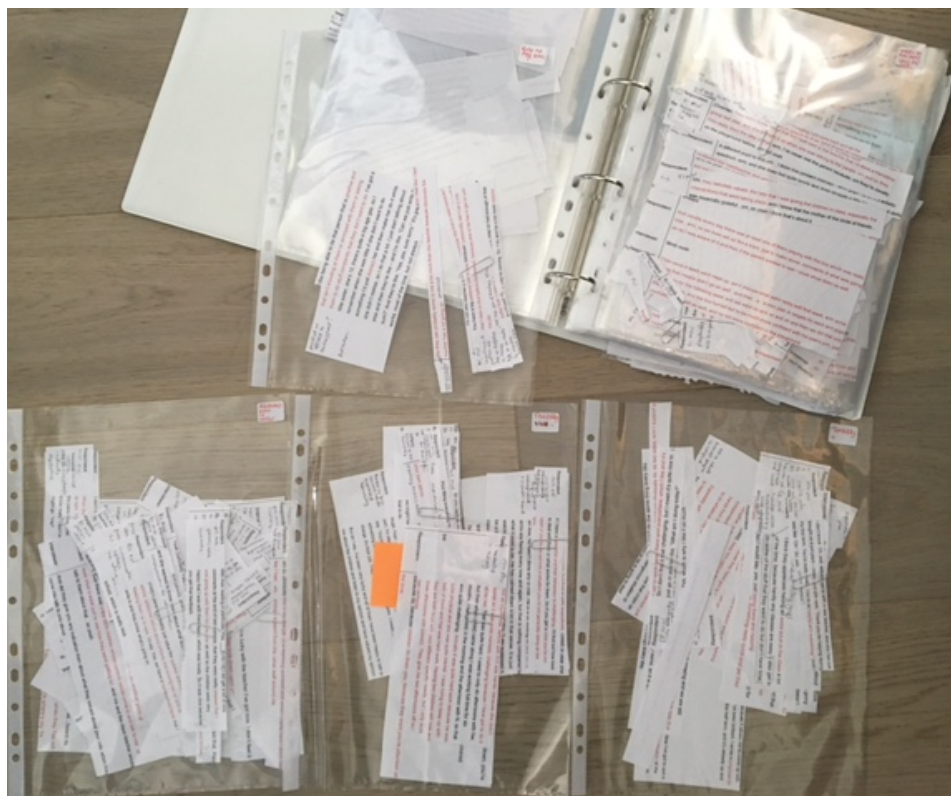
Appendix C Sample interview transcript extract with initial codes

Raw data	Initial codes
<p>Interviewer: Yes, it's always good to get that feedback. What about the children? What do you think they value the most about your role?</p> <p>Respondent: I think probably for them the most important thing is the relationship we have with them. So that they want to have a positive relationship with you and that they can trust you and that you are there, but that you're going to be firm and fair with them. They know that I won't take any nonsense off them. I tend to be quite caring but then if you cross the line, I'm not having it. They know that.</p> <p>But also quite often they like to have a little bit of a giggle, a little bit of fun as well. They come up and if you're reading a book that's funny or something like that...</p> <p>But it's a fine line because you're not there to be their friend, you're not there to be buddy. You're there to be a teaching assistant. But yes, they like to have me there, I'm sure.</p>	<p><i>Children perceive their relationship with the TA as the important thing TAs offer</i></p> <p><i>Trusting relationship is important to children</i></p> <p><i>Availability of TA is important to children</i></p> <p><i>Children value boundaries</i></p> <p><i>TA makes boundaries clear</i></p> <p><i>Children are drawn to the fun side of the TA</i></p> <p><i>Balancing relationship with maintaining boundaries as a result of other areas of their role</i></p> <p><i>Children enjoy TA presence</i></p>

Appendix D Sample observation transcript extract with initial codes

Raw data	Index	Code
<p>TA: Yeah, erm. Look at the boy's playing ball!</p> <p>Pause...Boys..have you tried a chest pass? Like that that we did in PE? Go and get it then.</p> <p><i>Child 4: I'll do it, I'll get it</i></p>	L1.12	<i>Comment on play: idea for play questionx2: instruction for play</i>
<p><i>Child 5, pass here sweetie. Oh wow. 1:1 child, ready?</i></p> <p><i>Child 4: We do one like (inaudible)</i></p>	L1.13	<i>Instruction for play: affirming comment: include 1:1 child in play</i>
<p><i>TA: (laughs). To you. Whay! (Pause 5 sec) Oh wow, are you finished? (pause 2.28-2.42) Child 5, do you need your coat on my love, are you cold?</i></p> <p><i>Child 5: No</i></p>	L1.14	<i>Laugh in response to play: affirming comment: question about play: procedural question clothing</i>
<p><i>TA: Are you alright? (pause 9 secs) ooohh.</i></p> <p><i>2.57-3.19 no interaction (walking)</i></p>	L1.15	<i>Open question approach child: affirming comment</i>
<p><i>TA: are you having a show girls?</i></p> <p><i>Child 6: Yeah, we're doing a show.</i></p>	L1.16	<i>Question about play</i>
<p><i>TA: Oh wow. And what is the show, called?</i></p> <p><i>Child6: Its er erm, Cindy</i></p> <p><i>Child 7: Cinderella and Goldilocks.</i></p>	L1.17	<i>Affirming comment: question about play</i>
<p><i>TA: wow</i></p> <p><i>Child 8: Cindylocks.</i></p>	L1.18	<i>Affirming comment</i>
<p><i>TA: So who is, in it who's the (overlap)</i></p> <p><i>Child 8: erm, child 6's Cinderella, and me and child7, we are three characters each.</i></p>	L1.19	<i>Question about play</i>
<p><i>TA: OK, well that's complicated.</i></p> <p><i>Child 7: 6 characters!</i></p>	L1.20	<i>Comment on play</i>

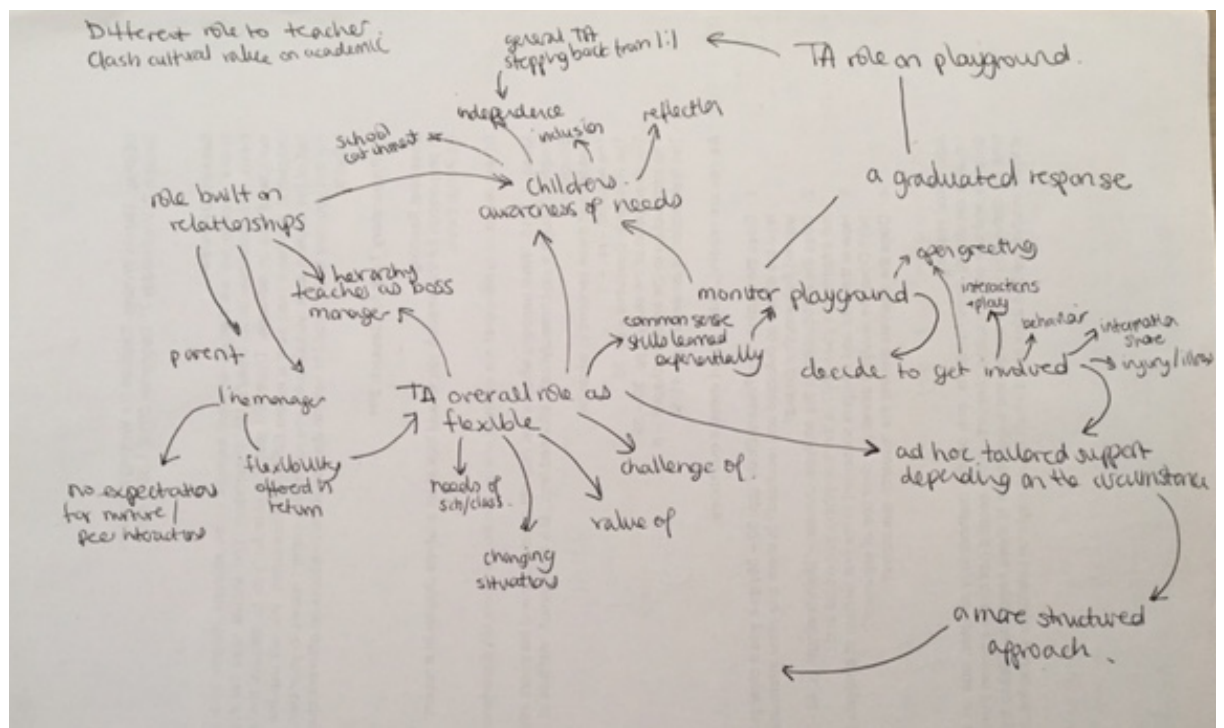
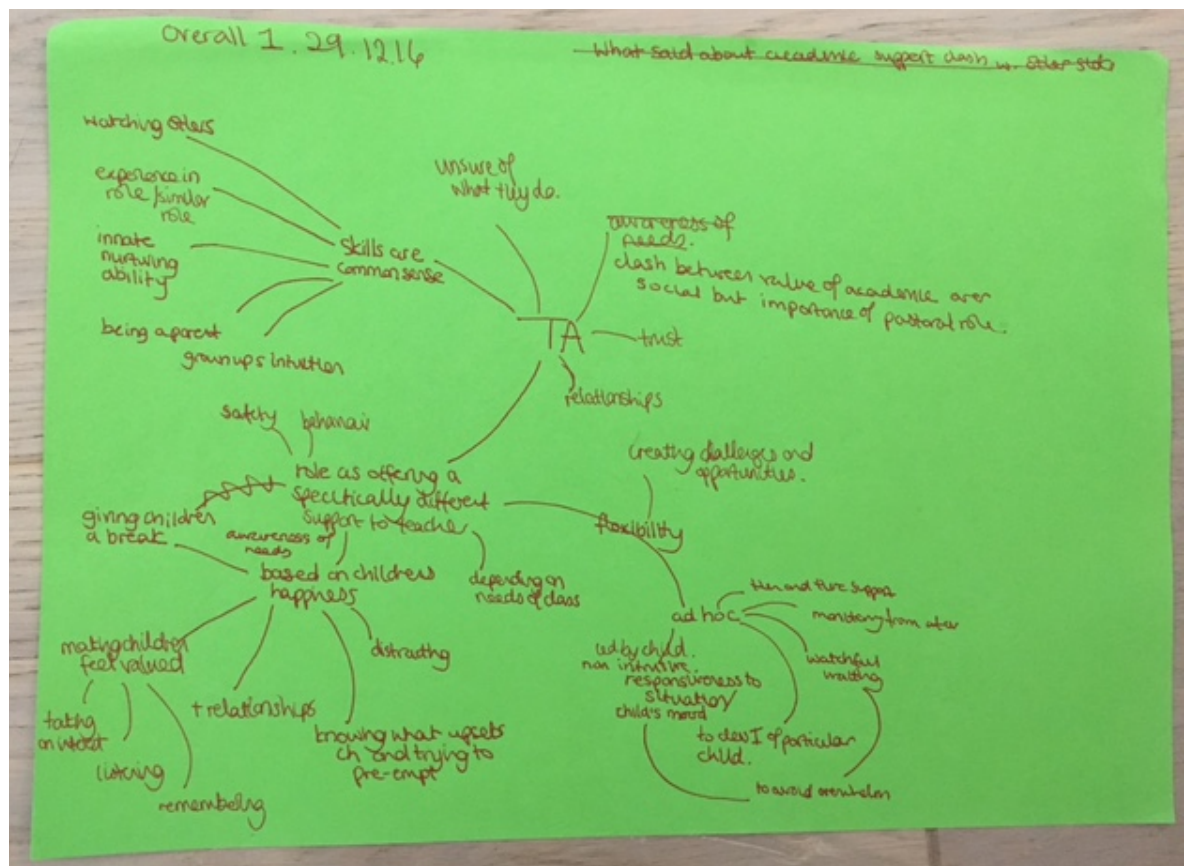
Appendix E Photographic examples of the process of thematic analysis

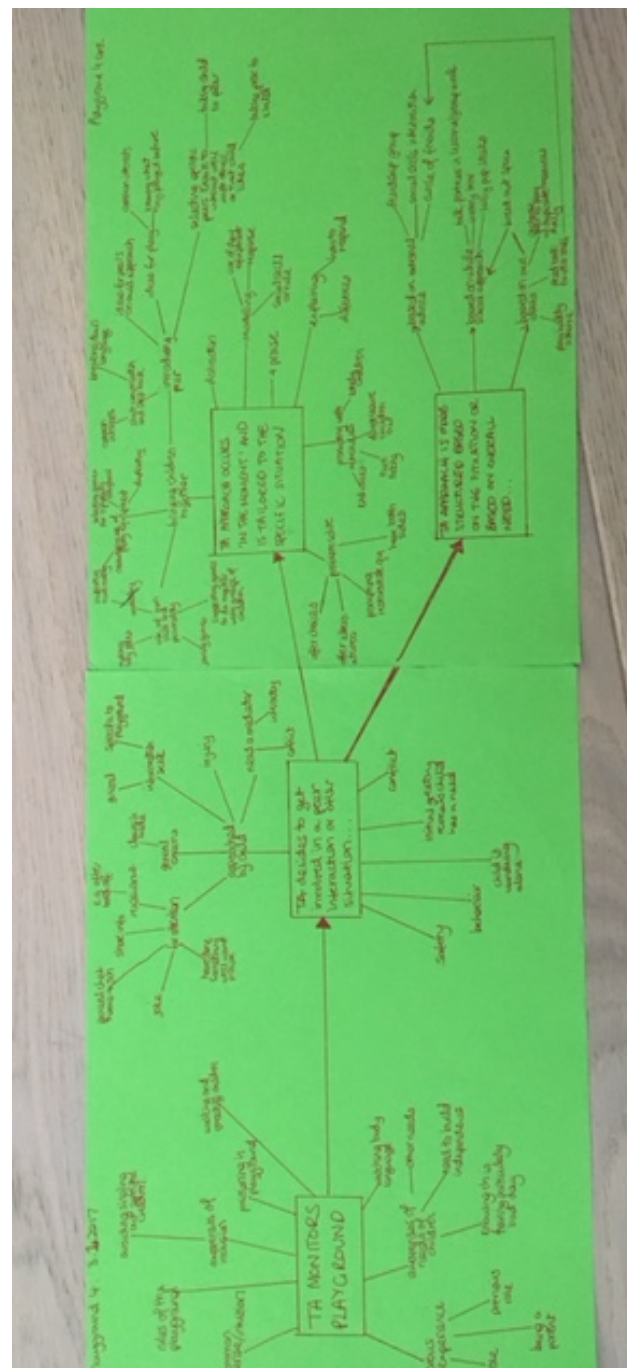
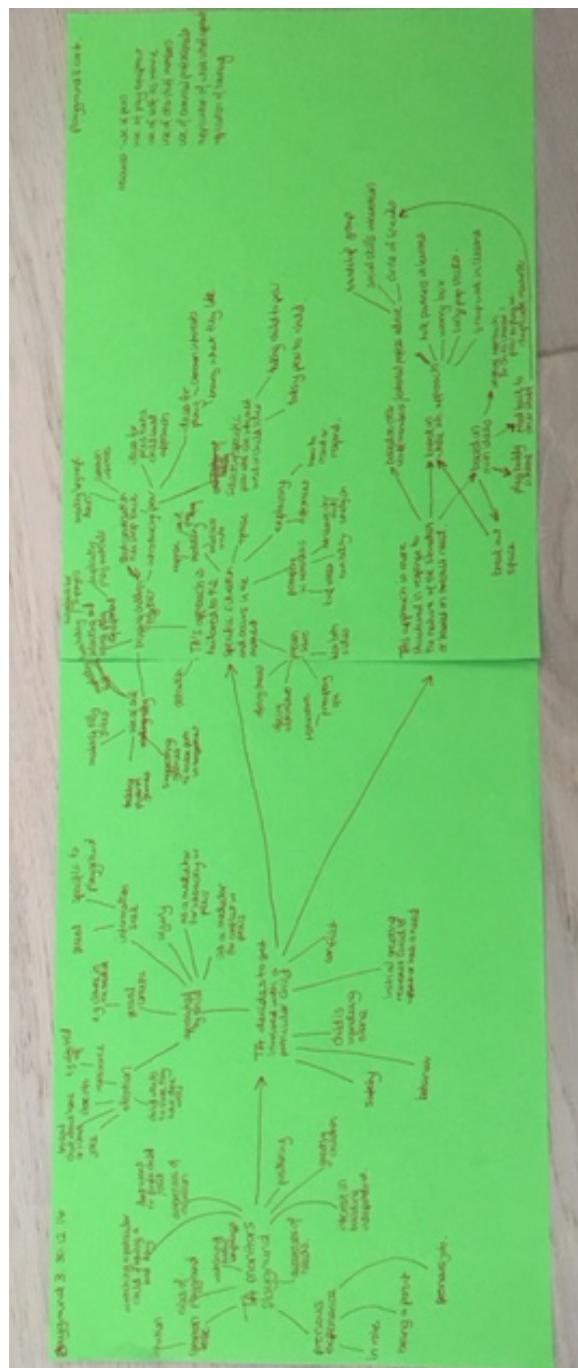


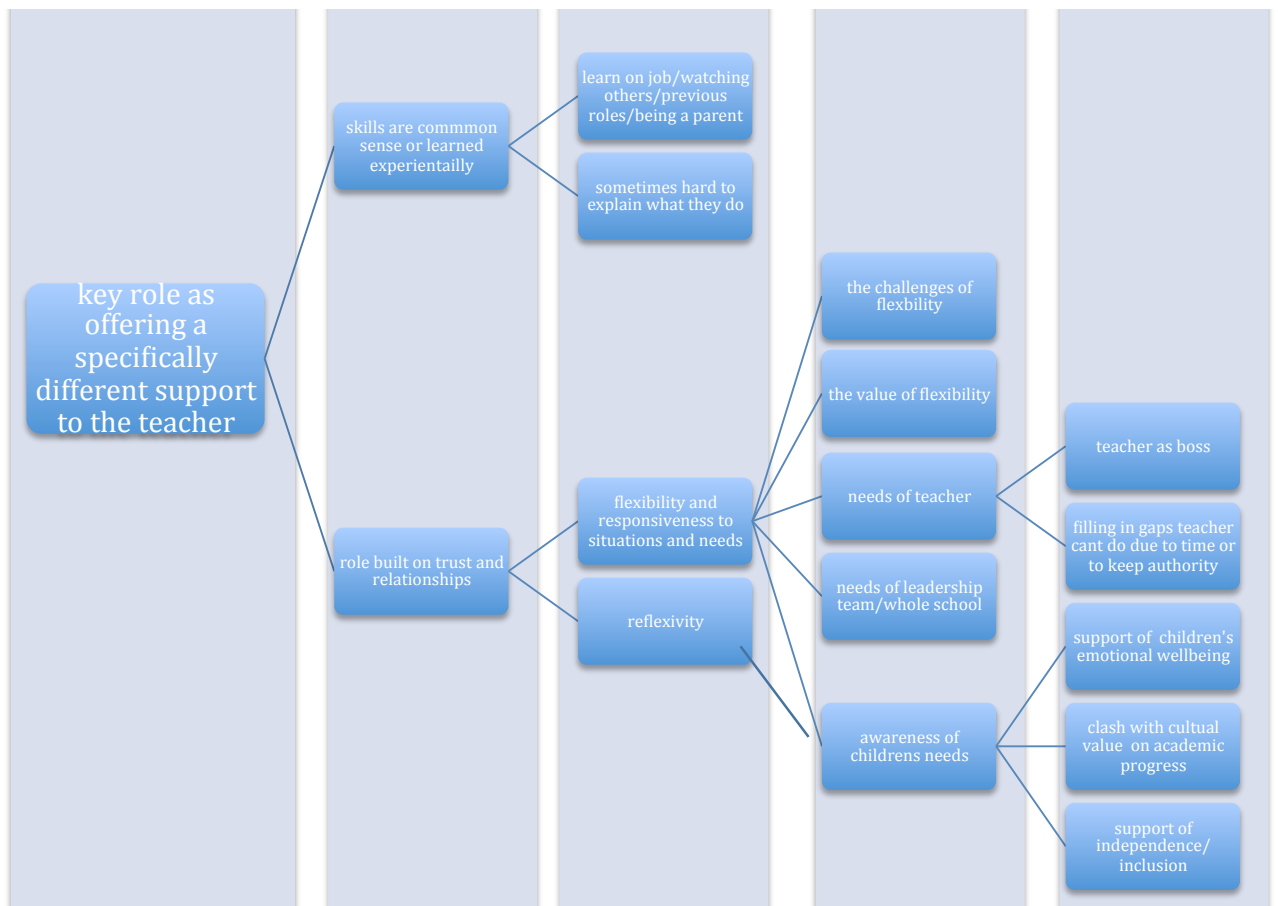
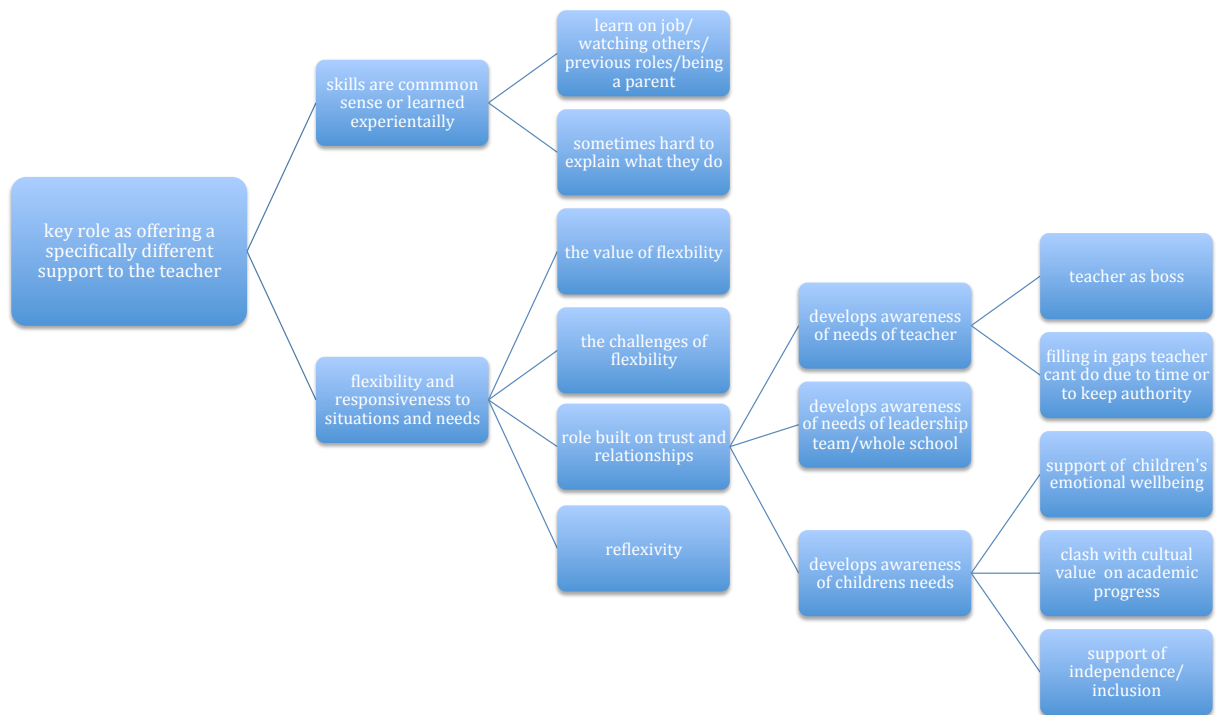
Appendix F Example of codes within a subtheme and theme

Individual codes	Subtheme	Theme
<p>Parents value reassurance from TA about their child</p> <p>Parents value reassurance from TA about struggling with their own children</p> <p>Parents can relate to TA because they have a child themselves</p> <p>TA can relate to parent because they have a child themselves</p> <p>Having the same TA over a couple of years makes communication easier</p> <p>TA values feedback from parent about children being happy with their support</p> <p>Parent values opportunities for informal communication with TA about interventions</p> <p>Amount of contact with parents depends on age group</p> <p>Parents value getting written communication from the TA</p> <p>Parents trust TA to carry out work to a certain standard</p> <p>Relationship makes communication easier</p> <p>Relationship builds confidence to communicate</p> <p>Opportunities for informal communication about child's progress or any concerns</p> <p>Parents value being able to chat informally with TA</p> <p>TA is available for parents as a point of contact</p> <p>TA tries to be see parents point of view</p> <p>Parent pass on information from home and listen to information from TA</p>	<p>TAs relationships with parents provides a link with school and reassurance</p>	<p>TAs' role is mediated by positive relationships</p>

Appendix G Examples of the process of refining subthemes and themes







Appendix H Ethics form

Institute of Education



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Ethics Application Form: Student Research

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

For further support and guidance please see accompanying guidelines and the Ethics Review Procedures for Student Research <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/research-ethics-committee/ioe> or contact your supervisor or IOE.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk.

Before completing this form you will need to discuss your proposal fully with your supervisor(s). Please attach all supporting documents and letters.

For all Psychology students, this form should be completed with reference to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics and Code of Ethics and Conduct.

Section 1 Project details			
a.	Project title		How Teaching Assistants Facilitate the Peer Interactions of Children they Support
b.	Student name		Nicole Salisbury
c.	Supervisor/Personal Tutor		Professor Peter Blatchford
d.	Department		Psychology and Education
e.	Course category (Tick one)	PhD/MPhil	<input type="checkbox"/> EdD <input type="checkbox"/>
		MRes	<input type="checkbox"/> DEdPsy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		MTech	<input type="checkbox"/> MA/MSc <input type="checkbox"/>
		ITE	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Diploma (state which)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Other (state which)	<input type="checkbox"/>
f.	Course/module title		DEdPsy Thesis Module
g.	If applicable, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.		N/A
h.	Intended research start date		11/2015
i.	Intended research end date		05/2017
j.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in <i>If research to be conducted abroad please ensure travel insurance is obtained through UCL http://www.ucl.ac.uk/finance/insurance/travel</i>		UK

k.	Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?	
	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	External Committee Name:
	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ⇒ go to Section 2	Date of Approval:

If yes:

- Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.
- Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service](#) (NRES) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee](#) (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 Project summary

Research methods (tick all that apply)

Please attach questionnaires, visual methods and schedules for interviews (even in draft form).

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interviews | <input type="checkbox"/> Controlled trial/other intervention study |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focus groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Use of personal records |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaires | <input type="checkbox"/> Systematic review ⇒ <i>if only method used go to Section 5.</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Action research | <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary data analysis ⇒ <i>if secondary analysis used go to Section 6.</i> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Observation | <input type="checkbox"/> Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Literature review | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, give details: |

Please provide an overview of your research. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, your method of data collection (e.g., observations, interviews, questionnaires, etc.) and kind of questions that will be asked, reporting and dissemination (typically 300-500 words).

The current research will address gaps in the literature regarding the role of TAs in facilitating peer interactions. Although the negative implications of TA support on peer interactions has been raised in research, the positive role for TAs in this area has largely been ignored to date. There is particularly little investigation of how TAs support peer interactions naturalistically and implicitly or how they apply structured interventions as research tends to investigate TA support in structured, formal contexts such as the classroom, where there are less opportunities for this. The qualitative methods used in previous studies have had a more general focus on wider TA roles rather than specifically exploring peer interactions which has lead to a lack of detail regarding exactly how TAs support peer interactions, particularly on playgrounds. There is a need for more detailed investigation of what TAs are actually currently doing regarding children's social interactions. This study aims to gather information on good practice and draw up some recommendations that can be used to advise schools to consider deployment of TAs as a resource to facilitate children's peer interactions.

1. Research questions: What are TAs views about their own facilitative strategies for children's peer interactions?
2. What kinds of TA-pupil talk facilitate children's peer interactions during unstructured times on the playground ?

To address research question 1 individual face to face semi-structured interviews will be conducted to explore TAs perspective on their talk with pupils, the strategies they use naturalistically and the structured interventions they may use. Thematic analysis will be used to analyse interview data. The six phase approach

of thematic analysis set out in Braun and Clarke's explanation (2006) will be used. Following this a small sample of participants who took part in the interviews will be selected to address research question 2. Video recorded observations of their talk with pupils in unstructured settings will be carried out to gain a view of their practice in context. These observations will be unstructured so as not to impose predefined categories on the data and will allow the codes to emerge through an iterative process, therefore no observation schedule will be used. The interactions between TAs and children will be analysed using applied conversation analysis. Moment by moment detailed analysis of the full video-recordings will occur. Then extracts of TA-pupil talk related to peer interactions will be selected for transcription and further analysis. The researcher will adhere to the general transcription rules set out by Have (2007) including the details of the conversation (silence, overlapped speech, elongated vowels and inflections). Descriptive information on TA characteristics will be gathered and considered in the analysis.

Participants will be selected through an opportunistic sample through contacting Headteachers of primary schools in Hertfordshire by email with an outline of the research and criteria for participants needed and through directly contacting SENCOs with whom the researcher has a working relationship with. The sample for the second stage of data collection will also be opportunistic, participants from the interview stage that are willing to be video recorded during the observation stage.

After data has been collected and analysed, the findings will be disseminated to the schools that took part in the form of a research brief with a cover letter. Participants will be informed that if requested, they may be provided with individual verbal feedback on the observation data collected related to themselves at the end of the interview they take part in.

Section 3 Participants

Please answer the following questions giving full details where necessary. Text boxes will expand for your responses.

a.	Will your research involve human participants?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/> ⇒ go to Section 4
b.	Who are the participants (i.e. what sorts of people will be involved)? Tick all that apply.		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Early years/pre-school <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ages 5-11 <input type="checkbox"/> Ages 12-16 <input type="checkbox"/> Young people aged 17-18	<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown – specify below <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adults <i>please specify below</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Other – specify below	
	NB: Ensure that you check the guidelines (Section 1) carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES).		
c.	If participants are under the responsibility of others (such as parents, teachers or medical staff) how do you intend to obtain permission to approach the participants to take part in the study? (Please attach approach letters or details of permission procedures – see Section 9 Attachments.) I have created a information letter and consent form for parents of children who may be seen on the video recording of TAs interactions with children during the observation in the second phase of my research. I have attached this.		
d.	How will participants be recruited (identified and approached)? Once Headteachers have been contacted and have agreed to the research being conducted in their school, a letter to teaching assistants will be sent to the school		
e.	Describe the process you will use to inform participants about what you are doing.		

	<p>Participants will be made aware of the aims of the study using information sheets with additional face to face discussions if required when participants attend interview. A letter will be given to the participants outlining the purpose of the research, its aims and information about both stages of data collection, who will have access to the information they provide and details surrounding confidentiality. Once they have read this, they can choose to sign the form (with the option to withdraw at any time) or opt out. In this letter, the researcher will clearly explain the reasons for the research including the importance of gaining the voice of TAs and the aim of exploring good practice of TAs in facilitation of interactions.</p>
f.	<p>How will you obtain the consent of participants? Will this be written? How will it be made clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate at any time?</p> <p><i>See the guidelines for information on opt-in and opt-out procedures. Please note that the method of consent should be appropriate to the research and fully explained.</i></p> <p>For the first stage of the research (interviews), a consent form will accompany the information sheet described above. Participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw at any point during the study and consent will be sought for all teaching assistant participants. Participants will be given the option to sign the form (with the option to withdraw at any time) or opt out. For the second stage of the research (observations), participants will be given a further consent form to agree to being video- recorded.</p> <p>Due to the use of video recordings to collect observation data consent will also be sought for all children who will be present on the school playground at the time of data collection due to the possibility that they may be captured on the video. Due to the large number of children present on the playground, opt out consent forms will be used that will describe the purpose of the research, the aims and the possibility that their children may be present on the video recording and that extracts of their talk with TAs may be used as part of the analysis to gain an understanding of the interactions between TAs and children and how this facilitates peer interactions.</p>
g.	<p>Studies involving questionnaires: Will participants be given the option of omitting questions they do not wish to answer?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
	<p>If NO please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.</p>
h.	<p>Studies involving observation: Confirm whether participants will be asked for their informed consent to be observed.</p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
	<p>If NO read the guidelines (Ethical Issues section) and explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.</p>
i.	<p>Might participants experience anxiety, discomfort or embarrassment as a result of your study?</p> <p>Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>
	<p>If yes what steps will you take to explain and minimise this? The teaching assistants involved may experience anxiety due to their practice being video recorded, observed and analysed in detail. The researcher will ensure that the teaching assistants are aware of the exact purpose of the research: that the purpose of the observation will be to look for extracts of good practice only. Through conducting interviews first, it is hoped that the researcher will be able to develop a rapport with the participants prior to video-recording them and that the teaching assistants who agree to this further aspect will have a deeper understanding of the research after answering the interview questions.</p>

	If not , explain how you can be sure that no discomfort or embarrassment will arise?
j.	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants (deception) in any way? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	If YES please provide further details below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
k.	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	If NO please explain why below and ensure that you cover any ethical issues arising from this in section 8.
l.	Will participants be given information about the findings of your study? (This could be a brief summary of your findings in general; it is not the same as an individual debriefing.) Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	If no , why not?

Section 4 Security-sensitive material

Only complete if applicable

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

a.	Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
c.	Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues			

Section 5 Systematic review of research

Only complete if applicable

a.	Will you be collecting any new data from participants?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will you be analysing any secondary data?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> *	No <input type="checkbox"/>
* Give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues <i>If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) and if you have answered No to both questions, please go to Section 10 Attachments.</i>			

Section 6 Secondary data analysis Complete for all secondary analysis

a.	Name of dataset/s		
b.	Owner of dataset/s		
c.	Are the data in the public domain?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
		If no, do you have the owner's permission/license? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/>	
d.	Are the data anonymised?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
		Do you plan to anonymise the data? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Do you plan to use individual level data? Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Will you be linking data to individuals? Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	
e.	Are the data sensitive (DPA 1998 definition)?	Yes* <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
f.	Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>
g.	If no , was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>
h.	If no , was data collected prior to ethics approval process?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>* Give further details in <i>Section 8 Ethical Issues</i></p> <p><i>If secondary analysis is only method used and no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to Section 9 Attachments.</i></p>			

Section 7 Data Storage and Security

Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

a.	Confirm that all personal data will be stored and processed in compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA 1998). (See the Guidelines and the Institute's Data Protection & Records Management Policy for more detail.)	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>* If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with the DPA 1998 and state what these arrangements are below.</p>		
c.	Who will have access to the data and personal information, including advisory/consultation groups and during transcription? The researcher will have access to the data and the research supervisor. It is possible that the data may be sent to a secure transcription service depending on the time limits of during the analysis phase.	
During the research		
d.	Where will the data be stored? Observation schedules and transcriptions will be stored at the researcher's home address. Electronic data will be saved onto a password protected computer and then deleted from the video recorder. All information stored will be anonymised to protect the identities of the participants.	
e.	Will mobile devices such as USB storage and laptops be used?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> * No <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>* If yes, state what mobile devices: Laptop</p>		

	* If yes, will they be encrypted?: Yes	
After the research		
f.	Where will the data be stored? The data will be saved onto a password protected computer.	
g.	How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format? Data and records will be kept for 2 years, anonymised and on a password protected computer	
h.	Will data be archived for use by other researchers?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> * No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	* If yes, please provide details.	

Section 8 Ethical issues

Are there particular features of the proposed work which may raise ethical concerns or add to the complexity of ethical decision making? If so, please outline how you will deal with these.

It is important that you demonstrate your awareness of potential risks or harm that may arise as a result of your research. You should then demonstrate that you have considered ways to minimise the likelihood and impact of each potential harm that you have identified. Please be as specific as possible in describing the ethical issues you will have to address. Please consider / address ALL issues that may apply.

Ethical concerns may include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Methods - Sampling - Recruitment - Gatekeepers - Informed consent - Potentially vulnerable participants - Safeguarding/child protection - Sensitive topics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International research - Risks to participants and/or researchers - Confidentiality/Anonymity - Disclosures/limits to confidentiality - Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection) - Reporting - Dissemination and use of findings |
|---|--|

Sensitive topics; during the interview process, some interview questions may cause participants to feel embarrassed, for example questions around training or support from management teams may highlight that they have not received any training from the school, or support from senior management teams. Participants may feel concerned that this information may be revealed to management teams. Findings will be reported in a sensitive manner, particularly if participants are all selected from one particular school, and participants will be informed that their identities will be confidential throughout the process.

Confidentiality and reporting; It is important that TAs are reassured that the research will keep personal information confidential and that I will not report anything which could reveal their identity. I will ensure this through anonymising the data collected using a code system. I will not report the names of the Schools who took part.

Section 9 Further information

Outline any other information you feel relevant to this submission, using a separate sheet or attachments if necessary.

--

Section 10 Attachments Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached

a.	Information sheets and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research, including approach letters	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
b.	Consent form	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
	If applicable:		
c.	The proposal for the project	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
d.	Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
e.	Full risk assessment	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Section 11 Declaration

		Yes	No
I have read, understood and will abide by the following set of guidelines.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BPS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	BERA <input type="checkbox"/> BSA <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state) <input type="checkbox"/>		
I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I confirm that to the best of my knowledge: The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.			
Name	Nicole Salisbury		
Date	21.5.16		

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor.

Notes and references

Professional code of ethics

You should read and understand relevant ethics guidelines, for example:

[British Psychological Society](#) (2009) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, and (2014) *Code of Human Research Ethics*
or

[British Educational Research Association](#) (2011) *Ethical Guidelines*
or

[British Sociological Association](#) (2002) *Statement of Ethical Practice*

Disclosure and Barring Service checks

If you are planning to carry out research in regulated Education environments such as Schools, or if your research will bring you into contact with children and young people (under the age of 18), you will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) CHECK, before you start. The DBS was previously known as the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)). If you do not already hold a current DBS check, and have not registered with the DBS update service, you will need to obtain one through UCL.

Ensure that you apply for the DBS check in plenty of time as will take around 4 weeks, though can take longer depending on the circumstances.

Further references

The www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk website is very useful for assisting you to think through the ethical issues arising from your project.

Robson, Colin (2011). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (3rd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

This text has a helpful section on ethical considerations.

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage.

This text has useful suggestions if you are conducting research with children and young people.

Wiles, R. (2013) *What are Qualitative Research Ethics?* Bloomsbury.

A useful and short text covering areas including informed consent, approaches to research ethics including examples of ethical dilemmas.

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, you may refer the application to the Research Ethics and Governance Administrator (via IOE.researchethics@ucl.ac.uk) so that it can be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A Research Ethics Committee Chair, ethics representatives in your department and the research ethics coordinator can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the Research Ethics Committee.

Reviewer 1

Supervisor name	
Supervisor comments	
Supervisor signature	

Reviewer 2

Advisory committee/course team member name	
Advisory committee/course team member comments	
Advisory committee/course team member signature	

Decision

Date decision was made		
Decision	Approved	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Referred back to applicant and supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Referred to REC for review	<input type="checkbox"/>

Recording

Recorded in the student information system	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Once completed and approved, please send this form and associated documents to the relevant programme administrator to record on the student information system and to securely store.

Further guidance on ethical issues can be found on the IOE website at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/srs/research-ethics-committee/ioe> and www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk