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School of Psychology

Amplifying voices, redefining roles: exploring the experiences and aspirations of Teaching Assistants in English mainstream schools

by

Fernanda Dias da Silva

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4631-1790

Thesis for the Degree of Doctorate in Educational Psychology

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Abstract

Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences

School of Psychology

Doctor of Philosophy

**Amplifying voices, redefining roles: exploring the experiences and aspirations of
Teaching Assistants in English mainstream schools**

by

Fernanda Dias da Silva

Teaching Assistants (TAs) comprise nearly a third of the school workforce in England and play a crucial role in supporting student learning, inclusion, and well-being. Despite their growing responsibilities, TAs often face professional ambiguity, limited recognition, and low pay, with systemic issues that remain largely unaddressed. This thesis seeks to deepen the understanding of the evolving TA role through two qualitative enquiries, each with distinct yet complementary aims. The first study, a systematic literature review, thematically synthesises findings from the past decade to identify persistent challenges and changes in the TA role, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. By analysing patterns across qualitative studies, the review highlights the need for clearer definitions, stronger support systems, and more inclusive policies for TAs. Building on this, the second study adopts a collaborative and social constructionist approach, working directly with TAs to co-construct knowledge about their experiences, challenges, and hopes for their profession. Through focus groups, TAs identified key priorities for change and assessed the impact that embedding these changes would have on them, teachers, and students. Together, these studies aim to centre TA voices, which are often absent in research and policy, to inform ongoing national dialogue, particularly in light of the recent reinstatement of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB). This thesis aims to provide timely, TA-centred insights for school leaders, external professionals, and policymakers committed to a more equitable and sustainable future for TAs in schools.

Keywords: “teaching assistant”, “school support staff”, “school workforce”, “education policy”.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Fernanda Dias da Silva

Title of thesis: Amplifying voices, redefining roles: exploring the experiences and aspirations of teaching assistants in English mainstream schools

I 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.

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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Definitions and Abbreviations

BERJ	British Educational Research Journal
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
DfE	Department for Education
DISS.....	Deployment and Impact of Support Staff
EP(s).....	Educational Psychologist(s)
LA.....	Local Authority
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analysis
SENCo(s)	Special Educational Needs Coordinator(s)
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SLR	Systematic Literature Review
SLT	Senior leadership Team
SSSNB.....	School Support Staff Negotiating Body
TA(s).....	Teaching Assistant(s)
UK	United Kingdom

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Aims and rationale of the thesis

My aim within this thesis was to explore the evolving role of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in mainstream schools in England, with particular attention to their professional experiences, perceived challenges, and ideas for meaningful improvement. TAs constitute approximately 30% of the school workforce. Their responsibilities have expanded far beyond their original administrative and classroom support to include instructional, pastoral, behaviour, and targeted support (Department for Education, 2023; Hodgen et al., 2022; Clarke & Visser, 2019). The contextual background to this thesis is that TAs, in England, continue to report low pay, lack of recognition and training, as well as role ambiguity (Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Montacute, 2023b; Ofsted, 2022). These challenges have been further exacerbated by post-pandemic pressures on school staff and ongoing recruitment and retention difficulties (Education Support, 2021; Hall & Webster, 2023a). Moreover, systemic and financial constraints have led to inconsistent practices, contributing to feelings of marginalisation among TAs. Currently, there are some acute concerns about the sustainability of the TA workforce given these conditions (Merrick, 2024). Furthermore, not addressing the current state of TA deployment may impact not only TA retention but also the overall functioning of schools and the quality of support for students (Geeson & Clarke, 2023; Moss et al., 2021b). Considering this, it is crucial to ensure that TAs' voices and insights are incorporated into future school development and policy decisions (Radford et al., 2015b; Vaughn & Jacques, 2020). This thesis contributes to this by presenting two distinct yet complementary research enquiries: a systematic literature review (Chapter 2) and an empirical collaborative study (Chapter 3), centring TAs' voices to examine how their role has developed over time and how it can be strengthened.

The systematic literature review (Chapter 2) synthesises qualitative research from the last decade exploring TAs' experiences in England. The review addresses persistent issues reported across studies, including the lack of formal training, role clarity, and recognition (Webster, 2024; Hodgen et al., 2022; Hall & Webster, 2023a; 2023b), while also identifying how TAs have adapted and responded to shifting expectations in different contexts, such as during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Moss et al., 2021b; Maitland & Glazzard, 2022). This review contributes to ongoing national conversations with the reinstatement of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB; Department for Education, 2024a), which offers a renewed opportunity to influence new policy in relation to TAs' pay conditions and professional development. The synthesis provides an evidence-informed foundation of TA experiences that can inform this dialogue, drawing directly from the voices of TAs. Finally, the themes identified in Chapter 2 informed the design and focus of the empirical research in Chapter 3.

Building on the gaps and implications identified in the literature review, the empirical study (Chapter 3) takes a collaborative approach, using a collaborative approach to create a safe space for TAs to reflect critically and construct knowledge together about the current state and future of their role (Reason & Bradbury, 2008; McIntyre, 2008). I engaged with eight mainstream TAs across two focus group meetings to explore their current experiences, priorities, and ideas for improvement. During the meetings, the initial themes identified in Chapter 2 were shared and evolved through collaborative discussions with TAs into more nuanced insights regarding motivation, values, and systemic changes, demonstrating how the findings from Chapter 2 were not only reinforced but also deepened and extended through lived experience and collective meaning-making. My approach was particularly important given the historic lack of direct involvement of TAs in informing and shaping research and policy that affects them (Barentsen & Watt, 2014). Rather than imposing pre-determined solutions or using pre-established questionnaires, my research aims to meaningfully listen and amplify TA voices to co-produce insights underscored by their group identity, reality, and knowledge (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). My overarching aspiration is that the co-constructed implications in this study will support current discussions about the future of these valuable professionals.

Taken together, the two studies offer a reflective and a relational account of the TA role, examining how it has been represented in existing research and co-constructed in practice. This thesis does not aim to generalise findings to all settings or TAs, but instead to honour the perspectives of those who participated, to offer meaningful insights for practice. This body of work also seeks to contribute to the broader policy debate at a time when the sustainability of the TA workforce is under increasing strain (Ofsted, 2022; Montacute, 2023a; Education Support, 2021, 2024). Ultimately, my thesis project aims to provide a timely and grounded contribution to improving the working lives of TAs and to encourage educational psychologists, school leaders, and policymakers to reflect on their role in building a more equitable and inclusive school system for all staff and students.

1.2 Ontology and epistemology

Throughout both the literature review and empirical study, I adopted a qualitative methodology, grounded in a relativist ontology. Relativists interpret reality as multiple, constructed, and shaped by individual and collective interpretations of the world (Crotty, 1998; Burr, 2015; Robson & McCartan, 2016). From this perspective, what is considered “real” is context-dependent and socially and culturally mediated, shaped by the language, values, and power structures embedded within particular communities and historical moments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By adopting a relativistic lens, I was able to approach the data from both studies not in a search for

singular truths about the TA role, but as an opportunity to highlight the potential plurality of meanings and realities that TAs construct about their work, shaped by their interactions, relationships, and the wider educational and social systems they navigate.

Given the nature and purpose of the respective studies, along with their distinct research questions, different epistemological positions were adopted for each one. In the systematic literature review, I approached the research from a social constructivist epistemology, which emphasises that reality and knowledge are individually constructed through experiences and engagement with the world around them (Schwandt, 2003; Galbin, 2014). Here, I was not engaging directly with participants – in this case, TAs – but rather constructing meaning through synthesising data from previous qualitative studies. These studies involved varied forms of meaning-making between researchers and participating TAs. My interpretations, therefore, operated at a secondary level from making sense of how others had developed and been shared across different times, contexts, and methods (Schwandt, 2003). The social constructivist stance enabled me to examine how the meanings surrounding the TA role have evolved over the past decade, while engaging with the voices of TAs through the analysis of secondary data across multiple studies.

The empirical study drew more on a social constructionist epistemology, which views reality and knowledge as co-constructed through social interaction, discourse, and power relations within specific cultural and historical contexts (Gergen, 1991; Burr, 2015). As such, the focus group process provided a dialogical space where meaning could be actively constructed in the moment through conversations between the participant TAs themselves and between the TAs and me as a facilitator. Furthermore, social constructionism recognises language not only as a vehicle for expressing thoughts, but also as a constitutive force that shapes knowledge and how group identities are formed, and whose voices are privileged (Shotter, 1993; Sampson, 1989). This profoundly influenced how I approached my data collection and analysis in this study. As a researcher, I acknowledged my position of power in relation to others, recognising how this could influence the co-creation of certain narratives and themes as I posed questions during discussions. This prompted me to approach this research using a collaborative approach based on principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), emphasising the shared ownership element of the research process, the respect for and value of local and experiential knowledge, and the potential for research to lead to social change (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

These different but complementary epistemological positions shaped the structure and tone of the studies. In the literature review, I assumed a more distanced and interpretive role, critically examining and synthesising patterns across the data to better understand the TA role and its persistent challenges across the years. Meanwhile, in the empirical study, my role became more

collaborative and facilitative, working alongside TAs to explore and represent their meanings, language, and lived experiences whilst engaging more relationally and politically with the knowledge that was being formed. This prompted me to be more reflexive, considering how my own assumptions, background, and professional identity may have influenced the research process, from what I chose to highlight in the findings to how I interpreted the emotions present during the group interactions. In both studies, I sought to legitimise and amplify the voices of TA, often marginalised in education policy and academic research. Together, the two epistemological approaches acknowledged both the individual sense-making present in existing literature and the collective, co-created understandings that emerged through shared dialogue with participants. *This* dual approach reflects the complexity of researching under-represented voices in education and underscores the value of epistemological flexibility and reflexivity in educational and psychological research (Raskin, 2002; Andrews, 2012).

1.3 Reflexivity and axiology

Reflexivity and axiology are integral to qualitative research and central to my approach throughout this thesis. Reflexivity refers to the process of critically reflecting on one's own assumptions, positionality, and influence on the research process (Finlay, 2002), whilst axiology relates to the values a researcher brings to their work and how they shape the research process, including its design, implementation, and interpretations (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). My personal and professional background informed my research journey. I was born and trained in Brazil, where I worked as a school psychologist supporting children with additional needs. In that context, I often collaborated closely with TAs, although the role and structure of the education system differed from what I encountered after moving to the UK. Upon relocating, I was not immediately able to practise as a psychologist and instead began working as a TA. Through this experience, across nursery, primary, secondary, and special education settings, I learned about the English education system and developed deep, personal insights into the realities of the TA role. It was during this time that I developed a profound respect for the work of TAs and a growing awareness of how often the role is overlooked and underappreciated. I witnessed how TAs support not only pupils, but also teachers and families, often without adequate recognition or resources. These experiences were instrumental in shaping the focus of my doctoral research. When I applied for the Doctorate in Educational Psychology, I knew I wanted to shine a light on the experiences, contributions, and challenges faced by TAs.

Throughout this thesis project, I have been ever mindful of how my own passion and values could influence the research process. My identification with the TA role meant that I needed to remain aware of the risk of inadvertently privileging my own narrative over those of my participants.

As such, I continuously questioned how my prior experiences might affect the ways I interpreted data, facilitated conversations, and chose which voices to amplify. While my insider perspective enabled me to build trust with the participating TAs and understand many of the issues they raised, I also recognised the importance of creating a safe, open space where they could express views that might differ from mine. I did not impose my interpretations during the focus group discussions; instead, I engaged as an active listener and reflexive facilitator, using prompts to clarify and explore meaning without steering the conversation toward predetermined assumptions.

This reflexivity extended to the data analysis and reporting, particularly in the selection and presentation of quotes. I was careful to include a range of views and tones to reflect the diversity of perspectives shared and not just those that aligned most closely with my own. I also acknowledged that my experience, while relevant, was shaped by specific contexts and may not be representative of all TAs. Therefore, I positioned myself as both an insider and an outsider, an advocate, but also a researcher committed to integrity, accuracy, and respect for participants' own words and meanings. Ultimately, I see this research as a contribution to a broader movement for equity and recognition within education. My axiological stance is grounded in values of inclusion, respect, and social justice, particularly in relation to marginalised educational voices. Through this study, I aimed not to speak for TAs, but to offer a space in which their voices could be heard, centred, and validated, hoping that this may help inform future practices across schools and systems.

1.3.1 Dissemination plan

I have written both research papers in this thesis with the aim of submitting them for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, to ensure that the insights generated through this work can be shared with a broader audience of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. In particular, I am preparing both the literature review and empirical study for submission to the *British Educational Research Journal* (BERJ). This journal is well-regarded for its focus on policy-relevant issues in education across the UK. The renewed governmental interest in school support staff, marked by the recent reinstatement of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB), makes this a timely moment to contribute evidence-informed ideas derived directly from the voices and experiences of TAs. I am also committed to sharing these findings with those directly impacted by them. The findings of the empirical study have already been presented to a group of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCoS) during a local SENCo forum, where the response highlighted the relevance and urgency of the issues raised. Building on this, I will present the research and its implications to my Educational Psychology Service (EPS) within the next school term. This will be an opportunity to discuss how EPs can advocate for TAs within schools and support more inclusive practice systems. In the longer term, I aim to develop accessible summaries of key findings and recommendations for

distribution to schools, leadership teams, and local authorities, to encourage meaningful, systemic reflection on how TAs are supported, recognised, and integrated into educational decision-making. My supervisor, Rob Webster, has set up an opportunity for the findings to be summarised on a very popular blog for TAs, making them accessible to those who they will most impact.

1.3.2 *Postscript*

It's hard to put into words what this journey has meant to me. My passion for educational psychology began all the way back in 2012, during the early days of my psychology degree in Brazil. From the very beginning, I knew I wanted to be part of something bigger - something that would help children and young people access the education they deserve, surrounded by professionals who see and value them for who they are. That passion has never left me; it has only grown.

Moving to a different country was one of the most life-changing decisions I have ever made. I had to learn to work within an education system that was entirely unfamiliar to me and speak a language that was not my own. It was humbling, stretching, and full of challenges. But then I found myself working as a TA, and everything clicked. I felt like I belonged, like I was finally part of something meaningful again. I saw the incredible impact TAs had on children, families, and teachers, and I also saw how invisible and undervalued that impact often was. When I applied for the Doctorate in Educational Psychology, I made a promise to myself, and to all the brilliant, kind, and resilient TAs I had worked with, that I would advocate for them. I carried that promise with me through every step of this thesis.

Then, just as I was finding my rhythm as a trainee EP and researcher, life flipped upside down and I became a mum. And with that, something awakened in me. A deep, fierce force I had never felt before. Suddenly, it was not just about the children I worked with, it was also about the child I now held in my arms. I wanted to help shape an education system that would be ready for her, that would see her, support her, and honour the people who care for and educate her. That became my fuel, especially on the nights when I was sleep-deprived, mentally stretched, and wondering how I would ever manage it all. Balancing motherhood, the doctorate, research, and placement was far from easy. But I did it, and I'm proud. Proud not only for myself, but for my daughter, who I hope one day will look back and know that her mum did not give up. That even in a world that was not always built with neurodiverse people like me in mind, who see and process the world differently, I kept going and created something I hope will matter.

This journey taught me that I am more resilient than I imagined, that I can connect deeply and authentically across language and cultural boundaries, and that I can write and research in a second language. It taught me that academic work does not have to be cold or distant. It can be human, it can make people feel seen, and it can drive real change. Research does not have to live in

journals forgotten in dusty drawers; it can live in the hearts and minds of those it was written for. My hope is that readers come away feeling empowered, that they see what is possible when we listen to each other, and that they believe they can make a difference. I hope TAs who read this feel heard, respected, and valued, and I hope they see how much they matter. TAs, in my view, are the everyday heroes who show up, day after day, to support our children — your children, my child. They are part of shaping the next generation of decision-makers, creators, and leaders. So, I hope this thesis did them justice and that this is only the beginning.

Chapter 2 The Evolving Role of Teaching Assistants: Perspectives on Change and Persistent Challenges – A Literature Review

2.1 Abstract

Teaching Assistants (TAs) play a vital role in supporting teaching and inclusion in mainstream schools. Over the past decade, the TA role has expanded significantly, accompanied by increased responsibilities, yet continues to be shaped by inconsistent expectations, limited professional development opportunities, and unclear policy guidance (Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Department for Education, 2024b). This literature review systematically examined 15 qualitative studies published between 2014 and 2023 that explore the perceptions and experiences of TAs working in mainstream schools in England about their roles. Thematic synthesis was used to analyse the data, with particular attention given to participants' voices to better understand how they experience, interpret, and navigate their professional identities. Four key themes were identified: role identity, preparedness, feeling valued, and relationships. Across studies, TAs were described as adaptable, emotionally attuned, and skilful when building relationships. However, the findings also highlight persistent challenges, including unclear role boundaries, exclusion from decision-making, and a lack of training and recognition. Although some studies noted short-term improvements during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as greater collaboration and visibility of the TA role, these gains were often lost post-pandemic (Moss et al., 2022). The review concludes with implications for policymakers, Educational Psychologists, and school leaders, calling for a more transparent national framework, improved access to training and overall support, and greater inclusion of TAs' voices in school systems. By amplifying the lived experiences of TAs over the past decade, this review offers critical insights and implications to support more equitable, sustainable, and inclusive educational practices, with a focus on improving the professional contributions and experiences of TAs.

2.2 Introduction

The role of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in England has undergone considerable changes over the past decade (Department for Education, 2023; Sharples et al., 2016). Historically, TAs were primarily employed as classroom aides, assisting teachers with administrative and non-teaching tasks (Aylen, 2007; O'Neill, 2008). Gradually, the TA role has evolved to include teaching whole classrooms and small groups of students, delivering interventions, managing behaviour, and providing pastoral care (Clarke & Visser, 2019; Department for Education, 2024b; Yildirim, 2024). TAs have also become increasingly responsible for supporting and including students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in mainstream schools (Porrino et al., 2014; Webster & Boer, 2019). Changes to the TA role were reflected in alternative job titles, such as 'Individual Needs Assistants' or '1:1 TAs',

who provide targeted support for students with additional needs, and 'Higher-Level Teaching Assistants', who are more involved with teaching and can supervise other TAs (Geeson, 2022; Hancock et al, 2010)

Despite their growing presence in schools over the years, the large-scale, mixed methods Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project, conducted between 2004 and 2009 found that students who received the most support from TAs often made less academic progress compared with students who received less support from TAs (Blatchford et al., 2009; Blatchford & Webster, 2009), even when accounting for factors connected with receiving support in the first place (e.g. being on the SEND register). The impact was greatest for students with the most complex SEND who typically receive the highest level of TA intervention. This study raised critical concerns about the decisions school leaders and teachers make regarding the deployment of TAs. Subsequently, several changes were proposed to improve TA support and deployment (Inglis, 2019; Sharples et al, 2016). There was an emphasis on training and guidance to increase effectiveness and consistency in the delivery of targeted and evidence-based interventions, and to avoid TAs simply providing improvised and ad-hoc support for students (Hodgen et al., 2022; Sharples et al., 2016; Webster et al., 2013). Additionally, schools were encouraged to integrate TAs in planning and decision-making processes, as well as promote partnership and collaboration between teachers and TAs (Radford et al., 2015a; 2015b; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; McDermott, 2017).

Since the DISS project, many qualitative studies have continued to examine how TAs are deployed. These studies have focused on both the TA role in improving academic and broader outcomes for pupils and their professional identity, with particular emphasis on their lived experiences in supporting pupils in various contexts (Houssart, 2012; Roffey-Barentsen, 2014; Vardy et al., 2024). Such studies have consistently emphasised a lack of clarity in the TA role, insufficient training, and a tendency for TAs to be used as unqualified substitutes for teachers, rather than as structured support within the classroom (Hodgkins et al, 2024; Webster, 2024). Despite the consistency of these findings, schools may find it challenging to implement the changes to practice provided in extensive evidence-based guidance (e.g., Sharples et al., 2016; Webster et al., 2021). Budget constraints and staffing pressures have limited the extent to which schools can provide training and supervision for TAs, and research suggests that their role continues to lack a clear definition (Montacute, 2023b; Ofsted, 2022; Webster & Blatchford, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also reshaped the TA role, introducing both formal and informal responsibilities that have persisted beyond the pandemic (Hall & Webster, 2022). During the periods when school were closed to the majority of students, TAs were responsible for delivering resources and learning activities to children with SEND and the children of key-workers, planning and delivering

remote lessons to students, and offering emotional support to children and families struggling with the disruptions of lockdown (Maitland & Glazzard, 2022; Moss et al, 2022). However, when schools reopened, some TAs were expected to continue undertaking these additional duties with little guidance or training, now facing higher pressure to address and close the learning gaps and emotional difficulties exacerbated by the pandemic (Hall & Webster, 2023b; Moss et al., 2022). Since then, many schools have been experiencing increasing difficulties with employment and retention among TAs, with some deciding to leave the profession in search of better pay, as well as improved job quality and progression (Alston, 2023; Hall & Webster, 2023b).

In light of the current contextual challenges associated with the TA role, the need for a clearer understanding of the scope and impact of TAs within school systems, and the importance of learning from the lived experiences of TAs themselves, this systemic literature review seeks to bridge a gap in the existing research base and provide important insights for researchers, policy makers, senior school leaders and wider staff in schools. This review focuses on bringing together qualitative studies directly involving TAs to identify similarities and differences across their methodologies and findings and present an integrated synthesis of their collective ideas. Reviewing studies across the last decade also allows for an understanding of the persistent or changing challenges to the TA role over time (Torraco, 2016). Furthermore, this research makes a timely contribution to ongoing national conversations, particularly in light of the recent reinstatement of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB), which was abolished in 2010, to address these very challenges. This literature review contributes to the field by offering evidence-informed insights drawn directly from TAs' voices over the last decade, capturing how they have perceived their role and the changes to it over time. In doing so, it provides a valuable foundation for informing future policy and practice, grounded in the lived experiences of TAs. Finally, as part of a wider body of thesis work, completed at the University of Southampton, this review sought to inform a subsequent collaborative research project with TAs (see Chapter 3).

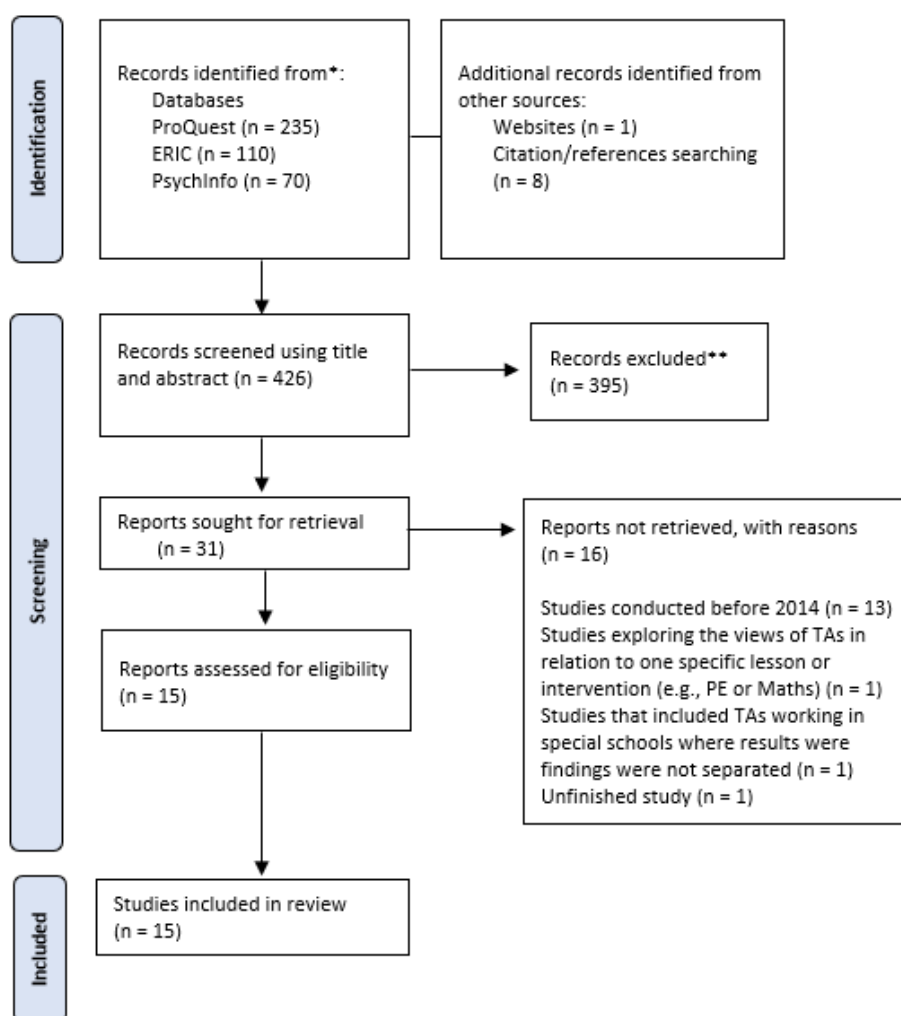
2.3 Methodology

A systematic search strategy was developed with keywords relevant to the sample, phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, and research type (Cooke et al., 2012). The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analysis (PRISMA) approach (Moher et al., 2009) was used for the screening process, as shown in Figure 1. Three electronic databases (PsycInfo, ERIC, and ProQuest) were used due to their relevance to education and Psychology. An initial scoping search was conducted using the following terms: "teaching assistant" OR "teaching assistants" OR "teacher assistant*" OR "classroom* assistant*" OR "learning support assistant*" OR

“paraprofessional*” N3 view* OR perspective* OR voice* OR opinion* OR thought* AND role OR responsibility* OR impact AND mainstream N2 setting* OR provision* OR education OR school*.

Figure 1

Systematic search strategy using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach (Moher et al., 2009).



The first database search was conducted between March and April 2023, a second search was conducted between July and August 2023, and a third search was conducted between April and May 2025. The limit for the date of publication was 2014, focusing on the past decade’s journey of teaching assistants working in mainstream schools and allowing for consideration of any changes proposed after the publication of the nationally impactful DISS study in 2011 and 2012 (Blatchford et al., 2009, 2011, 2012). A limitation to origin and design was also applied, including only studies from England, which used a qualitative design. Overall, the search yielded 424 studies, including records identified from websites, citations, and references. After screening for titles and abstracts, 395 studies were removed, using the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1). The remaining 29 studies

were assessed for their eligibility after a full-text examination. Thirteen studies were removed, and 15 studies were included in this review. A systematic literature review protocol was pre-registered on the Open Science Framework (OSF; da Silva, 2023). To further ensure rigour, a second researcher independently conducted the database searches and contributed to the risk of bias assessment, supporting the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings.

Table 1*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom and 1:1 Teaching Assistants, Learning Support Assistants • Mainstream primary and secondary school • Teaching assistants' attitudes/values/beliefs on their role and impact • Unpublished thesis and journal articles published in or after 2014 • Studies reported and published in English • Studies conducted in England • Qualitative studies, mixed studies containing qualitative data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newly qualified teachers, trainee teachers, bilingual support assistants, emotional literacy support assistants, after-school club assistants • Studies conducted in special educational settings, alternative provisions, Pupil Referral Units, nurseries, further education (16-18 years) and higher education (18+ years) settings • Studies focusing on the views of other educational staff or students on the TA role and impact • Studies exploring TAs' views on delivering specific interventions or subjects (e.g., Maths and English) • Journals/articles or thesis published before 2014 • Studies conducted in any country other than England • Studies that include England as part of a wider UK study, which include Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland • Quantitative studies

2.3.1 Quality assurance

The 15 included studies were quality-assessed using the Manchester Framework for qualitative studies (Bond et al., 2013), as depicted in Appendix A. The studies could receive a maximum score of 14 points and were sorted into three main groups based on their ratings: low (0-4, n = 0), medium (5-9, n = 5), and high (10-14, n = 10). The characteristics and scores for each study are presented in Table 2. Although quality scores provided useful insights into the studies' methodological rigour, none of the included studies were considered to be of low quality. The robustness of the research design was a key factor considered during the appraisal process, but inclusion decisions were also guided by the richness and relevance of the findings in relation to the review's aims. As a result of these considerations, no studies were excluded at this stage.

Table 2*Characteristics of reviewed studies*

Study number	Author and date	Country	Site setting for data collection	Sampling approach	Participant details	Data collection methods	Analysis approach ¹	Quality Assurance rating
1	Conboy (2021)	England	Mainstream primary schools	Unspecified sampling approach	Seven TAs from different schools with at least one year of experience and working in a role to support multiple children in the classroom	Semi-structured interviews with an interview schedule asking TAs to reflect on an experience of their choice	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)	9
2	Ihenacho (2020)	England	Mainstream First School (for children aged 4 to 9 years old)	Purposeful sampling (via headteacher)	Four TAs	Semi-structured interviews	Strauss and Corbin's (1990) Ground Theory coding	14

¹ As reported by study authors.

3	Noble (2020)	England	One primary school	Purposeful sampling (via established contacts)	12 TAs or high-level TAs	Semi-structured interviews. TAs were asked to bring two experiences as an example. One where they thought that worked well, and one where preparedness could have been better. Written reflective pieces completed by the researcher after each interview.	Thematic Analysis	14
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5	Clarke & Visser (2019)	England	Mainstream primary school	Purposively and opportunistically sampled.	Sample 1 – Thirteen TAs from the same primary school. Sample 2 –Seventeen Tas * TAs were enrolled on a degree course at an English higher education institute but were all employed in different schools.	Sample 1 - Questionnaires with open and closed questions 9n = 13), focus groups (n = 11), and individual interviews (n = 4) Sample 2 - Modified iteration of the questionnaire disseminated to TAs in Sample 1.	Not specified	5
4	Maher & Vickerman (2018)	England	Mainstream secondary school	Convenience sampling (via wider research project)	Twelve SENCOs and twelve Learning Support Assistants	Surveys and individual semi-structured interviews	Systematic qualitative analysis (Bryman, 2012)	11
6	Wren (2017)	England	Mainstream primary school	Unspecified sampling approach	Eleven children with a statement of SEN and sixteen TAs from the same school	Semi-structured interviews supported by drawing activities for pupils	Categorical coding analysis	6

7	Bowles et al. (2017)	England	Two mainstream primary schools	Unspecified sampling approach	Eleven TAs from two mainstream primary schools	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	9
8	Salisbury (2016)	England	Two mainstream primary schools	Opportunistic sample	Seven TAs (four from one primary school, three from another primary school)	Semi-structured interviews and audio-recorded observations of two 15-minute break times	Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	14
9	Cockroft & Atkinson (2015)	England	One mainstream primary school	Sampling	Eight Learning Support Assistants	Focus group	Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	7
10	Marville (2015)	England	One mainstream secondary school	Unspecified sampling approach	Seven teaching assistants	Focus groups (with school staff), semi-structured interviews (with TAs/LSAs and students), classroom observations, questionnaires (only for parents)	Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	12

11	Webster & Blatchford (2015)	England	45 mainstream primary and secondary schools	Volunteer sampling	66 Teaching Assistants 40 SENCos/inclusion managers 56 Teachers 33 Parents/carers	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis	10
12	Kelly (2020)	England	Two mainstream schools in London	Sampling	Four 1:1 teaching assistants	Narrative interviews	Reflexive thematic analysis	14
13	Richardson-Frankton (2022)	England	One mainstream primary school (part of a multi-academy trust)	Sampling	Four teaching assistants	Focus groups (face-to-face and online)	Thematic analysis	14
14	Hall & Webster (2022)	England	Five primary schools	Purposive sampling (interest surveys)	Nine teaching assistants Eight teachers Five headteachers One senior leader	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic coding framework	13
15	Kimber (2023)	England	Mainstream primary school (quantity not disclosed)	Purposeful sampling (via established contacts)	Seven teaching assistants	Semi-structured interviews	Reflexive thematic analysis	12

2.3.2 Data synthesis and extraction

Thematic synthesis was used to analyse the findings of the 15 studies. This method was chosen because it enables researchers to interpret and analyse data flexibly and inductively from multiple qualitative studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008). An inductive approach enabled an immersion in the data and the identification of recurring ideas and concepts relevant to this study's research question. Thematic synthesis also aligns with the constructivist epistemology adopted by the researcher. Constructivism asserts that individuals actively construct understanding and meaning through their interpretations and interactions within their social contexts, emphasising the significance of individual perspectives and experiences in shaping reality. This aligns with the constructivist epistemology adopted by the researcher (Pretorius, 2024; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Therefore, the meaning and understanding constructed in this review derive from the researcher's proximity and active interaction with participants' perceptions.

A three-stage process for thematic synthesis was followed, and the findings of each study were coded and analysed using NVivo 12. Although the authors' interpretations from the reviewed studies were considered throughout the analysis and presented in the discussion, an emphasis was placed on centring and staying true to participants' quotations, with interpretations only included when clearly illustrated by data. This meant that the analysis and this overall review could remain focused on valuing how participants described their realities and roles in different periods. It also enabled increased advocacy and insights to come through directly from the participants by avoiding, as much as possible, any further contamination from the authors' interpretation of the data. The first stage comprised familiarisation with the data and line-by-line coding. Key concepts and initial codes were identified during this stage, resulting in 73 initial codes. In the second stage, codes were revisited, and similar codes were grouped through an iterative process of comparison and refinement, resulting in 12 descriptive themes. In stage three, descriptive themes were refined and grouped, considering their similarities and pertinence to this study's research question. This resulted in five overarching themes and ten descriptive themes, representing a cohesive concept that enables a meaningful, comprehensive, and up-to-date understanding of TAs' perceptions of their role and impact. One of the overarching themes regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the two related descriptive themes were recently incorporated into all other themes, resulting in the final four overarching themes and eight descriptive themes. The process of transitioning from Stage One to Stage Three is illustrated in Appendix B. An overview of the studies from which descriptive themes were most evident can be found in Table 3, with additional illustrative quotes provided in Appendix C

Table 3*Descriptive themes identified in each reviewed study*

Descriptive Theme:	Webster and Blatchford (2014)	Marville (2015)	Cockroft and Atkinson (2015)	Salisbury (2016)	Bowles et al. (2017)	Wren (2017)	Maher and Vickerman (2018)	Clarke and Visser (2019)	Kelly (2020)	Noble (2020)	Ihenacho (2020)	Conboy (2021)	Richardson-Frankton (2022)	Hall & Webster (2022)	Kimber (2023)
Role expectations and boundaries	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Ever-changing dynamics and responsibilities	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Navigating challenges	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Sources of TA Knowledge	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
The unnoticed contributions and impact	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Navigating hierarchies and seeking inclusion	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Connection with students	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
TA-teacher dynamic	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y

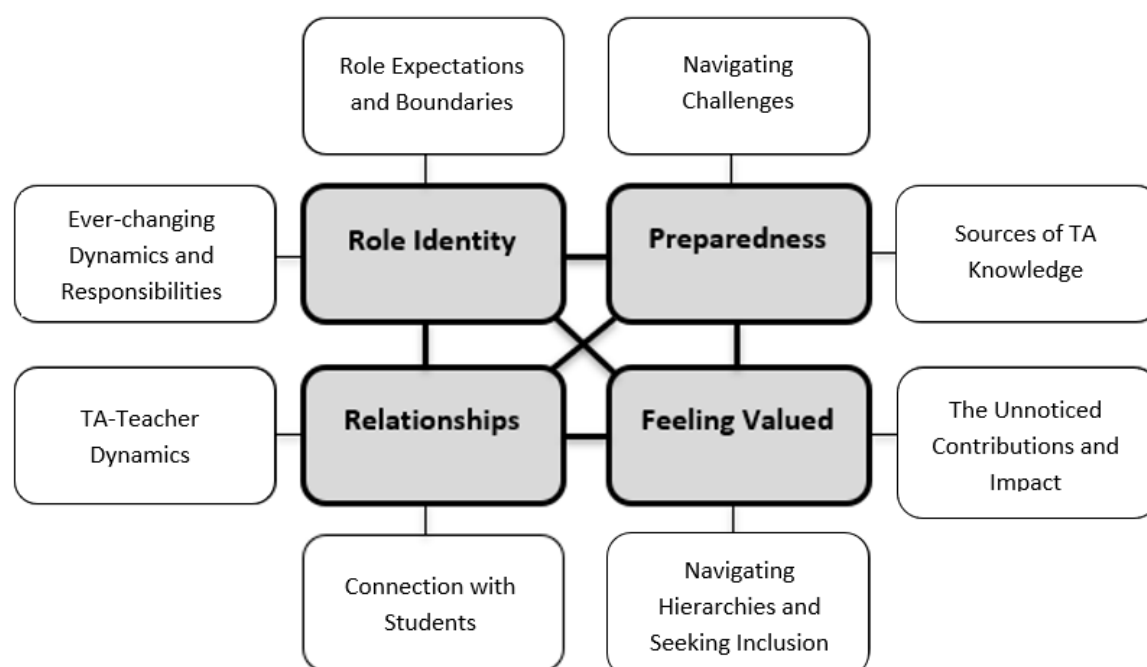
2.4 Synthesis

2.4.1 Synthesis overview

The 15 qualitative studies included in this synthesis were published between 2014 and 2023. All studies were conducted in England. Four overarching themes and eight descriptive themes were developed through the thematic synthesis process, depicted in Figure 2. The overarching themes were constructed considering their relevance to the review question: What are teaching assistants' perceptions of their role and impact in the last decade (i.e. from studies published between 2014 and 2023)?

Figure 2

Graphic representation of analytical themes (in bold) and their connections with descriptive themes.



2.5 Findings

2.5.1 Analytical theme - Role Identity

2.5.1.1 Descriptive theme 1 - Role expectations and boundaries.

Many TAs shared that they entered their role intending to secure a job with flexible hours that would fit their personal lives, particularly those who were parents (Kelly, 2020; Maher & Vickerman, 2018). On the other hand, for some TAs, this was a step towards building a career in education (Hall & Webster, 2022; Ihenacho, 2020; Maher & Vickerman, 2018). There was an overall understanding within the literature that a TA must be someone who enjoys working with children

(Ihenacho, 2020; Richardson-Frankton, 2022), has certain personal qualities, such as being patient and compassionate (Kelly, 2020; Richardson-Frankton, 2022), and knows how to deal with some level of autonomy and flexibility (Ihenacho, 2020; Marville, 2015). The expectation was that their role would be largely practical and supportive, yet well-defined and relatively straightforward, as suggested by their job descriptions (Clarke & Visser, 2019; Maher & Vickerman, 2018). However, once entering the profession, many TAs quickly realised “it is completely different to how you imagined it was going to be” (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015).

TAs expressed difficulties in ‘knowing their place’ and managing the conflicts of not being the class teacher yet assuming multiple responsibilities believed to be the teachers’ and feeling wholly responsible for a child’s education (Clarke & Visser, 2019; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Noble, 2020). Some TAs also felt they were often asked to provide specialist support beyond their expertise, such as speech and language and occupational therapy related tasks (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). One TA expressed their discontentment with external professionals ‘telling TAs what to do’, then, “they walk out, get paid a decent wage, and we are doing their job” (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). Finally, TAs described their role as ‘being a second parent’ (Marville, 2015) or the ‘in-between person’ (Kelly, 2020; Salisbury, 2016; Webster & Blatchford, 2014), feeling responsible for children’s personal care, advocacy, safety, and emotional well-being (Kelly, 2020). Conversely, one TA felt their primary responsibility was to contain students, so they did not ‘shout or distract the other children’ (Wren, 2017). This highlights the intricate boundaries of their position in relation to other adults supporting the children, such as class teachers, parents and other external support professionals, as well as the subsequent difficulty TAs have in developing a consistent professional identity. Here, the TA role appears to be permeated by various external and transcending roles, while also being bound to none.

The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily redefined the boundaries within the TA role. There was no clear guidance for what their role would entail during this period. One TA described that “instead of being the TA at the moment, you’re being the teacher or sent wherever to do whatever, and you’re not fully sure what role they’re asking you to do because you just need to be there” (Richardson-Frankton, 2022). Additional demands also included “doing lots of applications for child benefits” and “providing emotional support, not just for the children, but for the whole family” (Hall & Webster, 2022). One TA questioned, “Were we TAs? Helpers? Were we keyworkers? I don't know. Who were we?” (Hall & Webster, 2022), highlighting the loss of their role identity during that period. Upon transitioning back to normality, some TAs felt that they were “expected to do more and more with less and less,” leaving them feeling more fragmented and unsupported than before.

2.5.1.2 Descriptive theme 2 - Ever-changing dynamics and responsibilities.

According to the reviewed studies, TAs often experienced an unpredictable work environment, where dynamics and responsibilities changed daily (Bowles et al, 2017; Clarke & Visser, 2019; Conboy, 2021; Ihenacho, 2020; Marville, 2015; Salisbury, 2016). In addition to classroom support, they were asked to manage challenging behaviour (Conboy, 2021; Clarke & Visser, 2019; Marville, 2015; Salisbury, 2016; Webster & Blatchford, 2015; Wren, 2017), teach small group, and deliver one-to-one interventions (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Marville, 2015; Salisbury, 2016; Webster & Blatchford, 2015). TAs expressed difficulties finding the right balance between supporting individual children they were assigned to and assisting the whole classroom, describing how “it’s hard to split yourself” (Kelly, 2020). One TA described working in a different classroom every day, which did not allow them to “get to know children well enough”, and despite having been hired as a one-to-one TA (Clarke & Visser, 2020). Conversely, some TAs appreciated the “positive effects of the changing role” (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Marville, 2015; Salisbury, 2015), highlighting the versatility that made the role more interesting and rewarding (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Kelly, 2020; Marville, 2015; Salisbury, 2016). For some, “no two days are the same,” which made the work feel “less repetitive” and “more exciting” (Marville, 2015). Others shared that adapting to different situations allowed them to “learn something new every day” and “develop skills they never expected to have” (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Kimber, 2023; Salisbury, 2016).

In Richardson-Frankton’s, Hall & Webster’s, and Kimber’s studies, TAs reflected on the shifting responsibilities and expectations of their role during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. While some TAs acknowledged an increase in their responsibilities during lockdown, they also appreciated having “the time to sit down and do it properly” (Richardson-Frankton, 2022), which they felt improved the quality of their support. This extra time allowed some to be more creative and responsive to students' needs, including supporting the development of social and life skills. Enhanced communication with families also emerged as a positive aspect of this period, with TAs describing regular check-ins and communication as strengthening relationships and creating a stronger sense of community. However, as schools transitioned back to normality, TAs faced intensified pressures to resume their pre-pandemic roles whilst also having to “get the children back, get them reading, get them writing, get your data up, close the gap” (Kimber, 2023). One TA described post-pandemic days as “really intense” (Richardson-Frankton, 2022), while another felt like “trying to bail water out of a boat with someone punching holes underneath you” (Kimber, 2023), highlighting the overwhelming expectations placed upon them despite their expanded responsibilities and minimal support.

2.5.2 Analytical theme 2 - Preparedness

2.5.2.1 Descriptive theme 3 - Navigating Challenges.

Within the reviewed literature, TAs described facing various daily challenges, particularly due to the limited guidance and support available. One TA described their approach to this as “muddling our way through” (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015), explaining how they felt unprepared and stressed when trying to manage their workload and navigate complex situations and challenges independently, which led to a “snowball effect” (Noble, 2020). On the other hand, where time was provided for planning, assessing and preparing resources to work with students, TAs felt more confident in their abilities to take on teaching tasks and deliver interventions (Noble, 2020; Richardson-Frankton, 2022).

Feelings of unpreparedness and being unable to cope with challenges seemed directly linked to TAs’ self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Whether TAs felt confident enough to voice their opinions and concerns, or to whom they felt comfortable voicing them, seemed to depend on the school culture and the TAs’ character. In schools where teachers and SLT were seen as unquestionable authority figures, TAs felt more pressure to “keep quiet” and “just go with the flow” (Noble, 2020). Even when they worried about “getting it wrong” or “making things worse” (Kimber, 2023), some hesitated to ask questions as “you sound like you aren’t doing your job” (Noble, 2020). Conversely, when schools fostered a more collaborative environment, TAs felt they could be “quite direct” when sharing their concerns and asking for support (Ihenacho, 2020). Additionally, some TAs felt they lacked emotional support despite the daily challenges they often experienced. As one TA reflected, “You have been strong for everybody else [...] Who’s there for you?” (Hall & Webster, 2022), highlighting the lack of opportunities for TAs to express their own emotions and receive the same care they usually extend to others.

The findings revealed a nuanced perspective during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the increased unpredictability and significant upheavals, some TAs felt more able to deal with the uncertainties during this period as the wider school community, including parents, were “in this together” and “pulling each other through it” (Richardson-Frankton, 2022). Furthermore, the stronger sense of unity and shared responsibilities contributed to the development of a more supportive and collaborative environment (Hall & Webster, 2022). However, some TAS “had no idea what to do”, as parents “were just crying on the phone” (Hall & Webster, 2022), and they did not feel capable of supporting them properly without guidance or qualifications to do so. As restrictions gradually faded, these new demands seemed to have been added to some TAs’ regular routines, coupled with the additional pressure to support students affected by the disruptions caused by the lockdowns, resulting in more feelings of uncertainty and unpreparedness than before (Hall &

Webster, 2022; Kimber, 2023; Richardson-Frankton, 2022). This ongoing expectation for TAs to constantly adapt and respond to challenges without adequate support has led to a sense of exhaustion, as one TA described, “it’s quite wearing actually... It must be quite draining... I think there’ll probably be a level of fatigue [because of] that constant level of adaptability and flexibility of working in school” (Hall & Webster, 2022).

2.5.2.2 Descriptive theme 4 - Sources of TA Knowledge.

According to the TAs in the reviewed literature, the methods by which they gained knowledge varied considerably. TAs argued that the limited access to formal training opportunities often led them to fill their knowledge gaps independently and learn “on the cuff” (Kimber, 2023), highlighting how they had to improvise when formal training was lacking (Kelly, 2020; Maher & Vickerman, 2018). Learning through practice and personal research was a common thread in their narratives and was often perceived as more beneficial than formal training and qualifications, as it provided insight into aspects of the job that could not be taught (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Ihenacho, 2020; Marville, 2015). Additionally, for some participants, real-life experiences, such as being a parent of a child with special educational needs, offered useful insights that could be applied to their role and are less likely to be learned through training (Conboy, 2021; Ihenacho, 2020; Maher & Vickerman). For the majority of TAs in the analysed literature, however, the most valuable way of acquiring knowledge was through learning from observing and collaborating with others, particularly more experienced TAs (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Conboy, 2021; Ihenacho, 2020; Marville, 2015). Additionally, for one TA, observing another colleague also positively impacted her confidence, “...watching somebody else do a different lesson... in a different class, their approach... that’s really important. And then you come back, and you think, ‘Actually, I could do that’, you know?” (Ihenacho, 2020).

Conversely, some TAs felt that more structured and comprehensive training was necessary, expressing frustration with the minimal training opportunities offered, considering the increasing demands of their roles (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Marville, 2015). They argued that better training would enhance their confidence and increase their abilities to meet their students’ needs more consistently and effectively, particularly when working with students with specific needs (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). For instance, one TA shared, “When we go to the training course, it makes me feel better about myself because I do know what I am doing. It helps me feel that I am doing the right thing [...] It is a confidence boost when you go” (Marville, 2015). Another shared concern was that some aspects considered inherent to the TA role, such as providing behaviour management and emotional support, were not paired with adequate training or guidance regarding boundaries and expectations, therefore leaving TAs “to get on with it” and relying on “common sense” (Clarke &

Visser, 2019). Finally, whilst there was recognition regarding issues with costs and limited time, some TAs emphasised they would like to be included in training opportunities which are often reserved for teachers, as this would also contribute to their professional development and better performance in their role (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Ihenacho, 2020).

2.5.3 Analytical theme 3 – Feeling Valued

2.5.3.1 Descriptive theme 5 - The Unnoticed Contributions and Impact.

Some TAs in the reviewed literature felt that their contributions to the school community and positive impact on students were underappreciated and not recognised, particularly by the SLT (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Kelly, 2020; Maher & Vickerman, 2018; Marville, 2015). In addition to their regular responsibilities, working beyond their designated hours and at home to create resources and plan activities, as well as researching topics relevant to their work, were some of the examples shared of going above and beyond their remit to support students and perform their role successfully; however, some TAs expressed that working additional unpaid hours is often “expected” by the SLT and hence undervalued (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). The extent to which TAs felt valued by teachers varied among studies. Two TAs expressed that teachers often “appreciate having an extra adult in the class” (Salisbury, 2016) and acknowledge and compliment them for their hard work (Marville, 2015). In contrast, one TA shared that they felt “like they (teachers) look down upon you” (Salisbury, 2016). Overall, being recognised and supported by teachers was perceived as key to how effective and confident TAs felt within their practice.

Another aspect highlighted in the research was the frustration TAs felt regarding their low pay scale compared to that of other educators and professionals (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Marville, 2015). Whilst there was recognition that an increase in salaries would not depend solely on their managers’ decision, one TA argued that this should be acknowledged by the school community, particularly the SLT, given the unmatched level of responsibilities and expectations placed upon them (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). In Hall and Webster’s (2022) study, a TA explained, “I’m not sure if I’m going to be here next year, because this job doesn’t [pay enough]. I’d love to stay, but the money’s just not good enough,” while another commented, “I do think this industry is going to have a problem keeping TAs . . . because of the wages.”. This disparity between the demands associated with the TA role and the limited acknowledgement left TAs mainly relying on intrinsic motivation to continue performing their roles (Marville, 2015). As one TA put it, “It’s never, never been about the money. I definitely wouldn’t be doing this for the money” (Hall & Webster, 2022).

Conversely, the intensified and collaborative efforts of TAs during the pandemic were met with an increased sense of recognition (Richardson-Frankton, 2022). The shared struggle to care for the individual needs of students and their families against the uncertainties of this period seemed to

bridge gaps and bring the school community together (Hall & Webster, 2023). For instance, some TAs reported that their opinions were more sought after and valued, and they were more actively involved in planning and decision-making than before, which included receiving emails from the teacher with their plan and being asked for their contribution and opinions. One TA shared that she would be asked by teachers, “‘What can you add extra? or ‘What do you think?’ ‘Do you think this is okay?’” which made them feel “heard” and that they said something “of value” (Richardson-Frankton, 2022). Similarly, another TA described how support from colleagues and recognition made a difference to their confidence and motivation: “They’re really positive with their language as well. [SEND coordinator] said to me the other day: ‘Your relationships with the kids are so fantastic, I can’t wait to see what you’re going to do as a teacher’” (Hall & Webster, 2022). However, as the pandemic subsided, many TAs felt that the recognition decreased whilst the extra responsibilities were maintained.

2.5.3.2 Descriptive theme 6 - Navigating Hierarchies and Seeking Inclusion.

Within the research, feeling recognised was significantly intertwined with TAs' sense of belonging within the school community. For instance, some TAs expressed that their passion for their jobs and having a strong sense of school community, such as being like 'a family', made them feel more motivated to perform their role despite daily challenges, particularly during the pandemic (Ihenacho, 2020; Hall & Webster, 2022; Richardson-Frankton, 2022). Nonetheless, the data also revealed the complexities of the power dynamics and hierarchies experienced by some TAs in their search for inclusion, both in terms of recognition of their significance and their inclusion in decision-making processes (Conboy, 2021; Kelly, 2020; Noble, 2020; Salisbury, 2016). Teachers were sometimes held in a place of authority and referred to as "the boss" or "the person in charge", while one TA described themselves as being "at the bottom of the ladder" regarding school hierarchy (Salisbury, 2016). The dynamics of their interactions influenced how safe TAs felt in voicing their opinions and ideas, particularly when those differed from the teacher's. For instance, one TA stated that they often choose to "keep quiet" and "just go with the flow" because "they are teachers, they are trained, they know what works and what doesn't work" (Noble, 2020). Additionally, there were instances where distinctions were made amongst the TA group. TAs who were pursuing a teaching qualification were perceived to occupy a slightly higher position in the hierarchy and were consequently heard more compared to the other educational support staff, which again highlighted the intricacies of power structures within the school environment (Conboy, 2021).

Some TAs felt they were not included in processes that they considered key to effectively performing their roles, such as in-school training, planning, meetings, and relevant emails (Ihenacho, 2020; Salisbury, 2016). TAs argued that their inclusion in those processes is the responsibility of the senior leadership team, but that, on many occasions, their role and responsibilities were not well-known or acknowledged by them. Yet, TAs did not feel it was their place to contest any decision made by the SLT, given their higher status within the hierarchy (Marville, 2015; Noble, 2020). One TA in Kimber's study (2023) shared that "what the teacher wanted... that's what she wanted. I was cross about that... but there was nothing I could do because I'm only a TA", reinforcing the limited autonomy some TAs felt even when disagreeing with decisions they believed were harmful to students. Another reflected, "You spend all the time with these children... [but] outside agencies don't ask for any feedback", which illustrates how their insight is often overlooked in favour of more senior or externally positioned professionals.

Conversely, during the COVID-19 pandemic, TAs reported a stronger sense of community and a shift in power dynamics, with hierarchies becoming less prominent (Richardson-Frankton, 2022). According to TAs, what contributed to this was increased communication, more time to discuss and

plan with teachers, and the sharing of responsibilities. TAs described that they had to “rely on” and “trust” each other, which led to a “really strong bond” and “good friendship” with teachers. A TA in Hall & Webster’s study highlighted this shift, stating: “I think it’s just to really listen to the staff... we’re really just as valued as the teachers and it comes across in that way. Our opinions are taken into account,” showing how during these crisis circumstances opened space for more inclusive practices.

2.5.4 Analytical theme 4 - Relationships

2.5.4.1 Descriptive theme 7 - Connection with Students – Balancing Dependence and Independence.

The relationship between students and teaching assistants emerged as a key aspect of the TA role within the reviewed research. TAs were identified as pivotal figures in fostering connections and student independence in addition to their academic role (Bowles et al., 2017; Hall & Webster, 2022; Kelly, 2020; Wren, 2017). The type of connections formed with TAs seemed different from those between students and teachers, owing to the more approachable and flexible nature of the TA role (Clarke & Visser, 2019; Conboy, 2021; Kimber, 2023; Marville, 2015). TAs become mentors and confidants, occupying a less formal authority position than teachers, which contributes to students feeling safer in trusting them with their feelings and concerns, both within and outside the classroom (Hall & Webster, 2022; Kelly, 2020; Marville, 2015). The insightful quote from one TA, “a lot of students come to you because you are not a teacher. We have the time; they come to us at lunchtime groups, and we sit and talk to them”, illustrates the essence of this relationship (Marville, 2015).

Nonetheless, the close nature of the student-TA relationship also presented some challenges, particularly in striking the right balance between fostering strong connections without inadvertently encouraging dependency (Kelly, 2020; Ihenacho, 2020). Whilst having a positive bond with students was identified as beneficial for successfully helping them achieve their goals and working well together, there was a general worry about creating “too much of an attachment” and of students being “too reliant and dependent” on them, particularly those working one-to-one with a child (Kelly, 2020). For instance, TAs described how their emotional state could influence students’ behaviour and engagement (Kelly, 2020; Noble, 2020).

The sense of guilt and frustration resulting from TAs feeling unable to establish boundaries and perform their role effectively impacted their motivation and emotional health (Kelly, 2020). A TA described, “It’s like an internal battle, I guess...But, I don’t know, in the back of your head, I’m like, ‘Oh, but should I be someth- like should I be doing something with him right now, even though he’s getting on fine or, yeah, but I’m just trying not to think like that, which is a bit difficult” (Kelly, 2020)

There was recognition in the reviewed literature of the need for more guidance and support for TAs on how to establish and implement relationship boundaries with students so that the support offered does not hinder students' social, emotional, and academic development and independence but also to help decrease the emotional toll on TAs as a result of this (Ihenacho, 2010; Noble, 2020; Webster & Blatchford, 2014).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the student-TA relationship also underwent considerable changes. "It wasn't just about reading. It wasn't just about education. It was about sharing their feelings, sharing their tears" (Hall & Webster, 2022), showing how TAs became a key emotional support for students during this period. Furthermore, some TAs developed a closer relationship with students' families and felt a sense of recognition of their hard work. One TA recalled, "The amount of messages [...] when the parents picked the children up who were in school saying 'thank you', like what they wouldn't usually do. It wouldn't just be picking the child up and take them home, it was a 'thank you for what you're doing' and like 'we appreciate everything'" (Richardson-Frankton, 2022). However, these meaningful connections became harder to sustain post-pandemic, as TAs were expected to quickly transition from being "a key emotional point of contact" back to a more task-driven, instructional role (Kimber, 2023).

2.5.4.2 Descriptive theme 18 - TA-teacher dynamic – the need for collaboration and partnership.

The reviewed literature provided insights into the dynamics between TAs and teachers and the importance of developing a collaborative approach. The quality of the TA-teacher relationship was found to impact students' experiences and classroom dynamics, contributing to more consistent, effective, and positive support for students (Kelly, 2020; Kimber, 2023; Ihenacho, 2020; Maher & Vickerman, 2018; Marville, 2015; Noble, 2020; Webster & Blatchford, 2014; Wren, 2017). For instance, TAs who felt respected and valued by teachers described being more engaged and motivated in their role (Ihenacho, 2020; Noble, 2020). Conversely, a perceived partition or conflicting power dynamics often led to TAs feeling frustrated and disengaged, which could compromise the effectiveness of their communication and collaboration with teachers (Clarke & Visser, 2019; Salisbury, 2016). Moreover, TAs who felt overlooked or marginalised by teachers expressed difficulties asserting their perspectives or addressing concerns about students (Kelly, 2020; Marville, 2015).

Time constraint was a key aspect hindering effective communication between TAs and teachers. TAs argued that the demanding nature of their roles and the pressure, both generally within the school and upon them to raise attainment levels, left insufficient space for collaborative planning and work with teachers (Maher & Vickerman, 2018; Marville, 2015; Webster & Blatchford,

2015). One TA shared their frustration about not having time after lessons “for two minutes to get that opportunity just to ask are we continuing with this, what is the next step, have you got something you could e-mail me, if not again after school I might reflect on the five lessons of the day and think, I didn’t really get that, why didn’t I know that” (Marville, 2015). Additionally, the limited time allocated for meaningful dialogues between teachers and TAs hindered effective lesson planning and guidance, ultimately impacting the consistency of student support and approach (Clarke & Visser, 2019; Ihenacho, 2020).

Besides the challenges and uncertainties inherent to the COVID-19 pandemic, TAs highlighted how the intensified need for rapid adaptations and collaboration during this period forced school staff to rely on each other and prioritise time for mutual support and regular check-ins (Richardson-Frankton, 2022). A shared sense of solidarity and mutual trust strengthened the TA-teacher bonds and reinforced the importance of partnership in overcoming adversity, reducing work-related stress, and providing optimal support for students. One TA shared how “you had more contact with teachers because you were communicating about everything... and because we were working in such small teams, you just had to rely on each other” (Kimber, 2023). However, the end of pandemic restrictions brought feelings of frustration as the time for collaboration was once again reduced, along with increased pressure on teachers and TAs to address the learning gaps that had widened during school closures.

2.6 Discussion

This synthesis explored TAs’ voices in qualitative research over the last decade to understand how they make sense of their professional identities and contributions to the school community. The findings indicate that the TA role is multifaceted and continually evolving. A systemic factor contributing to this is the absence of a national framework or template for what the TA role should entail (Hodgkins et al., 2024). Instead, how individual schools interpret and construct the TA role is influenced by several variables, including school culture, leadership views, and staffing and funding pressures (Webster & Blatchford, 2014; Webster, 2024). This lack of consistent national guidelines, coupled with the relatively weaker position TAs have in the organisational hierarchy (which inhibits their capacity for shaping lived experiences within the school systems), contributes to the unpredictability, tensions, and feeling of job satisfaction TAs describe across multiple studies (Alston, 2023; Ofsted, 2022). Furthermore, while the expectations and demands of TAs continue to rise, preparation, support, and recognition remain low, even when TAs are asked to provide pedagogical, emotional, and specialist support that exceeds their level of expertise (Moss et al., 2022; Webster & Blatchford, 2014). The lack of structured training brings ambiguity and uncertainty to TAs’ experiences, which is exacerbated by their frequent exclusion from decision-making processes and

relevant meetings (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Noble, 2020; Salisbury, 2016). Although some TAs appreciated the flexibility of their role, many described feeling ‘thrown in at the deep end’ or left to rely on personal judgement and ad hoc peer support (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Noble, 2020).

The literature evidenced the passion and commitment TAs have in supporting students and teachers. However, feelings of being unseen, undervalued and taken for granted were commonly reported across the studies. This was particularly noticeable during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when, despite increased contributions and greater collaboration with teachers and families, TAs often felt that their efforts were not acknowledged (Hall & Webster, 2022; Kimber, 2023; Richardson-Frankton, 2022). In light of these findings, Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well placed to support more inclusive school practices. EPs could involve TAs more actively in consultation and planning where appropriate, recognising and valuing their contributions in supporting students. However, this should not lead to TAs being expected to take on excessive responsibilities without adequate training or support. To ensure that, EPs should encourage reflective conversations in schools to help clarify boundaries, ensure expectations are manageable, and advocate for appropriate training and recognition for all staff. Furthermore, EPs are also in a position to question whether specific tasks should remain the responsibility of teachers, rather than being placed onto TAs. Maintaining this balance will be essential to avoid exploitation and preserve the integrity of both roles (Dowd, 2024; McDermott, 2017).

Data from this review suggests that it would be timely for policymakers to carefully consider the persistent issue of TA pay and employment conditions, along with the unintended consequences of reducing TA hours or responsibilities, particularly when expectations for their role in inclusive education continue to grow (Department for Education, 2019; 2023). The expectation that TAs will continue to work “above and beyond” without fair compensation can also contribute to burnout and dissatisfaction, which will most likely lead to increasing recruitment and retention difficulties (Dowd, 2024; Mowat, 2023).

Finally, the pandemic period, despite its many challenges, revealed how increased collaboration, communication, and recognition of TAs' roles could lead to stronger relationships within the school community and improved support for students (Hall & Webster, 2022; Richardson-Frankton, 2022). However, these positives, such as stronger bonds with teachers, students, and families, as well as greater involvement in planning and additional time for preparation, faded once schools fully reopened (Moss et al., 2022). By taking the valuable lessons learned during this time and intentionally building on them, it is possible to create more inclusive, supportive, and sustainable structures for TAs in mainstream education, thereby offering an essential avenue for future research to explore.

2.6.1 *Implications*

A key implication from this review is the need for a national framework and guidance that clearly defines the scope of TAs' responsibilities. This would help address the uncertainty and hesitancy many TAs experience when asked to perform tasks beyond their training and competency. Any such guidance or policies should be widely communicated across the entire school community so that there are consistent expectations and clear boundaries regarding what TAs can — and cannot — be expected to do. Alongside this, sustained investment in comprehensive and ongoing training is essential. While TAs highly value informal learning through experience, observation, and peer collaboration, the findings show that access to formal training remains limited and often inaccessible (Ihenacho, 2020; Maher & Vickerman, 2018). Policymakers and school leaders should ensure that funding and time are allocated to enable TAs' participation in relevant, role-specific training, thereby enhancing their confidence and capacity to provide effective student support. Promisingly, recent steps, such as the reinstatement of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB), signal a recognition at the policy level of the need to better define and support the role of TAs in schools (Department for Education, 2024a), and the types of professional development and training needed to support them.

At the same time, the findings raised questions about how different forms of expertise are valued (or not) in England, where hierarchy and academic qualifications remain deeply embedded in education, healthcare, and policy, positioning 'professionals by experience' such as TAs lower in such institutional (and wider labour market structures despite their valuable contributions. There is a risk that academic elitism may obscure the legitimacy of TAs' professional insight developed through their lived experience, particularly when it comes to relational, pastoral, or emotional support. Therefore, recognising TAs' expertise by experience and proximity is also crucial, not as a substitute for training, but as a complementary source of knowledge that should be considered in decision-making and school practice. From a social justice and equity perspective, the data also suggests that some TAs may remain in their roles because they are financially secure enough to prioritise purpose-driven values, such as making a difference in children's lives or drawing on their own signature strengths. However, in a broader societal context, this highlights how their essential contributions remain undervalued and insufficiently recognised as integral and valuable to their community, despite some clear evidence to the contrary.

Greater inclusion of TAs in school decision-making processes is also needed. Their daily proximity to students, particularly those with SEND, positions them as crucial contributors to planning, communication, and consistency in support (Webster et al, 2013). Enabling TAs to participate meaningfully in meetings and planning sessions would enhance their effectiveness and

sense of agency and belonging. School leaders should also prioritise opportunities for collaboration between teachers and TAs, as this was found to be beneficial to both staff well-being and student outcomes (NCFE, 2023; McDermott, 2017). When TAs felt part of a trusting and collaborative partnership, they reported feeling more confident, less isolated, and better able to cope with emotional demands (Dowd, 2024; Kimber, 2023). Building inclusive and emotionally supportive environments that foster mutual respect and collaboration would not only contribute to safeguarding students' experiences but also contribute to TAs' sense of belonging and well-being. Improvements in these areas would enhance TAs' job satisfaction and retention, reducing the likelihood of them leaving the profession in search of better conditions elsewhere (Dowd, 2024).

It is important to emphasise that none of these recommendations are novel or groundbreaking. This review has revealed that a common pattern of concerns and solutions has been consistently echoed within studies throughout the past decade; hence, it would be hard to deny the strong weight of evidence behind them. What makes the recommendations even more urgent is the growing number of TAs choosing to leave the profession due to poor working conditions and lack of support (UNISON, 2022; Alston, 2023). This has cascading and cumulative effects for schools, students and families. As TAs leave, the pressure on teachers – who are themselves experiencing high levels of stress and burnout (NASUWT, 2024) – intensifies, which ultimately impacts students both emotionally and academically (Madigan & Kim, 2020), particularly those with additional needs whose support structures have become increasingly fragile (Ofsted, 2021). This impact then affects parents and families, compounding a sense of struggle and a rising sense of distress and dissatisfaction about our education system.

2.6.2 *Strengths and limitations*

One key strength of this review is its focus on the voices of TAs across multiple studies, who have often been overlooked in educational research and policy decisions (Page, 2025; Webster, 2021). The synthesised research from the past decade has captured a range of policy shifts, including austerity and curriculum reforms (Cowan & Mumford, 2021; Department for Education, 2013), as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, it provides a comprehensive understanding of the TA role, including its challenges and impact, across different school settings and over time. All studies included have undergone a robust quality assurance process, which deemed them to be of at least medium or high quality. This process strengthens the credibility of the data, including findings originating from thesis work, thereby bringing to light valuable insights that may have otherwise remained inaccessible due to publication bias or timelines. Other key strengths include valuing the TA voice through analysis and reporting, as well as the importance of the implications for current policy and practice. In contrast to large-scale surveys, which can limit the depth of understanding and

can be shaped by confirmation biases, this research offers policy-makers something more tangible and grounded, through the sharing of insights drawn directly from those most affected by policy changes.

There are some acknowledged limitations of this review, as with all academic work. For example, the TAs' experiences will likely vary depending on the area and schools' particular context, such as access to funding and organisational culture, which may not have been fully captured in this review (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2022). Additionally, some studies may have been overrepresented due to the richness or quantity of the data they presented. In synthesising the overall themes, some voices and nuances of smaller studies may have been missed or less prominent (Dixon-Woods et al, 2005). Furthermore, some of the studies were conducted during or shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a unique and time-bound context that may not fully reflect 'normal' conditions. Finally, the synthesis aimed to identify changes over time; however, few studies adopted a longitudinal approach, which has limited the confidence with which the current review can conclude the trajectory of policy and practice changes.

2.7 Conclusion

This study draws on qualitative data from the past decade to provide a comprehensive and in-depth account of TAs' perceptions and experiences within mainstream education. It highlights TAs' resilience, adaptability, and relational expertise, whose impact on students and overall school culture is often undervalued. By centring TAs' voices, this review contributes to a more holistic understanding of how they experience and are positioned within the school community. The findings underscore four key analytical themes — role identity, preparedness, feeling valued, and relationships — which consistently shaped how TAs made sense of their work and the challenges they faced. These themes point to persistent structural and cultural barriers that have remained largely unaddressed, despite repeated identification in the literature over the past decade. Although not novel, the recommendations for school leaders and policymakers — to make both structural and financial adjustments to the TA role to safeguard staff well-being and the sustainability of the TA role, as well as to avoid further disruption to school effectiveness and the wellbeing of educators, children and families in the years ahead — remains as urgent as ever.

Chapter 3 More than our money's worth: Uncovering the overlooked value(s) of Teaching Assistants - A collaborative, change-focused study.

“If you're not valued, then you're not happy, and then how can you work with children and expect them to be happy and confident?”

3.1 Abstract

Teaching Assistants (TAs) are a significant and valuable part of the educational workforce in England whose role and numbers have continued to rise (Department for Education, 2017; Hodgen et al., 2022). Yet, the ways in which schools deploy TAs vary considerably, and the critical contributions they make are often unrecognised and under-reported (Geeson & Clarke, 2023; Radford et al., 2015b). The increased demand for TAs and limited funding have prompted concerns among school leaders regarding the sustainability of current TA deployment practices and the need for urgent change (Webster & Blatchford, 2019). This study employed a collaborative approach by conducting a focus group exploration with eight mainstream TAs. Through active involvement and shared perspectives, this research aimed to empower TAs, granting them agency in advocating for their needs and disseminating their insights to inform the development of best practices and policies for the future. The study employed an iterative data collection and analysis process, with TAs contributing to the identification and construction of key themes that best aligned with their priorities (Lenette, 2022; Levac et al., 2019; Wallace & Giles, 2019). By engaging deeply with and sharing the outcomes of these findings with key stakeholders, the research aims to catalyse more informed discussions and purposeful and realistic actions to enhance the experience and deployment of TAs within mainstream educational settings. This collaborative research initiative contributes to ongoing efforts to recognise and optimise the vital role played by TAs in fostering inclusive and effective learning environments in mainstream schools.

3.2 Introduction

Over the past 20 years, the number of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in mainstream schools across the UK has increased substantially, with TAs now accounting for approximately 30% of the school workforce (Department for Education, 2023; Hodgen et al., 2022). This rise has been driven by efforts to address attainment gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils, as well as increased awareness and demands for school inclusion (Alborz et al., 2009; Department for Education, 2024c; Webster & Blatchford, 2019). Initially employed by schools in the 1980s to assist with non-teaching tasks, TAs have increasingly taken on additional responsibilities, including behaviour management and conflict resolution, pastoral and emotional support, teaching and

assessing learning, supporting students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), as well as carrying out administrative tasks and extracurricular activities, such as after-school and breakfast clubs (Clarke & Visser, 2019; Hall & Webster, 2022; Webster, 2024). Furthermore, research consistently highlights the essential role TAs play in the effective functioning of schools, alleviating teacher workload and contributing to student development and well-being (Conboy, 2021; Jackson et al, 2021; Salisbury, 2016). However, despite their extensive and increasing range of duties, TAs continue having less training and support when compared to other educational staff and are among the lowest paid workers in the UK (Blatchford et al., 2012; Bowles et al., 2017; Office for National Statistics, 2024; Webster et al., 2011).

Cuts to school funding have led school leaders to express concerns about long-term stability of their TA workforces and the ways TAs are deployed and the need for urgent change (Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Hall & Webster, 2023). While demands for TAs continue to rise, financial constraints have forced many schools to reduce their TA workforce, with recent data indicating that approximately 74% of primary school headteachers have cut the number of TAs due to budget pressures (Montacute, 2023a). These funding challenges are particularly pronounced for supporting pupils with SEND, directly impacting TAs, who have increasing demands to support more pupils with fewer resources and less overall support (Merrick, 2024; Wren, 2017). Moreover, school leaders reported difficulties in recruiting and retaining TAs due to the low pay and limited career progression, which results in increased staff shortages, increased workloads for remaining TAs and reduced support for pupils who need their assistance, ultimately creating a continuous cycle of strain and attrition (Department for Education, 2024b; Ofsted, 2022).

Additionally, research has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified recruitment and retention challenges for TAs in the UK, as they were among the most affected during the lockdown period (Education Support, 2021; 2024). During periods of lockdown when schools were effectively closed to all but the most vulnerable students, TAs provided enhanced emotional and academic support to students, adapted resources for remote learning, delivered lessons, and supported the transition back to in-person learning after schools reopened (Moss et al. 2021b). The additional pressure and responsibilities, which remained post-pandemic, led to increased stress, anxiety, and burnout among TAs (Hall & Webster, 2023). Furthermore, post-pandemic financial pressures, exacerbated by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, have driven many TAs to leave their roles entirely and seek better-paid opportunities, further contributing to TA shortages (Department for Education, 2023; Fazackerley, 2022; 2023).

The voices of TAs have been captured in several studies over the years and used to draw implications for practice (Anthony, 2005; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Nobel, 2020), and researchers

suggest that listening to TAs' views is crucial to promoting effective and quality practice (Barentsen & Watt, 2014). However, a systematic literature review of qualitative studies over the past decade revealed that while the TA role has undergone continuous changes and increasing expectations, many of the same challenges persist (see Chapter 2). TAs have consistently reported concerns regarding unclear role expectations, lack of sufficient training, and feeling undervalued (Geeson & Clarke, 2023; Moss et al., 2021b; Radford et al., 2015a; 2015b). These recurring issues in research, despite minimal changes in practice, highlight a gap between policy changes and meaningful improvements for TAs. It is, therefore, crucial to consider what is missing from existing approaches and explore how research can move beyond simply identifying issues to actively fostering and promoting the changes it advocates.

A key limitation of much of the existing research may be that it has been conducted on, rather than with, TAs. This means that while studies have generated implications for practice, these have been mainly derived from the researchers' interpretations of what TAs need based on, for example, the views of the school leaders that employ them, rather than involving them in shaping potential and more realistic changes and solutions (Barentsen & Watt, 2014; Vaughn & Jacques, 2020). Moreover, research findings are often not disseminated or made accessible to stakeholders, who play a critical role in facilitating change, thereby preventing fruitful and informed discussions about evidence from taking place (Lingard, 2013). It is essential that researchers adopt a collaborative approach where TAs can engage in co-constructing strategies to help tackle the issues involving their deployment. Additionally, researchers are responsible for disseminating these findings to school leaders and policymakers, inviting them to reflect on how such changes could support their school community and address ongoing challenges.

In light of the literature and key limitations discussed, a collaborative approach was taken to explore TAs' views on their current role and how to improve their experience and job satisfaction, and address the following research questions:

- How do teaching assistants perceive the evolving expectations and challenges of their role within mainstream schools in England?
- What do Teaching Assistants identify as key factors that support or hinder their effectiveness, job satisfaction, and inclusion into the broader school system?
- What are the immediate changes needed to improve the experiences and effectiveness of Teaching Assistants?

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Participants

Participants were eight teaching assistants from four primary schools within one Local Authority (LA) in the Southeast of England. They were recruited via convenience sampling through the researcher's existing professional contacts. The first point of contact was SENCos via their linked Educational Psychologists (EPs). The email briefly explained the research and invited TAs to express interest by responding to an online questionnaire (see Appendices D and E). Twenty-five TAs initially expressed interest in participating; however, eight were selected based on their availability for the focus group dates, their employment status within schools (as opposed to through external agencies), and their responsiveness to follow-up communication. Participants were offered a research incentive and support with travel expenses if needed. Demographic information and information about their role were sought to understand the diversity of the group. All the participating TAs identified themselves as female.

Their experience in the role ranged from two to ten years. Among the group, one TA also held the position of Higher-Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA), and another worked as an Individual Needs Assistant (INA). Most of the participants were involved in one-to-one support during the school day, with only three not engaging in this type of work. Similarly, all but three regularly carried out interventions outside the classroom, either on a daily or weekly basis. Following selection, participants were emailed with further information about the research topic and their participation (see Appendix F). Pseudonyms were used to represent participants in this study, rather than assigning them numbers, to personalise their contributions and preserve the relational and participatory nature of the research, while still maintaining their anonymity (Lahman et al, 2015).

3.3.2 Design

This research was conducted by a trainee educational psychologist from the University of Southampton as part of their training, under the supervision of two academic tutors from the same doctoral programme and one associate professor with vast experience in the researched field. Ethical approval was obtained through the University of Southampton's Ethics and Research Governance Committee. Consent forms can be found in Appendix G.

In this study, a qualitative approach employing semi-structured focus groups was used, and a collaborative research model guided by participatory and relational research principles was adopted to guide discussions and generate themes during meetings (Lenette, 2022; Levac et al., 2019; Wallace & Giles, 2019). The collaborative approach was selected because it aligns with the researcher's social constructionist standpoint, whereby challenges, ideas, and implications are explored and constructed

alongside participants who have expertise and firsthand experience on the researched topic (Burr, 2015). Nonetheless, whilst some aspects of this work were collaborative, particularly in how barriers to meaningful change were identified and themes were generated directly by participants, some aspects of more traditional focus group design remained, such as using pre-planned prompts and researcher facilitation to guide discussion and maintain focus on the research aims (Kitzinger, 1994). Semi-structured focus groups were employed to ensure good facilitation and discussion of key issues arising from the reviewed research (see Chapter 2). These groups also sought to reduce for any power imbalances within the different TA roles and to, helpfully, address the overarching research questions which had been set out as part of the lead researcher's thesis project proposal and established beforehand with participants (Clarke & Visser, 2019; Jackson et al., 2021; Lowe & Pugh, 2016). Finally, this research drew on elements of Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955) by incorporating helpful resources and tasks to elicit constructive, change-focused conversations, such as the ABC framework (Tschudi & Winter, 2012). Previous studies have demonstrated how these tools can facilitate deep and rich findings which can enhance understanding beyond the use of basic interview schedules (Gibby Leversuch et al, 2021).

3.3.3 Procedure

The present study encompassed three phases. The first phase comprised an extensive literature review of TAs' views on their roles and responsibilities over the past ten years, analysed using inductive thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008; see Chapter 2). The themes generated from this review were used to inform the research questions for the current study, and a summary of each theme was shared with selected TAs via email in preparation for the second phase (see Appendix H).

The second phase entailed two 2-hour focus group meetings with eight TAs. Focus group meetings were arranged via email and took place in an LA meeting room. The TAs were divided into two groups of four in the first meeting. Each group was asked to reflect on the themes and determine whether these were still relevant to their practice post-pandemic, what had changed, and what issues remained present. Then, TAs were asked to rank these themes in order of priority to their role and include any missing themes not identified in the literature (see Appendix I). In the second meeting, the two groups were brought together to share and reflect on the topics generated in their discussions, their priorities, and any unresolved questions, and to agree on overarching priority areas. An adapted version of the ABC Model (Tschudi & Winter, 2012) was used as a reflective tool to support discussion and generate insights into the changes TAs would like to see in their professional roles. In this research, the first scale (A) was used to contrast the current state of the TA role with how participants ideally imagined it could be, including what changes would need to

happen to make that vision a reality. The second scale (B) focused on identifying the potential advantages and disadvantages of implementing these changes, as well as the barriers to their implementation. The third scale (C) explored the perceived advantages and disadvantages of maintaining the current situation (see Appendix J).

The third and final phase involved analysing and drafting a summary of what was produced and discussed during the focus groups and disseminating this to school leaders. Before dissemination, the summary was sent to the participant TAs for member checking (see Appendix K and Appendix L), to ensure the proposed changes remained relevant at the time of dissemination. The findings were disseminated at a primary SENCo forum. This allowed for meaningful discussion around the issues and priorities raised by TAs, and the feedback gathered was used to inform the study's implications for practice and proposed next steps. A pre-designed questionnaire was distributed alongside the findings to guide discussions and elicit reflections on the proposed changes, potential barriers, and long-term implications (see Appendix M and Appendix N). SENCos were asked for consent to use their written notes as part of the study's data, helping to inform the final implications for practice.

3.3.4 *Process of analysis*

A hybrid analytic approach was adopted to analyse the data in this research, drawing on principles of PAR and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019). This approach was designed to authentically capture the participants' voices whilst using a structured analytical framework (Birt et al., 2016; Harvey, 2015). My role as the researcher was to facilitate and analyse, guiding the process collaboratively while maintaining responsibility for ensuring coherence, accuracy, and integrity in representing participants' views.

My analysis began with reviewing qualitative TA research from the past decade and synthesising recurring themes. During the meetings, I supported the reflexive process by helping participants to keep track of ideas, asking prompting questions, and facilitating decisions about which aspects and changes would be more meaningful to them. Using the Tschudi ABC framework as a scaffold helped structure discussions and subsequent analysis by encouraging participants to consider the implications of implementing or not implementing the proposed changes. This framework helped clarify priorities during data construction and supported a more targeted and actionable interpretation during the dissemination phase (Tschudi & Winter, 2012).

Following transcription, I engaged in repeated, close reading of the data to code and group content under the co-constructed themes, cross-referencing key ideas and representative quotes in accordance with the principles of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). My role as the researcher was to interpret and organise the data in a way that honoured their voices and

situated their contributions within the current educational context. A table with additional quotes was created with additional quotes that could not be included in the main article, so that no voices were lost (see Appendix O). A summary of the findings was presented at a SENCo forum, where I gathered feedback and prompted reflections on what was shared and constructed by the TAs during the focus groups. This helped connect participants' insights to those positioned to enact change, which enriched my analysis by providing a broader perspective on the feasibility and potential impact of the proposed changes within the local school communities where participants are placed. Figure 3 provides an outline of how and when the research was conducted separately or collaboratively.

3.4 Findings

The focus group discussions resulted in four overarching themes that reflected the TAs' perceptions of their roles and the conditions that shaped their day-to-day experiences in schools. These themes — *Respectful Communication*, *Role Expectations*, *Support is Key*, and *Recognition of Impact* — were co-constructed with the TAs themselves (Amina, Ava, Freya, Grace, Ivy, Olive, Taylor), based on their contributions during the first focus group session. Guided by the researcher, who facilitated the process by prompting reflections and suggesting possible groupings of ideas, the TAs collaboratively identified, named, and ranked these themes in order of importance. While all four were considered essential to their job satisfaction and motivation to remain in their roles, participants expressed particular urgency to address the challenges with communication and role expectations, which were seen as foundational to the other two themes. A thematic map was developed to illustrate the interaction between these key domains (see Figure 4). The themes are explored in detail below, with participants' voices foregrounded to capture their lived experiences.

Figure 3

Steps in analysis and researcher-participant Involvement and collaboration.

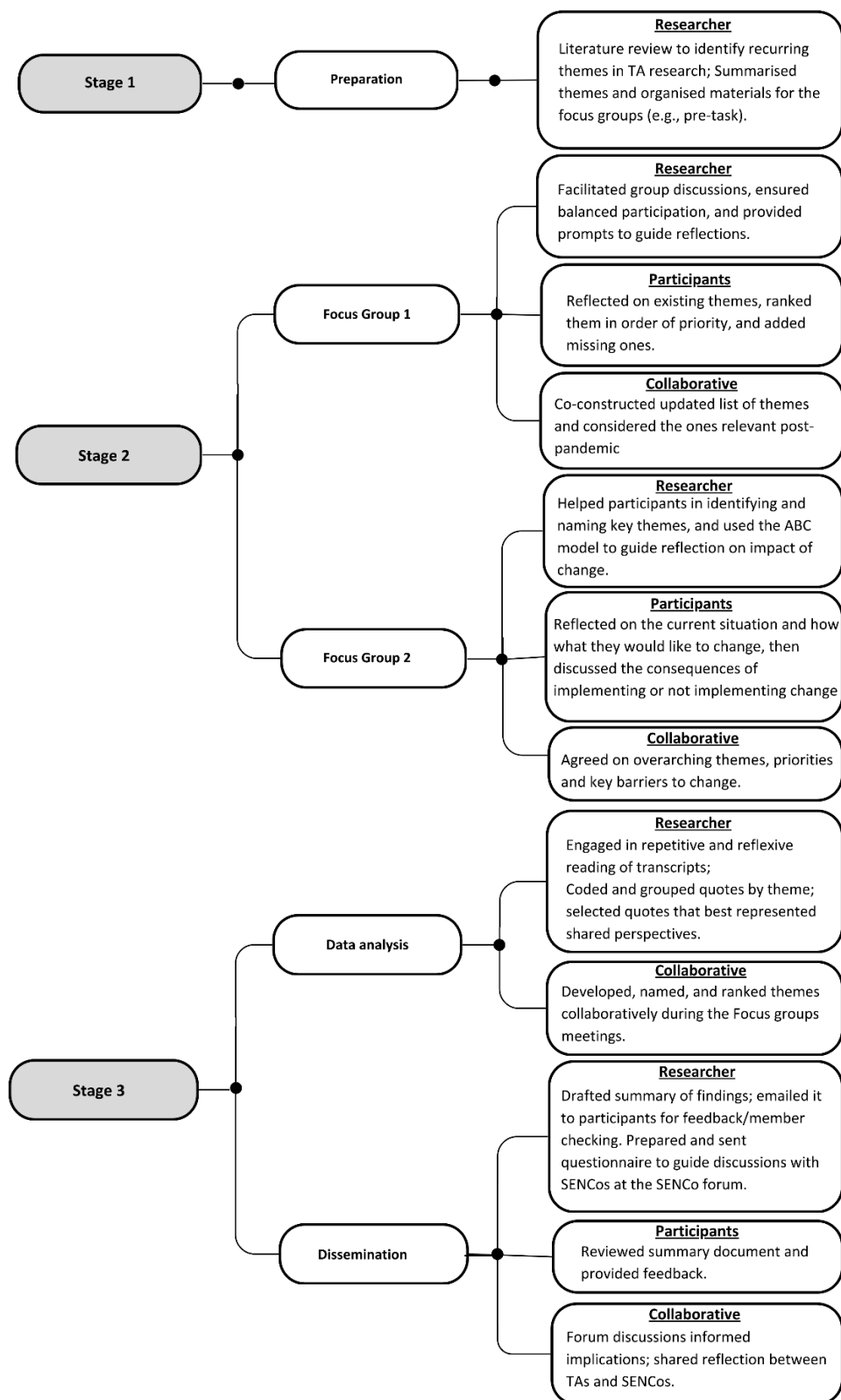
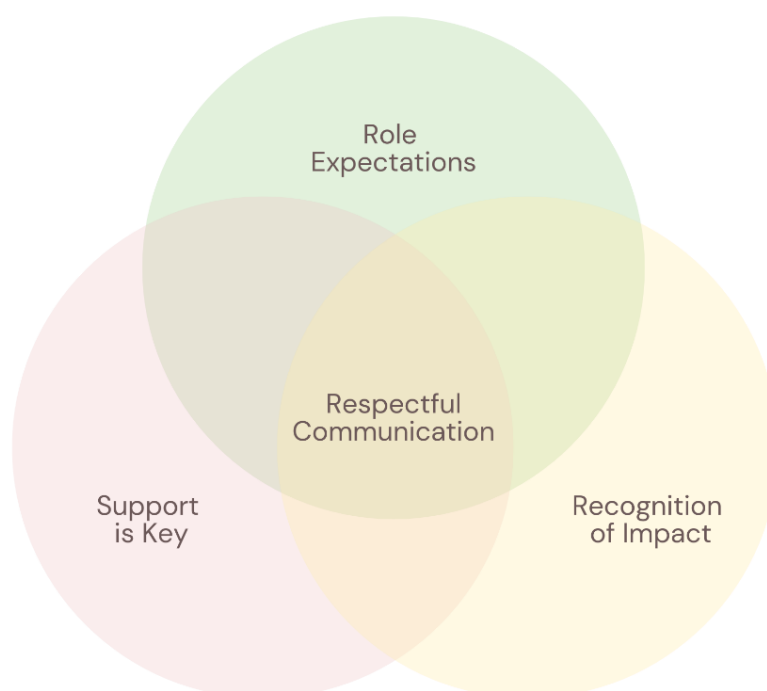


Figure 4

Core Themes Shaping TA Experiences and Their Relationship.



Respectful Communication

During discussions, TAs consistently emphasised that “the two things really come down to respect... If they (SLT and teachers) communicate properly with you.” (Grace). This included feeling listened to, having their views and ideas valued, as well as having open channels of dialogue between staff of all levels. According to TAs, embedding respectful communication went beyond politeness to ensure transparency, acknowledgement, and collaboration in their daily practice, even through small gestures of consideration.

Freya: “If we’re motivated in our role, then we can pass on that motivation to the children. So if we look like we’re happy to be at school and enjoying ourselves, and we’re treating each other with respect, then that is modelling that for the children as well.”

Amina: “They (SLT) think about the big things... always. When actually, if you think about the very small things, and you do the very small things, they should offer that value, truly, not just, “Oh, and thanks everyone for doing extra.”

Participants highlighted positive examples of respectful communication in their practice. For instance, having regular, even if quick, meetings with other staff to share relevant information, where their insights were seen to improve overall collaboration and relationships. Furthermore, when their unique perspective was sought and valued, they felt like “working as a team” (Ivy) with

the teachers and as equal contributors to children's learning, which enhanced their confidence and fostered a sense of community. One TA also shared that they had a suggestion box in the staff room, allowing staff members to anonymously voice concerns or feedback without fear of judgment, which was especially helpful for those who found it difficult to speak up.

Amina: "Every morning, she would inform me of what child was doing what, what email had been sent by what parent. She was really, really good at that. And we always found out. And I never, ever arrive 15 minutes early. So, it really is possible. She just had the desire to share that with me. [...] And that comes from your teachers and your leadership ... good communication breeds good relationships with your teachers and your children. And without those, it's very hard to fulfil your role."

Several participants expressed frustration over inconsistent communication practices, for instance, where some information considered necessary to support their role was not shared or when information was shared via email without being provided "the time to actually read it" (Freya). To perform their roles effectively, TAs felt the need to constantly seek information from teachers throughout their day, because "if you don't seek it, it doesn't come. It's like asking, asking, asking all the time. What's happening about this? What's happening...?" (Ivy) which could be challenging without dedicated time for such discussions. TAs felt that not only did this impact their ability to perform their role effectively, but also led to a broader feeling of being undervalued and unseen as professionals.

Ivy: "Because I sometimes find it frustrating when there's information about a child in your class and you only happen to hear about it through the teacher and you're like, well, if I'd have known that, I would've acted in a different way or I would've done something differently, or I would've taken the time to do this or that."

TA discussions also touched on broader school culture and its impact on relationships. Feeling unheard or dismissed, particularly by the senior leadership team (SLT), was a recurring sentiment. This was especially evident when issues voiced by TAs were not addressed in ways that met their expectations or needs. One TA reflected on the lack of regular appraisals, with only one occurring in eight years, leaving them feeling overlooked. This was echoed by other participants, who shared they never had appraisal meetings. As a result, TAs began to see little value in sharing their views and concerns. The extent to which participants felt listened to by their teachers was also inconsistent and depended on the individual teacher. Participants emphasised that "it needs to come from SLT, that appreciation, the communication" (Grace), setting an example for others within the school community and fostering a culture where everyone's voice was heard.

Olive: “But I feel like if there was a really big problem that I had in school, I actually don’t know who I would probably tell. I’d tell my counterpart, my colleagues. Maybe my teacher this year, because she’s brilliant. But I’m not sure I would go to SLT.”

Participants shared ideas to improve and embed respectful communication in their schools. This included regular team meetings and well-being groups, which provided an opportunity for staff to discuss their welfare and other concerns openly. TAs suggested that having “a very brief one-on-one conversation with your teacher every morning” (Olive) could strengthen collaboration and help TAs feel more integrated as an essential part of the team. Nonetheless, participants acknowledged that implementation could be challenging, as it would involve increasing contracted hours and salaries, which might not always be feasible. Another suggestion included implementing more structured avenues for feedback, such as regular check-ins with SLT or more regular appraisal meetings. Finally, TAs emphasised the importance of receiving verbal feedback and being recognised, particularly when asked to do something unexpectedly. The ways requests were phrased, despite seemingly minor differences, were key to fostering a sense of respect and appreciation from other staff members, for instance, by saying “Oh, I know you’re really busy, but if there’s any way you can do this, I’d really appreciate it” (Freya). TAs reported that such changes could lead to a more positive school culture, reducing feelings of dismissal and marginalisation among TAs, and enhancing trust and collaboration between teachers, teaching assistants, and SLT.

Amina: “Because what we were discussing in our group, you know, when does something that you do as an extra become part of just an expectation, and that’s normal. You come in half an hour early every day. At what point do they expect you to come in early rather than going, ‘Thank you so much for coming in early,’ and say, ‘You’re late’? They very quickly stop seeing that as extra, and they start thinking, ‘Well, that’s just normal.’ But again, that is our responsibility to also set that expectation and say, I am doing this extra.”

3.4.1 Role Expectations

Throughout the discussions, TAs reflected extensively on the importance of defining and understanding their role more clearly, both within the school and in the perception of staff and parents, as well as within government authorities. Many noted that often others underestimate their role, assuming they only offer basic support or undertake minor classroom duties, which does not reflect the reality of their daily work. Some TAs highlighted the dynamic nature of their role, appreciating that no two days were the same and viewing this as an opportunity to “gain lots of different skills that you can then use at different times” (Ivy). For some, the experience and skills gained through their role served as a stepping stone to further professional development, such as pursuing a teaching degree, attending university, or taking on specialist roles.

Olive: “People don’t know... they think we’re just like parent helpers, you know, that do a bit of filing, a bit of sticking and reading.”

The unpredictability in the TA role also presented challenges. While creativity and spontaneity were essential, TAs were “never pre-prepped to this, there’s no warnings.” (Olive), they would have “to expect, just to go in one day and then be given something else to do” (Grace). The lack of time for preparation and the increasing number of demands often make it difficult to sustain creative processes. TAs shared that they often felt overwhelmed and in a state of “firefighting” (Olive), particularly when asked to do something at the last minute or work in unfamiliar classrooms or with students they did not know well. TAs expressed a shared need for clear and consistent role expectations to navigate their daily responsibilities more effectively and with greater confidence.

Freya: “Yeah, what can we do in that time? You know, it’s not whistle-blowing or like negative in anyway. It’s trying to find a way to do all the things that are required of you [...] And I think if we look at what we do in a day and think, ‘How on earth do you manage to fit that all in?’”

Many TAs expressed that their role involved far more responsibilities than they initially expected when they started the job, and they often felt unequipped to meet these demands due to the lack of available resources and training. Many TAs questioned whether they were ‘teaching assistants’ or ‘assistant teachers’, as they often found themselves taking on tasks seen as the responsibility of teachers. Some TAs expanded on this point, highlighting that in addition to classroom support, they were frequently expected to handle behaviour management, speech and language support, and even tasks described as being “on a social worker level” (Olive), which were outside the scope of their role and beyond their skill set. Additionally, TAs noted that teachers often became overwhelmed by demands, making it essential to offload some work to TAs to meet needs effectively. However, they felt that collaboration was sometimes lacking, as teachers often did not prepare materials for them to use with pupils or were unaware of the specific interventions TAs were delivering. This lack of clarity and support, coupled with limited opportunities for professional development or career progression, left many TAs feeling unfulfilled in their roles.

Amina – “I think the teaching assistant is different to the assistant teacher. Which we are both of. Sometimes, you are a teacher and sometimes a teaching assistant, if that makes sense. And I think they’re quite different roles that we are required to do.”

Taylor: “The way I see it, our role is to assist the teacher. The teacher directs us to do whatever’s needed to support the children. If the impact improves like the children’s improvement, I think that’s secondary to helping, enabling the teacher to do the best job that they can do.”

TAs highlighted the need for more time and dedicated spaces to prepare for and complete their learning, alongside more opportunities to communicate with teachers and SLT when they do not feel confident undertaking such tasks. TAs stressed that they should not be expected to take on tasks beyond their skill set without receiving appropriate training to support them. They believed that addressing these issues would improve retention and lead to a more positive and motivated workforce, with stronger, more skilled staff and greater consistency in delivering support to students.

Olive: “Well, I guess it’s being able to say, ‘Do you know what, I’ll give that a go. It might not go into plan’. And knowing there’s no sort of comeback, but at the same time going, “Well, actually, why don’t we get you brilliant on this as well?” So, you know, to identify the areas of training.”

Ivy: “Quite often we have the lowest groups to do interventions with. Whereas those particular children need more of the teacher. Because the teacher has the skills to be in that position.”

3.4.2 Support is key

The theme of support emerged as central to TAs’ experiences, both in enabling them to perform their role effectively as well as having a positive impact on their well-being. Both practical and emotional support were highlighted as vital to the TA role, due to juggling multiple responsibilities and managing unpredictability daily – mostly on their own and, reportedly, without much guidance. Many TAs expressed that feeling truly supported meant not having to constantly ask for help but instead being seen and acknowledged when things became overwhelming. Feeling seen and supported not only enhanced TAs’ job satisfaction but also reduced stress and the risk of burnout. When supportive systems were in place, TAs felt more equipped to handle challenges and more likely to remain in their roles long-term.

Amina: “And I think that’s what you want, you want... a person wants to be seen and... so you don’t always want to say, ‘Actually, I’m not all right.’ You want someone to say, “I don’t think you’re okay.” [...] You just need to, and I think they have to... like say maybe... because a teacher or SLT should recognise whether needs are high or things are different, so therefore they should be on alert to sort of go, “I need to check that.” [...] Sometimes it’s high-level stuff that is like I don’t know how to deal with this. And therefore you do sometimes really need someone to recognise that.”

Freya: “Because we want the children to feel safe. You want the school to be the environment that is safe for them. But we also want it to be safe for us.”

Many TAs expressed that they often do not feel comfortable asking for help, as oftentimes their concerns are not acknowledged or acted upon. They understand the importance of continuing to raise issues for them to be addressed, yet they worry about being perceived as incapable of doing their job or as complaining too much. This fear of speaking up has often left them feeling isolated and struggling to navigate challenges on their own, even in situations where they clearly needed additional support. TAs initially believed they were the only ones experiencing this, but when given the opportunity to discuss with other TAs, they realised it was a widespread issue. They highlighted that the SLT and teachers are not always aware of the difficulties they encounter and should make more of an effort to check in more consistently on them, assess their well-being, and be open to hearing when things are not going well and they need more guidance.

Amina: “So you want someone to see that, you don’t... that doesn’t mean you’re less of a person or, you know, every day, you should work in a place and we should live in a society where we don’t feel like that makes us weaker.”

TAs emphasised that support is not just about professional guidance but also about safeguarding the well-being of everyone within the school, including staff. Many TAs described how the stress they face daily due to the lack of adequate support negatively affects their confidence and mental health, with some reporting that it follows them home and can impact their personal lives. TAs cautioned that if these issues remain unaddressed, the consequences could include increased absenteeism, as well as many TAs leaving their roles entirely, which in turn would place additional strain on the remaining staff.

Freya: “I know, but I want to be able to talk about the things because they’re important, because my outside life, you know... it impacts. And you know, I’m trying to bring up my son, and I’m trying to work, and I’m trying to make sure that he gets to college, but I’m already at school because I did the breakfast club. And it’s just sometimes it’s too many balls in the air.”

Some TAs shared measures that their schools had implemented, which they believed should be more widely adopted. For instance, regular meetings, staff well-being groups, and access to supervision were highlighted as particularly beneficial in fostering a supportive environment. Opportunities to shadow more experienced colleagues, as well as receive constructive feedback and be observed, were also valued. Additionally, TAs suggested that having a designated TA representative to communicate collective issues and feedback to SLT, along with access to supervision sessions, would help ensure their voices are heard and their concerns are properly addressed. Finally, TAs advocated for a more balanced workload, highlighting that while immediate

pay increases or additional staffing may not be feasible, sharing responsibilities more equitably would help prevent burnout.

Olive: “Because we used to always be observed. And I suppose that could be a scary thing for a lot. However, it’s a really good way of getting that appreciation and that feedback as long as it’s given in a really constructive, really good way.”

Grace: “And we were talking about this recently about any other job that when you’re working with children and with, you know, lots of needs, emotional or otherwise, you get supervision. You need to get, you know, regular sort of one-to-one with someone to talk about any incidents, about how you’re feeling.”

3.4.3 Recognition of impact

TAs described their work as crucial yet frequently overlooked or undervalued. Many expressed frustration over the lack of recognition for their contributions, feeling that their role is often viewed as mere classroom assistance rather than being acknowledged for its complexity and multifaceted responsibilities. They emphasised how they often go “above and beyond” (Olive) to support students not only academically, but also emotionally, while helping to ease the workload of teachers, which contributes to a positive learning environment. According to participants, their role also demands creativity, dedication, and adaptability, with many investing time outside of work to research strategies for supporting pupils – an effort that often goes unnoticed by others.

Ava: “And it is that, it is that ‘I’m just TA’. And I’m like, if we put everything and then we turn around and go, ‘Well, that’s just what I do’. I think we realise there’s that four or five different roles that we do all in one that we kind of go, ‘Well, I just do that because it’s my job’. And it’s like, ‘Well, it’s not’. If we looked back at what this role was supposed to be, the amount of things that we’ve picked up and we’ve adapted to doing it would be massive.”

TAs felt that senior leaders often overlook their daily challenges, and only seem to recognise the essential role of TAs when their absence leads to disruptions in student learning and behaviour, heightened pressure on teachers, or logistical challenges within the school. However, schools continue to dismiss TAs as they go under restructuring, leaving the remaining TAs with a heavier workload and the expectation that they will be able to adjust without additional support. According to TAs, this results in a sense of insecurity regarding their jobs, with many feeling easily replaceable and even disposable. TAs also noted that their role has evolved to include more teaching-related tasks, yet their pay has not been adjusted to reflect this shift. While they understand that systemic changes, such as salary increases, are not easily implemented, this still contributes to feelings of being undervalued.

Amina: “No one cares about TAs. That is the reality. All teachers or anyone until they say, ‘But your child is going to have a much worse education now for it’, because actually, all the children that come here, all these needs, are running chaos, and there’s no one to help them. [...] So my point is if they don’t recognise the impact we’re making, they don’t understand that the kind of impact that is lost when that is gone. And I think people only... they don’t look at what they have, they would look at what they won’t have.”

Taylor: “Somebody looked at our budget and said, well, 60% of yours goes on your support staff. And it's like, yeah, but have you seen what they do? Like, they are 60% of what goes on here. And it is that... until you... I've said it to people before, kind of thing, it's like, come and do my job for a day. Come and do it for a week and tell me that I earn what I should.”

TAs reflected on how the COVID-19 pandemic brought notable shifts to their role, particularly during school closures. They described taking on responsibilities such as calling parents to check on their and children’s well-being, providing support to families, planning and teaching key worker children in school while teachers focused on remote learning, and creating engaging classroom activities to support a wide range of skills. However, while some TAs appreciated the increased flexibility during the pandemic, many felt disappointed that once schools returned to normal, their efforts during this critical period went again unacknowledged. Instead, they found themselves having to adapt to a new norm where they were expected to do more than before. TAs noted that the lack of recognition of their vital role during the pandemic left many feeling unmotivated to keep working in education, resulting in some leaving the role altogether.

Amina: “So I think for some people that (the pandemic period) did make a shift. So I think suddenly it felt okay for the school to go, ‘Oh, and I want just this as well. Oh, and just this. Oh, and this now.’ So, it didn’t change back to what it was. It didn’t fully change back.”

Ava: “And it was like we came back, and it didn’t feel like there was a lot of appreciation or a lot of thanks. It really is a blank statement that actually we acknowledge that, you guys did a lot of the work kind of thing, don’t get me wrong we were on rotas and stuff like that like I think a lot of schools were but we were still the ones in that were having to work out the work that the teachers were just putting up for their kids to do and it was just like... actually they came back and it was almost like, ‘Okay, we’re back to normal now.’”

Despite these challenges, many TAs expressed they feel pride in their role, because “you can make an impact on someone’s actual life” (Amina). They spoke about how the nature of their role enables them to build unique and strong connections with children, and how children often feel more comfortable confiding in them than in other staff. They also mentioned the emotional rewards

of the work, particularly when students recognise and appreciate their support, sometimes even years later, which reinforces the significance of their contributions by “knowing that you’ve helped them with something that is important”

Ava - Even when it’s like you look back and there’s... the other thing that about some of the kids that we’ve had that have just got in year one now, there’ll be going, ‘If you look at them in reception, there’s no way they will be doing this stuff that they do.’ And you look and you go, ‘Well, that’s a team effort. Like that’s all of us coming together and that’s why they are like that now.’ And they think it’s one that... and if we do... again, it’s almost those little victories that we look at them and we go, ‘Well, actually we were a part of that.’ But it’s almost us acknowledging that, ‘But we had a part to do with that’”

Lastly, TAs suggested ways to improve their sense of value and recognition. For instance, having regular appraisals where their successes can be listed and celebrated, and positive feedback given to allow them to see the impact of their work and feel that their efforts are recognised at all levels – from students, teachers, and leadership. Additionally, as TAs often come from diverse professional backgrounds, being invited to contribute using their various skills, such as art, music, or expertise in a different language, was highlighted as a great way to feel valued as a unique individual as well as enhance their engagement and confidence. Simple acts of daily appreciation were once more mentioned, such as acknowledging “tiny little successes” (Freya). One TA suggested visual representations of their impact, such as progress tracking tools or intervention graphs, to help demonstrate the effectiveness of their work and reinforce its importance. TAs argued that implementing such measures would also help improve job satisfaction and performance, ultimately benefiting both students and the wider school community.

Amina: “I think being recognised, I think again from your... from every level, from the children, to the teacher, to the SLT, if you don’t feel like anyone’s recognising what you do, it can be quite a hard job to do because you’re not doing it for the money. To feel like you’re making an impact, and if no one’s recognising the impact you’re making, it feels quite thankless, I think. But if you feel valued and make a connection with people, that’s like the core of the job, really, isn’t it?”

Olive: “Well, the thing is, there are a lot of people who do above and beyond, aren’t there? But the problem is when you’re working in a place where you do feel appreciated, then you don’t mind doing that because you get the best out of people.”

3.5 Discussion

This study explored the perceptions and experiences of TAs in mainstream primary schools in England regarding their role, the challenges they face, and implications for job satisfaction, retention, and effectiveness. Participants reflected on their evolving role and considered what changes would likely lead to more meaningful and sustainable improvements. The analysis of data revealed how systemic pressures on TAs, particularly funding constraints, increasing responsibilities, and a lack of formal recognition, affect their experiences, as well as the overall functioning of schools and student outcomes. These findings align with previous research, pre- and post-pandemic (Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Hall & Webster, 2023). Considering the ongoing difficulties schools face in recruiting and retaining TAs, this study brings further considerations on the sustainability of the TA workforce in England (Montacute, 2023a; 2023b), and the way in which they are esteemed, relative to teachers.

The findings reinforce long-standing concerns about the TA role and the growing expectations to perform responsibilities beyond their job description and professional expertise (Hall & Webster, 2023; Webster, 2024). These expectations reflect both an expansion and a blurring of the TA role with the role of teachers, which, while not officially mandated, has become normalised in many school contexts. Furthermore, as with previous research (Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Hall & Webster, 2022), participants in this study described how these increasing demands are often not accompanied by adequate training or guidance, leading to feelings of self-doubt and a sense of being under-supported. Limited opportunities for professional development and little space for collaboration between TAs and teachers further aggravate this issue, often leading TAs to leave the profession searching for roles where they feel more motivated and have a clear pathway for progression (Department for Education, 2023; 2024c). While TAs in this study downplayed the role of pay in relation to their motivation for being a TA, they nevertheless echoed familiar and longstanding sentiments about their relatively low pay, and how this symbolises their low status and value in the school workforce.

Despite these professional and personal challenges, TAs expressed pride in the positive impact they have on students, both academically, socially, and emotionally. Their key role inside and outside the classroom has been repeatedly emphasised by research (Burton, 2008; Conboy, 2021; Salisbury, 2016). However, participants felt their significance was only acknowledged when their absence led to disruptions. This aligns with the view expressed by Webster et al. (2021) that one of the most effective ways to understand and appreciate the impact of TAs is to imagine life in school without them. The sense of being "invisible" was particularly strong among TAs supporting students with SEND. Despite having a crucial role in the education and inclusion of these students, TAs

reported that they are rarely included in decision-making processes and relevant meetings, even when these directly impact their daily work, consistent with previous research (Webster et al., 2011; Wren, 2017). TAs in this study emphasised that meaningful recognition should begin at the senior leadership level and extend to the wider school community. They believed that fostering a culture of appreciation and respect would validate their efforts and enhance the overall perception of their profession, ultimately improving job retention.

Finally, recent research has highlighted how financial constraints on schools, alongside the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, are shaping the deployment and retention of TAs (Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Hall & Webster, 2022; Department for Education, 2023, 2024b). While participants in this study did not explicitly reference these factors, they provide an important background to understand the current structural pressures impacting the TA workforce. For instance, participants reported that one-to-one TA roles are being phased out, with responsibilities being redistributed to general classroom TAs without corresponding adjustments to workload and expectations. These pressures have been exacerbated in the post-pandemic period, as TAs are now expected to sustain the additional responsibilities they undertook during school closures (Education Support, 2021; 2024). These findings also reinforce post-pandemic research, highlighting the critical role TAs played in maintaining student engagement and well-being throughout lockdowns (Moss et al, 2021b). However, participants reported that their efforts were largely unacknowledged once schools returned to normal (Education Support, 2021). These ongoing shifts have deepened feelings of being undervalued and unsupported, contributing to declining morale and increased attrition amongst supporting staff (Hall & Webster, 2023b; Ofsted, 2019).

Now more than ever, there is a pressing need for schools and policymakers to re-examine the deployment of TAs, including how they are supported, acknowledged, and meaningfully integrated into the education workforce systems and processes. The findings of this study reinforce longstanding concerns identified in chapter 2 of this thesis, concerning role ambiguity, limited access to training, and the sense of being undervalued – the exacerbation of which risks worsening recruitment and retention difficulties. This research further contributes to ongoing national conversations, especially in light of the recent restatement of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB), which will lead to the first national framework for TAs' pay and conditions. The findings bring fresh insights to the factors that affect TAs' motivation and professional identity, including how small shifts in communication and recognition can make a meaningful difference. In doing so, it strengthens the case for reforms that are not only structural and financial but also relational and values-driven.

3.5.1 Limitations

This study was based on a small and self-selected sample of TAs from one region in England. While the collaborative approach provided rich insights, the findings cannot claim to be representative of all TAs nationally. As all participants were primary school TAs, experiences may differ in other contexts, such as in secondary settings or alternative provisions, though based on findings from other research, it is almost certain that similar challenges apply in other settings in England. Furthermore, participants volunteered to take part, meaning they may have had particularly strong opinions or experiences, potentially leading to self-selection bias and overrepresentation of dissatisfied or engaged viewpoints (Florczak, 2021). Nevertheless, the consistency of themes with those found in previous literature suggests that many of the experiences reported in this study are likely to resonate with TAs in other mainstream and special school contexts in England, the UK, and further afield. Additionally, there was a gap between the focus groups (December 2023) and the member-checking phase (early 2025), which could have influenced TAs' reflections due to changes in participants' experiences or school contexts. Future research could build on this work by incorporating a wider range of stakeholders and considering longitudinal designs to track the impact and cost of implementing or not implementing the suggested changes over time.

3.5.2 Implications for Practice

The findings of this study highlight several recommendations and implications for schools, policymakers, and EPs (see Table 4 and Table 5). Given the ongoing retention crisis and increasing reliance on TAs to support students and teachers, there is an urgent need to reconsider how TAs are deployed and supported within schools. The lack of role clarity, insufficient training, and limited recognition identified in this study suggest that current approaches to TA deployment are unsustainable and require improvement. This study is grounded in the belief that TAs should be central to discussions and decisions regarding their roles, as they are directly impacted and responsible for meeting set expectations. To ensure that the proposed changes were both meaningful and practical, all recommendations and implications were co-constructed with the participating TAs.

Although gathering TAs' voices alone was a deliberate choice, the absence of school leaders or teachers' views means this study cannot provide a full picture of how roles are interpreted and constructed schoolwide. That said, the dissemination of this study's findings at a primary SENCo forum revealed that many SENCos were surprised by how TAs were feeling in their roles, further evidencing the lack of communication between SLT and support staff described by the TAs in this study. If SLT are unaware of the day-to-day experiences, challenges, and well-being of their TAs, the prospect of meaningfully supporting them becomes minimal. A key barrier identified by SENCos was

the lack of time and funding to implement suggested changes. However, one critical question is whether schools can afford *not* to make these changes. The long-term cost of inaction is already becoming clear through mounting difficulties in employing and retaining TAs. While SENCos may not directly influence pay structures, policymakers must consider the broader impact of undervaluing TAs, not just on support staff but also on teachers and students. Several studies have shown that teachers experience unsustainable stress levels, with many leaving the profession (McLean et al., 2024; Moss et al., 2021a; Lester & Michelson, 2024). How much longer can we overlook that continued decisions to deprioritise and underinvest in the TA workforce risk destabilising the entire school system? Table 5 outlines some discussed and hypothesised implications for key stakeholders concerning whether the suggested changes above are prioritised and implemented.

Table 4*Co-constructed recommendations by theme*

	Co-constructed recommendations
Respectful Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily or weekly check-ins with teachers to improve information sharing. • More opportunities for open dialogue with SLT, ensuring TAs feel heard and included in decision-making (e.g., appraisal meetings). • A culture of appreciation, where staff verbally acknowledge each other's efforts, particularly when TAs take on additional tasks.
Role Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clearer delineation of TA responsibilities, avoiding unspoken or assumed expectations. • Greater consultation with TAs when assigning tasks to ensure feasibility. • Access to targeted training in areas they are expected to support, such as behaviour management and specific interventions. • Access to dedicated space and time to plan for weekly interventions or tasks (e.g., group work with students outside of the classroom)
Support is Key	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular supervision or check-ins to discuss challenges and well-being. • A designated TA representative to communicate collective concerns to SLT. • Shadowing opportunities and mentoring from experienced TAs to help new staff build confidence. • More structured team meetings to share experiences and best practices (e.g., TA meetings facilitated by the SENCo/SENCo assistant) • Mental health and well-being initiatives, including staff well-being groups.
Recognition of Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular appraisals to provide feedback and professional development discussions. • Verbal positive feedback and recognition from teachers and SLT - such as acknowledging their role in students' progress, not only in academics but also in emotional development. • Opportunities to share ideas and skills, including those from previous professional backgrounds. • Inclusion in relevant meetings where their insights can contribute to decision-making. • A system to visually track and demonstrate their impact, such as progress graphs for interventions.

Table 5

Implications for policymakers, schools, and EPs of implementing or not implementing key changes from the co-constructed

Implications for policymakers		Implications for schools		Implications for EPs	
<p>If Implemented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved retention and job satisfaction among staff, reducing recruitment and training costs. - Greater educational continuity and stability for students, particularly those with SEND. - Stronger alignment with inclusive education policies. - Enhances the value of support staff in the education system and elevates the quality of 	<p>If Not Implemented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continued instability in the support workforce, leading to long-term consequences for student support and learning outcomes. - Increased educational inequality, especially for students with additional needs. - Higher future costs for the education system due to disengaged learners, unmet needs, and reactive interventions. 	<p>If Implemented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved TA retention and job satisfaction, reducing recruitment pressure and costs. - Enhanced collaboration between teachers and TAs, improving the quality of classroom support and student outcomes. - Promotes a whole-school culture of inclusion, recognition, and staff well-being. - Encourages innovation and sustainable practices without relying solely on costly formal training. 	<p>If Not Implemented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater TA turnover, increasing the pressure on remaining staff - Teacher burnout may rise due to increased workload and lack of adequate classroom support. - Student disengagement may increase, requiring costly reactive interventions and behaviour management strategies. - Staff dissatisfaction may extend beyond TAs, contributing to broader 	<p>If Implemented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater opportunity to work systemically by supporting whole-school changes rather than focusing solely on individual cases. - Increased uptake and implementation of EP recommendations due to more capacity and shared responsibility among staff. - More sustainable support systems for students, particularly those with SEND. 	<p>If Not Implemented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Referrals to EPs may increase due to unmanaged or escalating difficulties in the classroom. - Recommendations from EPs may go unimplemented due to a lack of staffing, time, and resources, reducing their impact and value. - Limits EPs' ability to support systemic change, contributing to inefficiencies.

Implications for policymakers		Implications for schools		Implications for EPs	
provision in mainstream schools. - Offers a proactive model that aligns with national workforce development strategies	- Fails to address systemic issues that impact learning outcomes and staff well-being across the education sector.	- Improved communication and transparency with families regarding the role and support TAs provide, building trust through consistent quality provision for students. - Prioritising and valuing all staff, including teaching assistants (TAs), models inclusivity and mutual respect for students.	retention issues across the school. - Inequality and lack of respect are modelled to students through the consistent undervaluing of certain staff - Disruption of school-parent relationships can affect reputation, admissions, and external evaluations (e.g., Ofsted).		

3.6 Conclusion

The findings from this study contribute to the evidence that current working conditions, characterised by high expectations, low pay, limited voice, and unclear boundaries, are unsustainable and risk undermining TA well-being and wider school functioning (Blatchford et al., 2012; Bowles et al., 2017; Ofsted, 2022). The findings also highlight a collective future vision from TAs themselves – school cultures where everyone feels recognised, supported, equipped, and empowered to contribute. The research demonstrates that TAs are full of ideas for how their roles could be more effective, fulfilling, and sustainable. Through open and honest discussions, they outlined what would make a meaningful difference not only to their professional but also personal lives. As exemplified by Olive, “if you are happy in your job, then the chances are that happiness will stay with you when you are outside of your work... it makes everything better, doesn’t it?”. The values shared throughout the discussions would also create a better and safer educational environment for students. “If we are motivated in our role, then we can pass on that motivation to the children. So, if we look like we are happy to be at school and enjoying ourselves, and we are treating each other with respect, then that is modelling that for the children as well.” (Freya). When these needs are met, TAs believe, “retention would improve, massively” (Freya). This study answers the call to centre TA voices and suggests that the path forward lies in listening carefully to those who *do* the work and enabling *them* to shape the future of their profession.

Appendix A Quality assurance tool: Manchester framework for qualitative studies (Bond et al., 2013)

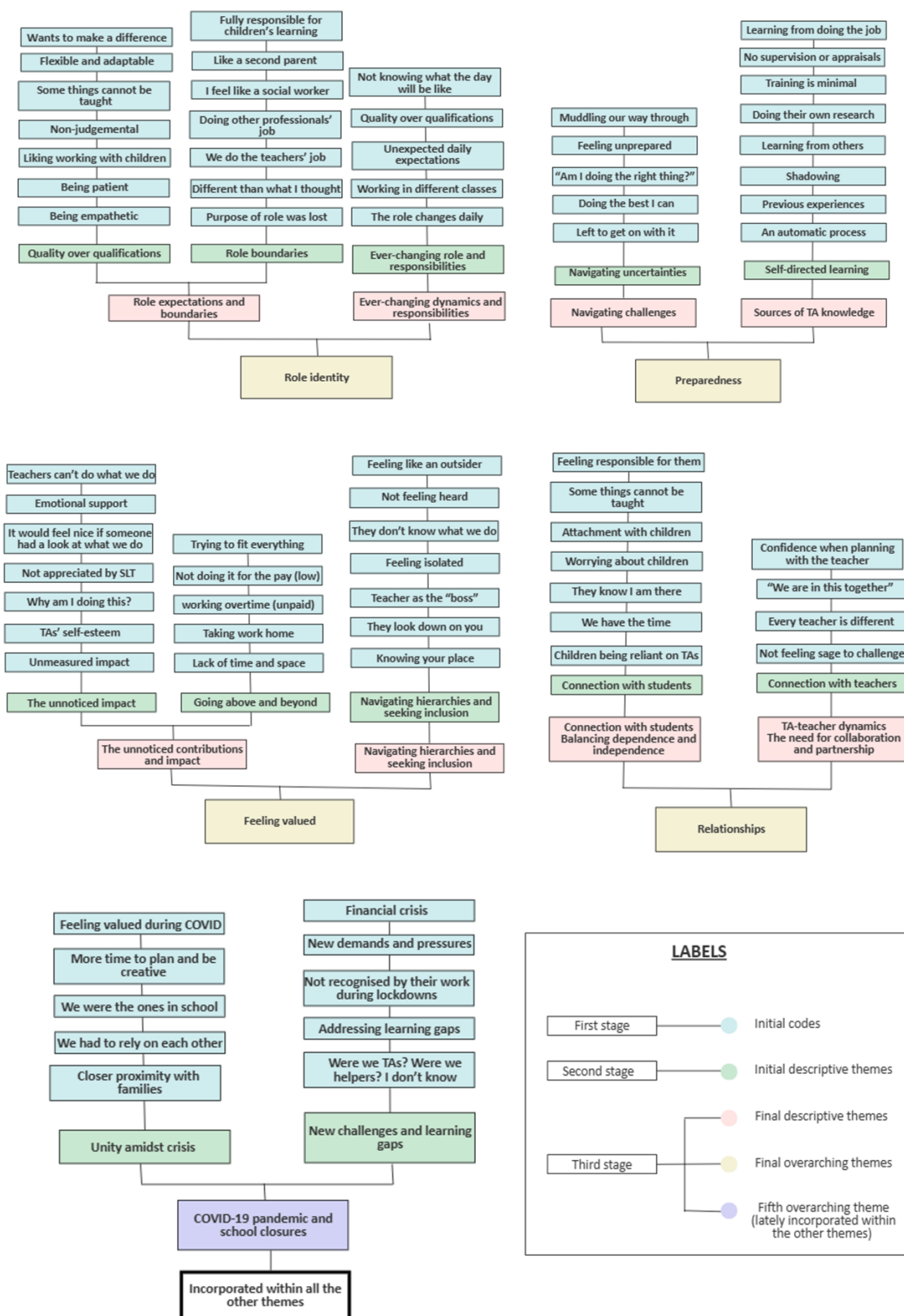
Criterion	Score	R1	R2	Agree coeff.	R1	R2	Agree coeff.	Comment
Appropriateness of the research design <i>e.g. rationale vis-à-vis aims, links to previous approaches, limitations</i>	1 0							
Clear sampling rationale <i>e.g. description, justification; attrition evaluated</i>	1 0							
Well executed data collection <i>e.g. clear details of who, what, how; effect of methods on data quality</i>	1 0							
Analysis close to the data, <i>e.g. researcher can evaluate fit between categories/themes and data.</i>	2 1 0							

Criterion	Score	R1	R2	Agree coeff.	R1	R2	Agree coeff.	Comment
Evidence of explicit reflexivity <i>e.g. impact of researcher, limitations, data validation (e.g. inter-coder validation), researcher philosophy/ stance evaluated.</i>	2 1 0							
Comprehensiveness of documentation <i>e.g. schedules, transcripts, thematic maps, paper trail for external audit</i>	1 0							
Negative case analysis, <i>e.g. contrasts/ contradictions/ outliers within data; categories/ themes as dimensional; diversity of perspectives.</i>	1 0							
Clarity and coherence of the reporting <i>e.g. clear structure, clear account linked to aims, key points highlighted</i>	1 0							

Criterion	Score	R1	R2	Agree coeff.	R1	R2	Agree coeff.	Comment
Evidence of researcher-participant negotiation of meanings, <i>e.g. member checking, empower participants.</i>	1 0							
Emergent theory related to the problem, <i>e.g. abstraction from categories/ themes to model/ explanation.</i>	1 0							
Valid and transferable conclusions <i>e.g. contextualised findings; limitations of scope identified.</i>	1 0							
Evidence of attention to ethical issues <i>e.g. presentation, sensitivity, minimising harm, feedback</i>	1 0							
Total	Max 14			Mean coeff.			Mean coeff.	

Note. The R1 and R2 rating columns refer to inter-rater reliability were not used when assessing research for this study.

Appendix B Thematic synthesis stage 1 to stage 3: Overarching and descriptive themes developed from initial codes



Appendix C Descriptive themes identified in each in each reviewed study with illustrative quotes

Table C1

Descriptive themes identified in the reviewed studies 1-8 with quotations

Descriptive Theme	Webster and Blatchford (2014)	Marville (2015)	Cockroft and Atkinson (2015)	Salisbury (2016)	Bowles et al. (2017)	Wren (2017)	Maher and Vickerman (2018)	Clarke and Visser (2019)
Role expectations and boundaries	"I'm not the class teacher and I'm not her mum—so I'm that person in between"	"It is like being a second parent really." "I think with LSAs we pick up the kids that are on the borderline of going that way."	"It can be teaching speech and language, occupational therapy, basically all these people, these outside agencies who are of loads on money, tell us this is what you need to do, they walk out,	"I need to be this in between person"		"Sometimes I feel like a zookeeper because my job is to keep him contained on his table. 1 know I've done well if he hasn't shouted out or distracted any of the other children. I keep him calm so that		". . . sometimes it's about knowing your place, if that's the right thing to say (.) there is a line that you don't want to cross which I think affects how you deal with things. . ."

			get paid a decent wage and we're doing their job."			the teacher can teach"		
Ever-changing dynamics and responsibilities	"Pedagogical planning and decision-making (n = 34); monitoring behaviour (n = 33); pastoral/emotional support (n = 18); and promoting the pupil's independence (n = 16)."	"...it is getting the student to engage really with what is going on in school be it social or academic we help with the emotional support and anything else that comes up"	"...because you could have all the qualifications in the world but once you start that job, it's completely different to how you imagined it was going to be."	"Just support in the classroom with children that need help, talking things through, doing stuff, like getting things laminated. Just being around to support them, I think."	"Well I usually sit behind them . . . give them a little tap . . . make sure they're watching and Listening"	"Sometimes I feel like a zookeeper because my job is to keep him contained on his table. I know I've done well if he hasn't shouted out or distracted any of the other children. I keep him calm so that the teacher can teach"	"I help the pupils to progress. . . I help them to get ready for the adult world or whatever they go on to do whether it's college or things like that. I just get the best out of them"	"If you're moved continuously, class to class all day long, every single day you don't have a chance to become any sort of pastoral (.) you don't get to know the children well enough."
Navigating challenges	"I sometimes question myself:		"A lot of our role as an LSA is muddling,	"I know, I'm just going to tell you				

	am I doing the right thing?"		muddling our way through"	what I do out there. Because when you ask me, I'm like "I don't know what I do"				
Sources of TA knowledge		"Everyday it is different, everyday you are called on to use a different skill that you've got and that is what makes the job interesting, you go in thinking that you are going to support one student and someone else needs your help that day."	"You can have all the qualifications in the world, but if you don't like working with kids then it's completely irrelevant as far as I'm concerned."	"Because every day is not the same, which makes it more interesting for me."			"One of the reasons I did become a teaching assistant is because I have a son who has ADHD, so I understand ADHD a lot more than the average person because I have to deal with it at home. I think having that expertise of living with	"Participants described how they were 'left to get on with' behaviour management using a combination of 'common sense'"

							someone with ADHD can be used in the workplace.”	
The unnoticed contributions and impact	“...no one would want to work solely, 20 hours a week with one person, singularly; without any personal involvement in the school community.”	“And also to be paid what we are paid and still do the job shows that we want to do the job because you can go and get this pay at the supermarket... it is like a family”	“You probably would get more on a till at Aldi but I don’t want to do that and I love my job, but I am just saying that, for our pay scale that our expectations in comparison to our pay terms are quite high.”	“I think they appreciate having an extra adult in the class a lot of the time, because hardly any classes are easy. I also get to do some of the stuff that they want to do but don’t have time, so I would say, yes, just being there and helping.”		“I spend most of my time working out how to change the work that has been set. We do sometimes try the same work as everyone else, but most of the time we end up changing it halfway through.”	“I need to spend time getting resources ready for some of my lessons and you just don’t have the time to do it all so you end up doing loads of stuff at home’ ‘When I do stuff at home it means that my kids haven’t got me because I’m	

							doing stuff for work.”	
Navigating hierarchies and seeking inclusion				“There is a big, big divide and....I’m lucky with the teacher I’ve got now, I don’t feel it with her, erm...it kind of, feels like they look down upon you.”				“...sometimes it’s about knowing your place, if that’s the right thing to say (.) there is a line that you don’t want to cross which I think affects how you deal with things...”
Connection with students – Balancing dependence and independence	“When you have a child on a statement, it can be very alienating if they’re always working with one LSA. That’s not healthy. . . no one	“We make school for some of our students a positive place to be, where it might not have been when they first came, they	“I think what hinders most is time...’cos there literally aren’t enough hours in the day to do what needs to be done for each child’.”	“So I’ll just walk round, talk to the children, sort out issues, have a chat with people, just get a feel of what’s going on. It’s quite relaxed.	“I’ll lean in with my group and talk to them . . . then what I’ll often find is they’ll come up with good ideas but they won’t share them . . . So then	“Sometimes I feel like a zookeeper because my job is to keep him contained on his table. I know I’ve done well if he hasn’t		“...the teachers can sometimes press the wrong buttons to be honest, and you can see the effect it has on the

	would want to work solely, 20 hours a week with one person, singularly; without any personal involvement in the school community.”	may not have always had that positive image of school [...] If they’ve got a problem at home or with someone at school, like Internet bullying, they wouldn’t speak to the teacher but they will ask to speak to us”		We’ll be positioned in certain places so that ... children can access a grown-up near where they are.”	you can just give them a nudge and say you know you had a really good idea.”	shouted out or distracted any of the other children. I keep him calm so that the teacher can teach”		child (.) but as a teaching assistant (.) I would never be able to say.”
TA-teacher dynamic – the need for collaboration and partnership	“You don’t have time to talk to teachers. You don’t have time to sit down and say, ‘Actually,	“I do find it difficult with teachers around communication, I’ll pass on anything that is relevant about	“Some teachers will give you the week’s plan ahead of the week so that you can	“Sometimes they laugh at me if I say, “You’re my boss,” kind of thing, but they are in charge and if I think		“The teacher can’t cope with him on her own; she spends all of her time with him and can’t work with	“We need more time to plan with the teacher, even if it was only half an hour after school	“Someone I’ve not worked with before I’d find it quite tricky (.) so with them I’d perhaps take a back seat and

	what shall we do with him today? I've tried this"	the child. If a lesson is not going well because it is not well planned. I find it difficult to approach a teacher and say this is not working. I would find it unprofessional if someone came to me and said that."	be bearing that in mind."	something and they don't, that's the way it goes. I mean, they are in charge, it's their job. They manage me."		the others. When I'm there, at least she has a chance to actually teach the rest of the kids"	each day. However, the problem is money. I wouldn't do that for free"	just try and wait for a while, until I knew what was going on. I wouldn't just jump in. So I don't do the same with all teachers (.) it depends how familiar I am with how the teacher runs their classroom."
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Table C2

Descriptive themes identified in the reviewed studies 9-15 with quotations

Descriptive Theme	Kelly (2020)	Noble (2020)	Ihenacho (2020)	Conboy (2021)	Richardson-Frankton (2022)	Hall & Webster (2022)	Kimber (2023)
Role expectations and boundaries	“[...] so yeah it can be that kind of an in-between, like I know I am his teaching assistant, but it can feel like more than that...erm so yeah, I don’t know.”	“Sometimes, I don’t feel as if it’s my place to add something. Because they are teachers they are trained they know what works and what doesn’t work and sometimes I feel as if hmm, just keep quiet, just go with the flow.”		“And because they’re at school for so long. So, you do almost feel like their sort of parent, while they’re here, because that’s it.”		<p>“At that time (pandemic), were we TAs? Helpers? Were we keyworkers? I don’t know. Who were we?”</p> <p>“I don’t have the training to be a counsellor for parents . . . or be a social worker . . . I have no idea what to do.”</p>	<p>“There aren’t enough social workers. There aren’t enough Ed Psychs. There aren’t enough of anything. [...] that’s why they’ve tried to introduce the things like the ELSAs to try and do something. That’s not enough, it just means we’ve got to do more.”</p>

Ever-changing dynamics and responsibilities	"I guess because, it's so like, not drummed in but like, I know that my job title is a one-to-one. But obviously, if you have children that need help, I'm not going to ignore them, but it can be difficult to balance it sometimes"			"If you didn't work in a school, I don't think people would realise quite the role that an LSA has, in supporting children. I do quite often go home and feel like I've been a social worker for that day. Not just an LSA."	"I think like things like...erm interventions that we discussed before or like, I think we're getting a lot more put on us now because of what they've missed."	"Our role from 2020 to this day... has changed. It's properly changed, and I think it's going to continue."	"The government talks about how important schools are and how we've gotta do this and that. I'm expected to do more and more with less and less [...] you're just trying to bail water out of a boat with someone punching holes underneath you."
Navigating challenges	"I feel really good that...today didn't go to waste, at least they did something...but when...he don't want to do	"That's when you start to panic because you don't feel prepared and that's not good for you or the children because you do doubt	"I teach a phonics group ... from year one... I'd had a little bit of experience of phonics in my previous role...	"Initially, I was just using common sense. And I was feeling... I was, to be honest,	"But then I'm not always 100 percent sure what I'm supposed to be doing over there? It's knocked...it's knocked my	"I'm not sure if I'm going to be here next year, because this job doesn't [pay enough]. I'd love to stay, but the	"We're exposed to these new responsibilities and not, just not necessarily have the confidence or the

	anything, I feel like “oh, today he missed out so much” so, I feel err like a little bit guilty like “how can I help him more? How can I make him do this thing?”	yourself and you do question.” “I felt awful, unprepared, I felt stressed. I felt hot. I felt under pressure.”	but I’d not been through the whole structure...”	I was feeling scared, because when children were approaching me, I didn’t know how to help them.”	confidence a little bit.”	money’s just not good enough.”	experience to back it up at the time. And you, you just learn, learning on the on the cuff.”
Sources of TA knowledge	“I find it very rewarding because you actually see that individual, you know, their changes are happening, and this is coming from you”	“I never before used to go online and read up on [Trisomy Disorder] children, now I go on different websites, see things for him, activities for him, and erm, makes me feel like I’m doing research for my own child”	“asking ...and talking to people ...what do they do, and how can I do this. That’s how I basically learnt in the beginning.”	“[I] felt happy. Yeah, because I could see the result, and I thought I made a difference there.” “asking ...and talking to people ...what do they do, and how can I do this.	“But that's something...your compassion and your heart goes out to them. So just, you know, if I can do this with them, it'll, you know, give them another experience, or give them a little bit of something else.”		“I don't know if it's because I've had, like, lots of training [...] so that's why I feel confident because I've got the network I suppose, of support and the training to be able to do it.”

				That's how I basically learnt in the beginning."			
The unnoticed contributions impact	"it's horrible when you kind of, don't get appreciated"	"Sometimes I do think maybe it would be nice if, um, someone actually had a look at any of the things that I do."	"I just felt like I was spinning all the plates and they were all smashing at the same time. 'It had a massive impact on my confidence, because for the rest of the week I wasn't sure on what I was meant to be doing, which was frustrating."		"And I suppose as well, I think the bottom of all that is the feeling that you've been heard, you know that you've said something, and it's of value."	"I was doing lots of applications for benefits, child benefits. . . for parents not being able to read and write in any language. They were relying on children. Children are able to speak [English], but sometimes it's hard for a child, who is 8 or 9 years old, to fill in a form which is 20-something pages."	"What we do isn't measured [...] so I actually spent an hour at lunchtime with a child that needed whatever. That's a whole hour of my time. That was really important but it's not measurable [...] There's nothing to show for it other than that child is now calm and can go into class and access the afternoons learning."

<p>Navigating hierarchies and seeking inclusion</p>	<p>"when you're, you're experienced, your views aren't taking in consideration, it's like, well you are just a TA...you know, "we're the teacher of the class", erm, you know, it doesn't count, this is, "I'm doing it this way" and that's it."</p>	<p>"Sometimes, I don't feel as if it's my place to add something. Because they are teachers they are trained they know what works and what doesn't work and sometimes I feel as if hmm, just keep quiet, just go with the flow."</p>	<p>"And if there's any training that we spot [noticing training opportunities], she'll say, even if it's something that's... teacher based, she would still be happy to send us on it as teaching assistants [being included]."</p> <p>"Because she thinks just because we've got a teaching assistant title, doesn't mean we can't do those training things</p>	<p>"Well, she's higher than a TA. In fact, she's actually studying to be a teacher."</p>	<p>"The staff, so like the teacher would be like, 'god, I didn't think of something like that' or 'thank you' and they'll be like, the next time, it'll be like what we've come up with, like, Whoa, yeah, it's nice. Hopefully, that will continue."</p> <p>"Yeah...it's a bit of inclusion as well really, that we maybe wouldn't have been included in before."</p>	<p>"I think it's just to really listen to the staff because some of the schools I've been in, the TAs have kind of been dismissed. We're really just as valued as the teachers and it comes across in that way. Our opinions are taken into account."</p>	<p>"But that's what the teacher wanted. That's what she wanted. I was cross about that because I knew that they were wrong but there was nothing I could do because I'm only a TA."</p>
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			what teachers get.[being included]”				
Connection with students – Balancing dependence and independence	<p>“it can be difficult to judge, like you know, having a really good bond, which means you can work really well, and having like...too much of an attachment, I would say, where it is like, too reliant and dependent on me”</p> <p>“I guess is like the struggle for all 1:1s, because, they are reliant on</p>	<p>“And I think that hugely impacts on the children because if you’re flustered then they pick up on that and you might not be outwardly flustered but they know that something is awry, don’t they, they’re not daft.”</p>	<p>“So, if I was out doing training, who was gonna have that child?”</p> <p>“Well, I won’t be out for the next six weeks on a Wednesday because who’s gonna have that child when I’m not in?”</p>	<p>“I would say nine times out of 10 they come to the LSA rather than the teacher if they’ve got a problem.</p>	<p>“Because you lose those links and because you know you're not phoning home and saying how are you? How's the little one, you know? And...and because you've lost that link, that's when you've gone back to being two separate like entities kind of thing whereas before you were one community you were in this together, you were</p>	<p>“It was a tough time. (pandemic) It wasn’t just about reading. It wasn’t just about education. It was about sharing their feelings, sharing their tears.”</p>	<p>“We are more trusted adult than the professional teacher that they just only see in the classroom [...] her seeing me in Lidl is gonna be much easier. She's gonna be able to trust me and speak to me more. And see me, as a peer rather than someone to be feared”</p>

	you, like it's part of your job description, but it is like trying to, kind of form some independence as well"				pulling each other through it. Where once that link was broken because the kids came back into school, they were on the other side of the door again, they were on the playground, the other side of the fence you know and that was kind of the changing point."		
TA-teacher dynamic – the need for collaboration and partnership	"she would shout at me about things, in front of the children and I'm like "I'm not having this conversation with you now. I will	"I contacted the teacher to see what I would be delivering, and we agreed a time that it would be mutually good to meet. I felt that this was really beneficial	"And i-if you work with a teacher more than just, like, passing by in one year, kind of thing [supporting same teacher], then you get to		"Yeah, and the way...the way you trust people as it...it kinda threw you into a place where you have to rely on each other, and you need that honesty		"And it's being able to trust the teachers that you work with so that if you go to them and say, 'look I've seen this'. That they're not gonna go well,

	talk to you at the end of the day, but I am not having this conversation in front of the children”	because I knew that I would be prepared for the lesson.” “It definitely makes you more confident in what you’re doing and being able to have time to run it past the class teacher as well.”	know how they work [practice-based knowledge builds over time], and then you can model and work alongside, the same way the teacher’s delivering it [align practice].”		and you need...you needed it each other.”		‘don't be so silly that's fine’.”
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Appendix D Email to SENCos

Dear [SENCos'/Headteacher's Name],

I am a trainee educational psychologist at the University of Southampton, conducting research for my thesis on the experiences and expectations of UK teaching assistants. This project has been developed in consideration of the immense pressure schools and school staff are under with a key goal being understanding how the TA role can be effectively supported and sustained.

I would like to invite one of your school's support staff (e.g., TAs, LSAs, or INAs) to participate in my study. Participation involves attending two 2-hour focus group meetings with TAs from other schools in the Autumn term 2023, which will take place outside school hours. As an appreciation of their time, a £40 Amazon voucher will be gifted to the participant TA.

Please, can I ask you to share this email and the poster attached widely with the TAs at your school. Interested teaching assistants should complete a short questionnaire by September 29th. The questionnaire can be accessed by clicking on this link: <https://forms.gle/HUARjZpmhJpbNRoa6>. Meeting timings will be discussed with participants directly.

After the focus group meetings are finalised, findings and implications for practice will be shared with stakeholders (e.g., headteachers/SENCos) to think about how the information gained can be best used in their school. Further information will be sent after TAs focus groups are completed.

Your support and the involvement of your teaching assistants are greatly appreciated.

Kind regards,

Nanda Dias

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Southampton


ARE YOU A TEACHING ASSISTANT?

I AM LOOKING FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THEIR ROLE

YOU CAN TAKE PART IF YOU ARE:

- ✓ WORKING AS A TEACHING ASSISTANT, LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANT, OR INDIVIDUAL NEEDS ASSISTANT
- ✓ WORKING IN A MAINSTREAM PRIMARY OR SECONDARY SCHOOL

WHAT IS INVOLVED?

 TWO GROUP MEETINGS WHERE YOU WILL BE INVITED TO REFLECT ON YOUR EXPERIENCE OF BEING A TA AND HOW YOUR ROLE CAN BE IMPROVED. MEETINGS WILL LAST 2 HOURS AND EVERYTHING YOU SAY WILL BE ANONYMISED.

 THE TIME AND DATE OF THE 2 GROUP MEETINGS WILL BE ARRANGED TO BE AS ACCESSIBLE AS POSSIBLE FOR ALL TO ATTEND, AFTER INTEREST HAS BEEN REGISTERED. YOU WILL BE GIVEN A £40 VOUCHER AS A THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.



IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING, PLEASE COMPLETE THE SHORT QUESTIONNAIRE BY SCANNING THE QR CODE OR PASTING THE LINK TO YOUR BROWSER

<https://tinyurl.com/4t6hk2de>



Nanda Dias

Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Southampton
fdds1n21@soton.ac.uk



Appendix E Survey Questionnaire

Revealing and reflecting on the experiences and expectations of UK teaching assistants, now and for the future of their role – A participatory action research

If you would like to be contacted to participate in this study, please answer the questions below. The information collected will be used for selection purposes and will be anonymised and stored safely.

1. Please provide an email or contact number to be contacted by the researcher *

2. What is the name of your current role? (e.g., Teaching Assistant, Learning Support Assistant, Individual Needs Assistant). *

3. How long have you been working in this role? *

☐ Less than a year

☐ Between 1-2 years

☐ Between 2-5 years

☐ More than 5 years

☐ More than 10 years

4. Are you employed to work 1:1 with children with special educational needs? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. In your job, how often do you deliver interventions or teach groups of children outside of their classroom? *

☐ Every day

☐ Every week

☐ A few times a month

☐ I have done this in the past, but I do not do this anymore

☐ I have never done this

6. What is your current gender identity? *

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Non-binary

☐ Genderqueer

☐ Prefer not to say

7. What is your ethnicity? * (Check all that apply)

☐ English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British

☐ Irish

☐ Gypsy or Irish Traveller

☐ Roma

☐ Any other White Background

☐ Caribbean

☐ African

☐ Any other Black, Black British, or Caribbean background

☐ White and Black Caribbean

☐ White and Black African

☐ White and Asian

☐ Any other Mixed or multiple ethnic background

☐ Indian

☐ Pakistani

☐ Bangladeshi

☐ Chinese

☐ Any other Asian background

☐ Arab

☐ Any other ethnic group

☐ Prefer not to say

Appendix F Email to TAs

Dear [TA's Name],

I'm pleased to inform you that you've been selected to participate in our research project on the experiences of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in mainstream schools. We're in the process of finalizing the meeting details, which will be confirmed soon. Our preference is to hold these meetings in person, but we'll arrange virtual sessions if necessary. Your presence at both meetings is crucial for the success of our research.

The proposed time frame for these meetings is between the week before the last week of November and the second week of December. Please keep these dates in mind.

If, for any reason, you can't attend the first meeting, we regret to inform you that you won't be able to participate in the second meeting. Your commitment to both meetings is essential for the integrity of our research.

Attached to this email, you'll find the Participant Information Sheet and the Consent Form. Please review these documents carefully and return the completed Consent Form by Friday of this week to confirm your participation.

Your contribution is highly valuable and will significantly enhance our understanding of the TA profession. Your insights will shape the field of Teaching Assistants, benefitting both current and future TAs.

Thank you for your interest and willingness to participate. We look forward to working with you and learning from your valuable experiences.

Best regards,

Nanda Dias

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Southampton

Appendix G Consent forms

Consent Form – Teaching Assistants

Study title:

Revealing and reflecting on the experiences and expectations of UK teaching assistants, now and for the future of their role – A participatory action research

Researcher name: Fernanda Dias

ERGO number: 81579

Date: 12-05-23

Version number: 3

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet for this study and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study.	
I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time for any reason without my participation rights being affected.	
I understand that whilst my responses to answers may be shared with others, my data will be anonymised and my identity will be protected.	
I understand that I may be quoted directly in reports of the research but that I will not be directly identified (e.g. that my name will not be used).	
I understand that if safeguarding issues come to light during discussions, the researcher will, in discussion with the interviewee, ensure that the school safeguarding lead is aware so that the school settings safeguarding policy can/has been followed.	
I understand that the data I provided in the survey questionnaire to show interest in participating in this research will be used for recruitment purposes and will be anonymised and stored safely stored on password-protected laptops issued by the University of Southampton after selection.	

<p>I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time up until 3 days after each meeting (by notifying the researcher). After that time, the transcript of the meetings will be used anonymously in analysis, so there will be no further opportunity to withdraw. Should I withdraw within the 3-day period after the second or third meeting, any data collected from me will be removed from the most recent meeting, not the previous ones, which will be already anonymised.</p>	
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Name of participant (print name).....

Signature of participant.....

Date.....

Name of researcher (print name) Fernanda Dias

Signature of researcher

Date.....

G.1 Consent form - SENCos

Study title:

Revealing and reflecting on the experiences and expectations of UK teaching assistants, now and for the future of their role – A participatory action research

Researcher name: Fernanda Dias

ERGO number: 81579

Date: 05-05-23

Version number: 2

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the information sheet for this study and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study.	
I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time for any reason without my participation rights being affected.	
I understand that whilst my responses to answers may be shared with others, my data will be anonymised and my identity will be protected.	
I understand that I may be quoted directly in reports of the research but that I will not be directly identified (e.g. that my name will not be used).	
I understand that if safeguarding issues come to light during discussions, the researcher will, in discussion with the interviewee, ensure that the school safeguarding lead is aware so that the school settings safeguarding policy can/has been followed.	
I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time up until 3 days after the completion of the meeting (by notifying the researcher). After that time, the transcript of the meeting will be used anonymously in analysis, so there will be no further opportunity to withdraw.	

Name of participant (print name).....

Signature of participant.....

Date.....

Name of researcher (print name) Fernanda Dias

Signature of researcher

Date.....

Appendix H Summary of literature review findings shared with participants

PRE-MEETING REFLECTION TASK

If possible, please take a little time to look through the themes below and reflect on what aspects are crucial for positive changes in your role before we meet.

ROLE IDENTITY

- **Role Boundaries**

Teaching Assistants (TAs) navigate the complex role of not being the class teacher while assuming responsibilities beyond traditional boundaries. They find themselves in a space between students, teachers, parents, and specialists, often transcending prescribed roles to offer comprehensive support.

- **Ever-Changing Role and Responsibilities**

TAs discuss their diverse roles beyond traditional support, such as emotional aid, administrative tasks, interventions, and behaviour management. They highlight the gap between job descriptions and actual responsibilities, which often requires improvisation to address unique student needs.

PREPAREDNESS

- **Sources of TA Knowledge and Know-How**

This theme emphasises TAs' proactive approach to seeking and sharing resources with other TAs, doing their own research, and utilising personal experiences in their role. It underscores the evolving nature of the TA role, often prioritising personality traits over qualifications.

- **Navigating Uncertainty**

TAs share experiences of self-doubt and uncertainty in their roles, describing a sense of "muddling through." This theme unveils their work's emotional aspects, including guilt and stress due to perceived unpreparedness. TAs yearn for better preparation and improved training to effectively support students.

FEELING VALUED

- **The Unnoticed Contributions and Impact**

TAs discussed the importance of recognition and a strong sense of belonging within their school community. They emphasised their dedication, sometimes investing personal time at home to

prepare for lessons and activities, but still feeling underappreciated by teachers and senior leadership teams.

- **Navigating Hierarchies and Seeking Inclusion**

TAs discuss efforts to find their place within the school community. They navigate challenges, occasionally feeling isolated and hesitant to voice opinions. This theme reveals the complexities of power dynamics and TAs' quest for inclusion, both in decision-making with teachers and recognition of their significance.

RELATIONSHIPS

- **Connection with Students – Balancing Dependence and Independence**

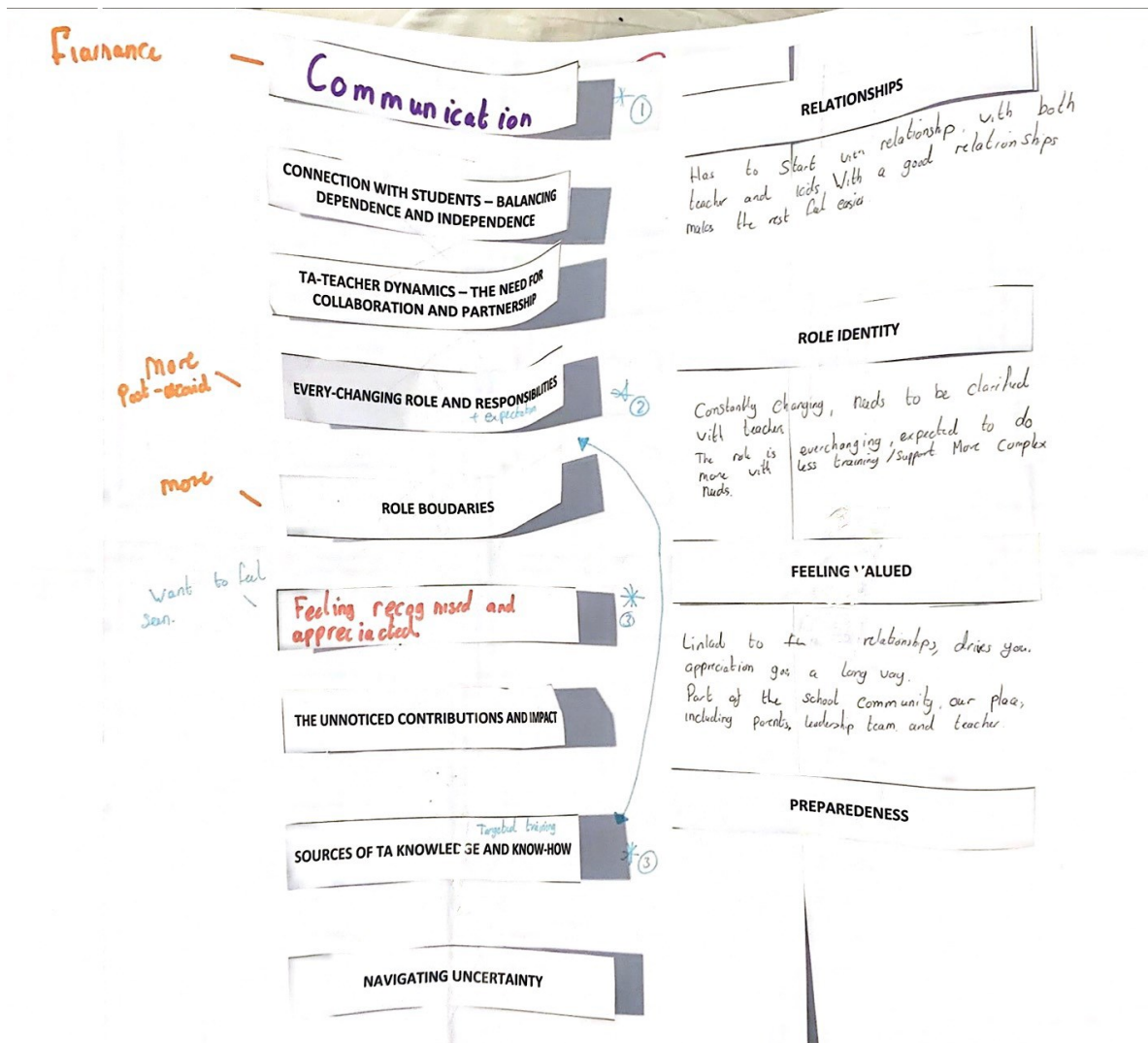
TAs acknowledge the challenges of nurturing these bonds whilst fostering student independence and resilience. They discuss their role in building personal connections to the students, and act as mentors, confidants, and supporters while preventing over-dependency.

- **TA-Teacher Dynamic – The Need for Collaboration and Partnership**

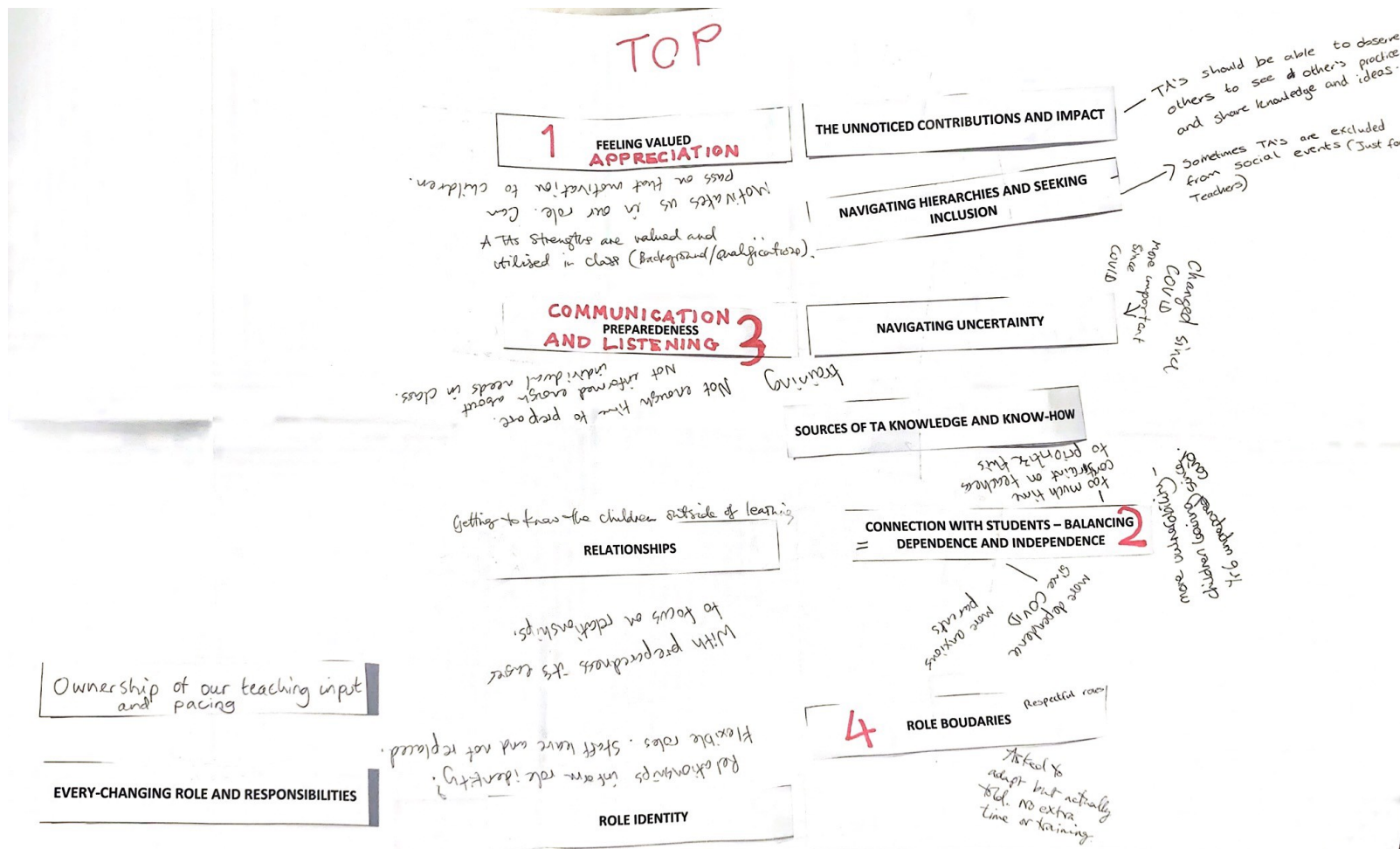
TAs stress the crucial role of positive TA-teacher relationships in supporting students, underscoring the need for improved planning and communication opportunities. This theme highlights the transformative power of collaboration, especially during adversity, promoting shared goals and a cohesive approach to student support.

Appendix I Production from the first focus group meeting

I.1 Group 1



I.2 Group 2



Appendix J Productions from the second focus group meeting using the Tschudi ABC framework

4 areas

- ① Respectful communication
- ② Role expectations
- ③ Support is Key
- ④ Recognition of impact

<p>Respectful communication</p> <p>not included in communication Have to seek forgotten plan for the week - expectations lack of consistency</p>	<p>1:1 conversation with teachers morn. Time to talk Resilience assertiveness</p>
<p>People leave + turnover</p>	<p>Improve relationships Retention</p>

<p><u>Role expectations</u></p> <p>Sudden changes ① variation - good as well "do something" "space" and "time" lead / groups leading / interventions behaviour management emotional support</p>	<p>target / goals</p> <p>clear expectations feeling equipped appraisal listening</p>
<p>gain skills people will do more drive</p>	<p>Precious time with children stronger staff Positive workforce consi Motivation Safeguarding</p>

<p>each other (TAs)</p>	<p><u>Support is key</u></p> <p>feeling seen Supervision (1:1) well being feedback / observation training Time to problem-solving</p>
<p>cons</p> <p>illness people are off burnout more absence mental Health Retention</p>	<p>pro</p> <p>Happy & staff</p>

<p><u>Recognition of impact</u></p> <p>Under the radar "get on with it" comes expected No one knows what we do role has changed above and beyond</p>	<p>graph of impact day to day ideas confidence "Mr will make a difference"</p>
<p>Impact that is lost it affects the children small things</p>	<p>Valuing themselves "we don't want to leave our jobs" disillusion children will suffer progress of children</p>

Appendix K Teaching Assistant Focus Group Findings – Summary for SENCos

Teaching Assistant Focus Group Findings – Summary for SENCos

Fernanda Dias – Trainee Educational Psychologist

The preliminary findings below represent the key themes collectively constructed with eight TAs during focus group discussions in December 2023, highlighting their experiences, challenges, and proposals for improving their role within schools.

	What TAs said about how things are now (at Dec 2023)	What TAs said would help	What impact this should have
Respectful Communication	TAs value open and respectful communication, as it helps them feel included, informed, and able to support students effectively. Strong collaboration with teachers and leadership fosters a positive working environment. However, communication is often inconsistent, with TAs feeling left out of important discussions, lacking regular updates, or not always having a clear platform to share concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily or weekly check-ins with teachers to improve information sharing. • More opportunities for open dialogue with SLT, ensuring TAs feel heard and included in decision-making (e.g., appraisal meetings). • A culture of appreciation, where staff verbally acknowledge each other's efforts, particularly when TAs take on additional tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened relationships between TAs, teachers, and SLT. • Improved collaboration and efficiency in supporting students. • Higher job satisfaction and sense of belonging.
Role Expectations	TAs are dedicated to their role and willing to adapt to meet the needs of students and staff. They appreciate the variety in their work and the opportunity to develop new skills. However, many feel that their responsibilities have expanded beyond what was initially expected, sometimes taking on tasks without the necessary training and guidance. A lack of clarity around their role can lead to uncertainty and inconsistency in expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clearer delineation of TA responsibilities, avoiding unspoken or assumed expectations. • Greater consultation with TAs when assigning tasks to ensure feasibility. • Access to targeted training in areas they are expected to support, such as behaviour management and specific interventions. • Access to dedicated space and time to plan for weekly interventions or tasks (e.g., such as group work with students outside of the classroom) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased confidence in carrying out their role effectively. • More equitable distribution of responsibilities. • Consistency when teaching and delivering interventions. • Reduced stress and improved retention of skilled TAs.

Support is Key	TAs recognise the importance of having strong support systems in place, as their role often involves working with students with complex needs. Feeling supported by colleagues and leadership helps build confidence and ensures they can provide the best support to students. However, many reported feeling isolated in their role, managing challenges without sufficient guidance. Some felt hesitant to ask for help, fearing it would be perceived as a weakness, while others expressed a need for more structured support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular supervision or check-ins to discuss challenges and well-being. • A designated TA representative to communicate collective concerns to SLT. • Shadowing opportunities and mentoring from experienced TAs to help new staff build confidence. • More structured team meetings to share experiences and best practices (e.g., TA meetings facilitated by the SENCo/SENCo assistant) • Mental health and well-being initiatives, including staff well-being groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger peer support network and a more resilient workforce. • Greater job satisfaction and reduced staff turnover. • More effective support for students due to improved confidence and well-being among TAs.
Recognition of Impact	TAs take pride in the positive impact they have on students. They contribute not only to academic progress but also to student well-being, classroom management, and the smooth running of the school. However, many felt their contributions were often overlooked, particularly when their work extended beyond academic support. They expressed that recognition was often focused on teaching staff, leaving their own efforts unnoticed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular appraisals to provide feedback and professional development discussions. • Verbal positive feedback and recognition from teachers and SLT - such as acknowledging their role in students' progress, not only in academics but emotional development. • Opportunities to share ideas and skills, including those from previous professional backgrounds. • Inclusion in relevant meetings where their insights can contribute to decision-making. • A system to visually track and demonstrate their impact, such as progress graphs for interventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased motivation and job satisfaction. • Stronger relationships with colleagues and leadership. • Greater retention of experienced TAs, leading to more stability for students.

Appendix L TA Role and Support: SENCo Forum Reflection Form

As part of this forum, we invite you to reflect on the findings shared by TAs regarding their roles, challenges, and proposals for change. Your insights will help shape future discussions and potential improvements in TA deployment and support.

1. What stood out to you the most from the findings shared? Did anything surprise you?
2. To what extent do you think the proposed changes are reasonable and achievable within your school setting?
3. What challenges might schools face in implementing these changes, and how could these be addressed?
4. What do you think would be the short-term and long-term consequences of implementing—or not implementing—these changes for TAs, teachers, and the wider school community?

Appendix M Quotes Table by Theme

Table M1

Respectful Communication	
TAYLOR	I do think there's an aspect of that. When you know the kids, so like for you guys where you follow them up, you know them far better than those teachers do already, that you can turn around... and not necessarily tell them exactly, but you can sort of tell them and go, well, actually, from what I know of this child and how I've worked with them, that's not really going to work. Can we try it another way? And I think when that dynamic is all right, this is then better because actually they realise that actually they're working to help me kind of thing. And most of the time, the...
IVY	Unless the teacher and you are working together, you're not going to get the best of the kids.
OLIVE	And it's changed. But then that would come down to your teacher, your relationship with the teacher, because each teacher would have a different idea. Well, some teachers need very little, and then you're a bit like a spare part sometimes.
IVY	That's why I think you're right, relationship comes first, because without a good relationship with your teacher, you're not going to be prepared. Without a good relationship, you're not going to feel valued, and you're not going to know what your role identity is.
AMINA	Yeah. Because it's kind of your driver, isn't it, you're doing it... because the thing is, because it's a job, the job is not a job. No one's doing the job for money, so it's like... I always sort of say it's a job for convenience and it's a job to enjoy. So, the joy has to come from the...
OLIVE	Yeah, you've got to have a nice time. You've got to have a nice time (overlapping conversation)...
AMINA	...you've got to laugh. If I've got to laugh, you've got to laugh with the kids, you've got to laugh with the teacher. You've got to be happy. And that, you know, so when you... yeah. So, definitely having now being in a year where my relationship were less with the kids. I say compared to last year, I would be... I would enjoy my day less because...
OLIVE	They don't want to hear it, they don't want to hear that there's a problem, that there's anything.
AMINA	Yeah, because I think if I didn't have this relationship with the teacher I've got now, I probably would have skipped off, for sure. So, that did sort of save it I'd say really.
IVY	If you had a sit down with your teacher on a weekly basis and said, you know, these are the... what children are we worried about? What's going on? I think communication should be at the top, because it's communication about the children, communication about what's happening next, in the next month, or even lesson planning or...
FREYA	One of the things that I think kind of is really important is the bit about collaborating with the teacher and yeah having good relationship with the teacher and knowing what you're supposed

	to be doing that day having, you know, the plans being shared with you, which we still haven't... had that because we know literally just going on morning.
GRACE	It's almost like you have to seek it out the information rather than it being seen as something you should know in your class.
GRACE	I'm actually going out with the staff as well. You know, I think we are quite good for that, organising kind of drinks and end of half term drinks and just hanging out together and just chatting. Especially this year because we've had a lot of new teachers, we had sort of had a mass retirement exodus last year and the year before. And so, there were lots and lots of new teachers, a lot of them are newly qualified as well. And so, it's been good to sort of go out with them and kind of learn more about them, and yeah, and I find that really helps that camaraderie.
OLIVE	I'm actually going out with the staff as well. You know, I think we are quite good for that, organising kind of drinks and end of half term drinks and just hanging out together and just chatting. Especially this year because we've had a lot of new teachers, we had sort of had a mass retirement exodus last year and the year before. And so, there were lots and lots of new teachers, a lot of them are newly qualified as well. And so, it's been good to sort of go out with them and kind of learn more about them, and yeah, and I find that really helps that camaraderie.
IVY	Yeah, and now our head teacher always said this, hello to me by name.
TAYLOR	I think with this one as well. I mean I haven't had it a lot, but sometimes you get put with a teacher you've never worked with, so you don't really know how they are with the children, how they're going to be with you. And I think sometimes just having that pre-meet before you're in that actually work together is good. But I know that people do get phoned in with people that they also may not necessarily like.
AMINA	Actually, hearing you mention observing, it would be really useful for us to get a chance, like you were saying, to observe other teaching assistants.
OLIVE	Yeah, because in our school, I mean, I might... hopefully this isn't off piece but it is communication, but we... correct me if you feel differently. But I feel like if there was a really big problem that I had in school, I actually don't know who I would probably tell. I'd tell my counterpart, my colleagues. Maybe my teacher this year, because she's brilliant. But I'm not sure I would go to SLT.
IVY	Because I sometimes find it frustrating when there's information about a child in your class and you only happen to hear about it through the teacher and you're like, well, if I'd have known that, I would've acted in a different way or I would've done something differently, or I would've taken the time to do this or that
FREYA	They don't happen, do they, because the information tends to end with the teacher. And then it's only when something goes wrong that you're then informed and you'd... yeah.

IVY	I suppose it's about being appreciated. It's that we are maybe as important to communicate with as the teachers.
TAYLOR	Yeah. It need to be consistent throughout the school. Some teachers will inform me of issues that I need to know about it in the class but that's usually the more experienced teachers, depending on their personality. But if it's just something that all teachers must do as part of (overlapping conversation).
FREYA	Because something that I really appreciate is whenever I'm asked to do something else on top of what I would've been doing or to make changes in a way that is new is when whoever's asking me, telling me to do that, that they acknowledge that it is extra. That you know, they say, "Oh, I know you're really busy and I really... but if there's any way you can do this, I'd really appreciate it." To be appreciative and to acknowledge that it isn't easy to suddenly, you know, bring another child into a group who's working at a different level or.
AMINA	But then you'd want... but you would then want... you do need... you probably... some people do need an advocate because I think some people find it very easy to speak up. And to whoever that is, whether that'd be the head or the, you know. But loads of people don't have that. So I suppose that's where you need that avenue where you can say it without feeling vilified or.
GRACE	We've put like a suggestion box (overlapping conversation) staff room which people could just write it on a slip.
IVY	Yeah. Or having regular kind of meetings with say you're in year one, all the TAs from year one get together and say what are we actually doing? What do we need to be able to this? What...? And also (overlapping conversation).
AMINA	I think recognition should perhaps be a thing because I think if you... like you said, that you're... I think everyone appreciates the fact that, they are asking sometimes things that they probably don't even want to ask. But it's like if you feel like that's recognised, then at least it makes it... you want to do it rather than... Because what we were discussing in our group, you know, when does something that you do as an extra become part of just an expectation and that's normal. You come in half an hour early every day. At what point do they expect you to come in early rather than going, "Thank you so much for coming in early," and say, "You're late". They very quickly stop seeing that as extra and they start thinking, "Well, that's just normal," so. But again, that's our... that is our responsibility to also have set that expectation and say, This is... I am doing this extra.
AMINA	You get angry with each other, you're angry, and you then make that... but not... but it's got to go somewhere. So they need to create that avenue where it will go somewhere. And again, that's people's responsibility to take it somewhere.
FREYA	Because we hear things that teachers don't, we get... you know, we get confided in which is one of the things I actually love about the role that, you know, we're seen as very much like the immediate trusted adult in their classroom.

OLIVE	And also if you've got an idea, sometimes, some teachers don't want to hear of any of your ideas or anything. But then other teachers are like, "Yeah, that sounds great go for it (overlapping conversation)."
IVY	Yeah, because quite often when you do an intervention, you have those children and you're seeing them every week. And so you work out more than maybe the teacher does like where they're at and what you can use, and what motivates them, and how you could do things differently. So they have an idea, this is what we need to actually teach these children, so it's [inaudible 01:30:03]. But you can do it in so many different ways depending on the children that you have. And that's why it's important working as a team with the teacher.
ISHA	Something that I will say about that is I've had issues with things before and I've told them about it, and it's just kind of got forgotten about, so I'm not really being listened to, so.

Table M2

Role Expectations	
AMINA	I would say, as important as feeling valued is, I would say that the role of identity is such a... like what you said, it is like so many different things now. Who knows whether you're a teacher, whether you're a social worker. I feel like, you know.
OLIVE	They have a go, don't they, at saying, oh, you know, you don't need to prepare anything, you know, (overlapping conversation) school. Yet the amount of TAs that come in and do above and beyond out of good will is quite...
OLIVE	And then there's obviously people that don't do that either. And the thing is, that is both fine, but it is what is required, what is the role?
AMINA	That comes in an hour and a half early and leaves an hour and a half late. It's like, well, actually, that's all well and good, but just don't. You don't have to do that.
TAYLOR	Probably on the other end of that spectrum, if I'm honest with you. So, I think I... contractually, we were looking at it, and I start at 8:30. I'm in at 8 o'clock most days. Well, not most days, every day, but. And it's less of a... it's more because we look at our time. So, again, I work more in the inclusion TA sort of stuff and nurture and stuff, and we looked at it and we thought we don't have enough time. If I get in by 8:30, we don't have enough time to catch up and fill in for what we've got to do in the day.
OLIVE	There is that expectation. And plus, you wouldn't employ a cleaner to come and clean your house and say can you do an extra hour today? I'm not going to pay you, but can you do an extra hour? That wouldn't happen and you'd be mad to think that you could.

AMINA	I just think because it's so hard to work out what you are like what is a TA now? Because actually it's not... you used to be a parent coming and doing some [inaudible 00:12:31] and now you are an assistant teacher. You're not a teaching assistant, you're an assistant teacher.
IVY	But then that brings up, you know, the thing of... I strongly believe that it's like because we're generally as TAs with the lower end of learning, whereas actually those children are the children that need more (overlapping conversation) from the teacher. So, we're not teachers, we're not trained as teachers at all.
IVY	...to be able to do it. It's like now in year one, it's like doing phonics, they want me to do maths, doing pre-teaching, ELA. And when do you do those bucket books and reading, and that's taking away from me building a relationship with all the other children actually.
AMINA	And the more everything's taken away, which is obviously the way it's going, the more roles we need to adopt. So, it's like, well, okay, so then what's the most important there? What is it? I don't know. So, that's what I think...
IVY	And isn't that why they're thinking that they're going to professionalise TA's, make it a profession which will then I suppose, hopefully be paid more. And also, you will have to do CPD training. It's like in SA I've had half a... half an appraisal.
IVY	And also, not with the... it's like I've expected to do all of these interventions and several people have said to me, no, you shouldn't be doing the maths one unless you've had the training and I totally agree with them. But then they can't afford to put us on the training. So, I've had half an hour somewhere and its sort of...
TAYLOR	Yeah. So, one of our year six teacher as well, [inaudible 00:57:49] year six teacher, and it's like... but this is what the job is kind of... And maybe because you're in it, you're a bit more like, well, I'm kind of here until I decide on something different kind of thing. Maybe there's that, but it was just actually that both of them are done. It's like, for a lot of our teachers are like but this is the job.
TAYLOR	I mean, as much as we turn right that that's such a massive thing because our head teachers spoken to us about that kind of thing before. And it'd been actually... I think somebody looked at... somebody looked at our budget and said, well, 60% of yours goes on your support staff. And it's like, yeah, but have you seen what they do? Like they are 60% of what goes on here. And it is that... until you... I've said it to people before, kind of thing, it's like, come and do my job for a day. Come and do it for a week and tell me that I earn what I should.
OLIVE	It seems to get mentioned, but then other things happen. So, I'm also looking at things like role identity and role boundaries and ever-changing role and responsibilities and how that will just suddenly be different. So, when I started at the school, if you were a key worker or an INA, you were with that child and that's what you did and you worked with that child and you planned around that child. And you know, you as... you want to give them a bit of independence, so you would helicopter a bit around the classroom and get to work with other children. But now I find

	that I'm being given other children to work with, as I mentioned before. And it seems to be that it's just... I'm suddenly given a child, they've got speech and language issues and I'm not being given any training or given any, like, any like their plan. And I have to go and keep asking for it because I'm not... I've been working with this child with their speech and language and suddenly.
IVY	What it says here about sort of self-doubt and uncertainty role in a sense of muddling through, I think that kind of ties in with it. So, I feel that a lot like I'm literally just getting through it sort of every day. And I think it's just getting a bit of a thank you sometimes makes you feel like, actually maybe I'm doing it right.
OLIVE	Yeah, especially since COVID, and all the extra work that's been involved in trying to help children who weren't in school try to, you know, support them with their... it's reading and well everything but reading.
OLIVE	Yeah, and the Year 5, the classes that I'm in now, that year group, they... it was lots, it was boy heavy summer born boys and so they were even before COVID when they were in reception, it was already there was a lot of children who needed interventions even at that age to sort of, you know, come out and think about very basic maths and reading. So, as soon as like they got like halfway through Year 1 and then, and we were working so hard with these groups to try and lift them up.
OLIVE	Yeah, and working out their expectations within the classroom. I know that's really, because you're not mind readers and yet sometimes it's sort of expected that you will be, and you know.
OLIVE	Apparently, that's what they said. Do you remember when... the bit straight after COVID when they wanted TAs to do a little bit more, they weren't working afternoons, they wanted them to work afternoons and we had that our school to try and help children, like doing afternoon interventions as well as morning ones. And then it all just sort of like died away, because the money died away, so they couldn't be paid, I think it lasted about a term.
OLIVE	Yeah. There's all this expectation from the government versus no money to pay for it, you're just meant to do it from your budget.
AMINA	Yeah, that's it. So it is ever changing so you can't, you know, pin it down in particular. I don't think that you ever necessarily will be able to or that you need to, so as a TA you need to be able to be flexible to work within the changes that happen. But what we then felt that being prepared was less important so that was less about our role, so having the ability to kind of react to whatever that is, without the responsibility of running the class because that's not our responsibility. So it's not necessarily our responsibility to take loads of time to prepare to do things because that I don't think is our role.
AMINA	Yeah. I think the teaching assistant is different to the assistant teacher. Which we are both of. So sometimes you are a teacher and sometimes you are a teaching assistant, if that makes sense. And I think they're quite different roles that we are required to do, depending on what year we're

	in and what the need is, what the teachers like, so there's... sometimes you just photocopy and sometimes you're teaching—you're teaching, so.
IVY	Quite often we have the lowest groups to do interventions with. Whereas those particular children need more of the teacher. Because the teacher has the skills to be in that position
AVA	I think after COVID it was really hard because I don't know what it was like for other schools. But for us, we were the ones that were in. So the TA, the support staff were the ones that were actually in the school with the key children. Our teachers were at home putting stuff up for them, so doing stuff like that, but we were the ones in the building.
AMINA	So I think for some people that did make a shift. So I think suddenly it felt okay for the school to go, "Oh, and I want just this as well. Oh, and just this. Oh, and this now." So it didn't change back to what it was. It didn't fully change back.
FREYA	And for teachers and management to understand our role in the big, you know, adult staffing. To understand why we are important and why we need to know all the things that they know.
AMINA	But I think that it is... but I think they probably are separate because if that... if you tell us what you expect, then we can take what we need or they can tell us what we need or its that feeling equipped, isn't it? Equipped to deal with. Because I think what we've all agreed is that the role does change, it's like this, this, this, this, so if you... because the need of the children seems to be increasing, even if you're just a TA, not an INA, sometimes I think this is way beyond. I'm dealing with stuff that I think I'm doing it right, but I don't know (overlapping conversation).
OLIVE	Well, sometimes we are asked to do things... sort of social worker level, isn't it, which are like (overlapping conversation).
OLIVE	People don't know... they think we're just like parent helpers, you know, that do a bit of filing, a bit of sticking and reading
IVY	And that's why last week both... I was going to say it's like sometimes you're really unsure as to whether you should tell your friends "I'm a TA" or you think "I'm just a TA". And actually, they have no idea what you do (overlapping conversation).
AVA	And it is that, it is that "I'm just TA". And I'm like if we put everything and that we turn around and went, "Well, that's just what I do." I think we realise there's that four or five different roles that we do all in one that we kind of go, "Well, I just do that because it's my job." And it's like, "Well, it's not." If we looked back at what this role was supposed to be, the amount of things that we've picked up and we've adapted to doing it would be massive.
TAYLOR	There was a time when it was planned that we would meet during class assemblies like a year at a time but that just fizzled out. It was an idea that never...
IVY	I think that's wholly the reason why I came in early because it means that the teacher is in a fairly relaxed state, so you can chat about worries you have about different children and find out what is going to be happening in the day.

AVA	And it's a really hard thing to kind of go... because they'll turn around to us and go, "Well, we're having to do this and we're having to use nappies." I'm like, "Well, I appreciate that but actually that's your job, that's a parent's role to do that. We will happily support that but that's your role to toilet train your children."
AVA	Well, I'm not sure that parents are more connected to the learning and it's just more of a, "What can you do for my child?" Sometimes it just feels like, "Oh, well, they can't do this." I'm like, "Okay, but we are doing our part. What are you doing your part?" And sometimes I feel like that's the missing bit. Not for every parent. But for some parents, it's just that it's all the pressure is on us to do the stuff and it's just like, "Well, actually, some of the stuff we need you guys to be doing out of (overlapping conversation)." There's a bit of a balance of it because it's like some of the stuff that we've done, like our parents have talked... like we talked for some of our reception at the moment, we're talking about like toilet training and things.
FREYA	But I don't mind variation if I'm given the time to prepare for it. If it's sudden and I feel like I'm being thrown into something without preparation.
FREYA	You know, somebody gives me some worksheets, like 10 minutes before the class starts, that's great. That's fine, I can look at the worksheets, and I can work out what we're doing, and I can get everything I need and then I'm okay, and that's great. But if I'm suddenly like, "Oh, please, just take this job. We're doing something. And I've just realised that they can't access this at all, so take them out and do something."
FREYA	And it is good to work with children that are working at different levels, you know, I do enjoy that. I just don't enjoy it when it's two children who come to me (overlapping conversation) who are so different from each other. That it's huge. But if I've got one child, one like for half an hour, and then I've got another child working at maybe the next level for another half an hour, it gives me loads of things to think about for my lower ability child to aspire to and how to get them there, you know, and I'm thinking, "Oh, actually, they would get that. So maybe if I use that as a way in with that." And it's just really good for...
AVA	I think the variety does then mean that you can be supportive towards other people. So we've had a couple of younger TAs start with us kind of thing that actually this is their first role, don't have a lot of experience. And actually they turned around and gone, "I don't know how to do that." And we've gone, "Oh, why don't you try doing it like this?" And actually having the variation, having the you've done lots of... even if it's just little parts, you can turn around and go, "Why don't you try it like that? I've done it before. Can't it work for them? Why don't you give it a try," kind of thing. And it just means actually you can be supportive of one another. And again, that builds that retention of actually they want to stay because it's like I'm not... even the TAs are leaving me on my own kind of thing, actually, it brings them in to that community and they want to stay a bit more.

AMINA	You know, she was young and vibrant, and brilliant. And she became an HLTA and she'd do all this stuff. But what she'd said, and she left now, is there was nowhere to go. So what's your drive? So you're like, "Well, I could do this, this and this. I could come in early and I could be this and someone could notice." But actually, what's the difference? Because I'm still going to earn the same as that person who does absolutely nothing and doesn't care. So if they give you some sort of thing to work, to drive for, then people will do more because actually they will be a bit more (overlapping conversation).
FREYA	We have learning mentors and that is a goal. But we have all the learning mentors, they're not going anywhere. They can't afford to pay for another learning mentor. So you can go in every appraisal and say like, you know, "I'd really like to be a learning mentor as you can see on all your other pieces of paper and... but I know that that's not going to happen, so."
AVA	We get a lot of that, it's a lot of people that stay with us for the year and that's going on (overlapping conversation) do the teacher thing.
FREYA	Yeah, or speech and language. They do like, you know, some... like a doctorate or something like that. So they're just thinking, "Well, I can't go anywhere else here. I'll make it happen for me somewhere else."
OLIVE	Yeah. But whereas actually a lot of companies you can join, like the private companies obviously, where you would come it at this level. And actually they're being given the opportunity to go to uni one day a week then become a teacher, you know.
FREYA	Yeah. And in your interview that would be talked about, and they'd say, "This is a progression. This is how you're going to..."
FREYA	And we were given a sheet to takeaway to write on first to then come in with, with them, anything we want to discuss. But we were given kind of categories to think about. And you know, I felt actually... but something that was said to me and I'm just reflecting on it now because we're talking about, you know, where we feel we can grow within our schools. And she said to me, "Because V, we don't want to lose you." And I just thought, "Oh, great. Is that what I'm aspiring to? Not being let go? Not being lost?" You know, "We want to keep you." So it's not like... and I just, I didn't know whether she meant that in the way that I'm saying, "Well, I wanted to do a different role," and that was... my ideal role would be to be a learning mentor, and that's what I'd really like to do. But I don't know whether she was... because we said, "Oh, there isn't a role here." And she's saying, "But we don't want to lose you." And at the same time I'm thinking, "Well, what you're telling me that if I want to do this, I have to go?" Yeah. It was a bit weird.
TAYLOR	The way I see it, our role is to assist the teacher. The teacher directs us to do whatever's needed to support the children. If the impacts improves like the children's improvement, that's... I think that's secondary to helping, enabling the teacher to do the best job that they can do
OLIVE	So H, I know what you're trying to say. So when I very, very first started in SA and I was literally a parent volunteer type of thing because I was in between jobs, anyway. I saw my role very much, I

	<p>was there so the teacher could do a really good job, could teach, and get... you know, they could do all of that. I really saw that. But in the 13 years I've been there, I think the role has definitely changed loads. I don't go in now feeling that same, "I'm here so you..." I mean, obviously I'm there to support them. But I think there's a lot more pressure and responsibility to put on us now.</p>
FREYA	<p>So when you're helicoptering around the classroom. And you're checking their understanding because you're asking them questions about what they're doing and what they're learning. So you're kind of like an extension of the teacher but all the other tables that the teacher's not at and you're just talking away to them and they're... you know, just by having a conversation with them about what they're learning their knowledge is being, you know, sort of strengthened.</p>

Table M3

Support Is Key	
TAYLOR	That again, that kind of links in with your teacher and actually you being able to turn around and go, look, if you want me to do this intervention or whatever, that's fine, but I need the time to prep it.
TAYLOR	And in the nicest way possible... I don't mean it to be rude, but actually if you really don't have that you can turn to the teacher and go, look, I don't have that set yet, but I haven't had any time to set it. And they will either wing it and they will give you something or you turn around and go, do you know what, scrap it then because at the moment I don't have the time to get that stuff ready and it's (overlapping conversation).
TAYLOR	I see that as very low down because quite frankly, if I don't have it, I'm going to turn to this teacher and go, look, I don't have it. Yeah, and it's almost as bluntly as that it's like this is not my problem. If this intervention doesn't happen, you're the one that has to answer to it.
OLIVE	So, this is training as well, isn't it? Because I think we're quite often asked to do these things, and we're not really properly trained to do them. And I guess with experience, you can wing it and the rest of it, but I always think I always want to do a job really well.
AMINA	But also, observation, because people aren't necessarily good. Just like a lot of teachers are really bad teachers. Some TAs are really bad TAs, and actually they shouldn't be doing anything with the kids. So, you know, I was teaching maths all that time, like really, you know, and not ever has anyone ever watched me do it. They've got no idea what I'm saying to these kids.
OLIVE	But no, but this is the thing is that we used to get observed regularly. We used to always get observed and you'd get feedback on your practice. That hasn't happened for years and years. Does that happen in your school?
OLIVE	Yeah. I mean, you're just doing that off your own back, really there should be some sort of formal programme.
AMINA	Yeah. Well, there should be something that everyone's following, so that everyone's doing exactly the same in every class.
IVY	And it's like... and I've spoken to one of the other people who do a different (overlapping conversation) and she's like, well, I'm not doing that. And I'm like, well, we need consistency, yeah.
OLIVE	Because that can often be a good time to share how you're feeling and, you know, feeling more confident about your role. But I do find when new people join, they are just thrown in the defence. And I don't... why they don't buddy them up with somebody just for a week just to see how things are done. But I always find that what happens instead is they just sort of like, you see them just looking a little bit like, and you're going to, are you're okay, and they're like, and then

	it's like little parts. They get help from people here and there to sort of find their way. Whereas I think a sort of buddy week could be a really good way to deal with that.
AMINA	Actually, that happened last year, I was sort of... I was the expert TA in Year 4 and there was a new TA in the same class as me. And so, I could help her sort of learn the role while also supporting other Year 4 classes and that system really worked for her yeah (overlapping conversation).
TAYLOR	Sometimes I think going to watch other TAs can help you because if you look at what they're doing, you think, oh hang on, I was doing that anyway. It makes you feel better about it, and having the time to actually go and watch other people is the issue.
TAYLOR	And obviously everyone has a whole range of different experiences, so some people might be better at other things than other people. But just being given that time to... in fact I was told that some of the TAs in reception were going to come and watch me and then it never happened, so yeah.
AMINA	Yeah, and that's why it's so nice when you do get to get... you get together and you can sort of talk about and find out a bit more about each other and sort of hear, you know, where... what people have, what their backgrounds are and you know, where their strengths are. Do you get a lot of planning time?
AMINA	I think one thing that most schools sort of start to do quite well. As I said, it's training and there's training everyone having the same training, the teachers and the support staff. And having follow up training on that so everyone is.
AMINA	I think that perhaps the preparedness and navigating more uncertainty because the needs are higher since COVID, I think, yeah, there's less uncertainty about how the children are going to behave, but they're learning, I think that's probably changed since COVID.
AMINA	Do you find if you have someone coming, I don't know if this example doing intervention and they'll speak to you as the sort of INA but then I never hear afterwards, like when they... if they send a report or anything, never get that kind of feedback from the teacher. Unless I ask, which again, I know the teacher's really busy, but I think it's quite important.
AMINA	Actually, hearing you mention observing, it would be really useful for us to get a chance, like you were saying, to observe other teaching assistants.
FREYA	Yeah. It's interesting, isn't it, because I don't know if you stay with a class or if you move around but because I'm a key worker, I move up the school, so I work with different teachers. So some teachers are great, like they just hand you something that the class is doing but it's maybe a sort of like a lower ability, so. And then they say, "Well, this is to do with this and I've prepared all this, and you just need to grab this, this, and this, and then if we go teach them." And then you feel kind of like all right, this teacher knows what these children need and they understand what my role is. And then I've had other teachers who are just, "Oh, I haven't done anything."

FREYA	Mm-hmm. And you just feel like you're failing everybody and this is the first... I would say this is the first you've actually seriously thought maybe I don't want to do this job anymore because it just feels so difficult and just soul destroying a little bit.
GRACE	Like a teacher we have now like I said, she's been there about a year and a half but only this is her first sort of official year, but. We have the regular meetings. We set up well-being groups, we'll meet sort of every half term, just talk about the staff well-being. We're doing so much training, she's getting as much training as possible. And we have TA meetings now which we never had in the last head, and it's all...
OLIVE	Because we used to always be observed. And I suppose that could be a scary thing for a lot. However, it's a really good way of getting that appreciation and that feedback as long as it's given in a really, constructive, really good way.
TAYLOR	I think that's the really big thing that's missing from our role, is the chance to observe each other and (overlapping conversation).
AMINA	And I think you... again, I think like in school's defence as well. I think we have to... like as TAs, we always have to remember that we have to deal with what's possible. Say, "Yeah, okay, in ideal world we'd go on these elaborate training courses." But we're not there, they haven't got the money or the time to do this, so we have to deal within the realms of feasibility. And sometimes we can't do everything, we want to, we can't make the impact of what to do, we can't... but we have to think about, "Okay, what can we do?"
IVY	It's like with them supporting us, supporting one another, supporting the children because it's about...
AVA	And that's really is the teacher that you work with because I know that I've worked with teachers and they've been brilliant at that and they catch you in the morning they'll go, "Just a heads up, this is what we're doing today." And then you've got teachers that like it's a passing moment of, "Well, we're doing this," because they're all...
FREYA	We've got a good SENCo, a really good SENCo assistant and a good SENCo. But this SENCo assistant is there more and is kind of like shop floor if you like and kind of going into classrooms and catching up with people. Whereas the SENCo, always seems to be in meetings and is really hard to get hold of. But the SENCo assistant is really good. So I'll get a lot of emails with sort of updated speech and language and stuff like that from them.
FREYA	Well, because I get the one for the child who I am the TA for, so I get that. But yeah, I did... actually, I did used to get quite a lot for the small group that I had. It was a bigger group than the small group I have now. And I did get sent IEPs and stuff like that from the SENCo assistant. But it's finding the time to actually read it. When am I supposed to do that? Because I sometimes get planning and sometimes I don't. And so, you know.

OLIVE	You know, you come in, so you... but the trouble is, it's all down to money, isn't it, because actually if they can pay us for 15 minutes extra a day, you could address a lot of that in that 15 minutes.
AMINA	I mean, last year, well, with a teacher I worked with for a few years, every morning she would inform me of what child was doing what, what email been sent by what parent. She was really, really good at that. And we always found out. And I never, ever arrive 15 minutes early. So it really is possible. She just had the desire to share that with me. So I think if I have the desire to know it, the teacher's got a desire to share it. Of course, it's possible. Because while they're coming in and putting their coats on, "Okay, school starts at 8:45." But it doesn't really start at 8:45, they're just kind of flapping around, you know. So there is always five minutes or, you know okay, they...
AMINA	And you don't feel like someones got your back and, you know.
FREYA	Yeah. Because if it doesn't get taken somewhere then it just... you rant, you feel better momentarily, you feel better for having offloaded, but it'll just happen again.
FREYA	Some of the support staff rep, so that's somebody who, you know. Yeah. I like the idea of that.
AVA	You've got (overlapping conversation), "Actually, look, I've been asked to do this. Do you know where I can go someone that can support me?" And go, "Yeah, sure," kind of thing. I think it would massively improve. And again build that kind of confidence and go, "Look, I don't know if I can do that. Can you send me to somebody?" That, or within the school, "Do you know of anybody that's done it before me that I can kind of go I can shadow them for a bit or I can observe them for a bit?" But I think it would improve that. And just if we knew that we can turn around and you could talk to some of your SLT, your staff and stuff like that, it will make it so much easier because you wouldn't almost have that build-up of resentment or argument or that festering, on that negativity that just build until something happens and it explodes.
AMINA	We would teach groups, small groups which, well, sometimes small constitutes... I mean, I would take nine sometimes. I sort of think, "I'm teaching nine children maths," like quite high level maths and, you know, in somewhere there's no space, there's no board, no... so it's like, "How am I supposed to do that?"
OLIVE	And there's not really much training that goes on with that to be honest.
OLIVE	I mean, you can learn obviously with certain teachers and again it goes back to observing maybe other people.
OLIVE	Well, I guess it being able to say, "Do you know what, I'll give that a go. It might not go into plan, but." And knowing there's no sort of comeback, but at the same time going, "Well, actually, why don't we get you brilliant of this as well?" So you know, to identify the areas of training.
IVY	But I think that's a bit... because we don't have appraisals, it's like that's the kind of thing that we should be doing in an appraisal, or.

FREYA	Yeah, we have appraisals and I've just had one, and we talked a lot. I talked a lot about trying to balance having a small group and teaching two children that were at different levels. And I actually said, you know, I'm happy to work with both children. I love working with both children, but working with them together at the same time, it's not working. So I'd like us to find a way for me to carry on working with them but separately, you know, if that can happen. So they've gone away with that.
AMINA	Our teachers, I did have one appraisal in eight years. Actually, it was with a teacher and I just thought, "Well, (overlapping conversation)."
AMINA	There was SP, like there was last year I was saying, kind of the emotional, like I had some quite... it was quite high need, some high need children, and that there were times where I was like, "Oh, hang on, I'm not all right." And I'm not particularly that sort of person that thinks, "Oh, I don't want to not be all right." But I did... so on that occasion I did feel actually very supported because I had that avenue to go to because I think what I felt was somebody saw that, somebody saw that, "Oh, hang on, you're not all right." And I think that's what you want, you want... a person wants to be seen and... so you don't always want to say, "Actually, I'm not all right." You want someone to say, "I don't think you're okay."
AMINA	You just need to and I think they have to... like say maybe... because a teacher or SLT should recognise whether needs are high or things are different, so therefore they should be on alert to sort of go, "I need to check that."
GRACE	And we were talking about this recently about any other job that when you're working with children and with, you know, lots of needs, emotional or otherwise, you get supervision. You need to get, you know, regular sort of one-to-one with, someone to talk about any incidents, about how you're feeling.
AMINA	And I think that actually is quite... it's always relevant because sometimes you are just, you know, you're just photocopying and it's fine. Sometimes it's high level stuff that is like I don't know how to deal with this. And therefore you do sometimes really need someone to recognise that."
TAYLOR	We have signed up to a well-being service.
AMINA	Yeah, yeah. I know, yeah. But to be fair, I'll probably never pick a phone up and phone... like you just, I think... because actually someone, you know, again it's not very long. You don't want to almost spend hours with someone. It's just the fact that someone says, "I know that that is really tough (overlapping conversation)."
AMINA	...the things you see, you need to see people, and in the sea of, you know, overworked, underpaid, understaffed. The ability to see people is diminishing and... but if you see... if you do, then all these problems sometimes will sort themselves out in a way. That's when I said earlier about little things [inaudible 01:19:36].

FREYA	Yeah. And sometimes you can feel it's happening to you and then you sit with everybody else, and you realise it's happening to everybody else.
FREYA	I know, but I want to be able to talk about the things because they're important, because my outside life, you know, it's...
FREYA	It impacts. And you know, I'm trying to bring up my son and I'm trying to work, and I'm trying to make sure that he gets to college, but I'm already at school because I did the breakfast club. And it's just sometimes it's too many balls in the air and... but yeah, she was really good my SENCo in the interview, in the appraisal. But I've written about all of this and then she kind of mentioned it back to me and she said, "You know, if I'm not in, is it okay if I let the assistant head know about what's going on for you?" And I suddenly thought, "I don't know if I do want everybody to sort of to know." Because I don't want them to see me as that when I'm also very capable and, you know.
AMINA	Every single person thinks that every single... mostly in life, that, "Oh God, they're all right. Yeah, they're all right." And no one's all right, and that's the thing." It's remembering that no one is all right, everyone is kind of doing it and getting on but everyone's got staff. So you want someone to see that, you don't... that doesn't mean you're less of a person or, you know, (overlapping conversation) every day, [inaudible 01:23:17].
AMINA	No, no, but like you... so you want someone to see that, you don't... that doesn't mean you're less of a person or, you know, every day, you should work in a place and we should live in a society where we don't feel like that makes us weaker.
FREYA	Because we want the children to feel safe. You want to the school to be the environment that is safe for them. But we also want it to be safe for us.
AMINA	Yeah, happy people work then. Happy people are better to work with, they work harder and, you know, both the children and the teacher, it's better for everybody if someone's happy, for sure. You know, there's not enough happy people in the world.

Table M4

Recognition Of Impact	
IVY	And the other thing, the feeling valued thing, it's like on several occasions I've come up with ideas or whatever and taken them to hopefully the appropriate people. But then, new ideas, sometimes you don't feel as though... well, they're not taken on board or thought about, they just say it at the time, at the... right, that's a brilliant idea and blah, blah, blah. Like talk tokens in the playground. And it really worked for some people. But yeah, (overlapping conversation).
IVY	Well, it's like... and quite often, you know, this particular idea was to make it easier for people, to make it easier for the children, you know, the idea was that if there was a dispute and there were like five children come up to you and say she did this, she did that. It's like you have one token, so one child can speak only when they've got this token.
AMINA	They don't. But I think it's finding that. I found it a bit more now, that value for myself. And that's come through other people talking to me about impact and like you think, actually, I can make an impact and I should be proud of that impact because actually filing a photocopy, I'm not... whatever, we can do that, but actually making an impact in a child's life through like an emotional connection, not many people get a chance to do that.
TAYLOR	...way of looking at it because if my granddad was talking to me about people, he goes, well, she looks after kids. And I do so much more than sit in a room and look after children. And they won't understand that and I have to, you know, there's an aspect of laying that down, because there's an age thing, generational about that.
AMINA	And I think like... so recently we've had a restructure in our school. And I did say that in our kind of meeting. I said, you know, it's taken me a long time to like work with this job title and feel value for myself. So, I said, by you doing this and now how everyone's being treated, you've taken that value away like that. Because everyone becomes a tick box rather than a person. So, that is what they've done, they've taken that away. And I think the leadership have the ability to do either that, to... so, the value comes from not just your teacher, but from your leadership team as well I think which is often lacking because the further away they get from you as a person, the less they care and the less they see. And actually, they don't know who does a job well, who doesn't do the job well. They don't care who does a job well. They just need someone there, someone there, someone there. And as long as that's done, they're like...
TAYLOR	I mean, I find it fascinating because it's like we had a real stint in the first term where we had a number of... and it was TAs that were off and it was less... so my line manager is great kind of thing, she really sees it like she's very aware that, you know, what we take up... we make up a big part of what our team does kind of thing. And it wasn't until we had such a handful off, that our teachers were going, well, this isn't being done and that's not being done. And I was like, yeah, because your TAs aren't here like... and these are the jobs that they all do. And this is what happens when they're

	not here. So, it was actually after that one that we found that there wasn't more appreciation from some, not all, but from some, they were a bit like...
OLIVE	Well, the thing is, there is a lot of people that do above and beyond, aren't there? But the problem is when you're working in a place where you do feel appreciated, then you don't mind doing that because you get the best out of people. It's a bit like, you know, all the years that we did choir and things like that and all the concerts, and all the shows and things, you know, we did it because we loved it and we feel valued. And actually, the teachers that were running it were brilliant. We did it for them really. However, once...
AMINA	And then we stopped doing it when it changed, yeah, not because the person doing it, no, it's not nice, but just because actually then you sort of reassess, you're like, well, actually, I'm giving out, I'm giving a lot of time, I mean, I'm getting in early and it's all, you know, so. And actually you start thinking, who am I doing this for? Because if I do it for the teacher, but I'm not doing it for the head, I'm not doing it for them, I'm not doing it to tick their box because I don't care about your box. I want your box to remain unticked, you know, so.
OLIVE	Yeah, and then you're all fighting for your job. So, she's got these ideas that actually our role as a TA is actually ineffective. And research suggests that a child's progress makes absolutely no difference to whether we were there or not.
FREYA	I work in three different year groups in Year 4 this year, and it's really interesting between the teachers, there's one in particular I feel so appreciated, so valued by. And I love working with them, and that's not to say I don't love working with the other teachers because they're lovely, but I really notice the one teacher who seems to go above and beyond to make not just her show her value of me, but she gets a whole class to say, look what AMINA's doing.
FREYA	Say thank you to everything, and that changes my mood and approach to my role. And I mean there's so much, you know, you have to be so flexible, and pre... I mean, what I notice is the teachers are having to make million decisions throughout the day. And my role is to be a teacher assistant and to assist them carry out their role, but yeah, but I feel feeling valued is it helps so much to sort of motivate me and it's yeah.
OLIVE	It's almost like you have to seek it out the information rather than it being seen as something you should know in your class.
OLIVE	Yeah, and sometimes it feels like you're doing it because somehow you love the role and because you know, you have... I remember when people were talking about how you could earn more working at Aldi than you could being a teaching assistant and you know, people leaving the role because they just weren't making enough money. And that affects the recruitment as well.
GRACE	Yeah, so maybe like ever changing role and responsibilities with role identity. Something that I do enjoy at my school though, which does make me feel valuable because I've got an art background. If ever there's any art in the lesson, they will get me to lead it and do it and sort of start it off. And since they've started doing that with me, that started properly in Year 4, that's made me feel much

	more valued and that there's something more to me than just this like INA, TA role of taking people disappearing off with children and coming back with children suddenly. And that was whole class, which was really nice, and the teachers that I had in Year 4 and the teacher now in Year 5, there was a lot of like saying, thanking me for at the end of each lesson, which was really good. And you know, the children would say.
OLIVE	And it's so important to do that as well. You know, because then you become a trusted adult which is, you know, the more adults they can trust and form bonds with, the better they will be when they become adults.
AMINA	Yeah, absolutely. I think that's not... with the national curriculum as it is, I think that there's not enough focus on that, on the bonds that the children need to make to become balanced adults.
AMINA	I think the being recognised, I think again from your... from every level, from the children, to the teacher, to the SLT, if you don't feel like anyone's recognising what you do, it can be quite a hard job to do because you're not doing it for the money. To feel like you're making an impact and if no one's recognising the impact you're making, it feels quite thankless I think. But if you feel valued and make a connection with people, that's like the core of the job really, isn't it?
IVY	Quite often we have the lowest groups to do interventions with. Whereas those particular children need more of the teacher. Because the teacher has the skills to be in that position
FREYA	Yeah. If we're motivated in our role then we can pass on that motivation to the children. So if we look like we're happy to be at school and enjoying ourselves, and we're treating each other with respect, then that is modelling that for the children as well, you know, because we often have... in our school, we have these kind of like... it's like a community class—class as a community and we have community charter which we sort of try to abide by. And obviously as you've got the school, it becomes kind of more like you have to say that you will abide by the charter which is to respect each other and to, you know, that we have the right to be heard and we have the right to learn, and we have the right to be safe, and things like that. And so to demonstrate that and to model that, and to also actually feel that, you know, feel appreciated and valued then hopefully you can pass that on to the children.
AVA	And it was like we came back and it didn't feel like there was a lot of appreciation or a lot of thanks. It really is a blank statement that actually we acknowledge that, you guys did a lot of the work kind of thing, don't get me wrong we were on rotas and stuff like that like I think a lot of schools were but we were still the ones in that were having to work out the work that the teachers were just putting up for their kids to do and it was just like... actually they came back and it was almost like, "Okay, we're back to normal now."
OLIVE	I think teachers are so stretched, you get some teachers that are obviously really appreciative and lovely, and the rest of it others that aren't. And I do think that they are so stretched that having to kind of deal with us (overlapping conversation).

GRACE	I think it needs to come from SLT, that appreciation, the communication but (overlapping conversation).
AMINA	Well, I think... like I often think, to say what you're saying, sort of communication and value I think what I think happens is, is they think about the big things... always. They think about the big things... always. When actually if you think about the very small things, and you do the very small things, they should offer that value, truly, not just, "Oh, and thanks everyone for doing extra. But you actually truly do that and that's by, you know, regular meetings or regular information or we expect this but we will do this, you know, your job role may require this but we will offer you this training. So what you then get, these things are quite achievable because everybody is very, very capable, that does the job. But if you really do look after those small things then the big things may not happen.
AMINA	...you think, "Well, actually, there's not many jobs where you can make an impact on someone's actual life." And you can't always make an impact where you think, "Well, actually, I think I have."
AVA	Even when it's like you look back and there's... the other thing that about some of the kids that we've had that have just got in year one now, there'll be going, "If you look at them in reception, there's no way they will be doing this stuff that they do." And you look and you go, "Well, that's a team effort. Like that's all of us coming together and that's why they are like that now." And they think it's one that... and if we do... again, it's almost those little victories that we look at them and we go, "Well, actually we were a part of that." But it's almost us acknowledging that, "But we had a part to do with that"
FREYA	When you have a child in an intervention group and then they make such great progress, that they no longer need to come to the intervention and they're back in the class. And you have to look at that and see how that was very much your success with that child.
FREYA	When they shout across the street, when they're now in secondary school, and you think, "Oh, you didn't like me at all but somehow you seem to remember who I am and you're waving at me."
ISHA	I think it's just knowing that you've helped them with something that's important. Like I've worked in a nursery before and it's kind of similar to that. But being a TA is kind of like, oh, when they're, I don't know, 25, they'll remember when they had an amazing TA
AVA	...(overlapping conversation) acknowledgement that actually we're part of that conversation as well because I'm not really sure how much... and that's... I'm not sure how much SLT really notice, acknowledge that we do the stuff that we do. If they're not with us on a regular basis, they're not going to see it. Like even if it's like a walk around the corridors, I don't think they're going to register that...
FREYA	And I think, you know, if you're happy in your job then the chances are then that happiness will stay with you when you're outside of your work. And you know, feeling valued at work means that you should be feeling valued outside of work and it all... it makes everything better, doesn't it?

AMINA	You don't want to go to work and be unhappy every day. I don't want to go to work and listen to people that are unhappy every day. And there's nothing... and some people are intrinsically negative and they love it, they love moaning about everything (overlapping conversation) about everything, so you can't always... (overlapping conversation)
AMINA	It's just like, you know. And okay, you don't want to meddle, you don't need anything, but it's... like we've always said, you know, no one realise, the job will always be underplayed because it's underplayed, you know, like...
AMINA	Who knows, yeah. I mean, I wouldn't... if I wasn't a TA, I'd have no idea what a TA did apart from I just think oh they do a bit of reading.
IVY	There was something recently and I think it was the [inaudible 01:27:43] who were going to introduce it with them, when we were doing interventions, they were going to do this, some kind of graph so that they could actually see the impact of what you're doing and see that actually is it worth doing. But that never came...
AMINA	I think the recognition probably hasn't changed but the requirement has, so I think... like you sort of think, okay, like it did used to be the parents just coming in, doing some bit of filling and whatever, and so it's not that anymore. So I feel like someone shouts about it, someone say, you know, someone SLT or whoever say, "This is what we've got," you know, (overlapping conversation).
AMINA	You know, yeah. We had like a recent... well, well a restructure in our school and they kind of, you know, said it very sort of like, "But don't worry, it's fine. It probably won't make..." It was like, "don't, no, there's nothing to see here, it's fine." And I was like, "Why are you not shouting out?" This is going to make a difference because for the first time you will see a difference. This will affect your child. And you know, I couldn't get my head around why are you not shouting about this? Because if you're saying it's not your fault, financially it's the government, and it's... then more people, the more people that realise that the actual impact of change and the impact we make, and therefore won't make if we're not able (overlapping conversation).
AMINA	It is going to affect your child. So you want to all get together (overlapping conversation) and shout about it. And this is what I don't understand its like is that. I don't know why we have this hush, hush, the don't don't... because I'm like, "Come on, let's do it."
AMINA	No one cares about TAs. That is the reality. All teachers or anyone until they say, "But your child is going to have a much worse education now for it," because actually all the children that come here that need all these need are running chaos and there's no one to help them.
AMINA	Yeah. So my point is if they don't recognise the impact we're making, they don't understand that the kind of impact that is lost when that is gone. And I think people only... they don't look at what they have, they would look at what they won't have.

OLIVE	Yeah, that's absolutely right. They're only going to start creating parents I suppose, isn't it, they're only going to start moaning when they realise that actually their class are hardly being taught at all because they're having to (overlapping conversation).
OLIVE	Well, yeah, you're getting rid of all these TAs. Who's now going to do all the break times that we've just had all this conversation then. The school trips, the residential, the extra... the above and beyond that we all do.
FREYA	The breakfast club, the after school club.
AMINA	And I think what it feels like to me now is if a child... there's a lot of children that kind of really way out, aren't they, so if you throw a chair, you're fine. But if you're not that child you are really... you're really going to suffer because they... those are the children that really are suffering, that someone (overlapping conversation) need to go, I see (overlapping conversation) and now they will open. But they will only open if, you know, if they are opened. Yeah, so. So that is what will be lost (overlapping conversation).
TAYLOR	It's like a pressure cooker and the teacher (overlapping conversation) pressure. TAs have been put under more pressure. Children (overlapping conversation).
OLIVE	We do so much of the emotional social stuff. And that's just sitting down, having a chat, you know, that is really important. And it's important for us but it's also important for that child.
IVY	Because it makes their learning... they're more open to learning if they're feeling in a comfortable space. Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Appendix N Teaching Assistant Research Findings: Feedback & Reflections

Thank you for taking the time to review and provide feedback on these findings. Your insights are invaluable in ensuring this research remains reflective of your experiences and relevant to your current work, as a year has passed since the focus group discussions. Your feedback will help maintain the participatory nature of this research and ensure your voices continue to shape the conclusions.

1. These themes accurately reflect the discussions held during the focus group in Dec '23. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

2. The needs identified in the findings align with my experiences as a TA. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

3. The proposed changes would positively impact my role and professional well-being. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly disagree

4. To what extent do these themes/findings remain relevant to your work today (Feb '25) compared to when the focus groups took place (Dec '23)? *

☐ More relevant now

☐ Just as relevant

☐ Less relevant

☐ No longer relevant

☐ Other:

5. Is there anything you feel should be added or expanded upon in the findings?

Respectful Communication

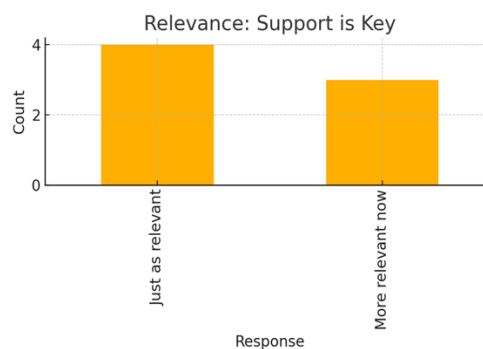
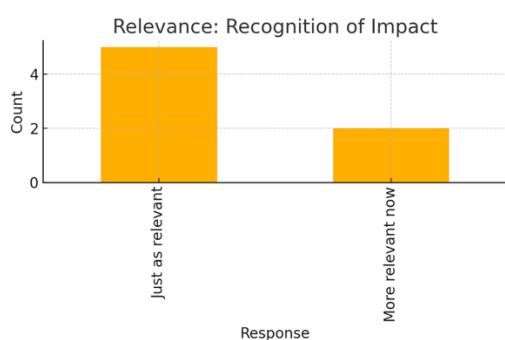
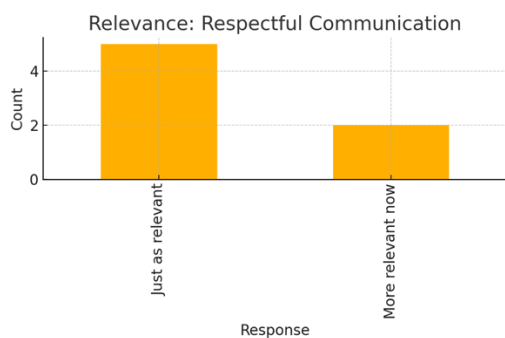
Role Expectations

Support is Key

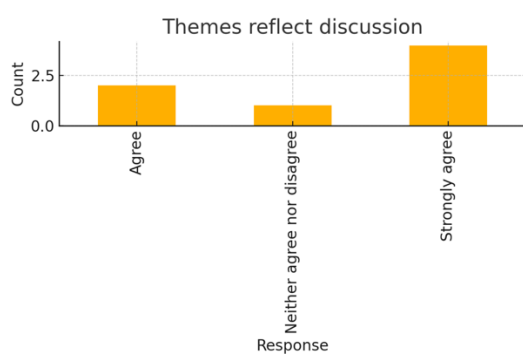
Recognition of Impact

N.1 Teaching Assistant Research Findings: Feedback & Reflections - Summary by Question

Relevance today (Feb '25)



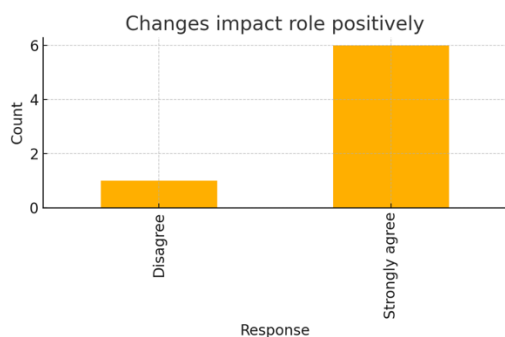
Themes reflect discussion



Needs align with experience



Changes would positively impact role



N.2 Additional Comments

“Now that we have less TAs more is expected often on the spot not planned and dinner ladies becoming INAs with no training”
“Fairer pay, particularly because TAs actually teach and don’t just help in the classroom, perhaps a change of job title is needed to acknowledge what experience TAs provide”
“I am very satisfied in my job role and wish to support the teachers and students as much as possible.”
“The experiences, challenges and proposals are still accurate and in fact I would as far as to say the challenges have increased dramatically especially as we have more children who need support but because the school is in deficit, there are no extra staff. In fact we have lost supply support due to the cost. I'm now being spread even more thinly even though I'm an INA who is meant to support one child with an EHCP.”
“I think it gets across the main message which is that we can feel undervalued”

Appendix O TA Role And Support

O.1 Senco Forum Reflection Form Results

1. What stood out to you the most from the findings shared? Did anything surprise you?

It is a hard job and there have been so many changes due to funding and increasing needs
Findings fit with our experience
No surprises, lots of familiar ongoing issues
Nothing surprising, but improvements need time and money
Not surprised, but sad how undervalued and underappreciated they feel
The lack of appreciation that TAs feel
Feelings of being isolated and always with a child
Not feeling valued by teachers/SLT
Teachers really value TAs – they feel lucky when they have one – but maybe TAs are not as aware of that as thought

2. To what extent do you think the proposed changes are reasonable and achievable within your school setting?

I think they need to be achievable. We have already drafted to do more meetings and training with TAs to increase communication.
Time for meetings is difficult to factor in where we cannot afford meetings after school
Being able to stick to regular time is difficult
Time is a constant restriction, lots of TA work relies on 'goodwill'. Best case scenario would be that suggested changes are achievable, however, sometimes in reality they are not
Communication with support staff can be dependent on teachers in team
We no longer have any AAs. All TAs have become 1:1s due to funding
Unfortunately they do not feel achievable
Achievable – TA rep and staff well-being group
Having a planned liaison time with TA/teacher during a morning assembly has worked very well
Has to be part of the timetable or won't happen
Teachers and SENCOs have become so stressed and overwhelmed that sometimes they forget to say 'thank you', which is not an excuse

3. What challenges might schools face in implementing these changes, and how could these be addressed?

Time
Money
High needs pupils not being safe without INAs so hard to release for planning time
Time and money are the major issues
Funding
Lack of funding
A lack of time – TAs arrive and depart at the same time as pupils
TA meetings are a challenge to organise/facilitate
Financial – no spare money
Money restraints, time restraints. So difficult to give planning/prep/handover time
Needs have increased after the pandemic and TAs are expected to manage those without proper training. But no funding for training available.

4. What do you think would be the short-term and long-term consequences of implementing—or not implementing—these changes for TAs, teachers, and the wider school community?

Great ideas and agree in principle
TAs feeling a higher sense of job satisfaction and self-esteem – long-term impacts on TA retention and positive impact on outcomes and progress
Isolation/job satisfaction
Staff retention
Huge positives to implementing them! Consequences of not – increased stress and decreased staff morale
Needs to be a whole school approach so everyone is aware of role, expectations and support available

Appendix P Focus Group transcripts

P.1 Transcript 1: First meeting – TA group 1

Speaker key

- Researcher Speaker One
- AMINA Speaker Two
- OLIVE Speaker Three
- IVY Speaker Four
- TAYLOR Speaker Five

Timecode	Speaker	Transcript
00:00:01	Researcher	Okay. So, guys, if I can ask you to, one by one, introduce yourselves, but one table each side, just so that when the person transcribes, they know who is talking. So, you can say just who you are?
00:00:18	AMINA	Do we just have to say our name, not where we're...? Okay.
00:00:20	Researcher	No, no, you don't need to say school. You can say Key Stage, maybe that would help.
00:00:23	AMINA	Yeah, yeah. So, I'm SD, Key Stage 2.
00:00:30	OLIVE	ST, Key Stage 2.
00:00:33	IVY	PH, Key Stage 1.
00:00:35	TAYLOR	SC, Key Stage 1.
00:00:37	Researcher	Thank you.
00:00:38	AMINA	That's a good split (overlapping conversation). Do we wait now or do we just talk about this then?
00:00:45	IVY	I don't know, don't know. I'll wait until they finish.
00:01:10	AMINA	Right, to this is our...?
00:01:11	OLIVE	[Inaudible 00:01:11] we finish at 6:00?
00:01:13	Researcher	So, guys, if you can discuss the themes, so that you have to prioritise the overarching themes, separate from the main themes. And there are some blank ones, if you feel like there's anything that is missing there.
00:01:28	AMINA	Okay.
00:01:29	Researcher	And you can discuss them and, you know, the idea is to have like for you all to agree on the ones that you prioritise.
00:01:38	AMINA	Okay.

00:01:38	IVY	Mm-hmm. Okay, right, so here we go.
00:01:42	OLIVE	So, what do you think is the most important then out of (overlapping conversation)?
00:01:42	IVY	Feeling valued. Feeling valued. Do you reckon you feel valued?
00:01:49	AMINA	Do you think you could...? Would you put that first?
00:01:50	OLIVE	But do you think that's the most important?
00:01:52	IVY	No, no.
00:01:54	AMINA	Have you...? I think it's right up there.
00:02:00	IVY	I don't think it is.
00:02:00	AMINA	But I don't think it's first. No, okay.
00:02:02	IVY	Personally, I think teacher, donor and collaboration, information.
00:02:10	AMINA	We're doing these ones first (overlapping conversation).
00:02:12	IVY	Yeah, these relationships first.
00:02:14	AMINA	Yeah, I would put relationships first. (overlapping conversation)
00:02:13	IVY	Because that's under relationships, because that's under relationships because unless you're...
00:02:19	OLIVE	TA, teacher dynamic, yeah.
00:02:20	IVY	Unless the teacher and you are working together, you're not going to get the best of the kids.
00:02:25	AMINA	Because are we going to... Because say we put these in one order. And then we have discussed these ones. Yeah, then we're going to put of these (overlapping conversation). So it could be that... no, no, but it would probably will end up being very similar, but it might be that there's a subheading that actually is seperat... we think was lower I imagine.
00:02:28	TAYLOR	I mean, I don't know. I would actually say role identity would be a little bit further up there for me. Because I just feel like where it's changed so much, we wear so many different hats now compared to, you know, even five, six years ago kind of thing. We wear so many different hats now.
00:02:57	IVY	Yeah. It's like the one that said role boundaries. It's like I don't actually know what our role actually is. Do you know what I mean, our responsibilities, our...?
00:03:07	OLIVE	And it's changed. But then that would come down to your teacher, your relationship with the teacher, because each teacher would have a different idea. Well, some teachers need very little, and then you're a bit like a spare part sometimes.
00:03:22	IVY	Yeah.

00:03:23	TAYLOR	And then you've got others that are so dependent on you kind of for all of that stuff and you're like, well, hang on a minute I didn't realise that you were going to need me for all of that kind of thing.
00:03:30	OLIVE	So, that is important, I suppose.
00:03:33	AMINA	I suppose I think like in terms of what how I do it, if the relationships with the children, but I think regardless of the... you need a nice teacher, you know, you want to have a good relationship with them, but if your relationship with children is different from year to year, isn't it? Like this year I would say is a bit of a dodgy old year, so I feel less of a connection with the children.
00:03:56	IVY	What year are you in now?
00:03:57	AMINA	Six. So, I'm always in year six, but some of you feel very kind of really connected to emotionally as well. And then sometimes you feel much more like...
00:04:08	TAYLOR	Put harder work kind of thing.
00:04:10	AMINA	Yeah. So, there's not an emotional connection. There's just a sort of you're an adult and they're a child rather than sometimes I think you have that. So, I think, for me, how I do my job or feel about it is very much connected to my relationships.
00:04:22	TAYLOR	And I will actually agree with the relationship, because I think, again, where our job has changed so much, I still work with some TAs now that are very like you're the adult and I'm the child, and you're just going to do what I tell you to. And I'm not saying that...
00:04:32	IVY	Which doesn't get the best of them?
00:04:34	TAYLOR	No. And actually, some of our kids now, they really cannot cope with that kind of thing. Because actually, you do have to look at home life far more than I think you had used to kind of thing because I think... I remember being at school and it probably was that actually that's the adult and I'm not going to answer back... I'm not going to talk them like that kind of thing. Whereas some of our kids now really aren't that bothered by it anymore.
00:04:54	OLIVE	No. Yeah, that's interesting. I've noticed that since COVID actually.
00:04:58	IVY	Really?
00:04:59	OLIVE	Yeah, I've noticed that actually children... you ask children to do things, some children to do things, particularly in the lower year groups I would say. And they would just turn around and go, no. And I was quite shocked by that in reception last year that was.
00:05:15	IVY	Do you think that's because...? Do you think that's because parenting, the ways people parent now has changed?
00:05:22	OLIVE	Yes, I do. And I do wonder if it was to do with COVID because when... yeah, when my children were in reception, and I

		used to work in reception and I said, oh, I'm going to go and read with you now, that child would be like, yes, I'm going to go and read with you they wouldn't go no. But they did last year.
00:05:44	TAYLOR	I think there's more of a friendship with some parents now, that almost that line is blurred of, well, I want to be their friend, and like we're not always there to be their friend. And I know it's different in our role because there's an aspect of actually if you have that secure relationship with them, you can call them out on some stuff. And you have to do it in a different way because you know them well enough to kind of go I can't come at this because we'll butt heads kind of thing. However, I know if I talk to you very well, I'm just wondering if that was maybe the best route that you could have taken kind of thing, that you can have that. But more so, do you know, I would agree with you, relationship is so important in there. Because actually, if you don't know those kids, and if you don't take the time to get to know them, you can't have those conversations with them.
00:06:24	IVY	And relationship comes into, again, your teacher, TA relationship.
00:06:29	AMINA	Yeah, it comes into everything, yeah.
00:06:30	IVY	Because that will change how much time you have with the children to build relationships. And yeah.
00:06:39	OLIVE	So, are we saying then relationships are—is our most important element (overlapping conversation)?
00:06:41	AMINA	Shall we put at the (overlapping conversation). We'll pencil it, we won't sellotape because that's too serious.
00:06:51	TAYLOR	That's very formal.
00:06:52	AMINA	So, okay.
00:06:54	IVY	So, what's the next one, preparedness?
00:06:58	AMINA	I would say, as important as feeling valued is, I would say that the role of identity is such a... like what you said, it is like so many different things now. Who knows whether you're a teacher, whether you're a social worker. I feel like, you know.
00:07:17	OLIVE	They have a go, don't they, at saying, oh, you know, you don't need to prepare anything, you know, (overlapping conversation) school. Yet the amount of TAs that come in and do above and beyond out of good will is quite...
00:07:31	IVY	I got a laminator for Christmas last year because I really wanted one.
00:07:35	AMINA	That's a terrible present.
00:07:36	IVY	No, I know.
00:07:37	AMINA	(Overlapping conversation) have another biscuit.
00:07:38	IVY	No, I know. It's just, and you do, you take stuff home and if you...

00:07:44	OLIVE	There's a lot of people that do, do that.
00:07:46	IVY	Yeah.
00:07:47	OLIVE	And then there's obviously people that don't do that either. And the thing is, that is both fine, but it is what is required, what is the role?
00:07:56	AMINA	Because I think there's an element of, with role identity, there's a sort of... well, there's an element of there's a very martyr, like there's a martyrish teacher. There's a martyrish TA.
00:08:09	TAYLOR	There's always a martyr, (overlapping conversation).
00:08:10	AMINA	That comes in an hour and a half early and leaves an hour and a half late. It's like, well, actually, that's all well and good, but just don't. You don't have to do that.
00:08:16	IVY	Because you're covering up the issue.
00:08:18	AMINA	Well, yes, they don't do that. I mean, I am a very—I'm a classic, I come in on time and I leave on time. Because I'm like within that perimeter of when I'm here, you got me, I'll do it. But you don't get me after that, because actually, also, what do I... you know, I'm not the teacher. So, I might take home an emotional thing that's happened, but I wouldn't take... I wouldn't think, right, I'm going to come in early.
00:08:44	TAYLOR	Probably on the other end of that spectrum, if I'm honest with you. So, I think I... contractually, we were looking at it, and I start at 8:30. I'm in at 8 o'clock most days. Well, not most days, every day, but. And it's less of a... it's more because we look at our time. So, again, I work more in the inclusion TA sort of stuff and nurture and stuff, and we looked at it and we thought we don't have enough time. If I get in by 8:30, we don't have enough time to catch up and fill in for what we've got to do in the day.
00:09:09	AMINA	But you're getting paid for half past eight.
00:09:11	TAYLOR	I get paid from half past eight.
00:09:12	OLIVE	This is what's wrong, isn't it? And I think that is fundamentally wrong because the school, like you say, the school then think, and this is what's happened to our school.
00:09:20	AMINA	They expect you to be in 8:00 and we're like we were a bit late so I'll come in at 8:30.
00:09:23	OLIVE	There is that expectation. And plus, you wouldn't employ a cleaner to come and clean your house and say can you do an extra hour today? I'm not going to pay you, but can you do an extra hour? That wouldn't happen and you'd be mad to think that you could.
00:09:38	IVY	I think if everybody only did their hours then they would say, oh, there is an issue here.
00:09:49	OLIVE	But that is the problem, that is the problem, isn't it. That that is the problem.

00:09:46	IVY	And now I've realised (overlapping conversation) that I'm slowly realising that actually I've given a bit too much and (overlapping conversation).
00:09:54	OLIVE	Because I'm an in early and leave late every day, I'm the same, but.
00:09:57	AMINA	But when I'm in, I am very positive. I don't moan about my job, I do what I need to do, I do it efficiently. So, actually, I think it's never about hours, it's about output. And so, you see a lot of people in every job, to be fair, but in teaching and education, I think people that they... everything is negative, everything is, you know, there's not enough money or time or anything. You think, well, okay, but you've got to change that from within. Because, you know, it's like... I had this conversation with the SRT saying, well, Ofsted. I was like, well, why does everyone kill themselves to get Ofsted ready? Why don't you let them come in and see what it is (overlapping conversation)?
00:10:44	IVY	(Overlapping conversation).
00:10:44	AMINA	And then it will change. And then they'll go, oh, this is the reality.
00:10:47	OLIVE	Yeah, we're just pretending. We're all pretending.
00:10:49	AMINA	So, if we all pretend it will never change.
00:10:51	IVY	And it's exactly the same in nursing. Nursing is so mirrors this kind of job. And also, it was the kind of job that wasn't paid enough. And we were staying like an hour, even two hours sometimes, if you were a relative.
00:11:08	OLIVE	It's public sector (overlapping conversation).
00:11:09	IVY	Yeah, public sector.
00:11:10	TAYLOR	But it's interesting if you look at the roles, and bear with me on this one but actually those roles are perceived as very feminine. And it's that very nurturing and that very caring and that very, well, we'll do it because that's what we're like and that's how we are. And I'm like, yeah, but that runs out for people at some point in time like you can't do that all the time, especially when... so I haven't got kids at home kind of thing. So, it's like I actually, I go home and I switch off. My friend who I work with, she picks... you know, we wait around, we pick our son up. She goes home and she's a mum. And I'm like, actually, even you go home and she's... we've had conversations where she's turned around and gone, actually, I've hit my quota. I don't feel like being or I don't... I'll come into work myself, I don't feel like being caring to somebody else's child, like kind of think because I have to deal with my own when I get out of here kind of thing.
00:11:53	OLIVE	Particularly, if you've got a tricky child as well.
00:11:54	TAYLOR	Yeah, exactly, totally.
00:11:56	AMINA	So, I think... yeah, so I think like the feeling valued, I would say I would put my own value, that's why I don't do... and it's not that I don't care about the kids (overlapping conversation) but I

		just... for me, I'm like I will do my (overlapping conversation) obviously there's time when I don't do that but like I certainly don't... I'm not like coming in at, yeah.
00:12:15	OLIVE	It's really hard to put these in order because...
00:12:85	AMINA	(Overlapping conversation) probably role identity.
00:12:21	OLIVE	So, we think that one's going to be kind of (overlapping conversation).
00:12:23	AMINA	I just think because it's so hard to work out what you are like what is a TA now? Because actually it's not... you used to be a parent coming and doing some [inaudible 00:12:31] and now you are an assistant teacher. You're not a teaching assistant, you're an assistant teacher.
00:12:36	IVY	But then that brings up, you know, the thing of... I strongly believe that it's like because we're generally as TAs with the lower end of learning, whereas actually those children are the children that need more (overlapping conversation) from the teacher. So, we're not teachers, we're not trained as teachers at all.
00:12:59	AMINA	I mean, you know, it's different in different years, isn't it? Because I'm in year six, so I'm teaching, not so much this year to be fair, but like this is the first year although we still do it, for the last however many years, every morning I will take a group and teach maths.
00:13:12	OLIVE	Well, we haven't got anywhere to take them now.
00:13:14	AMINA	There's no space.
00:13:15	IVY	Yeah, like it's just in the building's new interventions.
00:13:16	AMINA	Like you were, effectively, you were... I was a teacher, teaching maths to the kids that cannot—that find it the hardest to get it and you sort of think, okay, (overlapping conversation).
00:13:24	IVY	Whereas actually they need the teacher...
00:13:26	TAYLOR	They should be with their teacher, yeah.
00:13:27	IVY	...to be able to do it. It's like now in year one, it's like doing phonics, they want me to do maths, doing pre-teaching, ELA. And when do you do those bucket books and reading, and that's taking away from me building a relationship with all the other children actually.
00:13:46	OLIVE	Yeah, because you're being out.
00:13:47	AMINA	And the more everything's taken away, which is obviously the way it's going, the more roles we need to adopt. So, it's like, well, okay, so then what's the most important there? What is it? I don't know. So, that's what I think...
00:13:59	IVY	And isn't that why they're thinking that they're going to professionalise TA's, make it a profession which will then I suppose, hopefully be paid more. And also, you will have to do CPD training. It's like in SA I've had half a... half an appraisal.

00:14:18	AMINA	They're never going to do that (overlapping conversation).
00:14:21	OLIVE	There's no money (overlapping conversation).
00:14:21	TAYLOR	There's no money for them. But there is no money for them to be able to do that.
00:14:25	AMINA	They don't really do... because luckily, because the thing is, in a place like B&H , you get a quite high calibre of person for your £11, £12 an hour. So, if you go somewhere else, you're not. So, actually... you know, I can teach maths. But some people are not going to be able to do that. And actually, why should they be able to do that? It's not (overlapping conversation).
00:14:48	IVY	And also, of being given those children who need (overlapping conversation).
00:14:52	TAYLOR	Yeah, far more.
00:14:53	AMINA	So, they're kind of, you know, it's... so, I would say. That and then, I would probably say that.
00:15:01	TAYLOR	I agree. I think feeling valued comes over preparedness. Yeah.
00:15:03	AMINA	Yeah, because actually that I kind of think that's down to...
00:15:06	TAYLOR	That again, that kind of links in with your teacher and actually you being able to turn around and go, look, if you want me to do this intervention or whatever, that's fine, but I need the time to prep it.
00:15:15	AMINA	Yeah, give me some time to do it.
00:15:16	TAYLOR	(Overlapping conversation) and again, I think... actually that rolls in with that. Actually, if you have that relationship with the teacher, you can have a bit more of that conversation with them about it.
00:15:24	IVY	That's why I think you're right, relationship comes first, because without a good relationship with your teacher, you're not going to be prepared. Without a good relationship, you're not going to feel valued, and you're not going to know what your role identity is.
00:15:36	TAYLOR	So, I would agree. I would say feeling valued (overlapping conversation).
00:15:38	AMINA	Yeah.
00:15:38	OLIVE	Okay, yeah.
00:15:40	AMINA	And then I think being prepared is kind of... because I think...
00:15:44	IVY	If you all of these, you don't (overlapping conversation).
00:15:45	AMINA	Yeah. I don't think it's necessary to like... necessarily be at home preparing stuff for the next day. Because also, I don't even know what's going to happen the next day, you know, so it's like...

00:15:53	TAYLOR	And in the nicest way possible... I don't mean it to be rude, but actually if you really don't have that you can turn to the teacher and go, look, I don't have that set yet, but I haven't had any time to set it. And they will either wing it and they will give you something or you turn around and go, do you know what, scrap it then because at the moment I don't have the time to get that stuff ready and it's (overlapping conversation).
00:16:10	OLIVE	Well, we are told that particularly the INAs in high school, they are all told that it's the teacher's responsibility.
00:16:18	IVY	I know.
00:16:19	OLIVE	Now, I don't believe that. No, I think that is true, but that doesn't happen.
00:16:23	IVY	I know in reception and year one, the teacher doesn't know what was happening with the child.
00:16:29	OLIVE	So, the teacher needs to understand this then, the role identity.
00:16:33	AMINA	Yeah. I feel like I know what's going on when I get in there. I mean, I get in school and I'm like, okay, so that's happening, da, da, da, da, da.
00:16:41	OLIVE	Oh, yeah, (overlapping conversation).
00:16:42	AMINA	And I'm like, yeah, fine. And then obviously all the printouts are ready and it's...
00:16:45	OLIVE	Well, that's because we've prepared it.
00:16:46	AMINA	Because that's because—yeah, because (overlapping conversation). So, I have it up. Yeah, so that's fine, so.
00:16:52	IVY	It's like I always get a chance to... only because I come in early, do I get a chance to run through, it's like what are we doing today? And then I know I need to prepare this, I need to prepare whatever.
00:17:00	AMINA	But if you don't do that, what happens? But what does happen? I mean, like you come in 20 to 9:00. What happens if you do that? What doesn't happen?
00:17:11	IVY	I don't know.
00:17:12	AMINA	Well, try it.
00:17:16	Researcher	Sorry, did you sort these out?
00:17:18	AMINA	I think this is where we're at. Do you want us to sellotape them?
00:17:21	Researcher	Yes, if you can. Just separate them a little bit and then if you can put some notes on why do you feel this order is important for you.
00:17:34	IVY	Yeah.
00:17:36	Researcher	And then we will have a discussion later.

00:17:38	AMINA	Okay, it's facing you...
00:17:39	Researcher	And this is the first, right?
00:17:41	IVY	No, I'm not writing.
00:17:42	AMINA	Do you want to write?
00:17:43	IVY	(Overlapping conversation).
00:17:44	AMINA	I'll write it, fine. I'll write it. Well, I'm upside down.
00:17:48	TAYLOR	That can easily be fixed up.
00:17:50	AMINA	No, I know. But I mean, it's just notes really, it's just like a...
00:17:54	IVY	Yeah.
00:17:58	OLIVE	So, why do we...? Why do we think they should be the (overlapping conversation) ?
00:18:01	IVY	Because unless you've got a good relationship with children and the teacher, you wouldn't have all of these...
00:18:06	AMINA	Yeah, nothing else (overlapping conversation).
00:18:07	TAYLOR	So, you have to start with a relationship.
00:18:09	AMINA	Yeah. Because it's kind of your driver, isn't it, you're doing it... because the thing is, because it's a job, the job is not a job. No one's doing the job for money, so it's like... I always sort of say it's a job for convenience and it's a job to enjoy. So, the joy has to come from the...
00:18:25	OLIVE	Yeah, you've got to have a nice time. You've got to have a nice time (overlapping conversation)...
00:18:28	AMINA	...you've got to laugh. If I've got to laugh, you've got to laugh with the kids, you've got to laugh with the teacher. You've got to be happy. And that, you know, so when you... yeah. So, definitely having now being in a year where my relationship were less with the kids. I say compared to last year, I would be... I would enjoy my day less because...
00:18:58	IVY	And why do you think it's different this year?
00:19:00	AMINA	Just because the kids are much more (overlapping conversation).
00:19:02	OLIVE	They're a harder year group, so I don't... so weirdly... so I'm in year six as well.
00:19:05	AMINA	It's a funny year, year five.
00:19:10	OLIVE	Yeah, they are a funny year but because I've spent a year with them last year. See, I was in your position last year. I mean, (overlapping conversation) and I had a bit of an awful year last year, where now (overlapping conversation).
00:19:21	AMINA	It's not unbearable. It's just not, it's just not as fun because I have to be more stricter. So, rather than being, I don't

		want to... I am strict, but I feel like I'm teaching because I have to relentlessly do that.
00:19:35	OLIVE	It's relentless, it is relentless. It's behaviour.
00:19:38	Researcher	Guys, just to let you know. If you want to add any, any to these ones, feel free to add, okay?
00:19:46	AMINA	Okay. Yeah, okay. So, role identity wise, we said...?
00:19:53	IVY	What is our role now?
00:19:54	AMINA	Yeah, constantly changing.
00:19:56	TAYLOR	Yeah, constantly changing.
00:19:57	OLIVE	And actually, the teachers need to be aware. We need all to be on the same page.
00:20:02	IVY	Of what our role is.
00:20:03	OLIVE	Because teachers feel like our role, it varies, doesn't it from teacher to teacher?
00:20:10	AMINA	And I think you don't...
00:20:10	OLIVE	Some teachers want you to be... some teachers, I mean, because I quite like being really proactive and assertive and things like that and like doing things. And I've worked with teachers that are really happy about that. And I say, oh, shall I do this and shall I do that? And that they're really, really happy about that, but some teachers are not happy.
00:20:30	IVY	I know, because I'm never sure and it's like... I'm in a new class this year with a new teacher. I was with S last year, so she knows what I'm like. And it's like you're like, should I kind of like when the teacher is talking and coming up with ideas, it's like should I be contributing to this? Are they going to think or whatever?
00:20:50	AMINA	I think you can ask them sometimes. I mean, like I kind of... because behaviour management wise, I'm quite a big part of that. And actually, I just feel like sometimes I do feel like I'm standing up and I am saying, not... I would never talk over, but I would talk a lot. I will say, you know, back up strongly. So, I wouldn't just be a passive force in the classroom. I think some people are passive. That's different (overlapping conversation) isn't it, some will go passive. I think sometimes... but it's kind of finding that line without being an interference. It's like I'm not a teacher, you're the teacher, so.
00:21:25	TAYLOR	And so again, it's that balance with the teacher, isn't it? Where actually they will rely on us, well, are you going to say anything? I was like you're the teacher, like it has to come from you because...
00:21:32	OLIVE	Yes, but sometimes if they're a new teacher...
00:21:35	TAYLOR	Then I think they do rely a bit more.
00:21:36	OLIVE	And you're a sort of old TA (overlapping conversation).

00:21:41	TAYLOR	Seasoned TA.
00:21:42	IVY	It's like when you get a teacher that's covering the class that you know best. It's like you're so much more, there's like so much more take out that role.
00:21:52	TAYLOR	I almost don't mind that so much when it's a teacher that really doesn't know. So, it was a couple of years back and I was in the class, and genuinely I hadn't been in the hall, I wouldn't have heard it, but they had a supply in and they were like we can get away with what we want. And I came out of the corner and went, no, you can't, because I am still in the classroom, and there is still an aspect, so I think that... like with a supply, with a cover that doesn't know, and you know... like we all know those kids in that class that go we will definitely going to jump up. Yeah. Like I think you need that a little bit more kind of thing, like. But.
00:22:25	AMINA	And I think, I just think this is just like the role is ever changing, so that's why we just don't know what does it.
00:22:33	OLIVE	And not with the pay scale required.
00:22:36	IVY	No, no.
00:22:36	AMINA	(Overlapping conversation) that's the thing, I've just got a... I've just missed a call.
00:22:40	IVY	And also, not with the... it's like I've expected to do all of these interventions and several people have said to me, no, you shouldn't be doing the maths one unless you've had the training and I totally agree with them. But then they can't afford to put us on the training. So, I've had half an hour somewhere and its sort of...
00:22:58	OLIVE	What, so what were they, maths?
00:22:59	IVY	The maths, the... is it called first?
00:23:03	OLIVE	Oh, first number.
00:23:04	IVY	Yeah. I mean, it looks pretty straightforward.
00:23:07	OLIVE	Not reincorrect ? Not reincorrect ?
00:23:09	IVY	No. Oh, no.
00:23:10	AMINA	Oh, no, I can't stand reincorrect .
00:23:11	OLIVE	Oh, my God. I keep still getting millions of emails about reincorrect and (overlapping conversation).
00:23:16	TAYLOR	We've just brought them in. So, our head of maths put them in last year and I hate them.
00:23:22	OLIVE	The thing is, we're not trained properly on them.
00:23:24	TAYLOR	No.
00:23:25	IVY	I know, and that's...
00:23:29	AMINA	Okay. Yeah.

00:23:30	IVY	You're writing there.
00:23:32	OLIVE	Okay, that's the problem.
00:23:34	TAYLOR	Yeah, we've just put them in last year kind of thing. And we did some of the training for it but also it's like... so I'm not... I'm in the nurture room now. So, our day is totally different to what goes on in the classroom (overlapping conversation) on a regular basis. And we've had to squeeze in to do maths and to do the recorrects and stuff like that. We're just like I don't know where we put this because like when we do that and it takes the time that it does, and I appreciate that you need it to because it's the repetitive of this, that they see it but it's also like... but they're down here for a reason, like they're not down here at the moment to do the maths with us like they're down here for everything else that you guys are flagging up these kids for kind of thing. And it's like...
00:24:10	OLIVE	There's so many complexes needs now, isn't there, (overlapping conversation).
00:24:13	IVY	There is many more.
00:24:13	TAYLOR	Yeah, no, I think that goes under more complex needs, so much more.
00:24:18	IVY	And working in reception in year one, it's like there are... and I think next year is going to be worse. There are many more children with speech and language issues.
00:24:29	TAYLOR	So many more.
00:24:29	IVY	Because they never saw people's mouths, not for two years, and so yeah.
00:24:35	TAYLOR	It is really interesting because...
00:24:37	IVY	And also, you know, social interactions with other children. So, being able to sit.
00:24:40	TAYLOR	See, we found that really interesting because we were talking about... so, our year four kind of cohort at the moment are a really tricky year group at the moment. And we were talking about... and it's like actually lots of things they teach, so it was like, well, they're possessive, they're quite rough and tumble with their play and stuff like that but they also, like... but if you look at a couple of years back, they were year one at tables. And actually, what were they were being told, it's like, that's your pencil case, do not share anything that is in that pencil case...
00:25:06	IVY	That's a really good point, yeah. Yeah.
00:25:07	TAYLOR	...that's yours, you cannot share it with me. Actually, what have they learnt? They learnt that that's theirs and I don't have to share this because it's mine.
00:25:12	IVY	And now you're changing the rules.

00:25:13	TAYLOR	And now we're changing the rules and we changed the game. And now we're sharing it and we're like, well, hang on, I didn't have to that a while ago, why do I have to do this now?
00:25:19	AMINA	Yeah.
00:25:19	TAYLOR	And it was one of those things that we were looking at. And it's like all of them were like they get to the playground. And you can just tell, like they're playing football and it's rough and tumble it's like... but again, those years, those formative years where they would have been playing or they would have, you know, you do so much for turn taking, you do so much in the showroom, you do so much. Well, that's broken now, guys, we can't have that anymore. They were missed. They've missed such a big chunk of, but like especially at home and stuff, we've got kids that are like mum and dad will just pop out and buy another one by the time they're home from school, but then they don't value the whole... actually, we can't have that anymore because you broke it earlier. So, it's like maybe we can see it later on, but right now it's broken.
00:25:53	OLIVE	Oh, yeah. So, the entitlement, there is a greater...
00:25:57	AMINA	It's a massive behaviour as well. It's just massive because they've just been at home, like they've been parented by probably parents who are trying to work at the same time, it's like... so it's just like, yeah, whatever, whatever, just do it. And certainly, years one and two.
00:26:13	OLIVE	Year one. Year one who (overlapping conversation).
00:26:15	AMINA	And three, actually, that they're... I think, to some degree, like sort of younger ones, it's...
00:26:21	OLIVE	I think the intake in reception this year is much better than the last two years, it's been (overlapping conversation).
00:26:27	TAYLOR	I would agree with you on that like...
00:26:28	AMINA	Yeah, because they would have been too little, I suppose. This reception, they would have been too little to kind of, they would have been (overlapping conversation).
00:26:34	TAYLOR	They would have just been on the outside of it kind of thing.
00:26:36	IVY	But it's like all of the intake last year, they were the way that they were, couldn't sit, attention span, all that kind of thing...
00:26:44	OLIVE	No sharing, (overlapping conversation).
00:26:45	IVY	...because they hadn't been to a nursery.
00:26:46	AMINA	Yeah, exactly, yeah.
00:26:46	IVY	...because they missed out on nursery time. So, they'd been just with their parents. So, sharing was a massive issue.
00:26:53	OLIVE	And some of them, home would have been a one-bedroom flat, you know.

00:26:56	TAYLOR	Yeah. Yeah, exactly.
00:26:57	OLIVE	And maybe some people are trying to work and no (overlapping conversation) there's no space.
00:27:00	AMINA	Yeah, this is a new (overlapping conversation).
00:27:01	IVY	Yeah, they were very tricky.
00:27:02	OLIVE	So, this is we've been (overlapping conversation).
00:27:04	IVY	Why is this important? I suppose, why have we put them in this order?
00:27:08	AMINA	Oh, fine, okay.
00:27:10	OLIVE	So, do we want to put any notes with these before we write?
00:27:12	TAYLOR	(Overlapping conversation) feeling valued.
00:27:13	AMINA	Feeling valued. Why is this important?
00:27:15	TAYLOR	(Overlapping conversation) back that to relationship.
00:27:17	AMINA	Yeah, I think it drives you. I mean, there's nothing... someone saying thank you. Never, ever stops being brilliant.
00:27:27	IVY	I know.
00:27:28	AMINA	And like if someone means it, you know, just saying... so like my teacher last year, she would kind of (overlapping conversation).
00:27:35	OLIVE	Oh my God. Is it S?
00:27:38	AMINA	No, no, no, it's K.
00:27:39	OLIVE	Oh, K. Yeah.
00:27:40	AMINA	She was great in terms of like giving you a croissant or saying here you go, here's a... get me a bar of chocolate or a bottle of gin which is also good
00:27:49	TAYLOR	Which is also good. (laughter)
00:27:50	OLIVE	Yeah, it's weird because I had a teacher last year that was very sort of zero.
00:27:56	AMINA	So then you just think because actually...
00:27:56	IVY	All the ones I've worked with have been really thankful for...
00:27:59	AMINA	Yeah.
00:28:00	OLIVE	And then this year has been brilliant.
00:28:01	IVY	And it makes... it does make a difference.
00:28:02	TAYLOR	Yeah, so it's being somewhere that you feel appreciated makes the diff... and like you say, it makes such a massive difference. And you want to put the work in there kind of thing.

00:28:10	IVY	And the other thing, the feeling valued thing, it's like on several occasions I've come up with ideas or whatever and taken them to hopefully the appropriate people. But then, new ideas, sometimes you don't feel as though... well, they're not taken on board or thought about, they just say it at the time, at the... right, that's a brilliant idea and blah, blah, blah. Like talk tokens in the playground. And it really worked for some people. But yeah, (overlapping conversation).
00:28:43	AMINA	I suppose sometimes too many ideas create too much work because they... a teacher would be like, look, I have so much on, to... it's probably a fantastic idea but, no, who's going to...?
00:28:55	IVY	No, it was for the MDSAs (overlapping conversation).
00:28:57	AMINA	Yeah. But I suppose that there's that sort of, you know, that's the balance, isn't it, I suppose, finding...
00:29:04	TAYLOR	Because they probably look at it as, well, that's another thing I've got to do.
00:29:06	AMINA	Yeah, I will do that.
00:29:07	OLIVE	Yeah, who's going to manage that?
00:29:09	TAYLOR	Yeah. And actually, that's really hard as well because, well, I get that actually...
00:29:11	IVY	Well, it's like... and quite often, you know, this particular idea was to make it easier for people, to make it easier for the children, you know, the idea was that if there was a dispute and there were like five children come up to you and say she did this, she did that. It's like you have one token, so one child can speak only when they've got this token.
00:29:31	OLIVE	But we've done this before actually.
00:29:33	IVY	Oh, really?
00:29:34	OLIVE	Yeah, that's another... yeah, we've had... is that [inaudible 00:29:39]? It was a training we've had that before with the playground about everyone takes their turn and actually the children do try and...
00:29:48	IVY	Is that restorative justice training or was that at the...?
00:29:50	OLIVE	I'm just trying to think. It was ages ago now. So many things, training things.
00:29:56	IVY	Yeah.
00:29:56	OLIVE	And the idea of it really was the adult was to almost facilitate it, that the children actually try and resolve it themselves.
00:30:05	AMINA	Do you feel like less value because if an idea is not taken, do you feel like, oh, I've wasted my time or?
00:30:11	IVY	No, not necessarily. I suppose it's like feeling valued in the way that we are part of the school community, TAs, as well as teachers, as well as MDSAs . And everybody should feel as valued as each other.

00:30:27	AMINA	Yeah, because I feel like there's a value on... I am not proud to say I'm a TA. I do various jobs and that is not a job I say.
00:30:41	IVY	Really?
00:30:41	AMINA	Yeah. I will say I teach drama, I'll say I do acting, I will say I work... I'll briefly go I...
00:30:47	TAYLOR	I work in a school.
00:30:48	AMINA	...I work in a school a couple of days.
00:30:49	IVY	But is that because you have a thought of how other people see a TA job?
00:30:54	AMINA	I think I'm less like that now. I'm less like that now actually because I sort of found a value in it more because you certainly (overlapping conversation) see the kids that you help.
00:31:01	IVY	I think the general public don't know what the TA does.
00:31:05	AMINA	But that's an honest thing, is that that... so my own value is that I feel like, oh, you know, I've got a degree, I've done my education, I've got... you know, I could do all these things, yet I am a TA. It affects me a little, I feel a little bit like a care... nothing wrong with being a care worker but you sort of think, well, I'm in the same vein as that.
00:31:25	IVY	I know. It's like I did, it's like... because I was a nurse for 17 years and then ended up doing this and it's like... to begin with, I was a bit like... and also when you're in a social situation and you mention it and... and I think it's because they don't really understand how what a TA is (overlapping conversation).
00:31:45	OLIVE	What a TA is (overlapping conversation).
00:31:45	TAYLOR	No, they don't get the role anymore, they really don't.
00:31:48	OLIVE	And actually, this goes to the feeling valued and the role. I don't think parents actually know.
00:31:54	AMINA	They don't. But I think it's finding that. I found it a bit more now, that value for myself. And that's come through other people talking to me about impact and like you think, actually, I can make an impact and I should be proud of that impact because actually filing a photocopy, I'm not... whatever, we can do that, but actually making an impact in a child's life through like an emotional connection, not many people get a chance to do that.
00:32:22	IVY	No, exactly.
00:32:23	AMINA	And I did and I can. So, actually, that's a role I take very seriously.
00:32:28	IVY	Yeah, yeah. I think you're absolutely life.
00:32:30	TAYLOR	And it's actually, well, funny enough, it's one of our younger cohort because she's talking about going on to training, so it's... I don't want to just be a TA, that whole phrase that fills me with such rage and like there was nothing about this job that is

		just, okay? There is nothing about what you're doing it that is (overlapping conversation).
00:32:49	IVY	Is that because society has made it feel it feel like that?
00:32:48	TAYLOR	But it is, it's society and that is the perception of you're just the... and then there's an older school take it as it is bad, but in the last one, yeah, there was an old school...
00:32:55	IVY	And it's seen as you're a helper.
00:32:56	TAYLOR	...way of looking at it because if my granddad was talking to me about people, he goes, well, she looks after kids. And I do so much more than sit in a room and look after children. And they won't understand that and I have to, you know, there's an aspect of laying that down, because there's an age thing, generational about that.
00:33:12	IVY	Yeah.
00:33:12	AMINA	And I think like... so recently we've had a restructure in our school. And I did say that in our kind of meeting. I said, you know, it's taken me a long time to like work with this job title and feel value for myself. So, I said, by you doing this and now how everyone's being treated, you've taken that value away like that. Because everyone becomes a tick box rather than a person. So, that is what they've done, they've taken that away. And I think the leadership have the ability to do either that, to... so, the value comes from not just your teacher, but from your leadership team as well I think which is often lacking because the further away they get from you as a person, the less they care and the less they see. And actually, they don't know who does a job well, who doesn't do the job well. They don't care who does a job well. They just need someone there, someone there, someone there. And as long as that's done, they're like...
00:34:09	OLIVE	And I mean, some of our colleagues last week were in tears, literally, and trying to get things sorted and go into SLT because children were left without care and they weren't interested. They weren't interested.
00:34:25	TAYLOR	So, value comes a long way, and as soon as a you lose that value, yeah.
00:34:28	OLIVE	They don't want to hear it, they don't want to hear that there's a problem, that there's anything.
00:34:33	TAYLOR	I mean, I find it fascinating because it's like we had a real stint in the first term where we had a number of... and it was TAs that were off and it was less... so my line manager is great kind of thing, she really sees it like she's very aware that, you know, what we take up... we make up a big part of what our team does kind of thing. And it wasn't until we had such a handful off, that our teachers were going, well, this isn't being done and that's not being done. And I was like, yeah, because your TAs aren't here like... and these are the jobs that they all do. And this is what happens when they're not here. So, it was actually after that one that we found that there wasn't more appreciation from some, not all, but from some, they were a bit like...

00:35:10	IVY	And that's what I mean, it's like if everybody came in where they meant to, went home when they meant to, they would then realise that actually...
00:35:16	TAYLOR	We really honestly... do you know, when the strikes were being talked about and stuff like that, one of our... and again I think it was in our SLT, new to the SLT role, but had kind of gone, well, we would be all right, wouldn't we? But if all of the support staff striked, you would not run your school.
00:35:32	AMINA	They couldn't open the school, no.
00:35:34	TAYLOR	You couldn't and there's was an aspect... and actually, in to our head teacher's credit, he turned around and gone, okay, you're going to step in and be the one-to-one. Are you going to step in and do the lunch duties? Are you going to do the break...? Like it was one of those, he stepped in to like in our defence kind of thing, to step into that. But some people still see it as, well, we'd be all right. And I'm like you don't realise how big of a part we make of your classroom.
00:35:57	AMINA	But then If everyone didn't strike, this is what I sort of say, if you don't strike, so you come to work, but you work to rule, you work, so you don't... so no one does those extra hours, no one works up to, stays up until 10:00. No one comes (overlapping conversation). No one does it. And then you see where... then you see what's real. Well, actually, where are we?
00:36:14	IVY	Yeah.
00:36:14	Researcher	Hiya. So, we have about 10, 15 minutes to write those as well. So, you can use those in terms of the one's that you (overlapping conversation).
00:36:24	TAYLOR	Sitting in between, okay.
00:36:25	Researcher	Yeah, or...
00:36:26	AMINA	Or you can make a new...
00:36:27	Researcher	Or you can make new ones.
00:36:28	AMINA	We can do this.
00:36:29	Researcher	Yeah, yeah.
00:36:30	AMINA	Okay.
00:36:31	Researcher	And you can make notes about, you know, if these doesn't fit, but there is something about hierarchies or inclusion. But these then, you know, the things that don't fit. Just put a note next to it, so we can remember. It's more for you guys than for me because we're going to discuss them again next week.
00:36:48	TAYLOR	Okay, okay.
00:36:50	AMINA	Okay. So, maybe I would say, if they're talking about those sort of connection.
00:36:55	OLIVE	These are subheadings and...

00:36:56	TAYLOR	These are the subheadings.
00:36:57	AMINA	Connections with students, like balance in the... like connections with students, so I think that's quite...
00:37:01	TAYLOR	I would agree, I think that one must go... I would say at the top.
00:37:05	AMINA	Yeah, yeah.
00:37:06	OLIVE	Do you think that's more important than the teacher dynamic?
00:37:08	TAYLOR	I think so because actually I think... I think if a student, if you're not in the front, and I think when you do the one-to-one thing, and I do find in the lower key stages kind of thing, if you don't have that good relationship with you when you're not there or when you're off or something like that, actually they really struggle when it's just the teacher because you're the anchor and you're the constant for them kind of thing. And I think there is that balance and that dependence of, well, actually there are points where I'm not going to be here. I had a lad last year and he's on the spectrum and stuff like that, but he was heavily dependent on... when I came into the room, that was it. It did matter what he was doing, he was by my side until the end of the day and it's like, mate, you've got stuff that you've got to get done. And it was like... I was in interventions. So, it's like I would have to check in on him every time I come into the room because he knew he would have a part of the day with me. I said but you've got to do your work before you have that part of the day. And the days where actually he hadn't done it and he couldn't have it, it was a calyptic meltdown because he was so dependent and it was like... and I know that [inaudible 00:38:07] he's autistic, so there's an aspect of you can't necessarily teach all of that kind of thing. But it was just stepping back for him, and me in particular stepping back, such a big deal for him kind of thing, and such a, well, I don't like this and I will do whatever I can to make sure you are back and you have to be with me. Because the teacher, bless her, tried really hard, but was just a bit like, look, can you just come in and...?
00:38:29	AMINA	Can you just help, yeah, (overlapping conversation).
00:38:30	TAYLOR	Yeah. So, I was like, look, I can't, because if I do that, he's still getting what he wants, and we can't keep going like that.
00:38:37	AMINA	But I think the kids kind of like... they drive us, don't they? So, I think ultimately they drive me, you know, those kinds of relationships, and just the walking around school and having those little moments with all of them.
00:38:52	TAYLOR	They drive the role, let's be fair.
00:38:54	AMINA	Yeah. So, but then it probably what would come next?
00:38:57	OLIVE	And their need, I suppose their need, isn't it?
00:38:59	AMINA	Yeah.
00:39:00	OLIVE	So, it's whatever they need.

00:39:01	IVY	Would you say TA (overlapping conversation) dynamic?
00:39:03	AMINA	Yeah, maybe, yeah, because I think it's... if you've got a real of like... if you've really got someone who's, you know...
00:39:09	OLIVE	Hard work?
00:39:09	AMINA	Yeah. I mean, I've... yeah, I've had times where it's been too difficult, and it does make you think, oh God, it's just everything's harder.
00:39:17	OLIVE	Well, you just don't enjoy it. I had a whole year where I just didn't enjoy it.
00:39:19	AMINA	Yeah, so but...
00:39:22	TAYLOR	I do think there's an aspect of that. When you know the kids, so like for you guys where you follow them up, you know them far better than those teachers do already, that you can turn around... and not necessarily tell them exactly, but you can sort of tell them and go, well, actually, from what I know of this child and how I've worked with them, that's not really going to work. Can we try it another way? And I think when that dynamic is all right, this is then better because actually they realise that actually they're working to help me kind of thing. And most of the time, the...
00:39:49	AMINA	And you need to kind of like... I kind of like it when there's a sort of honesty between, so that it is... I mean, with my teacher now, we laugh, like really laugh. And it makes it just brilliant. And we don't always laugh. But there are times when we really laugh, and there's an honesty where we're like, oh God, yeah, so rather than being all like isn't everything brilliant and perfect and these children are brilliant and perfect? We're like, oh, you know, and with that, because that relationship is really important.
00:40:16	TAYLOR	You need that so much.
00:40:17	AMINA	Yeah, because I think if I didn't have this relationship with the teacher I've got now, I probably would have skipped off, for sure. So, that did sort of save it I'd say really.
00:40:27	IVY	Yeah.
00:40:28	TAYLOR	Okay, so role identity. Do we say role boundaries or ever-changing role and responsibilities?
00:40:34	AMINA	I think maybe that, isn't it?
00:40:34	IVY	That one, yeah.
00:40:36	AMINA	Yeah, because it's just never-ending.
00:40:37	TAYLOR	It is, yeah, okay. I think it's funny how many of us... so I was really honest and said I took on lunch duties a couple of years ago.
00:40:44	OLIVE	Oh my God, why would you do that?

00:40:45	TAYLOR	And I purely took it because I needed the money. If it wasn't to do with the money, I would have given it up years ago. But it is that really hard of... it's like you change hats, just...
00:40:54	OLIVE	Oh, it's awful.
00:40:55	AMINA	Yes, and then you're a dinner lady.
00:40:57	OLIVE	It's like the worst part.
00:40:59	TAYLOR	I hate the part at lunchtime, it's the worst part of the day like...
00:41:02	OLIVE	See, I managed to give mine up in [inaudible 00:41:03].
00:41:05	AMINA	I do too, but like yeah.
00:41:08	Researcher	Now, feel free to change the wording if you feel like it's not.
00:41:12	AMINA	Okay.
00:41:15	Researcher	Yeah, we can...
00:41:16	AMINA	Are you okay?
00:41:17	Researcher	Yeah, just if you feel like you... you know, I don't know how this thing's working.
00:41:22	AMINA	Well, they're kind of... I think the words are kind of working for us, (overlapping conversation) so it's fine.
00:41:26	Researcher	Okay, great. Right, thank you.
00:41:29	AMINA	Okay. So, then we went to feeling valued.
00:41:35	TAYLOR	So, hierarchies, navigating hierarchies and seeking inclusion or unnoticed contributions and impact.
00:41:43	AMINA	I try and make everything I do be highly noticed, so I liked... yeah, but I can understand that a lot of people do a lot of things and they don't get noticed because they become, like coming in early every day, it starts being something that you're doing, and it starts being something that you should do. So, expectation rather than going the extra mile, then that's just standard then, you just come in, you know, so probably like that.
00:42:17	OLIVE	Well, the thing is, there is a lot of people that do above and beyond, aren't there? But the problem is when you're working in a place where you do feel appreciated, then you don't mind doing that because you get the best out of people. It's a bit like, you know, all the years that we did choir and things like that and all the concerts, and all the shows and things, you know, we did it because we loved it and we feel valued. And actually, the teachers that were running it were brilliant. We did it for them really. However, once...
00:42:54	AMINA	And then we stopped doing it when it changed, yeah, not because the person doing it, no, it's not nice, but just because actually then you sort of reassess, you're like, well, actually, I'm giving out, I'm giving a lot of time, I mean, I'm getting in early and

		it's all, you know, so. And actually you start thinking, who am I doing this for? Because if I do it for the teacher, but I'm not doing it for the head, I'm not doing it for them, I'm not doing it to tick their box because I don't care about your box. I want your box to remain unticked, you know, so.
00:43:24	OLIVE	So, it's a funny thing, isn't it? Because this is the hierarchy bit.
00:43:27	IVY	Yeah.
00:43:27	AMINA	Yeah.
00:43:30	OLIVE	And I do think that SLT are often in a different world, particularly when you've got... another example really is where you've got HLTAs or a lack of them or supplies or gaps in staffing. And then, you've got SLTs sitting at computers doing work or doing whatever they're doing.
00:43:58	AMINA	Yeah. So, I would probably say maybe I'm looking at these... I would say that we perhaps... I don't know how much of that heading I would agree with this, like the navigating hierarchies and seeking inclusion, because actually I would just say feeling valued is about something more simple than that. It's like just being appreciated and recognised.
00:44:20	TAYLOR	Feeling appreciated and recognised.
00:44:21	AMINA	Yeah. Because actually the navigating hierarchies, it seems a bit more like role identity to me.
00:44:27	OLIVE	And feeling part of the team, feeling... it's just all about... isn't it, it's... and being...
00:44:32	AMINA	Yeah.
00:44:33	IVY	It's like I think you should have dedicated... if you're a TA and a teacher, you should have dedicated time where you sit and discuss all of the children. Because you see things that they don't see. They will be grateful for your input.
00:44:47	OLIVE	Because we used to go to the people profiling, didn't we, whatever it's called and then that's stopped.
00:44:53	IVY	Because I know nothing about... there are so many things that I found out about children that I think why has no one told me that?
00:45:00	OLIVE	Yeah, [inaudible 00:45:01].
00:45:02	IVY	Communication is I think (overlapping conversation)
00:45:08	TAYLOR	Oh, yeah, definitely. Yeah.
00:45:05	AMINA	Yeah, put in there.
00:45:07	IVY	I think (overlapping conversation) communication.
00:45:11	AMINA	Just put a new one because actually that's true, like sometimes...
00:45:15	OLIVE	Communication...

00:45:16	IVY	And (overlapping conversation) especially...
00:45:17	AMINA	(Overlapping conversation) in a class was her dad was dying, I didn't know and I was like... so I was talking to her at some point, she was talking about her dad and I was (overlapping conversation).
00:45:22	OLIVE	Yeah, and her died this weekend (overlapping conversation).
00:45:24	AMINA	Yeah, today, but I mean I know that now, but the last couple of weeks.
00:45:28	OLIVE	You didn't know.
00:45:29	IVY	That's ridiculous, that's ridiculous.
00:45:29	AMINA	I just didn't know. So, no one took me aside and said, he is now in a hospice. He is now... do you know what I mean? It's like so I was in a situation thinking...
00:45:34	IVY	But if you have on a weekly basis a sit down with your (overlapping conversation).
00:45:36	OLIVE	I know, it's awful if you think about (overlapping conversation) day-to-day it's been awful.
00:45:40	IVY	If you had a sit down with your teacher on a weekly basis and said, you know, these are the... what children are we worried about? What's going on? I think communication should be at the top, because it's communication about the children, communication about what's happening next, in the next month, or even lesson planning or...
00:45:55	TAYLOR	Should we take that up?
00:45:56	AMINA	Yeah, we can chuck it up there, because it doesn't matter, does it.
00:45:58	IVY	...all those things.
00:45:58	AMINA	So then, let's... because we are... what should we do with these (overlapping conversation)?
00:46:03	TAYLOR	I think we've changed that (overlapping conversation) being appreciated.
00:46:04	AMINA	We've changed that to that. So, should we maybe move that, lose that one?
00:46:07	TAYLOR	Yeah. The only one we haven't really talked about is preparedness and quite honestly I genuinely...
00:46:13	AMINA	I see that quite low down, don't you?
00:46:15	TAYLOR	I see that as very low down because quite frankly, if I don't have it, I'm going to turn to this teacher and go, look, I don't have it. Yeah, and it's almost as bluntly as that it's like this is not my problem. If this intervention doesn't happen, you're the one that has to answer to it.

00:46:25	AMINA	Yeah. You give it to me, I'll do it, well, I'm going to do it.
00:46:27	IVY	I, at the moment, I think I'm pretty naive as in they've told me this is the intervention. This is what you want to do and then I go up and think of things to do (overlapping conversation).
00:46:37	AMINA	I can't stop eating sandwiches, they're lovely (overlapping conversation). Can I swap that for a cheese? Because that's the one, that's the party food.
00:46:44	Researcher	You want one more?
00:46:45	AMINA	No, no, thank you.
00:46:45	Researcher	[inaudible 00:46:45].
00:46:48	AMINA	It wasn't cheese. It wasn't cheese.
00:46:50	Researcher	This is gluten-free. This is not gluten-free.
00:46:52	AMINA	Yeah. I could sense it wasn't. I was like, that's not right.
00:46:58	IVY	Yeah, the preparedness one. It's like I'm doing lots of interventions, and it's like I'm just told these are the interventions. And then I go off and find lots of things to do in that time to achieve that intervention.
00:47:11	OLIVE	So, this is training as well, isn't it? Because I think we're quite often asked to do these things, and we're not really properly trained to do them. And I guess with experience, you can wing it and the rest of it, but I always think I always want to do a job really well.
00:47:29	AMINA	Yeah.
00:47:29	IVY	And that's what I'm trying to do.
00:47:32	OLIVE	I'm not happy just to do it half-heartedly. So, the rec and mec thing that we do, the rec and mec , so we were... well, no, the training for that was diabolical, I have to say. And then we were expected to run this rec and mec every morning, really early, did it every morning. It was dire and...
00:47:53	TAYLOR	What was it? What are you talking about?
00:47:54	OLIVE	Rec and mec , so yeah, so you [inaudible 00:47:56]
00:47:58	TAYLOR	I wasn't in.
00:48:00	AMINA	I was still in bed.
00:48:04	OLIVE	But you know, we weren't really given...
00:48:06	Researcher	Five more minutes [inaudible 00:48:07].
00:48:07	TAYLOR	Okay, yeah.
00:48:08	AMINA	Okay. But the thing is like as well we do that thing.
00:48:11	OLIVE	Support and training I think is really important (overlapping conversation).

00:48:12	AMINA	But also, observation, because people aren't necessarily good. Just like a lot of teachers are really bad teachers. Some TAs are really bad TAs, and actually they shouldn't be doing anything with the kids. So, you know, I was teaching maths all that time, like really, you know, and not ever has anyone ever watched me do it. They've got no idea what I'm saying to these kids.
00:48:31	OLIVE	But no, but this is the thing is that we used to get observed regularly. We used to always get observed and you'd get feedback on your practice. That hasn't happened for years and years. Does that happen in your school?
00:48:42	TAYLOR	No, it doesn't happen in our school.
00:48:43	OLIVE	No.
00:48:43	IVY	You see, I really like that, because at the moment it (overlapping conversation).
00:48:46	AMINA	I'll get that there then (overlapping conversation).
00:48:47	IVY	I know and its phonics. And yeah, basically we're just teaching them sounds. But I'm doing lots of things to kind of make it exciting for them, do it in a different way or whatever, and I've trying to find lots of reasons. Because it's those children that their attention span is like that.
00:49:01	OLIVE	Yeah, so it's really hard.
00:49:03	IVY	So, yeah. And I've always been the kind of person that I want to know that I'm doing the right thing.
00:49:09	OLIVE	I'm all right, thank you.
00:49:10	AMINA	I might have a bit more water actually, I'll put that there, thank you.
00:49:11	IVY	And so, go through it with them and say this is what I'm doing. And they're like, oh, yeah, that's brilliant. And I do feel valued, but it...
00:49:20	AMINA	But then I suppose the other side of that is there is a, you know, I suppose if no one's asking you to do it and you're taking it on, then you're taking that on, aren't you? I'm talking like devil's advocate here, but like, if someone's not asking you, they're not saying, like, you do da, da, da, da, but you're doing da, da, da, da, da.
00:49:40	IVY	No, but they're asking me to do phonics intervention.
00:49:44	AMINA	No, but I used to do phonics. I worked in reception and I did phonics intervention, but I never ever did any...
00:49:47	OLIVE	Have you got a programme to follow?
00:49:49	IVY	Well, no.
00:49:50	AMINA	Like, I never did any preparation. I just took them.
00:49:52	OLIVE	Right. So no, I mean, I used to have a box, a phonics box, which...

00:49:56	AMINA	Yeah, like a box, yeah.
00:49:57	OLIVE	Yeah, and I would follow the programme and I would take (overlapping conversation) years.
00:50:01	IVY	Because this isn't a particular programme. This is just going back and refreshing the sounds that some children, the lower ones haven't actually got, and then we're moving kind of forward.
00:50:12	OLIVE	Because I think with children as well, it is...
00:50:13	IVY	So, I've made lots of games and stuff, it's repetition.
00:50:17	OLIVE	It's really important, but it's also important for them to know, every time they come to do phonics with you, there's a bit like Express Theatre. Show and tell then we will warm up.
00:50:28	AMINA	We do the same thing all the time.
00:50:29	OLIVE	And its routine, becomes part of everything they do. So, doing the same thing.
00:50:36	IVY	Yeah, and that's exactly what I'm doing. It's like, you know, they're doing the cards and then doing something else, and then we'll kind of play a game in a different way.
00:50:44	OLIVE	Yeah. I mean, you're just doing that off your own back, really there should be some sort of formal programme.
00:50:50	AMINA	Yeah. Well, there should be something that everyone's following, so that everyone's doing exactly the same in every class.
00:50:55	IVY	And it's like... and I've spoken to one of the other people who do a different (overlapping conversation) and she's like, well, I'm not doing that. And I'm like, well, we need consistency, yeah.
00:51:05	OLIVE	Okay, so this is where we need...
00:51:07	AMINA	But then I suppose if you were going... because that's the thing, because if you came to me and said, I'm doing da, da, da, I'm getting in early, I'd be like that, you are on your own, I'm not doing it.
00:51:15	IVY	No, no, no, they've been asked to do certain things.
00:51:17	AMINA	Yeah, okay, but they're saying I'm not doing it.
00:51:19	IVY	Yeah, yeah.
00:51:19	OLIVE	But this is where we as a TA body need to be sharing this practice and things and say, okay, look, you know, we're going to do some maths interventions this week, next week. Right, what are we going to do? How are we going to do it?
00:51:33	AMINA	Yeah. But that comes back to communication, doesn't it? And actually, setting it out, setting it out and saying, this is what I'd like you to do. And then, having the opportunity to go, actually, that's not possible, that's not possible.
00:51:42	IVY	And also, communication in respect to their... it's like, they want all of these things, but it's like I think there should be a

		time... give us a timetable of when we can do these things. It's like because they will...
00:51:52	OLIVE	Well, this is the other thing because (overlapping conversation).
00:51:53	IVY	...say no, we can't take them out now because they definitely need to do this. So, we can't tell them and then you can't find a space to do it anyway, and it's really hard.
00:52:00	AMINA	See, that's where Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 1 are a bit different, because we've got... yeah.
00:52:05	OLIVE	Well, I don't know, I (overlapping conversation) to do and...
00:52:06	AMINA	And also I don't need to be in the class all the time.
00:52:08	IVY	Yeah, I know.
00:52:09	OLIVE	...I would just like [inaudible 00:52:09]
00:52:10	AMINA	Yeah. But Key Stage 1 TA really needs to be in the class most of the time, whereas Key Stage... I can come out because they're year six, and there's lots of times when actually they're doing something they don't need me. So, I can go and do those jobs that I need to be prepared for the week after or whatever.
00:52:27	Researcher	Hi, have you finished?
00:52:27	AMINA	Yeah, I've badly sellotaped it.
00:52:29	Researcher	And this one is out, right?
00:52:31	AMINA	We've changed it.
00:52:32	Researcher	Great.
00:52:32	AMINA	Yeah.
00:52:33	Researcher	Okay. So, I would like you guys to think, would any of those be different pre and post pandemic? Do you think the order of your priorities would have been different if I asked you before the pandemic?
00:52:48	IVY	I think the children have changed post pandemic, but I don't know whether the school has or their role...
00:52:54	AMINA	Well, I think the role, I think the...
00:52:57	OLIVE	I think the role has.
00:52:59	AMINA	Yeah, I think the requirements have massively increased because of money and staffing and...
00:53:04	IVY	But is that because of COVID?
00:53:09	AMINA	Now, if you look at that year one lunch time in the outside there, it is like a zoo of kids and that never happened, like so that is behaviourally different like that would never happen. So, now there's children... I don't know about your school, but we've got kids who are nonverbal like so they're completely outside the

		mainstream education, but they are at that school. They're taking at least one adult all the time and that is... so you're... they're screaming, there's... you know, we would never have kids screaming around us. Never, ever.
00:53:40	OLIVE	But is this management?
00:53:30	AMINA	I don't think so. I think it's the changing children.
00:53:47	TAYLOR	I do think it's the changing children. I also think it's the remit for... so we're sort of in the same boat. We have a lot of kids that are nonverbal, we have a lot of behaviour issues that we haven't necessarily... I wouldn't say we haven't had before, but we're on another level now. And if you looked at them, if we fought for the kids that we technically maybe have suggested, you know what, we're not the right place for them (overlapping conversation)...
00:54:07	AMINA	But there's nowhere for them to go.
00:54:08	TAYLOR	There's nowhere for them to go. So, actually, you're just told to adapt, you're just told, you know, you have somebody that comes in and goes, well, if you just put this in place for them, that's great today.
00:54:16	OLIVE	They come in for an hour.
00:54:17	TAYLOR	Yeah, they come in for an hour and see then at their calmest whatever. And it's like, if you just do this. I'm like, yeah, but if we just do that, it's like it won't happen the same way tomorrow, if you came in tomorrow and saw it...
00:54:25	AMINA	They're circling education, they're just circling mainstream, but they're outside of it and they'll never be in. But I think everyone would agree probably this child should not be here, but there is nowhere for them to go. So, I think that is what's different is there was more money, there was more funding. We had a SEN, massively stocked SEN team.
00:54:41	OLIVE	Yeah, and they've all gone.
00:54:42	AMINA	They would take all the kids out, they'd all have these interventions, reading groups, English groups.
00:54:46	OLIVE	Yeah, but that was management that did that though. Management came in and went we're going to put all these SENs, we're going to put them in class.
00:54:53	AMINA	When ST came, so that would be four... how long was she here, was it four years, (overlapping conversation)?
00:54:56	OLIVE	(Overlapping conversation) five, six years now.
00:54:57	IVY	Because I wasn't there before that happened. So, I have no idea what it was like.
00:55:00	OLIVE	So, we had a big SEN team and they had two... and they were really, really qualified people that knew their stuff.
00:55:07	AMINA	But to be fair, we don't know the budget. I don't know the budget requirements. I don't know what was choice and what

		was... the management most definitely could have been better, but I don't know. It's always more complicated than we think it is. I mean, there is no money, they are trying to sort of do this, aren't they? And that's the difference, so I'd say pre-COVID was better because it seemed, everything seemed a bit simpler. I don't know if that's... it is COVID, but it's also budgets and money.
00:55:38	TAYLOR	I think budgets and money was a matter of (overlapping conversation).
00:55:40	OLIVE	I think money is the big thing.
00:55:41	TAYLOR	Money is the biggest thing and...
00:55:43	OLIVE	Because we've had... have you had this woman named S?
00:55:48	IVY	SF?
00:55:50	AMINA	No, not yet. I think she's on her way.
00:55:51	OLIVE	Oh, okay. She's on her way now. She's going to make out, she's your best friend. Yeah. And then she's going to tear the school...
00:55:55	IVY	Yeah, I know, I was so shocked, so.
00:55:58	OLIVE	Yeah, and then you're all fighting for your job. So, she's got these ideas that actually our role as a TA is actually ineffective. And research suggests that a child's progress makes absolutely no difference to whether we were there or not.
00:56:15	AMINA	Oh, that's funny.
00:56:17	OLIVE	And that's what...
00:56:17	TAYLOR	Oh, is that what it is? I never read.
00:56:19	OLIVE	Yeah, that's the research.
00:56:20	TAYLOR	It's just like what research? Who's research?
00:56:22	IVY	I'd love to see that.
00:56:24	TAYLOR	Childless people that live far away from school, that's who's research. I'm sorry, but what a load of rubbish.
00:56:31	IVY	But I must say, with all the restructuring and everything, it's like talking to some of the teachers, they are really worried about what's going to happen to them.
00:56:39	AMINA	Well, they should be worried because it'll be them that will do it. But you see, the thing is, our school now is at nearly 40% SEN. So, 40% SEN and so that's going up, we're going down.
00:56:48	IVY	Yeah. What's going to happen?
00:56:49	AMINA	And then it will, you know, it will break.
00:56:53	TAYLOR	Yeah.
00:56:54	OLIVE	It is going to break.
00:56:55	AMINA	It will break.

00:56:55	TAYLOR	It will break.
00:56:57	AMINA	So, but you know. And I do think the quality of teachers is not so good, it's bad, you know.
00:57:04	TAYLOR	I think they come into it a little bit with an idea and an image of what it's going to be like.
00:57:11	AMINA	Yeah, it isn't quite like that.
00:57:12	TAYLOR	I don't know, well, they think it's not like that if you've ever been this isn't what I signed up for. It's not but this is...
00:57:15	OLIVE	I also think there's not a great choice. I think we employ people because quite sometimes they're the only ones. It's...
00:57:24	TAYLOR	Yeah. Because we've got two teachers that are resigning end of this week and for both of them, it's just a bit like, actually, this job is really hard. It's like I look at the money I'm making compared to my friends and it's next to nothing and it's like...
00:57:36	OLIVE	Because they're doing like 70-hour a weeks, some of them, yeah.
00:57:38	TAYLOR	Yeah. And they're just a bit like, there's not enough time to do anything. I'm like I get it and I really do appreciate that, and it's like...
00:57:42	OLIVE	And they're resigning mid like Christmas, to teachers of classes, they're going at Christmas.
00:57:47	TAYLOR	Yeah. So, one of our year six teacher as well, [inaudible 00:57:49] year six teacher, and it's like... but this is what the job is kind of... And maybe because you're in it, you're a bit more like, well, I'm kind of here until I decide on something different kind of thing. Maybe there's that, but it was just actually that both of them are done. It's like, for a lot of our teachers are like but this is the job.
00:58:06	OLIVE	Yeah, we've had a lot of teachers leave that actually have not gone back to teaching.
00:58:10	TAYLOR	Yeah. But they're leaving...
00:58:11	OLIVE	And these are really... we've had really good teachers leave.
00:58:12	TAYLOR	And they're leaving education just as a whole, because they're just a bit like, actually, this is not what we signed up for.
00:58:17	OLIVE	Yeah.
00:58:17	IVY	Yeah.
00:58:18	TAYLOR	Yeah, they're disillusioned by it and it's like because it's not everything it's made out to be.
00:58:23	Researcher	Yes, if you think that one of those would be less prioritised or more prioritised before or after COVID, do you mind just making a note on that?

00:58:33	AMINA	Oh, okay, yeah, sure.
00:58:34	Researcher	(Overlapping conversation) there been more (overlapping conversation).
00:58:36	AMINA	These ones, yeah?
00:58:37	IVY	Yeah.
00:58:38	Researcher	Like more important since COVID or less important since COVID?
00:58:43	AMINA	Yeah.
00:58:44	IVY	More important since COVID, do you think? Connection with students because of the...
00:58:52	AMINA	I see less impact from COVID because I think that my children are older so...
00:58:59	IVY	Yeah.
00:59:03	AMINA	Yeah, I suppose that because the children's behaviourally is much...
00:59:05	TAYLOR	What do you think is more important?
00:59:06	AMINA	Yeah, I think because behaviour is so much worse, I think, you know, or challenging. It feels... I don't know, it feels a bit more impossible I think now than then (overlapping conversation).
00:59:20	OLIVE	I feel like there's... sometimes it feels like there's just no behaviour management sometimes...
00:59:30	AMINA	Yeah. Well, that would come into sort of the role is changed, like the children are changing, but we're not given the training and tools to change with them. So, you can't kind of keep going it's like, you know, square peg around the whole thing. You can't keep on. You've got to change the way you do it.
00:59:48	OLIVE	So, is that this then as well?
00:59:51	TAYLOR	More boundaries...
00:59:52	AMINA	Yeah, probably, yeah. I mean, that's ever changing, I think.
00:59:56	Researcher	Three minutes guys.
00:59:57	AMINA	Okay, three minutes. Gosh.
00:59:59	IVY	Okay.
01:00:00	AMINA	It's like the cube. Get out, get out. We're coming out. Okay.
01:00:09	TAYLOR	See, as much as we talk about that there are teachers that aren't necessarily... I think we've had some really bad TAs come through ours.
01:00:16	AMINA	Oh, yeah, yeah.

01:00:17	OLIVE	Oh, yeah.
01:00:17	TAYLOR	That, yeah, I've just been a bit like, how did you even manage to even get through? Like I mean, just a bit like...
01:00:21	AMINA	That's what I'm saying is actually if you play someone in the job that is a £12 an hour, that's what it is, or what it was £10 an hour, you know, actually, who are you going to get? You're going to get... you're going to get anyone, anyone. So, that's what it should be, it should be somebody who doesn't really care, just wants to come to work and doesn't really...
01:00:40	OLIVE	Your parent, yeah.
01:00:41	AMINA	(Overlapping conversation) whatever, so. But a parent would care, because they've got their (overlapping conversation). Someone who's got no invested, you know, like it was convenient for me because my children were there and your children and, you know, like... and actually... so there was a... you had a reason or had a purpose.
01:01:00	OLIVE	But it was a very different school. We've seen the change in our school has been. Well, we've had to increase in size and that was from them really, you know.
01:01:07	AMINA	I mean, it is fairly... you know, it's pay-based you, get a decent hourly rate. It doesn't matter, you know, you do whatever. But I don't know if COVID has changed that.
01:01:20	TAYLOR	I don't know about that, I'm not sure.
01:01:23	AMINA	I don't know if COVID has changed the role or just... it's probably that these maybe changed the kids. It's changed the children and it's therefore...
01:01:31	IVY	Yeah. Definitely in the earlier years.
01:01:34	AMINA	Yeah, behaviourally. It's a completely different place to be. There's just madness at every corner.
01:01:38	OLIVE	And I feel like staff turnover's greater. I mean, because I've been at this school 13 years, and at the very, very beginning, no one left. I mean, no one...
01:01:48	AMINA	It was a real sort of great job to have. It was like a real coveted job to be a TA like in terms of like because it was good hours and it was term time and all of these things. So, you know, I don't know about COVID.
01:02:02	OLIVE	And I just think the behaviour has definitely changed.
01:02:06	AMINA	Definitely affected.
01:02:07	TAYLOR	I think behaviour has.
01:02:08	OLIVE	I think. And as a result of that, our role is a little bit different.
01:02:13	AMINA	Yeah, but more than anything is funding's changed everything, so.

01:02:16	OLIVE	But money, the fund. Maybe we need to put finance down somewhere.
01:02:19	AMINA	Yeah, funding.
01:02:21	IVY	Funding and government.
01:02:22	OLIVE	Perhaps money, finance is up here because...
01:02:27	AMINA	Funding, yeah.
01:02:30	TAYLOR	That's probably not how you spell it, but there you go.
01:02:34	AMINA	Yeah, I think we're... that's it really, isn't it, that's... I feel like that's...
01:02:37	TAYLOR	I mean, as much as we turn right that that's such a massive thing because our head teachers spoken to us about that kind of thing before. And it'd been actually... I think somebody looked at... Somebody looked at our budget and said, well, 60% of yours goes on your support staff. And it's like, yeah, but have you seen what they do? Like they are 60% of what goes on here. And it is that... until you... I've said it to people before, kind of thing, it's like, come and do my job for a day. Come and do it for a week and tell me that I earn what I should.
01:03:13	AMINA	And I think the thing is like when you take that away like and if you reduce the number of people, so that 60% becomes 40%, it will probably still... it's going to tick over, but it just won't be as good. And that is it. It just won't be as good like someone said, oh, (overlapping conversation).
01:03:28	OLIVE	It's all of those children's progress, isn't it, this is the thing, it's about the children's progress and there's not going to be any progress.
01:03:33	AMINA	When we're not going to... because they're going to have no TAs in Key Stage 2 in our school now, in the afternoons and at all, so. And someone said, oh, well, that's... the deputy head said, oh, you know, 25 years I've worked and had no, you know, TAs in school. I said, well, that doesn't make it right, it doesn't make it right just because you can just scrape through. Why do I have to scrape through? Why do they have to scrape through?
01:03:57	IVY	And also, if we're saying that, you know, behaviour has changed, it's like children are needing more, et cetera. It's like we're failing them by not being present. Not being somebody that they can go to.
01:04:10	OLIVE	The children are definitely being failed I would say now, particularly in our school now.
01:04:15	AMINA	I imagine every school...
01:04:16	TAYLOR	I think it's a school-wide thing, I think it is just...
01:04:19	AMINA	I don't think it's just our school.
01:04:20	TAYLOR	I think it's every school that there are always some kids you're not catching on, you're not... we have a really heavy SEN core amount of kids kind of thing that we're nearly at 100 on our

		roster and it's like we're a school of like 300 (overlapping conversation).
01:04:29	IVY	And it's like those children that are (overlapping conversation).
01:04:35	TAYLOR	And you always think about those kids.
01:04:35	AMINA	But we're 40%.
01:04:36	TAYLOR	Yeah. And you always think about those kids that are like, actually, they don't necessarily hit your SEN, they're just bubbling underneath. We don't have the time to be able to catch those kids that are bubbling underneath.
01:04:45	IVY	And also, if they're not misbehaving, if they're not loud, those are the (overlapping conversation) slip through the net. And you're like...
01:04:53	OLIVE	And how about the middle's that really (overlapping conversation) reach their potentials? And they never do because you're (overlapping conversation).
01:04:58	IVY	They're never going (overlapping conversation).
01:04:58	AMINA	Do you have another question for us?
01:05:00	Researcher	It's the last one.
01:05:01	AMINA	Go on, then.
01:05:01	OLIVE	Go on.
01:05:02	Researcher	Last task. So, thinking about these ones, so these ones that you ranked just now, if I asked you, if I am going tomorrow to talk with head teachers, SENCOs, and people in charge about things that need addressing now or needs changing, what would those four be and how would you rank them and...?
01:05:27	AMINA	Out of these... out of these, yeah.
01:05:28	Researcher	Out of these, yeah. And if you want to add one or name or combine one, you can also do that, just put it... use a new piece of paper, but the ones that you pick, put a star next to it or use a (overlapping conversation) pen and just rank them. Thank you.
01:05:49	OLIVE	Okay.
01:05:50	Researcher	It's going to be eight minutes and then it's going to be finished.
01:05:52	AMINA	Okay, fine.
01:5:54	IVY	Four main areas there.
01:05:55	AMINA	I would say communication, ever, ever...
01:05:57	IVY	Communication.
01:05:58	AMINA	Because if you do lawful things and the big things don't seem so big, and that's what makes me so cross. It's like so simple sometimes, why are you doing it? Why are you making it so hard?

01:06:09	OLIVE	What are the four main areas that need addressing or changing?
01:06:15	IVY	Yeah, communication and...
01:06:17	OLIVE	I know, but should we mention that? I mean, I know it's probably... is it out of their control?
01:06:23	TAYLOR	I think the problem with that is they're given their grant by the council and the government (overlapping conversation).
01:06:26	AMINA	So, the head teacher couldn't go, right, we'll I'll give you more money because there's (overlapping conversation).
01:06:30	TAYLOR	There isn't any, there (overlapping conversation) the council aren't going to give any more kind of thing.
01:06:33	AMINA	Yeah.
01:06:35	OLIVE	So, communication then.
01:06:36	TAYLOR	I think the role and responsibility with this personally because I think actually conversation needs to happen not just with them but with teachers to turn around and go actually...
01:06:43	IVY	What do you want from us?
01:06:44	TAYLOR	...what do you want from us? Yeah.
01:06:45	AMINA	And I think maybe we should add the word expectation in there because it's like, what do you expect us to do like, what are you expecting here like, yeah, that's fine.
01:06:56	IVY	I suppose role boundaries is the same kind of...
01:06:59	AMINA	Yeah.
01:07:00	IVY	Yeah.
01:07:02	AMINA	Because I suppose it's nothing... they wouldn't care about teacher dynamics. Maybe this one, I think the...
01:07:10	OLIVE	Well, so maybe we need to add in training here, but when I say training, I don't mean let's... it needs to be really good, valuable training.
01:07:21	AMINA	Yeah, because we do an inset day every (overlapping conversation).
01:07:23	OLIVE	Oh, my goodness.
01:07:24	AMINA	...like absolute waste type of thing. We're all here, we're all here. They just wasted it; you just wasted it. So, yeah, maybe that's like a sort of knowledge and increase training. Maybe we should stop this.
01:07:36	OLIVE	Or specific. It needs to be specific training.
01:07:38	AMINA	Targeted training.
01:07:39	OLIVE	Yeah, targeted training, so like...

01:07:42	IVY	Targeted for interventions?
01:07:44	OLIVE	Yeah, for interventions.
01:07:46	AMINA	For different year groups really, as well. Because there's no point... we all did... so we did phonics, it's like why are we doing phonics? I never will do phonics.
01:07:53	OLIVE	No, yeah. No, exactly.
01:07:53	AMINA	Yeah, so.
01:07:54	IVY	And what they're trying to do is they're trying to give it to us because we want training, but they're also trying to do it cheaply. So, we've got somebody in, so we'll get 30 to listen to it, and they just...
01:08:06	AMINA	Well, and also so then they can say to you, can you come and take phonics in year one today? So, they want us to be able to be a bit more flexible.
01:08:13	TAYLOR	Yeah, to be able to move around a bit.
01:08:18	AMINA	Okay. Probably maybe more about that one, though, yeah.
01:08:20	IVY	I would say (overlapping conversation) recognise and appreciated.
01:08:21	AMINA	Yeah. Because actually that is something that's well in their power to do that, to actually really acknowledge...
01:08:27	OLIVE	And these two go together it's like if they give you time to go through training, you will feel...
01:08:35	TAYLOR	Do we need to write that (overlapping conversation)?
01:08:37	AMINA	I don't know. Do we...?
01:08:38	OLIVE	No.
01:08:39	AMINA	Four main areas. Oh, no, just four mains.
01:08:40	TAYLOR	Four mains, I wouldn't...
01:08:43	OLIVE	And actually, this can be done quite easily. So, I mean, you haven't had this...
01:08:49	TAYLOR	I think, funnily enough, I think if you talk to a teacher and they turn around and go, actually we want to feel appreciated, if you turn around they go, but do you do that in your class, to your TA? Do you make them feel appreciated? Because actually there's only so much that you can ask for it, but if you're not giving it out...
01:09:04	AMINA	Yeah, but that goes all levels of school, doesn't it.
01:09:06	TAYLOR	Yeah, that's just school-wide kind of thing. I think it's just the...
01:09:10	AMINA	I think the void between class and SLT is massive. Because I think you sometimes find a bond with your teacher, like, oh, God, this is hard, isn't it, but it's massively (overlapping conversation).

01:09:18	OLIVE	Yeah, yeah, yeah, well, (overlapping conversation) and you're supported with your teacher and (overlapping conversation).
01:09:22	AMINA	Yeah, but there's just enough... there's a void of nothingness.
01:09:25	TAYLOR	But I think there's almost... so sometimes the SLT, if they haven't been in the classroom for a long-time kind of thing, they then go up it and you forget what it's like.
01:09:32	AMINA	Yeah. Well, that's what I mean, that you keep... but that's why that is the most important thing, communication, because you have to keep that link, you have to keep that link. Yeah. We're probably pretty much done, aren't we?
01:09:43	IVY	So, we've got...
01:09:45	AMINA	We haven't numbered them. Do you want us to number them?
01:09:46	Researcher	Yeah, if you would rate them, how would you (overlapping conversation)? Yeah. What would be the first thing you're going to (overlapping conversation)?
01:09:53	AMINA	Yeah one. Maybe training, I don't know. Do you think?
01:09:59	OLIVE	All the expectations.
01:10:01	IVY	Yeah, yeah, knowing what their expectations are and then being given the training to reach those expectations. The appropriate training.
01:10:09	AMINA	No, I think this is quite important. Yeah.
01:10:12	TAYLOR	Yeah.
01:10:12	Researcher	Yeah. Can you write that? I love that, what you said?
01:10:16	IVY	Huh? Oh.
01:10:16	Researcher	What you just said, yeah.
01:10:18	IVY	So, number two, ever-changing role and responsibilities. What do they expect of us? And if we know what they expect of us, they need to give us the training to fulfil that.
01:10:29	Researcher	Maybe put an arrow here, like...
01:10:32	AMINA	Yeah.
01:10:32	IVY	Is that what I said?
01:10:34	AMINA	I don't know, something like that, yeah.
01:10:34	IVY	Yeah, yeah, yeah.
01:10:37	AMINA	So, we're going three, four...
01:10:39	IVY	And through having training, we'll then feel as though we're recognised and appreciated because they've actually thought, actually you're...

01:10:46	AMINA	Yeah.
01:10:46	IVY	Yeah.
01:10:47	AMINA	I would say that they're level, it's hard to sort of...
01:10:50	TAYLOR	Yeah, I wouldn't...
01:10:52	AMINA	It's hard to split them, isn't it? Because I kind of feel like you want to feel seen, that's all. You want to feel seen, that's it, not invisible.
01:11:00	IVY	Yeah.
01:11:01	AMINA	And, you know, the biggest thing I said is when they're trying to do all the things, I was like, trying to fit the puzzle together, I just said I'm not a bit of a puzzle. I'm a person.
01:11:10	IVY	Yeah.
01:11:11	AMINA	So, that's where you... straight away, you've failed, because it's like I'm not a puzzle. That's it.
01:11:17	IVY	But it's, you know, if it had have gone to interviews, and we had to interview, what I found really upsetting is the fact that none of your previous... what you've been doing at the school or any of your previous thing would have been taken into account at some points if you (overlapping conversation) points.
01:11:34	AMINA	Be sure... be absolutely sure they're not bothered about you or me or. They're not... I don't... I 100% believe they're not bothered about us. So, it's just... but, you know, that's why the relationship with the kids is so important because actually, I am bothered by that, and they are bothered by us usually, so.
01:11:52	IVY	And it's like, all the time that I go in early, or stay late, is for those children, so that I can then spend time with them, and not be having to do those things.
01:12:03	AMINA	Yeah.
01:12:04	IVY	Because in reception, in year one, there's no time to do anything else.
01:12:08	OLIVE	I think there's a lot of people that do, what sort of thing you're doing. I mean, I'm a little bit late as well, but it isn't appreciated. That is the thing, isn't it, and...
01:12:20	IVY	And I think I'm actually, gradually, because I haven't been there as long as you, it's like I'm gradually realising, actually, have I given a bit too much here, and now it's, as you say, it's like now...
01:12:32	AMINA	Expected.
01:12:33	IVY	Yeah, exactly.
01:12:34	AMINA	100%, yeah.
01:12:35	OLIVE	It's taken for granted, yeah.
01:12:35	IVY	Yeah. And it's like, hang on a minute.

01:12:39	OLIVE	Because actually, what if you needed to leave early.
01:12:41	AMINA	We're good.
01:12:42	IVY	Yeah, I know.
01:12:42	Researcher	Yeah, we're wrapping up. Thank you. I'm going to stop this (overlapping conversation).

P.2 Transcript 2: First meeting – TA group 2

Speaker key

- Researcher
- FREYA
- GRACE
- AVA
- ISHA

Timecode	Speaker	Transcript
00:00:00	Researcher	Okay, great. It is recording. Okay, I'm going to start putting them in the order importance.
00:00:18	FREYA	One of the things that I think kind of is really important is the bit about collaborating with the teacher and yeah having good relationship with the teacher and knowing what you're supposed to be doing that day having, you know, the plans being shared with you, which we still haven't... had that because we know literally just going on morning.
00:00:43	GRACE	Yeah, so following mixed timetable and what they're actually doing in every subject in it.
00:00:46	FREYA	Certainly, what they're actually doing yeah, then sort of from day to the next because you just don't have a chance to actually chat to have those conversations.
00:00:57	Researcher	There's not enough time, is there, yeah.
00:00:57	GRACE	So, it'd like, you'll be doing quick handovers of how they've managed.
00:01:01	Researcher	Yeah.
00:01:18	GRACE	Like I'm GRACE and I sound like this.
00:01:28	FREYA	I'm FREYA, currently working Year 4, but I have worked in all year groups.
00:01:35	ISHA	I'm ISHA, work in Year 2, but I've also worked Year 1, reception, and nursery.
00:01:42	AVA	I'm AVA and I work in reception, which I have done for five years now, long time.
00:01:49	GRACE	Because I'm a INA, so I've worked all the way through the school. So, the child I work with now who in Year 5, I started with them in Year 1, but previously to that I'd been start, I've just been in junior, so I've just done from Year 3 to Year 6. So, this was the first child that I've been with such a long period of time. Yeah, so going back to the... it's collaborating with the teacher.

00:02:43	ISHA	Just think if you get that a good relationship to start with, it makes everything else easier. And like obviously feeling valued is really important as well.
00:02:53	Researcher	Yeah, as well, I would say that's most important for me because if you don't feel valued, how can you build a relationship and have collaboration.
00:03:01	GRACE	They're very intertwined, aren't they, yeah. And if you're not valued, then you're not happy, and then how can you work with children and expect them to be happy and confident if you are not feeling happy and confident
00:03:15	ISHA	Shall we put that as the first (overlapping conversation).
00:03:17	Researcher	When you're speaking, if you speak too quietly, do you mind just putting this next to you?
00:03:21	GRACE	Oh, yeah. It's all right, whenever I talk and laugh, it goes right up to the top.
00:03:28	Researcher	AVA, do you agree?
00:03:29	AVA	Yeah, I rate that one as first, yeah.
00:03:36	Researcher	Do you feel [inaudible 00:03:36].
00:03:39	GRACE	It seems to get mentioned, but then other things happen. So, I'm also looking at things like role identity and role boundaries and ever-changing role and responsibilities and how that will just suddenly be different. So, when I started at the school, if you were a key worker or an INA, you were with that child and that's what you did and you worked with that child and you planned around that child. And you know, you as... you want to give them a bit of independence, so you would helicopter a bit around the classroom and get to work with other children. But now I find that I'm being given other children to work with, as I mentioned before. And it seems to be that it's just... I'm suddenly given a child, they've got speech and language issues and I'm not being given any training or given any, like, any like their plan. And I have to go and keep asking for it because I'm not... I've been working with this child with their speech and language and suddenly.
00:04:47	Researcher	I've got home (overlapping conversation).
00:04:49	GRACE	Yeah.
00:04:50	Researcher	Before because you're stuck on what to do, yeah.
00:04:54	GRACE	Yeah, and it is things like you were... you might... I mean, I have a twinkle account and I have it solely for the work that I do in school because the school refuses to get a twinkle account for the school. So, there's about 12, 13 of us with our own individual accounts and we keep saying, why didn't we get a school account? And we'd all pay into it because surely it would be cheaper than all other.
00:05:17	Researcher	How much does that cost?

00:05:19	GRACE	Mine's, I go for the one that's £7.50, but that's like the extra one. And then the one above that is the Ultimate, which is £9.99, something like that. But that's every month just so that I have access to all the work sheets and you know, when I'm doing interventions with maths that I have all this work that I can assess because the child I work with, he's working at Year 2 and the other child I've been given to work with, she's working at Year 4 and it's just really hard to have them both there because she can get on with work. Well, she appears to get on with work and I have to sort of... the child that I've been working with since Year 1 is very much a passive learner. So, it's like... it's a constant encouragement for me and keeping him focused. And then I'll look around at what she's done and she's kind of started off well and then lost where she is and it's spinning the spinning plates thing, and I find really difficult.
00:06:24	Researcher	With more extra responsibility, do you feel appreciated for the extra that you're doing?
00:06:31	GRACE	What I feel is that I've... it's more like I get a feeling that I've saved somebody having to be brought in to do this job as well. So, I've saved money and I just... I don't sometimes think they really look at my timetable and see where things can fit in because it's quite a struggle to fit things in and especially of what... I don't know if you find this as well, but the day will just suddenly change. And what you thought you were doing in a lesson and when you thought you had time to do something, suddenly that's gone.
00:07:12	Researcher	Yeah, and when you're working with children that have particular needs.
00:07:18	GRACE	Yeah.
00:07:20	Researcher	They're not always going to do what you want them to do, and it depends on how they're feeling that day.
00:07:25	GRACE	But it's going, maybe going back to this collaboration, suddenly they'll be like school... like trips that haven't even been mentioned. And then two days later we're going on a trip, and it's, you know, and you just think, okay, so we can't... I plan to do that then we now can't do that. And how all these things are discussed and then not even mentioned to the other members of staff.
00:07:50	Researcher	And shouldn't it be the teacher planning and the work to do.
00:07:54	GRACE	But surely at the start of each half term you would want to know when the timetable was going to be different. So, that you could make adjustments, yeah, and of course I've just been given this other child to work with so that it's just all over the place really. And I keep being told things like, oh it's just, you know, just like 20 minutes twice a week and you're like, okay, that's fair enough. And then at the moment we're doing all Christmas things and.
00:08:28	Researcher	Yeah.
00:08:31	GRACE	The 20 minutes trying like, we can do 10 minutes here and I'll try and do another 10 minutes here and yeah.

00:08:41	FREYA	I work in three different year groups in Year 4 this year, and it's really interesting between the teachers, there's one in particular I feel so appreciated, so valued by. And I love working with them, and that's not to say I don't love working with the other teachers because they're lovely, but I really notice the one teacher who seems to go above and beyond to make not just her show her value of me, but she gets a whole class to say, look what FREYA's doing.
00:09:18	GRACE	That's lovely.
00:09:20	FREYA	Say thank you to everything, and that changes my mood and approach to my role. And I mean there's so much, you know, you have to be so flexible, and pre... I mean, what I notice is the teachers are having to make million decisions throughout the day. And my role is to be a teacher assistant and to assist them carry out their role, but yeah, but I feel feeling valued is it helps so much to sort of motivate me and it's yeah.
00:10:12	ISHA	What it says here about sort of self-doubt and uncertainty role in a sense of muddling through, I think that kind of ties in with it. So, I feel that a lot like I'm literally just getting through it sort of every day. And I think it's just getting a bit of a thank you sometimes makes you feel like, actually maybe I'm doing it right.
00:10:34	FREYA	Yeah.
00:10:35	FREYA	Yeah, yeah. And I mean, in terms of like being given a timetable ahead to know what the kid's doing, it doesn't always happen.
00:10:44	Researcher	No, I think that really.
00:10:46	FREYA	And you do have to kind of muddle along and figure out what the kids are learning by being present in the classroom like doing whatever jobs need to be doing. But yeah, in terms of like the self-doubt, that is something that I feel I'm overcoming with more and more experience, but I've been doing these six years now. But it still happens, and I see teachers doubting themselves as well.
00:11:27	Researcher	Yeah.
00:11:28	GRACE	Yeah.
00:11:29	FREYA	Yeah, observing them, I think you're amazing. But it's... I think the culture in schools, everybody can always do better, and (overlapping conversation).
00:11:42	GRACE	Do you have TA meetings in your school?
00:11:44	FREYA	We do yeah.
00:11:45	GRACE	Because that can often be a good time to share how you're feeling and, you know, feeling more confident about your role. But I do find when new people join, they are just thrown in the defence. And I don't... why they don't buddy them up with somebody just for a week just to see how things are done. But I always find that what happens instead is they just sort of like, you see them just looking a little bit like, and you're going to, are you're

		okay, and they're like, and then it's like little parts. They get help from people here and there to sort of find their way. Whereas I think a sort of buddy week could be a really good way to deal with that.
00:12:23	FREYA	Actually, that happened last year, I was sort of... I was the expert TA in Year 4 and there was a new TA in the same class as me. And so, I could help her sort of learn the role while also supporting other Year 4 classes and that system really worked for her yeah (overlapping conversation).
00:12:52	GRACE	That's a good... really good thing to do.
00:12:54	ISHA	Yeah, we had a TA that had been off with stress and when she came back, they buddied her with me for a few days and she just needed like a little bit of boost.
00:13:05	FREYA	Yeah (overlapping conversation) as well so quickly, doesn't it?
00:13:10	Researcher	Yeah, I just think if she'd had that in the first place, maybe she wouldn't have got so stressed and, you know.
00:13:18	FREYA	Because the way we do our reading interventions, that just seems to change every year. Like be like a new way of doing it and a new structure and new set different books that you know, and then, so you have a bit of training, but if you then came in and you'd missed that training, you might be in a place where your school did it differently and now you are having this and yeah.
00:13:41	Researcher	AVA, what's your impression?
00:13:42	AVA	Sometimes I think going to watch other TAs can help you because if you look at what they're doing, you think, oh hang on, I was doing that anyway. It makes you feel better about it, and having the time to actually go and watch other people is the issue.
00:13:58	FREYA	Yeah, exactly yeah.
00:14:00	AVA	And obviously everyone has a whole range of different experiences, so some people might be better at other things than other people. But just being given that time to... in fact I was told that some of the TAs in reception were going to come and watch me and then it never happened, so yeah.
00:14:20	FREYA	Yeah, and that's why it's so nice when you do get to get... you get together and you can sort of talk about and find out a bit more about each other and sort of hear, you know, where... what people have, what their backgrounds are and you know, where their strengths are. Do you get a lot of planning time?
00:14:38	AVA	No, not at all, no.
00:14:43	Researcher	It's okay, if there's stuff, I mean there's not much that I need to plan to be honest. But if there is, then the teachers are very flexible and, you know, fit in around yeah, when it works best in the day.
00:15:03	FREYA	Yeah.

00:15:06	AVA	Something we... should be putting these in (overlapping conversation).
00:15:11	Researcher	Oh, sorry.
00:15:14	AVA	So, I suppose that's prepared.
00:15:16	Researcher	Preparedness.
00:15:17	FREYA	Be with navigating uncertainty.
00:15:21	AVA	Yeah.
00:15:22	Researcher	I think we have to (overlapping conversation) sorts of relationships feeling valued preparedness and role identity. So, you put feeling valued (overlapping conversation).
00:15:34	FREYA	Yeah.
00:15:39	Researcher	I mean preparedness is important, very important (overlapping conversation).
00:15:44	FREYA	That comes into the whole collaboration as well, doesn't it, preparedness because if you know what's coming up, then you even just thinking about what you might have done in the past within that is being prepared, isn't it?
00:15:58	Researcher	Yeah.
00:15:59	FREYA	Yeah.
00:16:04	AVA	I would say this is next give an importance.
00:16:05	ISHA	Yeah.
00:16:07	Researcher	Preparedness. In the role identity, that's... I mean, I'm a TA that's my job title, but I work as an INA and we just get moved around, you know, as is needed if a child has a need, we can get moved with kind of no.
00:16:28	FREYA	Yeah.
00:16:30	Researcher	Sort of warning, and yeah, just ever-changing rules and never knowing.
00:16:40	FREYA	And working with the children that are at different levels.
00:16:42	Researcher	Yeah.
00:16:44	FREYA	Because even within a sort of low performing group, there still will be so many differences between each child.
00:16:51	Researcher	Yeah.
00:16:52	FREYA	Yeah.
00:16:53	Researcher	Do you think with relationships it makes the ever-changing role that you have easier, so relationships would be more important than role identity?
00:17:05	ISHA	Yeah, because I think if you've got those three right, that will kind of sort out the role identity a bit maybe.

00:17:15	GRACE	Yeah, and it's not... it's relationships with everyone in school, isn't it, including children. You know, because when you get to know a child and they get to know you, then generally, you can there's... you can look out for sort of warning signs that they might not be managing. And you know, and then obviously with relationship with the teacher and being able to sort of ask the stuff to help you prepare.
00:17:44	AVA	Yeah, I mean, I found actually... I only found out the other day, like last week, that one of the children who had just started... had started in Year 3, so I'm working in Year 4, had previously gone to Steiner school. And had I known that I would've understood why they were not able to read or count, and that it... and that was lack of being prepared to work with this child.
00:18:17	GRACE	Not being informed.
00:18:19	AVA	Not being informed and that... but now I'm prepared, the relationship has changed and my role I can identify with a bit more.
00:18:32	GRACE	It's like when a child has trauma, you know, and you... and that's really important for us to know as well because it's behind all their behaviour, how they react, you know.
00:18:43	Researcher	Do you feel... I mean, I don't feel that I'm told that, and that if a child's had trauma or you know, whatever.
00:18:51	GRACE	Or pupil premium , you know, that's something.
00:18:54	Researcher	We have been... yeah, that is something that we've been doing this year, is them focusing on.
00:19:00	GRACE	It's almost like you have to seek it out the information rather than it being seen as something you should know in your class.
00:19:07	Researcher	Because sometimes if it's might be a sort of safeguarding child protection issue, which isn't going to be shared, but sometimes it would help us with our job if it was shared.
00:19:18	GRACE	Yeah, because it's often it's need to know, and I think if you have anything to do with that child, then you are in that need to know.
00:19:24	Researcher	I think that comes down to kind of feeling valued almost not important enough to be told that kind of thing.
00:19:33	S6	Sorry, are these sorted out?
00:19:36	FREYA	Yeah.
00:19:36	S6	Yes, okay. Do you mind cello taping, and then if someone, or all of you can just write some notes on why you chose those ones to be on top or the other ones not to.
00:19:50	Researcher	To write next to it.
00:19:51	S6	Yeah, and just for now.
00:19:53	Researcher	Yeah.

00:19:55	S6	Just some comments for us to remember next week.
00:19:58	Researcher	Yeah, I just realised we can replay the tape.
00:20:06	S6	Yeah.
00:20:09	AVA	I think it also depends on the level of experience teacher has.
00:20:15	Researcher	Definitely.
00:20:19	AVA	And.
00:20:20	S6	Sorry again if there's any that you want to add, feel free to add, yeah okay.
00:20:37	AVA	I'm going to write upside down I'm afraid.
00:20:40	FREYA	So, feeling valued motivates us in our role, yeah.
00:20:49	GRACE	And we can pass on the model that motivation, can't we, to the children.
00:21:01	c	I do think with that one as well, it's not just being valued by the teacher, it's being valued by the whole school kind of, and the whole teacher.
00:21:09	FREYA	Senior management, yeah.
00:21:11	AVA	Yeah, yeah. And my job role has changed so much in the last five years that like, it's all very in the classroom. I don't have any time to go and do filing or like going to get paper half the time, I don't have time to do.
00:21:26	ISHA	Yeah.
00:21:27	AVA	Things like that, I don't even.
00:21:29	ISHA	Yeah, don't get to do anymore.
00:21:32	Researcher	So, do you think there's.
00:21:33	FREYA	Make sure that photocopying.
00:21:34	AVA	No, I don't even get to use that photocopy.
00:21:38	Researcher	Do you think there's a difference between key stage 1 and key stage 2 in terms of?
00:21:43	ISHA	I've not worked in key stage 2, so.
00:21:49	TA	I feel like when I worked in key stage 1 my work was more valued and it was seen as I would plan for this child alongside what the class were doing. And the gap wasn't so big then either, so it was... we were in class more and I feel it's really important that he's in class as much as possible so that he has a feeling of community and identity within that class. So, that... and it was important then, that you know, and I could feedback, I had very experienced teachers, they wanted feedback a lot about what we were doing, and then for that, and that was really good. And then, so the early stage of key stage 2, it was just the gap was growing and we were out class a little bit more. And then I was given a

		group of children to work with the massive that were perceived as being at the same level, but they really weren't. So, it is trying to find like a middle ground there, and I think as the gap widens, it becomes a lot harder, so I noticed the school day, they just sort of, they want to let me get on with it until it's time for reports or it's time for IEPs or something like that. Or, you know, and suddenly it's like, oh can you fill this in? You know, and I'll often be saying, oh so we did this today, and he struggled with this, but he saw the pattern in this, and this went really well. And I sort of feed that on, and then I find that I'm sort of repeating myself at the end of the term when they have to know how .
00:23:36	Researcher	I have felt at times that the teacher doesn't really care what I'm doing as long as the child's not disrupting the class. Not the teacher with this year, but in the past, I felt that like, I'll take him out for a walk, or you know, anything rather than trying to get to the root of why he's behaving like that or that he needs, you know, scheduled sensory breaks, that kind of thing.
00:24:03	GRACE	Well, you might need a little bit of time.
00:24:04	Researcher	He just be, oh don't mind just, yeah, just as long he's not disrupting.
00:24:08	GRACE	She might need time to set something up. And suddenly you face with them all because they've all been kicked out the lesson to be with you and they're all starting to move everything and sit on things.
00:24:18	Researcher	It's yeah.
00:24:20	GRACE	And you've just been outside for break time.
00:24:24	Researcher	Yeah.
00:24:27	AVA	Just thinking about adding notes.
00:24:29	GRACE	Yeah.
00:24:30	ISHA	Yeah, I mean... yeah, I think there's a lot more need in key stage 1 in terms of support that the children need.
00:24:40	GRACE	Yeah, it's sort of kind of support, isn't it?
00:24:42	AVA	Yeah.
00:24:43	FREYA	Yeah.
00:24:44	ISHA	It's more hands-on, so you have less time for sort of preparing resources inside of things and there's more expectations on the teacher to do that. And but yeah, it's in key stage 2, the children, they're more, I don't know, I feel I have more time for whole class support.
00:25:13	FREYA	Yeah.
00:25:15	Researcher	Because they're more independent in some ways.
00:25:19	AVA	Yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:25:21	GRACE	And maybe some children are starting to be at the same levels as some of their peers so they can be grouped easier.
00:25:28	AVA	Yeah, they're more sort of... they've got into the swing of things like school wise.
00:25:34	GRACE	Yeah. I think you definitely see that with maths, as they start to make links to other kinds of maths. And as they remember, they go, oh you know, that's like my number... that's like number bonds. And then they can sort of link that and when they can think about, so time and money and the things that they are actually interested in and it becomes something that they are actually interested in, they do want to know about. So, that happens, which is really good in key stage 2, yeah, I find because in... the good thing about key stage 2 is that I'm... when I plan for maths, I tend to do it around the IEPs. So, it's just... it's a lot of repetition, but we're trying to do different topics so that it changes up. But I'll be doing planning based on the IEP and trying to look at what they're doing in class and thinking, right, okay, what can we do that fulfils the IEP but links to that. So, they're still feeling that connection even if we're not in class, whereas when I was in key stage 1, they were all kind of doing the same thing and it was all sort of teacher led really, it was like, give you this and try and do this and see how you get on. And that sort of feels a lot like management, like trying to manage a child and their behaviour rather than it being thinking about what they know and building on that.
00:27:17	ISHA	Right, in front here, it's on my mind. Just writing things coming into my head.
00:27:58	Researcher	The role identity is being given different roles with no extra training and no warning.
00:28:08	GRACE	Yeah, or extra money.
00:28:11	FREYA	(Overlapping conversation).
00:28:12	ISHA	I drew relationships in the whole role identity, I'm not sure if that's right though, I'll put a question mark there.
00:28:17	GRACE	And that comes about maybe from lack of repentment as well. So, if a person leaves and they're not immediately, then you'll find that you get given more to do.
00:28:33	AVA	I think when you actually look at the job description as well now it's so [inaudible 00:28:38].
00:28:38	ISHA	Yes.
00:28:39	AVA	It could mean anything, and there's just so many things you're meant to be doing all the time and sometimes it feels a bit impossible.
00:28:49	GRACE	Yeah, and sometimes it feels like you're doing it because somehow you love the role and because you know, you have... I remember when people were talking about how you could earn more working at Aldi than you could being a teaching assistant and you know, people leaving the role because they just weren't making enough money. And that affects the recruitment as well.

00:29:16	Researcher	Yeah.
00:29:22	S6	If you can look at those... the smaller ones now, you can fit it maybe next to it because you can use the ones feeling valued. And put it here in other priority and you can add things that you know, that are not there, basically.
00:29:40	GRACE	Yeah, so maybe like ever changing role and responsibilities with role identity. Something that I do enjoy at my school though, which does make me feel valuable because I've got an art background. If ever there's any art in the lesson, they will get me to lead it and do it and sort of start it off. And since they've started doing that with me, that started properly in Year 4, that's made me feel much more valued and that there's something more to me than just this like INA, TA role of taking people disappearing off with children and coming back with children suddenly. And that was whole class, which was really nice, and the teachers that I had in Year 4 and the teacher now in Year 5, there was a lot of like saying, thanking me for at the end of each lesson, which was really good. And you know, the children would say.
00:30:36	Researcher	Using your strengths as well, yeah.
00:30:39	GRACE	Yeah, which is really good, and I think that's really important that you know, that your strengths are known.
00:30:46	Researcher	Yeah.
00:30:48	GRACE	And you used.
00:30:49	Researcher	That's a good thing to write down, I think that strengths are known and used.
00:30:52	GRACE	Yeah, with relationships.
00:30:53	Researcher	Yeah.
00:30:55	GRACE	And yeah, it kind of fits in everything, doesn't it (overlapping conversation) fits with all of it.
00:30:59	ISHA	That's what you would expect teachers to do with children, so why should it not apply to everybody?
00:31:06	Researcher	Yeah. It says there, the evolving nature of the TA role, often prioritising personality traits over qualifications. I think that's quite true.
00:31:36	ISHA	Sources of TA knowledge and knowhow.
00:31:38	Researcher	Yeah.
00:31:42	ISHA	What does that come under?
00:31:43	Researcher	Preparedness.
00:31:44	GRACE	Yeah.
00:31:50	Researcher	How do you feel about the hierarchy in the school, do you think that there is a visible hierarchy?

00:31:58	AVA	I think so, I mean the children react differently to the people that work at lunchtime compared to the people that are there all time.
00:32:06	GRACE	I find that because I do lunchtime times as well. So, I find that they'll react differently to me at lunchtime compared to how they might react to me in the classroom.
00:32:16	Researcher	Oh, okay. Yeah, we don't.
00:32:17	GRACE	As well.
00:32:19	Researcher	We don't have separate lunchtime staff we have.
00:32:22	GRACE	Yeah.
00:32:23	Researcher	To do it.
00:32:24	GRACE	In fact, it (overlapping conversation) is all TAs and I think it's very rarely; I think we've got... it's more in the infants that we have people that come in just for the lunchtime.
00:32:34	ISHA	Oh, we haven't got (overlapping conversation).
00:32:35	GRACE	But everybody else is kind of there all the time, yeah.
00:32:39	Researcher	In a way, I quite like it though because it gives you a chance sometimes to actually chat with some of the children and sort of be a bit more playful with them.
00:32:49	GRACE	Yeah, as in if you're on the playground, I think so, yeah, in the canteen it's a little bit.
00:32:53	Researcher	No, the canteen's just like insane, literally you need to lie down afterwards.
00:32:58	GRACE	I did Breakfast Club at my school as well, so I love the Breakfast Club for that because, you know, it's not big, it's about the size of a class and it's just much more relaxed and you know, you find out a lot of things about.
00:33:14	Researcher	There's not enough of that is they've being able to actually just sit and be with the children, I'm always like, I've got to get this done and move on to the next thing.
00:33:23	GRACE	Learning their personalities more and yeah, which is really nice. Yeah, that's all sort of in the relationship, isn't there?
00:33:30	ISHA	There's so much to fit into a school there.
00:33:33	GRACE	Oh, my goodness, no.
00:33:34	ISHA	So, much learning and like.
00:33:38	S5	It's overwhelming.
00:33:38	Researcher	Yeah, it is really overwhelming.
00:33:40	ISHA	And yeah.
00:33:48	GRACE	I go on school like the trip in Year 5 and Year 6 when we have the residential.

00:33:55	Researcher	Oh, yeah.
00:33:56	GRACE	I go on those, I absolutely love those, that's my favourite time of the year. So, every time this will be my third time in Year 5 with this child and I just can't wait until we go away in... when is it now? I think it's July, yeah, and it's just so much fun, yeah. So, I've just popped in there, but less getting to know them outside of their learning.
00:34:27	AVA	Yeah.
00:34:30	GRACE	I'm actually going out with the staff as well. You know, I think we are quite good for that, organising kind of drinks and end of half term drinks and just hanging out together and just chatting. Especially this year because we've had a lot of new teachers, we had sort of had a mass retirement exodus last year and the year before. And so, there were lots and lots of new teachers, a lot of them are newly qualified as well. And so, it's been good to sort of go out with them and kind of learn more about them, and yeah, and I find that really helps that camaraderie.
00:35:12	Researcher	Yeah, definitely.
00:35:19	GRACE	And actually, that's kind to do with that because that's where that doesn't, there's no hierarchy when we all go out. You know, it's very different, but yes, it does exist in the day.
00:35:32	Researcher	Hi guys, you can write comments about those ones as well if you want. But we have about 10, 15 minutes to rank those as well.
00:35:42	ISHA	Okay.
00:35:43	ISHA	That's right.
00:35:45	c	I remember when I first started as a teaching assistant, I felt a little bit intimidated by the like, senior managers. Whereas now, and that was in another school, now I think I see the importance of senior leaders and always acknowledging you when, you know, when they pass you like sometimes in the past it didn't happen. And I felt like that.
00:36:19	GRACE	Yeah, and nervous.
00:36:21	ISHA	Yeah, and now our head teacher always said this, hello to me by name.
00:36:28	ISHA	I think quite a lot of them have done .
00:36:31	ISHA	Checks in with all of us, do you find that Sally?
00:36:34	AVA	Shall we say that again, I was writing?
00:36:37	ISHA	Do you find there's like some senior leaders, they do check in with you but say hello by name and...
00:36:44	AVA	Not at all, no.
00:36:45	ISHA	Not at all?
00:36:46	AVA	No.

00:36:47	ISHA	You don't find that at all?
00:36:48	AVA	No.
00:36:49	ISHA	Okay.
00:36:50	AVA	They're never really quite noticeable.
00:36:51	Researcher	Is it because do you... because when I went in nursery it was almost like a separate from the rest of the school. And if you're in one class for too long, you don't get to know the other member of staff.
00:37:04	AVA	Yeah, I have been in that same class for... well in reception for five years, so.
00:37:11	GRACE	That's a long time, isn't it, yeah.
00:37:13	AVA	But sometimes I might even say hello to somebody and it's just blank.
00:37:16	GRACE	And (overlapping conversation) elementary school as well, do you just have one class per.
00:37:21	ISHA	We have 3, 4.
00:37:25	GRACE	Oh, you have 3, 4, okay. So, do you have a lot to do with your other reception TAs?
00:37:30	AVA	The other reception TAs, people that work upstairs, it's like another world to me, so I don't know a lot of them upstairs.
00:37:37	GRACE	It's interesting, isn't it because ours used to be two separate schools, but they were connected by a staircase. So, it was the infant school and the junior school, and when I started working now, I worked, I started as an MDSA and then I was doing learning sports qualification at bonding . And I started off in the infants and I just had no idea like who anybody was in the junior, and then I went to work in the juniors, and I still knew the people in the infants, then it became a lot better because then I could... I can sort of mix with both. And I think it's better now there's more sort of people moving through both areas of the school. And yeah, it's a lot better now, but it used to be very separate.
00:38:29	ISHA	Yeah, I've seen that, and it's like an upstairs, downstairs.
00:38:32	GRACE	Yeah, and it would be... there'd be bigger turnover of support staff in the juniors and less so in the infants. So, the infant support staff are very... they've been there like absolutely years, and you almost had to kind of prove yourself.
00:38:46	ISHA	Yeah.
00:38:48	GRACE	Whereas upstairs it's like... it seems to be a lot of people who are younger, they're maybe doing... they're kind of between like uni and something else they want to do and yeah. So, you find that you might have somebody for a year and then they're off doing another qualification, something like that with uni, yeah.
00:39:13	ISHA	Connection with students, balance independently independence, yeah.

00:39:18	Researcher	I can also change the wording if you want, change anything that you feel like it's more related to what you're talking about (overlapping conversation) boundaries, does that come with (overlapping conversation).
00:39:28	ISHA	Yeah, and all that.
00:39:29	GRACE	Yeah.
00:39:33	ISHA	Navigating uncertainty.
00:39:39	GRACE	This is feeling like...
00:39:40	ISHA	That comes with.
00:39:41	GRACE	...unnoticed contributions.
00:39:42	ISHA	Preparedness, navigating uncertainty.
00:39:49	AVA	I was going to say, I feel like that one should be quite high up.
00:39:52	GRACE	Yeah.
00:39:53	ISHA	Contributions and impact yeah, so that's feeling.
00:39:56	ISHA	Yeah.
00:39:57	GRACE	Valued.
00:39:58	ISHA	Valued, yeah.
00:39:59	ISHA	So, that's still at the top.
00:40:00	GRACE	So, that could be with preparedness, couldn't it , navigating uncertainty.
00:40:04	ISHA	Yeah. Do you think this is more important than this?
00:40:18	GRACE	Yeah.
00:40:19	AVA	I think so.
00:40:20	GRACE	Yeah, especially since COVID, and all the extra work that's been involved in trying to help children who weren't in school try to, you know, support them with their... it's reading and well everything but reading.
00:40:33	ISHA	Social skills.
00:40:35	GRACE	Yeah, and the Year 5, the classes that I'm in now, that year group, they... it was lots, it was boy heavy summer born boys and so they were even before COVID when they were in reception, it was already there was a lot of children who needed interventions even at that age to sort of, you know, come out and think about very basic maths and reading. So, as soon as like they got like halfway through Year 1 and then, and we were working so hard with these groups to try and lift them up.
00:41:20	Researcher	So, navigating uncertainty versus sources of TA knowledge and knowhow, what's more important?

00:41:32	FREYA	Navigating uncertainty, yeah.
00:41:40	ISHA	And then TA, teacher dynamics the need for collaboration and partnership versus connection with students balancing independence.
00:41:52	GRACE	Oh, that's so tricky, isn't it?
00:41:53	ISHA	Yeah.
00:41:54	FREYA	They're both really important.
00:41:55	GRACE	Because they're both really important.
00:41:57	ISHA	Leave them equal.
00:41:58	FREYA	Yeah, leave them equal.
00:42:01	GRACE	Yeah, because that's what you strive for, isn't it, their independence in their learning.
00:42:08	AMINA	It's the core of the job, isn't it?
00:42:15	GRACE	Yeah.
00:42:16	FREYA	All the rest of it will fall into place a bit more.
00:42:22	AVA	I think with this one as well. I mean I haven't had it a lot, but sometimes you get put with a teacher you've never worked with, so you don't really know how they are with the children, how they're going to be with you. And I think sometimes just having that pre-meet before you're in that actually work together is good. But I know that people do get phoned in with people that they also may not necessarily like.
00:42:47	GRACE	Yeah, and working out their expectations within the classroom. I know that's really, because you're not mind readers and yet sometimes it's sort of expected that you will be, and you know.
00:43:01	FREYA	I've had to actually sort of complain about a teacher that I was working with once because of her kind of attitude towards sort of special needs and I kind of bit my tongue for so long and then it... there was an instant which upset me, and I did sort of go and speak to senior leadership about it and they listened and.
00:43:23	GRACE	Yeah.
00:43:25	FREYA	I don't know if anything particularly changed, but it's really hard to challenge the teacher as a TA, I find, even though, I think her knowledge of special needs is really limited, I think I probably have better knowledge than her on that, but because she's the teacher and the one with the degree, it's really hard to kind of be listened to.
00:43:55	Researcher	So, did you go to your line manager?
00:43:59	AVA	I went to the SENCO , and I mean the head teacher's really easy to talk to as well, I've spoken to her about it. Yeah, with the previous head teachers, absolutely no way will do.

00:44:13	ISHA	Yeah.
00:44:16	FREYA	But.
00:44:17	Researcher	I can relate to that as well.
00:44:18	FREYA	It still is really hard, isn't it? When I think it was only because it actually physically made me cry because of the way a child was being treated that I kind of had to say something but.
00:44:32	GRACE	Yeah, because you've worked so hard with that child to you know and developed an understanding with them and got to know them. But it is really hard if it feels like they're not fully understood by everybody they encounter.
00:44:47	FREYA	Yeah, definitely because you do form a bond with them.
00:44:51	GRACE	You do.
00:44:52	FREYA	You know, it's impossible not to.
00:44:55	GRACE	Yeah.
00:44:57	FREYA	Yeah.
00:44:58	GRACE	And it's so important to do that as well. You know, because then you become a trusted adult which is, you know, the more adults they can trust and form bonds with, the better they will be when they become adults.
00:45:12	FREYA	Yeah, absolutely. I think that's not... with the national curriculum as it is, I think that there's not enough focus on that, on the bonds that the children need to make to become balanced adults.
00:45:29	GRACE	Yeah, and it can take a long time for some children.
00:45:34	FREYA	Yeah.
00:45:36	GRACE	Yeah, depending on, you know, what they're experiencing outside of school and what they've experienced growing up.
00:45:43	FREYA	Yeah.
00:45:49	Researcher	Okay, just looking, so these ones are, yeah, this one's at the top and then, yeah, do you mind telling it (overlapping conversation) as you go? And if there's any that you don't feel fit, just get rid of them or the other client ones.
00:46:08	FREYA	Do you have any other ideas? Yeah.
00:46:18	ISHA	Something that I think is possibly not include, I don't think it comes onto any heading. And that is the amount of learning that's expected in one school day, there's so much pressure...
00:46:37	GRACE	And progress.
00:46:38	ISHA	...to cover.
00:46:39	GRACE	And that progress that's expected.
00:46:40	ISHA	So much.

00:46:41	Researcher	Yeah.
00:46:42	GRACE	Yeah.
00:46:46	ISHA	It's too intense.
00:46:47	GRACE	Yeah.
00:46:51	ISHA	For the children I think.
00:46:54	FREYA	Yeah.
00:46:55	ISHA	As a general observation for a lot, especially the younger ones, do you get that impression?
00:47:00	GRACE	Yeah, I've had to say something recently and in the mass group I reckon just say that why... what's the point in moving them on to something else before they've got what we are doing now because if I still feel like they haven't really got it and I want to keep going until they've got it before I move them onto something else. I've had a lot of discussions around that.
00:47:22	Researcher	We'll come back to that later in return that's, yeah.
00:47:26	GRACE	Yeah, but no, because those children would've forgotten that.
00:47:27	Researcher	Yeah, exactly.
00:47:28	GRACE	You know, build on it now so at least they've got some of it, yeah.
00:47:33	AVA	Yeah, I think.
00:47:36	ISHA	What heading could we say... you say in reception as well.
00:47:41	GRACE	Expectation... our expectation, isn't it?
00:47:43	AVA	In reception, and I think in reception it's like so much of a big thing that, you know, when they choose their learning, that's when the best learning happens but then.
00:47:53	Researcher	(Overlapping conversation).
00:47:55	AVA	Yeah.
00:47:56	GRACE	Sandwich.
00:47:57	AVA	So, the best learning's done when they have... they choose what they want to learn, but we only get less than an hour and a half for them to choose what they want to do because there's just so many planned activities and stuff that everyone's meant to be doing that there's not really a lot of time.
00:48:15	FREYA	Yeah, what maybe expectations.
00:48:21	Researcher	Pace of learning.
00:48:22	FREYA	Pace of learning.
00:48:23	GRACE	Yeah.
00:48:24	Researcher	But is that to do with our role or is that just.

00:48:29	ISHA	Just teaching in general?
00:48:30	GRACE	You know, it's to do with how much we say we have over what we do, isn't it really?
00:48:37	Researcher	Yeah.
00:48:38	GRACE	You know, not ownership of our...
00:48:41	ISHA	So.
00:48:43	GRACE	...of our teaching because we are teaching, aren't we?
00:48:52	ISHA	The ownership.
00:48:54	Researcher	Five more minutes for this one it's, okay?
00:48:57	FREYA	Okay.
00:49:01	ISHA	Ownership of our teaching inputs.
00:49:04	Researcher	Yes.
00:49:10	GRACE	And our pacing, so it's like, you know, because we are thinking about pacing, we're trying to keep up with the class, but we also understand that sometimes the reason we're working with these children is because they can't keep up with the class and it takes them longer to process everything.
00:49:28	Researcher	Yeah.
00:49:29	ISHA	Yeah, so that's like more of an INA role, isn't it?
00:49:36	FREYA	I think one thing that most schools sort of start to do quite well. As I said, it's training and there's training everyone having the same training, the teachers and the support staff. And having follow up training on that so everyone is.
00:49:54	GRACE	On the same page, yeah.
00:49:56	FREYA	Using the same methods, and that definitely makes a difference I think sort of continuous or continued training... regular training.
00:50:07	GRACE	Yeah.
00:50:09	FREYA	I think it's really important, and to refresh your skills as well.
00:50:14	GRACE	Yeah.
00:50:18	FREYA	I suppose that comes to sort of preparedness.
00:50:21	Researcher	Training?
00:50:22	FREYA	Yeah, but I think the whole school training, I think it's really important, all right thanks.
00:50:30	GRACE	That's fine, thank you.
00:50:42	FREYA	I mean I don't have a lot because the hours on that I don't have much work to do with the parents. But how does everyone feel about sort of relationships with parents?

00:50:56	S1	So, I... because I am INA primarily, I do have a good relationship with my child's parents I know them really well and the child that I started to support as well, I know their parents and but everybody else, it's just, they're just people in the... picking them up at the end of the day, aren't they? It is just, it's so... it's a very strange thing because I do start often work with other children in the classroom if I get a chance to kind of leave the child that I work with to work independently and often I'll hear things about parents from teachers and you just think yeah, you know, but I'm sure that they.
00:51:43	FREYA	Yeah.
00:51:44	GRACE	They're trying their best, yeah. You know, and with the children that are struggling often, the parents are absolutely doing their best.
00:51:56	FREYA	Yeah.
00:51:58	GRACE	But you know it's not easy.
00:52:00	Researcher	Yeah.
00:52:07	AVA	Like, I find a reception that I have a lot more of a positive relationship with the parents because I'll see them on the gate and every morning the teachers sometimes will say to me, oh can you just stand by the door and let the rest of the children out while I speak to somebody. So, I think that is good because then I know if she's ill, I know I can give the children out as well, but I know that people that work in other year groups don't have anything to do with the children, their parents really, it's all very separate.
00:52:39	Researcher	Yeah.
00:52:40	FREYA	I don't see them because like, I do school pick up and drop off from my son, so I don't (overlapping conversation) at that time.
00:52:47	GRACE	The TAs on the gate and they'll usually take in any sort of like, information that's handed over in the mornings. Do you go on the visits, have you done, you know, before the children start in the reception?
00:52:59	AVA	No, actually funny enough, I've just done a assignment about all of this.
00:53:04	GRACE	Oh, yeah.
00:53:06	AVA	Yes, so the head of Early Years went, but she went to... well, she went to visit all the children. So, I think that's good because they've got one familiar adult, but it wasn't the teachers going to meet the children that were going to be in their class. So, they built up only relationship with that one person, but not all the adults.
00:53:27	GRACE	So, our reception classes, it is the... it's the teacher and the TA attached to that class that go to the children that are coming to that class which I think works really well.
00:53:36	Researcher	Yeah.

00:53:37	AVA	Yeah, we don't do that
00:53:38	GRACE	Yeah, that... it's interesting isn't it, because I bet, you'd love that, wouldn't you?
00:53:42	AVA	Yeah, yeah that would be so much.
00:53:43	GRACE	And you see the value of that.
00:53:45	AVA	Yeah, yeah.
00:53:46	GRACE	Yeah.
00:53:47	Researcher	Yeah.
00:53:48	GRACE	Yeah, because it's such a, you know, it's a big thing starting school especially when some of them are like, maybe only just four and you're guest .
00:53:59	ISHA	Just finished ranking I think great.
00:54:02	Researcher	Okay, so I would like you to think about the ranking that you've done and if you think those would have been different, if I would ask... would've asked you before the pandemic and now and what would be different, what has shifted? If you could discuss that for about 10 minutes.
00:54:23	GRACE	Yeah.
00:54:24	Researcher	Thank you.
00:54:26	GRACE	I think the need has grown for intervention. It just seems, and I think that we have far more children diagnosed with autism, ADHD, you know, and anxiety that's gone through the roof. Yeah, there's so many more children that are struggling.
00:54:53	ISHA	Do you think that has been taken into account given like all the.
00:54:57	GRACE	I think it is within the school, but I don't think it is by the government.
00:55:00	ISHA	No, yeah.
00:55:01	GRACE	At all.
00:55:02	ISHA	Yeah.
00:55:04	GRACE	You know.
00:55:05	FREYA	Yeah, the children's wellbeing should have been kind of the emphasis when we came back after COVID and it was sort of a little bit and then straight back into learning, and I think that's.
00:55:16	GRACE	And it's down to targets, and Ofsted and need tables and .
00:55:23	FREYA	I think for some of the parents as well having really young children and being so isolated during COVID.
00:55:31	GRACE	And not knowing how to teach (overlapping conversation).

00:55:34	FREYA	Yeah.
00:55:35	GRACE	Being given, you know, watching a Zoom and then being sent home, all this stuff and you're trying to explain how to use it. But the... and they're, you know, they might have more than one child and the children at different ages and one child says, I'm not doing it.
00:55:51	FREYA	Yeah.
00:55:52	GRACE	You know.
00:55:53	FREYA	Really hard.
00:55:54	GRACE	Yeah, it must have been so difficult. And then of course when they came back to school, and they'd been at home and it's almost like having to start school all over again.
00:56:02	FREYA	Yeah, yeah, those sort of social skills.
00:56:07	ISHA	I think feeling valued has always been top for me. Yeah, COVID or no COVID.
00:56:21	Researcher	Putting numbers, and just because I noticed there's one there. So, is this part of this top ones or the.
00:56:28	GRACE	We're sort of like going sideways.
00:56:30	ISHA	Yeah.
00:56:31	Researcher	Oh, yeah these are sort of.
00:56:32	GRACE	Branching out.
00:56:33	ISHA	Yeah, we couldn't.
00:56:34	ISHA	And then it goes from top to bottom.
00:56:37	Researcher	Oh, okay. So, there's no top between this two or is that (overlapping conversation) that's fine, yeah.
00:56:43	GRACE	Yeah, we couldn't decide which was more important here (overlapping conversation).
00:56:52	FREYA	I think that perhaps the preparedness and navigating more uncertainty because the needs are higher since COVID, I think, yeah, there's less uncertainty about how the children are going to behave, but they're learning, I think that's probably changed since COVID.
00:57:19	ISHA	Navigating uncertainty.
00:57:20	FREYA	Yeah, change since COVID.
00:57:23	GRACE	And we have a lot, seem to have a lot more school refusers now than we did before. Do you want to just won't come in and then we start to get them to come in. But it seems to be like they're on their terms and then of course their... it's like they're setting boundaries but they're children and that's really makes them wobbly. Yeah, and lots of parents are very afraid.
00:57:52	Researcher	Yeah.

00:57:53	GRACE	You know, and they don't want to tackle things because they're so worried.
00:57:59	FREYA	If their children were kind of babies or toddlers during COVID that now the ones that starting school, I mean that was a very unique experience for them, I suppose.
00:58:10	GRACE	Yeah, well our Year 6s now were in Year 2 when it all started, so.
00:58:16	Researcher	When you say change it since COVID, do you feel that this has become more important or less important in your ranking?
00:58:25	FREYA	More...I would've thought.
00:58:26	GRACE	Yeah.
00:58:27	Researcher	Hmm.
00:58:28	GRACE	Yeah, yeah there's seems to be more uncertainty, doesn't there?
00:58:32	FREYA	Yeah, okay. I suppose the role identity maybe has changed as well because there are so many children now that getting late diagnosis, school refuses should say that kind of thing.
00:58:59	GRACE	And it seems like there's lots of children that you think to yourself, gosh, I bet they could really do with some like an INA somebody used there for them. But you can't have that many, I... you can't even have that many adults in the classroom.
00:59:10	ISHA	Yeah.
00:59:11	GRACE	It's becomes ridiculous.
00:59:12	ISHA	And last year I was working in a Year 1 class and there are about five adults in the class.
00:59:19	ISHA	Yeah.
00:59:20	ISHA	It's just... it was still bonkers.
00:59:24	GRACE	Yeah, it's a different kind of bonkers.
00:59:27	ISHA	Yeah.
00:59:31	FREYA	Do you feel though, I feel it in a lot ways you get the other children sort of calling your name and because they want to tell you something or they want you to tie their shoelace or just help him spell something and the child that I look after, he might be making a run for it. And so, I'm like, I'm really sorry I can't... I'll come back to you, and then I end up chasing him around the school and not coming back to them. And then I feel like I've let them down.
00:59:58	GRACE	It's that spinning plates thing, and you know, feeling like you're failing them all.
01:00:01	FREYA	Yeah, yeah.
01:00:03	GRACE	Because there's only one of you, and you are attached to this child with the greatest need. But yeah, they all have a need.

01:00:10	FREYA	But keep him safe before I tie their shoelace.
01:00:13	GRACE	Exactly, I know it's awful though, isn't it?
01:00:15	FREYA	But to them you just, you know, their little faces dropped don't they, and you kept saying, look, come on.
01:00:18	GRACE	You know, they're in your class, you feel connected to them.
01:00:20	FREYA	Yeah, that's quite a big part of your job.
01:00:24	GRACE	Yeah.
01:00:25	FREYA	Okay.
01:00:27	GRACE	Yeah, and I think obviously since COVID that has grown, there are children who just haven't learned to tie their shoelaces and.
01:00:35	FREYA	And they're used to the.
01:00:36	GRACE	Kept them young, really.
01:00:38	FREYA	Having attention as well, they're being at home with their parents.
01:00:42	Researcher	So, do you think that's affected the connection with student dependence and independence, yeah, there's more's dependence now.
01:00:50	GRACE	Definitely, yeah.
01:00:51	Researcher	Yeah, more dependence since COVID. And do you think parents are more anxious than perhaps if their children are (overlapping background conversation).
01:01:01	GRACE	Yeah.
01:01:02	Researcher	There's more anxiety.
01:01:03	GRACE	Well, every child that struggles in our school has a... has anxious parents.
01:01:08	Researcher	Yeah.
01:01:09	GRACE	Yeah. So, therefore you've got more dependent children who are getting to Year 6 off and then off to secondary school still really young.
01:01:27	ISHA	Yeah.
01:01:32	GRACE	I find I worry more about the children leaving and going off to secondary school now than I used to or how they're going to manage and how they're going to get by and how they're going to deal with everything. It seems like there's so many more vulnerable children.
01:01:48	FREYA	Yeah, but yeah
01:01:49	GRACE	Leaving Year 6.

01:01:54	Researcher	Yeah, that's perhaps something to put down. Yeah, I suppose it comes under.
01:02:00	ISHA	Do you mind writing it now?
01:02:01	Researcher	Yeah.
01:02:04	ISHA	I missed to put words in that sentence.
01:02:07	GRACE	Vulnerability, yeah.
01:02:20	Researcher	Children need some.
01:02:37	GRACE	And I think the expectation of parents is greater that you'll be able to fix everything.
01:02:43	Researcher	Yeah.
01:02:46	GRACE	Because that's what the government says.
01:02:48	Researcher	Yeah.
01:02:49	GRACE	They've given us all this money to fix it all.
01:02:52	ISHA	Was they?
01:02:53	GRACE	Apparently, that's what they said. Do you remember when... the bit straight after COVID when they wanted TAs to do a little bit more, they weren't working afternoons, they wanted them to work afternoons and we had that our school to try and help children, like doing afternoon interventions as well as morning ones. And then it all just sort of like died away, because the money died away, so they couldn't be paid, I think it lasted about a term.
01:03:19	Researcher	Yeah, I think there should have been a whole year of.
01:03:23	GRACE	Yeah.
01:03:24	Researcher	Sort of catch up at least.
01:03:27	GRACE	Yeah. There's all this expectation from the government versus no money to pay for it, you're just meant to do it from your budget.
01:03:39	Researcher	Yeah. In March, all key stage 2 TAs are going to mornings only from all day and there'll be I think just two TAs per three class year group.
01:04:00	GRACE	Yeah.
01:04:02	Researcher	So, how that's going to work?
01:04:03	FREYA	So, no TAs in the afternoon.
01:04:05	ISHA	No.
01:04:06	GRACE	Because with this (overlapping conversation) interventions in the afternoon at our school, yeah.
01:04:15	Researcher	So, if they cut hours.
01:04:16	AVA	Yes, cut the hours.

01:04:18	FREYA	Yeah.
01:04:21	Researcher	So, that's the last one, okay, we are going to have about eight minutes to do this one. So, if you think about those not the main ones, but the ones that you've just written down here. if you would choose four main areas that you think would be the priority to feedback the same concern to head teachers or anyone that is in charge. Their needs addressing, needs changing for you to be successful for you... for the role should meet your expectations and for it to be beneficial for you and for the children or for the school. What would you know, what... which ones would that be.
01:05:04	GRACE	Speaking out for?
01:05:05	Researcher	Yeah, could you put a star in it with a colourful pen, rank them. So, this would be my top thing, I would talk to saying because all head teachers about and if you want to change the name, give another title you can also do that.
01:05:20	GRACE	Okay.
01:05:21	Researcher	Okay. I mean the feeling valued.
01:05:29	GRACE	Yeah.
01:05:32	S6	Number one.
01:05:33	GRACE	Yeah, you could just go 1, 2, 3, 4.
01:05:38	ISHA	Yeah.
01:05:39	ISHA	Yeah.
01:05:47	FREYA	We sort of change the name in feeling valued, I think that (overlapping conversation).
01:05:51	GRACE	Pretty much sums it up, doesn't it?
01:05:56	FREYA	I feel like communication perhaps should be.
01:05:58	GRACE	Yeah, and that's kind of part of being prepared, isn't it? Having good communication.
01:06:03	FREYA	Yeah.
01:06:06	GRACE	So, having people communicate to you and being given the time to communicate with others.
01:06:10	FREYA	Communication.
01:06:12	GRACE	Yeah.
01:06:13	FREYA	So, okay, I'm going to write upside down now.
01:06:17	ISHA	I mean, two [inaudible 01:06:18].
01:06:18	GRACE	Yeah.
01:06:20	ISHA	I can't see it when I'm writing upside down. Well, I'm doing well.
01:06:26	GRACE	You are, see.

01:06:29	FREYA	And planning.
01:06:30	GRACE	See, yeah, got it.
01:06:32	ISHA	Here we go (overlapping conversation) communication.
01:06:46	GRACE	I suppose, and feeling valued is appreciation, isn't it, it's like, you know, being appreciated.
01:06:51	Researcher	Appreciation, recognition.
01:06:53	GRACE	Recognition, and that ties in that I think recognition because it's recognising who you are in your entirety.
01:07:02	FREYA	Do you think we could put communication and listening because it's got to work both ways, they need to listen to.
01:07:09	GRACE	Yeah, and understanding.
01:07:11	FREYA	Yeah.
01:07:12	GRACE	Yeah.
01:07:13	Researcher	Because if you want, you can also combine one or two or three, if you combine them, just do it like an arrow.
01:07:18	GRACE	Okay, yeah.
01:07:20	Researcher	Just to show that you combined them.
01:07:25	GRACE	Very good.
01:07:25	ISHA	All right, so this is number two, yeah, number two.
01:07:28	S6	Okay, yeah.
01:07:32	GRACE	Do you want me to spell (overlapping conversation), I think you can do it.
01:07:35	ISHA	I've got the hang of it now.
01:07:36	GRACE	You can write upside down and spell.
01:07:41	ISHA	Good for my brain, yeah.
01:07:42	ISHA	Right, there we go. So, number three.
01:07:49	GRACE	So, actually, yeah, because these are all... this is all linked, isn't it? This being connected with the students, being connected with the teachers being connected to senior management team.
01:08:09	FREYA	The collaboration and partnership.
01:08:13	ISHA	This one here, I think there's not... because there's not enough hours in the day and there's so much pressure on teachers to get stuff done. There's less emphasis on supporting students with their independence.
01:08:31	GRACE	Yeah, this is neglected, isn't it?
01:08:32	ISHA	Yeah, so.
01:08:33	GRACE	And yet it's what will.

01:08:34	ISHA	It's the most important thing for the children.
01:08:45	GRACE	Yeah, because turning them from passive to active learners, that's what makes the progress, isn't it?
01:08:51	ISHA	Yeah, yeah.
01:08:54	FREYA	And the less, or the more independent they are... the less they'll need us with them all the time which fill us up to do other.
01:09:02	GRACE	Yeah.
01:09:03	ISHA	Yeah, yeah.
01:09:05	FREYA	Jobs that me doing or how could the children.
01:09:07	ISHA	Yeah, I kind of feel this is maybe more important than this.
01:09:14	GRACE	Okay, pop with two on there then.
01:09:16	ISHA	Yeah, two.
01:09:15	GRACE	And then cut to three. Yeah, because if you link it with what's happened since COVID, that's massive, isn't it?
01:09:25	ISHA	Yeah.
01:09:25	FREYA	Yeah.
01:09:35	Researcher	So, there's too much time constraints.
01:09:46	FREYA	I think that let the role.
01:09:47	Researcher	Teachers to prioritise this.
01:09:56	GRACE	Yeah, because this is very fluffy, isn't it?
01:09:59	FREYA	See, I think if you are being appreciated for the job that you are doing the role boundaries become more respect (overlapping conversation) be set and respected.
01:10:12	GRACE	Yeah.
01:10:12	FREYA	They kind of (overlapping background conversation).
01:10:16	GRACE	Yeah, because it's when you're asked to change your roles slightly, but you're not like asked, you're told aren't you really?
01:10:22	FREYA	Yeah.
01:10:28	Researcher	So.
01:10:29	GRACE	So.
01:10:30	Researcher	Number four.
01:10:31	GRACE	Yeah.
01:10:32	Researcher	Yeah.
01:10:47	GRACE	So, should I mention, so I write something there about, you know, being told about changes to the role rather than asked something like that. Sort of ask but with... but you're being, you

		know, you're being told. Isn't, not like there's extra time to adapt to doing something different or more of it.
01:11:24	FREYA	Do you find if you have someone coming, I don't know if this example doing intervention and they'll speak to you as the sort of INA but then I never hear afterwards, like when they... if they send a report or anything, never get that kind of feedback from the teacher. Unless I ask, which again, I know the teacher's really busy, but I think it's quite important.
01:11:50	GRACE	That comes into that hierarchy, isn't it really?
01:11:53	FREYA	Yeah.
01:11:54	GRACE	Yeah.
01:11:55	FREYA	Actually, hearing you mention observing, it would be really useful for us to get a chance, like you were saying, to observe other teaching assistants.
01:12:07	GRACE	Yeah.
01:12:08	Researcher	And yeah, because you never got observed in the end, did you, so there's not enough time.
01:12:14	FREYA	It always happens, doesn't it?
01:12:15	ISHA	Yeah.
01:12:18	GRACE	Yeah, the point of it is to like.
01:12:19	ISHA	I mean, the senior managers like to observe teachers.
01:12:23	ISHA	Yeah.
01:12:24	ISHA	Yeah, but which is important, but it should work for all of us (overlapping conversation).
01:12:30	GRACE	We're all teaching, yeah.
01:12:32	ISHA	Yeah.
01:12:34	GRACE	And that does, again, if that gets pushed to one side, that's another thing of not feeling valued.
01:12:42	Researcher	How did... did you write how you would you use this title to talk to them or would you... how would you describe it in other words... in your words?
01:12:55	FREYA	I think being respectful of our roles.
01:12:59	GRACE	Respective role, yeah or yeah, I suppose, yeah.
01:13:02	Researcher	Okay, thank you .
01:13:04	GRACE	Yeah.
01:13:05	Researcher	And then we are wrapping up.
01:13:08	ISHA	It's gone so quickly.
01:13:12	FREYA	It's really hard because you could just talk about it all day.

01:13:15	Researcher	Yeah, yeah. I'm going to stop recording.
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P.3 Transcript 3: Second meeting

Speaker key

- Researcher Speaker One
- AMINA Speaker Two
- OLIVE Speaker Three
- IVY Speaker Four
- TAYLOR Speaker Five
- FREYA Speaker Six
- GRACE Speaker Seven
- AVA Speaker Eight
- ISHA Speaker Nine

Timecode	Speaker	Transcript
00:00:01	Researcher	<p>Hello, hello. Yes, do you mind putting one on this side (overlapping background noise) have one here. Maybe another one just to make sure because I'm paranoid. Take this, take this. Okay. Yeah. So we had that discussion last week about the priorities in the job of a TA. And I asked you to rank about three times using the themes that we had before. But we came up with—you came up with themes that made sense for you and some of them you named, you named differently which is great. Both groups brought things that were similar but also things that were a bit different. But I think they all can collapse and we can come up together with four main areas, that kind of address everything that everyone was talking in both groups. The idea is not to, you know, to summarise all the difficulties and everything that needs to change in these main areas. But it is just a starter for us to bring to stakeholders with this research and I'm not, you know, I can't promise anything is going to change. What I really want to do is bring your voices to the stakeholders as I am closer to them that you are and I want to bring that to them coming from you. My research is going to have your voices mainly and the stakeholders there is just... it's just a bit of the participatory part of the research which is me coming back to them and saying so these are what my TAs were saying, what are the difficulties in, you know, putting these things in place to make the job, you know more successful, et cetera. And hopefully, you know, they will have a little bit more about to think about, to reflect on when they think about employing TAs, keeping or letting TAs go, and what they expect from them. So that's the main goal. Maybe give them some food for thought that they can discuss amongst themselves after I feed back what we talk. So if you look at the papers, the first group... I don't have your names there because I can't have your names anywhere, that's why I made a copy without your names, but you will recognise yours. The first group had communication, ever-changing role and responsibilities, feeling recognised and appreciated, and sources of TA knowledge, and</p>

		know how as their main priorities. The first group, do you mind talking a little bit about why you selected these areas as the main areas for us to address with the stakeholders?
00:03:23	AMINA	That's us.
00:03:24	OLIVE	It that us? (Overlapping conversations)
00:03:28	Researcher	I thought you would've recognise.
00:03:29	OLIVE	Well, we could (overlapping conversation).
00:03:32	AMINA	Yeah. Well, we thought communication was the most important thing because without that, they're all quite linked to that as well I think.
00:03:45	OLIVE	Yeah, if you can't get the communication right, there's a knock-on effect for everything else.
00:03:51	AMINA	And that comes from your teachers and your leadership, you know, I think. So that was the ultimate option but we wrote that and same as the other group I think [inaudible 00:04:02]. But it's interesting how different ours are actually, to be honest. So yeah, I think it all came down—we were very much based on that as a beginner. I mean, and that comes from your teachers and your leadership ... good communication breeds good relationships with your teachers and your children. And without those, it's very hard to fulfil your role. We were saying that the role is ever-changing, so there's no real... you can't really define the role specifically now.
00:04:44	OLIVE	It depends on your cohort I would say as well, the need of your class.
00:04:44	AMINA	Yeah, that's it. So it is ever changing so you can't, you know, pin it down in particular. I don't think that you ever necessarily will be able to or that you need to, so as a TA you need to be able to be flexible to work within the changes that happen. But what we then felt that being prepared was less important so that was less about our role, so having the ability to kind of react to whatever that is, without the responsibility of running the class because that's not our responsibility. So it's not necessarily our responsibility to take loads of time to prepare to do things because that I don't think is our role.
00:05:37	Researcher	But do you feel that like this has been asked from you, even though it's not your role?
00:05:42	OLIVE	I think sometimes it is, yeah.
00:05:43	IVY	Yeah, yeah.
00:05:44	Researcher	And it's taking away that time to react as you would like to these situations where TAs would be... yeah, that would be part of a TA job?
00:05:54	AMINA	Yeah. I think the teaching assistant is different to the assistant teacher. Which we are both of. So sometimes you are a teacher and sometimes you are a teaching assistant, if that makes sense. And I think they're quite different roles that we are required to do, depending on what year we're in and what the need is, what

		the teachers like, so there's... sometimes you just photocopy and sometimes you're teaching—you're teaching, so.
00:06:28	Researcher	Yeah, yeah ok. Right. And what about the other ones?
00:06:32	AMINA	I think the being recognised, I think again from your... from every level, from the children, to the teacher, to the SLT, if you don't feel like anyone's recognising what you do, it can be quite a hard job to do because you're not doing it for the money. To feel like you're making an impact and if no one's recognising the impact you're making, it feels quite thankless I think. But if you feel valued and make a connection with people, that's like the core of the job really, isn't it?
00:07:09	Researcher	Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. And why did you select...? Why have you selected the group sources of TA, no knowledge of know how as a priority as well?
00:07:20	AMINA	So I don't want to be mocked , right?
00:07:22	Researcher	(Overlapping conversation). Yeah, anyone from the group.
00:07:28	OLIVE	Right, hang on, so what (overlapping conversation).
00:07:29	AMINA	So it's the sources of TA knowledge and you might need to look at that.
00:07:34	OLIVE	Okay.
00:07:35	IVY	Did we say about being trained appropriately to do different courses so that we're able to give the input that they're expecting us to?
00:07:46	OLIVE	Okay.
00:07:47	IVY	Quite often we have the lowest groups to do interventions with. Whereas those particular children need more of the teacher. Because the teacher has the skills to be in that position
00:08:09	Researcher	Okay, okay. So what about the other group? So the areas you chose were feeling valued and you named appreciation as well, connection with the students, so balancing dependence and independence, communication and listening, and role boundaries. Can you just like, yeah, just talk a little bit about why you selected those? It doesn't need to be in order.
00:08:36	TAYLOR	Well, like the communication is top from the other group, if you feel appreciated and valued then that underpins how you communicate with each other and build relationships, and all the rest of it. That's why (overlapping conversation).
00:08:54	FREYA	Yeah. If we're motivated in our role then we can pass on that motivation to the children. So if we look like we're happy to be at school and enjoying ourselves, and we're treating each other with respect, then that is modelling that for the children as well, you know, because we often have... in our school, we have these kind of like... it's like a community class—class as a community and we have community charter which we sort of try to abide by. And obviously as you've got the school, it becomes kind of more like

		you have to say that you will abide by the charter which is to respect each other and to, you know, that we have the right to be heard and we have the right to learn, and we have the right to be safe, and things like that. And so to demonstrate that and to model that, and to also actually feel that, you know, feel appreciated and valued then hopefully you can pass that on to the children.
00:09:59	Researcher	Okay. And then you also talked about the role boundaries. Do you feel like it's related to what they were saying about the responsibilities or did you have a (overlapping conversation)?
00:10:10	FREYA	Yeah. It's interesting, isn't it, because I don't know if you stay with a class or if you move around but because I'm a key worker, I move up the school, so I work with different teachers. So some teachers are great, like they just hand you something that the class is doing but it's maybe a sort of like a lower ability, so. And then they say, "Well, this is to do with this and I've prepared all this, and you just need to grab this, this, and this, and then if we go teach them." And then you feel kind of like all right, this teacher knows what these children need and they understand what my role is. And then I've had other teachers who are just, "Oh, I haven't done anything."
00:10:52	GRACE	Just do your best.
00:10:53	FREYA	"Just we're doing this, here's this pack, here's this file of parallel learning, if you could just go and..." so yeah, it's quite tricky and I mean... so and then... so role boundaries, one minute you are, yeah, can this. And then the next minute you are this. And it just feels like the money's the same, the respect and appreciation is the same. But now you're properly teaching because you have to go and find work that's suitable.
00:11:31	OLIVE	And you'll say the teaching assistant and assistant teacher.
00:11:35	AMINA	They're two different jobs.
00:11:34	FREYA	Yeah, definitely. I liked how you framed that because it's really true.
00:11:40	Researcher	Is there a...? I've never heard this. Well, does this exist, assistant teacher?
00:11:47	AMINA	Yeah, well.
00:11:49	OLIVE	Not officially.
00:11:51	AMINA	No, no, no. Assistant teacher is a job... I always think it's interesting because if you do some sort of form fill out for a job, often an assistant teacher is there but teaching assistant is not.
00:12:02	Researcher	Oh, okay, okay.
00:12:06	AMINA	But actually, they are the same but different, so I think it's... again, it's that, isn't it? It's like what do you want me to do?
00:12:14	FREYA	Yeah. And as a key worker, I'm quite used to being the teacher for the child I work with, my official child. So that's fine.

		But he's not at the same level as the other children I'm being asked to work with, so he kind of... it's just... because he doesn't mess around, I often feel like he's... they just think, "Oh, well, he just sits there." But then he's not having an education and...
00:12:38	OLIVE	When you say key worker...?
00:12:39	FREYA	Mm-hmm, INA .
00:12:40	OLIVE	An INA , okay.
00:12:41	FREYA	Yeah. But obviously as I've progressed through the school, I've become an INA /TA because I take out small groups of children to do interventions with. But I've had to say something in my recent appraisal to say it's not working like this with my child and with the other children. I'm happy to work with the other children but it can't be as the same time as I work with my child because they're just, you know, their level is completely different and they're losing out. And for me to sort of like see if he's okay then the rest of the group are losing out, but you know, I just... that's when you feel like you're spinning plates and that's all...
00:13:15	Researcher	Yeah. And that's the boundary in itself, isn't it, because you have one child and another child, so almost asking a teacher to teach in year three—well, year one and year three at the same time.
00:13:28	FREYA	Yeah. Or with my child it's like year two and year five, it's a huge gap, you know.
00:13:34	AMINA	But that is a problem though, isn't it, is that because the structures are changing is that everyone is being asked to do, it's like all INAs are no longer (overlapping conversation).
00:13:43	FREYA	Yeah, and it's really stressful.
00:13:44	AMINA	Yeah. In our school, 3 to 1s, or. And often they just get it as... they're really... their needs are very different. And then also TAs are also being asked to be one-to-ones because there's no TA, there's no one-to-one for the child that should have it but maybe doesn't have it as a statement, you know. So it feels like that's all changing, so that the need is increasing and the... you know.
00:14:13	FREYA	Mm-hmm. And you just feel like you're failing everybody and this is the first... I would say this is the first you've actually seriously thought maybe I don't want to do this job anymore because it just feels so difficult and just soul destroying a little bit.
00:14:29	Researcher	Do you feel like this feeling increased after COVID? Like do you feel there was like a shift, like a clear shift after COVID?
00:14:39	AVA	I think after COVID it was really hard because I don't know what it was like for other schools. But for us, we were the ones that were in. So the TA, the support staff were the ones that were actually in the school with the key children. Our teachers were at home putting stuff up for them, so doing stuff like that, but we were the ones in the building.
00:14:54	OLIVE	Were you teaching?
00:14:55	AVA	Yeah, we were the ones teaching.

00:14:55	OLIVE	Yeah, we were teaching.
00:14:57	AVA	And it was like we came back and it didn't feel like there was a lot of appreciation or a lot of thanks. It really is a blank statement that actually we acknowledge that, you guys did a lot of the work kind of thing, don't get me wrong we were on rotas and stuff like that like I think a lot of schools were but we were still the ones in that were having to work out the work that the teachers were just putting up for their kids to do and it was just like... actually they came back and it was almost like, "Okay, we're back to normal now."
00:15:26	Researcher	Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
00:15:28	FREYA	Yeah.
00:15:28	AMINA	I do remember that. I remember at our school, like that meeting or whatever it was, a Zoom or something, where they sort of say—they will say, "Now TAs, you're going to have to do this." And there was a lot of fear from the... because they were like, "Well, hang on, I don't know..." or they were sort of taking Zoom groups.
00:15:46	OLIVE	We were asked to teach over zoom.
00:15:49	AVA	Oh, that (overlapping conversation) as well.
00:15:49	AMINA	And that's kind of like (overlapping conversation) yeah for some people that's okay. But for some people who work in a different part of the school or, they were suddenly like, "Well, I don't know if I can do that, so." And also feel judged by that because you think, "Well, the parents might be there and the..." you know.
00:16:06	OLIVE	Well, the parents were there (overlapping conversation).
00:16:07	FREYA	Had to be there, and they had to be there, yeah.
00:16:07	AMINA	So I think for some people that did make a shift. So I think suddenly it felt okay for the school to go, "Oh, and I want just this as well. Oh, and just this. Oh, and this now." So it didn't change back to what it was. It didn't fully change back.
00:16:28	Researcher	Okay.
00:16:28	GRACE	And without any training for the extra roles. We're just (overlapping conversation).
00:16:34	FREYA	And we've had children from different year groups as well, so Zoom—if you were Zoom reading with children, you might have children from about three or four different year groups to read with so that was, you know. And you didn't know these children, so they weren't even in your class, you know, that you hadn't gotten a relationship with them.
00:16:52	Researcher	Right, right. And suddenly you have to be there (overlapping conversation).

00:16:55	FREYA	Yeah. And then there was older children that just didn't access the learning at all who were at home and then came back and then, you know, they'd kind of regressed quite a bit.
00:17:04	Researcher	Yeah. And you're working...? Do you feel like you're working more with these children now?
00:17:08	FREYA	Yeah, definitely.
00:17:08	Researcher	Okay, okay. Thank you. Yeah, I'm thinking... you know, I think there's still a lot of overlapping and we can think together forming areas that we can just make it our kind of understanding of what needs to... in what needs improving, what needs to change, what is important in your job. So as like one first main area, you were talking about communication and feeling valued and appreciated. So what would you say would be your first main area that both groups would feel comfortable with? Would it feel the communication, how would you name it?
00:17:55	GRACE	The two things really come down to respect.
00:17:59	AVA	Yeah, very true.
00:18:00	GRACE	If they communicate properly with you.
00:18:05	FREYA	And respect for your role.
00:18:06	GRACE	Yeah, respect of the role.
00:18:09	FREYA	And understanding the importance of you, yeah, because then they... you know, it's important for them to communicate, isn't it, it's important to, like they can...
00:18:17	OLIVE	I think teachers are so stretched, you get some teachers that are obviously really appreciative and lovely, and the rest of it others that aren't. And I do think that they are so stretched that having to kind of deal with us (overlapping conversation).
00:18:34	GRACE	I think it needs to come from SLT, that appreciation, the communication but (overlapping conversation).
00:18:41	OLIVE	And we do get thanked, don't we.
00:18:45	AMINA	Well, I think... like I often think, to say what you're saying, sort of communication and value I think what I think happens is, is they think about the big things... always. They (SLT) think about the big things... always. When actually if you think about the very small things, and you do the very small things, they should offer that value, truly, not just, "Oh, and thanks everyone for doing extra. But you actually truly do that and that's by, you know, regular meetings or regular information or we expect this but we will do this, you know, your job role may require this but we will offer you this training. So what you then get, these things are quite achievable because everybody is very, very capable, that does the job. But if you really do look after those small things then the big things may not happen.
00:19:46	GRACE	Like a teacher we have now like I said, she's been there about a year and a half but only this is her first sort of official year, but. We have the regular meetings. We set up well-being groups,

		we'll meet sort of every half term, just talk about the staff well-being. We're doing so much training, she's getting as much training as possible. And we have TA meetings now which we never had in the last head, and it's all...
00:20:16	OLIVE	Do you have appraisals?
00:20:18	GRACE	Yeah.
00:20:19	OLIVE	Yeah. At least one (overlapping conversation) had appraisals (overlapping conversation).
00:20:22	GRACE	Yeah, we did have in this previous.
00:20:24	OLIVE	Okay. And are you observed?
00:20:27	GRACE	No.
00:20:28	OLIVE	Because we used to always be observed. And I suppose that could be a scary thing for a lot. However, it's a really good way of getting that appreciation and that feedback as long as it's given in a really, constructive, really good way.
00:20:46	TAYLOR	I think that's the really big thing that's missing from our role, is the chance to observe each other and (overlapping conversation).
00:20:52	FREYA	Yeah, I just read that bit [inaudible 00:20:53].
00:20:54	IVY	Well, we should get together and say, "I'm having an issue with this and it's like (overlapping conversation)."
00:21:00	TAYLOR	Yeah, share our skills.
00:21:02	IVY	(Overlapping conversation) feel in a little box. I'm in year one and I don't kind of know what else happens.
00:21:09	OLIVE	Well, you're probably firefighting as well quite a lot of the time.
00:21:12	AMINA	Because that's the thing. Because when you sort of say be observed, I kind of think, "Well, what would you observe?" Like just say if I came to observe you, you know, what am I observing? So I think it does need to be quite specific, like maybe sharing the best practices or (overlapping conversation).
00:21:29	IVY	They're just like, "Oh, I'm not sure how to do this, or, "I've never done this before." It's like how do you do group reading for instance.
00:21:36	AMINA	Yeah. So perhaps it will be more of the feeling that you can ask. So if someone says right, "Okay, P, I want you to go and do this thing," and you go, "Yeah, okay," because that's what most people do. "Yeah, okay, no problem." The thing that you can actually go, "No, I can't. I don't know, I don't feel comfortable with that, so."
00:21:54	GRACE	It'd be like shadowing someone (overlapping conversation).
00:21:57	IVY	And I've often said that I'm not sure whether I'm doing it right, this is how I'm doing it, blah, blah, blah, just so that I feel

		more comfortable because I don't want to do the wrong thing. Sorry.
00:22:06	Researcher	Yeah, yeah. No, it's okay. I'm just thinking because we're going to think, in the next part, we're going to think about how the situation is, what is your desired situation, what needs to happen to change this, and what are the barriers to change this? So if we think about the... yeah. If you just think about like a summary of the main areas. We'll just say the first... sort of from hearing, I'm just trying to think about a name like it's better if it comes from you but I heard communication and respect.
00:22:47	IVY	Is that respectful... because it's like it's all very well (overlapping conversation).
00:22:49	OLIVE	It's all about communication (overlapping conversation).
00:22:50	IVY	(Overlapping conversation) yeah, but it's like what kind of communication? It's like the communication that's respectful, so actually I'm going to share this with you because it's important for you as well to know these things.
00:23:04	GRACE	And [inaudible 00:23:04] to work both ways, so that we feel that we can...
00:23:07	IVY	That we can communicate and...
00:23:08	OLIVE	Yeah, because in our school, I mean, I might... hopefully this isn't off piece but it is communication, but we... correct me if you feel differently. But I feel like if there was a really big problem that I had in school, I actually don't know who I would probably tell. I'd tell my counterpart, my colleagues. Maybe my teacher this year, because she's brilliant. But I'm not sure I would go to SLT.
00:23:38	AMINA	Yeah, yeah.
00:23:39	ISHA	Something that I will say about that is I've had issues with things before and I've told them about it, and it's just kind of got forgotten about, so I'm not really being listened to, so.
00:23:49	OLIVE	Okay.
00:23:51	IVY	That's what I mean by respectful communication, (overlapping conversation).
00:23:53	GRACE	We've all been given like a kind of line manager.
00:23:57	IVY	Yeah, (overlapping conversation).
00:23:57	OLIVE	Okay, so right to have that (overlapping conversation).
00:23:58	IVY	(Overlapping conversation) who is ours?.
00:24:05	OLIVE	I think it's going to be the new person coming in, isn't it?
00:24:07	IVY	What new person?
00:24:07	ISHA	Yeah, I think so.
00:24:08	AMINA	Yes, it was CP, wasn't it? She was probably the person.

00:24:13	IVY	But then they're quite... because of the job that they do, they're quite far removed from...
00:24:17	OLIVE	So that's the SENCo, that's going to be the SENCo.
00:24:19	Researcher	Right. Right, right. Yeah.
00:24:22	GRACE	So I think—sorry, like a closer working relationship with SENCos, because a lot of what we do is with the... well, I meant, INA . And so sort of having—working more with them, sort of having more access, I don't know.
00:24:37	IVY	Because I sometimes find it frustrating when there's information about a child in your class and you only happen to hear about it through the teacher and you're like, well, if I'd have known that, I would've acted in a different way or I would've done something differently, or I would've taken the time to do this or that
00:24:56	FREYA	Yeah, because we need to know.
00:24:57	AVA	I think that needs to come from the teacher (overlapping conversation) because actually if they've been told, if the SENCo has told the teacher that, and then the teacher's responsibility to go, "Just a heads up, this is going on with this child," I think that's... again, that's the whole communication.
00:25:09	OLIVE	Yeah, (overlapping conversation) doesn't happen.
00:25:10	AVA	No, it doesn't.
00:25:10	IVY	And that's why regular meetings with a teacher I think are really important and we (overlapping conversation).
00:25:14	FREYA	They don't happen, do they, because the information tends to end with the teacher. And then it's only when something goes wrong that you're then informed and you'd... yeah.
00:25:25	Researcher	So it is a part of...? Is it something about being, you know, being part of the school, being part of the community (overlapping conversation)?
00:25:34	GRACE	(Overlapping conversation) yeah.
00:25:34	IVY	I suppose it's about being appreciated. It's that we are maybe as important to communicate with as the teachers.
00:25:42	Researcher	Okay. So is it about...? So how can we name this? How do you think we can name this?
00:25:50	AVA	I think it's our identity within the schools because I think it is that... it's like you say, actually it stops... almost it stops at the teacher and they go, "Oh, by the way, did you not know that?" And it's like, "Well, no, why would I?" Like if you have a pass (overlapping conversation).
00:26:02	FREYA	You don't have access to that information.
00:26:04	AVA	I mean, like I work in the room—well, near my SENCo and stuff like that, and she tries to pass on what she can. But at the end of the day like she's one person and our caseload is... like so

		she... I think there is a natural, she (overlapping conversation) that the teacher is passing this stuff on. If the teachers don't even think about that actually should we be the people that know? Yes, yes, we should. And I'm not saying that we need to know the ins and outs of absolutely everything. But actually just going, "Look, actually we know at the moment they're having a really tough time, can you keep an eye on?" Just so that we can feedback. And again, that opens that communication to. We're the people that see some of these kids the most. So we're doing the (overlapping conversation).
00:26:40	IVY	Well, yeah, we have more opportunity.
00:26:42	AVA	Yeah. Or the lunch times and stuff like that. We see these kids, you know, at their freest when they're not in the classroom confined to that. We should be the people that go, "Look, we've noticed this. What's going on?" Instead of a, "Oh, well, yeah, that's why because this is going on." And it's like, "Well, if (overlapping conversation)."
00:26:58	IVY	(Overlapping conversation) I've often asked questions and then it's turned out actually, yes, there is an issue and it's like...
00:27:03	AVA	Yeah.
00:27:03	Researcher	Is this different from the respectful communication, you feel like it's two main different areas or?
00:27:10	OLIVE	Yeah. I think the teachers just don't... so I don't think they deliberately won't say but I think they're just...
00:27:15	GRACE	No, I think they're so (overlapping conversation).
00:27:17	OLIVE	It just doesn't cross their mind, I think it doesn't even cross their mind.
00:27:19	Researcher	Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm thinking if there is a... there's another area or if this is part of the respectful communication.
00:27:27	OLIVE	I think it's part of number one.
00:27:28	FREYA	Yeah.
00:27:29	Researcher	Okay, yeah.
00:27:31	AMINA	Yeah, because I think the more you're informed, the better you can be. But there's also, like you said, that we don't need to know everything. There's some things we absolutely don't need to know, it's nothing to do with us, but.
00:27:46	TAYLOR	Something to add. Sorry to...
00:27:47	AMINA	No, no, no.
00:27:48	TAYLOR	Yeah. It need to be consistent throughout the school. Some teachers will inform me of issues that I need to know about it in the class but that's usually the more experienced teachers, depending on their personality. But if it's just something that all teachers must do as part of (overlapping conversation).

00:28:12	OLIVE	So could that be...? Could that all be addressed by us having a one-to-one with our teacher every week? .
00:28:19	IVY	Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.
00:28:21	AVA	I know, but it's so true (overlapping conversation).
00:28:25	Researcher	I'm going to write all that up.
00:28:27	AMINA	Maybe the next sort of main area.
00:28:28	Researcher	Yeah, the main area. So if we think about, you know, the ever changing role and responsibilities or role boundaries because they are kind of related. How would you collapse them?
00:28:39	IVY	Like identifying what our role is, like then...
00:28:42	AMINA	Is it more like role expectation?
00:28:43	IVY	Yeah, yeah.
00:28:45	AMINA	So that if there's like again consistent what is your expectation of me, right? And again that's going to be different in each (overlapping conversation) each year, you know, that's the difference.
00:28:59	FREYA	Because something that I really appreciate is whenever I'm asked to do something else on top of what I would've been doing or to make changes in a way that is new is when whoever's asking me, telling me to do that, that they acknowledge that it is extra. That you know, they say, "Oh, I know you're really busy and I really... but if there's any way you can do this, I'd really appreciate it." To be appreciative and to acknowledge that it isn't easy to suddenly, you know, bring another child into a group who's working at a different level or.
00:29:34	Researcher	Mm-hmm. So how would you summarise it in a title for us? Do you talk about this ever changing role, the expectation, role expectations, if you like this or?
00:29:51	IVY	It's kind of from both sides, so if you know what I mean.
00:29:55	Researcher	Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
00:29:55	IVY	What they expect of us, and what we need to know (overlapping conversation).
00:29:59	AMINA	I would say role expectations is probably (overlapping conversation).
00:30:01	FREYA	Role expectation, yeah.
00:30:02	Researcher	Okay. We will go to each of them.
00:30:09	AMINA	Because if we know the expectations, then it's our responsibility to go, "Well, that's not what happened." You know, also so we have to manage (overlapping conversation)...
00:30:17	FREYA	Yeah, and to be open.
00:30:18	AMINA	...it's our responsibility to manage those expectations rather than just complain about the expectations so I think there is

		an e... it doesn't work always (overlapping conversation) complain, it is...
00:30:31	FREYA	And for teachers and management to understand our role in the big, you know, adult staffing. To understand why we are important and why we need to know all the things that they know.
00:30:49	IVY	And that's why communication is first.
00:30:51	FREYA	Yeah, yeah.
00:30:53	Researcher	There are two things also. There is one thing about the training and, you know, what you've been asked to do but also what support are you received to actually provide what you've been asked, right? How would you name this? How would you...? What title would you give to this, this area? If I go back to them and say, "So this is really important to my TAs, they are..." you know, it's not that they not... they don't want to do this, they don't know how or they don't feel supported, or they don't have the training or?
00:31:41	AMINA	I don't know how you (overlapping conversation).
00:31:45	OLIVE	Hang on, is it (overlapping conversation).
00:31:45	IVY	Is this with two?
00:31:46	Researcher	Yeah, yeah.
00:31:46	OLIVE	I feel like that's very close to number two. It's very similar.
00:31:50	AMINA	But I think that it is... but I think they probably are separate because if that... if you tell us what you expect, then we can take what we need or they can tell us what we need or its that feeling equipped, isn't it? Equipped to deal with. Because I think what we've all agreed is that the role does change, it's like this, this, this, this, so if you... because the need of the children seems to be increasing, even if you're just a TA, not an INA, sometimes I think this is way beyond. I'm dealing with stuff that I think I'm doing it right, but I don't know (overlapping conversation).
00:32:27	OLIVE	Well, sometimes we are asked to do things... sort of social worker level, isn't it, which are like (overlapping conversation).
00:32:32	AMINA	Yeah. So I think there's that. You just want to feel like...
00:32:36	OLIVE	But that comes back to that sort of almost observing, doesn't it, you know. And that training and sharing the best practice and (overlapping conversation).
00:32:45	AMINA	But that's about us saying I need this.
00:32:48	Researcher	Is it about advocacy? There's something about you feeling like you can see that and you... not only you can say that but you (overlapping conversation).
00:32:56	IVY	(Overlapping conversation).
00:32:58	GRACE	For us (overlapping conversation).
00:32:59	Researcher	For you, for you. Yeah.

00:33:00	AMINA	But I suppose you...
00:33:02	OLIVE	I think the thing is quite often this is in the moment, isn't it, where you're asked to do things, and it's now (overlapping conversation).
00:33:07	FREYA	Yeah, everything's just sudden, isn't it.
00:33:08	OLIVE	There's never (overlapping conversation) pre-prepped to this, there's no warnings.
00:33:13	IVY	It's like the preparedness.
00:33:14	OLIVE	It's like, "Okay, can you suddenly take this class?"
00:33:14	Researcher	It's the preparedness in the end, yeah.
00:33:16	AMINA	But then you'd want... but you would then want... you do need... you probably... some people do need an advocate because I think some people find it very easy to speak up. And to whoever that is, whether that'd be the head or the, you know. But loads of people don't have that. So I suppose that's where you need that avenue where you can say it without feeling vilified or.
00:33:43	GRACE	We've put like a suggestion box (overlapping conversation) staff room which people could just write it on a slip.
00:33:49	IVY	Yeah. Or having regular kind of meetings with say you're in year one, all the TAs from year one get together and say what are we actually doing? What do we need to be able to this? What...? And also (overlapping conversation).
00:34:00	FREYA	Yeah, what's working, what isn't working.
00:34:02	Researcher	So is that that sharing space?
00:34:03	IVY	Because it's like we have TA meetings but it feels like we're just (overlapping conversation).
00:34:07	FREYA	Talk tats , yeah.
00:34:08	IVY	Right, these are the things that you need to know. So there's no bringing forth, bringing up, "Oh, actually (overlapping conversation)."
00:34:17	FREYA	Yeah, yeah.
00:34:18	AMINA	[inaudible 00:34:19].
00:34:19	FREYA	A union rep but like a TA rep. Yeah.
00:34:22	TAYLOR	Yeah, a TA rep and bring—have a think tank, a think tank in the school which includes...
00:34:29	IVY	That's a proper TA meeting.
00:34:29	TAYLOR	...TAs as well as any other members of staff around the school.
00:34:35	AMINA	And I think you... again, I think like in school's defence as well. I think we have to... like as TAs, we always have to remember that we have to deal with what's possible. Say, "Yeah, okay, in

		ideal world we'd go on these elaborate training courses." But we're not there, they haven't got the money or the time to do this, so we have to deal within the realms of feasibility. And sometimes we can't do everything, we want to, we can't make the impact of what to do, we can't... but we have to think about, "Okay, what can we do?"
00:35:10	FREYA	Yeah, what can we do in that time.
00:35:10	AMINA	And how can we make that better and actually, you know.
00:35:13	IVY	That's why observing somebody doing the course or the thing that you're going to be doing.
00:35:20	FREYA	And speaking up when you really can't make it fit, you know. I'm saying this, that I haven't... that is not enough time for me to do that properly.
00:35:27	IVY	Yeah. And then being listened to and it's like, "Oh, we can do it."
00:35:29	OLIVE	And being confident enough to do that.
00:35:31	FREYA	Yeah.
00:35:32	IVY	Yeah.
00:35:32	Researcher	So is there something about self-advocacy and support that can we...? Do you feel that is an area?
00:35:42	AMINA	I think support is good because support feels like that falls into training and...
00:35:47	FREYA	And value.
00:35:48	AMINA	Yeah, again. So actually feeling supported to do your role, so... that you don't...
00:35:58	Researcher	It's hard, isn't it, (overlapping conversations). It's very hard to come up with a title. But yeah, but it's not only feeling like you are supported. It's feeling like you will be listened to and you are... you can... you know, that suggestion about having a place to put your—some questions or do you have that space to share, to problem solve with other TAs? It is about the self-advocacy again, you know. Even if it's not you saying that's what I need but having that collective and that support.
00:36:35	FREYA	It's positive as well. It's, you know, seeking a positive outcome, aren't you, with this that will benefit everybody.
00:36:42	Researcher	Yeah, yeah.
00:36:44	FREYA	Yeah, what can we do in that time? You know, it's not whistle blowing or like negative in anyway. It's trying to find a way to do all the things that are required of you.
00:36:57	Researcher	Yeah, so yeah.
00:36:59	AMINA	I don't know what you could call it.
00:36:59	OLIVE	It's definitely (overlapping conversation).

00:37:02	AMINA	It's like sort of facilitating of, I don't know, a positive...
00:37:05	FREYA	I mean, there is the thing where you had navigating hierarchies and seeking inclusion, I don't know whether that kind of... something around that fits this because, you know, if you think about the hierarchies of school and how we interact with each other, and trying to find a way for... and to be seen to be fitting in to that, and fed back to.
00:37:32	IVY	So maybe you need to have something like navigating because it's navigating the best practice, navigating of how and when you do things.
00:37:45	OLIVE	And navigating the support of the role.
00:37:47	ISHA	Like practice facilitation. Would that work maybe?
00:37:50	Researcher	Anything that you feel like it will encompass what you...
00:37:54	ISHA	Maybe, yeah.
00:37:56	IVY	Yeah.
00:37:56	AMINA	I just think it's just...
00:37:59	IVY	It's so many things, isn't it.
00:38:01	AMINA	It's just like it's a big... I mean, support is the...
00:38:05	OLIVE	Key.
00:38:05	FREYA	Key, yeah.
00:38:06	AMINA	I think it's the kind of thing there in terms of, you know.
00:38:11	IVY	And supporting one another.
00:38:12	FREYA	Yeah.
00:38:14	IVY	It's like with them supporting us, supporting one another, supporting the children because it's about...
00:38:19	Researcher	What if it's support is key or something like that?
00:38:21	FREYA	Yeah, something like that.
00:38:22	AMINA	Yeah.
00:38:23	Researcher	Yeah. Yeah?
00:38:23	FREYA	Yeah, let's go for that.
00:38:25	Researcher	If I change anything, I'll send an email to you during—no, I'm not.
00:38:30	OLIVE	On Christmas day.
00:38:30	Researcher	Christmas day, maybe, oh. Okay. I mean, you can use the email. If you get stuck during your holidays thinking about this and you can't sleep, send an email to everyone, we can agree. Okay. Support—support is key, okay.
00:38:53	OLIVE	So yeah, in all areas, isn't it.

00:38:54	FREYA	Yeah.
00:38:55	IVY	But there's so many subheadings to that, isn't there.
00:38:57	Researcher	Yeah. We will go through the subheadings, definitely. And I mean, this can be all of it. It can be three or we can have a fourth one. So we have the respectful communication, we have the role expectations, we have the support where we can, you know, talk about advocacy and talking about being able to ask for that support. This connection with students, do you feel like it comes under anything and the respectful communication within, you know, what you said or do you feel it needs to be an extra area? Do you feel like feeling recognised and appreciated...?
00:39:37	AMINA	I think recognition should perhaps be a thing because I think if you... like you said, that you're... I think everyone appreciates the fact that, they are asking sometimes things that they probably don't even want to ask. But it's like if you feel like that's recognised, then at least it makes it... you want to do it rather than... I think recognition should perhaps be a thing because I think if you... like you said, that you're... I think everyone appreciates the fact that, they are asking sometimes things that they probably don't even want to ask. But it's like if you feel like that's recognised, then at least it makes it... you want to do it rather than... Because what we were discussing in our group, you know, when does something that you do as an extra become part of just an expectation and that's normal.
00:40:16	FREYA	And what else are you going to be expected to do.
00:40:17	AMINA	You come in half an hour early every day. At what point do they expect you to come in early rather than going, "Thank you so much for coming in early," and say, "You're late". (overlapping conversation)."
00:40:28	FREYA	Because you're on time.
00:40:30	AMINA	Yeah, do you know what I mean? (Overlapping conversation).
00:40:31	FREYA	Yeah, yeah. No, I know exactly what you mean.
00:40:33	AMINA	They very quickly stop seeing that as extra and they start thinking, "Well, that's just normal," so. But again, that's our... that is our responsibility to also have set that expectation and say, This is... I am doing this extra.
00:40:59	FREYA	Mm-hmm.
00:41:00	Researcher	There was something that I heard last week that was something about not only within the school community but, you know, the society in general where we live, that don't recognise the work of TAs. Well, it's not only... so I heard something about... yeah.
00:41:17	IVY	We're not just babysitting children or we're not just like (overlapping conversation).
00:41:23	AVA	They just don't see I think that's (overlapping conversations).

00:41:24	IVY	They really don't (Overlapping conversations).
00:41:25	OLIVE	People don't know... they think we're just like parent helpers, you know, that do a bit of filing, a bit of sticking and reading
00:41:31	IVY	And that's why last week both... I was going to say it's like sometimes you're really unsure as to whether you should tell your friends "I'm a TA" or you think "I'm just a TA". And actually, they have no idea what you do (overlapping conversation).
00:41:44	AVA	And it is that, it is that "I'm just TA". And I'm like if we put everything and that we turn around and went, "Well, that's just what I do." I think we realise there's that four or five different roles that we do all in one that we kind of go, "Well, I just do that because it's my job." And it's like, "Well, it's not." If we looked back at what this role was supposed to be, the amount of things that we've picked up and we've adapted to doing it would be massive.
00:42:06	FREYA	And I think if we look at what we do in a day and think, "How on earth do you manage to fit that all in?"
00:42:10	AVA	We turn around and go, "We don't."
00:42:13	IVY	If you were to professionalise the job, the society would then think, "Oh, I see, it is an important job."
00:42:20	FREYA	Yeah.
00:42:20	Researcher	Uh-huh, uh-huh. So it is—so there is space for like one area about appreciation and recognition.
00:42:26	FREYA	Recognition, I think...
00:42:27	Researcher	Recognition?
00:42:28	FREYA	Yeah.
00:42:29	AMINA	Yeah. Recognition of impact maybe. So I think like making an impact for me is the only... is the real reason why, it's why (overlapping conversation)...
00:42:37	IVY	That's the reason why, yeah.
00:42:39	AMINA	...you think, "Well, actually, there's not many jobs where you can make an impact on someone's actual life." And you can't always make an impact where you think, "Well, actually, I think I have."
00:42:51	OLIVE	There's a chance that you can, isn't it.
00:42:52	AMINA	And that is a kind of privilege, quite a privilege.
00:42:55	AVA	Even when it's like you look back and there's... the other thing that about some of the kids that we've had that have just got in year one now, there'll be going, "If you look at them in reception, there's no way they will be doing this stuff that they do." And you look and you go, "Well, that's a team effort. Like that's all of us coming together and that's why they are like that now." And they think it's one that... and if we do... again, it's

		almost those little victories that we look at them and we go, “Well, actually we were a part of that.” But it’s almost us acknowledging that, “But we had a part to do with that”
00:43:20	GRACE	And that’s why we put up with everything else.
00:43:23	AVA	Yeah.
00:43:23	GRACE	With the job (overlapping conversation).
00:43:24	IVY	And even on a daily basis when you go home and you think, “Oh, such and such did that. Become much better at this.” So that’s why I loved nursing (overlapping conversation).
00:43:33	FREYA	When you have a child in an intervention group and then they make such great progress, that they no longer need to come to the intervention and they’re back in the class. And you have to look at that and see how that was very much your success with that child.
00:43:47	AMINA	Yes, yeah.
00:43:48	Researcher	Would you say that this is the main reason why you’re still a TA?
00:43:54	IVY	Yeah, yeah.
00:43:55	FREYA	Yeah. Just tiny little successes and spotting them, and acknowledging them. Yeah.
00:44:03	Researcher	What - if you have to name one thing that keeps you in the job? Do you know?
00:44:08	FREYA	The children.
00:44:11	TAYLOR	The children are sometimes the only (overlapping conversation).
00:44:14	AVA	Only I like to work frankly.
00:44:16	TAYLOR	They appreciate you, they really d- yeah (overlapping conversation).
00:44:18	OLIVE	(Overlapping conversation) the convenient... if you have... I mean, so S you don’t have children, so why are you in the job? It’s just interesting.
00:44:27	ISHA	I think it’s just knowing that you’ve helped them with something that’s important. Like I’ve worked in a nursery before and it’s kind of similar to that. But being a TA is kind of like, oh, when they’re, I don’t know, 25, they’ll remember when they had an amazing TA and it (overlapping conversation).
00:44:43	OLIVE	Yeah, yeah.
00:44:43	FREYA	When they shout across the street, when they’re now in secondary school, and you think, “Oh, you didn’t like me at all but somehow you seem to remember who I am and you’re waving at me.”
00:44:55	OLIVE	Yeah. Yeah.

00:44:57	Researcher	So sorry, I will need to time myself because I'm terrible. I love hearing you guys but I don't want to keep you later. So I'm just going to time it and we will have about 10 minutes per area basically. So let's try to really just talk about the one that we are looking at in order, okay? And thinking about the respectful communication, how is it now? How do you feel you are now in terms of respectful communication?
00:45:38	IVY	We're not included in a lot of communication.
00:45:42	Researcher	Mm-hmm.
00:45:44	AMINA	Well, I think you have to... if you don't seek it, it doesn't come. If you seek it, you can.
00:45:49	IVY	It's like asking, asking, asking all the time. What's happening about this? What's happening...?
00:45:53	FREYA	Yeah. And trying to remember to ask, when you're trying to remember lots of other stuff.
00:45:56	IVY	And even from the smallest things such as—well, it's not a small thing—but being given the plan for the week before the week happens, so that actually it would be...
00:46:06	GRACE	Yeah, I think also be prepared.
00:46:07	IVY	...prepared.
00:46:09	Researcher	So you don't feel like you (overlapping conversation).
00:46:10	IVY	In some way, even though those things don't happen or things change, at least you have an overview of what's expected of the children.
00:46:22	Researcher	Yeah, yeah.
00:46:23	FREYA	So some teachers are great at doing that and other teachers aren't, so it's that sort of lack of consistency.
00:46:29	Researcher	Right, right.
00:46:30	AVA	And that's really is the teacher that you work with because I know that I've worked with teachers and they've been brilliant at that and they catch you in the morning they'll go, "Just a heads up, this is what we're doing today." And then you've got teachers that like it's a passing moment of, "Well, we're doing this," because they're all...
00:46:41	FREYA	Because they're all self-absorbed.
00:46:43	AVA	And I do think (overlapping conversation).
00:46:43	IVY	(Overlapping conversation) I know the... I ask, you know, "What is it we're doing today," kind of thing. But it would be nice to have the plan that they kind of set out.
00:46:53	Researcher	Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. So now you feel like you're not included in communication, you have to seek a lot of that information by yourselves. You feel like you're forgotten sometimes. You would like to receive that plan on the week or at

		least have that communication with the teacher and know the expectations for the day. And you feel that there's a lack of consistency in ways, in the ways in which teachers or an SLT maybe talk to you, like communicate with you. Is that right?
00:47:23	FREYA	Yeah.
00:47:23	AVA	Mm, mm.
00:47:24	Researcher	What would be...? Is there anything that is positive regards to respectful communication now.
00:47:31	GRACE	I mean, we get... it has changed and we do get sent emails, like if a child gets a diagnosis, it's sent around so that everyone is aware.
00:47:41	FREYA	We've got a good SENCo, a really good SENCo assistant and a good SENCo. But this SENCo assistant is there more and is kind of like shop floor if you like and kind of going into classrooms and catching up with people. Whereas the SENCo, always seems to be in meetings and is really hard to get hold of. But the SENCo assistant is really good. So I'll get a lot of emails with sort of updated speech and language and stuff like that from them.
00:48:10	OLIVE	Okay, so but you're both INAs , yeah.
00:48:12	GRACE	Mm-hmm.
00:48:12	FREYA	Yeah.
00:48:13	OLIVE	But we don't get (overlapping conversation).
00:48:15	GRACE	So this goes out (overlapping conversation).
00:48:16	OLIVE	Does that go to TAs as well?
00:48:19	FREYA	Well, because I get the one for the child who I am the TA for, so I get that. But yeah, I did... actually, I did used to get quite a lot for the small group that I had. It was a bigger group than the small group I have now. And I did get sent IEPs and stuff like that from the SENCo assistant. But it's finding the time to actually read it. When am I supposed to do that? Because I sometimes get planning and sometimes I don't. And so, you know.
00:48:51	GRACE	Well, our head teacher is very aware of not bombarding everyone with emails. But I think I would rather be bombarded (overlapping conversation).
00:48:59	IVY	I'd rather have the information (overlapping conversation).
00:49:00	FREYA	Yeah. So I just put a flag on my email and I think, "Right, I'll try and remember to come back to that." Yeah.
00:49:08	Researcher	So what would be desirable? What would be the ideal situation in terms of respectful communication? What would happen?
00:49:16	OLIVE	Well, I feel like you—sorry.
00:49:18	FREYA	Sorry.

00:49:18	OLIVE	Yeah, I feel like that some of these you could address by having a very brief one-on-one conversation with your teacher every morning, so.
00:49:30	FREYA	Either on a Friday or a Monday. Like Friday for the week ahead or Monday.
00:49:34	OLIVE	You know, you come in, so you... but the trouble is, it's all down to money, isn't it, because actually if they can pay us for 15 minutes extra a day, you could address a lot of that in that 15 minutes.
00:49:49	AVA	I mean, it's nicely... like if it was a before work thing or an after, I know TAs that I work with now that would refuse to do it because it would be a, "I'm not staying past my time." So there's an aspect of it's not... and it's like actually where do you find time in the day to do that kind of thing.
00:50:02	OLIVE	Well, you can't do it in the day (overlapping conversation).
00:50:02	AVA	No, so it's almost a unless... because the money isn't there, the nicest way, the money isn't there for them to be able to do that (overlapping conversation).
00:50:09	FREYA	No, and how you're meant to take the time back in lieu whenever you're sort of in-set day, there's training.
00:50:12	AVA	Exactly, there's training or this, that (overlapping conversation).
00:50:14	Researcher	It's something about finding the time to have that respectful communication, is it?
00:50:17	FREYA	Mm-hmm.
00:50:18	OLIVE	Mm, yeah.
00:50:19	FREYA	Yeah.
00:50:20	TAYLOR	There was a time when it was planned that we would meet during class assemblies like a year at a time but that just fizzled out. It was an idea that never...
00:50:32	IVY	I think that's wholly the reason why I came in early because it means that the teacher is in a fairly relaxed state, so you can chat about worries you have about different children and find out what is going to be happening in the day.
00:50:49	Researcher	Mm, mm.
00:50:50	IVY	But otherwise if I came in on the dot, I wouldn't have a clue.
00:50:53	Researcher	So you would... so in an ideal world, you would come in, you have that time with the teacher to talk about what's happening. What about respectful communication in regards to SLT? What would that look like? What would be respectful communication?
00:51:11	IVY	How close are they to the shop floor? I don't know.

00:51:15	Researcher	Mm, mm.
00:51:18	OLIVE	I mean, with SLT... gosh.
00:51:27	AVA	I think to be honest like (overlapping conversation)...
00:51:29	FREYA	Like there are many parts to get hold of, aren't there.
00:51:29	AVA	...(overlapping conversation) acknowledgement that actually we're part of that conversation as well because I'm not really sure how much... and that's... I'm not sure how much SLT really notice, acknowledge that we do the stuff that we do. If they're not with us on a regular basis, they're not going to see it. Like even if it's like a walk around the corridors, I don't think they're going to register that...
00:51:48	AMINA	I don't think they might be bothered.
00:51:49	AVA	Yeah. But yeah, I agree. I'm just not sure it hits their roster.
00:51:54	OLIVE	I mean, yeah, I don't know what happens in your schools. But in our school, SLT are not in the... I mean, they're not in the class a lot of the time.
00:52:02	GRACE	My teachers are (overlapping conversation).
00:52:04	AVA	Well, a couple of ours are, yeah.
00:52:06	GRACE	Yeah.
00:52:06	OLIVE	And yeah, there's an expectation to put upon everyone else when they're not actually even in the class sometimes.
00:52:15	AMINA	I mean, last year, well, with a teacher I worked with for a few years, Every morning she would inform me of what child was doing what, what email been sent by what parent. She was really, really good at that. And we always found out. And I never, ever arrive 15 minutes early. So it really is possible. She just had the desire to share that with me. So I think if I have the desire to know it, the teacher's got a desire to share it. Of course, it's possible. Because while they're coming in and putting their coats on, "Okay, school starts at 8:45." But it doesn't really start at 8:45, they're just kind of flapping around, you know. So there is always five minutes or, you know okay, they...
00:52:58	IVY	Yeah. I suppose it depends that you're talking about because if their children are in the room kind of (overlapping conversation).
00:53:03	AMINA	Well, we've done it, we've done it. We've talked about really sensitive stuff and we just go out and she will stand in the doorway and so that they can see her or whoever needs to not be heard, I'll stand in a certain place, so. So it's absolutely possible without it being some big, huge thing. And there were a lot of things. So actually, I think that really is possible with...
00:53:27	IVY	Do you think it depends...? Because I don't know, what year group was that...
00:53:31	AMINA	Year six, always year six.

00:53:33	IVY	Yeah. Because in reception and year one, that is not possible at all.
00:53:39	AMINA	But that's a bit of both. That's the difference of the role, isn't it, because in year six or probably in juniors, it is, because they're going to sit there on their own.
00:53:46	IVY	Yeah.
00:53:47	TAYLOR	Thinking about SLT, has anybody worked with teachers that tell you how they sort of doubt how well they're doing or they're sort of questioning, then yeah they are experienced, amazing teachers. And so that culture is coming... it must be coming from the top. But the SLT are putting in so much pressure on then to meet expectations, is that why the government (overlapping conversation).
00:54:20	FREYA	And not telling them when they're doing a good job.
00:54:21	TAYLOR	And so it's creating this culture where, you know, and then if...
00:54:25	OLIVE	Yeah, a very confident experienced teachers...
00:54:28	TAYLOR	...doubt in the (overlapping conversation).
00:54:29	OLIVE	...anxiety and leaving the profession.
00:54:31	FREYA	And taking retirement, yeah.
00:54:33	OLIVE	And we have seen a lot of that (overlapping conversation).
00:54:34	FREYA	The last two years, loads of our experienced teachers have gone.
00:54:38	TAYLOR	And then that must... you know, because they're under so much pressure from above to then also make us feel appreciated and da, da, da, da.
00:54:51	OLIVE	If they're not feeling (overlapping conversation).
00:54:52	T4	If they're not feeling it themselves...? It needs to come from the top that...
00:54:54	FREYA	Yeah. Which is what we've said about being valued and appreciated, yeah, and for us that goes to the children. Yeah.
00:55:00	AMINA	And I only think, you know, again, the teachers that I work with who do, do that, they are very sort of overworked, overwhelmed over everything. But I kind of always think, "Well." And I think again the parental barrage of like emails and kind of complaint and... it's actually... now, that is not going to change, it's only going to get worse. So the only think, yeah, that we can change (overlapping conversation). And I think sometimes we're so set on, "Right, we'll change it. Pay us more. Give us more time." Well, actually, there isn't. They're not going to. There is no more time. So what can we...? We have to change within this about what we do. And I always think, you know, if they're ever going to train people, teachers, whoever, it should be resilience because actually if people are equipped to go, have the confidence

		to go “No”, and have the confidence to go, “Okay, I’ll hear that. But do you know what, it’s not (overlapping conversation).”
00:56:02	GRACE	No, see, I disagree.
00:56:03	OLIVE	That’s assertiveness as well.
00:56:05	GRACE	Because I think we shouldn’t... they shouldn’t have to put up with being treated like that if we had a decent government. I mean, all of it comes from the government really (overlapping conversation).
00:56:15	FREYA	But I think we have to hold each other up, don’t we...
00:56:17	GRACE	We do.
00:56:17	FREYA	...you know, and...
00:56:18	Researcher	So there some things that are possible, some things...
00:56:21	FREYA	There’s not a lot we can do about the current government.
00:56:22	GRACE	Yeah, you have to be realistic.
00:56:23	FREYA	Not yet.
00:56:24	AMINA	But that’s what I mean. Yes, ideally that they would be, one, a completely different government. The two would be more funding, there’d be, you know, there would be a recognition that this is a professional job, that what we do is really important. But actually, maybe that will happen one day, but it’s not going to (overlapping conversation).
00:56:44	GRACE	I’d just say that (overlapping conversation) it’s like [inaudible 00:56:48] as a way to make children kind of put up with... like I’ve got a son who’s autistic and, oh, he needs to be more resilient.
00:57:00	AMINA	I don’t think the children need to be more resilient.
00:57:01	GRACE	No, it doesn’t. Yeah, no, I’ve just a thing about the word, it’s just that word.
00:57:05	AMINA	I think that sometimes that the adults need to learn how to do that because I’ve seen teachers just crumble because they feel that the management don’t have them. So what there isn’t now is this kind of buffer between teacher and like parent, there’s no one going, “Do you know what, that’s my team...”
00:57:26	FREYA	Yeah, that’s what we need.
00:57:26	AMINA	“I won’t have at that, I will take that.”
00:57:27	GRACE	See, our head teacher is quite good with that, she will get involved. Yeah.
00:57:30	AMINA	So obviously it sounds like yours is really good and ours used to be and we’ve got a different one now and the buffer is gone. And so it’s almost like you’re on your own (overlapping conversation).

00:57:40	FREYA	The same for us now.
00:57:40	OLIVE	And the parents always right.
00:57:42	AMINA	And you don't feel like someones got your back and, you know.
00:57:44	GRACE	Senior leadership, are they like on the gates? Are they visible when the parents come in? Yeah
00:57:48	AMINA	Yeah, yeah, (overlapping conversation). So you know, it's pretty thankless I'm sure.
00:57:52	GRACE	Yeah.
00:57:52	IVY	I think parents are much more—much more involved in their children's education and much more kind of connected to the schools than my parents were because they haven't got a clue. And so they're expecting more. It's like the NHS as well, it's like patients, patients' relatives. More and more and more, they thought knew everything because of the internet and whatever.
00:58:15	AVA	Well, I'm not sure that parents are more connected to the learning and it's just more of a, "What can you do for my child?" Sometimes it just feels like, "Oh, well, they can't do this." I'm like, "Okay, but we are doing our part. What are you doing your part?" And sometimes I feel like that's the missing bit. Not for every parent. But for some parents, it's just that it's all the pressure is on us to do the stuff and it's just like, "Well, actually, some of the stuff we need you guys to be doing out of (overlapping conversation)." There's a bit of a balance of it because it's like some of the stuff that we've done, like our parents have talked... like we talked for some of our reception at the moment, we're talking about like toilet training and things.
00:58:54	FREYA	And it's huge, isn't it, yeah.
00:58:54	AVA	And it's a really hard thing to kind of go... because they'll turn around to us and go, "Well, we're having to do this and we're having to use nappies." I'm like, "Well, I appreciate that but actually that's your job, that's a parent's role to do that. We will happily support that but that's your role to toilet train your children."
00:59:09	FREYA	Yeah.
00:59:10	Researcher	So I think there's a little bit about the role expectation which we'll go in the next bit. But also the respectful communication from what I'm hearing needs to come from teachers, SLT, parents, meaning it involves everyone, not just, you know, not just one person or the SENCo, or. It's almost like a culture that needs to be developed within the school. So just because I...
00:59:42	GRACE	Like working as a team?
00:59:43	FREYA	Yeah.

00:59:44	Researcher	Yeah, yeah. So just because I know I'm over time, just very brief, what would happen if things stayed the same? What would happen? What would be the future of...?
00:59:59	GRACE	People would leave.
00:59:59	FREYA	I think more people would leave, yeah.
01:00:01	AVA	You will have a faster turnover I think of staff.
01:00:02	FREYA	Yeah, definitely. You wouldn't have people staying for like decades.
01:00:06	AMINA	Which is to detriment of the school and the children.
01:00:09	OLIVE	Well, we're seeing that already I think. I think we're already seeing that.
01:00:12	FREYA	I think it'll just increase.
01:00:13	OLIVE	At our school, no one left, ever. And now we have got quite a big turnover ourselves.
01:00:18	FREYA	It's the same for us.
01:00:19	Researcher	What do you mean? What was the time where people just shifted?
01:00:23	FREYA	People just stayed till they retired and like in support staff...
01:00:25	OLIVE	Yeah, you wouldn't go to leave (overlapping conversation).
01:00:27	FREYA	We had support staff who are like in their 60s.
01:00:29	AMINA	But I don't think (overlapping conversation) it was COVID.
01:00:31	AVA	No, I don't think it is.
01:00:33	OLIVE	I think ours was we increased in size and it was change of head.
01:00:37	Researcher	Okay, okay, (overlapping conversation).
01:00:38	FREYA	Yeah. And I would say ours was people retiring and not being replaced, mm-hmm. So then the work load increases, so people that are close to her time and suddenly think, "Oh, do you know, this is too much of me, [inaudible 01:00:48]," and then, yeah.
01:00:48	Researcher	Okay, right. And what would...?
01:00:50	AMINA	I think it's just having an open... having an open avenue to speak and be honest because I think what... because it being culture...
01:00:59	IVY	Which comes down to respect.
01:01:00	AMINA	...in every... in life, generally, is that we talk to each other and we complain to each other and we say, "Oh, this person did

		this and I can't do this." And there's this huge like culture of that but not (overlapping conversation).
01:01:14	FREYA	Not taking it to the next step.
01:01:15	AMINA	(Overlapping conversation) someone who actually can do something.
01:01:17	FREYA	Yeah, not taking to the line management. Yeah.
01:01:18	AMINA	You get angry with each other, you're angry, and you then make that... but not... but it's got to go somewhere. So they need to create that avenue where it will go somewhere. And again, that's people's responsibility to take it somewhere.
01:01:31	Researcher	Right, right.
01:01:31	FREYA	Yeah. Because if it doesn't get taken somewhere then it just... you rant, you feel better momentarily, you feel better for having offloaded, but it'll just happen again.
01:01:41	IVY	(Overlapping conversation) takes it with them.
01:01:42	FREYA	Yeah, and it just happens again.
01:01:44	IVY	Because it brings down the whole morale (overlapping conversation).
01:01:46	GRACE	(Overlapping conversation) it kind of goes back to that, doesn't it, yeah.
01:01:50	FREYA	Some of the support staff rep, so that's somebody who, you know. Yeah. I like the idea of that.
01:01:55	Researcher	So that would be the con, sorry. What would be the pros of changing to, you know, a more like a...? To have that culture, to feel like you've achieved that? Even if it's not the ideal, but.
01:02:13	AVA	I actually think it would be improve relationships, not just within the classrooms, but school wide it would improve relationships.
01:02:18	FREYA	And I think at home, outside (overlapping conversation).
01:02:19	AVA	You've got (overlapping conversation), "Actually, look, I've been asked to do this. Do you know where I can go someone that can support me?" And go, "Yeah, sure," kind of thing. I think it would massively improve. And again build that kind of confidence and go, "Look, I don't know if I can do that. Can you send me to somebody?" That, or within the school, "Do you know of anybody that's done it before me that I can kind of go I can shadow them for a bit or I can observe them for a bit?" But I think it would improve that. And just if we knew that we can turn around and you could talk to some of your SLT, your staff and stuff like that, it will make it so much easier because you wouldn't almost have that build-up of resentment or argument or that festering, on that negativity that just build until something happens and it explodes.
01:02:58	FREYA	Yeah.

01:02:59	Researcher	Do you feel people would go for the job a bit more? Would stay a bit longer as well?
01:03:05	FREYA	I think retention would be... would improve, yeah, massively.
01:03:09	Researcher	Okay, okay.
01:03:09	FREYA	And I think, you know, if you're happy in your job then the chances are then that happiness will stay with you when you're outside of your work. And you know, feeling valued at work means that you should be feeling valued outside of work and it all... it makes everything better, doesn't it?
01:03:26	AMINA	You don't want to go to work and be unhappy every day. I don't want to go to work and listen to people that are unhappy every day. And there's nothing... and some people are intrinsically negative and they love it, they love moaning about everything (overlapping conversation) about everything, so you can't always... (overlapping conversation)
01:03:38	FREYA	And they always end up in schools though.
01:03:41	AMINA	But like I don't want to listen to that, I don't want to come to work. I do the job because it's convenient and it's joyful. And if it's not convenient or joyful then what's the point?
01:03:49	GRACE	And the children pick up, don't they, if you're kind of stressed out or if you're happy as well, they can (overlapping conversation).
01:03:57	Researcher	Sorry, I need to go to the next one, otherwise, we won't do all of them. In terms of role expectations, how do you feel it is now? How are the expectations now?
01:04:10	IVY	I'm kind of unsure as to what it is. One day it's one thing and then the next day you have something different.
01:04:14	GRACE	You have to expect, just to go in one day and then be given something else to do (overlapping conversation).
01:04:20	FREYA	Yeah, yeah.
01:04:21	GRACE	You think you know what you're going to be doing.
01:04:21	OLIVE	See, I quite like the variation.
01:04:23	AMINA	I do as well, I have no issues with that.
01:04:26	FREYA	But I don't mind variation if I'm given the time to prepare for it. If it's sudden and I feel like I'm being thrown into something without preparation.
01:04:35	IVY	So it depends on what it is, (overlapping conversation).
01:04:39	FREYA	You know, somebody gives me some worksheets, like 10 minutes before the class starts, that's great. That's fine, I can look at the worksheets, and I can work out what we're doing, and I can get everything I need and then I'm okay, and that's great. But if I'm suddenly like, "Oh, please, just take this job. We're doing

		something. And I've just realised that they can't access this at all, so take them out and do something."
01:04:59	OLIVE	Do something, (overlapping conversation) do something.
01:05:01	FREYA	Plus where to take them. Oh my God, yeah.
01:05:04	IVY	Yeah, yeah.
01:05:05	AMINA	Yeah. I think that's a massive problem actually (overlapping conversation).
01:05:08	FREYA	It's a huge (overlapping conversations).
01:05:08	IVY	(Overlapping conversations) things.
01:05:10	AMINA	Probably in any school, certainly not in our school. There's nowhere to take any children (overlapping conversation).
01:05:13	IVY	(Overlapping conversation) is ridiculous.
01:05:15	OLIVE	Yes, space and times are missing .
01:05:17	IVY	Yeah.
01:05:18	Researcher	Okay, okay. And you said some variation, you know, you enjoy some variation. Like what is good about having variation in this role?
01:05:28	IVY	We gain lots of different skills that you can then use at different times.
01:05:32	FREYA	And it is good to work with children that are working at different levels, you know, I do enjoy that. I just don't enjoy it when it's two children who come to me (overlapping conversation) who are so different from each other. That it's huge. But if I've got one child, one like for half an hour, and then I've got another child working at maybe the next level for another half an hour, it gives me loads of things to think about for my lower ability child to aspire to and how to get them there, you know, and I'm thinking, "Oh, actually, they would get that. So maybe if I use that as a way in with that." And it's just really good for...
01:06:08	AVA	I think the variety does then mean that you can be supportive towards other people. So we've had a couple of younger TAs start with us kind of thing that actually this is their first role, don't have a lot of experience. And actually they turned around and gone, "I don't know how to do that." And we've gone, "Oh, why don't you try doing it like this?" And actually having the variation, having the you've done lots of... even if it's just little parts, you can turn around and go, "Why don't you try it like that? I've done it before. Can't it work for them? Why don't you give it a try," kind of thing. And it just means actually you can be supportive of one another. And again, that builds that retention of actually they want to stay because it's like I'm not... even the TAs are leaving me on my own kind of thing, actually, it brings them in to that community and they want to stay a bit more.
01:06:47	FREYA	And that there's not one way of working as well. That it is okay to work in lots of different ways and change it around, yeah.

01:06:53	OLIVE	Should there be a ranking or like a scale for TAs? So you say, you know, someone comes in, we've got no experience. But they're paid the same (overlapping conversation) who has...
01:07:04	FREYA	Oh, don't, we have that. We lost two members of staff this year because they wouldn't move them. They've been with the school for 15 years and they were trying to get on to the next level, level B, and they weren't... there was no intro —no,
01:07:16	AMINA	They wanted to go, move to level?
01:07:18	FREYA	B? Was it B or C? C, we're on... well, we're on B, yeah, they wanted to go to C.
01:07:24	IVY	What constitutes a C then?
01:07:27	FREYA	Well, when you looked at it on paper, that's (overlapping conversation).
01:07:30	OLIVE	Oh, that's a D. Yeah, high level's a D.
01:07:32	FREYA	Yeah, high level's a D. So we fulfil it all.
01:07:35	OLIVE	I'm wondering within the B. Within the B, you know, there'd be a starting...
01:07:42	FREYA	There is different pay scales within the B.
01:07:43	OLIVE	Is there?
01:07:44	FREYA	Yeah. There's different points.
01:07:47	OLIVE	Well, I don't (overlapping conversation).
01:07:49	AMINA	Do you know what, I think what the big problem is the expectation is, and this is why I say (overlapping conversation).
01:07:52	FREYA	Maybe it's just that C is the view point. Yeah.
01:07:56	AMINA	You know, she was young and vibrant, and brilliant. And she became an HLTA and she'd do all this stuff. But what she'd said, and she left now, is there was nowhere to go. So what's your drive? So you're like, "Well, I could do this, this and this. I could come in early and I could be this and someone could notice." But actually, what's the difference? Because I'm still going to earn the same as that person who does absolutely nothing and doesn't care. So if they give you some sort of thing to work, to drive for, then people will do more because actually they will be a bit more (overlapping conversation).
01:08:30	FREYA	It's the one role where there isn't any progress or, no.
01:08:32	AMINA	There's nowhere to go. You can be an HLTA but that is it, you cannot (overlapping conversation).
01:08:36	FREYA	But then they say to you, "Well, we have to lose a member of staff in order to move you to that," so (overlapping conversation).
01:08:44	AMINA	So actually (overlapping conversation).
01:08:46	OLIVE	The bribery.

01:08:47	FREYA	Yeah.
01:08:49	AMINA	Is to have some sort of goal. There's no goal.
01:08:52	TAYLOR	A target and goal.
01:08:53	AMINA	Yeah, like a (overlapping conversation).
01:08:54	FREYA	We have learning mentors and that is a goal. But we have all the learning mentors, they're not going anywhere. They can't afford to pay for another learning mentor. So you can go in every appraisal and say like, you know, "I'd really like to be a learning mentor as you can see on all your other pieces of paper and... but I know that that's not going to happen, so."
01:09:16	Researcher	It's about their expectations about what you do but also your expectations about your role and how it will change and...
01:09:21	AMINA	(Overlapping conversation) people driven.
01:09:24	FREYA	Hungry, yeah.
01:09:25	AMINA	Because actually...
01:09:26	FREYA	They've got something to strive for.
01:09:26	AMINA	Yeah. Because then you would get your like younger people in who would want to stay and think they could... well, okay, yeah, pathways into something else.
01:09:36	FREYA	We have a lot of people leaving to do teacher training, so.
01:09:39	AVA	We get a lot of that, it's a lot of people that stay with us for the year and that's going on (overlapping conversation) do the teacher thing.
01:09:43	FREYA	Yeah, or speech and language. They do like, you know, some... like a doctorate or something like that. So they're just thinking, "Well, I can't go anywhere else here. I'll make it happen for me somewhere else."
01:09:54	OLIVE	Yeah. But whereas actually a lot of companies you can join, like the private companies obviously, where you would come it at this level. And actually they're being given the opportunity to go to uni one day a week then become a teacher, you know.
01:10:08	FREYA	Yeah. And in your interview that would be talked about, and they'd say, "This is a progression. This is how you're going to..."
01:10:14	OLIVE	(Overlapping conversation) somebody we're interested in, yeah.
01:10:15	FREYA	Yeah.
01:10:15	Researcher	So in terms of the expectation, what are you asked to do now? If you have to make a list, like...?
01:10:23	AMINA	I think it's very different. It would depend on the years (overlapping conversation).

01:10:26	Researcher	Yeah, yeah. But it's, you know, anything that you can be, like teach?
01:10:31	AMINA	We would teach groups, small groups which, well, sometimes small constitutes... I mean, I would take nine sometimes. I sort of think, "I'm teaching nine children maths," like quite high level maths and, you know, in somewhere there's no space, there's no board, no... so it's like, "How am I supposed to do that?"
01:10:49	FREYA	In a corridor, maybe. Children running past.
01:10:50	AMINA	Yeah. How am I supposed to do that? I can't teach maths without a whiteboard, you know, the very least.
01:10:56	OLIVE	And within that nine...
01:10:57	FREYA	And for everyone to have space for their book.
01:10:58	OLIVE	...(overlapping conversation).
01:11:00	Researcher	Yeah, to navigate that range of ability. Well, that intervention, sorry.
01:11:05	AMINA	Well, that would be (overlapping conversation).
01:11:06	TAYLOR	One-to-one reading, lots of one-to-one reading. Group reading in Key Stage 1 (overlapping conversation).
01:11:12	GRACE	Behaviour management.
01:11:13	FREYA	Behaviour management.
01:11:14	AMINA	Behaviour management is massive.
01:11:15	GRACE	Yeah, no, that's a big part.
01:11:16	AMINA	Because some people cannot, haven't got the ability to do that. And if you haven't got behaviour management, you are screwed quite frankly.
01:11:24	FREYA	If you can't get them like that.
01:11:24	AMINA	Yeah, you're done. Wherever (overlapping conversation).
01:11:26	FREYA	Then you've wasted... then all that time has been spent just trying to get them to be quiet. Yeah.
01:11:32	OLIVE	And there's not really much training that goes on with that to be honest.
01:11:34	FREYA	There isn't.
01:11:35	OLIVE	I mean, you can learn obviously with certain teachers and again it goes back to observing maybe other people.
01:11:44	FREYA	And it comes down to confidence as well.
01:11:44	IVY	Because I've picked up so much from the different teachers that I've worked with, it's like, you know, changing your voice or saying something in particular, or. And it depends on the

		child as well. Some of them, they respond to praise. Some of them, they respond to being in-charge or whatever.
01:12:01	Researcher	What about emotional support?
01:12:03	AVA	That's massive (overlapping conversation).
01:12:07	Researcher	Right, so...?
01:12:08	FREYA	Because we hear things that teachers don't, we get... you know, we get confided in which is one of the things I actually love about the role that, you know, we're seen as very much like the immediate trusted adult in their classroom.
01:12:23	Researcher	Mm-hmm. Okay. And what would that expectation look like if it was improved for you, that role expectations?
01:12:33	AMINA	Just I think clear... again, is that feeling equipped of... because it's not their fault that it suddenly has to change sometimes but I suppose the more able we are to go, "That's fine."
01:12:48	OLIVE	Well, I guess it being able to say, "Do you know what, I'll give that a go. It might not go into plan, but." And knowing there's no sort of comeback, but at the same time going, "Well, actually, why don't we get you brilliant of this as well?" So you know, to identify the areas of training.
01:13:08	GRACE	It would help teachers...
01:13:09	IVY	But I think that's a bit... because we don't have appraisals, it's like that's the kind of thing that we should be doing in an appraisal, or.
01:13:14	OLIVE	We always used to have appraisals, always. You should have one a year.
01:13:17	IVY	Because then maybe pay can be achievement led. It's like, "Well, once you got to this level," I think.
01:13:24	Researcher	How is it for you there? You've got appraisals right, around...?
01:13:26	FREYA	Yeah, we have appraisals and I've just had one, and we talked a lot. I talked a lot about trying to balance having a small group and teaching two children that were at different levels. And I actually said, you know, I'm happy to work with both children. I love working with both children, but working with them together at the same time, it's not working. So I'd like us to find a way for me to carry on working with them but separately, you know, if that can happen. So they've gone away with that.
01:13:57	Researcher	Do you feel like you've been listened to? You (overlapping conversation)?
01:13:58	FREYA	Yeah, I did feel like I was listened to, yeah, on that occasion.
01:14:01	AMINA	And who does your appraisal?
01:14:02	FREYA	The SENCo.
01:14:03	IVY	How often do you have them?

01:14:05	FREYA	Once a year.
01:14:06	OLIVE	See, our teachers, and (overlapping conversation).
01:14:08	AMINA	Our teachers, I did have one appraisal in eight years. Actually, it was with a teacher and I just thought, "Well, (overlapping conversation)."
01:14:15	FREYA	Our TAs have been with the SENCo as well, so it's not just... it's everybody.
01:14:18	AMINA	Because I was like, "You're just the..." I don't know, I felt like, "What are you going to do? Nothing. You can't do anything at all."
01:14:24	FREYA	And we were given a sheet to takeaway to write on first to then come in with, with them, anything we want to discuss. But we were given kind of categories to think about. And you know, I felt actually... but something that was said to me and I'm just reflecting on it now because we're talking about, you know, where we feel we can grow within our schools. And she said to me, "Because V, we don't want to lose you." And I just thought, "Oh, great. Is that what I'm aspiring to? Not being let go? Not being lost?" You know, "We want to keep you." So it's not like... and I just, I didn't know whether she meant that in the way that I'm saying, "Well, I wanted to do a different role," and that was... my ideal role would be to be a learning mentor, and that's what I'd really like to do. But I don't know whether she was... because we said, "Oh, there isn't a role here." And she's saying, "But we don't want to lose you." And at the same time I'm thinking, "Well, what you're telling me that if I want to do this, I have to go?" Yeah. It was a bit weird.
01:15:28	Researcher	So in terms of like... so I know it's going to be a bit repetitive but what are the cons of not changing this? Is it the same as the previous one? Do you feel (overlapping conversation)?
01:15:39	FREYA	Yeah, they all tie in. Yeah.
01:15:41	Researcher	And what would be the pros of changing this and having more clear expectations, feeling equipped, having those appraisals, having those targets and goals that you worked towards and feeling [inaudible 01:15:57]?
01:15:57	AMINA	We just get more out of everybody (overlapping conversation).
01:15:59	OLIVE	(Overlapping conversation) stronger staff.
01:16:01	FREYA	Yeah.
01:16:02	OLIVE	Your workforce will be more talented.
01:16:05	AMINA	Positive, you're going to have a positive workforce I think.
01:16:09	GRACE	Do you think the teachers, it would help them? Because they would know what they can or can't ask.
01:16:16	FREYA	Ask of us, mm-hmm.

01:16:18	GRACE	Mm-hmm, yeah.
01:16:19	Researcher	A bit more consistency?
01:16:20	GRACE	Yeah, more consistency
01:16:21	Researcher	Okay. Sorry, I'll have to move on. I mean, when we were trying to come up with the titles, you were discussing that, so I will bring this to this, yeah, just so we go through them. So in terms of support, how do you feel is the support that you receive now? Types of support you receive or you don't receive?
01:16:50	IVY	Well, it's only from each other or the people that you feel comfortable talking to rather than...
01:16:58	AMINA	There was SP , like there was last year I was saying, kind of the emotional, like I had some quite... it was quite high need, some high need children, and that there were times where I was like, "Oh, hang on, I'm not all right." And I'm not particularly that sort of person that thinks, "Oh, I don't want to not be all right." But I did... so on that occasion I did feel actually very supported because I had that avenue to go to because I think what I felt was somebody saw that, somebody saw that, "Oh, hang on, you're not all right." And I think that's what you want, you want... a person wants to be seen and... so you don't always want to say, "Actually, I'm not all right." You want someone to say, "I don't think you're okay."
01:17:45	Researcher	That check-in email we ask TAs (overlapping conversation).
01:17:48	AMINA	You just need to and I think they have to... like say maybe... because a teacher or SLT should recognise whether needs are high or things are different, so therefore they should be on alert to sort of go, "I need to check that."
01:18:03	GRACE	And we were talking about this recently about any other job that when you're working with children and with, you know, lots of needs, emotional or otherwise, you get supervision. You need to get, you know, regular sort of one-to-one with, someone to talk about any incidents, about how you're feeling.
01:18:23	TAYLOR	Like your well-being.
01:18:25	GRACE	Yeah, well-being. Yeah.
01:18:26	AMINA	And I think that actually is quite... it's always relevant because sometimes you are just, you know, you're just photocopying and it's fine. Sometimes it's high level stuff that is like I don't know how to deal with this. And therefore you do sometimes really need someone to recognise that."
01:18:47	TAYLOR	We have signed up to a well-being service.
01:18:51	AMINA	Yeah, yeah. I know, yeah. But to be fair, I'll probably never pick a phone up and phone... like you just, I think... because actually someone, you know, again it's not very long. You don't want to almost spend hours with someone. It's just the fact that someone says, "I know that that is really tough (overlapping conversation)."

01:19:09	FREYA	You don't really want to have to explain things, do you, that...
01:19:11	AMINA	And that's it, I don't need...
01:19:12	OLIVE	The appreciation.
01:19:13	AMINA	Yeah, I don't need...
01:19:14	OLIVE	The recognition.
01:19:15	AMINA	...the things you see, you need to see people, and in the sea of, you know, overworked, underpaid, understaffed. The ability to see people is diminishing and... but if you see... if you do, then all these problems sometimes will sort themselves out in a way. That's when I said earlier about little things [inaudible 01:19:36].
01:19:37	Researcher	And there was something about having that space to share with each other, like support each other. Do you feel like you have that space or would you like to have more of that?
01:19:44	GRACE	You just don't have time.
01:19:45	AVA	No, it is, it's not having the time.
01:19:48	Researcher	Because I remember, that's my own experience, but I remember when I worked at S that we had... it was all... it was only during COVID after we didn't have it anymore. But we had a meeting every term with only with the TAs, and it was really (overlapping conversation).
01:20:03	AMINA	Oh, so no leader of that?
01:20:06	Researcher	There was the assistant SENCo with us.
01:20:09	OLIVE	They facilitated, yeah.
01:20:10	Researcher	Yeah, but we could bring some...
01:20:11	FREYA	You have N? Was it N then? Yeah.
01:20:12	Researcher	N, yeah, to problem solve. And I could bring, for example, you know, I don't know what to do, I just don't know what to do, and everyone would like shout with some like ideas.
01:20:22	FREYA	Yeah. And sometimes you can feel it's happening to you and then you sit with everybody else, and you realise it's happening to everybody else.
01:20:27	IVY	And you might think everybody else is brilliant at this and I'm the only one who can't do it.
01:20:31	FREYA	c of like... there's a chink in my armour if you like and suddenly I'm feeling very quite vulnerable and I don't... I'm just... I want.
01:21:45	IVY	But you shouldn't have to be, you know.
01:21:46	FREYA	I know, but I want to be able to talk about the things because they're important, because my outside life, you know, it's...

01:21:52	Researcher	Impacts (overlapping conversation).
01:21:53	FREYA	It impacts. And you know, I'm trying to bring up my son and I'm trying to work, and I'm trying to make sure that he gets to college, but I'm already at school because I did the breakfast club. And it's just sometimes it's too many balls in the air and... but yeah, she was really good my SENCo in the interview, in the appraisal. But I've written about all of this and then she kind of mentioned it back to me and she said, "You know, if I'm not in, is it okay if I let the assistant head know about what's going on for you?" And I suddenly thought, "I don't know if I do want everybody to sort of to know." Because I don't want them to see me as that when I'm also very capable and, you know.
01:22:35	OLIVE	But that (overlapping conversation).
01:22:37	FREYA	Yeah.
01:22:37	OLIVE	And is that because we haven't got it right with that whole respectful communication thing because we...
01:22:44	IVY	Yeah.
01:22:44	AMINA	I think it is but I think again it is down... like I would say, "Absolutely tell them," because why would you not? Because actually you shouldn't... no one should be ashamed of (overlapping conversation).
01:22:55	FREYA	No, I know, exactly.
01:22:57	AMINA	Every single person thinks that every single... mostly in life, that, "Oh God, they're all right. Yeah, they're all right." And no one's all right, and that's the thing." It's remembering that no one is all right, everyone is kind of doing it and getting on but everyone's got stuff. So you want someone to see that, you don't... that doesn't mean you're less of a person or, you know, (overlapping conversation) every day, [inaudible 01:23:17].
01:23:19	FREYA	I think because it was the end of term and I'm tired, it's like...
01:23:21	AMINA	No, no, but like you... so you want someone to see that, you don't... that doesn't mean you're less of a person or, you know, every day, you should work in a place and we should live in a society where we don't feel like that makes us weaker.
01:23:32	FREYA	Yeah.
01:23:31	GRACE	But people probably... they probably look at you and think, "Well, she's amazing. She's got all that going on (overlapping conversation)."
01:23:36	FREYA	Well, that's what they were saying and then I was going, "God, but sometimes I feel like you see this," you know, like the swan and the legs are going like mad under the water. Yeah.
01:23:49	Researcher	Sorry to interrupt.
01:23:50	FREYA	No, it's okay.
01:23:50	OLIVE	It could be a female thing as well.

01:23:53	FREYA	And menopause. It doesn't help, does it.
01:23:54	Researcher	(Overlapping conversation) one person, one man, that showed interest in the research and I chased him because I really wanted to have at least one, but he never replied, it's so sad. Guys, I will do the next one. If you need to leave, please do. And I thank you very, very much for staying and for coming. But yeah, I would try to wrap it up. But yeah, it's just one more and...
01:24:24	AMINA	What was that one?
01:24:25	Researcher	But yeah, so I summarise what you say, so just, about feeling seen, it's about having that feedback. And we talked about observations, we talked about supervision, having that one-to-one to communicate with, having training, having time to problem solve, but also looking after your well-being and feeling that people in your work community cares.
01:24:51	FREYA	Yeah, feeling safe.
01:24:52	Researcher	Feeling safe, yeah.
01:24:52	FREYA	Because we want the children to feel safe. You want to the school to be the environment that is safe for them. But we also want it to be safe for us.
01:25:01	Researcher	Yeah. So thinking about the cons, you know, if you don't feel that you're well being supported, you don't feel like you're getting enough feedback, training. What will happen?
01:25:16	GRACE	It's the same as the others.
01:25:17	AMINA	Yeah, isn't it.
01:25:17	FREYA	Also illness, if you're ill. You'll be... yeah.
01:25:22	AVA	I think you mean burnout.
01:25:23	FREYA	Yeah, burnout, massive.
01:25:24	AMINA	And actually that's probably a very good one if you look at the sickness levels at schools. And some people are off sick perhaps all the time and...
01:25:32	Researcher	Mm-hmm, sort of mental health as well?
01:25:33	FREYA	Yeah.
01:25:34	AMINA	I mean, there's probably a variety of things like, you know. So there's absences I think, that is one thing that's changed (overlapping conversation).
01:25:41	FREYA	Because the impact on everybody else.
01:25:43	AMINA	Yup. Yeah. Maybe it has meant that anyone could phone it at any point and no one cares anymore, so. For sure before COVID, it was nowhere near as much absence. And now it feels like a door has been opened and everyone's like, "Well, I can have..."
01:26:01	OLIVE	You got five days.

01:26:01	AMINA	Here we go. And they're like... it's just like a... and I think that does have a knock-on effect on well-being because you think, "Well, hang on. Why am I here?"
01:26:09	OLIVE	Well, then people have to cover (overlapping conversations).
01:26:13	AMINA	(Overlapping conversations) like this, that, so.
01:26:15	Researcher	Yeah. What would the pros? So if you're feeling seen, you're feeling supported, you feel like you have that supervision, you have their feedback, their observation, how would you feel and how...?
01:26:27	IVY	Improved well-being which then will... less sickness.
01:26:30	AMINA	Yeah, happy people work then . Happy people are better to work with, they work harder and, you know, both the children and the teacher, it's better for everybody if someone's happy, for sure. You know, there's not enough happy people in the world.
01:26:47	Researcher	So a lot of problems. Okay. Last one, I promise. So recognition of impact. How...? Trying to be brief and because we talked about it when we were trying to come up with a title. How do you feel this is now?
01:27:06	AMINA	I think it seems to be... everything goes quite under radar.
01:27:13	GRACE	So we just get on with it, don't we, and that's what's expected now, yeah.
01:27:15	AMINA	It's just like, you know. And okay, you don't want to meddle, you don't need anything, but it's... like we've always said, you know, no one realise, the job will always be underplayed because it's underplayed, you know, like...
01:27:32	OLIVE	No one really knows, yeah.
01:27:33	AMINA	Who knows, yeah. I mean, I wouldn't... if I wasn't a TA, I'd have no idea what a TA did apart from I just think oh they do a bit of reading.
01:27:39	OLIVE	Do a bit of reading.
01:27:40	AMINA	Yeah.
01:27:39	GRACE	Do a bit of reading.
01:27:41	IVY	There was something recently and I think it was the [inaudible 01:27:43] who were going to introduce it with them, when we were doing interventions, they were going to do this, some kind of graph so that they could actually see the impact of what you're doing and see that actually is it worth doing. But that never came...
01:27:57	OLIVE	Well, SF said that we had no impact.
01:28:00	AMINA	Yeah.
01:28:01	OLIVE	Have you had SF in you?

01:28:03	IVY	No.
01:28:03	Researcher	SF?
01:28:04	IVY	Yeah.
01:28:05	AMINA	She was some person who came.
01:28:06	OLIVE	Some person (overlapping conversation).
01:28:07	IVY	[inaudible 01:28:07].
01:28:08	FREYA	I love the way you say person. She said person.
01:28:15	OLIVE	Yeah, researcher. She's done lots of research. A bit like you really, she's researched the role of the TA. And in her research has shown that actually a TA has absolutely no... well, I wouldn't say it's in all cases but she made out to us that we actually don't have an impact on that child.
01:28:40	FREYA	I think that's when they were trying to talk about like getting rid of TAs, that's when that all happened, yeah. Because they were saying...
01:28:47	OLIVE	Instigated, that was what's... that's what instigated, no, yeah, it's recent.
01:28:53	AMINA	But I think like impact is, again, it can be like recognition of impact, it doesn't have to be some massive thing, it's just like...
01:29:01	FREYA	No, day-to-day impact.
01:29:02	AMINA	...knowing, being reminded that, yeah, okay, that one that you can, and two that you are, and... but that is not to say that everyone is because not everyone does, but.
01:29:15	OLIVE	And also if you've got an idea, sometimes, some teachers don't want to hear of any of your ideas or anything. But then other teachers are like, "Yeah, that sounds great go for it (overlapping conversation)."
01:29:23	FREYA	Yeah.
01:29:24	AVA	And I'm really sorry, I'm going to have to go because...
01:29:26	Researcher	That's fine. Yeah, thank you so much (overlapping conversations).
01:29:27	FREYA	Lovely to meet you.
01:29:29	GRACE	Bye.
01:29:30	FREYA	Bye. And it's the ones that don't want to hear your ideas, they kind of put you off wanting to share your ideas with the ones that then you discover they do and they love it.
01:29:39	OLIVE	(Overlapping conversation) confidence and (overlapping conversation).
01:29:40	IVY	Yeah, because quite often when you do an intervention, you have those children and you're seeing them every week. And so you work out more than maybe the teacher does like where

		they're at and what you can use, and what motivates them, and how you could do things differently. So they have an idea, this is what we need to actually teach these children, so it's [inaudible 01:30:03]. But you can do it in so many different ways depending on the children that you have. And that's why it's important working as a team with the teacher.
01:30:12	FREYA	Yeah.
01:30:12	Researcher	So do you feel like that recognition, where should it come from?
01:30:17	TAYLOR	The teacher.
01:30:18	Researcher	Mainly or do you feel like...?
01:30:22	IVY	Society.
01:30:25	TAYLOR	The way I see it, our role is to assist the teacher. The teacher directs us to do whatever's needed to support the children. If the impacts improves like the children's improvement, that's... I think that's secondary to helping, enabling the teacher to do the best job that they can do
01:30:54	OLIVE	I know what you're saying, yeah. Did you say society?
01:30:56	IVY	I feel like I'd like... but it's going more the other way, it's going more that actually we're going to be in the classroom much, much less and doing interventions much, much more. So that kind of... unfortunately the teachers are...
01:31:11	OLIVE	So H, I know what you're trying to say. So when I very, very first started in SA and I was literally a parent volunteer type of thing because I was in between jobs, anyway. I saw my role very much, I was there so the teacher could do a really good job, could teach, and get... you know, they could do all of that. I really saw that. But in the 13 years I've been there, I think the role has definitely changed loads. I don't go in now feeling that same, "I'm here so you..." I mean, obviously I'm there to support them. But I think there's a lot more pressure and responsibility to put on us now.
01:31:54	Researcher	Mm-hmm. And do you feel like within like the role changing, do you feel like you have the same kind of recognition? Do you feel you have less recognition?
01:32:07	AMINA	I think the recognition probably hasn't changed but the requirement has, so I think... like you sort of think, okay, like it did used to be the parents just coming in, doing some bit of filling and whatever, and so it's not that anymore. So I feel like someone shouts about it, someone say, you know, someone SLT or whoever say, "This is what we've got," you know, (overlapping conversation).
01:32:29	FREYA	Yeah. Well, it's a teaching role now. It's much more of a teaching role.
01:32:32	AMINA	You know, yeah. We had like a recent... well, well a restructure in our school and they kind of, you know, said it very sort of like, "But don't worry, it's fine. It probably won't make..."

		It was like, “don’t, no, there’s nothing to see here, it’s fine.” And I was like, “Why are you not shouting out?” This is going to make a difference because for the first time you will see a difference. This will affect your child. And you know, I couldn’t get my head around why are you not shouting about this? Because if you’re saying it’s not your fault, financially it’s the government, and it’s... then more people, the more people that realise that the actual impact of change and the impact we make, and therefore won’t make if we’re not able (overlapping conversation).
01:33:15	FREYA	If we’re lost, yeah.
01:33:16	AMINA	It is going to affect your child. So you want to all get together (overlapping conversation) and shout about it. And this is what I don’t understand its like is that. I don’t know why we have this hush, hush, the don’t don’t... because I’m like, “Come on, let’s do it.”
01:33:30	FREYA	That’s kind of how I felt about it, you know, I don’t know...
01:33:32	IVY	(Overlapping conversation) is filled for the next.
01:33:34	FREYA	You know when (overlapping conversation).
01:33:34	OLIVE	See, the head doesn’t want the bad press.
01:33:36	FREYA	You know, when Unison wanted us to go out on strike.
01:33:38	GRACE	I was just going to say that, yeah.
01:33:40	FREYA	Oh my God. So I have people in... I have TAs in my school who don’t like to rock the boat. Even though it was all beneficial to us, and I just thought, “Do you know what, I think we really do need to go on strike because we really need to say we value ourselves, this is how much we value ourselves and your children’s learning because we don’t want to be underpaid, we don’t want to leave our jobs,” you know. And there was just... like there’s about four or five people who didn’t vote, and... but really spoke about it as well, “Oh, no, I’m not... no, I don’t want to go on strike.”
01:34:15	AMINA	But it’s like the bins, isn’t it. It’s like no one cares about the bin people striking until their street is full of bin bags. So no one cares about us(overlapping conversation).
01:34:21	FREYA	Yeah, torn apart by seagulls.
01:34:23	AMINA	No one cares about TAs. That is the reality. All teachers or anyone until they say, “But your child is going to have a much worse education now for it,” because actually all the children that come here that need all these need are running chaos and there’s no one to help them.
01:34:39	FREYA	Or they’re just sat at the back saying nothing because they don’t understand, yeah.
01:34:41	AMINA	You sort of think actually then they’re going to... then they’re going to take notice.
01:34:44	Researcher	So do you feel like the problem is not much about you working with the children who have the highest needs, it is as well with the whole training thing. But it’s also about, you know, you

		are doing all these job. And it's not being recognised that you're actually working with the children who have the highest needs (overlapping conversation). So they don't (overlapping conversation)?
01:35:08	AMINA	Yeah. So my point is if they don't recognise the impact we're making, they don't understand that the kind of impact that is lost when that is gone. And I think people only... they don't look at what they have, they would look at what they won't have.
01:35:25	OLIVE	Yeah, that's absolutely right. They're only going to start creating parents I suppose, isn't it, they're only going to start moaning when they realise that actually their class are hardly being taught at all because they're having to (overlapping conversation).
01:35:40	AMINA	(Overlapping conversation) do you know what, there's actually no support staff in the class now, and actually... so whereas once...
01:35:47	IVY	Next year is going to be interesting.
01:35:48	FREYA	Yeah, yeah.
01:35:49	AMINA	It was fine, you know.
01:35:50	GRACE	Even things like when the children needs their coats and things like that and the parents (overlapping conversations).
01:35:57	FREYA	(Overlapping conversations) interventions.
01:35:57	OLIVE	All the (overlapping conversations) and all the things we have to sort out (overlapping conversations).
01:35:59	FREYA	So when you're helicoptering around the classroom. And you're checking their understanding because you're asking them questions about what they're doing and what they're learning. So you're kind of like an extension of the teacher but all the other tables that the teacher's not at and you're just talking away to them and they're... you know, just by having a conversation with them about what they're learning their knowledge is being, you know, sort of strengthened.
01:36:22	OLIVE	Reinforced.
01:36:23	FREYA	Yeah.
01:36:24	Researcher	Guys, pros and cons of staying the same and moving on?
01:36:28	OLIVE	The same thing.
01:36:29	IVY	The same answer.
01:36:31	Researcher	Okay.
01:36:34	OLIVE	Yeah, I mean, I think it is the same (overlapping conversation).
01:36:37	TAYLOR	(Overlapping conversations).
01:36:39	FREYA	Well, they just won't... the children will... the children will suffer.

01:36:44	AMINA	It absolutely affects the children, without a doubt it affects them.
01:36:50	OLIVE	I think the progress of children is definitely going to be affected.
01:36:53	FREYA	And if we're not in the classes, we certainly aren't going to go in just for lunches. It's like, you know. It's like, you know what...?
01:36:59	OLIVE	Well, yeah, you're getting rid of all these TAs. Who's now going to do all the break times that we've just had all this conversation then. The school trips, the residential, the extra... the above and beyond that we all do.
01:37:10	FREYA	The breakfast club, the after school club.
01:37:10	GRACE	But it's helping out the children with the kind of like the middle ability, they just get...
01:37:16	AMINA	They'd be done for, for years, (overlapping conversation).
01:37:18	IVY	What was that?
01:37:19	AMINA	The middles, the middles have been done for years, yeah.
01:37:21	GRACE	Kind of middle ability, they just... and they could be achieving so much more (overlapping conversations).
01:37:24	IVY	And no one knows they're so (overlapping conversation).
01:37:26	FREYA	But when you helicopter, those are the ones you're focusing on, aren't you, because you're trying to...
01:37:31	IVY	Because they're quiet, and they get on and stuff (overlapping conversation) and they're just not noticed.
01:37:33	Researcher	Do you feel like the TAs are the ones that usually see that...?
01:37:37	FREYA	Yeah.
01:37:37	OLIVE	Yeah, definitely. I probably know my children in my class. Way better than the teacher does.
01:37:43	AMINA	And I think what it feels like to me now is if a child... there's a lot of children that kind of really way out, aren't they, so if you throw a chair, you're fine. But if you're not that child you are really... you're really going to suffer because they... those are the children that really are suffering, that someone (overlapping conversation) need to go, I see (overlapping conversation) and now they will open. But they will only open if, you know, if they are opened. Yeah, so. So that is what will be lost (overlapping conversation).
01:38:18	IVY	It's a bit like whoever makes the loudest noise. It's so (overlapping conversations)...
01:38:23	AMINA	(Overlapping conversations) there's so many extreme children (overlapping conversations).

01:38:24	IVY	...The comparison between, being a TA and being a nurse is phenomenal. It's like in the 10 years—17 years that I was a nurse, the role changed massively. It was like we were taking blood, we were doing cannulation, we were doing... they were going to get us next to do blood guesses and things like that. And we never used to do that at all. And it's just like more and more, and more and more. And then you're taking away from the real reason why you went into nursing which was to spend—to look after a patient. It's like you didn't have time to wash a patient. But if you did wash a patient, that is the time when you assess them, their body. But also (overlapping conversation) their mental state and... well, that kind of... it's the same with kids, if you haven't got that time to kind of... five minutes influence (overlapping conversation) them.
01:39:10	TAYLOR	It's like a pressure cooker and the teacher (overlapping conversation) pressure. TAs have been put under more pressure. Children (overlapping conversation).
01:39:19	OLIVE	Everyone is (overlapping conversations).
01:39:21	FREYA	(Overlapping conversations) and especially the elderly and they don't want to make a fuss.
01:39:28	Researcher	I added to role expectations that you value time, having that time... the protected time that the teachers don't have but you appreciate having that time and that connection with the students (overlapping conversation).
01:39:41	OLIVE	Yeah. I think it's important because that's when your disclosures happen that's when (overlapping conversation) safeguarding.
01:39:46	TAYLOR	It's safeguarding, yeah, that's what (overlapping conversation) yeah.
01:39:47	FREYA	Yeah, huge, absolutely.
01:39:49	IVY	Because you can't expect...
01:39:49	FREYA	Because we're the first port of call for safeguarding generally.
01:39:51	IVY	...a teacher to know in depth that... because their focus is on the whole class (overlapping conversation).
01:39:58	OLIVE	And teachers as well, their focus is on teachers (overlapping conversation).
01:40:00	IVY	Yeah, it would be.
01:40:01	FREYA	Like spotting little behaviours.
01:40:01	OLIVE	We do so much of the emotional social stuff. And that's just sitting down, having a chat, you know, that is really important. And it's important for us but it's also important for that child.
01:40:13	IVY	Because it makes their learning... they're more open to learning if they're feeling in a comfortable space. Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

01:40:21	Research	Guys, thank you. Thank you so much. I hate interrupting but I also don't want to keep you until 10:00 PM here. (Overlapping conversations) Thank you so, so much. I really appreciated it, just hearing all of what you're saying. And it's just interesting because some of it... some of the sentences you were coming up with were actually the titles, some of the titles I modified when I was doing my first research. I had a title which was getting on with it. I had a title saying about the role being like changing. I had a title saying above and beyond with...
01:41:03	OLIVE	See, it just needs to be simple, doesn't it.
01:41:06	FREYA	Yeah.
01:41:08	GRACE	Will we get to see a copy of the (overlapping conversations)?
01:41:10	Researcher	Yeah.
01:41:10	OLIVE	So keep us updated on what (overlapping conversations).
01:41:12	IVY	I mean, that would be great. Yeah. And what you're going to do with it, that would be...
01:41:17	Researcher	I will. If you give me permission (overlapping background noise) email, I will give you as many updates as I can do. Hopefully, I'll be able to publish, but.

Glossary of Terms

ABC framework	A personal construct psychology tool developed by Tschudi and Winter (2012) to explore and facilitate change towards a desired outcome.
Axiology	The study of values, including the researcher's own beliefs and ethical stance, and how these influence the research process.
Constructivism.....	An epistemological perspective that views knowledge as individually constructed through one's experiences and interpretations of the world.
Epistemology	The branch of philosophy concerned with the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge.
Inductive approach.....	A method of analysis where patterns and themes emerge from the data itself, rather than being based on pre-existing theories or hypotheses
Lockdown	A period during the COVID-19 pandemic when schools and public places were closed to control the spread of the virus.
Ontology	The study of the nature of reality, often concerned with what we assume to be real in the world.
Reflexivity	The ongoing process of critically reflecting on how the researcher's identity, background, and assumptions influence all stages of the research.
Relativism	The belief that reality and truth are not absolute but instead shaped by individual perspectives, cultures, and contexts.
Social constructionism.....	participants

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