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The Perspectives and Experiences of Children With Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Primary Schools Regarding Their Individual Teaching Assistant Support

by

Hayley Louisa Frisby

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THE PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM PRIMARY SCHOOLS REGARDING THEIR INDIVIDUAL TEACHING ASSISTANT SUPPORT

Hayley Louisa Frisby

Over the past twenty years there has been a continuous and significant rise in the number of teaching assistants (TAs) working within English schools and they are increasingly taking on a more pedagogical role, often working with pupils with special educational needs (SEN). A systematic review of the international literature was conducted, exploring the impacts of TA support on pupils' academic, social and emotional/behavioural outcomes (including 24 papers published between the years 2000 and 2015). Key stakeholders' views about the impacts of TA support were found to be largely positive, as were evaluations of TA-led targeted academic interventions. A number of quantitative investigations of regular TA support for specific pupils indicated a negative relationship between TA support and pupils' academic progress. Pupil perspectives regarding their TA support were rarely documented within the literature. A qualitative empirical study was conducted to contribute more of a pupil voice. Ten Year Six pupils with SEN took part in individual semi-structured interviews, discussing their one-to-one TA support. Props (such as a 'Judge' figurine) helped to set expectations and reassure participants, whilst a creative, visual activity supported their communication and engagement. Participants' discussions highlighted that they were almost constantly accompanied by a TA and saw the TA as their 'teacher'. There was a significant degree of separation from the class teacher and a perception that the TA knew participants better than the teacher did. Pupils had rarely been consulted about their TA support in school. However, great admiration was shown for TAs, who were often considered to epitomise their ideal TA. Participants' discussions suggested that TAs advocated for pupils and possibly looked beyond their labels of SEN. They talked passionately about the emotional support provided by TAs (including building their sense of belonging within school) and suggested that TAs support more positive interactions with peers.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, **Hayley Louisa Frisby,** declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

The Perspectives and Experiences of Children With Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Primary Schools Regarding Their Individual Teaching Assistant Support.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

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x

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

CASP Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

DISS Deployment and Impact of Support Staff Project

DfE Department for Education

DfEE Department for Employment and Education

DfES Department for Education and Skills

EBSCO Elton B. Stephens Company

EP(s) Educational Psychologist(s)

EHCP(s) Education Health and Care Plan(s)

MAST Making a Statement Project

MLE Mediated Learning Experience

Ofsted Office for Standards in Education

PAL Positive Approaches to Learning

SATS Standard Assessment Tests

SEBD Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

SEN Special Educational Needs

SENCo(s) Special Educational Needs Coordinator(s)

SEND Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SPLD Severe and Profound Learning Difficulties

TA(s) Teaching Assistant(s)

UN United Nations

WOS Web of Science

WPR Wider Pedagogical Role model

ZPD Zone of Proximal Development

Chapter 1:   Literature Review

How has the Literature Shaped our Understanding of the Impacts of TA Support for Primary School Pupils, including those with SEN?

Context

Over the past twenty years, there has been a consistent and dramatic increase in the number of Teaching Assistants (TAs) within English schools. The School Workforce Census (DfE, 2015a) shows that the number of full-time equivalent TAs increased from 79,000 in 2000, to 147,000 in 2005, to 194,000 in 2010 and to 255,000 in 2014. During 2014, TAs made up 27% of the school workforce. Researchers refer to this growth as 'rapid' (Saddler, 2013, p. 145) and 'unprecedented' (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell and Webster, 2011, p. 443) and those from other countries, including the USA, Australia and Canada, confirm that this has been an international trend (e.g. Giangreco, 2010; Stephenson and Carter, 2014; Tews and Lupart, 2008).

There has also been a significant shift in the nature of the TA role. Whilst TAs once assisted the teacher in administrative tasks as an 'extra pair of hands' in the classroom, (Groom and Rose, 2005, p. 20) they have increasingly taken on a more direct teaching role. Moyles and Suschitzky (1997) refer to the shift from an ancillary role in supporting teachers' work, to a teaching role directly supporting pupils' learning. TAs are now expected to carry out many jobs that would once have been the sole responsibility of the class teacher (e.g. Butt and Lance, 2005; Estyn, 2007). This increased pedagogical focus of the TA role has created a blurred boundary between the teacher and TA remits (e.g. Mistry, Burton and Brundrett, 2004; Moran and Abbott, 2002). One distinction that is increasingly highlighted in the literature (e.g. Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin and Russell, 2010) is that whilst teachers spend their time teaching the whole class, TAs spend their time supporting pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Lamb (2009, p. 29) reports that much of the teaching and support for pupils with SEN has 'been handed over to TAs'.

Legislation & Change

The changes outlined above can largely be understood in terms of ongoing developments in government legislation and policy. Prior to the 1980s, the majority of TAs

worked in special schools for pupils with SEN (Alborz, Pearson, Farrell and Howes, 2009). Thomas (1992) argues that the publication of the Warnock Report (Warnock, 1978), which promoted the inclusion of children with SEN within mainstream schools, was a significant antecedent to changes in TA numbers and roles. TA support has been a 'response to the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools...' (Alborz et al., 2009, p. 5) and 'one of the principle means of ensuring inclusive education' (Bowers, 1997, p. 218). The use of the term 'inclusion' requires a level of caution here; whilst increasing TA support might relate to more frequent placement of pupils with SEN within mainstream schools, whether or not they are fully 'included' remains a contested issue (e.g. Booth and Ainscow, 2011).

Governmental policy documents and legislation have apparently bolstered the inclusion movement; 'Excellence for All Children: Meeting SEN' (DfEE, 1997) highlighted the moral, social and educational benefits of inclusion and the 2001 SEN and Disabilities Act (DfES, 2001a) strengthened SEN pupils' rights to a mainstream education, removing two of the four conditions required for placement within mainstream schools. However, a statistical report by the Department for Education (2015b) indicates that the proportion of pupils with Statements being educated within mainstream schools in England declined (slightly) between 2007 and 2015; it is likely that continued increases in TA numbers within mainstream schools have been influenced by additional contextual factors.

In the late 1990s, English pupils were being outperformed academically by their peers in other countries (Reynolds and Farrell, 1996) and the government strove to improve outcomes. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies were introduced in 1998 and increasing numbers of TAs were involved in supporting these interventions. Around this time, there were reports asserting the effective contribution of TAs (DfEE, 2000) and the necessity of the wider role of the TA in achieving higher standards (DfES, 2002). A national evaluation (Ofsted, 2002) claimed that the quality of teaching was higher in classrooms where a TA was present.

During the early 2000s, difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers were linked to high levels of stress, low levels of job satisfaction and overwhelming administrative demands (e.g. DfES, 2000; Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2001). The National Agreement (DfES, 2003) aimed to improve teacher experiences and increase educational standards. A key element was for teachers to delegate tasks to TAs, further promoting the increased numbers and varied roles of TAs.

Impacts of TA Support

Research investigating the work of TAs in schools has also increased over the past twenty years. Many studies provided a generally positive view of the impacts of TAs, including their role in supporting pupil engagement during the Literacy Hour (Farrell, Balshaw and Polat, 2000) and using targeted interventions to improve pupils' grades (Savage and Carless, 2005). However, conclusions within the field have often tended to rely on the views of various stakeholders and small samples of pupils/schools, and studies often placed more of a focus on the roles, training and experiences of TAs than pupil outcomes. Giangreco, Broer and Edelman (2001) pointed out that there had been no systematic review of the international literature looking at pupil outcomes and Blatchford et al. (2008, p. 7) suggested that whilst the general assumption within education was that TAs helped to increase pupils' progress, 'the problem headteachers faced was proving it'. A systematic review of the literature conducted in 2003 (Howes, Farrell, Kaplan and Moss, 2003) presented a mixed view of the impacts of TAs and called for further research.

A seminal study was conducted in the UK between 2003 and 2009 by Blatchford and colleagues (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012). The 'Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS)' project is the largest study of TAs and the first to utilise a systematic, longitudinal methodology to investigate their impact. One of the most important and controversial findings was the negative relationship between the amount of TA support received and levels of pupil progress.

More recently, research has increasingly considered the complexities of the interactions between TA support and pupil outcomes. Some of the most well-established factors thought to influence the impact of TAs include, for example, the availability of training and ongoing supervision (Slavin, Lake, Davis and Madden, 2009), the ways in which TAs interact with pupils (Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou and Bassett, 2010) and whether TAs are working with individual pupils or small groups (Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley, 2008). Webster et al. (2011) propose the 'Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR)' model as a framework for interpreting findings from the DISS Project, consisting of five elements: TA characteristics, conditions of employment, preparedness, practice and deployment. Webster et al. propose that research suggests that TAs have very little allocated time for planning and feedback with teachers, would benefit from increased training opportunities and that their line managers tend to lack training around supporting the work of TAs ('preparedness'). They also suggest that TAs are often the primary educators for pupils with SEN, who become separated from teachers and peers

('deployment') and that interactions between TAs and pupils can be of a lower pedagogical quality ('practice'). This WPR model goes some way towards explaining the reasons behind the impact of TA support on pupil outcomes and prompts debate about the most appropriate TA role. The authors concluded that further research is needed for greater clarity within this debate.

Current Review

Whilst research continues to contribute to our understanding and whilst the numbers of TAs and their responsibilities within schools continue to grow, the need to synthesise the evidence remains a priority. Two of the most recent reviews of the literature (from the USA and the UK) suggest that 'the research on paraprofessionals (TAs) remains insufficient to inform policy decisions with a high level of confidence' because 'many key deficiencies in this body of research persist' (Giangreco, Suter and Doyle, 2010, p. 50) and that further research is required in such areas as TA support within subjects other than literacy, impacts of TAs adapting the curriculum and impacts on social and emotional outcomes (Alborz et al., 2009).

The current review is based on international literature published between the years 2000 and 2015, which explores the impacts of TA support for pupils, aiming to bring previous reviews up to date and to continue to add clarity and depth to the debate over the most appropriate TA role. Based on the finding that TAs spend much of their time with those pupils with SEN and often take on responsibility for their learning, one aim of the review was to give special consideration to the impact of TA support for pupils with SEN. The review focuses on literature regarding primary, not secondary school, based on the greater numbers of TAs in primary settings (DfE, 2015a) and the differences in the practice of TAs between settings (e.g. Blatchford, Bassett, Brown & Webster, 2009). The review considers a wide range of literature, including reports of qualitative and quantitative studies, previous reviews, as well as commentary articles (based on the very small number of articles retrieved in preliminary searches). An added emphasis was placed on locating literature which included pupil voice. This was inspired by repeated suggestions within previous work about the absence of pupil voice within research on TAs (e.g. Bland and Sleightholme, 2012; Tews and Lupart, 2008) and by the most recent SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014, p. 14) which highlights the need for 'a clearer focus on the participation of children and young people…in decision-making'.

Method

Data Sources & Search Strategy

Searches were conducted within two electronic databases: PsycINFO via EBSCO and Web of Science (WOS). Various synonyms for 'teaching assistant' were generated (by reading through a selection of known articles), acknowledging the variety of terms used within the UK and the prevalence of alternative terms used elsewhere. The titles of articles were searched for these synonyms, and the abstracts (in PsycINFO) and the topics (in WOS) were searched for the terms 'school', 'special educational needs' and 'impact' alongside a number of synonyms for each. (See Appendix A for full search terms).

Synonyms were separated by the search command 'OR' whilst the four main collections of like-terms were separated by 'AND'. Asterisks were used at the ends of words/phrases such as 'teaching assistant', so that the searches also retrieved these terms with different endings (e.g. 'teaching assistants'). Adding in a selection of search terms regarding pupil voice drastically reduced the number of retrieved articles and so a separate search (Search 2) was conducted within each database, searching the titles of articles for the terms 'teaching assistant' and associated synonyms, as well as synonyms for 'pupil voice'. All searches were refined by date, 2000-2015 and language, English. Additional papers were obtained through manual searches of the retrieved articles.

Inclusion & Exclusion

In accordance with pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1) articles were scanned for relevance (titles, abstracts and where necessary full texts). Those which did not meet the criteria, or were repetitions of articles that had already been retrieved, or reported on the same study as another paper, were excluded along with a small number of articles which could not be accessed. An exception to this is that three papers reporting on the DISS study were all included, as they focused on different pupil outcomes. Twenty-four articles remained, for inclusion within the in-depth review. (See Figure 1 for search details).

The inclusion and exclusion criteria ensured that the search found papers focusing on the *impacts* of TA support (not TA role, training or experiences) on *pupil* outcomes and experiences. The criteria enabled the search to find papers focusing on the impact of TA support on different types of pupil outcomes e.g. academic, social and emotional.
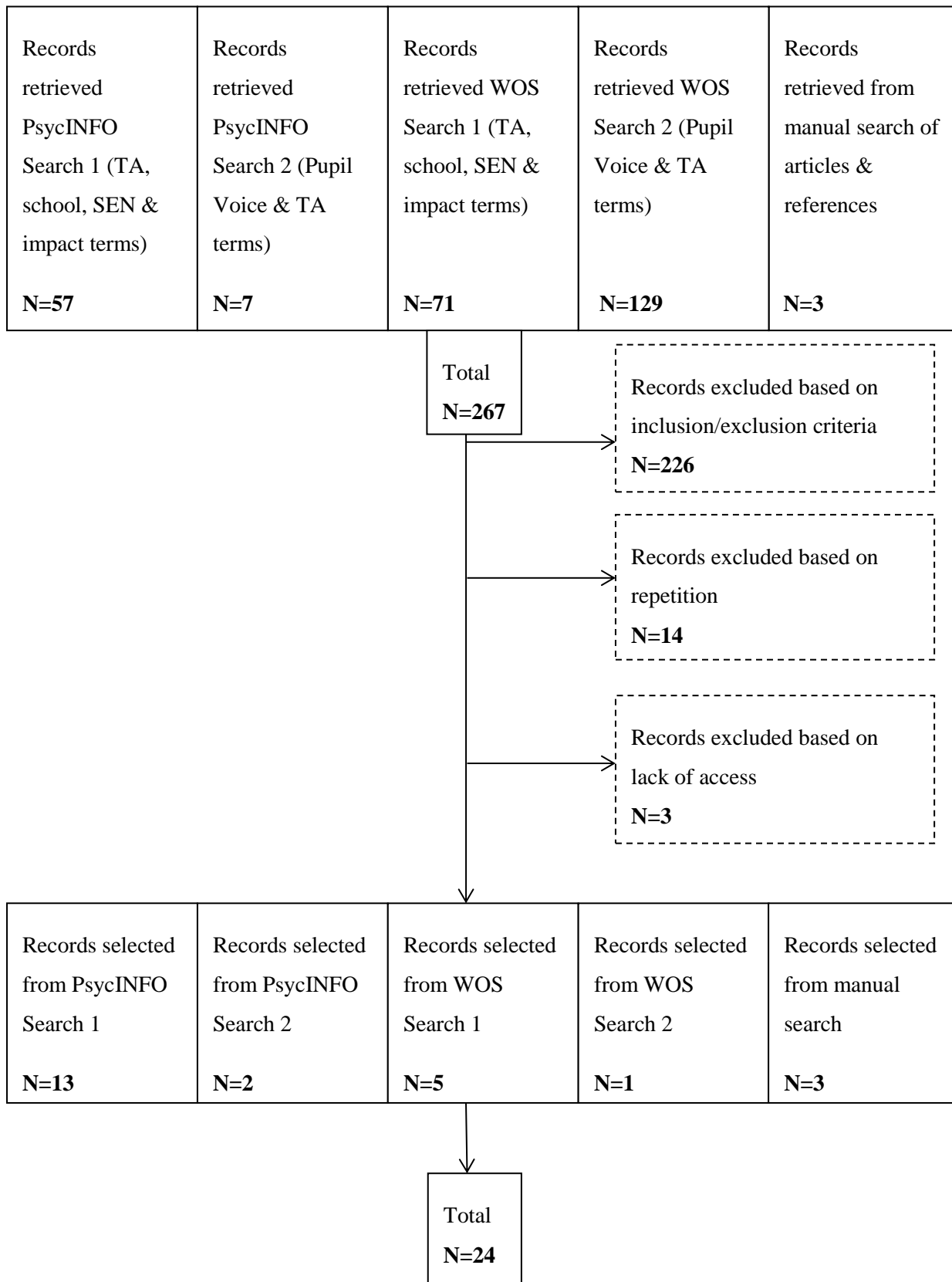
Figure 1: Flowchart showing the paper identification and screening process.

Table 1.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Include	Exclude
Papers focusing on the impacts / effectiveness / consequences / effects of TA support	Papers focusing on training for TAs or the TA role or papers that do not distinguish between the impact of teachers and TAs, papers which focus on the experiences of TAs
Impact of TA support on pupil outcomes, any outcomes e.g. social, academic, behavioural…	Impacts of TA support on other outcomes e.g. teachers, school environment
English language	Not English language
Published between 2000 and 2015	Published pre-2000
Westernised country with similar TA system to UK	Non-westernised country, or country with very different TA system to UK
Primary school setting (mainstream or special)	Settings other than primary schools e.g. secondary schools, colleges
Any alternative terminology used for TA e.g. paraprofessional, learning support assistant…	Professionals with a completely different role to a TA, e.g. school nurse
Published in peer-reviewed academic journal	Published in a book, un-published work e.g. dissertations, not peer-reviewed

Quality Assessment

Qualitative studies were assessed using the checklist produced by the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP), which was adapted to include two additional criteria and produced scores out of twelve (see Appendix B for quality assessments). Systematic reviews were assessed using the CASP guidance, being rated out of ten. Quantitative studies were assessed based on the guidance by Downs and Black (1998), considering the quality of the reporting and methodology, producing a score out of twenty-four. Three commentary articles were checked for clarity of ideas, the inclusion of evidence to back up arguments and their relevance within the field (due to the lack of a suitable standardised checklist). These were considered to fulfil the criteria sufficiently and equally.

Results

Paper Mapping

Using the systematic search procedure, twenty-four journal articles were selected, which explored the impact of TA support on pupil outcomes and were published between 2000 and 2015. (See Appendix C for data extraction). Three of the selected papers were commentaries on the topic, two were systematic reviews of the literature and nineteen were reports of empirical studies (twelve qualitative and seven quantitative). Most of the articles were written in the UK (nineteen) whilst a small number were from the USA (three), New Zealand (one) and Canada (one).

All of the selected articles considered academic outcomes for pupils (solely or jointly with another area of impact). Eight articles gave significant focus to social outcomes and nine considered emotional and behavioural outcomes. A significant proportion of the articles also explored and discussed the role of TAs in the general inclusion of pupils with SEN within the mainstream classroom. Just over half of the articles (thirteen) concluded with largely positive results, whilst four reported mostly negative impacts and seven reported mixed findings or were inconclusive. Sixteen focused on pupils with SEN and nine papers included an element of pupil voice.

Quality Assessment

Qualitative Studies

Of the papers reporting on the twelve qualitative studies, the majority clearly described their aims, design, methodology and findings. On the whole, appropriate qualitative methods (often interviews and questionnaires) were employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the impacts of TA support on pupil outcomes. A strength of a number of the qualitative studies is that they contribute pupil voice to an area of research where there has been felt to have been a shortage (Bland and Sleightholme, 2012; Tews and Lupart, 2008). That said, only a small number of the studies interviewed solely pupils (five) and sometimes where other parties were also interviewed, their views could dominate pupils' voices. Lacey (2001) interviewed 43 TAs as well as thirteen pupils, but all of the findings are from the TA perspective. Giangreco and Doyle (2007, p. 433)

pointed out that in 'perspective-seeking studies about teacher assistants…the assistants themselves are the most common respondents'. Across the twelve selected qualitative studies, the perspectives of 721 TAs were sought, in comparison to 320 pupils.

Semi-structured interviews were often used, which allowed flexibility for researchers to follow participants' trails of thought and might have meant that it was less likely that researchers would simply find what they were 'looking for'. However, interview schedules were rarely included within the appendices, which could have provided greater transparency and replicability. In most cases, questionnaires and quantitative data (e.g. school reports, academic levels) were used to triangulate the interviews, boosting reliability by contributing an additional measure.

Only one study (Tews and Lupart, 2008) considered the relationship between the researcher and participants as a potential influence over the findings. This is especially important when adults are interviewing children; in their everyday experiences, children are aware that adults are looking for particular answers. Furthermore, the power differentials between adults and children could have placed pressure on pupil participants to give only positive reports of school staff. Only around half of the qualitative studies provided discussion about the possible ethical issues involved and how these were managed. For example, Woolfson and Truswell (2005) talked about the importance of anonymity, participants' rights, informed consent and confidentiality.

Within the nine studies which gained pupil voice, there was little mention of any special adaptations to the interview methodology aiming to support children to express their views. When considering that many of these pupil interviews were with children with SEN, an added layer of support could have been a useful tool, for example, using simplified language, visual aids or providing opportunities to use alternative methods of communication such as card sorts, scaling and drawing. Eyres, Cable, Hancock and Turner (2004) asked their youngest participants (Reception Year to Year Three) but not their older participants (Years Four to Six) to draw the adults in their classroom, aiming to give them a 'concrete starting point from which to elaborate' (p. 150).

There tended to be a lack of justification as to why qualitative methodologies were utilised and it was rare within the twelve articles to discuss the epistemological stance of the authors. Some of the studies described data analysis procedures transparently and thoroughly; for example, Tews and Lupart (2008) provide a detailed paragraph about how interview transcripts were coded and how themes were derived. Other studies provided

very little information about data analysis, such as Rose and Doveston (2008) which simply states that 'open coding was used' (p. 152).

Overall, of a possible twelve, all of the qualitative studies scored at least seven and the highest score received was eleven. Qualitative studies were considered to contribute greatly to the overall review, in line with Jackson and Waters' (2005, p. 369) suggestion that 'qualitative research has an important role in systematic reviews to answer questions that go beyond effectiveness'.

Quantitative Studies

The seven papers reporting on quantitative studies clearly described their aims, methodologies, findings and conclusions. They included a representative sample and were clear about participant recruitment. Some studies, such as Blatchford et al. (2011) had a very large sample (4716 pupils) and a wide range of age groups (pupils from Years One, Two, Three, Six, Seven, Nine and Ten). However, others had much smaller samples, for example Lane, Fletcher, Carter, Dejud and Delorenzo (2007) had only 24 participants. Many focused only on children in Years One and Two; the justification behind this was often that the researchers were interested in early intervention. Participants that were lost during the studies were only taken into account by Vadasy, Sanders and Tudor (2007) and Savage and Carless (2008) and the characteristics of lost participants and the methods for dealing with missing data were not described in any detail within any of the studies. This is despite some losing around 30% of their participants between immediate and follow-up testing (Savage and Carless, 2008).

One paper reported on a naturalistic, longitudinal survey study, one involved systematic observations and five studies used a pre-test post-test design. All pre-test post-test studies used an intervention fidelity check, aiming to ensure that the TA support was taking place according to pre-set guidelines and the usual protocol. However, studies did not tend to share the findings of these fidelity checks. A strength common to all of the studies looking at a particular TA-led intervention, was that the intervention itself was described in great detail. Studies tended to use control groups that received no TA support and instead continued with teaching as normal. Controls were largely well-matched with the experimental and comparison groups, for example, the DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2009) matched participants based on SEN status, gender and previous attainment. Some studies were unclear about the level of matching between control and experimental groups; Muijs and Reynolds (2003, p. 224) claimed to have found 'a close-to-exact match for all

pupils targeted' but later commented that the experimental sample were 'by nature of the targeting of pupils for support… significantly lower achieving, more likely to be eligible for free school meals and more likely to have SEN'. An additional consideration, that was not included within any of these studies, was the use of a control group who received the same intervention as the experimental participants, led by a qualified teacher; other studies have found teachers to be more effective during one-to-one reading interventions than TAs (Slavin et al., 2009).

Studies largely used robust measures of pupil progress, relevant to the particular outcomes; Savage and Carless (2008) used a selection of literacy tests, including reading, writing and spelling assessments that were nationally standardised, as well as teacher assessments. However, some studies used just one single measure of progress (e.g. Muijs and Reynolds, 2003) which might have been strengthened with additional measures.

The quantitative studies took place within a naturalistic setting and mostly pupils were working with familiar staff. However, elements of a small number of studies detracted slightly from the naturalistic design, such as the study of Vadasy et al. (2007) in which 76% of the TAs were brand new to the school at the start of the intervention. Amongst the selected studies, there was little consideration of the possibility of the Hawthorne Effect, even though in most designs, the experimental group received special treatment whilst controls continued with schooling as normal.

On the whole, the quantitative studies provided useful evidence of the impact of TA support on a number of pupil outcomes: approaches to learning, engagement, maths and literacy progress and emotional/behavioural difficulties. The quality assessment scores (out of 24) ranged between 18 and 23. A somewhat surprising finding of the review was the lack of any quantitative studies conducted within the last five years (Blatchford et al., although published in 2011, reports on the DISS study, conducted between 2003 and 2009).

Systematic Reviews

The two previous systematic reviews of the literature were considered to be of a high quality; the Alborz et al. (2009) paper scored a maximum ten and Giangreco et al. (2010) was given nine, having failed to provide a quality analysis measure of selected studies. Such a measure might have been particularly useful, as some of the studies they selected used very small samples (e.g. Wertz, Zigmond and Leeper, 2001).

Both reviews addressed a clearly focused question, using a replicable and transparent search protocol and drew relevant conclusions, which considered implications for the field and future research. They included academic and social-emotional pupil outcomes and also considered wider school-based outcomes. A small minority of the conclusions might have benefitted from greater detail, for example, Alborz et al. (2009) suggest that there may be a critical duration of TA-led interventions in school but do not provide details about what this duration might be and why. Giangreco et al. (2010) conclude that peer support might be an effective alternative to TA support, but this is based on one single-participant study (Carter, Cushing, Clark and Kennedy, 2005) and there is no detail about how such peer support would be best implemented.

It seems that both reviews reported their findings based on pre-determined categories of TA impacts, which meant that within some categories, there were very few studies to draw on. Giangreco et al. (2010) include the topic of 'school change' (p. 48) which is based on just one study. Similarly, Alborz et al. (2009) set out to include studies of the impact of TA support on school leadership staff, but found none. However, this method did allow for gaps in the research to be highlighted. Schlosser (2007, p. 1) suggests that systematic reviews are 'uniquely suited' to pick up on gaps within the literature and both of the selected reviews gave significant consideration to areas in need of further research. However, despite the shortage of studies which explored pupil perspectives on the impacts of TA support, neither review emphasised this element of missing data within their conclusions.

Within the current review, details of the relative quality (and the particular factors limiting the quality) of each paper were considered throughout the process. Greater caution was taken around conclusions and interpretations drawn from lower quality studies, but because there were not substantial differences in quality amongst the papers, evidence was not explicitly weighted.

Impacts of TA Support on Pupil Outcomes

Academic Outcomes

TA support impacts upon various outcomes for pupils; academic outcomes are the most frequently studied and were a consideration within all 24 papers. It had long been assumed that an extra adult within the classroom must logically provide greater support for pupils to progress academically, until the publication of the DISS project in 2009. In one of the papers reporting on the DISS project, Webster et al. (2010, p. 323) conclude that 'those

pupils receiving most TA support made less progress than similar pupils who received little or no TA support', even after controlling for factors such as SEN status and prior levels of attainment. This was true across seven year groups and three subjects.

Further publications of the DISS study add possible explanatory factors for the negative impact of TA support on pupils' academic outcomes. Based on systematic observations within 49 mainstream schools as well as time logs completed by TAs, Blatchford et al. (2009) concluded that a higher level of TA support resulted in greater separation between students and the class teacher. Pupils also tended to engage in more active and longer interactions with TAs compared to teachers, especially those pupils with higher levels of SEN. The DISS report by Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) concludes that not only do those students with more TA support interact more with TAs and less with teachers, the quality of these interactions is generally lower. TAs were more likely to focus on task completion rather than developing understanding, to give incorrect explanations of concepts, to provide prompts which gave students the answer (61% of TA prompts compared to 11% of teacher prompts) and to ask closed questions. This was based on the analysis of audio recordings of adult-to-pupil interactions in 130 maths and English lessons within 15 schools.

Webster (2014) reports on the 'Making a Statement (MAST)' study (Webster and Blatchford, 2013), which also involved systematic observations to explore the experiences of pupils receiving a high level of TA support, specifically those with Statements of SEN. He explains that this study found evidence that pupils with Statements spend just over a day a week outside of the classroom, are almost constantly accompanied by a TA and are three times more likely to interact with a TA than a teacher. TAs had the main responsibility for educating these pupils and were regularly planning and adapting learning materials. Teachers often appeared to lack confidence in teaching pupils with SEN and considered the TA to be the 'expert' for this task.

Tews and Lupart (2008) found a number of consistent results. They conducted semi-structured interviews with students with SEN, who received a large amount of TA support. Pupils tended to describe a large degree of separation from the class teacher, spending much of their time with the TA instead. They understood the TA role to include teaching them, explaining concepts and helping them to remember things. Adding to previous findings, some of the pupils recognised that the TA would sometimes help them with tasks that they could manage independently. The authors concluded that such close TA support might impact upon pupils' behaviours for learning, i.e. independence and self-

determination. The pupil interviews conducted by Eyres et al. (2004) similarly found great overlap between the perceived TA and teacher roles, meaning that for some pupils, TAs held the main responsibility for teaching and learning.

Muijs and Reynolds (2003) compared the progress in numeracy of low-achieving pupils who received TA support to those who did not. The TAs in this study received three days of training focusing on supporting pupils within numeracy lessons and received ongoing support. Pupils in each condition were matched based on baseline maths test scores, gender, free school meals, SEN status and ethnicity and the sample of 360 pupils was obtained from 18 schools. The progress of pupils in the experimental and control groups did not significantly differ, in fact the scores of the control group increased slightly more, suggesting again that TA support failed to improve pupils' academic outcomes and adding that this may still be the case even when training and a more specific, instructed deployment is provided.

Giangreco et al. (2010, p. 45) suggest that the studies included in their systematic review found that there was much evidence that TAs are 'operating with high levels of autonomy, making instructional decisions' and 'providing the bulk of instruction'. They suggested that interactions with TAs are alternative rather than supplementary for some pupils and that TAs lack adequate training and designated time for planning with and learning from teachers.

Rutherford (2011, p. 95) suggests that handing over the main responsibility of teaching pupils with the highest level of need to TAs can have 'detrimental effects on students' learning'. She highlights the 'injustice of assigning unqualified teacher aides (TAs) to students whose learning support requirements (through no fault of their own) often challenge teachers'. Other papers also commented on the ethical concerns around this type of TA deployment (as the primary educators for children with SEN). Webster (2014) argues that there is a need to address the assumption that a child with SEN requires a large number of TA hours, which will then mean that their needs are met. Giangreco et al. (2010, p. 50) commented that 'serious ethical questions are raised' because 'the long-standing and troubling situation persists that, as a field, we continue to assign the least qualified personnel to students who present the most challenging learning and behavioural characteristics'.

Saddler (2013) highlights the drastic ways in which some of the findings of studies such as the DISS were interpreted, quoting a newspaper headline: 'TAs blamed for poor

results' (p. 147). But she and many other researchers within the current review are clear that blame should not be placed with TAs. Webster et al. (2010, p. 139) suggest that the impact of TAs on pupils' academic progress depends on the 'decisions made about rather than by TAs'; they explain the negative impact of TA support in terms of their preparedness (training and professional development and day-to-day planning and discussing with teachers), practice (less skilled interactions, potentially due to lack of preparedness) and deployment (direct pedagogical role, with mainly pupils with SEN). These are three of the main components of the WPR model (Webster et al., 2011).

Saddler (2013) also suggests that the negative findings around the academic impact of TAs (e.g. from projects such as the DISS) are largely taken from quantitative, statistical methodologies. Within the current review, there are a number of articles included which gained the qualitative perspectives of key stakeholders and many of these studies drew positive conclusions about the impact of TA support on pupils' academic outcomes. Similarly, the review conducted by Alborz et al. (2009) concluded that 'key stakeholders perceive the presence of TAs in classrooms as contributing to improved academic outcomes' (p. 30). Stakeholders possibly feel that TA support leads to greater engagement, focus and access to teaching (which they logically assume should result in better academic scores), but the reality may be that the quality of these activities with which pupils are more engaged is lower and so the support is not translated into improved scores.

Lacey (2001) interviewed TAs, pupils, teachers and parents, focusing on pupils with Severe and Profound Learning Difficulties (SPLD). Most TAs felt that their role should involve supporting pupils' learning and that they were making a valuable contribution to pupils' understanding and academic progress. TAs believed that their support was most effective when working with small groups of pupils, rather than one-to-one. Vickerman and Blundell (2012) also interviewed TAs who supported pupils with SEN. They found that in Physical Education lessons, 60% of participants felt that they added value to the teaching and learning taking place. TAs in this study emphasised the importance of having time to prepare and feedback to teachers. They described how they played 'pedagogically valuable roles' (p. 148) when teachers 'actively engaged with them in planning, preparation and delivery'.

Rutherford (2011) found that TAs believed that pupils would not manage as much academic work without their support. However, it is helpful to refer back to the finding that TAs tend to demonstrate more of a focus on task completion rather than moving learning forwards, so even if they are helping students to get through a larger quantity of

work, it might not involve the highest quality of experience for the child. TAs in Rutherford's study also highlighted that in their experiences, teachers were not always able to understand SEN pupils' needs as well as TAs might. This is likely to link back to the finding that close TA support can lead to higher levels of separation from the class teacher and whole-class teaching (e.g. Webster and Blatchford, 2013).

Studies that have explored the views of teachers and senior management have often found that teachers consider TAs to be essential for pupils with additional needs to be able to engage with lesson tasks (Farrell et al., 2000; Groom and Rose, 2005) and that staff believe that TAs provide useful support to increase the quality of learning (Woolfson and Truswell, 2005). Woolfson and Truswell also picked up the idea that TAs might indirectly support pupils' learning by increasing the levels of parental engagement with their children's education; it could be suggested that this idea is quite novel to the TA research. Literature around the substantial impact of parental involvement (e.g. Sacker, Shoon and Bartley, 2002) would promote this aspect of the TA role (if effective).

Five studies included in the review focused solely on pupils' perspectives. Pupils expressed largely positive views about TA support (Fraser and Meadows, 2008; Rose and Doveston, 2008), with some considering it essential (Tews and Lupart, 2008). Bland and Sleightholme (2012) found that if given the choice, 100% of the 28 pupils in their study (with and without SEN) would choose to have a TA in their classroom. One pupil in the Fraser and Meadows (2008, p. 355) study explained that 'without them a lot of us wouldn't get our work done even though they only help some people, I think those some people would otherwise be dragging the rest of the class down so that the teacher can't give their full assistance to us'. However, this statement highlights the predominant form of deployment of TAs, as the main people responsible for pupils with SEN (which is thought to limit the effectiveness of their impact) and how that view of TA support percolates down to pupils.

Alborz et al. (2009) suggest that TAs tend to have a more positive impact on students' academic outcomes through more structured, targeted interventions, as opposed to more general one-to-one support for SEN pupils. The four studies included within the current review, which evaluated the effectiveness of targeted interventions were very positive. Where TAs were provided with training and structured materials and plans, they supported pupils with reading difficulties to make better progress in literacy. Between them, these studies included 282 pupils across Years One to Four. The literacy interventions took place for 20-30 minutes, three or four times a week, lasting between

nine weeks and five months. A number of these studies also found evidence that gains in literacy skills were maintained up to sixteen months later. Although these studies are limited to younger pupils and literacy interventions, they provide further evidence that it is the ways in which TAs are prepared, supported and deployed that influence the impact that they can have on academic outcomes.

Summary of Academic Outcomes

When all 24 papers are considered, a mixed picture of the impact of TA support on pupils' academic outcomes is produced. A number of quantitative studies have shown that general TA support is negatively associated with pupil progress. At odds with these findings, is the positive relationship between TA support and pupil progress (in literacy) when TAs use a more structured, targeted intervention. Stakeholders' perceptions of TA support for academic outcomes are positive.

Taking the papers into account, factors that are likely to increase the positive impact of TA support in this area include: working with small groups (not individuals); having well-defined and separate but complementary roles for teachers and TAs; providing training, ongoing support and professional development for TAs (especially around interaction and explanatory skills); teachers maintaining responsibility for the progress of pupils with SEN but including TAs in planning and delivery; providing TA-led structured and targeted interventions for pupils with SEN; ensuring that TA support is supplementary rather than alternative to teacher support; TAs working with the whole class to enable teachers to work more often with pupils with SEN; staff recognising and planning for when pupils need to be exercising independence and TAs encouraging greater parental involvement.

Social Outcomes

Saddler (2013, p. 145) claims that 'TAs' influence on pupils' education has not yet been researched effectively' because literature has focused on academic outcomes, and largely ignored social outcomes. She argues that TAs could potentially have a powerful influence over pupils' social competence, which in turn would impact positively upon academic outcomes due to the 'inherent social nature of learning' (p. 147). She refers to evidence that pupils with SEN are more likely to be bullied and marginalised (McLaughlin, Byers and Peppin-Vaughn, 2010) and to have fewer friends (Frostad and Pijl, 2007) suggesting that social support may be just as important as academic. However, Saddler

does not consider that close TA support might also contribute to these issues, rather than being a solution to them.

Including Saddler's, eight articles gave a significant focus to the impact of TA support on pupils' social outcomes. Of these papers, four made generally positive conclusions, one made negative conclusions, two provided a mixed view and one suggested that TAs have no impact.

Tews and Lupart (2008) interviewed eight students aged three to 30 (in Canada) with various SEN about their perceptions of their TA support. Six participants reported that they received social support from a TA, involving teaching social skills, helping them to form and maintain friendships and educating other pupils about their needs. There was less agreement about TA support received through break times; whilst three felt it was necessary to support socialisation with peers, others thought that they would prefer independence at these times. Participants interviewed by Woolfson and Truswell (2005) were more positive about TA support over break times, reporting that they facilitated play activities (including turn-taking and playing by the rules). They also felt that TAs played an effective anti-bullying role in school and enabled pupils with SEN to engage in more positive small group interactions. However, this sample also included TAs themselves, members of staff and parents, whose views might differ from pupils. Also, the TAs in this study had been allocated to classrooms rather than specific pupils with SEN, possibly a more effective form of deployment.

Lacey (2001) explored the views of parents, staff and pupils with SPLD and found that supporting social needs was mentioned most frequently, with only nine percent of parents' and TAs' responses mentioning academic support. An example from an observation is given, where a TA initiated conversations with peers and then helped to simplify their language to ensure pupils had understood. Like a number of other authors however, Lacey proposes that the TA literature base is largely missing research into social rather than academic outcomes. In their systematic review of the literature, Alborz et al. (2009) conclude that more research is needed to clarify the impact that TAs have on students' social outcomes and they present research with mixed findings. They too found that TAs can facilitate small group work with peers, but also suggest that close, constant TA support can interfere with peer and teacher interactions and can leave pupils feeling stigmatised. Linking back to the importance of TA preparedness however, Alborz et al. (2009) refer to a study by Caulston-Theoharis and Malmgren (2006) which found that

when TAs were provided with training around supporting pupils' social interactions, they had a positive impact on the socialisation of pupils with high levels of SEN.

Through interviews with TAs, Rutherford (2011) found evidence for the importance of a trusting and respectful relationship between pupil and TA, which enables TAs to advocate for the pupil and to support their participation in the social life of the school. However, in her review of previous research, she finds that many studies have suggested that TAs are more likely to hinder social interactions, due to increased separation between pupils and peers and greater stigmatisation.

Lane et al. (2007) considered the potential indirect impact that TAs might have on pupils' social outcomes, through improving their academic attainment, suggesting that low-attaining pupils often also have difficulties socially. They refer to previous research showing that through the implementation of a literacy-based intervention, TA support also improved pupils' playground behaviour towards peers (Lane, O'Shaughnessy, Lambros, Gresham and BeebeFrankenberger, 2001). However, in their study, pupils with social and literacy difficulties demonstrated improved reading skills but no differences in peer interactions. The authors suggest that a longer duration of intervention, or one-to-one intervention for those with more extreme violent behaviours, or more specific training for TAs about supporting social behaviour might have produced more positive results.

Giangreco et al. (2010) provide largely negative conclusions about the impact of TA support on pupils' social outcomes, but do suggest that more research is needed for clarity. They refer to a study (Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005) which found that when thinking back to their TA support in school, young adults' reflections highlighted that there was a tendency to see their TA as a 'mother', 'friend', 'protector from bullying', or 'primary teacher'. Participants valued the nurturing element of their relationship with their TA but at times this relationship might have been an alternative to friendships with peers or interactions with teachers. The authors suggest that pupils feel devalued when TA support hinders opportunities for social interactions. Such findings link back to the MAST project, which found robust evidence that one-to-one TA support means more separation from teachers and peers. Giangreco et al. (2010) suggest that teachers tend to be more engaged with pupils with SEN when TAs are allocated to the whole class rather than individuals.

Summary of Social Outcomes

Papers provided relatively mixed findings about the impact of TA support on pupils' social outcomes and this area requires further research. Half of the papers provided

positive views or findings, promoting a feeling that TAs have the potential to enact a powerful influence on pupils' social development (although this might not be easily measurable in an objective way). TAs can support pupils to build and maintain friendships, can teach them social skills, facilitate play with peers and small group activities/tasks, initiate conversations and mediate language; they might work with peers to increase empathy and awareness of pupils' needs, and to prevent/tackle bullying. Training for TAs in terms of how best to support social development supports their effectiveness and allocating TAs to whole classes rather than individual pupils appears to reduce the likelihood of negative impacts. TA support might not be so effective when it replaces interactions with peers and teachers, fosters dependence or underestimates pupils' abilities. There is a shortage of evidence that TAs might indirectly support social outcomes through structured, targeted academic interventions. The ideal duration, preparation and implementation of such interventions is yet to be established. So far, the views of various stakeholders have been largely positive, but more quantitative research could add further clarity.

Emotional & Behavioural Outcomes

Nine papers considered the impact of TA support on pupils' emotional and/or behavioural outcomes. Groom and Rose (2005) focused on the role of TAs in supporting the inclusion of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Amongst the various stakeholders (TAs, teachers, governors, parents and pupils) that they interviewed, there was an overwhelming view that TAs significantly improved the inclusion of these pupils, helping to increase their self-esteem and confidence and reducing the frequency of exclusions. TAs provided counselling support, anger management work, structured emotional literacy interventions, self-esteem building groups and led Personal Social and Health Education small-group teaching sessions. Pupils commented that 'they are there for you…they back you up…you feel like if you've got a problem they will help you to get through it' (p. 27).

Woolfson and Truswell's (2005) participants (staff, parents and pupils) discussed TAs providing effective emotional and behavioural support, including calming pupils down when distressed and providing someone to talk to at difficult times. Bland and Sleightholme (2012) and Fraser and Meadows (2008) asked pupils to talk about the characteristics that might make an ideal TA and they mentioned kind, caring, helpful, friendly, thoughtful, encouraging and understanding. Each of these characteristics might promote emotional, caring support for pupils.

Rose and Doveston (2008) also focused on pupil perspectives and found that many described the TA helping them to feel safe and secure within school and supporting their emotional regulation. The authors describe the TA as a 'temporary emotional container' (p. 151) helping to acknowledge pupils' feelings, empathise, and role model how pupils might deal with emotions in-the-moment. An additional suggestion within this research is the importance of pupils feeling like they have chosen TA support rather than it being forced, suggesting that a more collaborative relationship between pupil and TA might promote effective emotional and behavioural support.

Alborz et al. (2009) suggest that studies based on the views of various stakeholders tend to provide evidence for the positive impact of TA support on emotional and behavioural outcomes, including increased self-esteem, independence and confidence. They comment that experimental quantitative studies have largely provided contrasting results, such as the work of Vander Kolk (1973) which found that TAs' therapeutic support did not impact on pupils' self-esteem. They suggest that the therapeutic intervention was not long enough in duration, considering that emotional and behavioural changes take time. This study was conducted over 40 years ago and might not be relevant to today's TAs and pupils; many changes have taken place in this time frame, such as a hugely increased awareness and implementation of emotional literacy interventions and a more holistic and emotional understanding of pupil behaviour.

As mentioned earlier, Lane et al. (2007) suggest that structured, targeted TA-led academic interventions might help to build pupils' emotional wellbeing and encourage more positive social behaviour. They base this hypothesis on previous work (e.g. Lane et al., 2001) which had found that such interventions can have 'collateral effects on behaviour' (p. 267). Their study found that although a literacy intervention conducted by TAs impacted positively upon pupils' academic progress, it failed to impact on behavioural measures such as a 'Total Disruptive Behaviours Scale'. They suggest that a number of limitations such as a small sample size (24) and high attrition (five participants lost) might have restricted the study's power to detect significant change and also wonder if more differentiated, incremental measures of progress could be more sensitive to change. They also comment that TAs might benefit from behaviour management training.

A larger-scale, quantitative study to investigate the impact of TA support on pupils' emotional and behavioural outcomes was the DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2011). A significant focus was given to pupils' 'positive approaches to learning' (PAL) which included measures of: distractibility, confidence, motivation, disruptiveness, independence,

relationships, completion of work and following instructions. For participants in Year Nine, a high level of TA support had significant positive effects on all eight PAL measures (e.g. pupils with more TA support were eleven times less likely to be distracted in the classroom). However, for pupils in Years One, Two, Three, Six, Seven and Ten, levels of TA support had no significant effects on PAL. These findings were not expected, nor are they easy to explain. The authors comment that the significance of the Year Nine results might be due to this being the largest sample, or due to the tendency of secondary school TAs to work more exclusively with particular individuals (although Year Ten did not experience the same impacts). They also suggest that staff in secondary school place more emphasis on encouraging independent learning behaviours and teachers might have expectations that pupils will demonstrate these behaviours. However, possibly apart from independence, the measures of PAL used in this study are likely to be prioritised across all age groups, such as completing work and limiting distractibility. Blatchford et al. (2009) conclude that TA presence within a classroom was linked to less off-task behaviours of non-SEN pupils and to less of the teacher's time being spent on behaviour management. It is possible, therefore, that TA support has wider impacts upon pupil behaviour, but does not tend to impact on the behaviour of pupils with SEN.

Summary of Emotional & Behavioural Outcomes

Studies considering stakeholders' perspectives reported positive findings in terms of the impact of TA support on pupils' emotional and behavioural outcomes. TA support for these outcomes took place both in-the-moment (of distress) and during ongoing skills-building work. Such support seems most effective when pupils feel a level of control, i.e. opting-in to receive TA support, and when a relationship develops which enables the TA to act as a 'secure base' (Bowlby, 1988).

Quantitative experiments have revealed less positive results, although there were only a small number of such studies available. One found that an academic TA-led intervention did not have knock-on effects on pupils' behavioural difficulties and the DISS study found a lack of evidence for an effect of TA support on pupils' PAL, except in Year Nine. Further quantitative exploration is required, which might utilise more rigorous and sensitive measures of emotional and behavioural outcomes.

Pupil Voice

Nine papers gained pupil voice to explore the impact of TA support. Five of these focused solely on pupils' perspectives whilst others also included teachers, parents, senior

management staff and TAs. Four focused on the views of pupils with SEN: one with pupils with SEBD, one with pupils with SPLD and two with pupils with a variety of SEN including Autism and Prader-Willi Syndrome. Seven of the pupil voice papers concluded with largely positive findings on the impact of TA support on pupils' outcomes and two presented mixed findings.

Four of the papers around pupil voice, which also included interviews with other stakeholders, did not place emphasis on pupils' views in their reporting. Lacey (2001) and Farrell et al. (2000) included no results from the pupil perspective, Woolfson and Truswell (2005) included one table of pupil perspectives and Groom and Rose (2005) included three quotes from pupils. Additionally, in the study by Lacey (2001) pupils with SPLD were almost all accompanied by their TA during the interviews (to aid communication) which might have limited the extent to which pupils felt that it was appropriate (or safe) to express their opinions.

The under-emphasis of pupil voice within these articles relates to the danger of 'tokenism' described by Rose and Doveston (2008), who suggest that professionals can gather pupil views with good intentions, but then fail to analyse them or to use the information to influence change. Rose and Doveston (2008, p. 153) report that pupils can 'provide unique insights' into the impacts of TA support in school and that in any evaluation of these impacts 'a failure to incorporate the pupil voice would be a serious omission'. Fraser and Meadows (2008, p. 359) report that 'children in the main talked openly and incisively about their thoughts on the questions posed and that 'children's views are fluently expressed and they can offer intelligible and realistic ideas about TAs and their work, even at five years of age'.

Eyres et al. (2004) commented that 'overall, the children participated well in the "language game" of being interviewed' (p. 150). However, they also suggested that younger participants were less able to effectively articulate their thoughts about TA support and a number of the interviews were cut short due to the pupil ending them or time running out. They talk about the need to consider the power relations between children and the adults interviewing them and the potential benefits of using different methods to support children's communication, referring to the Mosaic Approach (Clarke and Moss, 2001) which includes tours, cameras, drawing and role play.

Whilst there are factors which complicate or threaten the methodologies used to explore pupil voice, there is agreement within these studies about the importance and value

of hearing pupil views and many of the studies refer to the need to address the shortage within the TA literature. Bland and Sleightholme (2012) comment that there 'appears to be little research on whether pupils value working with TAs' (p. 173) and Fraser and Meadows (2008) comment that 'there has been little research in the area of children's perceptions of TAs' (p. 352). Tews and Lupart (2008) highlight that it might be those students with SEN whose voices are the most overlooked, suggesting that 'the perspectives of students with disabilities concerning the roles of educational assistants are markedly absent from the literature' (p. 40). Potentially there is a need to develop our understanding of the most effective ways of gathering the views of pupils with SEN.

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Discussion

Summary of Findings & Implications

The impacts of TA support on pupil outcomes have been explored more widely over the past 15 years, as the numbers and responsibilities of TAs in schools have continued to increase. Empirical studies, systematic reviews and commentary articles have provided further insights. Although the findings around academic, social and emotional/behavioural outcomes are quite mixed, it often seems to be the case that TAs have the potential to act as a very valuable resource in schools, should they be trained, supported and deployed in the most constructive ways. Papers within the review support the use of the WPR model to understand and plan for the most effective implementation of TA support within schools.

Papers consistently demonstrated that various stakeholders regard TA support very highly and believe that it is effective in bringing about positive changes for pupils' academic, social and emotional/behavioural development. The emerging views of the pupils themselves complement the views of parents, teachers, school management staff and TAs. In terms of maximising the positive impacts of TA support, issues arising out of perspective-seeking studies include ensuring that interactions with the TA do not become alternatives, but rather are additional to interactions with peers and teachers, striving to encourage independence in pupils and taking a step back at times when support is not essential, and making sure that the TA has a clearly defined role that is different from that of the class teacher, who should maintain the overall responsibility for the progress of children receiving TA support.

A number of quantitative evaluative studies within the review supported the use of TA-led structured and targeted interventions, especially those focusing on early literacy skills. Where TAs are provided with training, ongoing support and structured materials and plans, these interventions are most likely to succeed. The overall duration of such interventions possibly needs to be at least nine weeks and might include 20-30 minute sessions three or four times a week (based on the minimum criteria within the reviewed studies).

Quantitative studies of more regular, ongoing and unstructured TA support tended to yield less positive results. High levels of TA support for individual pupils was associated with a lower level of academic progress and did not appear to improve pupils' approaches to learning, such as confidence, concentration and following instructions. The authors of such papers emphasised that these effects would most likely be due to the decisions taking

place around TAs rather than by them. A variety of factors might be taken into account when aiming to optimise the positive impact of TAs, including allocating them to whole classes rather than individuals, providing training, ongoing support and dedicated time for planning and feeding back with teachers and ensuring that the responsibility of all pupils' learning remains with the class teacher. It is important to make sure that pupils receiving TA support have as many opportunities to interact with the class teacher and peers as those not receiving such support, that pupils feel that they have some control over their TA support, that a respectful and nurturing relationship between the TA and pupil is developed and that pupils still receive regular opportunities to act independently.

An additional conclusion is that TA support has the potential to impact on a much wider range of outcomes than purely academic progress. Some of the most powerful messages from the pupil perspective involved the TA providing emotional support and many parents of pupils with SEN often felt that their social development, enabling true inclusion within the school, was an area to be prioritised. Although each of these different outcomes are undeniably interrelated, from the current review, it seems that TA support with a specific and clear focus might be most likely to bring positive impacts for particular areas of difficulty.

Another concluding thought is that uncovering pupil voice within research on TAs has begun to provide unique and relevant insights, but may not yet have been fully prioritised. The viewpoints of pupils are sometimes overshadowed by those of adult participants, and the power of the voices of pupils with SEN and the most effective methods to elicit them have yet to be fully realised.

Gaps in the Literature & Implications

The largest focus within the literature is given to academic outcomes for pupils, despite the growing realisation that TA support has a much wider impact for pupils. Papers are increasingly revealing insights about social and emotional/behavioural impacts, which some researchers argue are just as important. It is widely understood that for pupils to access learning and to make progress, they need to feel fulfilment in more basic needs such as emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging, so a promising area for further research would be to continue to explore the impact of TA support on pupils' wider outcomes. Such research might benefit from more sensitive measures of effectiveness, acknowledging the long term nature of social and emotional changes.

Evaluations of TA-led structured interventions have largely focused on younger pupils and literacy skills, so investigations of interventions with older pupils and other curriculum subjects would add to the literature base. Such interventions might also be compared to teacher-led interventions and it could be helpful to compare interventions of different durations. Qualitative data could help to advance the intervention literature, where various stakeholders might reflect on their experiences.

In the sample of papers selected systematically for the current review, there were no quantitative papers that had been published within the past five years. Further quantitative explorations of the impacts of TA support would provide a useful contribution to the field. It seems that there have not yet been any quantitative studies to follow-up on projects such as the DISS, that have looked again at the impact of TA support since improvements may have been made in the preparedness, practice and deployment of TAs. Such research could provide further clarification that these are the main factors influencing the relationship between TA support and pupil outcomes.

Further research might also aim to explore the differences between pupils with different types and levels of SEN, and whether these influence the ways in which TA support is effective. It might also continue to increase the use of pupil voice; studies which emphasise these views, support pupils to be able to express them effectively, analyse them in great detail and take seriously the implications for practice will help those most directly affected by TA support to become a more powerful voice within the field.

Chapter 2:   Empirical Study

The Perspectives and Experiences of Children With Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Primary Schools Regarding Their Individual Teaching Assistant Support.

Teaching Assistant Numbers & Role

Teaching Assistants (TAs) (also referred to as classroom assistants, learning support assistants and paraprofessionals) are employed within school settings to support teachers, pupils, the curriculum and the school (DfEE, 2000). Over the past two decades, there has been a consistent and dramatic increase in the number of TAs working within schools in England (and internationally). Between the years 2000 and 2014, the number of full-time equivalent TAs in England increased from 79,000 to 255,000 (DfE, 2015a).

Additionally, the role of the TA has significantly changed over time. Moyles and Suschitzky (1997) describe a change from an ancillary role supporting the teacher, to a teaching role supporting pupils' learning and Tews and Lupart (2008, p. 40) explain that TAs are 'increasingly assuming greater responsibility for instructional decision-making'. Reviewing seventeen studies of the TA role, Cajkler et al. (2006, p. 4) conclude that there 'seems to be a growing sense of …TAs seeing their role as co-educator with teachers', and Giangreco, Suter and Doyle (2010, p. 45) confirm that similarly, in the USA, TAs are now 'operating with high levels of autonomy, making instructional decisions'.

Whilst teachers spend their time teaching whole classes, TAs often spend their time supporting pupils with special educational needs (SEN) on a one-to-one or small group basis (Webster et al., 2010). Lamb (2009, p. 29) reports that much of the responsibility for supporting pupils with SEN has 'been handed over to TAs'. Webster and Blatchford (2013), moreover, found evidence that pupils with Statements of SEN are almost constantly accompanied by a TA, they are three times more likely to interact with a TA than a teacher, and that TAs regularly plan, adapt and implement these pupils' learning activities. Researchers debate the appropriateness of the more pedagogical TA role (e.g. Warhurst, Nickson, Commander & Gilbert, 2014; Webster, 2014) and highlight ethical issues around 'assigning unqualified teacher aides (TAs) to students whose learning support requirements (through no fault of their own) often challenge teachers' (Rutherford, 2011, p. 95).

Influential Legislation & Policy

In England, developments in governmental legislation and policy have contributed to the increasing numbers and widening roles of TAs. Before the 1980s, most TAs worked within special schools for children with SEN. Thomas (1992) suggests that the Warnock Report (Warnock, 1978), which promoted the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream settings, was a precursor, and TA support has often been seen as a 'response to the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools' (Alborz, Pearson, Farrell and Howes, 2009, p. 5). The term 'inclusion' however, requires some caution; whether pupils with SEN are fully included rather than merely placed within mainstream schools and how this is changing over time remains a contested issue (e.g. Booth and Ainscow, 2011).

In response to evidence that English pupils were being outperformed academically by pupils abroad (e.g. Reynolds and Farrell, 1996), the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies were introduced in 1998 with increasing numbers of TAs becoming involved in supporting these interventions. Reports consistently asserted the effective contribution that they made (DfEE, 2000) and the benefits of their wider role (DfES, 2002). A national evaluation conducted by the inspection body Ofsted (2002) found that the quality of teaching was better when TAs were present in the classroom, although, Lehane (2016) points out that this does not necessarily mean that the quality of *learning* (for all pupils) was better.

During the early 2000s, school leaders experienced difficulties with recruitment and retention of teachers, who were feeling highly stressed and experiencing little job satisfaction and excessive administrative demands (e.g. DfES, 2000; Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2001). The National Agreement (DfES, 2003) aimed to improve teacher experiences and pupil outcomes; key to this was identifying non-teaching tasks that could be delegated from teachers to TAs.

The focus of Statements of SEN and since 2014, Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), on the number of hours of TA support required for particular pupils continues to reinforce the one-to-one assignment of TAs to pupils with SEN. Balshaw (2010, p. 337) refers to the 'legacy of one-to-one funding for pupils with additional needs' and Slee (2012) suggests that teachers more readily hand over responsibility to TAs when they are assigned to support an individual pupil with SEN.

Theoretical Premise

Strategically providing an additional adult (TA) to closely support pupils to advance to higher levels of learning is an idea underpinned by social constructivist theory. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that learning is a social process, whereby a more able individual helps a learner to shape and develop their understanding. Based on Vygotskian theory, by helping a pupil to engage with tasks just above their current independent ability level ('scaffolding' their learning), a TA can support a pupil to work within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and to make progress.

The theories of Feuerstein (e.g. Feuerstein, Klein and Tannenbaum, 1999) suggest that TAs might provide 'Mediated Learning Experiences' (MLE) to enable pupils to construct meanings from their interactions with the environment and specific learning tasks. The adult might, for example, support the learner to make sense of the purpose of a task and to 'bridge' learning to new situations. Social Constructivist principles sit well with holistic, environmental understandings of SEN as opposed to more outdated within-child, deficit assumptions. Whilst Social Constructivism provides a theoretical underpinning for the implementation of TA support, it also suggests that there are numerous conditions required for scaffolding from a key adult to be effective. In a study of adult-to-pupil ratios in primary classrooms, Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown and Martin (2004) found evidence that simply placing more adults in the classroom is not enough to bring about positive impacts for children's learning and the large-scale Tennessee STAR Project (Mosteller, 1995) found the same in American classrooms. Increasing research over the past twenty years has added to our understanding of the requirements for effective TA support and of the intricacies of the impacts that TAs can have in the classroom.

Research

For some time, there was a general feeling that TA support must contribute to improved outcomes for pupils; Docherty (2014, p. 190) refers to the 'implicit message that the presence of an additional adult constitutes support'. Blatchford et al. (2008, p. 7) suggest that whilst the general assumption was that TAs helped to increase pupils' progress, 'the problem headteachers faced was proving it'.

A large-scale seminal study conducted by Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012) in the UK largely contradicted earlier assumptions and raised significant questions about current models of TA deployment. The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) study, using a longitudinal, naturalistic methodology, found a negative relationship between the amount of TA support received and levels of pupil progress. This finding,

which has been described as 'disturbing' (Farrell, Alborz, Howes and Pearson, 2010; p435) and 'disappointing' (Balshaw, 2010, p. 337) was the case across seven Year groups, three curriculum subjects and after controlling for prior attainment and SEN status. The impact was most significant for those pupils with higher levels of SEN. Relatedly, Gray, McCloy, Dunbar, Dunn, Mitchell and Ferguson (2007) found that low-achieving pupils receiving daily one-to-one TA support with a systematic phonics intervention, made slightly less progress in reading than low-achieving pupils who continued with whole-class teacher-led support. Muijs and Reynolds (2003) also found that pupils receiving TA support during numeracy lessons made slightly less (though not statistically significant) progress in numeracy than pupils receiving no TA support.

Such findings are at odds with other studies that have found TAs to bring positive outcomes, for example, when delivering targeted academic interventions for pupils with SEN. Savage and Carless (2005) found that TAs implementing a nine-week reading intervention helped Year One pupils with literacy difficulties to improve their phonological skills, letter-sound knowledge and decoding skills. Additionally, increasing numbers of qualitative studies have revealed that 'key stakeholders perceive the presence of TAs in classrooms as contributing to improved outcomes' (Alborz et al., 2009, p. 30). Groom and Rose (2005) interviewed teachers, TAs, parents and pupils, finding an overwhelming view that TAs are essential for pupils with SEN to manage lesson tasks and play a critical role in supporting their social, emotional and behavioural needs, for example, providing self-esteem building, anger management and emotional literacy interventions. TAs report that pupils would not complete as much work without them, (Rutherford, 2011) and that their support adds value to teaching, learning and assessment (Vickerman and Blundell, 2012).

Such discrepancies within the research have promoted further investigations and have led those who have reviewed the literature to conclude that 'the research on paraprofessionals (TAs) remains insufficient to inform policy decisions with a high level of confidence' (Giangreco et al., 2010, p. 50).

Explaining the DISS Findings

Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou and Bassett (2010) conclude that compared to teachers, TAs are more likely to focus on task completion (rather than advancing understanding), to ask closed questions, to give incorrect explanations and to provide prompts which give pupils the answer (61% of TA prompts compared to 11% of teacher prompts). Such practice is at odds with the principles of Vygotskian Theory, as

pupils are less likely to be stretched above their current ability levels and prompted to think for themselves. The Making a Statement (MAST) study (Webster and Blatchford, 2013) added that pupils with SEN spend most of their time with TAs and that TA support seems to be an alternative (to teacher-led instruction) rather than a supplementary support. Furthermore, pupils in the study of Tews and Lupart (2008) suggested that sometimes TAs might assist when pupils could manage independently, potentially leading to a level of dependence.

Researchers consistently highlight that the impact of TA support is due to the 'decisions made about rather than by TAs' (Webster et al., 2010, p. 139) and Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin and Russell (2011) propose the Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR) model as a framework for interpreting and explaining the findings of the DISS study. This includes five factors: TA characteristics, conditions of employment, preparedness, practice and deployment, all thought to influence the impact of TA support. Webster et al. suggest that research indicates that teachers and TAs have very little designated time to plan and feedback to each other and there are limited training and professional development opportunities for TAs ('preparedness'). TAs are often the primary educators for pupils with SEN, working one-to-one and being seen as the 'expert' for this role by other members of staff ('deployment') and the interactions that TAs have with pupils can be of a lower pedagogical value than those of teachers ('practice'). Cockroft and Atkinson (2015) report that during their recent focus groups with TAs, the arising discourses largely supported the value of the WPR model. However, certain elements of the model (e.g. practice) have received more empirical support than others (e.g. deployment).

Pupil Voice

Whilst 'paraprofessional issues are a growing area of interest and importance' within educational research (Giangreco et al., 2010, p. 44) there still 'appears to be little research on whether pupils value working with TAs' (Bland and Sleightholme, 2012, p. 173). In perspective-seeking studies, TAs are the most common participants and pupils' views are rarely sought (Alborz et al., 2009; Giangreco and Doyle, 2007). Those children with SEN are particularly overlooked, and their voices are 'markedly absent from the literature' (Tews and Lupart, 2008, p. 40).

Previously, professionals could tend to talk on behalf of children (Davie, Upton and Varma, 1996), but Tangen (2008, p. 157) suggests that interest in children's perceptions

and experiences has grown because of professional and theoretical movements towards viewing children as 'social agents who make sense of their own experiences' and due to legal/political initiatives, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989). The new SEN and Disability Code of Practice (DfE, 2014, p. 14) gives some emphasis to pupil voice, promoting 'a clearer focus on the participation of children and young people… in decision-making'. Researchers are increasingly reporting the benefits of gaining pupil perspectives; this can increase pupils' engagement in school (Cooke-Sather, 2006) and their sense of identity as learners (Flutter and Ruddock, 2004), reduce challenging behaviour (Davie and Galloway, 1996), promote collaborative teacher-pupil relationships (Fielding, 2007), and build teachers' understandings of how pupils learn (Mortimer, 2004). The small selection of studies gathering pupil views has suggested that pupils can provide incisive, intelligible and sometimes unique ideas concerning TA support in schools.

TA Support & Academic Experiences

Burroughs (1985), in early consideration of pupil voice in the study of TAs, reports that pupils appreciate TA support and feel that it is necessary. Rose and Doveston's (2008) pupil interviewees similarly expressed that they completed more work and were more engaged with education, when supported by a TA. Fraser and Meadows (2008) interviewed 86 pupils aged five to eleven years and found that they generally felt positive about being withdrawn from lessons to work with TAs, would be willing to work as hard for TAs as they would for teachers, and one participant described how TA support for pupils with SEN also helped the whole class. He stated that 'without them a lot of us wouldn't get our work done even though they only help some people, I think those some people would otherwise be dragging the rest of the class down so that the teacher can't give their full assistance to us' (p. 355). However, this does suggest that TAs were working with and taking the main responsibility for those pupils with SEN, potentially a less effective form of TA deployment.

Moreover, pupils with SEN suggest that they spend more time with a TA than their teacher and learn more from them (Tews and Lupart, 2008) and they sometimes struggle to explain the difference between the two adults (Eyres, Cable, Hancock and Turner, 2004). Broer, Doyle and Giangreco (2005) interviewed ex-pupils with SEN (as young adults) about the TA support that they received in school. The ways in which they viewed their TA could be categorised into four different roles, including that of the 'primary educator'.

The authors highlight concerns around pupils' separation from the class teacher and pupils feeling that they were less deserving of the teacher's time.

TA Support & Social Experiences

Previous findings in relation to pupils' social outcomes and experiences also provide a rather mixed picture. In the aforementioned study by Broer et al. (2005), pupils' discussions also reflected views of the TA as a 'mother,' 'friend' and 'protector from bullying'. Comments relating to the TA as a mother-figure suggest a good level of closeness and admiration, but having a 'mother' in school might interfere with peer socialisation. The TA as a 'friend' was considered to 'fill the companionship void' (p. 421) but again hints at isolation from peers. Pupils have also reported feeling singled-out and stigmatised amongst the peer group as a result of TA support (e.g. Bowers, 1997). Many pupils mentioned that the TA would confront bullies and report incidents, which although supportive, inadvertently removed the drive for pupils to stand up for themselves, problem solve and to talk to teachers about their problems.

However, seeing the TA as a friend was a positive factor for participants in Fraser and Meadows' (2008) study; 'she feels like a friend…we don't feel embarrassed to go up to her' (p. 354). Furthermore, Tews and Lupart (2008) interviewed eight pupils with SEN and report that TAs provide social support for pupils, by increasing opportunities to socialise with peers, increasing the peer group's empathy and understanding of pupils' SEN and helping pupils to take turns and follow the rules during play with friends. Various factors are likely to influence the effect of TA support for pupils' social experiences including training for TAs (Caulston-Theoharis and Malmgren, 2006) and the quality of the TA-pupil relationship (Rutherford, 2011). A skilled TA who knows the pupil well could provide social prompts and challenges pitched within the pupil's ZPD and encourage learning to be bridged to new social situations.

TA Support & Emotional/Behavioural Experiences

Within studies of pupil voice, there is greater consensus about the impact of TA support on pupils' emotional and behavioural experiences; findings are overwhelmingly positive. Rose and Doveston (2008) interviewed 33 primary and secondary school pupils with SEN; pupils felt that TAs helped to build their confidence and to keep them out of trouble. The authors stress that TAs can act as a 'safe haven' or a 'temporary container for the excessive anxiety' experienced by pupils (p. 151), supporting their healthy emotional regulation. Pupils value a number of nurturing qualities in TAs, including being calm,

patient and caring (Fraser and Meadows, 2008) as well as kind, respectful and helpful (Bland and Sleightholme, 2012). Pupils comment that TAs are 'there for you…they back you up…you feel like if you've got a problem they will help you to get through it' (Groom and Rose, 2005, p. 27).

Whilst the perspectives of other stakeholders tend to corroborate these positive findings (e.g. Woolfson and Truswell, 2005), quantitative studies, utilising teacher-completed rating scales of behaviour, for example, have not yet provided such support (Blatchford et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2007). However, quantitative research has largely focused on academic outcomes, overlooking wider factors such as pupils' emotional wellbeing (Alborz et al., 2009; Saddler, 2013).

New Study into Pupil Perspectives of TA Support

Researchers report that children can offer 'sensible and considered answers' and 'intelligible and realistic ideas about TAs and their work' (Fraser and Meadows, 2008, p. 359) and that 'a failure to incorporate the pupil voice would be a serious omission' (Rose and Doveston, 2008, p. 153). Despite this, very little research has considered children's perceptions of TAs (Fraser and Meadows, 2008). The study reported here recognises the abilities and the rights of pupils to express their views, and was designed to further illuminate their perceptions regarding their one-to-one TA support.

Semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted with ten pupils in Year Six with Statements or EHCPs and a variety of SEN. 'The prerogative of pupils, regardless of their need or ability, to be involved in decisions which affect their lives has been established…' (Shevlin and Rose, 2008, p. 425) and the present study utilised a participatory communication tool within interviews, aiming to support pupils with SEN to fully express their points of view. The study was underpinned by the belief that the perceptions and experiences of those pupils most directly affected by TA support would usefully contribute to the ongoing debate about the TA role.

Research Question & Aims

The main research question was: What are the perspectives and experiences of primary school children with SEN regarding their individual TA support? The aim was to explore participants' views on such issues as the TA role, their relationship with the TA, the reasoning behind and organisation of their TA support, the benefits and limitations (impacts) of their TA support and the characteristics of their 'ideal' TA.

Method

Design

The research was based on a social constructionist epistemology; meanings were considered to be 'constructed frameworks rather than direct reflections of the real' (Raskin, 2008, p. 16) and children were thought to actively interpret and make sense of their own experiences and interactions with the world. The methodology was therefore exploratory (not predictive) and qualitative in nature, aiming to gather rich examples of the lived experiences of a purposive sample of children. The literature base around TAs has been criticised for focusing largely on statistical conclusions, drawn from quantitative studies (e.g. Saddler, 2013) and so the current research aimed to add greater depth to the knowledge generated in such quantitative findings.

As the study used a small, specific sample, the aim was not necessarily to generalise the findings to all pupils and their TA support or to find a general consensus. However, it was hoped that by deeply exploring these children's experiences and the sense that they made of them, the findings could make some contribution to our understanding of some of the wider issues concerning TA deployment. Patton (2002, p. 584) suggests that one might make 'extrapolations' from qualitative research, that is, 'speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations'. It is proposed that the findings are likely to be useful in supporting explanations of the needs and appropriate support for pupils in other, similar contexts.

Sample

Ten pupils (seven boys and three girls) in Year Six took part in the study (see Table 2 for participant details). All names have been changed to protect their identities. All participants had a Statement or EHCP stating that they required at least 25 hours of TA support weekly. Pupils had all been working with their current TA for at least three months.

Participants were recruited from eight primary schools within one Local Education Authority in the South of England. The researcher was working as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) at the time of recruitment and was thereby linked to five primary schools. The Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCos) at these schools were approached to identify pupils in Year Six, who had Statements or EHCPs stating at least 25 hours of TA support. Four participants were recruited from four of these schools. Three EP

colleagues also approached the SENCos working within their linked primary schools, setting up communication with the researcher, and six pupils from four schools were identified. The SENCos were informed of the research aims, scope and methodologies and then they approached particular pupils and their parents about the possibility of pupils taking part. Consent forms were given to parents (Appendix D) and pupils (Appendix E) and the times and dates of interviews were arranged between the SENCo, class teachers and the researcher.

Guidance about sample size was taken from fourteen prominent qualitative methodologists' discussion of the question 'how many qualitative interviews is enough?' (Baker and Edwards, 2012). Based on the time and resources available, the exploratory research question, predictions about data saturation and the specific participant characteristic requirements, the researcher deemed a sample of ten to be appropriate. Year Six pupils were chosen because many of the quantitative research studies in the field (upon which the study aimed to elaborate) involved primary-aged pupils (e.g. Muijs and Reynolds, 2003; Webster and Blatchford, 2013), and because of the assumption that pupils at the upper end of primary school would potentially have had TA support for a longer time and might have been more able than younger pupils to express their points of view. Sampling was not narrowed to particular areas of SEN, to ensure that enough participants could be identified and with the view that a broader sample could illuminate a range of experiences.

Table 2.

Participant Details.

Participant (All names have been changed)	Primary SEN	Year Statement/EHCP first issued	Number of TA hours (on statement/ EHCP)	How many TAs support this pupil?
Scott	Autistic Spectrum Disorder	2011	25	1
Paul	Physical Disabilities	2009	25	2
Toby	Social Emotional & Mental Health	2015	25	2
Amy	Hearing Impairment	2009	25	1
Mariusz	Speech Language and	2013	25	1

	Communication Needs			
Ben	Asperger's Syndrome	2015	25	1
Thomas	Learning Difficulties	2011	25	1
Joseph	Physical Disabilities	2009	25	1
Lauren	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	2014	25	2
Becky	Hearing Impairment & Autism Spectrum Disorder	2009	25	2

Resources

All of the resources were piloted with two pupils prior to the study. The aims of this process were to check that the resources were appropriate and effective in supporting pupils to engage in discussion, and that the questions were as clear and neutral as possible. Participants' views were explored using individual semi-structured interviews (see Appendix F for schedule) lasting between eleven and 52 minutes (on average 32 minutes). Interviews were recorded electronically. Group interviews were rejected as an option as they might have caused some pupils to feel more anxious about communicating their thoughts, some pupils could have been influenced by other participants, and the researcher would have been less able to facilitate individual pupils' understanding. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed flexibility for the researcher to adapt to individual pupils' needs, interests and engagement, and to follow their trails of thought to a certain extent, meaning that the interviews were less likely to simply find what the researcher was looking for.

A participatory communication tool was included within the interviews. Referred to as 'The Ideal TA' activity, this was a modified version of 'The Ideal Self' (Moran, 2001) based upon the principles of Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955). Participants were asked if they would like to draw or model (with modelling clay) their current TA and later to draw or model their imagined ideal TA. Accompanying discussions prompted children to make comparisons between the two figures. Inspiration was taken from 'The Mosaic Approach' (Clarke and Moss, 2001) which combines verbal (interviewing) with visual methods of gathering children's views, including drawings, taking photographs and map-making. The four key assumptions of the Mosaic Approach influenced the present research: children were seen as 'experts in their own lives,' 'meaning makers,' 'rights

holders' and 'skilful communicators' (Clarke and Moss, 2005, p. 5). The creative, practical Ideal TA activity aimed to increase participants' enjoyment and engagement, their perceived level of control (as they could choose whether to draw or model or neither) and to facilitate their communication. Eyres et al. (2004, p. 150) report that drawing the adults in the classroom gives children a 'concrete starting point from which to elaborate' and Thomas and O'Kane (1998, p. 343) report that in their research, the 'use of these participatory techniques greatly assisted in breaking down imbalances of power' between adult (interviewer) and child (interviewee).

A number of props were utilised to support expectation-setting, rapport-building and calming of participants. A Lego 'Judge' figurine (see Appendix G) was shown to participants, to aid explanations that there were no right or wrong answers in the interview and that their own opinions were important. Participants were invited to place the 'Judge' facing away from them, as there would be no one 'judging' the things that they said. A 'stop sign' also taken from a Lego set (see Appendix G) was given to participants; they were invited to either verbalise or to present this stop sign to the interviewer if they wanted to stop the interview or skip a question. The use of props was guided by the work of Newton and Wilson (2011, p. 14) around Person Centred Planning, who claim, for example, that 'when we playfully talk about the serious subjects of judgement…we can create a safer climate'.

Procedures

The research received approval from the University of Southampton School of Psychology Ethics Committee and Research Governance (Appendix H). At the start of the interviews, participants were welcomed, the interviewer introduced herself by first name and they engaged in informal discussions to build rapport and help the child to relax. Child-friendly consent forms (which had already been signed) were revisited and the interviewer checked that pupils were able and willing to proceed. The props were then introduced and explained. Participants were shown the electronic recording device, were told that only the interviewer would listen to the recordings and that once they had been written up (anonymously) the recordings would be deleted and they were asked if they felt okay for the session to be recorded. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, with the exception of any child safeguarding issues that might be raised (acknowledging that in any discussion with young people, sensitive information might be shared that needs to be passed on to the relevant safeguarding lead professionals within school). It was also anticipated that if negative experiences of TA support were shared,

then pupils would be asked if they would like the researcher to pass on any information to the school's SENCo. Participants were told that during the interview they would have the opportunity to draw pictures or make plasticine models and were asked if they would feel happy for the researcher to photograph these and store and share them anonymously.

The interviewer followed the interview schedule, making adaptations in-the-moment for individual pupils' needs, interests and engagement and prompting for more information. Questions that were not well understood were explained again using alternative vocabulary or examples. Participants were given the choice of engaging with the drawing and/or modelling resources. At the end of the interviews, participants were asked if they had any questions and were presented with a £5 toy shop voucher as a 'thank you' for taking part.

The interviews took place in a quiet room within each school. On the whole, members of staff were not present during interviews, in order to limit any pressure that the pupils might have felt to portray positive views, although Lauren asked her TA to sit in for the first ten minutes (during informal discussions) and Toby wished to be supported by his two TAs throughout his interview.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed each interview verbatim (anonymising participant and TA details) and uploaded photographs of participants' drawings and models, storing these documents on a password-protected laptop. Data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis, following the guidance and stages of Braun and Clarke (2006) (see Table 3) and using the computer software program QSR N-Vivo 10. Thematic analysis was selected based on its compatibility with a Social Constructionist approach, to provide a structured and transparent process of analysis and because it was suitable for the analysis of a combination of visual and verbal data. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 37) also suggest that thematic analysis can be 'useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development'.

Coding took place at the level of meaning, to allow for a coherent set of codes to be organised and to manage the tendency of some participants' discussions to go off on a tangent or change topic part-way through sentences. Photographs of participants' drawings and models were coded by highlighting individual sections that represented a particular idea. The aim was to use manifest codes, but it is acknowledged that some more latent codes will have been present, based on the (inevitable) interpretations and views of the

researcher (Willig, 2008). A check of the meaningfulness of the codes was conducted, by recruiting a person independent of the research to use the coding manual to code one interview transcript: 91% of this transcript was coded consistently with the researcher's decisions and all discrepancies were discussed and re-coded as appropriate. This largely involved extracts being linked to additional codes.

Table 3.

Summary of the phases of Thematic Analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006)

Phase	Description of Actions during this Phase
1	Familiarisation with the Data
	Transcribing, actively reading and re-reading transcripts, looking carefully at drawings and models, making notes of initial ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about them.
2	Generation of Initial Codes
	Systematically coding interesting pieces of the data (organising data into meaningful groups), collating data relevant to each of these codes (tagging and naming sections of the transcripts and photographs using the computer software). (See Appendix I for Coding Manual).
3	Searching for Themes
	Collating different codes to make themes, collating data relevant to each theme, thinking about the relationships between codes, between themes and between different levels of themes, initial codes may go on to create main themes, subthemes or may be discarded.
4	Reviewing Themes
	Checking whether themes make sense in relation to the coded extracts and photographs and the dataset as a whole (refining themes) creating a thematic map, refining the thematic map (does it effectively reflect the meanings within the whole dataset?). (See Appendix J for a table of themes and subthemes and Appendix K for Thematic Map development).
5	Defining and Naming Themes
	Defining and further refining themes, identifying what is interesting about data extracts within each theme and why, conducting and writing a detailed analysis for each theme, identifying whether themes contain any subthemes.
6	Producing the Report
	Telling the story of the data (concise, interesting, logical and coherent), using vivid extracts to demonstrate points, providing an analytic narrative, making an argument relating to the research question.

Results

The Thematic Analysis Process established six over-arching themes based on the data, each comprising a number of sub-themes (see Figure 2).
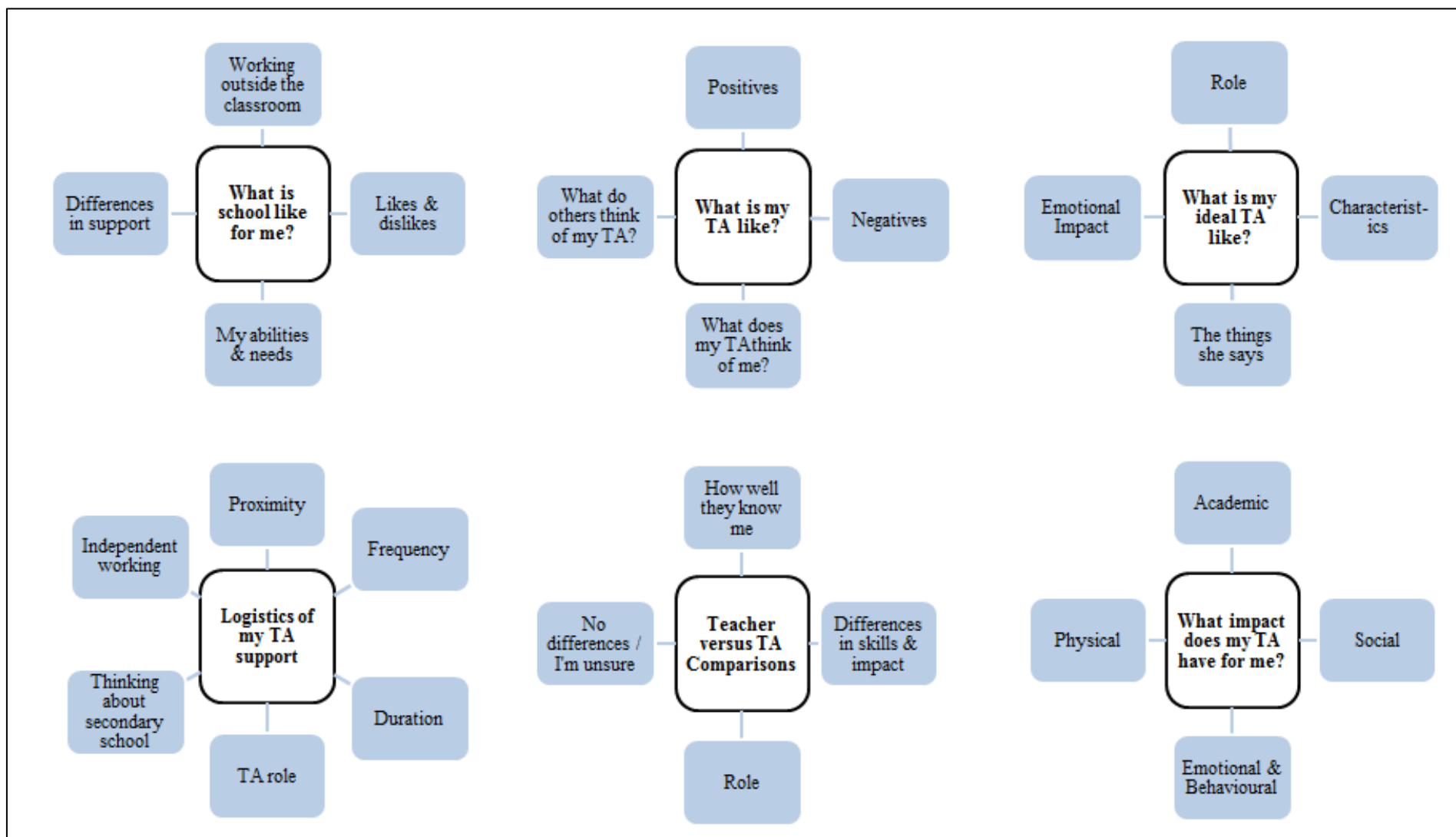
Figure 2: Thematic Map (six over-arching themes and associated sub-themes)

What is school like for me?

Most participants said that they liked going to school, especially to see their friends and to learn about new things. Those who felt less positive commented on their own worries and particular stressors within school, for example, Joseph described feeling too much pressure in terms of the SATS examinations, Scott described feeling stressed about difficult work and Paul spoke of anxiety around his health and being left alone.

> *'And they keep going on about these SATS. It's starting to worry me a little bit. I feel like they're going on about it too much'.* (Joseph)

> *'There is sometimes, I keep, when I work too hard on my writing, I get stressed, like that and I get all angry cuz I get too much stressful'.* (Scott)

When talking about their own abilities and SEN, most participants considered themselves to be getting on well at school and some could identify their own strengths.

> *'I'm more of a person which you don't listen and learn you do it and learn. I learn better like that. That's something I've worked out'.* (Joseph)

> *'I'm very good at maths; I do the best at maths'.* (Scott)

However, during discussions of their SEN, there were a number of misunderstandings and signs of fixed mind-sets about these difficulties. Scott explained that his Autism means that he goes crazy and Ben described Asperger's Syndrome as an anger problem. Pupils overwhelmingly expressed that their SEN meant that they were different from peers and many stated that they needed extra help in school.

> *'I'm autistic. It means I go crazy, it's actually true, cuz I got tablets, that's when I make myself calm, I don't get like, I have to get more weight on'.* (Scott)

> *'Since I'm not a very athletic person. And true fact: I'm the slowest in the class. And also I have the least stamina'.* (Ben)

> *'Well if I could hear fine, if I was normal, ordinary like the other children, I wouldn't need help'.* (Becky)

Participants identified that there were differences within their classrooms in terms of the work that pupils were given and the amount of support that they received. This variation was mostly considered to be positive and dependent on individual pupils' needs.

'Yes. I think it was in maths, some people that still need a bit of help with their times tables go and work with Miss X [TA]'. (Ben)

[Referring to all of the pupils in the class] *'Most of them do all the same things, but Andrew he just likes to draw stuff, so we, the teachers normally get him to draw a picture, stick it in his book and write underneath it'.* (Lauren)

'Erm I mean they seem to need more help so I think it's fair enough'. (Paul)

Participants talked about spending time working or receiving support outside of the classroom and there were mixed views on the value of this. For different participants, the function of working outside appeared to vary.

'I work in my area, I have my own desk, I don't always work inside the classroom'. (Scott)

'Yeah cuz sometimes everybody's just talking all the time, being chatty and it's really loud in my ears, it's quieter outside, so it's easier'. (Amy)

'Sometimes it's a bad thing because you can get sent out for not doing enough work'. (Lauren)

Logistics of my TA support

Participants highlighted the close proximity of the TA and the frequency of their support.

'But Jane would already be by me, so I'd ask her'. (Scott)

[Interviewer: 'How much time do you spend with her?'] *'Always'.* (Mariusz)

[Interviewer: 'How much time do you spend with her?'] *'Lots'.* (Thomas)

It was sometimes the case that participants had worked with the same TA for a number of years and there were discussions around the benefits of getting to know the TA over time, with some participants feeling nervous about working with a new, unfamiliar TA.

'Since Year Four; I've worked with her for a long time'. (Thomas)

'The first time I met Jane I was a bit shy, cuz I was scared cuz it was new, I was scared'. (Scott)

[What's it like to work with a new TA?'] *'That's weird, you get used to them'.* (Paul)

Whilst Becky talked about feeling frustrated that she was unable to work more independently, most participants described how their TA would tend to encourage them to work on their own unless they were truly stuck.

'Yeah I like to work by myself.' [Interviewer: 'How do you feel about working with your TAs?'] *'I'm okay with that but sometimes I find it frustrating'.* (Becky)

'I was really confused in maths and decimal column dividing. She broke down the steps and showed me how to do it on the whiteboard. Then I could do it by myself'. (Ben)

'Sometimes they help me for a while and then when they feel like I've got the idea, they'll go and help other people and then they'll come back to me'. (Lauren)

There was confusion for a number of participants about whether or not they would or could receive TA support in secondary school. A few of them described how difficult they would find secondary school without a TA and what the consequences might be.

'That would be so bad, I need that. I would rather get home schooled'. (Paul)

'Hard and never learn nothing'. (Mariusz)

In terms of the TA role, most participants thought that although the TA had a certain level of responsibility to prioritise their needs, they were also involved in supporting small group work outside the classroom, supporting other pupils in class and helping the teacher.

'Their job is to support me'. (Becky)

'Yeah, she works with John, Sarah and me. Sometimes it's for phonics'. (Scott)

'She helps everyone, not just me'. (Ben)

'Other people and me. I know they can't always be based around me like little moths or whatever'. (Joseph)

'To help children and the adults, the teachers and stuff'. (Paul)

What is my TA like?

Overall, participants talked very positively about their TA's characteristics; seven out of the ten participants considered their TA to already be 'ideal' and were not able to think of any ways in which the TA could be even better. Descriptive terms used most often included 'kind' 'funny' 'helpful' and 'friendly'.

[Interviewer: 'do you have fun with your TAs?'] *'Yeah'.* (Toby)

'Funny, chatty, and kind'. (Amy)

'Polite, kind and helpful'. (Lauren)

'I like Jane the most. I like her how she is'. (Scott)

Participants' drawings and models of their TAs and the labels that they gave to them also tended to depict kind, friendly and cheerful characters (See Figure 3). Lauren's TA was smiling and waving, Amy's model was smiling, Paul's drawing was smiling and asking if he was okay, and Scott's model was labelled 'happy' and 'kind'.

Figure 3: Photographs of participants' models and drawings of their current TA (from left to right: Lauren, Amy, Paul and Scott.)

Joseph held a less positive view of his current TA; he described her as being 'pushy' and sometimes 'mean' and he elaborated with a number of examples. He also suggested that one way in which his TA could become closer to his ideal TA would be if she smiled more; this was highlighted in his two models (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Photograph (zoomed-in further on the right) of models of Joseph's current TA (the model on the left) who is not smiling and his ideal TA who is smiling.

'Kind, happy and overall just someone who can help someone like me. Maybe a bit funny'. (Ben)

'And if Amy makes a mistake, she like says something nice, but when I make a mistake, she pulls this face and like says "no no no"'. (Joseph)

'She can sometimes be a bit mean towards me. Say if I forget, like if someone holds the door open and says "hi, how are you today?" and I say "I'm fine". She'll say "fine what?" And I don't know, fine thank you. Sometimes I think that saying fine, I'm fine, is enough. That's just me though. I feel like she's trying to change my personality'. (Joseph)

'You know I can walk unaided a little bit now, after I had that operation, as I can walk she … I don't know if this is the correct word, but she's taking it for granted, because I can do that now she wants me to do it on and on and on, whereas I need to do it, stop for a little bit, do it, stop for a little bit, you know. And again, five days a week is quite tiring'. (Joseph)

Other participants also suggested that their TAs could be 'bored' and 'grumpy' and Lauren talked about a previous TA telling her off unnecessarily.

'She feels sad I think, because sometimes she's bored. She like, "sigh" sometimes she's bored'. (Mariusz)

'Sometimes a bit tired and grumpy'. (Ben)

'Well if I didn't get something right, she would erm, like get really mad at me cuz she thought I wasn't listening, but I would be'. (Lauren)

Participants talked about what their peers and teachers thought about their TA. Peers were very much considered to think positively about the TAs, appreciating their humour and kindness, although Lauren and Mariusz highlighted that this meant that some other pupils were jealous.

'So my best friends they like her, they think she's funny and that she's a good character to have in the class. And I think a lot of the other children are the same'. (Paul)

'They think they're nice but they get jealous because they think I get more help'. (Lauren)

Teachers were also perceived to think highly of TAs, to such an extent that a few participants questioned whether the teacher would cope without the TA.

'I think they like them, they like having their help and stuff'. (Paul)

[Interviewer: 'What do you think your teacher thinks about Miss X?']
'Supportive'. (Thomas)

'It's like, I think erm she feels better, cuz sometimes, really nice, she helps, sometimes she can come in handy and the teacher needs her'. (Scott)

'Maybe she could cope but it would be hard'. (Ben)

When asked to consider what their TA thought about them, participants said that the TA liked them, would use a variety of positive adjectives to describe them, felt proud when they had done well and recognised their difficulties. Joseph wondered if his TA thought that he was rude, especially when he struggled to do something.

'I think she's proud of me when I've had a really good day; that makes me feel happy'. (Ben)

'She thinks I'm kind, caring, and funny. Funny because I was born funny'. (Amy)

Teacher versus TA comparisons

Whilst some participants considered there to be no differences between their TA and their teacher and a few were unsure about this, participants on the whole differentiated between the two adults based on how well they knew them, their role, and their skills and impact. TAs were more often seen as the person to ask for help and the one who would prioritise them over the rest of the class (whilst sometimes the teacher would not help them at all). The majority of participants also thought that their TA knew them better than their teacher did.

[Interviewer: 'Are there any differences between your TAs and your teacher?']
'No'. (Toby)

'Yeah erm, teachers are like writing on the massive whiteboard and watch all the children and she doesn't help. Like she writes stuff, like, in science she writes stuff and give sometimes a learning goal. I stick it in my book, Miss X help me'. (Mariusz)

'Well, my teacher doesn't really come to me, like if I need help, but my TA comes to me whenever I need help'. (Amy)

'TA. They know me much better. Because, like I say, the teacher has to know everyone, so she knows a fair bit about me, but the TA, I'm the first person, so they know most about me'. (Paul)

Teachers were sometimes viewed as more dominant than TAs (giving them instructions) and as having greater knowledge and awareness of lesson content.

'Sometimes she bosses her around, like can you go and get the glue sticks please?' (Amy)

'Yeah, erm, I think they're different because one of them knows what they're doing, like teacher knows what they're doing, feels confident about what we're learning. Some of the people who help, are different, cuz they, sometimes they don't know what they're doing'. (Lauren)

[Interviewer: 'Is there a time when you would ask your teacher for help?'] *'Say if I was stuck on such a hard question that even Miss X didn't know the answer'.* (Ben)

What is my ideal TA like?

Participants referred to various characteristics whilst talking about, drawing and modelling their ideal TA (See Figure 5); it was important for many of them that the TA was happy (and smiled a lot), kind, funny and encouraging. Some talked about their ideal TA being knowledgeable, not too serious, outgoing, understanding and never shouting. For two of the boys, a male TA would be ideal. There were a small number of references to the ideal TA role, which would include teaching and also supporting other pupils.

'A man would understand a boy more than a woman would. And also, thinking about the other boys in my class, they would probably like a male too'. (Paul)

'He would teach them, but make it fun'. (Paul)

Figure 5: Photograph of Paul's drawing of his ideal TA

Participants' ideal TAs would say encouraging things and ask questions about the support that they might need. For a number of participants, the emotional support that their ideal TA would provide was emphasised. An ideal TA would help pupils to feel happy and to look forward to going to school. For Lauren, an ideal TA would be a counsellor and Paul felt that they should be a good listener.

' "Are you okay with this?" "Would you like any help?" '. (Joseph)

'She's like a counsellor who helps'. [Interviewer: 'and how would she help?']
'Their job is erm, to help people, with their problems'. (Lauren)

'Just listen to them. What are their worries, listen to them'. (Paul)

What impact does my TA have for me?

Many participants talked about the TA providing academic support; they often found it challenging to explain exactly how the TA helped them, but were clear that they would struggle in lessons without a TA. For Joseph, academic support from a TA tended to mean greater distance from the teacher.

'Sometimes she tells me to carry on, try to extend my sentences'. (Becky)

'I think by helping with my thinking, sometimes my head feels really clogged up with ideas'. (Thomas)

'Like writing on the whiteboard, sometimes she say how to write it, but she says the sounds'. (Mariusz)

[Interviewer: 'What would school be like for you without your TA?'] *'It wouldn't be as good. I would just be thinking at home about how I wouldn't even try at school since it would be too hard'.* (Ben)

'Sometimes I'm relieved, like when Miss X goes somewhere else, cuz I get to spend a bit more time with other teachers'. (Joseph)

The majority of participants also described the impact of TA support for their emotional wellbeing and behaviour. Many said that the TA made them feel happy and helped to calm them when they were angry or anxious (by listening to them, taking them to a 'safe space' in school or talking through their problems). Lauren described how the TA helps her to feel a sense of belonging within school.

'Happy! She's there, she's the only one that makes me happy'. (Scott)

'I have this anxiety, erm, I don't know why I have it, but, it's, I don't like being left and I get very anxious. So if I did that, if I didn't have my TAs I'd be very anxious'. (Paul)

'I talk to him about stuff'. (Toby)

'If I'm angry, she helps calm me down'. [Interviewer: 'How does she help you to calm down?'] *'Erm, putting me in my safe space'.* (Ben)

'They make me feel happy; they make me feel like I'm meant to be here'. (Lauren)

For Joseph too, his TA support and their interactions brought huge implications for his emotional wellbeing in school, only for him, these were largely negative. When asked whether he had spoken to anyone else in school about his difficult experiences, he said that he would not want to because he would get into trouble.

> *'Sometimes it's just a misery. Sometimes I wish I could just go somewhere else'.* (Joseph)

> *'I wouldn't really like to say it, out loud, cuz I don't want to get into trouble or anything, or get a detention, or seem like I'm being rude'.* (Joseph)

A number of participants mentioned that the TA helps them to manage their behaviour, for example intervening to stop them from swearing, being late and shouting out. However, Joseph felt that sometimes his TA told him off for the 'weirdest of reasons'.

Additionally, there were discussions about the social benefits of receiving TA support, including help with social skills and friendships and support with group games at break times (See Figure 6). However, for Joseph, support did not continue into break times and he felt alone.

> *'Yeah to be kind. To make friends'.* (Thomas)

> *'So when I'm upset with my friends, my TA helps me'.* (Lauren)

> *'I'm on my own at play time, by the way'.* [Interviewer: 'How does that make you feel?'] *'Sad cuz I have no one to like talk to'.* (Joseph)

Figure 6: Photograph of Paul's drawing of his current TA suggesting a game of scrabble at break time.

TAs were described as providing important physical support for a number of participants, including physiotherapy interventions, 'quiet times' where hearing aids could be taken out (See Figure 7), checking in with pupils to make sure that they had heard instructions clearly, supporting movement around the school and enabling pupils to fulfil basic needs (e.g. toileting and mealtimes).

> *'Physio, I need them to get me out and stuff like that. And take me if I need to go to the toilet, or if they need to get my snack, and lunch. They have to be there just in case I choke. Or just to keep an eye on me really'.* (Paul)

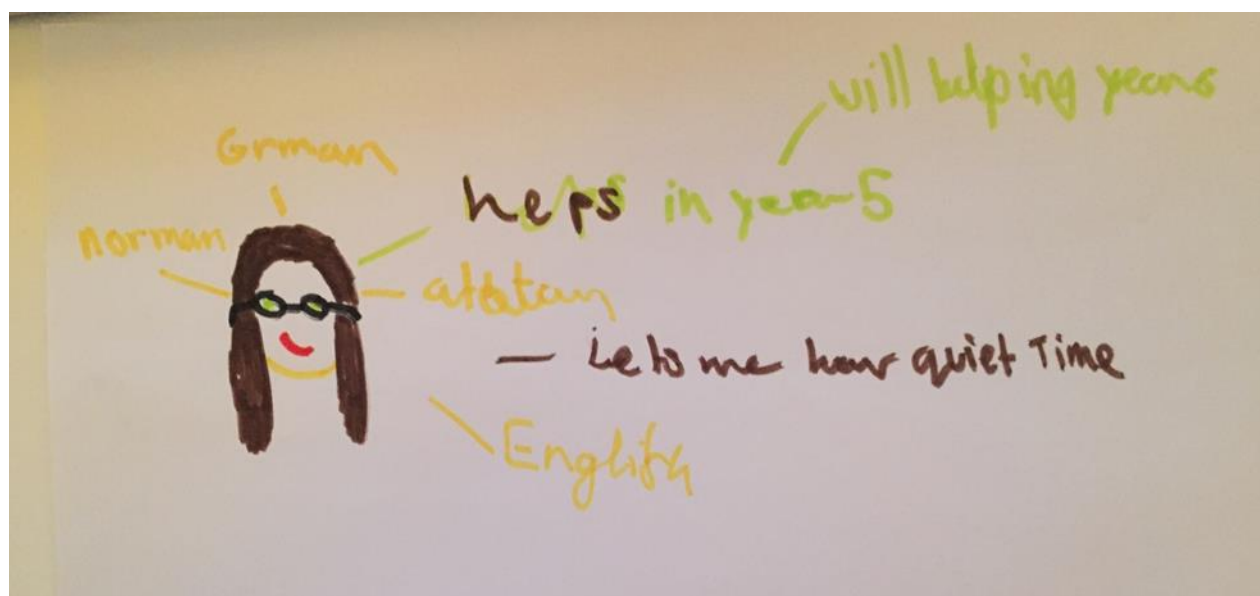> *'Like going up the stairs, going down the corridor, holding doors open'.* (Joseph)

Figure 7: Photograph of Becky's drawing of her TA, including a reference to how she 'lets me have quiet time'.

Discussion

The contribution of the data to the original research questions and to the TA literature base will be discussed, along with other important issues arising from the pupil perspective.

School Experiences & SEN

Participants were mostly positive about their school experiences; some particularly enjoyed the social aspects of school and many described a favourite subject with enthusiasm. A few worries which were discussed tended to relate to perceived pressures that were being placed on pupils, for example around the SATS examinations or the pressure to keep up with peers (both physically accessing peers, and matching them academically). This arguably relates to the prominent use of assessments, results tables and comparisons between pupils; Connor (2003, p, 101) suggests that 'children may be the unwitting victims of current target-setting pressures upon teachers and schools'. It may be especially important to consider the pressures being placed upon children with SEN in particular, and their anxieties, as studies have suggested that the prevalence of mental health difficulties is higher amongst these pupils (Emerson and Hatton, 2007; Rose, Howley, Fergusson and Jament, 2009) and Reiss (1993) warns that teaching staff might attribute certain pupil behaviours to a diagnosed special educational need rather than recognising them as a symptom of mental health challenges.

Participants largely demonstrated a good awareness that children have individual educational needs and so might receive different work and differing levels of support in school. They tended to accept this as fair and logical, rather than feeling that every pupil should be treated exactly the same. As has been found previously, participants were often aware of which pupils received what support and could describe the members of different 'sets' or groups for interventions (e.g. Marks, 2011).

When talking about their SEN, participants sometimes used labels (e.g. 'autistic') with their own interpretations of what they meant (e.g. 'I go crazy') differing from conventional definitions of these needs and one participant showed only a partial understanding of the purpose of his medication. This perhaps illustrates the need for adults to be more open and explicit with children about their needs and to make any terminology more accessible for them. It also supports the movement towards greater inclusion of children within the statutory assessment process as proposed in the new SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014).

Several participants talked about feeling different to their peers because of their SEN and it is possible that having a TA constantly by their side might contribute to such feelings, as one participant suggested, when she talked about 'normal' people not needing help. Some participants made comments that highlighted a fixed mind-set about their difficulties (Dweck, 2006). This might relate to findings that teachers feel uncertain about the specific pedagogies suitable for supporting pupils with SEN, that many of the tasks that pupils with SEN are given remain undifferentiated (physically) and that TAs (with very little training or preparation time with teachers) are often given the main responsibility for task-setting (Webster and Blatchford, 2013). To promote more of a growth mind-set within the classroom, it is likely that teachers and TAs require a shared understanding, possibly training, and time to communicate/collaborate, so that pupils receive tasks that are effectively differentiated (physically and verbally) and so that the interactions that adults have around the tasks use the language of a growth mind-set.

TA Support: Logistics

Most participants suggested that they spend a lot of time with the TA (which would have been expected based on the selection criteria for this research) and that the TA is often in very close proximity, linking to findings from the MAST study where pupils with Statements were almost constantly accompanied by a TA. Some participants spoke of the convenience and the reassurance provided by this closeness, as the TA could immediately help whenever needed. Many also expressed that although the TA might be close-by, they would still be encouraged to work on their own unless they truly needed help and the TA would leave them to try things independently when they were able to (sometimes going away to help others at these times). Despite the small sample of the current study, these findings offer a challenge to previous research which suggests that such close, frequent TA support leads pupils to develop dependence on this adult (e.g. Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli and MacFarland, 1997) and that TAs sometimes help pupils even when they can access the task independently (e.g. Tews and Lupart, 2008). It is possible that over time, (especially since the DISS and MAST studies have become so widely disseminated) TAs are increasingly encouraging greater levels of independent working for the pupils they support.

However, becoming dependent on an adult might not be a particularly conscious choice, where pupils capitalise on the TA's support to save themselves from doing work. It might be more the case that pupils do not realise that they can access tasks independently

which would mean that interviews with pupils themselves might be unlikely to detect dependence. Furthermore, a small number of discussions within the current study did portray an element of dependence on the TA, for example when pupils described how they would not cope without their TA. Within this context, where the TA is close-by a lot of the time but is leaving the child to work independently as much as possible (almost as if on 'stand-by' for immediate help when needed), questions are raised about the planning of the TA's time (i.e. could some be better spent elsewhere?) and whether TAs feel pressured to be seen to be helping frequently and immediately to protect their own professional identity. It is also likely that with the TA being so close, pupils are not encouraged or driven to think about how to seek help (from peers or teachers) or to persevere alone, as one source of support is so readily accessed. Giangreco et al. (2010) propose that peer support could be a positive alternative to TA support, but this might be less likely to occur when a TA is frequently so close.

Interviews with pupils also indicated that close and frequent TA support can lead to a greater degree of separation from the class teacher, with many participants feeling that the TA knew them better than the teacher did. This corroborates much of the previous research (e.g. Tews and Lupart, 2008; Webster and Blatchford, 2013) which suggests that TA support can become an alternative rather than a supplementary support (to teacher-led instruction and support). Most participants understood the TA role to involve prioritisation of their needs (over other pupils') whilst the teacher would be responsible for the whole class. Although Thomas said that he would be equally as likely to ask the teacher or the TA for help, others felt that they would and should turn to the TA first, and Paul and Mariusz stated that their teacher does not help them.

Such findings also relate to research which has suggested that TAs are often taking on the main responsibility for pupils with SEN (Lamb, 2009) and are playing a largely pedagogical role (Giangreco et al., 2010). It seems that these strategies of TA deployment have been internalised by pupils, who can come to see the TA as their 'teacher'. Broer et al. (2005) who similarly found that pupils viewed their TA as their 'primary educator' suggested that this might cause pupils to think that they are less worthy of the teacher's time. Handing over the responsibility for those children with the greatest levels of need within the classroom to TAs has consistently been highlighted as unethical (e.g. Giangreco et al., 2010; Rutherford, 2011) but it appears pupils as well as staff continue to see this as the norm. A more promising element of pupils' discussions focused on the TA working with pupils in small groups as well as individually, which is proposed to be a more

effective form of TA support for pupils' learning (Lacey, 2001; Sharples, Webster and Blatchford, 2014).

Further comparisons between the teacher and the TA helped to illuminate pupils' experiences of their support. Whilst some participants struggled to explain the difference between the two adults (as was found by Eyres et al., 2004), others indicated that the teacher might be more knowledgeable, skilled and confident, for example, being more likely to give correct explanations and to know the answers. Such findings support the conclusions of Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) around the 'practice' of TAs compared with teachers and the need for increased support and preparation for TAs in terms of their subject and pedagogical knowledge. Whilst teachers are typically trained up to a post-graduate level, TAs often enter their profession with few qualifications and little training, yet the two professionals are often now fulfilling similar roles.

When thinking about secondary school, a small number of participants felt that they would like the opportunity to work more independently without TA support, but many instead expressed concerns that they would not manage without it, potentially because they have become so used to an almost constant presence of a TA within school. There was a substantial level of confusion about TA support at secondary school; participants did not seem to be well-informed about whether or not they could or would be receiving TA support and what this support might look like. This suggests a lack of consultation on the part of pupils in terms of the implementation of their TA support (i.e. something that is done to them rather than with them), although it is possible that transition planning work could have been taking place in the Summer Term, after all of the interviews had been conducted. With the transition to secondary school being a relatively stressful and disruptive time for pupils (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999), perhaps especially those with SEN (Hodson, Baddeley and Laycock, 2005), gradual transition planning, which is person-centred and includes the question of TA support, would seem to be a helpful provision for these pupils.

Describing the TA

When describing their TAs, participants tended to show a great amount of admiration and used a variety of positive terms, including kind, funny, helpful and friendly, similar to previous findings from interviews with pupils (e.g. Bland and Sleightholme, 2012; Fraser and Meadows, 2008). Their statements seemed genuine and they talked with great enthusiasm, with Scott, for example, asking on several occasions to

take the researcher to meet his TA. Toby, whose two TAs were in the room throughout the interview, also made positive comments, for example, about how he had fun with his TAs and how they helped him when he was stuck. Such comments were unlikely to be due to the pressure of saying the 'right' thing about his TAs, in that for the majority of questions, Toby said 'dunno' or 'not sure' when he did not want to (or was not able to) respond in more detail. However, the presence of the TAs might have made him less likely to make negative comments and so it cannot be assumed that he holds purely positive views about this support.

Several participants were so happy with their current TA support that they were unable to imagine a TA who was more 'ideal'. Participants largely felt that their peers also liked the TAs and valued their presence within the class and said that teachers found TAs to be helpful and supportive. On the whole, pupils' ideal TAs were considered to be happy, knowledgeable (about the curriculum), funny, caring, outgoing and inspiring and someone who helped the target pupils as well as others.

Unlike many previous pupil interview studies, one participant (Joseph) held a particularly negative view of his TA, considering her to be too pushy, mean and at times to treat him less favourably than other pupils. This TA was perceived to become angry when the pupil made mistakes. Relatedly, another participant perceived that his TA could sometimes feel grumpy and would sigh with boredom whilst supporting him. These findings highlight the importance of pupils being consulted about the support that they are receiving in school (Joseph had been feeling upset about his TA for years with no one knowing) and the potential impact of the daily interactions and the quality of the relationship between TAs and pupils. It possibly speaks of the strains that are placed on the relationship when two people spend such a lot of time together. Ethically, something further needed to be done in response to the information shared by Joseph, and so following supervision discussions within the University and the Educational Psychology Service, Joseph was revisited and was asked how he had been feeling following on from the interview and if he had shared his experiences with anyone else in the past (he had with his parents). He agreed that he wanted to share some of his views about how his TA support could be improved with the SENCo and so these messages were passed on.

In discussions around what the TA might think of them, participants tended to communicate that the TA liked them, understood their needs and felt proud when they did well. It was important for some participants to make their TA proud, as this made them feel very happy about themselves. It seems that in this way, the TA can play a parent-like role

in school, by advocating for these pupils and their needs and because their views about pupils' progress are so important for pupils' own wellbeing and self-efficacy. Furthermore, when the TA knows the child well and can appreciate their individual needs as well as recognising their potential, they are able to pitch their level and style of scaffolding most effectively. The idea of the TA as an advocate for the child connects with Rutherford's (2011) suggestion that by presuming competence, TAs hold higher expectations for pupils and are less likely to be distracted by labels of SEN. In her study, one TA stated that 'when you actually start to know a person, the label becomes irrelevant' (p. 106). Perhaps in the present study, participants felt that the TA was the one person who saw past their label; they did indicate that the TA knew them better than teachers did.

Impacts of TA Support

A clear theme within the data was the academic support provided by TAs; pupils talked about TAs helping with thinking, writing, understanding things and encouraging pupils to try challenging work. Many participants expressed that they would not cope with their work without the TA. A number of participants appeared to describe the TA providing effective 'scaffolding' for their learning (linking back to Social Constructivism), for example breaking tasks down into smaller steps and modelling and coaching around work before then encouraging pupils to apply learned skills independently. Unlike previous findings that TAs can provide unclear or inaccurate explanations (e.g. Rubie-Davies et al., 2010), a number of participants felt that the TA helped them to understand tasks by providing clear explanations and building on the teacher's input (although it would be difficult for pupils to detect incorrect explanations). Furthermore, even those pupils who received TA support due to their physical needs appeared to emphasise the importance of the academic support provided by TAs. Although this was perceived to be helpful, it does raise questions about the specificity of TA support (the purpose and boundaries) and possibly gives unintended messages about less entitlement to and actual contact time with teachers rather than TAs.

Emotional support provided by TAs appeared to be important for most participants. They talked about the TA making them feel happy (sometimes being the only person in school who did), helping them to manage anxiety and anger and acting as a sympathetic listener who pupils were comfortable to talk to about their problems and concerns. For a number of participants it seemed as though their close relationship with the TA enabled them to feel a sense of belonging within school; the magnitude of this is clear, considering that increased sense of belonging improves pupils' academic performance (Newman,

1991), behaviour (Osterman, 2000) and motivation (Goodenow, 1992). In this way, TAs appear to support greater inclusion of pupils with SEN within mainstream settings, in line with previous suggestions (e.g. Saddler, 2013). TAs might arguably be the most likely person to be able to foster a sense of belonging for the pupils they support, as their relationship is often characterised by 'stability, affective concern and continuation into the foreseeable future', conditions thought to be required for needs of belongingness to be fulfilled (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p. 500). For a number of participants, the ideal TA would be a good listener, or might even take on a 'counsellor' role, although specific, therapeutic training would likely be required as Alborz et al. (2009) suggest that TAs are not always very successful at undertaking specific therapeutic tasks without preparation or support.

Participants described the social support that TAs can provide, including helping to build and maintain friendships, fostering social skill development and supporting games with peers, in line with previous studies (e.g. Tews and Lupart, 2008). Whilst some research has suggested that TA support can lead to stigmatisation within the peer group (Bowers, 1997), can hinder socialisation (Broer, Doyle and Giangreco, 2005) and increase the degree of separation from peers (Giangreco et al., 1997) the current participants' discussions did not reflect this. Two participants with physical needs talked about requiring social support in the form of enabling them to physically access their peer group, to keep up and to involve themselves in games at break time. Whilst one of these participants described his TA setting up lunch time board games with groups of peers and often spending all of the break times with him, the other participant felt rather abandoned and alone at break times and wished that his TA could facilitate more inclusion within the peer group at these times. These discussions raise questions around planning the timings and aims of TA support, as it might be the case that pupils with physical needs could benefit from social TA support at break times even more so than in the classroom (when peers are already close-by). It is likely that pupils with other forms of SEN would also benefit from TA support at the more unstructured times of the school day, for example, those with Autism who might struggle to initiate interactions with peers and can become significantly isolated (Bauminger and Kasari, 2000).

Reflections on the Strengths & Limitations of the Study

A significant strength of the current research is that it gathered rich, qualitative data to contribute greater pupil voice to the literature, specifically of pupils with SEN (perhaps usually the least well-acknowledged demographic). The research was designed to be

person-centred: using a flexible semi-structured interview schedule so that participants' needs, understanding and priorities could be supported and employing props and visual activities to break down power imbalances, build rapport, facilitate communication and to foster enjoyment during the data collection process. Focusing on pupils' views without interference or overshadowing from other stakeholders' views allowed for rich discussion and reflection and meant that each child's voice could be heard and valued. The sample of participants had a variety of different SEN and they were at an age where they were often able to think about TA support in the present, past and the future, providing a wide range of perspectives and anecdotes.

A possible limitation of the study is that the views of pupils were sought without any triangulated information such as teacher or TA perspectives, observations of pupils working with their TAs, or information about the WPR model within these schools, which could have added greater validity and context to the findings, perhaps allowing for conclusions to be more confidently generalised to pupils in different schools and contexts. It is also possible that the SENCos who agreed to select pupils for involvement in the research might have felt more positive or more confident about the quality of TA support in their schools (than those who did not respond) meaning that the findings could be weighted towards more positive examples of practice. It is also possible that certain aspects of the methodology employed might have made it easier for pupils to tell positive rather than negative stories about their TAs; for example, the wording of questions such as 'how does she help you to learn?' might not have provided enough of a clear opportunity to talk about any ways in which the TA might in fact hinder learning. Additionally, extra support to generate ideas about the ideal TA could have increased pupils' responses during these discussions, for example, providing vignettes of a variety of characters for pupils to consider.

The Ideal TA activity was not always able to be fully utilised, because several participants were unable to imagine a more ideal example, although this finding was considered to be telling in itself. Finally, one participant (Toby) found it very difficult to talk to the researcher and responded most often by saying 'don't know' or by shrugging his shoulders, meaning that his views were not gathered in great detail. He had also asked that his two TAs sit in on the interview, which could have caused further reluctance to share certain thoughts or experiences. The researcher ensured though, that some of his responses, where he had felt more confident and expressive, were included in the analysis and reporting. It is possible that a number of preliminary rapport-building sessions together

leading up to the interview might have supported Toby to share his views more openly and comfortably.

Implications for Practice & Future Research

A significant implication for practice within schools is that pupils ought to be consulted and involved in monitoring the effectiveness and focus of their TA support, being reassured that they would not get into trouble for giving feedback (with additional actions being taken if necessary, to prevent any implications arising for pupils). Greater transparency and clarity around the purpose and boundaries of TA support (following careful assessment and monitoring of specific needs) could help to ensure that this support is implemented most efficiently (i.e. focusing specifically on the required areas of development, not spreading into others where the pupil might act more independently).

The research suggests the need for significant consideration and caution where pupils who receive TA support are becoming routinely separated from the class teacher and internalising the sense that their primary educator is the TA (which might contribute to questions that pupils have about their entitlement to teacher support) (Broer et al., 2005). School leadership and policy could lead the way in changing such practices and in implementing more effective and more ethical versions of TA deployment. The findings of this study connect with the recommendation of time for the teacher to work closely with individual pupils with SEN whilst TAs look after the rest of the class (Webster, 2014). Furthermore, greater attention might be given to the potential emotional benefits of TA support for pupils, as this appears to be important to them. Schools might consider additional training and resources (including time) for TAs to maximise this wider impact and the relationship between pupil and TA could be more widely acknowledged as an influential factor in the extent to which TA support is successful.

Future research might involve interviews with pupils of different age groups, with different SEN and from different parts of the UK. Further qualitative research might benefit from the use of similar props and visual activities, as these were considered to greatly facilitate pupils' engagement with the present study. Quantitative researchers could be encouraged that TA support impacts much more widely than purely academically and might conduct more investigations around the emotional and social impacts, with links between TA support and sense of belonging in school being a potential interesting focal point.

Conclusion

Ten pupils in Year Six with SEN provided fascinating, unique and thought-provoking insights into their own experiences and perspectives of TA support; they demonstrated skill, passion and enjoyment in sharing their views. Participants mostly expressed great admiration and appreciation for their TAs and highlighted the ways in which they supported numerous aspects of their development and wellbeing. The findings indicated that TAs are fulfilling a much wider role than purely supporting academic engagement, and the theme of emotional support (sense of belonging, talking about problems, advocating for the child, being the only person to make them feel happy) was particularly powerful. Participants also demonstrated that they could act as helpful consultees in the planning and monitoring of their TA support and contributed a number of issues for consideration and caution, including the continuing degree of separation between these pupils and their teachers and the TA taking on primary responsibility for their support.

Taken together, participants' views emphasise the complexity and the abundance of requirements necessary for successful TA support; not only must TAs demonstrate a wealth of skills and a variety of positive characteristics, the logistics of their work in schools must also be carefully considered. The WPR model provides a useful framework for interpreting and acting on current findings; when TAs' preparedness, practice and deployment are effectively planned for and supported, TAs can be enabled to maximise their skills and characteristics to bring about positive change for pupils.

Appendices

Appendix A. Literature Review: Search Terms

Appendix B. Literature Review: Quality Assessment

Appendix C. Literature Review: Data Extraction

Appendix D. Parental Consent Form

Appendix E. Participant Consent Form

Appendix F. Interview Schedule

Appendix G. Props

Appendix H. Ethics Approval

Appendix I. Coding Manual

Appendix J. Themes and Subthemes

Appendix K. Thematic Map Development

Appendix A - Literature Review: Search Terms

Terms relating to Teaching Assistant

Teaching Assistant*, classroom assistant*, teacher assistant*, learning support assistant*, paraeducator*, paraprofessional*, educational personnel, support staff, teacher aid*, learning mentor*.

Terms relating to pupil/school:

Pupil*, school*, student*, child, teaching, education

Terms relating to SEN:

Special education, special educational needs, special needs, low achievers, learning disabilities, learning difficulties

Terms relating to impact:

Impact*, effect*, influence, consequence*, outcome*

Terms relating to pupil voice:

Pupil voice, pupil perspectives, pupil views, student voice, student views, student perspectives, children's views, children's perspectives

Appendix B – Literature Review: Quality Assessment (highlighted criteria were added to the original tool by the researcher)

Qualitative Study	Clearly states aims	Appropriate qualitative method	Research design explained	Recruitment method explained	Data collection explained	Researcher-participant relationship considered	Ethical issues considered	Rigorous data analysis	Data analysis explained transparently	Clear statement of findings	Clear summary - integration of key findings	Valuable research?	Total rating (out of 12)
Vickerman & Blundell, 2012	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	10
Rubie-Davies et al., 2010	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
Rose & Doveston, 2008	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
Groom & Rose, 2005	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	8
Lacey, 2001	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	7
Farrell et al., 2000	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	9
Rutherford, 2011	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	8
Tews & Lupart, 2008	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	11
Woolfson & Truswell, 2005	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	7
Fraser & Meadows, 2008	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	9
Bland & Sleightholme, 2012	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	7
Eyres et al., 2004	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	7

Systematic Review Paper	Addressing clearly focused question	Appropriate types of papers	Replicable and transparent search protocol	Appropriately thorough search	Assessed the quality of papers?	Results combined appropriately	Effective communication of main findings	Precise results	Results have useful implications	Consideration of appropriate outcomes	Total rating (out of 10)
Alborz et al., 2009	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	10
Giangreco et al., 2010	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	9

Quantitative Study	Aims clearly described	Outcome measures clearly described	Sample clearly described	Conditions clearly described	Potential confounders between participants considered	Findings clearly described	Distribution of data & estimates of random variability	Potential adverse effects of intervention / involvement mentioned	Lost participants described	Actual probability values reported	Representative sample	Intervention within representative setting/context	Participants blind to intervention	Attempts to blind those measuring outcomes
Blatchford et al., 2011	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	n/a	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Blatchford et al., 2009	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	n/a	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Muijs & Reynolds, 2003	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	n/a	No	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Savage & Carless, 2008	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Vadasy et al., 2007	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Lane et al., 2007	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Savage & Carless, 2005	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Quantitative Study (cont…)	Any retrospective unplanned analyses were acknowledged	Time periods between intervention and tests appropriate	Appropriate statistical tests	Intervention fidelity	Accurate outcome measures	Participants from same population at same time	Random allocation of participants	Participants and professionals blind to allocation	Adequate adjustment for confounding	Lost participants taken into account	Total rating (out of 24)
Blatchford et al., 2011	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes	No	21
Blatchford et al., 2009	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes	n/a	23
Muijs & Reynolds, 2003	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes	No	20
Savage & Carless, 2008	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	No	20
Vadasy et al., 2007	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes	21
Lane et al., 2007	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	No	No	18
Savage & Carless, 2005	n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	No	19

Appendix C – Literature Review: Data Extraction

Paper, terminology used & Country	Type **Commentary Article** **Empirical Study** **Literature Review**	Methodology	Participants	Pupils with SEN?	Pupil Voice?	Area of Impact	Impact	Factors considered in relation to TA impact
Saddler, 2013. Teaching Assistants. England.	CA	Reviews literature on impact of TAs on learning then critically discusses social inclusion literature, linking the two	n/a	Yes – focusing on impacts for pupils with SEN	No	Learning and Social Inclusion	**Inconclusive**. More research needed, which considers social inclusion	Changing role, legislation, 1:1 deployment, relationship,
Webster, 2014. Teaching Assistants. England.	CA	Reviews research evidence around impact of TAs and suggests implications for the statutory assessment process and Educational Psychologists	n/a	Yes – main focus is on impact of TAs for pupils with SEN	No	Academic progress & Inclusion	**Negative** impact of 'velcro TA' on academic progress	Statutory assessment process (emphasis on quantity not quality of support), deployment, legislation, EPs managing parental expectations
Vickerman & Blundell, 2012. Learning Support Assistants. England.	ES	**Qualitative**, questionnaires and interviews with TAs (& some quantitative data)	500 TAs	Yes – focus is pupils with SEN	No	PE lessons – learning, behaviour, inclusion	**Mixed** – 60% of TAs felt added value to learning, teaching and assessment in PE	Training for teachers and TAs, legislation, relationship and collaboration between Teacher-TA, preparation, confidence, status,

Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell & Webster, 2011. Support Staff. England & Wales.	ES (Part of DISS)	**Quantitative**, naturalistic, longitudinal. 8 measures of positive approaches to learning (PAL). Reports and observations of level of TA support.	4716 pupils from Years 1,2,3,6,7,9,10	No – all pupils included, although SEN status is identified and considered	No	Positive approaches to learning (PAL)	**Mixed** – positive impact on PAL for Year 9 pupils, few effects for Year 1 & 3, no effects for Years 2,6,7 and 10.	Legislation, 'Wider Pedagogical Role WPR' Model – practice (role), deployment & Preparedness
Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou & Bassett, 2010. Teaching Assistants. England & Wales.	ES (part of DISS)	**Qualitative**. Analysis of audio recordings of teacher-pupil and TA-pupil interactions (& some quantitative data)	Pupils, TAs and teachers from 15 schools (primary & secondary)	Partly – pupils not selected because had SEN but because naturalistic study design – most TAs were working with those with SEN	No	Nature and quality of everyday interactions which are assumed to impact on quality of teaching and learning	**Negative** – Teachers more likely than TAs to show aspects of 'effective teaching' in their interactions with pupils	WPR Model, legislation, language/interactions (e.g. TAs more likely to provide answers, focus on task completion, give incorrect explanations)
Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin & Russell, 2010. Teaching Assistants. England.	CA	Proposes the WPR model as a tool for understanding how TA support impacts on pupils' learning	n/a	Yes – pupils with SEN are main consideration	No	Educational outcomes	**Negative** impact on academic progress, especially those with highest levels SEN. Some positive results from targeted intervention studies.	WPR Model, legislation,
Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010. Paraprofessionals. USA.	LR	Systematic review of 32 studies	n/a	No – studies reviewed were not selected based on participant with SEN (although many discussions about SEN)	No	General student outcomes, largely academic and social	**Inconclusive**. Need for more research, but studies reviewed suggest many barriers to successful TA support.	Deployment (e.g. responsibilities i.e. set tasks that are beyond reasonable expectations for TAs), training, turnover of staff, level of respect for TAs within school, supervision, legislation,
Blatchford, Bassett,	ES (part of	**Quantitative**. Systematic	Pupils in Years	No – pupils not selected	No	Pupil engagement	Largely **positive** - increased	Legislation, deployment (e.g. blurred

Brown & Webster, 2009. Support Staff / Teaching Assistants. England & Wales.	DISS)	Observations	1,3,7,10 in 49 primary and secondary schools	based on SEN, but naturalistic study means many of those working with TAs did have SEN		(including interactions) and individual attention received from adults	individualisation of attention and overall teaching, increased on-task behaviour, increased pupil engagement, more active interaction with adults. But – negative impact on contact time with teacher.	teacher vs TA roles, working with individuals or small groups, proximity), interaction, SEN status,
Rose & Doveston, 2008. Learning Mentors. England.	ES (part of wider study, this paper only reports on pupil interviews)	**Qualitative**, semi-structured interviews with pupils (& some quantitative data)	33 pupils, primary and secondary	Yes – pupils with some level of additional need / barriers to learning were interviewed	Yes	Confidence, academic progress, attitudes towards learning	**Positive** views about impact of TA support, e.g. academic achievement, feeling safe, emotional regulation, confidence, social inclusion.	TA-child relationship, role (i.e. as distinct from teacher role e.g. TA more time to focus on individuals, more likely to advocate for child)
Groom & Rose, 2005. Teaching Assistants. England.	ES	**Qualitative**. Questionnaires for Head Teachers and line managers of TAs, and interviews with governors, teachers, TAs, pupils and parents. (& some quantitative data)	Questionnaires - 94 Head Teachers, 20 line managers of TAs. Interviews - 10 Key stage 2 pupils, 6 parents, 5 governors, 5 teachers, 5 line managers of TAs, 8 TAs (from 5 primary schools, chosen based on 'interesting practice').	Yes - whole focus on pupils with SEBD	Yes	Inclusion of pupils with Social Emotional and Behavioural difficulties.	**Positive** – overwhelming view that TAs contribute significantly to the inclusion of pupils with SEBD. Increased self-esteem and confidence. Reduced exclusions.	Role, legislation, training, teamwork between teacher and TA, deployment (e.g. working with pupils with SEBD, small groups, home-school liason, social support), TA skills and personal qualities (e.g. nurturing), relationship TA-child, planning for deployment, planning and feedback time with teachers , respect for TA within school, school ethos,

Muijs & Reynolds, 2003. Learning Support Assistants. England.	ES	**Quantitative**. Quasi-experimental design, pre-test post-test	360 pupils (half acted as control group) low achievers, from 18 schools in 2 LEAs	Yes – all pupils were 'low- achievers'	No	Maths achievement/progress	**Negative** – no significant differences in progress between those receiving TA support and those in control group (in fact control group's scores increased slightly more)	Legislation, training, role (i.e. specialist Numeracy Support Assistant role), supervision,
Lacey, 2001. Learning Support Assistants. England.	ES	**Qualitative**. Interviews and observations of teachers, TAs and pupils. Interviews with parents.	24 schools (12 mainstream, 12 special). Observations of 53 pupils with SLD or PMLD. Interviews with 13 pupils. 43 TAs observed and interviewed, 25 teachers observed and interviewed. 30 parents interviewed.	Yes - whole focus on pupils with SEN	Yes	Inclusion of pupils with SLD/PMLD	**Positive** – better understanding within interactions with peers, increased learning	Legislation, relationship Teacher-TA, role (e.g. level of responsibility), deployment (e.g. one-to-one/subject department), training, planning time, priorities (e.g. focus on building social or academic skills), feeding back to teacher, preparedness, teacher's skills with SEN pupils, valued role within school,
Farrell, Balshaw & Polat, 2000. Learning Support Assistants. England.	ES	**Qualitative**. Semi-structured interviews with TAs, teachers, pupils, parents, SENCos, Head Teachers, Heads of Support Services, governors, members of senior management teams (SMT). Survey of providers of training for TAs. Observations of TAs.	17 schools chosen to represent 'good practice.' Interviewed 147 TAs, 113 teachers, 47 pupils, 34 parents, 29 SENCos/SMT,19 Heads, 4 Heads of Support Services,	No – not distinguished	Yes	General educational expereinces and outcomes	**Positive** – teachers mostly felt TAs are essential for inclusion to work, 95% TAs felt they were making a genuine contribution to pupils' education,	Role, legislation, EP involvement with TAs and teachers, planning with teacher, training, deployment (e.g. supporting on-to-one, withdrawing from lessons), supervision, qualifications, career structure, value of job within school,

			9 school governors. Questionnaire for training providers - information on 339 courses provided					
Rutherford, 2011. Teacher Aides. New Zealand.	ES	**Qualitative**. Individual semi-structured interviews with TAs	18 TAs, 9 from primary and 9 from secondary schools	Yes – pupils with 'disabilities' are the focus	No	General educational experiences and outcomes and social inclusion / a just education system	**Positive** – TAs perceived that pupils would not complete as much work without them, TAs advocated for pupils, support inclusion and therefore social justice	Role, supervision, training, status/respect, relationship TA-child, legislation, TA believes in educability of pupil, recognises feelings of pupils, TA expectations,
Savage & Carless, 2008. Classroom Assistants. England.	ES	**Quantitative**. Quasi-experimental design, pre-test post-test, evaluation of targeted 9 week intervention.	104 Year 1 pupils, poorest readers from 9 schools. 3 different intervention conditions or control condition. 55 of these were followed up after 16 months.	Yes – pupils with reading difficulties	No	Reading comprehension, maths, writing, spelling	Largely **positive** –improved literacy skills (immediate post-intervention tests) and for the 55% who responded particularly well to the intervention – improvements were sustained after 16 months	Preventative interventions, training, qualifications, resources provided, ongoing support, length and intensity of intervention,
Vadasy, Sanders & Tudor, 2007. Paraeducators. USA.	ES	**Quantitative**. Randomised control trial, pre-test post-test, evaluation of targeted 2-5 month intervention.	46 pupils in Grades 2 & 3 from 9 schools.	Yes – low word reading abilities	No	Reading -accuracy & fluency	**Positive** – gains in reading accuracy and fluency, maintained after 3 months	Training, evidence-based interventions/approaches, deployment (e.g. systematic targeted interventions, scripted lessons), length of intervention, age of pupils, Teacher-TA planning time,
Lane, Fletcher, Carter, Dejud &	ES	**Quantitative**. Randomised control trial, pre-test post-test,	24 pupils in 1st grade (18 boys, 6	Yes – poor early reading skills &	No	Reading skills & Behaviour & Social	**Mixed** – Positive impact on reading skills (maintained after 4	Level of difficulties of pupils , role (e.g. SEN pupils, interventions), training,

Delorenzo, 2007. Paraprofessionals. USA.		evaluation of targeted 10 week intervention.	girls)	'emotional and behavioural disorders'		interactions	weeks), no impact on social and behavioural measures. Students rated intervention as 'favourable.'	stakeholders' perceptions of interventions, length of intervention, sensitivity and relevance of assessment measures used
Savage & Carless, 2005. Learning Support Assistants. England.	ES	**Quantitative**. Quasi-experimental design, pre-test post-test, evaluation of targeted, small group 9 week interventions	108 pupils (54 girls, 54 boys) in Year 1 from 9 schools	Yes – poorest readers	No	Reading	**Positive** – improved reading skills including phonological skills, letter-sound knowledge and decoding skills	Training, preventative approach, characteristics of TA, deployment (e.g. small groups, SEN), ongoing support for TA, type of intervention, materials provided, training for teachers, role,
Alborz, Pearson, Farrell & Howes, 2009. Support Staff. England.	LR	Systematic in-depth review of 35 studies	n/a	Yes – most studies included focused on pupils with SEN	No	Participation, academic progress, social and emotional adjustment (and other school-related outcomes)	**Positive** – trained and supported TAs can have positive impact on progress in literacy, TAs can support engagement in learning and social activities	Training, support, deployment (e.g. discrete well-defined areas of work, one-to-one or small groups), impacts for teachers (e.g. feel supported, less stressed), legislation, roles, interactions, collaboration teacher-TA, proximity, impacts on teachers (e.g. wellbeing, support) teaching (e.g. effectiveness) and school ethos (e.g. inclusion)
Tews & Lupart, 2008. Paraprofessionals. Canada.	ES	**Qualitative**. Student perspectives explored using individual semi-structured interviews	8 pupils (4 primary, 4 secondary)	Yes – all pupils had SEN, (Autism, developmental delay, Down Syndrome, brain injury Prader-Willi Syndrome)	Yes	General educational experiences / inclusion	**Mixed** – TAs can facilitate social interaction & most pupils felt TA support was essential. TA contact can reduce contact with teacher and peers and can encourage dependence and reduced self-determination.	Role (decision-making, instructional), deployment (e.g. one-to-one, SEN, alternative support rather than supplemental), training, relationship TA-child,
Woolfson & Truswell, 2005. Classroom	ES	**Qualitative**. Evaluation of Local Authority Project (9 months). Questionnaires and	5 TAs allocated to 3 primary schools. 17 Pupils (Year 1)	No – TAs working with whole class and pupils selected for interviews	Yes	Personal and social development & learning	**Positive** – TAs perceived to provide useful support to increase the quality of pupils' learning and	TAs can impact on parental involvement, roles, training, status, qualifications, career structure, planning with teacher,

Assistants. Scotland.		focus groups with parents, interviews with TAs, teachers and Head Teachers. Focus groups with pupils. Observations.	randomly selected for interviews. Teachers and Head Teachers interviewed. 8 parents selected.	were not selected based on additional needs			to encourage personal and social development (e.g. help to calm, promote turn-taking games).	deployment (e.g. additional not alternative support), relationships TA-child,
Fraser & Meadows, 2008. Teaching Assistants. England.	ES	**Qualitative**. Questionnaire and group interviews to explore pupils' views	3 primary schools, 419 pupils completed questionnaire, 86 interviewed. Pupils aged 5-11years.	Not really – all children interviewed had experience of being support by a TA but were not necessarily identified as having SEN	Yes	General educational experiences	Largely **positive** – most children would prefer to have a TA in class than not, considered direct TA support with work to be helpful, identified that TAs freed up more of the teacher's time and felt that being withdrawn from class was a positive thing.	Changing role, legislation,
Bland & Sleightholme, 2012. Teaching Assistants. England.	ES	**Qualitative**. Interviews with pupils.	28 pupils in Year 5 & 6 in one school.	No – sample not selected based on additional needs	Yes	General educational experiences	Largely **positive** – 100% of pupils interviewed would choose to have a TA in their classroom. Many identified that TAs helped to support pupils' confidence and around half of participants felt that they would prefer to talk to a TA than a teacher if they had a concern.	Deployment, role, qualifications, experience, characteristics of TA,
Eyres, Cable, Hancock & Turner, 2004. Teaching Assistants. England.	ES	**Qualitative**. Interviews with (pairs of) pupils.	78 primary school pupils (aged 5-11 years) in 6 schools.	No – pupils were not selected based on additional needs	Yes	General educational experiences	**Mixed** – Pupils were in agreement that TAs 'helped' within the classroom, however, their discussions also revealed a blurriness and confusion between	Status, role (e.g. overlap between teacher and TA, teacher teaches and TA 'helps'), working relationship between teacher and TA, deployment (e.g. one-to-one or small groups, SEN),

						teacher and TA roles and responsibilities	

Appendix D – Parental Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

Parental Consent Form (Version 1. Date: 22.07.15)

Study title: **The perspectives and experiences of primary school children with special educational needs regarding their individual Teaching Assistant support**

Researcher name: Hayley Frisby

ERGO Study ID number: 17013

Please read this information carefully before giving consent for your child to take part in the study.

Please put your initials the boxes if you agree with the statements:

I have read and understood the information sheet (version 1; dated 22/07/15) and

have been offered the opportunity to contact the researcher to ask questions about

the study.

I agree to my child being interviewed and having their responses recorded via

dictaphone. I understand that these recordings will be destroyed once

anonymously written up.

I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that they will be given

the option to stop at any time without their legal rights being affected.

Statement of Consent

I have read and understood the information about this study. In consenting for my child, I understand that our legal rights are not affected. I also understand that data collected as part of this research will be kept confidential and that published results will maintain that confidentiality. I finally understand that if I have any questions about my child's rights as a participant in this research, or if I feel that they have been placed at risk, I may contact the chair of the Ethics Committee, Psychology, University of Southampton, SO17 1BJ, UK. Phone: +44 (0)23 8059 3856, email fshs-rso@soton.ac.uk

I certify that I have read the above consent form and I give consent for my child to participate in the above described research.

Name of Child participant (print name)……………………………………………………

Signature of Parent/Guardian…………………………………….Date:…………………..

Appendix E – Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

Hello (NAME)

PHOTOGRAPH OF
RESEARCHER

My name is Hayley.

I work with children and teachers in schools.

I am planning to come into your school to find out more about Teaching Assistants

as part of a piece of research.

I'm wondering if it might be okay to chat to you about the help that

you get in school?

I'll bring along some colouring pencils, plasticine, felt-tips and other bits and

bobs so that we can use those to share some ideas too if you would like to.

When I've talked to you and nine other children (at different times) I will write a report.

I will not mention yours or any of the other children's names, so no one
who reads the report will know that you were involved or what you said to
me.

I will ask you some questions, but you don't have to answer them all – you
can choose. Also, there are no right or wrong answers! You can say at any
point if you would like to stop taking part and go back to your classroom.

Do you think that you would be okay to talk to me for about an hour one day
in school?

Yes   No   (Please tick one of the boxes)

Name: _____Date: _____

Appendix F – Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

- Welcome child into room and have 5/10 minutes informal discussion to build rapport/let them settle.

- Thank the child for coming along and discuss what the study is interested in (how they feel about school, the help they receive, especially help from Miss/Mr X). Revisit and check the Child consent form.

- Use the props to help to set expectations: the miniature Lego judge character is used to explain that their comments today will not be judged and the miniature toy 'stop' sign is for them to use if they would prefer not to answer a question or would like to finish the session and return to class.

- Explain confidentiality & recording of interviews and storage and sharing of photographs of models/drawings.

SCHOOL QUESTIONS

a) Do you like coming to school?

b) What is your favourite thing about school?

c) How well are you getting on at the moment? Anything particularly tricky? Anything particularly easy – or doing quite well in?

d) Do all of the children in your class always do the same work or do different people do different things?

e) Do some children have more help than others?

Possible prompts might include: why? Can you tell me a bit more about that? How come? Why do you think that is? Is that a good thing?

TA QUESTIONS

They might have brought up the fact that they have a TA in the previous question, if not, discuss the fact that there is an extra adult(s) in the classroom, including Miss/Mr X, check that they know exactly who is being referred to.

In following questions – instead of saying 'TA' the name of the TA (that the child would say) should be used.

f)   Do you spend time with TA?

g)   How much time/how often? (if struggle, give options of never/sometimes/often)

h)   Why do you spend time with TA?

i)   What is TA's job?

j)   How does TA help you to learn?

k)   What is the difference between your TA and your teacher?

l)   Do you spend time with TA outside the classroom? Why? What's that like?

At this point, the Ideal TA activity would be completed collaboratively with the child (see below for guide)

Building on and moving on from Ideal TA activity:

m) What do the other children in the classroom think about TA?

n) Has she helped you this morning? Did you struggle with anything this morning? – What did TA do to help? How did she explain that? How did she make sure that you understood that? What has she taught you today? Does she ask you questions? Does she help you to remember things? How?

o) If you didn't have TA with you, how would you get on? Have you done any work without her this week?

p) How well does TA know you? How well does your teacher know you? Or Who knows you best, TA or teacher? Why is that? Is that a good thing?

q) If you needed help, would you ask TA or the teacher? Why?

r) Will you need TA at secondary school? Why? Will you have one?

Ideal TA Activity

Materials needed: Paper, pencil, pen, coloured pens, colouring pencils, plasticine, ruler, rubber, pencil sharpener, post-it notes

How it works: Child is told that we can now use some of these things whilst we're talking to share some ideas about TA; they are offered the options of drawing, making a plasticine model or using none of the above and just continuing to talk.

As the Child (C) draws or works with the plasticine model, the Researcher (R) can offer to help with labels for ideas that are discussed, on the paper around the drawings/model, or on post-it notes.

R prompts the drawing/plasticine modelling and discussion. Firstly by asking the first bullet point below and then working through the questions listed underneath. When these are completed, R asks the second bullet point below and then works through the list of questions again.

- I'm wondering if you could think about what your TA is like, do you think you could draw/sketch/model your TA?

And later on…

- Now I'm wondering if you can think about the most brilliant, perfect TA, one who is ideal and really good at what they do. Can you imagine this person and do you think you could draw/sketch/model them?

➢ What is this person like?

➢ What 3 words could you use to describe them? How do you know that they are …?

➢ What do the children in the classroom think of this person?

➢ What does this person think of you?

➢ How would this TA make children that he/she worked with feel?

➢ How does this TA feel?

➢ If this person brought a bag into school, what would it have in it? (Can encourage to draw bag and items as talking)

➢ What does the teacher think of this person?

➢ What does this person do in the classroom?

➢ What sort of things might this person say to the children in the classroom?

➢ Do children listen to this person? Why (not)?

Now place the two drawings apart from each other, with another sheet of paper (landscape) in between. On this piece, draw a scale from 0-10 that looks like it stretches from the current TA on the left and the ideal TA on the right. Then consider the following with the child:

❖ How could current TA be move further towards the ideal TA? Or, how could they be more helpful to you in the classroom?

Appendix G – Props

Appendix H – Ethical Approval

Appendix I – Coding Manual

Code	Description	Example Extract	Exemptions/Restrictions
Asking for help when stuck	Talking about whether they ask for help, who they ask for help, how they ask.	'If you don't know, you say "what am I doing?"'	
Can't feedback about TA support in school	Barriers/reasons why they would not tell others in school about their TA support	'I wouldn't really like to say it, outloud, cuz I don't want to get into trouble or anything, or get a detention, or seem like I'm being rude'	
Close proximity of TA	How close the TA is and how they feel about this	'TA, they're closer'	Not time spent with TA but physical distance
TA nationality	Pupil describes TA's nationality/heritage	'German. Italian. English. She's also I think Norman'	
Emotional impact of ideal TA	Imagined impacts of being supported by ideal TA	'Their job is erm… to help people. With their problems'	Ideal not current TA
Getting rewards for good behaviour	Rewards that receive in school for positive behaviour	'I get treats, sometimes, like I go on the laptops and stuff. So that's when I'm really good'	
Getting to know TA over time	Feeling differently about TA over time or getting to know more about them	'First time I met her, I didn't feel so alright with her, but now I'm alright'	
Have worked with my	Mentioning the long	'Ermmm I think	Duration, not frequency

TA for a long time	duration of TA support	longer than a year'	or proximity
Feeling nervous about working with a new TA	Feeling nervous when thinking about or actually having to swap to a new TA	'The first time I met Jane I was a bit shy, cuz I was scared cuz it was new, I was scared	
Spend lots of time with my TA	High level of TA support in school	'I think all day, not the whole day, but the whole school day'	Frequency, not duration or proximity
How well my teacher knows me	How pupils feel the teacher knows them, could be very well or not well	'She doesn't even know all my names. I got three names, one Polish and two English. One middle name'	Teacher not TA (although might be part of a comparison, so code in both)
Ideal TA characteristics	Might be physical attributes or personality characteristics	'Funny. Outgoing. Inspiring'	
What ideal TA might say	Things that they think the ideal TA might say to them or to other people	'Keep going'	
Ideal TA role	Descriptions of the role that their ideal TA would take on in school	'She's like a counsellor who helps'	
How I feel about working independently	Could be positive or negative feelings towards independent working in school	'Yeah I like to work by myself, I definitely don't like working with other children'	
TA leaves me to work independently when I can manage	Talking about the TA encouraging or enabling independent	'sometimes like when I don't need her, sometimes I can do it	

	working	on my own, and she lets me get on'	
TA supports me even when I could manage independently	Discussing things that they feel that they could manage without TA support, but still tend to receive it	[Might you be able to do any of that by yourself do you think?] 'Yeah going up the stairs I think I could, but there's just the danger of me falling down, which might happen, but, doubt it'	
Lack of male TAs	Mentioning most TAs are female	'Yeah you normally don't get male TAs'	
Generally likes or dislikes going to school	Opinions on coming to school – positive or negative	'yeah so I like this school'	
Like going to school to see friends	Friends are given as the main reason for liking school	[What's your favourite thing about school?] 'My friends'	
Favourite subjects at school	Discussing which subjects are their favourites or that they enjoy	'sport and maths, and my favourite work is maths'	
Likes going to school because of opportunity to learn or work towards a good job	One of main reasons given for liking school or needing to come to school being learning or career-based	'Yeah, a lot of people, that's how you do it, cuz erm or you're gonna be like a poor person. My brother knows someone who doesn't go to school and .. cuz he doesn't	

		like it, and he doesn't know anything'	
My TA is already ideal	Descriptions of current TA as ideal or being unable to think of ways in which he/she might become more ideal	'Good, she's perfect'	
My TA is too pushy	Considers TA to be too pushy	'Miss X forced me to play it, even though I didn't want to'	
TA feels sad or bored	Thinking about TA feeling negative emotions	'Erm… sad. I think'	
TA support stops at break times	TA does not support at break times	'The teachers are having their break, including Miss X, so basically… some play times it's just like, I'm going to be honest, I just wish that I could go and pay with the golden time stuff, cuz at some lunchtimes I'm just sat around, aimlessly'	
TA can be mean	Pupils feeling that their TA is being mean / unkind	'she can sometimes be a bit mean towards me'	
TA makes me feel unhappy	Pupils describing the TA causing them to feel unhappy	'Once she's sat next to me again, I'm just like, not happy'	Feelings of unhappiness related to TA, not mentions of feeling unhappy generally in school

TA seems angry when I make a mistake (current TA or a previous TA)	Pupils describing TA becoming angry or seeming to become angry when the pupil makes a mistake or is struggling	'if Amy makes a mistake, she like says something nice, but when I make a mistake, she pulls this face and like says 'no no no..'	
TA treats other pupils more favourably	Describing the feeling that their TA treats other pupils more favourably in comparison	'ever since a girl called Amy came into this school, it seems that Miss X spends a little bit more time with her, than me… and it seems like she favours her a bit'	
TA is trying to change my personality	Pupils feeling that the TA says and does things to try to change the way that they are/how they behave	Sometimes I think that saying "fine, I'm fine" is enough. That's just me though. I feel like she's trying to change my personality'	
Anxiety / worries / stress about school or work	Pupils' anxieties, worries and stressors within school, sometimes as reasons why they don't like coming to school	'I'm gonna be honest, sometimes I'm a bit worried, cuz sometimes like … I'm on a walker, and sometimes teachers rush me'	
Bullying	Any mention of bullying incidents	'once I was like there was someone mean and like kept on picking at me, its fine now, all sorted out,	

		and it didn't seem like they were doing anything. Cuz like it kept on, then he just got bored of me'	
Negative experiences at a previous school	Talking about experiences at a previous school that were negative	'I needed one-to-one cuz I had a really bad school, they was like, they didn't teach me anything'	
Awareness of own strengths	Pupils talking about their strengths and areas of skills	'I'm very good at maths, I do the best at maths'	
Describing own SEN and difficulties	Descriptions of their understanding of their own SEN, what they mean	'I am autistic'	
How am I getting on at school?	Talking about how they are getting on generally in school at the current time	'I'm alright in school, I just, nothing too hard, nothing too easy'	Current time, not in the past
How I learn best	Discussing learning styles / preferences	'I'm more of a person which you don't listen and learn you do it and learn. I learn better like that. That's something I've worked out'	
I need help / TA support in school	Acknowledging that they need help or TA support in school, perhaps giving a reason for why	'Oh I need help. Yeah'	

Peers' views of TA	Positive, negative and neutral thoughts of peers towards TA	'They think they're nice but they get jealous because they think I get more help'	
TA encourages me to try	Describing the TA as encouraging or inspiring	'She explains it to me and she encourages me'	
TA explains things to me	TA explains things in school	'Then if you don't get that, then she will come over and they'll do it like help you a bit. Try and make it more clear and that's mainly their job'	
TA is friendly	Describing TA as friendly or similar	'Sweet. Friendly'	
TA is fun / funny	Describing TA as fun / funny	'They're both funny, yeah'	
TA is happy	Describing TA as happy or similar	'Helpful. Jolly'	
TA is helpful	Describing TA as helpful and possibly explaining why or how	'Oh they just help me erm give me tips, stuff like that'	
TA is kind	Describing TA as kind or similar	'oh she always is kind'	
TA makes me feel happy	Describing TA making them happy	'Happy! She's there, she's the only one that makes me happy'	
TA helps me to feel I belong	Discussing impact of TA for sense of belonging	'They make me feel like I'm meant to be here	

Sad about leaving a TA	Talking about moving on and not being supported by this TA anymore – causing them to feel sad	'It's gonna be really hard leaving her'	
Separation from peers and teachers	Talking about not seeing so much of teachers and/or peers (maybe suggesting this is because of TA support)	'I don't always work inside the classroom, I work in my area, I have my own desk, I don't always work inside the classroom'	
Small group work with TA	Talking about small group work that pupils engage in with TA and other peers	'when I was doing maths today, I was stuck and Miss had to take out me, and Millie and Jake, cuz Millie had been up all night doing her homework'	
TA prioritises me or has responsibility for me	Talking about TA as the main person who would look after them or be responsible for them, meaning that the TA would prioritise them over peers	'Their job is to support me'	
How well does TA know me?	How well they feel that the TA knows them	'TA. They know me much better'	Current TA not a previous TA
TA provides academic support	Any descriptions of help with learning, engagement with tasks, progress or	'I think by helping with my thinking, sometimes my head feels really clogged	

	similar	up with ideas'	
TA provides emotional support	Any descriptions of supporting with emotional regulation or wellbeing	'I have this anxiety, erm.. I don't know why I have it, but, it's … I don't like being left and I get very anxious. So if I did that, if I didn't have my TAs I'd be very anxious'	
TA helps to manage my own and/or peers' behaviour	Discussions of TA managing behaviour	'Maybe if I get angry and accidentally swear, she might say something bad'	
TA provides social support	Descriptions of TA helping with social skills, friendships, break time socialising or similar	'Yeah to be kind. To make friends'	
TA provides support for physical needs	Descriptions of TA supporting with physical needs or self-help routines or similar	'Physio, I need them to get me out and stuff like that'	
TA support at secondary school	Any discussions about whether or not they will have a TA at secondary school and what they think this would be like	'Yeah Mum said that I will have three other ones, cuz it's a massive school'	
TA thinks negative things about me	Perceiving that the TA does not think positively about them	'I think she thinks … well she sometimes she's just like 'oh he's so rude' and	

		sometimes I say that I can't do that and she's like 'that's so rude'	
TA thinks positively about me	Perceiving that the TA thinks positively about them	'They think that I'm getting on okay. Say I was Mrs X, and I was doing the work, she's be thinking 'she's doing really well she can do the rest of it by herself' or something'	
My teacher thinks positively about my TA	Descriptions of perceived positive thoughts and opinions of teachers towards TAs	'I think they like them, they like having their help and stuff'	Their own class teacher rather than other adults
No differences between teacher and TA or I'm unsure	Saying that there are not differences between teacher and TA or being unsure of whether there are differences and what these might be	'I don't think that my teacher or Miss Y make it more fun. I'm not sure'	
Preferentially asking TA for help	Talking about being more likely to ask TA for help than teacher	'Jane would already be by me, so I'd ask her'	
Differences between teacher and TA	Differences between teacher and TA for example in terms of skills, impact, role…	'Yeah, erm… I think they're different because one of them knows what they're	Not comparing different TAs

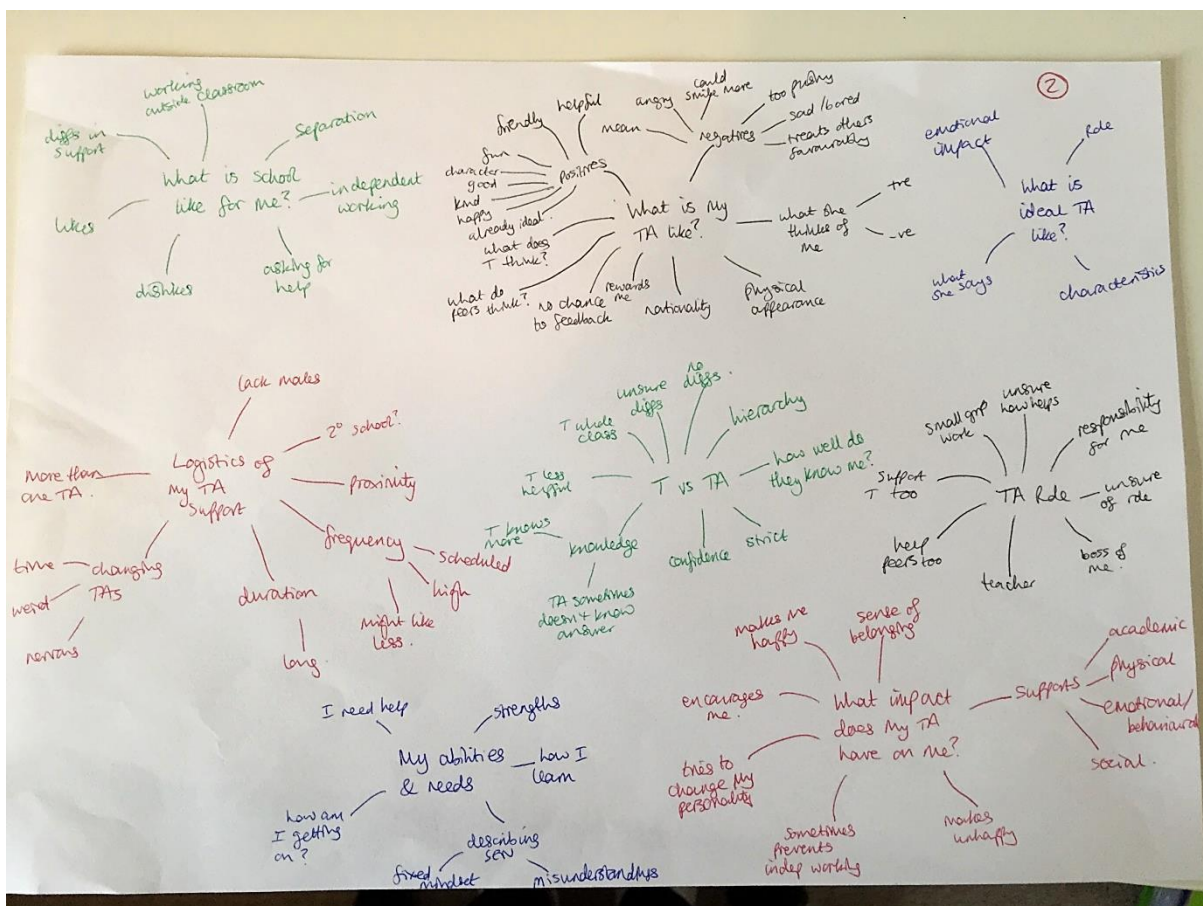|		doing, like teacher knows what they're doing, feels confident about what we're learning. Some of the people who help, are different, cuz they, sometimes they don't know what they're doing'	
Understanding of the differences in support between pupils	Talking about some pupils receiving/needing more help and different pupils doing different work and sometimes giving their opinion on this arrangement	'Sometimes we do different work, cuz like, if we have different spellings then we go to a different room'	
TA helps teacher and other pupils as well as me	Talking about the TA having a wider role outside of just working one-to-one with particular pupils	'To help children and the adults, the teachers and stuff'	
Working outside of the classroom	Talking about work done outside of the classroom	'when I was doing maths today, I was stuck and Miss had to take out me, and Millie and Jake'	Not whole class working outside, just this pupil or small group

Appendix J – Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Example Code	Example Extract
What is school like for me?	Likes and dislikes	Like going to school to see friends	'Doing things with my friends'
	My abilities and needs	Awareness of strengths	'I'm very good at maths, I do the best at maths'
	Differences in support	Some people have more help than others	'Yes. Like some need more help. Normally there is someone that will just walk around the class and you can be like 'I need help' and they will come over and help you out'
	Working outside the classroom	Positives of working outside of the classroom	'I mean it's good. Yeah, cuz it means I can do more stuff on my own in class'
Logistics of my TA support	Proximity	Happy about TA being close	'Yeah. We look happy sat next to each other'
	Frequency	I spend lots of time with my TA	'I think all day, not the whole day, but the whole school day'
	Duration	Have worked with TA for a long time	'I've been working with her since about three years, or when I was year three'
	TA role	Unable to explain how the TA helps	[How do they help you to learn?] 'I don't know'
	Thinking about	I will have TA support	'Yeah Mum said that I

	secondary school	in secondary school	will have three other ones, cuz it's a massive school'
	Independent working	TA leaves me to work independently when I can manage	'sometimes like when I don't need her, sometimes I can do it on my own, and she lets me get on'
What is my TA like?	Positives	TA encourages me to try	'She explains it to me and she encourages me'
	Negatives	TA seems angry if I make a mistake	'If Amy makes a mistake, she like says something nice, but when I make a mistake, she pulls this face and like says 'no no no...'
	What TA thinks of me	TA likes me	'Sometimes when I'm like having a laugh, she's like "he's nice"'
	What others think of TA	Peers saying negative things about TA	'Because other children say mean things about them'
Teacher versus TA comparisons	How well they know me	TA knows me better than my teacher does	'TA. They know me much better'
	Differences in skills and impact	Sometimes TA doesn't know the answer	'Say if I was stuck on such a hard question that even Miss X didn't know the answer'
	Role	Preferentially ask TA	'Jane would already be

			for help	by me, so I'd ask her'
	No differences / I'm unsure	No differences between teacher and TA	[Are there any differences between these TAs and your teacher?] 'No'
What is my ideal TA like?	Characteristics	Ideal TA characteristics	'She would encourage me to work hard'
	The things she says	What ideal TA might say	'Keep going'
	Emotional impact	Emotional impact of ideal TA	'Just listen to them. What are their worries, listen to them'
	Role	Ideal TA as a counsellor	'She's like a counsellor who helps'
What impact does my TA have for me?	Academic	How TA helps me to learn	'Sometimes she tells me to carry on, try to extend my sentences'
	Social	TA support at break times	'We have competitions, where we all team up and play scrabble'
	Emotional and behavioural	TA provides emotional support	'Happy! She's there, she's the only one that makes me happy'
	Physical	TA support for physical needs	'she lets me take my hearing aids out'

Appendix K – Thematic Map Development

Diagram 3

③

- independent working
- asking for help
- What is School like for me? — separation
- differences in support
- likes + dislikes
- characteristics — rewards — positives
- what is my TA like?
- physical appearance, gender & nationality
- no chance to feedback
- what others think of TA — peers, Teacher
- what one thinks of me
- characteristics — negatives — actions
- emotional impact
- what is my ideal TA like?
- role
- what one says
- characteristics

- secondary school thinking
- More than one TA
- Logistics of My TA support — proximity
- frequency
- duration
- changes — long

- no differences / unsure
- Teacher vs TA — how well they know me
- role
- differences in skills and impact
- knowledge, confidence
- strict
- helpfulness
- teaching
- focus on me
- responsibility
- small groups & one to one
- TA Role — uncertainty
- also supports others
- Teacher — peers

- My abilities & needs — strengths
- how I'm getting on
- SEN

- emotional / behavioural — what impact does my TA have on me? — academic
- physical
- social

Diagram 4

④

- differences in support
- What is School like for me?
- working outside the classroom
- what do others think of TA?
- What is my TA like? — positives, negatives
- emotional impact
- what does TA think of me?
- What is my Ideal TA like? — role
- things she says
- characteristics
- My abilities & needs
- likes & dislikes

- secondary school thinking
- independent working
- Logistics of My TA support — proximity, frequency
- TA role
- Duration

- no differences / unsure
- Teacher vs TA — how well they know me
- role
- differences in skills + impact

- emotional / behavioural
- what impact does My TA have on me? — social, academic
- physical

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