Exploring the perspectives of the pedagogical role of Teaching Assistants (TAs) from a Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) perspective: How do they support the development of independent learners?

Submitted by Ysanne Alana Marville to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology in Child, Educational, and Community Psychology, July 2015.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has been previously submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.
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**Figure 1** Conceptual map of the structure of the research  
**Figure 2** Six Types of Mediating Principles
GLOSSARY

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<td>TA</td>
<td>Teaching Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSA</td>
<td>Learning Support Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>TLSA</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning Support Assistant</td>
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Many of the references use the previously listed acronyms to indicate the same thing, similarly when I use TA, LSA or TLSA I am speaking about Teaching Assistants.

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<thead>
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<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Linking teaching and learning; the method and practises that support teaching.</td>
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<td>Scaffolding</td>
<td>Modelling the problem solving process to students, appropriately challenging and then allowing students to attempt the problem independently with guidance available if needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td>Supporting a student through a task by intervening with appropriate support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educationalist</td>
<td>A person who has special knowledge in the methods of teaching.</td>
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* For the purpose of this research when I use the above terms, the meanings are as indicated in the glossary.
Figure 1. Conceptual map of the structure of the research.
1.1 Overview

This thesis is formed of two papers. The first explores the perspectives of the pedagogical role of TAs, using a Personal Construct Psychology Approach, and how they support the development of independent learners from the TA’s view as well as views of the SENCo. The second explores the perspectives of the students and families whom TAs support. Figure 1 presents a conceptual map of the structure of the research.

1.2 Paper One: Exploring the pedagogical role of Teaching Assistants from a TA perspective.

The literature reviewed for paper one discusses the existing evidence, which supports the role, impact and effective use of TAs. I discuss the importance of the development of this role, particularly as it contributes to positive student outcomes. I then explore the theory and research, which indicates the importance of considering TA support as additional to rather than alternative to mainstreamed teaching. The literature also emphasises the importance of seeking the TA perspective when exploring their role.

The rationale informing this paper includes:

- The benefit of the pedagogical role of TAs in supporting inclusive classrooms, which contributes to positive student outcomes.
- The current negative view of TA support as suggested in the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project.
- The importance of taking an emancipatory approach and being inclusive of the participants being researches to reduce the power imbalance.

Paper one explores the perceptions and the experiences of TAs, and other members of school staff on the role of the TA. It also explores the current belief about what the role should entail, and how it contributes to student progress. A mixed-methods approach- as data generated from focus groups
was then further explored in the class observations, semi-structured and semi-structured interviews involving, focus groups, structured class observations, and semi-structured interviews was utilised with TAs and other members of a Local Authority secondary school.

Information in the literature indicates that the TA role is often viewed a valuable by the majority of school staff. TAs through the use of mediation supported students’ thinking and contributed to the development of students’ problem solving skills. There may be a difference in opinion in what their roles are perceived to be by the senior leadership team. TAs perceived their roles as ensuring the development of a well-rounded student, usually by valuing their social and emotional development over academic attainment. Implications for practice include the value in seeking the perceptions of TAs when seeking to inform training packages that would be relevant for their role. Educational Psychologists are well placed to facilitate conversations that would support the development of a mutually agreed role based on TA experience, school demands, and statutory guidance.

The findings from paper one influenced the development of paper two, as the perceptions of TAs were shared with parents and children and they were asked to comment and contribute their views. The practice of including parents’ and students’ perceptions is viewed as best practice as indicated in the Special Education Needs Code of Practice (DfE 2015).

1.3. Paper 2: Exploring the pedagogical role of the TA from a student and parent perspective.

In the literature review for paper two I explored the perceptions of the different systems a student exists in, for example home and school. Literature also speaks about the need to maintain positive home-school relationships. I also explored the relevance and importance of the student and parent voice. The Educational Psychologists is well placed within a school system to support the development of positive home-school relationships. Further the EP role as
constant advocate for students would ensure that their as well as their parents’ views are constantly sought and included.

The rationale informing this paper includes:

- The benefit of the pedagogical role of TAs in supporting inclusive classrooms, which contributes to positive student outcomes.
- The need for the voice of students and families to be an integral part of the support they receive.
- Educational Psychologists being well placed to support TA development in their perceived role, and provide support in school when this role is not well understood by their colleagues.

Paper two explores the views of students and parents as to what in their opinion determines good TA support. Particularly what aspects of TA support do they value the most. Data collection methods included focus groups, and questionnaires with students of a Local Authority secondary school and their parents.

Paper two findings

Paper one and two provide an exploration of the perceptions of the TA role within a large secondary school. The present research highlights that the TAs perceived that their most valuable way of working with the students was through support, and explores how barriers to working effectively might be removed. It further indicates how EPs could be used to guide schools in supporting TAs as they develop their roles to meet the needs of various students with special educational needs and to support their families.

1.4 Researcher Interest

I have many reasons for exploring this area of research. Teaching Assistants (TAs) are novel to me, as they are not often used in Barbados. In my role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), I realised that my interactions were often with TAs or developing interventions that would be carried out by them.
Whereas TAs are typical members of the British educational community, this is not the case in Barbados, an island that has modelled its educational system on the British system. I wondered why this practise had not been adopted, is it a result of the culturally different views about inclusion, and learning or have economic factors influenced the development of support services in education? However, this research is interested in exploring the cultural perspectives. Barbados still utilises a largely didactic teaching style, which does not always encourage learning through discovery and exploration. Pupils have their own tables and the teacher is seen as the only guide and resource of knowledge. At times special educational needs are viewed as a within child problem, as pupils are often required to adapt their learning to fit into the model of teaching.

In my experience as a TEP, I have observed school staff reorganising their classrooms, and adjusting their teaching methods to incorporate a TA based intervention that would support a pupil with SEN. It appears that the majority of staff in schools recognise that it is the responsibility of the adults around a young person to support and promote academic and emotional development.

In my opinion, TAs’ practice varies from school to school, and also within schools. These practices may vary as TAs may adapt their responses to meet different pupils’ needs. However, I am curious if there exists a general policy and agreement on what indicates good TA practice. I think it would be useful to explore what TAs view as good practice and if there are any barriers to working in these ways. I also believe that it would be useful to explore what has contributed to their views of good practice, i.e. what evidence is their teaching practice based on?

I have experienced that EPs roles often include: aiming to understand why an intervention has been implemented, challenging how interventions are done, and containing school staffs anxieties about pupils. I believe that due to EPs use of consultation (Wagner, 1995) we are best placed to challenge current ways of practice when they are not evidenced based. Using methods of consultation to guide discussion usually facilitates the development of
alternative ways of thinking without offending others, through a shared exploration, non-didactic approach. However, EPs should first understand what is currently guiding the present practice, to enable them to explore how TAs think, behave, act, and feel. This research paper seeks to explore these concepts.

A report by the Sutton Trust (2014) suggests that students in a class with a TA present do not, on average, out perform those in one where only a teacher is present. Further, pupils who are low attaining or identified as having SEN may perform worse in classes with TAs. In contrast to this, research by Blatchford, et al, 2004, Blatchford, Basset, and Brown, 2005, indicates there is a positive and valuable role of TAs. One of the aims of their research was to close the gaps in knowledge around TA practice. The research indicated that TAs spent over half of their days in a direct pedagogical instructional role supporting students. However TAs picked up pedagogical knowledge by tuning into teacher delivery. It is interesting that there appears to be little explicit discussion about why certain practices are used, particularly as these practices constitute a large portion of their interactions with pupils. The research by Blatchford, et al, 2004, Blatchford, Basset & Brown, 2005 further suggests that TAs provide a majority of the support for pupils with SEN, and TAs focus tends to be on tasks completion rather than understanding.

Research into personal epistemological beliefs has offered insight into how to promote effective teaching and learning across educational settings (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2006). At present there has been no research, which significantly investigates the relationship between TAs personal epistemological beliefs, their pedagogical knowledge and practice, and their personal experiences of school. I wonder whether TAs experiences of schools have influenced how they practice supporting pupils. What are the beliefs that they hold with regard to knowledge and how it is gained? To what extent are these influencing the degree to which they use mediating techniques to support learning? I believe that utilising philosophical methods; exploring perceptions, as well as strategic methods; rating scales, of Personal Construct Psychology would be ideal in seeking to explore these questions.
Paper One: The Perspectives of the Pedagogical Roles of TAs: How Do They Support the Development of independent Learners: Exploring TAs’ views.

2.1 Abstract:

The study sets out to explore TAs perceptions of their practice by investigating the incidence of scaffolding present in their work with students. A mixed-methods approach to data collection involved a focus group of 12 TAs, and structured classroom observations followed by semi-structured interviews of 7 TAs. This allowed the researcher to discuss what was observed as well as discover their views on their and other TAs’ practice. Varying degrees of mediation were observed: scaffolding, acceptance but challenging pupil’s response, bridging, exploring systematic thinking, and using process oriented questions. Very rarely did TAs give answers to problems in isolation. TAs often were responsible for supporting students in regulating their behaviour, and indicated that their focus was not solely on students academic attainment but more so on their emotional and social development as well. Implications for practice within the school system are explored.

2.2 Introduction

The first of two papers plans to explore Teaching Assistants (TAs), and what in their opinion constitutes good practice. This paper also wants to explore the views of the pedagogical role of TAs. Particularly:

• To what extent TAs are using methods of mediation to support pupils learning?
• How much of TAs personal experience of school, has influenced their knowledge about teaching and learning?
• What are TAs beliefs about how knowledge is gained?

The role of the TA has been extensively explored and researched (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell 2013, Blatchford et.al. 2012, and Farrell, Alborz, Howes,
& Pearson 2013), for example due to concerns about their impact on students’ outcomes. Some research has contributed to policy and practice, which governs the effective deployment of TAs. In the following literature review, I will discuss what the TA role is perceived to be, explore impact of the TA role, as well as indicate the benefits of having a shared and agreed understanding of the most useful ways to deploy and utilise TA support.

Due to an increasingly inclusive ethos adopted by schools, teaching assistants (TAs) have become a normal addition to classroom and school environments (Unison, 2014). They often support students who require additional intervention, by facilitating further strategies that benefit those who are finding some aspects of school difficult (Ainscow, 2005). Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) views are utilised as I am seeking to understand TAs perspectives, and I believe their perspectives will guide their motivations, behaviour and attitudes. PCP is an appropriate model to support me in obtaining how TAs perspectives link to their reality. I considered using principles of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) as a theoretical model to support my understanding of the TA role, however, while CBT gives people a model to think about a situation differently and links thinking and behaviour, I do not believe that it supports the interpretation and understanding of attitudes and behaviours as well as PCP.

TAs can be viewed as a major historical development to education. They have a direct effect upon the day-to-day classroom experiences of children and young people, with respect to the ways in which they are taught. The role was developed as a result of the movement towards inclusive education; one of the most profound educational changes to occur in the United Kingdom has been the rapid increase in the number of school- based teaching assistants (Blatchford, Russell, & Webster, 2012). TAs were viewed as benefitting mainstream classroom teachers, by providing close support to children with complex learning and behaviour needs (Hancock, & Eyres, 2004). There was a significant increase of TAs during the 1900s and early 2000s, as a result of a focus on national literacy and numeracy targets (Hancock, & Eyres, 2004). Funds were made available through specific government spending.
programmes across the UK to recruit TAs to support the 1 in 4 children who were not progressing as required (Hancock, & Eyres, 2004). For the purpose of this research, it may be useful to indicate the original purpose of the TA role. In mentioning why this role was created, whether the current role has adapted and evolved, and what has contributed to the changing TA role can be explored.

2.3 Review of the Literature

The literature review explores the impact of teaching assistants, how teaching assistants are used, and the effects of teaching assistants on students’ learning and development. The theoretical approaches that influenced this research are Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), and social cultural theory, the use of these theories are viewed by the researcher as contributing to the body of literature that exists on the role of TAs. The term pedagogy is also explored in the literature, specifically as it relates to the types of strategies that are utilised in the classroom to support learning.

EBSCO E- Journals was the main gateway used to search journals. The key journals that I have identified for my research are, ‘Educational Psychology in Practice’, ‘Educational Research’ and the ‘Journal of Educational Psychology’. The key word searches conducted were: ‘the role of teaching assistants’, and ‘pedagogy’. From those key word searches, 7 research papers were selected, as they were viewed to be relevant to what is explored in this paper. This literature review is recursive in nature, as the findings from similar research studies, which explored the roles and effects of TAs, are discussed (Ridley, 2008). Farrell, Alborz, Howes. & Pearson, is a useful integrative review of previous work exploring the role of TAs. Butler and Green, 2005, as well as O’Connell, B. 1998, are two key books that have influenced me in my thinking. I consider that Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Loughran, & Farrell are important researchers into the field of Teaching Assistants (TAs).
2.3.1 The impact of Teaching Assistants

Webster, Blatchford, and Russell (2013) studied the ways in which some schools used and deployed TAs, as a result of DISS research that indicated there was a negative impact of TAs’ support on pupils’ academic progress. Problems do emerge when TAs are given an ill-defined remedial role (Blatchford et al, 2012). While there is evidence of the indirect effect that TAs have on pupil standards, what must take precedence is the direct effect on pupil attainment through overtly pedagogical input (Blatchford et al, 2012).

TAs are not teachers but are often called upon to undertake teaching duties (Graves, 2014). It is suggested, that one of the main pedagogical roles of TAs, should be focus on pupils understanding a task, rather than simply completing a task (Blatchford et al, 2012). Further despite Teaching and Learning Support Assistants (TLSAs) huge variations in practice there is little coherence regarding roles, responsibilities, training, pay, and career pathways. While there has been a focus on professionalising the workforce to ensure more highly skilled staff, there is limited evidence of role clarity or increased status for TLSAs in schools (Cajkler et al. 2006). TLSAs are often used to cover for teachers to allow them planning, preparation, and assessment time (Watson, Bayliss, & Pratchett, 2013), they were initially used to overcome the problems of class sizes, the shortage of teaching recruits, and poor teacher retention (Ofsted, 2002, DfES, 2003).

Watson, Bayliss, and Pratchett (2013) argue that a deficiency model exists for TLSAs who are expected to work in the shadow of the teacher and perform the same roles, but to a lesser standard, the TLSA is placed in the role of the less competent adult rather than a competent other. The nature of the TLSA role may cause TLSAs to view their contribution to students and education as insignificant or of lower standard; their support position may not be viewed as an important or fulfilling role (Watson, Bayliss, & Pratchett, 2013).

Farrell, Alborz, Howes, and Pearson (2010) carried out a review of the literature, which focused on the impact of teaching assistants on improving
pupil’s academic achievement. All but one article indicated that trained and supported TAs, working one to one, or in a small group, helped primary aged children to make significant gains in learning when compared to similar children who did not receive TA support, and there has been an overreliance on TAs in inclusive classrooms (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010). Graves (2014) explored the development of school staff who support pupils in the classroom. The TA role often evolved from parent helpers to paid assistants, and there was often no requirement for formal qualifications or professional development beyond informal peer learning (Graves, 2014). A large part of the TA role was to ease teachers’ workload, improve their work life balance, and improve pupil performance in schools (DfES, 2003).

2.3.2 Pedagogy – Linking Teaching and Learning

Effective teaching practice includes using pedagogical knowledge, critical reflection of one’s practice, and knowledge of effective practice in teaching in diverse settings, which includes children with special educational needs (De Silva, 2013). In countries such as Australia and the United States, the range of tasks entrusted to TAs includes pedagogical responsibilities (Trent, 2014). As pedagogy is a widely used term, it is important to grasp how it is being applied in a given situation to fully understand, that which is intended, and the subsequent implications of its use (Loughran, 2013).

2.3.3 Vygotsky’s Scaffolding and Mediated Teaching

This research paper takes into account that utilising principles of scaffolding and mediation could contribute to good teaching practices (Tzuriel et al, 1999). Vygotsky’s social cultural theory emphasises the importance of adult-child interactions, in developing a child’s intellectual skills (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning is a process of interactions between an individual and the material through a process of mediation (Tzuriel, 2000).

Having analysed the findings from the focus group I created an observation criteria (Appendix 3 ). In the table below I have listed some of the principles of
mediation (Feuerstein, Klein, and Tanubaum, 1999), which Feuerstein uses for mediated learning. I did not observe all of Feuerstein’s principles of mediation, but the ones listed in the table were observed in the classroom and discussed during the focus group.

TAs appear to incorporate some principles of mediation when carrying out their roles. Principles of meditational teaching styles (Figure 2) have influenced the framework for the classroom observations (Appendix 3) as TAs indicated that they used these techniques when supporting students learning and it has been identified as the most important and distinguishing characteristic of teachers’ behaviour (Tzuriel, Kaniel, & Kanner, 1999). In meditational teaching, adults elicit evidence of systematic thinking from pupils, use process oriented questions, and they accept the pupil’s response while challenging their answers, and requiring justification (Tzuriel et al, 1999).

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<tr>
<th>Bridging</th>
<th>Making logical connections, cognitive concepts, principles, and rules to their many applications in everyday life</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principles of Transcendence</td>
<td>Students using principles, rules, and reflective thinking across all areas of the curriculum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating Meaning and Purpose</td>
<td>Explaining teaching method and giving practical life examples and experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regulating Behaviour</td>
<td>Positive praise and comments, re-direction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>TA intends to use the interchange to change the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>TA selects, enhances, focuses, and otherwise organizes the world of stimuli for the learner, according to a clear intention and goals for that learner’s enhanced and effective functioning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3.4 Personal Construct Psychology

I took a personal construct psychological point of view. As I seek to understand how TAs define and perceive their role within an educational sector that is constantly evolving. I am interested in how TAs perceptions of their role influence how they carry out and adapt their role. It is my belief that personal construct psychology is an appropriate theory to draw from when seeking to interpret and understand why and how people ascribe values to and interpret their environments. I believe that TAs are continually trying to make sense of their role within a school environment. Through thinking critically about their day-to-day experiences they will form a perception or belief about their roles. I am interested in their perceptions and how they construct them, as such PCP was a useful perspective to seek to interpret and explore TAs’ roles and views.

Kelly (1955) posits that each person formulates in his own way, constructs through which he views the world of events. People strive to make sense of events, experiences and themselves by detecting repeated themes that enable them to anticipate what is likely to happen with future events (Butler, & Green, 2007). I am suggesting that the types of support given by TAs are governed by their perceptions of what has worked in the past, what they perceive to be a useful tool or intervention, and what they view progress of a pupil to look like. Further their constructs of their role, as well as their constructs of how others view their role could be influencing their actions within the classroom (Kelly, 1955). These are two areas that this research intends to explore.

The assumption that people’s current perceptions, understandings, and insights are dynamic (Robson, 2002) supports the aims of this research paper. People constantly re-create their own experiences, and these
experiences are opened to questioning and reconsideration (Butler, & Green, 2007).

2.4 The Present Research - An Outline

I am surprised that my literature search did not reveal any studies, which took an explicitly PCP viewpoint when exploring the day-to-day experiences and views of TAs. It would be useful for studies to seek to understand how TAs define and perceive their role amidst an educational sector that is constantly evolving. As my research is seeking to discover what the established pedagogical role is, and what the next steps are in making that role more effective, I am hoping to collaboratively develop clear objectives and roles, with TAs, teachers, pupils, and SENCos.

Previously mentioned research papers in this literature review spoke about heuristic scaffolding (Radford et al. 2014). The view that the language TAs use to support learning is important when seeking to understand how they support the development of independent learners is one that I hope to develop. Utilising, for example principles of scaffolding; challenging through the zone of proximal development, and modelling which are methods of mediation could contribute to good teaching practices. Vygotsky’s social cultural theory emphasises the importance of adult-child interactions, in developing a child’s intellectual skills (Vygotsky, 1978). This paper seeks to add to the literature by using social cultural theory as a method of exploring TA and pupil interactions.

The methods in the literature previously discussed, support exploring the views and experiences of professionals; as a result, similar methods of data collection will be useful when seeking to contribute to the already existing literature. The observation schedule employed by this research focuses on the language TAs use in the classroom to guide pupils through a task. Further, the questions asked in the semi-structured interviews as well as the focus group, seek to discover the types of questions that TAs ask pupils to guide, develop, and challenge their thinking. Principles of meditational
teaching styles have influenced the framework for the classroom observations, and the focus group in this research, as it has been identified as the most important and distinguishing characteristic of teachers' behaviour (Tzuriel, Kaniel, & Kanner, 1999).

### 2.4.1 Research Aims

- To explore the perceptions of TAs, particularly their role in supporting students' attainment.
- To explore the extent to which TAs utilise principles of mediating learning strategies when engaging students in learning.

### 2.4.2 Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. What are TAs’ views on the type of teaching they use to maximise students’ learning?
2. To what extent is TAs’ knowledge about teaching and learning influenced by their own experiences?
3. To what extent do TAs use principles of mediated teaching when they are supporting students?
4. What are TAs’ constructs about how others' view their role?

### 2.5 Methodological Position

The aims of this research are to explore the views of TAs from theirs’ as well as other school staffs' perspectives. I am particularly interested in the views, about the role of the TA in supporting learning from a Personal Construct Psychological (PCP) perspective. PCP fits within an interpretive as well as a relativistic point of view. In that it assumes that individuals create their views in a variety of ways about the world by their experiences of it. Words and events hold different meanings for different people. This research also assumes that reality is interpreted social action, rather than the sole
interpretation of an objective reality, people will vary their actions based on
the related outcomes, and adjust their interactions in response to the social
context and the impact of these actions on others (Robson, 2002). The
assumptions within the interpretive as well as relativistic paradigms influence
the methods used in this research.

A review of the research methods employed by studies exploring school staff
views often utilised qualitative measures such as semi-structured interviews
(Burton & Goodman, 2014 and Trent, 2014), and quantitative measures such
as structured observations (Webster, Blatchford, and Russell, 2013). The
knowledge I am investigating is constructed in a multitude of ways; it is an
interactive co-construction. Knowledge is a compilation of LSA made
constructions and perspectives, as such it fits within a PCP paradigm (Kelly,
1955). I also believe that reflecting on the perspectives and values that LSAs
ascribe to their actions, is an active part of how LSAs construct their role.
People are pro-active 'agents' who make sense of their experiences (Kelly,
1955), the ontological assumption, which supports this worldview, is one that
indicates that the social world is diverse and dynamic, and not only divisible
into quantifiable elements. As such, I used a mixed methods process of data
collection using sampling triangulation to strengthen construct validity. As well
as analysing mixed data collected from the focus groups, class observations,
and the semi-structured interviews, I used thematic analysis to gather a rich
sense of the TAs' experience. These methods seem to be the most effective
way to explore the perceptions of the TAs. (Teddlie, and Tashokkari, 2009).
The qualitative process facilitates the collection of TA views as it relates to
understanding and implementing their roles. Qualitative research allows
investigators to approach problems that are difficult to access in any other
way (Carrera-Fernandez, Guardia-Olmos, Pero-Cebollero, 2014). Further,
the reasons that influence and indicate the specific strategies TAs use can
also be explored. As this research seeks to understand the beliefs that govern
how a TA mediates and supports learning.

I have also reflected on how my position as a researcher may impact this
research. I bring my own views and values to the research, and I actively
reflected on this during data collection and analysis. I ascribe to the view that there is no objective knowledge, rather knowledge is derived from different perspectives (Hammersley, 1999).

2.6 Research Design

This exploratory PCP research utilised a mixed-method design through focus groups, structured observations and semi-structured interviews, to obtain the perceptions of school staff on the roles and value of TAs.

2.6.1 Participants

This research took place within a local authority secondary school in the South-West of England. It was useful to reassure and remind staff that were not accustomed to the research process of my role frequently, so they did not feel judged. Staff commented after the process that it was useful for someone to highlight what they did on a daily basis.

TAs initial involvement occurred through their weekly staff meetings. I discussed the research plan, and the ten members of staff indicated interest. Seven TAs indicated their interest and availability to be observed and then interviewed. This represents a respectable percentage of the TAs in school.

Focus Group

Focus groups highlight the most important topic as well as those ideas and views that are consistently shared by group members (Robson, 2002). It is an organized, facilitated discussion, designed to enable researchers to better understand the range of opinions among a target group of people (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007).
Classroom Observations

There may be a discrepancy between what people say they have done and what they actually do (Robson, 2002). Structured observations will be used to corroborate and support the data obtained from the interviews. These observations will be used to validate what was reported in the interviews. Classroom observation schedules will be used to group interactions into categories of the behaviors of the TAs.

The observation schedule employed by this research especially focuses on the language TAs use in the classroom to guide pupils through a task. Further, the questions asked in the semi-structured interviews as well as the focus group, seek to discover the types of questions that TAs ask pupils to guide, develop, and challenge their thinking. The classroom observation schedules are based on the following principles of mediated learning: intentionality and reciprocity, mediation of meaning, mediation of transcendence, mediation of feelings of competence, and mediation of control of behavior (Tzuriel, 2013).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Tomlinson’s (1989) approach to hierarchical focusing was used to generate the semi-structured interviews (See Appendix 1), hierarchical focusing is described as a systematic approach to the resolution of a dilemma. The semi-structured interviews were developed around 4 main areas of investigation: TAs’ background, and previous experience, TAs’ perspectives of their role, TAs’ perspectives of others’ roles, and recommendations. The first questions asked would be closed questions, followed by open-ended questions, which sought to identify the beliefs and values of TAs.

These exploratory semi-structured interviews will have an inter-subjectivist bias (Robson, 2002) as knowledge will be collaboratively built and meanings conveyed, as I will conduct the semi-structured interviews, as this will allow
to adapt my reactions to the verbal and non–verbal responses of the participants. As the individual perceptions and meanings ascribed to the pedagogical role of TAs is valuable to this research (Robson, 2002), semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. In this way I can further explore the meanings underlying particular responses. Structured questionnaires would not facilitate this exploration and as a result they were not used for this research (Robson, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper 1</th>
<th>Participants and Methods</th>
<th>Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Group</strong></td>
<td>I meet with 10 members of staff to gain their views on what they considered the ‘ideal’ LSA to be, and what where their perceptions of the LSA role. When they heard the term LSA what did they think of?</td>
<td>This supported me in eliciting the views of LSAs in an organized manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class Observations</strong></td>
<td>I observed 9 LSAs during a one hour lesson as they supported students in class. The observation schedule was generated from the data gathered during the focus groups. The focus groups were used to elicit the perceptions the LSAs had of their role in supporting students. Some aspects of the LSA role appeared to match Feuerstein’s mediating principles, hence aspects of this theory contributed to the development of the observation checklist (see appendix 3)</td>
<td>This supported me in evidencing what LSAs indicated their roles to be. Where they actually supporting students in the ways they shared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semi-Structured Interviews</strong></td>
<td>Following the classroom observations, seven LSAs volunteered to be interviewed. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, and I focused on further exploring what was observed in the classroom, what they said during the focus group, and what their perceptions of their roles were.</td>
<td>Supports exploration around LSAs’ constructs of their roles. The evidence gained around how LSAs support students’ Academic progress was used as it met the criteria for paper 1.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The main text that supported my analysis of Data was Robson (2002). Please see 2.6.4 for full data analysis method.

Figure A. Table summarising the stages of research in paper 1.

2.6.2 Materials
Please see Appendix 2

2.6.3 Methods

This research used thematic analysis to identify the underlying ideas, and assumptions about the role of TAs. Thematic analysis is a method used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within the data (Braun, and Clarke, 2006). Interviews, observations, questionnaires, and focus groups produce rich data. Using thematic analysis, which searches across the data to find repeated patterns of meaning, will support this research in achieving its goal of understanding the experiences, meanings, and realities of the participants.

Classroom Observation

Paper copies of the checklist (Appendix 3) were made, and the researcher ticked off what was observed during a 60 minutes class where a TA was supporting a student or groups of students.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the classroom observations, I carried out the interviews at the school, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and were fully transcribed.

2.6.4 Data Analysis

Focus Groups
The transcribed school staff data was analysed and organised into themes using thematic analysis. The researcher also made notes of themes that were emerging. The written, pictorial, and scaled responses from the student focus groups were collated and reported.

**Structured Observations**

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the classroom observations. The frequency of different types of support were calculated and presented in a bar chart. (See Appendix 3).

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

The themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews were organised through the use of thematic analysis. Thematic Analysis was used as it was viewed to be best suited in supporting the critical realist and interpretive perspective of this PCP research. It is an inductive data-driven approach, which supports the researcher in identifying and analysing themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

As such the analysis was guided by Braun & Clarke’s (2006) 6-phase guide to thematic analysis following a series of stages:

1. Familiarisation with the data (conducting the interviews and making notes of issues that were raised, fully transcribing the interviews, reading and re-reading the transcripts and noting possible themes).
2. Initial coding (assigning a label to sections of the text which described a particular key concept).
3. Finding Themes (grouping similar coding categories).
4. Defining Themes.
5. Producing the report (thematic maps).

Thematic analysis was used for all staff interviews as well as the initial focus group. (See Appendix 8)
I conducted the focus group, all class observations and semi-structured interviews. The focus group and semi-structured interviews were recorded digitally, and I transcribed them manually. The focus group interview was entirely coded by uploading the document into NVIVO software and analysed.

The uploaded transcribed interviews were classified and coded using the information gained from the LSAs. The different ways LSAs supported students learning were given different codes. Themes emerged from the analyses and were mostly linked to LSA support of learning.

The transcribed semi-structured interviews were printed and codes that were previously identified from the focus group were highlighted. New categories also emerged and these were then coded under new labels and grouped to create new themes. As paper 1 focused largely on LSA academic support, codes that related to these academic themes were selected as they met the academic criteria.

The different themes that emerged, and how they were linked were then represented in Figure 3 below.

2.7 Ethics

Ethical Guidelines provided by the British Psychological Society and the University of Exeter were followed in this research. Approval from the University of Exeter’s ethics committee was obtained in October 2014. All participants in this study were briefed about the aims and purpose of the research prior to their involvement and informed written consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw and were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of all information. Please refer to Appendix 6 for the complete consideration of all ethical issues and practices, along with example consent forms.
2.8 Findings

Findings from the focus groups, structured classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews are presented below in relation to each of the research questions guiding this research. The thematic maps shown below will be referred to in the results section.

![Thematic Map](image)

**Figure 3 Themes that emerged when exploring TAs’ perceptions of their roles during the TA interview.**

TAs indicated that a significant aspect of their roles was supporting learning. The sub themes that emerged from supporting learning were academic support and building motivation. Further themes emerged indicating how TAs perceived they supported academics and motivation.
TAs perceived that their knowledge of students supported them in determining where to begin their intervention.

*Figure 4 Themes that emerged from TA interview, which indicates how TAs’ perceive the relationship between the theme of social and emotional support and the theme of academic support and Independent Learning.*

From the classroom observations that the TAs were using a range of mediating principles that also took account of behaviour and emotional response of the students. This will be explored through a structured interview in paper 2. Social and Emotional Support will be explored in paper 2.

**2.8.1 Research Question 1.**

To what extent do TAs use principles of mediated teaching when they are supporting students?

The one hour structured classroom observations highlighted the type of support TAs used when guiding students through a task (see Figure 5 below)
For the purposes of this research mediation refers to the categories listed in the table above.

The most frequently observed mediation techniques were scaffolding techniques and regulation of students’ behaviour. The scaffolding techniques included, differentiating instructions, modelling thinking, modelling trial and error, co-constructing plans, reducing writing load, and using sentence starters. Scaffolding also included helping students to summarise their thinking so their work could be understood by others. This range of scaffolding techniques was frequently used by TAs when supporting students through tasks.

Regulation of behaviour was managed by using positive language e.g. ‘you can do it’, ‘we’ll work it out together’, and ‘that is perfect’. Students’ concerns were also acknowledged, and TAs when supporting students who were either finding a task difficult, appeared distracted, or who lacked motivation to
complete a more challenging assignment frequently used this positive strategy.

It was interesting to note that while certain interventions were more frequent, other interventions had a higher level of consistency. TAs used process questions, and accepting as much as possible of students’ responses consistently e.g. ‘how else’, ‘how do you know’, ‘how are you going to record this’, and ‘where else might this happen”. This supported the students in thinking about how they arrived at a response.

The mediating principle ‘insistence on logical justification’ was not used as frequently as other mediating principles. Instead of TAs using questions such as, ‘what does that tell you’, and ‘can you tell me anything more’, they tended to use the following process oriented questions, ‘why did you think it is better to do it this way’, and ‘why do you think this should be considered first’.

Although all TAs with the exception of one were observed supporting students in discovering rules that they could then subsequently use to work through tasks, this mediating principle was not used as frequently as ‘scaffolding’. When guiding students in creating steps that would consistently support them in problem solving, TAs used language such as ‘What do you think you are doing?’ ‘What is it called, do you remember?’ ‘How might you remember it next time?’ ‘What could you do differently?’

The three least frequently observed mediation techniques based on Feuerstein’s mediation were ‘principles of bridging’, ‘systemic thinking’ e.g. ‘what do you think about this’, and ‘communication of purpose’. While the majority of TAs did use bridging, for example, sharing a story about another setting where the rule students’ discovered could be applied, or linking a story or event a student is interested in to the current activity, it was not as frequently observed. Language that supported systemic thinking was observed in some classrooms but not frequently e.g. TAs did ask students questions such as, ‘why should we look at this carefully at this picture before describing it’. This type of language mediation was only occasionally
observed. Language that communicated the purpose of the activity to students was observed in the majority of classroom, but was not a common occurrence. TAs often communicated the purpose of the activity after being prompted by students’ interest e.g. ‘Why am I doing this?’

The less positive practise of giving answers in isolation did not occur often in the classroom observations. TAs gave answers in lessons that required students to figure out an aspect of a problem before moving on. It seemed to be used pragmatically so that students could keep up with the pace of the lesson.

In addition to the data obtained from the graph, through semi-structured interviews perceptions arose into the type of mediation TAs used to support students in class. A key theme in describing their role was ‘academic support’- particularly making the curriculum accessible. A sub theme that emerged from this was ‘modelling behaviour’. TAs commented that they modelled trial and error, and asking good questions of the class teacher. TAs perceived that these techniques encourage their students to have the confidence to ask questions, and to admit that it is acceptable to not know, and to ask for help.

‘I think it is good for the children to see you learning as well, then they realise that you don't know everything and it makes you more approachable. You put your hand up and ask questions if the students can see you enjoying the lesson as well, then they will enjoy it……..I also think that if you find something hard yourself in the lesson and they see that you find it hard then it makes it ok for them to find it hard, and also it brings in it is ok to make a mistake, it is ok to keep trying.’

(TA 5 see coded nodes Appendix 7)
2.8.2 Research Question 2

What are TA’s views on the type of teaching they offer to support pupils’ learning?

Another theme to emerge from the interviews was that of ‘supporting learning’. TAs supported students by making the curriculum accessible through mediation and challenge according to individual needs, and appropriately challenging them through tasks. TAs indicated that as they knew the students so well, they could identify when a task perceived as challenging by the student was none the less perceived by the TA an appropriate one for them to attempt. Linked closely to this theme was ‘building motivation’. TAs reported that students’ initial response to learning was negative as they found it challenging.

‘…….Making kids understand that this isn’t just an interlude to get your five GCSEs or not. It is about not making the kids feel like a failure if they are not destined to get those academic qualifications, to give them faith in themselves and a sense of pride……. they feel they are being judged against the students who are capable of getting A* and they feel a failure before they start as the expectation is you get the best qualifications you can, so you have to encourage them with the things they are good at.’
(TA 7 and SENCo see coded nodes Appendix 7)

2.8.3 Research Question 3

To what extent is TAs’ knowledge about teaching and learning influenced by their own experiences?

During the focus group one of the themes that emerged was ‘TA personality’. TAs perceived that their personality was the most important factor in being able to support children and carry out their roles’ effectively. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being high importance in terms of their roles, TAs collectively gave
personality a 10, it was the only factor to receive this score, as they felt that it significantly influenced their approaches to teaching, and learning. They felt that while training was important, it was ranked at 7, as there were some aspects of the job that could not be taught. It was interesting to hear that TAs perceived the issue of personality to be key for them. This is not an area that has been widely researched, neither was I expecting TAs to value it so highly, it is worthy of further investigation.

The theme of personality was then further explored in the semi-structured interviews. TAs commented that the SENCo would consider their personalities when assigning them to support a particular need. TAs perceived that students who had social and emotional difficulties, which contributed to behavioural challenges, would need a TA who had a ‘stronger character’ and who had previous experience of supporting that type of need. It was also perceived that students who required motivation, and increased confidence to engage with tasks would be better supported by a TA who was described as more ‘momsey’.

‘The SENCo is really good at putting us with children who suit us….. I think personality wise we do know the children that we work with….. I don’t think that I would be any good with a child who needed really strong and firm structure…. There are other people who are really good at being much firmer and I think the SENCo knows who to put us with, she suits our personalities to the children…’
(TA 7 see transcribed interview Appendix 9).

‘Life experience’ was another theme that emerged from the focus groups and was also explored further in the semi-structured interviews. TAs shared that, as some of them did not have a positive experience of school when they were students, they could identify with how some of the students they were now supporting were feeling. TAs also perceived that having peer support was a positive aspect to their day to day working, and this also influenced their approach to teaching. Peer support was collectively ranked at 8 on the scale. TAs perceived that collectively they have a wealth of experience, and
knowledge in how to effectively support students’ learning, and without peer support and guidance, it would be increasingly difficult to support students’ learning.

‘It is really difficult to think about what we do, it is such an automatic process, we just get on with it.. I’ve been doing this for over 20 years, I have a lot of resources, it is something that evolves the longer you are a TA the more ammunition you have for a lesson, every thing is in my Mary Poppins bag…

(TA 5 see transcribed interview Appendix 9)

Another theme to emerge from the focus groups was ‘peer support’; this theme was further explored in the semi-structured interviews. TAs were often supported by colleagues who had successfully supported a particular need. TAs perceived that using each other for advice was a beneficial system, which supported them in successfully managing and supporting students’ learning. While peer knowledge and experience was often described as a good starting point when supporting students, TAs also shared their view that every student was different. TAs felt that at times you had to adapt the strategy you were using as you ‘might get a desired outcome quicker’. TAs perceived that if the student appeared demoralised by the intervention, particularly if it was constantly being repeated, then adjusting their approach was a useful option.

‘We talk to other TAs, we get ideas and share resources, so we can progress and move on…. I have drawn from colleagues over the years who have supported a number of students…. I know how they have succeeded and I have seen them succeed with their students we use each other for advice’

(TA 4 see transcribed interview Appendix 9)

TAs also indicated that their knowledge of teaching and learning was also acquired through experience and training in previous roles, as well as training they received in their current setting. During the semi-structured interviews most TAs indicated that they received basic training, but would like more in
terms of the particular area of need they supported. TAs indicated that their training ranged from: basic TA training, National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 for TAs, courses to support the different children they support, and courses training them in using concrete resources, which support the students they support.

“I do make a lot of resources for him so that he is able to have concrete materials and this helps him to access his lessons’. It is a combination of shadowing other TAs, any training courses that come up through the year, a lot of in house training through department meetings…. I think it is a bit of both, I worked with adults with difficulties’.

(TA 4, TA 5 and TA 7 see transcribed interview Appendix 9)

2.8.4. Research Question 4

How do TAs perceive other members of staff perceptions of them?

During the semi-structured interviews TAs perceptions were sought on how class teachers and members of the senior leadership team viewed the role of the TA. TAs perceived that class teachers as well as the SENCo were supportive of their role. TAs felt as though class teachers highly appreciated and valued the support that they gave to them and the students they supported. TAs indicated that some class teachers would explicitly indicate their gratitude towards them, and would often thank them for their support. Some class teachers would inquire of TAs guidance when preparing a lesson to ensure that it would be appropriate for all students to access.

‘A teacher might say can you speak to him or her as I can never get anything out of them, or if I speak to them they kick off….I have never felt that a teacher didn’t want me in their lesson, I think they do appreciate us, we have a good relationship with teachers on a whole…We offer support that enables the teacher to get on with the business of teaching’.

(TA 5 and TA 7 see transcribed interview Appendix 9)
Some TAs perceived that all class teachers would not have a consistently shared view about their role. Class teachers’ perceptions would range from the TA role being one that supported them (the teacher) to one that offered support for students. The main theme that emerged from this question was ‘the positive impact of TA presence’. TAs perceived that class teachers would find it increasingly challenging to deliver their intended lesson without TA support. The pressure was for all students to be included equally as far as possible. This would involve creating a lesson that is appropriately differentiated so that all students can assess it, and being able to support the students who needed it. All of this was perceived to be difficult by the TAs without TA support.

The majority of the TAs interviews indicated that the members of the senior leadership team would have a vague idea of the support they offered to students. TAs perceived that the some members of the senior leadership team perceived their role to be one that only comprised of reading and writing for students. TAs also perceived that the members of the senior leadership team viewed their role as reactive rather than proactive. TAs also perceived that the effort that they put into their roles was not understood or appreciated by members of the senior leadership team. TAs perceived that they were appreciated, and their roles understood by 90% of the school staff. They expressed the view that it felt good to be understood by the majority of the staff, and for their roles to be understood by 100% was unrealistic.

‘Class teachers will express that what you did was brilliant, they will acknowledge you, but senior leadership team don’t ever speak to you or anything….

(TA 5 see transcribed interview Appendix 9)

During a focus group the SENCo indicated that she did not like the term TA, as in her opinion the term assistant did not reflect what the team does. She perceived that TAs provided, ‘a real bridge between home and school, between teacher and student in the classroom, and sometimes a bridge
between the students and other students.’ The SENCo further indicated that the role of the TA was ‘enormous’, and to use the language and narrative of assistants to describe it devalues, and ‘lessens’ what TAs do. She further explained that it is an ‘immeasurable and unquantifiable role where the TAs give a child a voice, give a child the ability to come in every day, and not feel sick to their stomach waking up in the morning thinking I can’t come to school.’ When asked to give a summary or a slogan for her perception of the TA role, she expressed the following view, that TAs, ‘giving students back their life when they did not have one is immeasurable.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Principles of scaffolding were the most frequently utilised mediating methods employed by TAs when supporting students in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• TAs perceived that life experiences and peer support contributed to their knowledge and skill in teaching, and supporting students’ learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• TAs perceived that most class teachers and the SENCo understood and appreciated their role. However, they felt as though the members of the senior leadership team did not have a good idea of the value of the TA role.</td>
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Figure 6 above lists the key finding in a hierarchical order, which supports the values and beliefs of TA.
2.9 Discussion

In this section the findings are discussed in relation to previous research in the area. The issues and limitations of the study are examined and the implications for EP practice are discussed. Suggestions for future research are examined.

2.9.1 Mediating Principles

The intensity of TA focus appeared to be on the mediation in terms of social and emotional development and this will be explored further in paper 2. The present research would indicate that TAs mediation could be grouped into two themes, academic and social and emotional. While the themes of social and emotional wellbeing, and academic intervention are linked, and most TAs perceive that complement each other for the purposes of this research they will be discussed separately.

Academic Mediation
The findings revealed that TAs were using mediating principles when supporting students in class, however the extent and types of mediation used varied between TAs. TAs tended to ‘open up’ talk linguistically and cognitively, rather than ‘close it down’. This finding is in contrast to research by Webster, Blatchford, and Russell’s study on the Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants project, 2013. This could be due their observation that TAs in secondary schools tended to ‘situate themselves at the side of the room’ which meant they had fewer opportunities to engage in conversation with students. I observed that TAs tended to sit with the students that they were supporting, and also moved around the classroom to be better able to help those students who required it. As a result of this, TAs had opportunities to engage in mediating language when supporting students’ learning.

Findings also revealed that the most common mediating technique for an academic focus for the students used by TAs was scaffolding. The need for heuristic scaffolding – a method of teaching which allows students to learn by
discovering things for themselves (Radford et.al, 2014) - as a necessary practise that should be incorporated within a TA’s pedagogical role has been highlighted by Radford et.al.2014. The present research explores and provides a greater insight into what types of scaffolding TAs are currently using to support students’ learning. By TAs incorporating scaffolding techniques into their pedagogical approach it contributes to the development of independent learners as indicated in the research by Holten, and Clarke (2006).

Webster, Blatchford and Russell (2013) they observed that TA interactions ‘closed down’ student talk. However, they did not identify whether the mediating principle observed was bridging or scaffolding. The present research indicates that using scaffolding TAs were able to ‘open up’ student talking and support thinking. Bridging was not often observed in this research paper, linking the current activity to one the student had been engaged in previously. It may be useful to consider whether, with more experience or increased preparedness where TAs were not going into lessons ‘blind’ as suggested in the work of Webster, Blatchford, and Russell (2013) whether TAs would more frequently utilise principles of bridging to engage students in learning? This will be further discussed and explored in paper 2. What was evident from this research is that TAs support discussion and conversation with students using varying types of mediation.

The importance of TAs mediation was further highlighted under the theme ‘academic support’. Here TAs indicated that their roles were often to differentiate the language used, this was a mediating of language technique used so that students could access the curriculum. TAs often described having to ‘think on their feet’; this will be explored further in paper 2. Findings from, Webster (2013), and Radford et.al. (2014) research indicates that all TAs have a high level of responsibility for moment by moment pedagogical decision making, explaining, and modifying tasks. Radford et.al (2014) also discussed the issue of TAs support in differentiation teacher talk and how this helps students think for themselves.
The importance of using principles of mediation when supporting the development of student independence (Blatchford, Webster, and Russell, 2013; Holton, and Clarke, 2006) is supported through the high frequency of scaffolding observed, as well as ‘academic support’ being a key theme in the TA interviews. TA-student interactions were underpinned by language geared at supporting students in developing their own problem solving skills.

It was not clear from the semi-structured interviews whether TAs were taught about mediation in their initial training. It would be useful to explore how they developed these skills and whether TAs training packages should included mediation principles and techniques.

2.9.2 TA Personality

Personality has been viewed as one of the teacher characteristics connected with excellence, and described as teachers’ personal qualities, interpersonal skills, and positive relationships with students (Grieve, 2014). TAs used the term personality to describe their ability to build positive relationships with students, as well as, being nurturing in nature. For the purposes of this study Grieve’s (2014) definition will be used. The findings revealed that TAs perceived their personalities to be the most important factor, which contributed to them successfully supporting students. Further to this Grieve’s (2014) research also indicated that this positive relationship or ‘relationship in action’ is an essential characteristic for excellent teachers. As TAs are also in the role of “teacher” some of the time, Grieve’s (2014) research can also be attributed to their practice.

Findings also indicated that the TAs perceived their particular personalities’ were the main factor when being considered to support specific challenges. Lenon (2015) in Telegraph Media Group Limited indicated that one of the characteristics that make a good teacher, as indicated by head teachers, are the right personality. Lenon’s (2015) article further states that the best teachers are not disciplinarians rather they are the ‘velvet hand in the iron glove’. While this evidence relates to teachers it could be useful when
exploring what supports the ‘ideal’ TA role as there is little evidence around TA personality in literature. This confirms the perceptions held by TAs that it is important for them to be warm and generous, not to be messed with, passionate about students and keen for all to do well, which is shared by Lenon (2015).

During the semi-structured interviews the theme of ‘empathy’ was highlighted. TAs indicated that they identified with the students they supported, as they did not always have a positive experience of school. Loughran’s (2013) research indicated that teachers are confronted by their own identities and this shapes the nature of their pedagogical experiences. I did not see any instances of over identification (2002) but for some TAs it might be difficult not to. This quote would lead me to want to investigate that occurrence further.

‘I could see a huge amount of myself in him, so I knew how he was feeling in certain situations so he didn’t need to express himself verbally, I thought I’ve been through that, I had a dreadful time in school myself so I could see that in him.’

(TA 4 see transcribed interview Appendix 9)

The SENCo of the school perceives that personalities contributes to success in education, and is a strong indicator of successful outcomes. This is also highlighted in work by Simpson, Thurston, and Lauren (2014) and Klassen, and Tze (2014). What is unclear is whether other members of staff share the view that TA personality is a good indicator of success in supporting students. This may be useful to explore in future research.

### 2.9.3 Contributions to Pedagogy

The findings indicated that TA pedagogy was influenced by a variety of factors, with personality being the most highly valued factor. TAs indicated that previous experiences of school, life experiences, previous roles, peer support and guidance, and training all contributed to the development of their pedagogical role. This finding confirms research by Loughran (2013), which
found that all learners (students and teachers) are confronted by their own identities, actions and practices, all of which inevitably shape the nature of their pedagogical experiences.

When the term pedagogy is discussed, it is often synonymous with the acquisition and mastery of academic materials. TAs were observed focusing on supporting pupils in understanding tasks rather than completing tasks as indicated by Graves (2014). This fits with the conventional pedagogical role of mediation and scaffolding, however, TAs overall focus was on the development of self confident, emotional secure young people.

**2.9.4 Feeling Valued**

Findings indicated that TAs consistently felt valued and appreciated by teachers. While TAs did share the view highlighted by research from Watson, Bayliss, and Pratchett (2013), of being notoriously underpaid. They did not share the view that they were perceived as undervalued members of the school workforce. The SENCo shared the view indicated in the work of Graves (2013) that the language, particularly the use of the word support when describing TAs may add to the perceived poor status of this role.

Further findings in this research indicated that TAs did not perceive their roles to be in the shadow of the teacher or to a lesser standard, as suggested by Watson, Bayliss, and Pratchett (2013). TAs perceive their roles to be separate but complementary to that of the teacher. Teachers value TA support in class, as without TAs, their roles would be increasingly difficult. TAs viewed themselves to be a part of a team, they had a good relationship with the teacher, and they saw students progressing, these three things contribute to them feeling valued (Blatchford et.al. 2014).

Findings also suggested that TAs perceived that members of the senior leadership team neither value nor understand their role. They consistently indicated that senior leadership team members could shadow them for a day, so they would appreciate how they support the needs of students. It would be
useful to explore whether senior leadership team members view TAs as the ‘less competent other’ who operates in the shadow of the teacher as suggested by Watson, Bayliss, and Pratchett (2013), rather than a complimentary professional whose primary focus is the development and progress of students, particularly in the areas of social and emotional wellbeing.

TAs perceptions on the support they offer is more about social and emotional wellbeing that any other theme associated with education, such as academic techniques. Care work and social and emotional support traditionally associated with mothers tends not to be seen as productive work, particularly within the current education policy in England (Graves, 2014). This research finding could also be contributing to TAs’ perceptions that members of the senior leadership team do not see them as valuable.

**2.9.5 Relation to Theoretical Models**

As indicated in the literature, relating findings to theoretical models of mediated learning employed by TAs highlighted some thought-provoking topics. In referencing Feuerstein’s et al. (1999) principles of mediated learning (see Figure 2), each principle was observed, but in varying degrees. The principle of ‘regulation of behaviour’ was the most commonly used principle, and is explored fully in paper 2 in relation to how TAs support students’ social and emotional development. This is an interesting finding as the purpose of using mediating principles as a theoretical model was to explore how TAs were supporting students in developing their thinking. It was expected that the most commonly used mediating principle would have been ones to support the direct acquisition of academic skills. The findings indicated that the indirect support of academic development through regulation of behaviour principles, focused on the development of students’ social and emotional development.

What was not commonly observed was bridging, and perhaps this indicates a need for TAs to be more purposeful when using these principles. I wonder
whether TAs are explicitly told and familiar with principles of bridging, do they observe class teachers using it? It would be interesting to explore these concepts. It would also be useful to discuss how TA practices’ could be developed further through training to increase these techniques. It would be interesting to explore whether TAs perceive any barriers to utilising principles such as bridging, which are established through research as effective in supporting student learning (Feuerstein et al. 1999).

The findings about the kinds of relationships TAs build with students, relate to Vygotsky’s (1978) social cultural theory. TAs understand the idea that learning is a social process, it is an interaction that plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). It appears that TAs are supporting students into the ‘zone of proximal development’ through a collaboration of regulation of behaviour, scaffolding, and social interaction. Vygotsky (1978) indicated that it is only when a learner is in the ‘zone of proximal development’ that cognitive development can occur.

2.9.6 Study Limitations

Methodological issues as well as personal reflections are highlighted here.

Participation in the classroom observations and semi-structured interviews were self-selected, they volunteered to be observed and share their perceptions of their experiences. As a result this may not have represented the views of all TAs in the school. However, given the nature of this interpretive research, the aim was to discover the ‘day to day’ experiences of TAs in that particular school.

I reflected on how my role can influence the research process, particularly when thematic analysis is used as a method of data analysis. Each stage of the process was treated with rigour and I sought to triangulate by obtaining multiple sources of information, this supported confidence in the findings. Reflections were made about the power imbalance regarding the researcher and the TAs during the semi-structured interviews and classroom observation. I was sensitive to TAs’ perception that I was there to criticise their practice
and time was spent sensitively trying to create a sense of equality between the researcher and TAs.

2.9.7. Relevance to Practice

This study highlights the perceptions of the pedagogical role of TAs. It gives insight into what TAs perceive their role to be as they seek to support students in developing social, emotional, and academic skills. This study builds on previous research in the area of the role, impact, and effective deployment of TAs. This study also builds on, and links with previous theory in the areas of effective teaching, and learning. This research adds to the research by firstly, using a PCP approach to explore and demonstrate the value TAs attach to particular areas of their role, and secondly through understanding what TAs perceive their roles to be would enable the school to better support them developing this role.

The impact of TAs is of interest both locally and nationally. TAs are the most expensive intervention in supporting students with SEN, it would be beneficial if their current practices could be appreciated, and recognised as valuable. This is only possible through research into their roles. This study could influence the policy and practice, which guides how TAs are deployed and trained.

The implications for educational psychology practice include:
- developing and delivering training packages that would better inform the TA role by supporting TA practices’ such as bridging, and emotional wellbeing of students.
- offering supervision and guidance to TAs who are supporting students with social and emotional difficulties.
- acting as a mediator between staff who may not understand the TA role.
2.9.8 Future Directions for Research

Areas for future research were mentioned in the discussion, and could develop from the present study. It would be useful to determine whether school staff share the belief that TAs’ personality is more important when carrying out their roles than training, and whether it is viewed as a good indicator of TA success. It would also be helpful to explore what value members of the senior leadership team place on developing students’ social and emotional wellbeing, particularly what are their perceptions of the TA role. Another area to further explore would be whether the TA role developed as recognition that adults rather than children needed to adjust to meet students’ needs. Is it a reflection of the rejection of the ‘within child’ model, which the inclusion agenda rejects? I would also like to explore whether with training TAs would more readily utilise principles of mediation associated with bridging. Finally it would be useful to explore what theoretical underpinning members of staff perceive TAs to be using when carrying out their roles.

2.9.9 Links to Paper two

Developing on the findings from paper one, paper two invites parents and students to share their perspectives on the role of the TA. Parents and students should feel more involved in the process, which determines the kind of extra support available to meet their needs. Statutory guidance (DfE, 2015) advises that the voice of children and parents be integral in planning interventions geared at supporting them. Paper two looks at:

- To what extent do parents and students agree with the perceptions of the TA role that was discussed in paper one.
- Students’ perceptions of TA support, particularly what do they value most about the TA role.
- What could be done to further develop the support delivered by TAs.
- To what extent do TAs perceived their teaching as having a nurture element.
• It seemed that they were mediating emotion and behaviour as well as academic learning, and this will be further explored.
3.1 Abstract

Following findings from paper 1, this study sets out to further explore the roles of TAs from the perspectives of students and parents. TAs indicated that a significant aspect to their role was developing the social and emotional wellbeing of the students they supported. This paper explores to what aspect those views were shared and valued by students and parents. A mixed-methods approach to data collection involved a focus group of 3 students, 21 parental questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews of 7 TAs. 64% of parents indicated that TAs provide social and emotional support to their students, and 95% of parents indicated that the role was important in supporting their children in having successful school experiences. Students indicated that TAs knowing them well was one of the most important aspects needed to support them. The theme of ‘student nurture’ is explored, as TAs perceive this to be one of the main aspects of their role. Implications for practise within the school system are explored.

3.2 Introduction

Based on the findings from paper one and its theoretical underpinnings, I also consulted research concerned with positive psychology and self-determination theory. Paper two plans to further explore the extent TAs’ pedagogical role is underpinned by a focus on social and emotional development. It is particularly interested in the extent this focus is recognised and valued by students and parents. This paper is particularly interested in:

- To what extent are TAs supporting students’ emotional and social development valued by students.
• To what extent are TAs supporting students’ social and emotional development valued by parents.
• To what extent are TAs supporting students’ social and emotional development valued by students.
• What are the barriers TAs experience when supporting students in the manner they perceive to me most appropriate.

The importance of supporting students’ mental wellbeing has been highlighted in statutory guidance (DfE, 2015). In the following literature I will explore the effective use of TAs, discuss the benefits of supporting the development of students’ social and emotional wellbeing, and indicate the advantages of including the perceptions of students and parents. I believe that this research could contribute to previous research on effective inclusive practices.

3.3 A Review of the Literature

The literature review explores the role of teaching assistants, particularly in supporting students’ social and emotional development. The theoretical approaches that influenced this research are mental health and emotional wellbeing. Literature on gaining the ‘voice of the child’ was by the researcher as contributing to the body of literature that exists on the role of TAs. Similarly to the literature review in paper 1, the term pedagogy is also explored in the literature, specifically as it relates to the types of strategies that are utilised in the classroom to support learning.

EBSCO E- Journals was the main gateway used to search journals. The key journals that I have identified for my research are, ‘Educational Psychology in Practice’, ‘Educational Research’ and the ‘Journal of Educational Psychology’. The key word searches conducted were: ‘the voice of the child’, ‘the voice of the parent’ and ‘emotional wellbeing’. From those key word searches, 8 research papers were selected, as they were viewed to be relevant to what is explored in this paper. This literature review is recursive in nature, as the findings from similar research studies, which explored the roles and effects of
TAs, are discussed (Ridley, 2008). Adderley, Hope, Hughes, Jones, Messiou, and Shaw, and Klassen and Tze are useful integrative reviews of previous work exploring positive inclusive practices. I consider that Ainscow, and Kaplan are important researchers into the field of what supports students’ development.

3.3.1 The Role and Effects of Teaching Assistants

Due to an increasingly inclusive ethos adopted by schools, teaching assistants (TAs) have become a normal addition to classroom and school environments (Unison, 2014). They often support students who require additional intervention, by facilitating further strategies that benefit those who are finding some aspects of school difficult (Ainscow, 2005). Teachers are able to support the rest of the class, whilst TAs support the work of specific groups of pupils (Blatchford, et al, 2004). The role of teaching assistants within a large college can be complex; it can often be emotionally intensive, demanding and require unrealistic expectations (Mclachlan, and Davis, 2013). LSAs were found to be poorly equipped for their role, and felt their was a lack of appropriate training to prepare them for their roles supporting learners (Mclachlan, and Davis, 2013). In some cases the separation of TAs from teaching is deliberate and explicit, and this might account for reports of confusion and uncertainty over the roles and responsibility of TAs (Butt & Lowe, 2012). This confusion has some impact on TAs and schools’ ability to retain them (Trent, 2014). Blatchford, Russell, and Webster (2012) insist that ‘schools have much to gain from TAs, and few, if any, would wish to lose them’. Trent (2014) study involved developing TAs unique identity, as there needs to be a better understanding of the experiences of TAs in school-based settings.
3.3.2 Pedagogy – The relationship between teaching and learning

Pedagogy focuses on understanding the relationship between, teaching and learning, and depends on a teacher making informed decisions about practice (Loughran, 2013). It would suggest that teachers are consciously reflecting and adapting their style of teaching based on how learners respond. Teaching is dynamic, and involves the serious consideration of what is to be taught, and how it is to be taught (Loughran, 2013).

Webster (2014) explored how research evidence on the role and impact of teaching assistants could inform professional practice. Through detailed case studies of 48 Year 5 pupils with statements, he found that the reliance on teaching assistants to include pupils with statements of SEN in mainstream settings masks a collective, unintentional failure of educationalists to provide schools and families of children with SEN with pedagogically sound models of inclusive provision. Pupils with statements spent the equivalent of just over a day a week away from the classroom with the TA, who had the main responsibility for teaching, and delivering alternative programmes and interventions. Webster (2014) indicated that all TAs had a high level of responsibility for moment-by-moment pedagogical decision making, explaining and modifying tasks. The National Workload agreement signed by the government and most teaching unions in 2003, saw a number of tasks previously seen as preserve of teachers become permissible for TAs, including planning and preparing lessons, delivering lessons, assessing, recording, and reporting (DfES, 2003).

3.3.3 Supporting Social, Emotional, and Mental Well-being

The SEN Code of Practice 2014, indicates that children and young people may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways: being withdrawn, being isolated, as well as displaying challenging behaviour. The SEN Code also includes children and young people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and those with attachment disorder into the wide group of students with social and emotional
difficulties. Statutory guidance mandates that schools should have a clear process to support these students (SEN, 2014). To create a more inclusive learning environment schools are aiming to remove the barriers to learning by placing effective special educational provision (SEN, 2014). While special educational provision includes academic mediation through differentiation and scaffolding, it also involves social and emotional mediation. I believe that it may be more challenging for schools to quantify and evidence their provision to meet social, emotional, and mental health needs as there may be a different type of dynamic provision, which adjusts constantly to meet students’ needs.

Mental health and behaviour guidance in schools (2015) indicates that schools should be a safe and affirming place for children where they develop a sense of belonging and feel able to trust and talk openly with adults about their problems. Further, students would benefit from a committed senior management team which develops a culture within the school that values all pupils, allows them to feel a sense of belonging, and makes it possible to talk about problems in a more opened manner. The drive to support the development of students with good emotional wellbeing is becoming increasingly valued in schools as emotional wellbeing in a good indicator of academic attainment. Social, emotional, and mental health difficulties may dispose students to have significantly greater difficulties learning than the majority of those of the same age (Mental Health and Behaviour, 2015).

The characteristics of the adult who offers support to students is important. Teacher personality plays a part in education, and is a strong indicator of teacher success (Simpson, Thurston, and Lauren, 2014; Klassen, Tze, 2014). Telegraph Media Group Limited (2015) suggest that a good teacher has the right personality; the best teachers are not disciplinarians they are a ‘velvet hand in an iron glove’, not to be ‘messed’ with. They are passionate about students and keen for all to do well. TAs are often placed in a similar role to teachers, and the above are relevant to their practice also. While this research is about the role of TAs, I believe that exploring what contributes to good teacher practice can guide an exploration of the roles of TAs. Grieve (2010)
describes the teacher characteristics associated with excellence in terms of personal qualities and interpersonal skills. Further, positive relationships with students are an essential characteristic for excellent teachers (Grieve, 2010). In recognition of this finding some schools are placing a greater emphasis on the development of interpersonal skills when training teachers. The development of interpersonal skills is identified as necessary in supporting teachers to develop students’ openness to new thinking, and participation in social, cultural, economic and political life (Grieve, 2010). This should also apply to the training of TAs.

Finally in seeking to support students’ development, their views should be obtained. Exploring ‘children’s voices’ supports the discovery of the practices, which promote inclusion, and they should be central to the discussions about decisions that will ultimately affect them (Ainscow and Kaplan, 2005). Children’s ideas should be recognised as the starting point for moving towards more inclusive practices rather than just having a viewpoint on issues that adults consider to be of importance (United Nations Rights of a Child, 1989). I believe that it is also important to include the views and perspectives of parents when working with their children. Working in a systemic manner is often viewed as a more useful and positive practice, as it takes into consideration the multiple influences on a child or young person (Bronfenbrenner, 1978). Henderson and Mapp (2002) indicate that when parents are involved in their children’s education, those children are likely to attend school consistently, and demonstrate good academic, social, and behavioural skills. The importance of parental involvement through all educational decisions is undisputed; research indicates the positive outcomes for children when parents are involved in their education (Epstein, 2001). Further, research into special education also links positive social, emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes for children with disabilities when parents are involved (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, Shogren, 2011; Zhang, Hsu, Kwosk, Benz, and Bowman-Perrot, 2011).
3.4 The Present Research- An Outline

While there are many studies, which mentioned that students were observed during the research process, I am not aware of any study that explored pupils’ views from a PCP perspective on TA support. It would be useful for studies to explore to what extent the perceptions of the TA role was shared by TAs and those it was developed to support, for example students and their families.

Following the findings from paper one, where TAs perceived that a significant aspect of their role was to provide nurture when supporting the social and emotional development of students. I thought it would be useful to explore whether this belief was shared and valued by students and their parents. My research is seeking to discover what the perceptions of the pedagogical role of TAs are. I am hoping to discover a clear, shared narrative by including the views of students and parents.

Previously mentioned research papers spoke about including the ‘hidden voices’ of children, this can lead to the development of more inclusive classroom in schools (Ainscow, and Kaplan, 2005). The view that students’ perceptions are central to the discussion of the role of TAs is important when seeking to understand what type of support is recognised as most beneficial. Including parents in this dialogue is also viewed as necessary when seeking to obtain the perceptions of the TA role.

The methods in the literature previously discussed, support obtaining the views of students and parents, as a result, similar methods of data collection will be used when seeking to contribute to the already existing literature. The co-construction of a mind map, and rating scale with students supported the researcher in facilitating the focus group. This focus group supported the discovery of students’ views of how TAs supported them in school, and what in their opinion was the most beneficial method. The questionnaires allowed this research to obtain parental views in an anonymous manner.
3.4.1 Research Aims

- To explore students’ and parents’ perceptions on the value of the social, emotional, and mental health support offered by TAs.
- To seek clarification of the different perspectives between TAs, teachers and senior management with regard to the value TAs place on supporting students’ emotional wellbeing.

3.4.2 Research Questions

1. To what extent are pupils able to express their views on what type of TA support they receive?
2. What are parents' views of the type of support TAs offer to their children?
3. To what extent do TAs use principles of mediated teaching when they are supporting students academically and emotionally?
4. What are the barriers to providing support with wellbeing as well as academic development for pupils?

3.5 Research Methodology

The aims of this research are to explore the views of TAs from the perspectives of students and parents. I am particularly interested in the views of students and parents, about the role of the TA in supporting learning from a Personal Construct Psychological (PCP) perspective. Please see Appendix 7 for the remainder of the methodology.

3.6 Research Design

This exploratory PCP research utilised a mixed-method design through focus groups and questionnaires, to obtain the perceptions of pupils and parents on the roles and value of TAs.
3.6.1 Participants

This research took place within a local authority secondary school in the southwest of England. Parents and students from the school were involved in this research.

Three students participants from Key stage three, and four who had a range of special educational needs were selected by the SENCO to meet the researcher’s requirements. These students then comprised the student focus group. While methods, which utilised questionnaires, could have been used, I felt that a more active participation method was more useful when seeking to accurately exploring and gain students’ views.

Of the parent/ carer participants who were invited to share their perceptions of the TA role via questionnaires, twenty-one of twenty-five responded. This comprises a respectable return.

As children may be easily swayed, a structured method of allowing children to record their answers was used. I acknowledged that as an adult there may have been a perceived power imbalance by students, this led me to utilize focus groups where there were more students than adults. Children were asked questions, and with the support of the researcher created mind-maps, rating scales, and ideal drawings of their view of the TA role. This research assumes that group interviews will be less intense than one to one interviews (MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck, & Myers, 2003). As students will also be responding individually, it will reduce the influence of a dominant individual. This is one of the reasons that they were chosen to facilitate data gathering from pupils (See Appendix 11).

The interpretivist paradigm I adopted led me to ask students initial questions, let them lead discussions, explore their views using task based methodologies (mind-maps, and rating scales, while use their language back to them when asking follow up questions (Punch, 2002).
Questionnaire

The themes that emerged from the staff and students’ focus group informed the development of the parent questionnaire. This tool was used to explore parents’ perspectives. As parents were asked to share their agreement or disagreement with a statement that emerged from the data, their perspectives either corroborated or contradicted what school participants indicated as valuable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper 2</th>
<th>Participants and Methods</th>
<th>Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi Structured Interviews</td>
<td>Following the classroom observations, seven LSAs volunteered to be interviewed. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes, and I focused on further exploring what was observed in the classroom, what was said during the focus group, and what their perceptions of their roles were.</td>
<td>Supports exploration around LSAs constructs of their roles. The evidence gained around how LSAs support students’ Social and Emotional development was used as it met the criteria for paper 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>3 students, from each secondary key stage comprised the focus group. I met with the students for 1 hour on each of 2 separate occasions. We co-created mind maps around their perceptions of the LSA role, and ranked various aspects of their perceptions of this role. I then discussed the findings of the LSA interview in terms of themes and then invited these students to rank these themes in terms of importance to them.</td>
<td>Visiting twice allowed me to confirm whether I had represented their views accurately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Questionnaires</td>
<td>25 parental questionnaires co-constructed with the SENCo were sent out, and 20 were completed</td>
<td>This allowed me to obtain parental perspectives on the LSA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and returned. Parents were also asked to give their perspectives on themes that emerged from the LSA focus group and the semi-structured interviews.

| Analysis | The main text that supported my analysis of Data was Robson (2002). Please see 3.6.4 for full data analysis method. |

Figure B. Table summarising the stages of research in paper 2.

### 3.6.2 Materials

#### Focus Groups

The researcher to record the pupils’ focus group responses used flip chart paper, and pens.

#### Questionnaire

The researcher designed the parental questionnaire in collaboration with the school SENCo, building on findings from the TA focus group in study 1 (See Appendix 4). The SENCo has established a good relationship with the parents of the students whom the SEN Team supports, and as a result 80% of the questionnaires were returned. Parents also spontaneously contacted the researcher by phone to further discuss their views on the role of TAs in supporting their children.

#### Semi-Structured Interviews

Please see Appendix 2

### 3.6.3 Methods

#### Focus Groups
The researcher, who explained the aims and purpose of the research, and why the students were involved, facilitated the focus group. The student’s views were obtained in a more creative manner, an approach similar to ‘an ideal drawing and its opposite’ (Moran, 2001, & Beaver, 2011) was used, as well as rating scales, and mind maps. Children were asked to draw their idea of an ideal TA, and the opposite and then indicate where they thought their TAs fell. The ideal self-drawing supports exploring the beliefs students' have on their experiences of TA support in a gentle manner (Moran, 2001) by highlighting their views on the kind of TA they would want and the contrasting TA they would not want. The mind maps discuss what TAs did and what they would like them to do. These items were then ranked on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being most important.

**Questionnaire**

Paper copies of the parental copies of the questionnaire were sent home with students. The questionnaires were self-completed, and returned to school and collected by the researcher. Due to the reasonably high response rate, 80%, the sample could be seen to reflect the views of the wider parental group robustly.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Following the classroom observations, I carried out the interviews at the school, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and were fully transcribed.

### 3.6.4 Data Analysis

**Focus Groups**

The written, pictorial, and scaled responses from the student focus groups were collated and reported.

**Questionnaires**
Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data generated from the questionnaires. The frequencies were calculated for each question to indicate the most and least common responses, and reported in percentages. The qualitative data generated from the open-ended questions were collated and grouped into themes.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

Thematic analysis (Braun, & Clarke, 2002) was used for all staff interviews as well as the initial focus group (See Appendix 8). I conducted the semi-structured interviews, which were recorded digitally, and transcribed manually by me.

The uploaded transcribed interviews were classified and coded using the information gained from the LSAs. The different ways LSAs supported students’ social development were given different codes. Themes emerged from the analysis and were mostly linked to LSA’s nurture, social, and emotional support.

The transcribed semi-structured interviews were printed and codes that were previously identified from the focus group were highlighted. New categories also emerged and these were then coded under new labels and grouped to create new themes. As paper 2 focused largely on LSA social and emotional support, codes that related to these social themes were selected as they met the social development criteria.

The different themes that emerged, and how they were linked were then represented in Figures 7 and 8 below.
3.7 Ethics

Ethical Guidelines provided by the British Psychological Society and the University of Exeter were followed in this research. Approval from the University of Exeter’s ethics committee was obtained in October 2014. All participants in this study were briefed about the aims and purpose of the research prior to their involvement and informed written consent was obtained from all participants (including students, and their parents). Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw and were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of all information. Please refer to Appendix 6 for the complete consideration of all ethical issues and practices, along with example consent forms.
3.8 Findings

Findings from the focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires are presented below in relation to each of the research questions guiding this research. The thematic maps shown below will be referred to in the results section.

![Theme Map]

Figure 7 Themes that emerged when exploring TAs’ perceptions of their roles during the TA interview. TAs indicated that a significant aspect of their roles was supporting social development. The sub theme that emerged from supporting social development was nurture. Further themes emerged indicating how TAs perceived they provided a nurturing role by knowing students well and being available to listen to students.
Figure 8  Themes that emerged when exploring TAs’ perceptions of their roles during the TA interview. TAs indicated that a significant aspect of their roles was supporting social development. The sub themes that emerged from supporting social development were social and emotional support. Further themes emerged indicating how TAs perceived they supported social and emotional development in students.
3.8.1 Research Question 1

To what extent are pupils able to express their views on what type of TA support they receive?

During the focus groups, the student participants used language that ranged from ‘helper’ to ‘friendly’ to describe the TAs in their school. They indicated that both teachers and TAs teach but the TA will translate words, as ‘some teachers do not know how to teach for all students’. Students indicated that TAs will prompt to keep them on task, and scribe if they need it. The themes that emerged from the initial student focus group on how TAs supported students were, ‘breaking language down for understanding’, ‘helping me to understand why I am angry’, and ‘helping me to become calm’. The students agreed that TAs were particularly supportive in helping them to understand why they sometimes say horrible things and why other students say horrible things. Using the rating scale one student indicated that their school with TAs would be rated at 10, and without TAs it would be a 3. Another student rated school with TAs at 6, and without at 5. Both students relied heavily on TA support, and had TA support in every class. I wonder whether the differences in their responses were as a result of their different needs.

A younger student contributed views by drawing an image of ‘the best TA’, and ‘the worst TA’ (see Appendix) The drawings indicated that the best TAs were nice, so that you weren’t scared, said have a nice day, gave you pens if you forgot yours, and helped with work by explaining and giving information. The worst TAs were angry, shouted, ordered you around, did not help you with work, and they did not give you pens if you forgot them. When asked to place the TAs at the school on the scale using ‘the best TA’ as one end and ‘the worst TA’ at the opposite end, their TAs were rated as ‘the best TA’.

I visited the students a second time to facilitate another focus group to confirm that I had represented their views accurately. I also introduced themes that emerged from the TA interview to determine whether students also recognised and valued those themes. The themes of ‘knowing me well’, ‘nice
and kind’, and ‘teaching me’ were consistently rated at 10 on the rating scale. With ‘knowing me well’ being identified as the most important TA characteristic.

3.8.2 Research Question 2

What are parents’ views of the type of support TAs offer to their children?

The responses to the questionnaires indicated that parents’ perceived TA support to be valuable. 90% of parents indicated that TAs provided academic support to their children, 54% indicated that TAs supported the development of life skills, and 67% indicated that TAs provided social and emotional support. 95% of parents indicated that they viewed TA support as important. A further theme that emerged from the TA interview was the view that TAs motivated students, and supported them in developing confidence in their abilities. I thought it would be useful to explore whether this view was valued and shared by parents. 71% of parents indicated that they completely agreed with that view, and 29% of parents indicated that they somewhat agreed with TAs motivating and developing confidence in their children. Parents also reported that TAs supported their children in having a positive experience of school. 86% of parents rated TAs as 7 or higher on the rating scale when indicating how much they perceived TAs supported their children in having a positive experience of school.

The themes that emerged when parents were asked to elaborate on their views of TAs importance were all linked to inclusion. Parents indicated that TAs supported their students in accessing mainstreamed education. Without TA support parents believed that their children would be unable ‘to function’ in class, they would, ‘find it difficult without help’, and having TA support, ‘enables my son to participate and cope in mainstream.’

Parents indicated that TAs helped with their children’s concentration and motivation and perceived that TAs ‘encouraged and challenged their children’.
They also indicated that as a result of TA support their children were showing an increase in confidence, and also appeared happy at school, “The LSA who has increased confidence, and he seems happy at school”. Parents also indicated that it was important that TAs offered academic, social and emotional support. It was important to parents that TAs helped with their children’s understanding of learning situations, supported them when they were becoming frustrated and stressed, and helped them him to calm down. Parents perceived that it is important for their children to have positive support.

3.8.3 Research Question 3

To what extent do TAs use principles of mediated teaching when they are supporting students?

The largest theme to emerge from the semi-structured interviews was ‘nurture’. TAs perceived that they spent more time with the students in comparison to the amount of time spent with other members of staff. They perceived they were able to form a different type of relationship with students and this supported them in knowing which type of mediation would be most beneficial to a particular student. TAs commented that they would correct students who labelled them as teachers. They perceived that it was important for them to be seen as different to teachers, so that students would relate to them in a different way.

‘...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. They stop us in the corridor walking to classes..... I quite often get called a teacher by the students but I say that I am not, I am a LSA, because I think our role is very different, we get to do a lot more, teachers can’t do what we do, they are not able they do not have the time.’

(TA 5 see Appendix 7 Coded Nodes)
Sub themes that emerged were ‘knowing students well’, and ‘listening’ (see figure 4) TAs perceptions were that students were aware of TAs care and support in terms of the students being listen to, and their views being deemed as important. TAs commented that when a student realised that you genuinely cared, students’ attitudes towards school, and TAs changed. The TAs perceived that this change was sometimes necessary to help them carry out their role of supporting academic development.

‘…..the first student that I worked with hated school and hated teachers and to a degree hated life. So he was quite challenging, it took a lot of caring, social skills, reassurance, and confidence. Today he is a prefect in the school, so it goes to show how a pupil can change with support……. An 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……. They know they are loved it is like a family (TA 3, TA 10, and SENCO see Coded Nodes Appendix 6)

A further theme to emerge was ‘social and emotional development’, and while it is linked to the theme of ‘nurture’ it will be discussed separately. TAs perceived that the support they offered students in terms of supporting emotional and social development was a key aspect of their role. They perceived that before some students could access the national curriculum, they would need particular interventions aimed at developing their confidence, self-esteem, and resilience.

Further TAs perceived that while other members of staff were pressured by having to show progress solely in the academic attainment of students, it was their role to also support the development of a well-rounded individual.

‘….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 ….. Some children don’t know how to conduct themselves, the social rules, how to look or act and
they speak out in the only way they know. .... They don’t think that it is rude, they really have no idea.’

(TA 2 see Transcribed focus group Appendix 7 and TA 6 see coded nodes Appendix 6)

A sub theme of ‘social and emotional support’ was the theme of ‘mediating experiences’. These were often social situations which students were finding difficult to navigate. TAs perceived their role to be one of being advocates, or mentoring students to think about other ways of managing a difficult experience and supporting them in considering a more positive way of viewing a scenario. These social situations were not only based in school, but TAs also mediated difficult relationship with students and their parents.

‘….. Today there were issues between the students and a teacher and I was able to calm the situation and keep the student in the lesson. Whereas ordinarily the student would have been off and gone…. some of them don’t have that positive role model…. we make school for some of our students a positive place to be, where it might not have been when they first came, they 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’

(TA 3 see transcribed interview Appendix 9)

It was interesting that the theme of ‘progress’, emerged within the theme of ‘social and emotional development’. TAs indicated that what they enjoyed most about their role was seeing students’ progress, indicating that academic progress was important and perceived as valuable by them. However, TAs perceived that for some students their emotional and social progress was more important than academic achievement in the national curriculum at certain times. TAs were gratified when students appeared to be happy, especially when their previous demeanour was one of being uncomfortable or sad. TAs appeared to be more concerned with students’ holistic development, rather than the 2 sub levels of academic attainment that was a national
requirement. TAs also perceived the social and emotional curriculum as important, they felt that students needed to be taught the skills that would support them in, managing school environment, home environment, and their futures' successfully.

‘Yes academic is important but if he can pick up two or three things from the lesson I am really happy with that, but to be able to work with others, to give his opinion and listen to others, to support others using empathy which he can do sometimes, is more important for him than learning history and geography…… Achieving is being able to integrate into your lessons on your own, it is being able to mix with your peers, he can go into tutor groups with his peers. ..it is more than 2 sub levels of progress.’
(TA 3 see transcribed interviews Appendix 9)

A further sub theme within ‘social and emotional support’ was ‘supporting students in managing and understanding their emotions’. This theme was linked to supporting students in mediating challenging social situations. TAs perceived that they were more able than teachers to focus on the emotional wellbeing of the students, as teachers were often under pressures of curriculum demands. TAs value of social and emotional development is high, as they perceive that for academic interventions to be successful and to be able to create meaningful outcomes, students need to feel confident enough to be supported and challenged. TAs view that working on students’ social and emotional development is not mutually exclusive with academic development, rather it necessary to achieve academic support.

‘it is being able to see him having a friendship group without alienating himself. He has learnt not to get into people’s faces, he has learnt about appropriate space’. …. they will have that security to know that he can either succeed or fail in something, but still feel as though they have accomplished something, but they need that support. A safety net of someone like us for them to be able to progress’.
(TA 3 see transcribed interview Appendix 9)
Key Findings

- TAs’ perceive a large portion of their role to be supporting students’ social and emotional development, this was viewed as a necessary starting point at times, before academic interventions could be successfully used. Principles of scaffolding were the most frequently utilised mediating methods employed by TAs when supporting students in class.

- Having a nurturing personality was perceived as the most important trait in supporting the TA role. TAs perceived that training was important, but there were certain necessary characteristics that could not be taught.

- TAs spent a significant portion of time supporting students in regulating their behaviour during class.

Figure 9 above lists the key findings in a hierarchical order, which supports the values and beliefs of TAs.

3.8.4 Research Question 4

What are the barriers to providing support to pupils?

During the semi-structured interviews TAs indicated that poor communication, structure of the classroom, students’ experiences, and pressures from other members of staff at times acted as barriers to supporting students. The theme of ‘pressure from others’ reflected TAs perception that the national focus on students achieving two sub-levels of progress across the national curriculum at times acted as a barrier to them delivering the type of support they viewed as most valuable. TAs indicated that as teachers were pressured to focus on pupil attainment and academic progress, these pressures were passed on to them. They felt pressured to show that a pupil had completed a task or understood a concept above all else. At times TAs felt that some members of staff viewed their support of students’ social and emotional support was acting as a barrier to supporting students’ academic development.
‘I think a barrier is the attainment targets, teaching staff are constantly under pressure to show achievement, and to get attainment levels up, which is disseminated. We get that, the SENCo will get that from the SLT, it is mentioned at department meetings….we are poked with that stick more than I care to mention’.

‘…last Ofsted inspections… the purpose of the role was lost, it was all about making sure we knew what their target grades are and what we need to do next. With students with SEN you can only take that to a certain limit, because beyond a certain point it means nothing.

(TA 4 see transcribed interview Appendix 9)

The theme of ‘classroom structure’ also revealed TAs perceptions of barriers. TAs indicated that they always wanted to appear respectful of teachers by not speaking when they were speaking. However, when the lesson was structured so that the teacher spoke a lot during the lesson, TAs were unable to support the students as they would have preferred to as there was not the space given in the lesson to discussion. TAs felt they could not use language to differentiate the task or support students’ thinking, as it would have disrupted the teacher and the other students.

‘Some subjects you cannot talk to the student in the class, some teachers do not support that well’

(TA 3 see transcribed interview Appendix 9)

The final theme to emerge from the semi-structured interviews around the topic of barriers to learning was ‘poor communication’. TAs expressed frustration when they were unsure of the lesson content when they were supporting students. Lack of communication between teachers and TAs often resulted in TAs feeling ill prepared. TAs indicated that having prior knowledge would have supported their thinking about the language that they could use to support students, rather than having to think on the spot, which ‘can be challenging’. TAs shared that if they had been made aware of the topic to be
covered in classes, they could have brought appropriate resources, which would have supported the student in accessing the material.

3.9 Discussion

In this section the findings are discussed in relation to previous research in the area. The issues and limitations of the study are examined and the implications for EP practice are discussed. Suggestions for future research are examined.

3.9.1 Students’ Views

The findings from the student’s focus groups indicated that they valued the TA support they were receiving and they indicated a range of factors, which they perceived as valuable. Students indicated that TA social and emotional support was an aspect of the TA role that they valued. It is convenient that students valued TA social and emotional development as it is perceived by TAs as a significant aspect of their role. Students were also able to indicate and discuss the range of personal characteristics (Appendix 6), abilities and support that they perceive as necessary for them to have a positive and successful experience in school. This supports the practice of using methods of person-centred planning when including students in co-constructing an education plan, which optimises on their success (Kennedy, Long, Jolivette, Cox, Jung-Chang, and Thompson, 2001). It was apparent that students’ likes and strengths were used when their support programmes were developed, as most aspects of their programme were viewed in a positive manner. Students collectively indicated that the presence of TAs in schools supported them in accessing the mainstream social and academic curriculum.

It may be useful for schools staff to continue to explicitly explore with students what they value about the TA role and their student support plan, as well as what they would like to have included in their support programmes. This would support the continued development of support packages, allow staff to reflect on what might improve the school experiences for future students, and
provide greater opportunities to those who may have been previously denied guidance that may have been valuable and necessary for them. In this way students would be included in the process, and afforded the opportunities to contribute to a support plan that is designed to cater to their needs. This creates a system of support that is done with the students rather than to them. This supports Ainscow and Kaplan (2005) research, which indicates that as children experience first hand the impact of inclusive practices, their ideas should be viewed as starting points for moving towards inclusive practices rather than what only what adults view as important.

3.9.2 Parental Contributions

The results indicated that the majority of parents felt that academic support was a part of the TA role, however, more than half of parents also indicated that supporting social, emotional, and life skills development was also a part of the TA role. This indicated that while parents recognised that TAs supported social and emotional development, parents’ perspectives were that the main aspect of the TA role was to support the academic development of their children. This would suggest that parents perceived that the main pedagogical role of TAs was to support development in writing, reading and numeracy development in line with national curriculum requirements. Parents valued the TA role, and indicated that they supported their children in accessing the curriculum by supporting them in reading and writing. Parents also indicated that helping their children to understand concepts in class was an important aspect of the TA role. TAs were viewed by parents as central to supporting their students success and development in school, without them some parents reported that their children would not have made significant progress.

Similarly to the voice of students, the voice of parents must be considered as central to the process when creating a plan of support for their children. These findings have highlighted that parents and school staff both value and identify that social and emotional support, as well as academic support are central to the TA role. However, the value assigned the various aspects of the role is
different. This may cause some tension as parents could expect that TAs primary role is a focus on progress in the national curriculum, and they may not be aware of how wellbeing can support academic learning and parents may anticipate the TA role to reflect this focus. It would be useful for schools to engage in effective parental involvement as suggested by Turnbull et.al (2011). Schools should engage in a reciprocal dialogue with parents, rather than a one-way relationship where parents are informed of the support plan (Epstein, 2011). National Parent Teacher Association (2013) emphasises that parents, staff, and students should work together through all aspects of the child’s social, behavioural, and educational interest. Educational Psychologists are well placed to facilitate these conversations with parents, school, and students. This will be explored further in the research.

### 3.9.3 Mediating Principles

The theme of social and emotional mediation appeared to be more valued by TAs than academic mediation. It was surprising that the data from the classroom observations produced one theme reflecting social and emotional support, whereas academic intervention produced several themes. However, on further investigation, through focus groups and semi-structured interviews, the data highlighted TAs’ perceptions of the significant need for students’ social and emotional wellbeing.

**Social and Emotional Mediation**

The findings revealed that TAs highly valued the social and emotional development of the students they supported. Within the semi-structured interviews whenever TAs were asked to speak about student progress, the theme that emerged was progress in social and emotional development, rather than in the national curriculum. TAs emphasised that academic attainment was important, however, for the majority of the vulnerable students they supported, developing social skill, self-esteem, confidence, and ways to understand their emotions was more important for their holistic development and wellbeing. These ways of thinking are supported by guidance from the Local Authority as it has been identified that deficits in social skills and
confidence play a significant role in the development of emotional difficulties (DfE, 2015). Social and emotional difficulties may cause students to have significant difficulties in learning (DfE, 2015).

TAs perceive that supporting students social and emotional wellbeing is working in a proactive manner, as emotional well-being is viewed as the foundation, which supports academic intervention. Before learning can effectively occur, students must feel safe and secure (Maslow, 1943). Thus, through the sub theme ‘nurture’ that lies within ‘social development’, it is highlighted the value TAs place on ‘knowing students well’, and building relationships with them. These findings confirm research by Mujis and Reynolds (2003). These are the bedrocks upon which all pedagogical practices are formed. Pedagogy is the relationship between teaching and learning, and it should occur through the context of a relationship (Loughran, 2013).

The theme ‘listening to students’ again highlighted the values TAs place on supporting student wellbeing. TAs felt that they were better placed than other members of staff to create deliberate time for students to talk openly about their problems. This practise fits with statutory guidance as indicated in SEN Code of Practise (DfE, 2015). It states that schools should be a safe and affirming place for children where they can develop a sense of belonging and feel able to trust at talk openly with adults about their problems.

The sub themes of ‘mediating relationships with peers’ and ‘mediating relationships with teachers’ was found to be an important indication of progress. TAs often indicated a sense of pride when a student who was finding it difficult to manage peer relationships or teacher interactions was able to use strategies to have more positive social experiences. TAs highly value students developing appropriate social skills. While a significant share of work supporting students with SEN was possible because of TA support, this support was often in addition to and not an alternative which is in contrast to research by Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle (2010). All classroom observations took place while students were in mainstream lessons. While TAs perceive
that the know the students better, teachers still identify and have a relationship with SEN pupils, as they are the teachers for all students including those with SEN (DfE, 2015).

This focus on placing a high level of support on students’ social and emotional development may not be understood by all members of staff, as they may perceive academic progress to be more important. It would be useful to explore whether the focus on student wellbeing has contributed to some TAs perceiving that they are not viewed as valuable members of the staff team. This will be further discussed in ‘feeling valued’ section.

3.9.4 Contributions to Pedagogy

The findings also suggest that TAs perceptions of teaching and learning appear to reframe the paradigm and content of pedagogy to include a greater emphasis on social and emotional development.

It was also highlighted that TAs wanted their role to be viewed as separate to that of the teacher. They perceived that they were able to create different kinds of relationships with students, as they had more time available to do so than teachers. It is important to note this as TAs are often called upon to undertake teaching duties (Graves, 2014). The SEN Code of Practice indicates that TA should be able to lead the class while the teacher works more closely with students who have learning difficulties. This may lead to tension from TAs as they do not perceive their role to be that of a teacher, and may not want to compromise the nature of the relationships they have built with the students they support. This perception is also indicated in Loughran’s (2013) research, which indicates that teaching is dynamic, and involves the serious consideration of what is to be taught and how it is to be taught. TAs perceive that at times social skills and supporting emotional well being are to be taught through building relationships with students.

Dasilva (2013) indicates that the challenge with pedagogy is giving the right support at the right moment for the child to develop. It would be useful to
explore whether other members of staff perceive TAs supporting students emotional wellbeing at times instead of academic support to be a part of their role. This future research could also explore whether members of staff value training over a TAs' personality when indicating what is an important factor in supporting the TA role this has implications for recruitment.

3.9.5 Communication and Planning

The findings indicated that TAs perceived the barriers to them supporting students' were pressures to show academic progress, lack of communication between them and teaching staff, and challenging home situations.

Pressures to show academic support may be as a result of research, which indicated that students who received the most TA support, made less progress (Blatchford, Russell, and Webster, 2012) as well as the requirement to show student progress across the national curriculum. Schools are often judged by their students' attainments in national assessments; one of the key features in the Ofsted framework for school inspection is pupil achievement (Education Act, 2005). Students with social and emotional difficulties attainments' should also reflect the progress they have made in non-academic areas. If students' social and emotional progress held as much value as their academic attainment perhaps members of school staff would feel confident and supported when choosing to initially focus support on emotional wellbeing if that was in the best interest of the student.

Findings also indicated that poor systems of communication also acted as barriers to TAs supporting students learning. This is supported by findings from Blatchford et.al (2004). In exploring the role and effects of TAs in English primary schools, TAs indicated concerns about planning time and feedback. The challenge in effectively communicating is a pragmatic one, because of how TAs schedules are planned there is often not enough time to have a discussion with a teacher before the class begins or to check e-mails to see if there has been communication and direction from teachers. Another factor that could be contributing to TAs difficulty in supporting students is the reality that some TAs are supporting numerous subjects, the amount of planning
time necessary to prepare for the numerous settings they support could create a challenge for schools to manage.

Findings also indicated that students’ home environments sometimes acted as a barrier to TAs being able to deliver support to students. TAs reported that if students had a difficult morning then it would influence their experience of school on that particular day. TAs know students well and usually foster good relationships with parents, so they are often able to recognise that a student may be having a difficult day. TAs are often sensitive to this and adjust their interaction to the student as required. The recognition that other environments will influence students’ responses in a school environment links to Bronfenbrenner’s (1978) systems theory. Which indicated that people exist in different interacting environments, TAs being sensitive to and supporting the development of productive links between environments contributes to the development of emotional wellbeing in students.

3.9.6 Relation to theoretical models

The findings related to the theoretical models explored in the literature suggested there was a need for further discussion and reflection. Grieve’s (2010) research indicated that development of interpersonal skills is necessary to develop students’ openness to new thinking. This finding was represented on numerous occasions in the process of completing this research. TAs, students, and parents indicated that good relationships with students were the foundation necessary for progress to occur. Further, TAs and students indicated that a trusting relationship was a necessary aspect of the TA role, students knew there was a safe person they could share their worries with, and this links to guidance in the mental health and behaviour guidance in schools (2015).

While my literature review did not discuss Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory or positive psychology, neither was I expecting to have these theories emerge from the data analysis, I believe that these theories can add to this current research. It appears that TAs are utilising principles of the previously
mentioned theories, as a result I believe it would be useful to briefly mention them here. While I did not have the opportunity to explore whether Maslow (1987) or positive psychology methodologies guided TA’s practices, TAs appeared to recognise that students needed to feel a sense of safety and protection, before they could realise a sense of belonging, which then led to a development of their confidence and ability to achieve (Maslow, 1978). Findings also indicate that TAs are supporting the core elements: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment, which positive psychology suggests are essential to the development of psychological wellbeing (Seligman, 2002).

3.9.7 Study limitations

Both methodological issues and personal reflections are discussed in this section.

There are a number of challenges that placed limitations on this study. These limitations are to be expected when conducting ‘real world’ research (Robson, 2002). This research had a small sample size of students, parents, and TAs, this would suggest that the findings could not be generalised across educational settings even though they could be viewed as robust reflection of the school involved in the research. Time restrictions impacted on the method used to explore parents’ views, while questionnaires allowed parents’ views to be analysed, having a parental focus group would have been useful as an expansion to this study.

Upon direction from the researcher, the SENCo organised the students who made up the focus group, and sent out the questionnaires to parents. I reflected on the possible bias that may have resulted from the manner in which student and parental participants were selected. I also reflected on the possible power imbalance during the student focus group, and wondered whether students’ responses were influenced by my presence. Future research could explore whether students could anonymously share their views on the type of support they are receiving. I planned to facilitate a
solution circle with students to problem solve on possible barriers that they were facing, but time restrictions did not allow this. This idea could also be explored in future research, which aims to explore students’ views into their experiences.

3.9.8 Relevance to practice and Contributions to Knowledge

This research has highlighted the significant value parents and students place on the social and emotional aspects of TAs’ roles. It also demonstrates the positive influence TAs are having on students’ social and emotional wellbeing, which results in students having a more positive experience of school as reported by students, parents, and TAs. This paper contributes to research, which explores the role and effect of TAs and the effective use and deployment of TAs. It confirms that TAs contribute significantly when it comes to supporting the social and emotional development of students. They recognise this as a valuable aspect of their role, and would like this recognition and value to be acknowledged by all members of the school staff. Parents and students also recognise the importance of the TA role, specifically as it relates to supporting the emotional well being of students. It also suggests an extension and expansion of the TA role, which specifically focuses on the emotional wellbeing of students as a method to further support their academic development.

This present research would have bearing on how to best deploy and train TAs to meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families. Nationally this research supports government policy and guidance, which places a greater emphasis on supporting the social, emotional, and mental health needs of children and young people (DfE, 2015). It also supports national guidance which requires obtaining the views of students and parents and including them in the decision making and planning processes. This research explores and highlights effective methods of supporting students with SEN to have positive school experiences in both social and academic situations. Other schools could explore whether these findings are relevant to the experiences
of students in their schools, and implement strategies, which support the development of good emotional wellbeing of their students.

The implications for educational psychology practice are:

- Facilitating conversations between home and school, which highlight their shared beliefs about supporting students, as well as assuaging concerns when parents believe that other areas of development, should be prioritised.

- Developing initial training for TAs, which schools may wish to purchase as a traded service that emphasises their roles in supporting the social and emotional mental health of students.

- Indicating the range of the EP role, and highlighting their research capabilities.

- Demonstrating the role of the EP in sharing the commonly held view of the importance of the TA role with members of the leadership teams in schools.

### 3.9.9 Future directions

Future research could extend this current study by conducting semi-structured interviews with parents, which further explores their responses in the questionnaires, to obtain a more detailed perspective of their views. Future research could also extend this study by facilitating solution circles over an extended period of time to address the barriers indicated and review the actions agreed regularly. The approaches used in this research may be applied to different educational settings where schools are seeking to explore how students are being supported.

A crucial aspect for future would be to include members of the senior management team in discussions about their perspectives of the TA role. Initial research plans intended to include the perspectives of the senior leadership team; however, due to time restraints and the limits on this small scale study, it was felt that exploring the views of those the TA role directly impacts was sufficient to explore and discover the perceptions of the TA role. The lack of the management team voice is a recognised limitation in this
study, and a main area for future research would be to explore their perceptions of the TA role and how those perceptions impact practice and their relationships with TAs.

Similarly to Maslow’s and positive psychological theories, I was not expecting that principles of Self-Determination Theory would be evident in the data that emerged about the TA role. Finally it would be useful to explore from a Self-Determination Theoretical perspective (Ryan and Deci, 2000) whether active student participation into their support plan contributed to increased motivation. Research could compare whether an active student voice caused a significant difference in student outcomes. It would be ideal to explore whether students who were supported by TAs who focused on developing emotional wellbeing show more or less progress than students who did not received social and emotional support.

3.9.10 Conclusion: Linking paper one and two

This thesis is formed from two papers, which explore the perspectives of the pedagogical roles of TAs when supporting the development of students. These papers highlight the aspects of the TA role, which is underpinned by scaffolding and mediating both academic and social skills. The connected papers highlight the significance of the TA role, and suggest that academic and social development should not be viewed separately. Many schools “appear” to views these roles separately as indicated by pastoral leaders who support social and emotional development, and special educational need leaders who support academic development. This paper would support schools being confident in adopting a more joint approach to linking these teams as it may result in more positive outcomes for students.

Cognitive development is limited to the zone of proximal development where the student is cognitively prepared but requires help and social interaction to fully develop (Lenon, 2015). Scaffolding student’s understanding of concepts are supported, this research would cause me to believe that scaffolding in collaboration with social, emotional, and mental health support facilitates
learning. This paper provides a significant contribution to the area of TA support as it links to social and emotional development. It offers useful insights into the lived experiences of TAs, and how it relates to their support of students, and demonstrates the benefits of exploring and corroborating multiple perspectives when exploring a specific area. The active participation of TAs, students, and parents indicated that they were interested in the development of this knowledge, which empowered TAs to continue to be confident in supporting students in the manner they perceived contributed to the most positive outcome for students and their families. While this research was focused on one local authority secondary school, the findings support and extend the existing theory, research, policy, and practice in the area of TA deployment. This paper also highlights the importance of including the voices of parents and students, and how this supports the development of effective support systems to meet their needs.

3.9.11 Post Script

As a piece of Educational Psychology research, this research is shared and owned by the school setting in which it was created. It is my aim as a researcher to report this study in a manner, which shows the contribution of the participants and establishes the collaboration between the participants. I hope the culmination of this paper is not the end but the beginning of a journey, which seeks to further explore and construct knowledge on what supports emotional wellbeing and positive school experiences for children and young people. I recognise that during the process of this research my own views and understanding of mediation and scaffolding has expanded to include a greater focus on emotional wellbeing.

I aim to share this work through formal and informal presentations and discussions with other schools, parents, students, and colleagues. I hope to publish in a journal in the near future. This research has influenced my practice as a educational psychologists practitioner as I aim to explore with schools how they are utilising their TA staff, and through consultation I hope
to explore whether they would consider what is in my opinion a more useful way of support students’ needs.
4.1 References:


Punch, S (2002). “Research with Children: The Same or Different from Research with Adults?”. *Childhood,* 9(3), 321-341.


4.2 Acknowledgements

During this research process I have been pleasantly overwhelmed by the interest indicated by colleagues, and the commitment of all involved in the creation of this research. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who supported through this challenging process and made this research possible:

- To my support system of family and extended church family and friends who prayed me through this process.
- To the participating school, parents and students who were enthusiastic in sharing their views and voices.
- To Dr Tim Maxwell, Professor Brahm Norwich, and Dr Andrew Richards for their continued guidance and support through this process.
- To my mentor Terri- Anne Hornby who believed in my ability to complete this research process more than I did
## 5. Appendices

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**Appendix 1 Final Interview Schedule**

Questionnaires were designed so that questions that could be answered easily were first, followed by more difficult questions.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>THEMES TO COVER IN INTERVIEW</th>
<th>ACTUAL QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Background</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Experience</td>
<td>How long have you been a Teaching Assistant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are you Part-Time or Full-Time?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Who do you report to?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Who / What do you support?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
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<td>A specific student?</td>
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<td>A particular class?</td>
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<td>A particular subject?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A specific challenge?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Options/Aspirations</td>
<td>How come you become a Teaching Assistant?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Was this always a part of your career plan?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is this a step towards another career?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How did you become a Teaching Assistant?</td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What was your route in?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Was there training involved?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Current Situation</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual's Perspectives on Work</td>
<td>You said you support...... How do you see the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perspectives on Good Practice</td>
<td>Think of a good teacher; give me 5 or 6 aspects of their teaching that convinces you that they are a good teacher.</td>
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<td>Why do you value that?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How easy is it to implement training that you have had?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What would need to happen for implementation to be easier?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What are the challenges to implementing...</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Role</td>
<td>Day to Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others’ Perspectives</td>
<td>Do you see your role as different to other TAs?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>During the focus group your colleagues mention personality being the most important, can you tell me more about this?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What would other TAs say that your role is?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Different / Same to what you indicated?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Different / Same to their role?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What would a CT say that your role is?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Different to other TAs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>If the HT came along, what would he/she expect to see you doing?</td>
<td>What would a child whom you support say that you do? <strong>Probe Q</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Support?</strong></td>
<td>Could they identify when a day has been successful?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What would that look like to them?</td>
<td>What would a child who you don’t support say that you do? <strong>Probe Q</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Support?</strong> <strong>Probe Q</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Recommendations?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Improvements</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>What would a child whom you support say that you do? <strong>Probe Q</strong></td>
<td><strong>Improvements</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Would other TAs share this view?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Would the CT share this view?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you were to do things differently, what would it look like?</td>
<td><strong>Would other TAs share this view?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the HT/SENCo/CT were to do things differently, what would they do?</td>
<td>Why do you think they would do things in this way?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How is this sustained?</td>
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<td>If you had three magic wishes that would improve your job, what would they be?</td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is that important to you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broad Theme</td>
<td>Sub-theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Background</td>
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<td>How did you become a Teaching Assistant?</td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
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<td>What was your route in?</td>
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<td>Was there training involved?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### 2. Current Situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual's Perspectives on Work</th>
<th>You said you support….. How do you see the main body of your work?</th>
<th>Probe Q</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you support…..</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If I were to come into the class, what would I see you doing?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Was it what you thought you would be doing?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What about it do you enjoy most?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What are the challenges?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What do you think is the most beneficial aspect of the support that you give?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Is that important to you?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Why?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Has there been an opportunity to develop your practice?</td>
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<td>Are you able to</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perspectives on Good Practice</td>
<td>Think of a good teacher; give me 5 or 6 aspects of their teaching that convinces you that they are a good teacher.</td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
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<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Why do you value that?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How easy is it to implement training that you have had?</td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What would need to happen for implementation to be easier?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What are the challenges to implementing training?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. Role</strong></td>
<td><strong>Day to Day</strong></td>
<td><strong>Probe Q</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could you talk me through a typical day?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How do you judge if a day has been successful?</td>
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<td>What facilitates a successful</td>
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<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>What makes a day difficult?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How many teachers do you work with?</td>
<td>How many teachers do you work with?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do they vary in the type of support and teaching they want you to implement?</td>
<td>Do they vary in the type of support and teaching they want you to implement?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Probe Q</td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Think on your feet</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others’ Perspectives</td>
<td>Do you see your role as different to other TAs?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive/ Negative Support / Facilitate</td>
<td>Positive/ Negative Support / Facilitate</td>
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<tr>
<td>What would other TAs say that your role is?</td>
<td>What would other TAs say that your role is?</td>
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<td>Probe Q</td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
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<td>Different / Same to what you indicated?</td>
<td>Different / Same to what you indicated?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Different / Same to their role?</td>
<td>Different / Same to their role?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shared role/ sense of belonging?</td>
<td>Shared role/ sense of belonging?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What would a CT say that your role is?</td>
<td>What would a CT say that your role is?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Probe Q</td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
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<tr>
<td>Different to other TAs?</td>
<td>Different to other TAs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Same?</td>
<td>Same?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
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<td>If the HT came along, what would he/she expect to see you doing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What would a child whom you support say that you do?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Could they identify when a day has been successful?</td>
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<td>What would that look like to them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What would a child whom you don’t support say that you do?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Recommendations?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Improvements</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What can be done to add to what you currently do?</td>
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<td>Why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>If you could receive training in a particular area, what would it be?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why would you value that?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would other TAs share this view?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would the CT share this view?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>If you could make a change to your job, what would it be?</td>
<td>Why?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>If you were to do things differently, what would it look like?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Would other TAs share this view?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would the CT share this view?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>If the HT/SENCo/CT were to do things differently, what would they do?</td>
<td>Why do you think they would do things in this way?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What works well?</td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
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<td>Why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How is this sustained?</td>
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<tr>
<td>If you had three magic wishes that would improve your job, what would they be?</td>
<td>Probe Q</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What is that important to you?</td>
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Appendix 2 – Materials

Focus Groups:
Flip chart paper and pens were used by the researcher to record the pupils’ focus group responses. The School Staff focus group was recorded digitally with voice recorders, and transcribed to derive themes. The focus group began by sharing the purpose and objective of the research, and indicating to school staff why their views would be useful to obtain, and how their views would be used.

One of the main benefits of the focus groups was that it facilitated a data rich discourse, where the shared views of school staff could be explored in detail. Often comments made by a member of staff on their views instigated a debate, which either corroborated or contradicted views. The researcher was aware that a weakness of focus groups is that more dominant characters may lead and influence the direction of the discussion. To attempt to manage this weakness everyone was given an opportunity to respond to the questions posed in turns.

Class Observations
The researcher designed a structured observation checklist based on mediated learning experiences (Tzuriel, 2013, Tzuriel, 2000, Tzuriel, Kaniel, & Kanne, 1999). (See Appendix 3). Themes that emerged during the focus group with school staff informed the design of the observation scheduled. The research questions were also used as a guide in developing the structured observation schedule.

One of the benefits of structured observations is that staffs’ responses to their roles could be corroborated and evidenced in a more robust manner. To control the bias of a stand-alone observation, the semi-structured interviews were designed to facilitate a discussion of what was observed. In this way school staff could indicate whether what had been observed was typical, and they could comment on what was observed.
Semi-Structured Interviews

I designed the TA interview schedules building upon information from the focus group, which explored staff perceptions of their role. Following the focus group, school staff indicated their availability to take part in the classroom observations, which were followed by the semi-structured interviews. Those who opted out suggested that their views had been adequately represented during the focus group. The semi-structured interviews produced rich data as it allowed the conversations generated to be led by the interviewee.

Semi-structured interviews may be biased as some questions could be interpreted as leading, and would only facilitate the discussion of the researcher’s interest. To control for this bias, question were developed by building upon the focus groups, and classroom observations, utilising the research questions to ensure validity, as well as tutor input.
### Appendix 3- Structured Observation Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Observation</th>
<th>Number of times observed in an hour</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks Students Questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks Process Questions (How, Why, How Else, How do you Know)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you going to record your results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where else might this happen?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Why do you think that one is bigger?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of as much as possible of student’s responses.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept but challenge students’ responses. Insistence on logical justification for both correct and incorrect responses. (That is a beautiful answer, but can you tell me why it is correct?)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does that tell you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell me more.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging - making logical connections.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing a story about another setting where the rule and activity could be applied.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing a relevant story to communicate ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elicit evidence of systematic thinking.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Give me a reason why we should look carefully at this picture before describing it).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know what you are looking for?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the graph showing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give me a reason why w should look carefully at this picture before describing it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about what you didn’t like, what could we do differently and why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What do you think about this?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use process-oriented questions. (Why do you think it is better to count/ do it this way?)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which type of line would be better to draw</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think the size should be considered first?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refrain from using answers or rules but guiding students to the discovery of rules.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What things are you measuring?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do we have to do for that one?</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>What were you in control of in that one?</td>
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<td>What do you think you are doing?</td>
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<td>What do you think you might need to do?</td>
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<td>What is it called, can you remember?</td>
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<td>How might you remember, next time?</td>
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<td>What could you do differently?</td>
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| Giving answers and rules in isolation. Allowed student to engage in conversation, ran out of time and class had moved on | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Communication of purpose. Explaining teaching method and giving practical life examples and experiences. Showed student the end result, what they needed to produce. | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Regulation of behaviour. (Positive praise and comments, re-direction) Don’t worry We’ll work it out together It’s fine That’s perfect Acknowledging what was important to pupil and their non-academic concerns (sleeping/worrying about other classes) That’s it You can do it. Using name to get students’ attention. I am pleased about that. | 1 | 5 | 7 | 10 | 7 | 1 |
| Varied Attempts Leaving alone after initial instruction Supporting them through planning their activity by reducing writing load. Reminding them of principles and | 1 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

| 4 | 4 | 5 | 1 |
| 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
rules
Offering different suggestions/choices for starting.
Backwards chaining – completing some of the tasks and allowing students to complete.
Modelling thinking and trial and error.
Helping students to summarise thinking.
Rewording instructions and breaking them down into smaller chunks.
Using sentence starters

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Appendix 4- Questionnaire

While questionnaires provide a quick and efficient system of obtaining information from a large number of people, the extent to which a view can be explored may be limited. To control for this weakness both opened and closed questions were employed. To support a greater response from parents, the questionnaire utilised was brief (less than 10 questions).

1. What type of support does the Learning Support Assistant (LSA) offer your child/ ward? Please tick all that apply.
   
   Academic __  Life Skills__  Social and Emotional __

2. Is it important to you that your child/ ward is supported by a LSA? Please tick the one that applies.
   
   Yes __  No __  I am not sure __

3. If you ticked ‘Yes’ in question 2 could you briefly explain why this is important to you?
   
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

4. LSAs motivate students and support them in developing confidence. To what extent do you agree with this statement? Please tick the one that applies.
   
   Completely __ Somewhat __ Neutral __ Somewhat__ Completely__
   Agree  Agree  Neutral  Agree  Agree

5. On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being not so much and 10 being very much, how much does the LSA support your child/ ward in having a positive experience of school?

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

   😊  😊
Appendix 5- bar chart indicating mediating principles utilised in one hour classroom observations
Appendix 6- Ethics

Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications and view the School’s Policy online.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter).  DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND

Your name:  Ysanne Marville

Your student no:  620030685

Return address for this certificate:  111 Gloucester Road, Exeter Devon, EX42EB

Degree/Programme of Study:  Dr Child, Education, and Community Psychology

Project Supervisor(s):  Tim Maxwell

Your email address:  yam202@exeter.ac.uk

Tel:  07539486006

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.
I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed: Ysanne Marville……………………………………..date: 25.9.2014………..

Certificate of ethical research approval

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT:

Exploring the views of the pedagogical role of Teaching Assistants (TAs)

1. Brief description of your research project:

This research seeks to explore the views of, as well as what influences, the day-to-day Teaching Assistant pedagogical role. It is an interpretive piece of work, which aims to gather the views of teachers, pupils, TAs, and SENCOs. This research expects to discover what is thought to be good TA practice by those it impacts. Further, this research aims to facilitate a solution-focused session, to discover next steps in developing the TA role.

2. Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):
Teaching Assistants, Class Teachers, Special Education Needs Co-ordinators, Primary and Secondary Pupils (7 years- 16 years)

Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:

3. informed consent: Where children in schools are involved this includes both head teachers and parents). Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document. a blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents: Each consent form MUST be personalised with your contact details.
The aims of this research will be explained to all participants. They will also be informed how the research will be reported before they are asked to participate. Participants or their guardians where appropriate, must give permission to be a part of this research before any data can be collected. Please see the attached consent form.

4. anonymity and confidentiality

This research will seek to remain anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. Schools will be referred to as School 1 and School 2, etc. in the research. Participants will be referred to as participant 1 and participant 2, etc. in the research. Please see attached consent form.

5. Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

The methods of data collection used will be: 1:1 semi-structured interviews with the adults participating in the study, focus groups with the children and young people participating in the study, and classroom observations of TA’s support students.

All participants will be informed that their involvement is voluntary; this term will be explained in detail. Participants will also be informed that they may withdraw from the study at any point of the data gathering process. Further, they will be told that their data will be removed from this research, upon request.

6. Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project - e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires, or

All data will be stored in compliance with the data protection act. Data collected will only be used for the purposes of this research, and will be stored in a secured locked cupboard. All digital data will be stored on an encrypted data stick and backed up to the University U-drive. Data will be confidential and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in
anonymised form. Raw data collected from participants will be destroyed after it has been analysed.

7. Special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.

The focus group questionnaire will be differentiated by offering pupils the option to draw what the ideal TA looks like, and what they do.

There will be a TA available but not present during the focus group process. If at any point a pupil becomes distressed by the process, the focus group will end immediately, and the pupil will have an opportunity to discuss the situation with an appropriate adult.

8. Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

There are none.

This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School’s Research Support Office for the Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: September 2014 / December 2015

By (above mentioned supervisor’s signature): ..........
N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

GSE unique approval reference: 

Signed: date:

Chair of the School’s Ethics Committee

In the information you give to participants on your consent forms, you should also state what they will have to do if they take part (what is the process?)
Title of Research Project: Exploring the views of the pedagogical role of Teaching Assistants (TAs)

CONSENT FORM: participants’ parents / guardians

My name is Ysanne Marville, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist doing research with your school. This project seeks to explore the views of the Teaching Assistant role, by gathering the perceptions of Class Teachers, SENCo, Teaching Assistants, and pupils. The aim of this research is to understand what is considered to be good Teaching Assistant practice. Further, this research aims to facilitate a solution-focused session, to discover next steps in developing the TA role. The final aim of this research is to present the findings of what constitutes good TA practice in an induction booklet for new Teaching Assistants. I will ask pupils to draw an image, which represents the ideal teaching assistant, and this will be discussed. I will then ask them to draw an image, which represents the opposite of the ideal, and this will also be discussed.

If you have any queries about this project, please contact me at yam202@exeter.ac.uk.

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for my daughter / son to participate in this research project and, if s/he does choose to participate, s/he may at any stage withdraw their participation

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about my daughter / son

any information which my daughter / son gives will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations

if applicable, the information, which my daughter / son gives, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information my daughter / son gives will be treated as confidential
the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my daughter’s / son’s anonymity

...(Signature of parent / guardian )
...(Date)

...(Printed name of parent / guardian) ......................................................................
...(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participants’ parent or guardian; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s): …07539486006…………………………………..

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:
Ysanne Marville
yam202@exeter.ac.uk……………………………………………………………………………………
OR
Tim Maxwell, University of Exeter
T.Maxwell@exeter.ac.uk………………………………………………………………………………

* when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University’s registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Revised March 2013
Title of Research Project: Exploring the views of the pedagogical role of Teaching Assistants (TAs)

CONSENT FORM

My name is Ysanne Marville, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist doing research with your school. The research seeks to explore the views of the Teaching Assistant role, by gathering the perceptions of Class Teachers, SENCo, Teaching Assistants, and pupils. The aim of this research is to understand what is considered to be good Teaching Assistant practice. Further, this research aims to facilitate a solution-focused session, to discover next steps in developing the TA role. The final aim of this research is to present the findings of what constitutes good TA practice in a induction booklet for new Teaching Assistants. This research will take the following process to collect data: a focus group discussing what an ideal teaching assistant is, class room observations followed by a discussion about what was observed, and semi-structured interviews.

If you have any further questions about this research please contact me at yam202@exeter.ac.uk

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation and may also request that my data be destroyed

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations

if applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

............................………………..

.....................................
(Signature of participant )
(Date)

……………………………………
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s): ...07539486006……………………………………

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

YsanneMarville
yam202@exeter.ac.uk………………………………………………………………………………
OR
Tim Maxwell
T.Maxwell@exeter.ac.uk

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Revised March 2013
Title of Research Project: Exploring the views of the pedagogical role of Teaching Assistants (TAs)

CONSENT FORM: student participants

My name is Ysanne Marville, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist doing a project within your school. I want to know what you think about Teaching Assistants. What you like about them, and what you would like to change about them. I have also asked other members of your school what they think about Teaching Assistants. I am trying to find out what the best Teaching Assistants do, and use that information to create a booklet. Today you will be taking part in a focus group, comprised of your peers. I would like you to draw what the ideal teaching assistant would look like, and then we will discuss it. I would then like you to draw what the opposite of an ideal teaching assistant would be, and then we will discuss it.

If you have any queries about this project, please contact me at yam202@exeter.ac.uk.

I understand what this project is about.

I understand that:

I do not have to take part in this project. I can say no thanks.

Any ideas I give will only be used for this project.

Neither my name, nor the name of my school will be used in this project.

I can ask for information I have shared to not be used after I have shared it.

............................................................................................................................
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(Date)

(Printed name of participant)
One copy of this form will be kept by the participants’ parent or guardian; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s): ...07539486006.................................................

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:
Ysanne Marville
yam202@exeter.ac.uk..............................................................................................................
OR

Tim Maxwell, University of Exeter
T.Maxwell@exeter.ac.uk..............................................................................................................

* when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University’s registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

Revised March 2013
Appendix 7- Methodological Position Paper 2

The methodological position of paper 2 is similar to that if paper 1, in that I believe that using a PCP approach supports exploring the held views of participants. As such this approach is utilised as it fits within the interpretive nature of this research paper. One of the main differences in this paper is the theoretical underpinning that influenced the method. I wanted to include student participants in this research, as I believe their views are central to any discussion, which explores how to cater to their needs. Ryan and Deci (2000) theory of self-determination focuses primarily on how internal motivation is developed. Two of their three principles: connectedness and autonomy were central to the developing of this research. This research assumes that if students felt that they were in control of their goals, could contribute to interventions, and experienced a sense of belonging this would add positively to their well being. As a result students views were explored.

A review of the research methods employed by studies exploring students’ often utilised qualitative measures such as group interviews with participatory tools (Adderley, et.al, 2015, and Shaw, et.al. 2011). Also children were asked to consent to their own participation in the research, and explicit consent was also obtained from parents (Shaw, et.al. 2011). Quantitative measure such as questionnaires were employed to explore parental views. Similarly to paper one, the ontological assumption of this paper suggests that implementing a mixed methods approach is one of the best methods to explore and interpret social and lived experiences. As such, utilising a mixed methods process, discrete statistics, and thematic analysis to gather a rich sense of students’ and parents’ experiences would be an effective way to explore the research areas. Qualitative research allows investigators to approach problems that are difficult to access in any other way (Carrera-Fernandez, Guardia-Olmos, Pero-Cebollero, 2014). Further, the values and perceptions that are held by parents and students can be explored. This research seeks to understand the beliefs that govern how a TA mediates and supports learning, and I believe it would be useful to gain knowledge from all those the TA role supports.
Appendix 8– Section of the CODED NODES and THEMES

**LSA Nurture**
Caring about students
Caring about what we do
Going above and beyond
Being a second parent
Constantly available to listen
Extra eyes to keep them safe in social environments
Preventing bullying
Building relationships
Not the teacher so a different relationship
Reassuring
Giving them a sense of pride and faith beyond academics
Emotionally Involved
Unconditional Love
Family
Encourage using strengths
Empathy
The right personality
Helping them
Loving the job

**LSA Academic Support**
Curriculum Support
Supporting Settling into class
Initial Routine
Differentiating the curriculum
Adapting yourself
Modelling Learning
LSA Enjoying the lesson
Letting students teach us what they know
Modelling making mistakes
Modelling determination
Asking students for help
Constant prompting
Keeping students focused
Repetitive and direct instruction
Modelling listening
Giving Keywords
Asking questions
Adjusting workload, particularly the amount of writing

**LSA Social and Emotional Support**
Engaging with social aspect of school
Mediating between teachers and students
Building a different relationship with students
Helping emotional support
Supporting social skills development
Having lunchtime groups to help build student confidence
Helping students feel happy at school
Making school a positive place
Building trust
Helping them through personal problems
Being there to listen
Being sensitive to needs
Knowing them well
Treating them like individuals
Starting each day fresh
Treating them like your own children
Drive enthusiasm and positivity
Support their aspirations
Developing empathy

**Student Progress**
LSA support in developing social and emotional progress
Seeing change in all areas of student life, academics and social skills
Reminding them to take their HW and helping with HW
Motivating through challenging academic tasks
Going to lessons, and now succeeding in Maths
Having fewer meltdowns
Increasing participation.
Getting better grades in subjects
Showing expected progress in some subjects, and highlighting that to students.
Differentiating worksheets
Using simple language
Adjusting workload

**LSA School Experience**
Making school a better place
Relating to students
Early identification of need
High expectations
Loving school
Sharing our difficulties in school
Importance of school experience

**LSA NURTURE**

[Internals\Transcribed focus group] - § 14 references coded [16.40% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.99% Coverage
LSA 4 Again what everybody else has said, I have been here for 4 years. I think every LSA I’m not saying it is expected of us but we naturally do it because we care so much about the children that we support, but we seem to go above and beyond. A lot of us spend extra countless hours beyond what we are paid to do extra countless things, we don’t ask for any thanks or anything like that we just do it because it benefits the students.

Reference 2 - 0.88% Coverage
LSA 4 I do a lot of after school things, so it gets me involved in the life of the school. You get to understand the school ethos and what it is all about, you get to see other students you wouldn’t necessarily see before. We all just do
it. I have a catering class with LSA 1 we stay after to help out. We miss our lunches just so we are more prepared, and because we care about what we do.

Reference 3 - 0.57% Coverage

it isn’t just education curriculum wise it can go as far as toileting, social skills, mixing with their peers, making friendship groups, building confidence. It is like being a second parent really. LSA 1 that is what it can feel like at times

Reference 4 - 1.41% Coverage

LSA 5 you support them, a lot of students come to you because you are not a teacher and though there is confidentiality and some things will have to be reported they can still talk to you about boy friend/ girlfriend relationships, falling out with their friends whereas a teacher might brush it under the counter if they haven’t got time. We have the time, they come to us at lunchtime groups and we sit and talk to them. They stop us in the corridor walking to classes. The girls in my tutor are like this (indicating constantly finding her to talk) but for me that is a part of my role and I enjoy doing that.

Reference 7 - 1.87% Coverage

LSA 10 I’ve been here 8 years and I work with YR 11 and the first student that I worked with hated school and hated teachers and to a degree hated life. So he was quite challenging, it took a lot of caring, social skills, reassurance, and confidence. By the end of year 9 he became independent and subjects like RE you literally had to drag him into a lesson, that student now is on A*. So you can see the change around. There are issues with other subjects like Maths but he still gets through, and he will have issues because of his ASD so we dropped languages so he could have free periods so he could study with me, so if there were any difficulties we could go through everything. Today he is a prefect in the school, so it goes to show how a pupil can change with support. He is a positive role model for others.

Reference 8 - 1.68% Coverage

R1 You just used the term unconditional love that is a very expressive term, that I would not have expected to hear in a school. I wouldn’t normally associate it with working with young people in a professional capacity what you talking about makes me think of a family. S*. They know they are loved.

LSA 1 it is like a family LSA 7 You are with them from first thing in the
morning, and if you are with one child or a small group. So I spend more time with them than I do your own children. R1 Do you have a similar sort of experience those of you who have children?

Reference 11 - 0.75% Coverage

LSA 7 I think there is a worry certainly for the children I work with that they feel they are being judged against the students who are capable of getting A* and they feel a failure before they start as the expectation is you get the best qualifications you can, so you have to encourage them with the things they are good at.

Reference 12 - 1.11% Coverage

LSA 1 Training, a lot of it is personal experience. R1 Would you make one of those more important that the other? Is it more important to have the empathy to begin with, can this job be taught? LSA 4 You can’t work with kids without having some sort of empathy. R2 Do you think that is more a personality thing, ‘this is what I bring to the role’. Is it about personality? LSA 5 You can’t come into this job if you are miserable. LSA 4 I want to say you can’t learn to be caring but you can.

Reference 13 - 0.97% Coverage

LSA 6 How would understand them otherwise. R2 Your own personality?

LSA 6 10 R1 Your own personality is more important than your personal experience? You have to be the right sort of person. LSA 4 Children pick up on your emotions LSA 1 They are very perceptive. LSA 6 they will ask Ms are you ok, if they feel you are having a tough day. LSA 4 if something is not right at home it impacts, so if you think about yourself.

Internals\Transcribed Interview 3 - § 2 references coded [3.35% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.41% Coverage

LSA 3 You have to want to do the job, you have to enjoy and love it to do it. As we said we do not get paid a lot so to do the job you must love it. You could get paid a lot more somewhere else. For me it is that I just love doing it, I always have.

Reference 2 - 1.94% Coverage

R2 If I was to ask the pupil whom you support, what would he tell me you do? LSA Support him by being there with me, sitting beside me, helping me. R2 What would other pupils, those whom you don’t support say that you do? LSA
They would say that I am there to help Tom, to support him being in lessons, to help them as well.

**LSA ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

**Internals\Transcribed focus group** - § 9 references coded [12.97% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.38% Coverage

The role has changed quite dramatically in those last 10 years I think, but for me the role of the LSA is to ultimately make the curriculum accessible to students,

Reference 2 - 1.14% Coverage

Some one to support an individual or a group of individuals. It is that additional support they are going to require within this environment that they need to achieve however small it is.

LSA 3 I think that is part of a good LSA to be able to adapt yourself to whatever lesson you have been called to, I mean my languages are absolutely useless but I can still support because I can adapt myself. **LSA 5** I think it is good for the children to see you learning as well, then they realise that you don’t know everything and it makes you more approachable. You put your hand up and ask questions with the students, sometimes you can see a student struggling and they won’t put their hands up to ask the question. You put your hands up to ask that question and in that way the information gets across. R2 Please tell me if I am getting it? It is good for children to see you modelling learning, so if you don’t know it they can see you trying to work it out, if you are not getting it they can see you solving what do I do when I am stuck. All LSAs **YES**

Reference 5 - 0.63% Coverage

LSA 5 7 years, I have had two or three different students. I think without support in the class the majority of our students would disrupt the learning of others, not by being bad behaved. Having us there helps them access the curriculum more which stops the behaviour.

Reference 6 - 1.48% Coverage

LSA 8 if the students can see you enjoying the lesson as well, then they will enjoy it, if you are sat there with a po face then they are going to feel the
same. LSA 4 I also think that if you find something hard yourself in the lesson and they see that you find it hard then it makes it ok for them to find it hard, and also it brings in it is ok to make a mistake, it is ok to keep trying. I know the lessons that I am in that I find hard like IT, but I’ve said I know nothing about this I am going to be learning just as much as you are, we kind of all worked through it together. It is nice as they can teach you how to do things and you are teaching them as well.

S* It is making the curriculum relevant to students and extending it beyond school. Making kids understand that this isn’t just an interlude to get your five GCSEs or not. It is about not making the kids feel like a failure if they are not destined to get those academic qualifications, to give them faith in themselves and a sense of pride.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Internals\Transcribed focus group - § 12 references coded [19.23% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.70% Coverage
I think we work with such a wide range of students that for me it is getting the student to engage really with what is going on in school be it social or academic, if we can aide that process and make it accessible for the kids then I think that is the main role, and at the end of it they come out well rounded.

Reference 2 - 1.04% Coverage
I quite often get called a teacher by the students but I say that I am not, I am a LSA, because I think our role is very different, we get to do a lot more, teachers can’t do what we do, they are not able they do not have the time. Like today there were issues between the students and a teacher and I was able to calm the situation and keep the student in the lesson. Whereas ordinarily the student would have been off and gone, and wouldn’t have come back.

Reference 3 - 1.79% Coverage

Reference 4 - 1.33% Coverage
LSA 10 Some children don’t know how to conduct themselves, he social rules, how to look or act and they speak out in the only way they know. It seems that a lot more children are not having good social skills being learnt at home, it is very poor even from the brightest kids they have no way of socialising. They don't seem to know how to speak to an adult or each other,. They don't think that it is rude, they really have no idea. What is totally unacceptable like swearing is completely normal at home. I had a year 7 ask me Miss is ‘piss off’ a bad thing. She genuinely did not know. 

Reference 5 - 1.44% Coverage

I do a lunchtime group with LSA 5, it is a young carers group, but now it is anybody that needs somewhere to go over lunchtime. It was quite a small group it has grown to 30. We have had really good feedback from parents evening and we also do a morning group which is social skills and building confidence and that is lovely as we get referrals from other LSAs, teaching staff, heads of year so we get to meet pupils that we wouldn’t necessarily meet and this is lovely because we see them in the corridor after and they are happy to say hello and then they met other people in the group and they have made friends it is nice.

Reference 6 - 3.26% Coverage

LSA8 I have been here 8 years. I work mainly with a boy in year 11 who has real confidence issues and didn't like coming into school. I have been working with him for 2 years now and he is great. We don’t have any lateness in the mornings, I used to have to wait in reception for him and escort him to his tutor room and now he is really happy to come to school. He is doing really well now compared to what he was like and a lot of it is down have the confidence and reassurance, I am not really doing anything, he is perfectly capable of doing it himself but he needs that reassurance and encouragement just to let him know that he is doing the right thing. R2 I would stop you and say that you are doing something because if you weren’t there he probably wouldn’t have been able to build those skills. He needed your support to do those things. LSA 8 I am really fond of him and he is leaving next year and I am already thinking what am I going to do, what will I do without him but he is a lovely boy, I have found that now he is becoming more confident I am moving around the group more. I can get him started with his work and then
move around the group cuz they are all needy and some are challenging and require a lot of assistance. I think once they know what they are doing the challenging behaviour disappears a little bit. They do need a lot of help in the group. I find I work a lot with the group and I got to know them well.

Reference 7 - 2.12% Coverage

LSA9 I’ve been here 18 years and my role has changed greatly since I’ve been here. I agree with what everyone has said but I have made a few notes. One of the things I think the whole team are is positive role models for the students. That really helps them as some of them don’t have that positive role model. Being able to do that is really good, we make school for some of our students a positive place to be, where it might not have been when they first came, they may not have always had that positive image of school. What I particularly like about the job I do is that it is different everyday, every minute, I never know what is going to happen and I thrive on that, I like that. I think that the team and all of us are good at being non-judgemental with the students which helps. I think we all like learning ourselves so we are keen to pass on to students that learning is a positive thing. We make it fun and enjoyment.

Reference 8 - 3.02% Coverage

LSA 5 we are not worried about the targets, we are worried about the child social wise and how they will access college. We have one or two and they have to focus on 30. LSA 7 The children see us in a different light as well, they see us as different to teachers. They will approach us with problems that they might be frightened to speak to the teacher about. It is more that they trust us, they tell us their personal things. 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. Even though they know we have to act on it, they will trust us to do it sensitively. They trust us as more of a parent, that a teacher we are not as official. LSA 4 A teacher has 30 students in a class, so if the have 8 classes. We only have a small amount of kids. The teacher tries to help every child they can but they are some that slip through. We are more accessible. We pick up the ones that would slip through. We kind of do the teachers job then, cuz the teacher should make sure that every child, not just in achievement, but take out the achievement, is all rounded.
anyway, but because of the amount of kids that they have I don’t think that happens. I think with LSAs we pick up the kids that are on the borderline of going that way.
Appendix 9—Section of the Transcribed Focus Group

Focus Group

R1 Most research into TAs asks teachers, but what research into TAs asks TAs?

LSA 8. Might be awkward for some of us to say what we do because sometimes you seem to be the only one running around in the lesson.

R1 That is a really good point.

R1 we want you to think about your strengths, to tell us through this medium what makes a good LSA, how you measure up to that LSA. You all have ideas of what makes a good LSA, and when all those ideas are chucked into the pot this incredible thing will rise out of the air like a phoenix, which you have modelled. Then you will all tell me how well you match up to this LSA, this thing you have created. That’s is what we are doing.

S* This is our version of the Sutton report, it did not speak to the LSAs, 13 primaries, and 12 secondaries. It is this horrible statement that LSAs make no difference in terms of impact and progress to students, we clearly know differently. I know differently, you know differently, the students know differently. That is the purpose of this as well to give you an opportunity and me to celebrate the success of what you do. The Sutton report has been a damaging tool especially for LSAs, I know schools that have disbanded their SEN team because they think they don’t need one. If you think about it if you are not making a difference to the progress of the kids why are you there, why do you have a job, we can save money. So it is political and I am protective of you guys, and I know how committed and how much you love the students that you work with generally.

There was a child who couldn’t even eat, who wasn’t coming into schools, and now he is in school and sitting having lunch and that is down to the work of the LSAs.

R1 Those things that S* is talking about the quality that you bring to students’ lives are not things that are measurable in current outcome questionnaires. Questionnaire may be asking to rate your effectiveness based on academic outcomes, and if the progress if demonstrating that students are achieving the same academically at the end of the year as at the beginning then teachers might believe that the LSAs are not having any impact on progress. What those questionnaires aren’t saying is that those students are remaining in school, they are talking about their feelings without shouting or throwing things around, they are going from place to place quietly without getting into fights, they are sharing about their private lives and dreams and ambitions to you, but those things aren’t measurable currently. So we want to create a piece if research which will allow you to describe those things, so that people, SMT or those outside the school will be able to read about more qualitative
values that you bring to the role. That aren’t measurable in traditional types of questionnaires, we are trying to get you voice. Think about the problems you have, the things people don’t see, how much of her time is spent just trying to track them down and get them to a place where they should be before you can even think about imparting the National Curriculum. That is almost secondary to stabilising the anxiety of this young person.

S* The impact on families and teachers, and parents and the lesson.

LSA 5 If we weren’t in the lesson, teacher wouldn’t be able to teach that lesson, because they would have to be focused on one particular student all the time.

R2 Can you briefly tell me when you think of the term LSA what do you think about, what comes to mind?

LSA 1 I’ve been here just over 10 years, the role has changed quite dramatically in those last 10 years I think, but for me the role of the LSA is to ultimately make the curriculum accessible to students, but I think we work with such a wide range of students that for me it is getting the student to engage really with what is going on in school be it social or academic, if we can aide that process and make it accessible for the kids then I think that is the main role, and at the end of it they come out well rounded.

LSA 2 I’ve been here for about 15 years and the role changes, but it changes daily. I go into a classroom and I think I am going to be doing one thing and I am doing something completely different. I try and differentiate the curriculum so it is accessible to all students not just those with SEN, some guys who are just not getting it that day or finding that particular subject quite difficult. I quite often get called a teacher by the students but I say that I am not, I am a LSA, because I think our role is very different, we get to do a lot more, teachers can’t do what we do, they are not able they do not have the time. Like today there were issues between the students and a teacher and I was able to calm the situation and keep the student in the lesson. Whereas ordinarily the student would have been off and gone, and wouldn’t have come back.

LSA1 We build very different relationships to the students than the teachers do.

LSA2 I am proud of that, that our relationships are different, so even though we help support the learning we help with the emotional support and anything else that comes up. 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. It can even be one of the brighter students in the group that you wouldn’t normally give help to but we are able to give them the support they need at that time, that the teacher is just not able to, because of time constraints and different restrictions that they have.
R2 is there a situation where you walk in to a class to support a child and you are not aware of the subject that is being taught, are you sometimes learning it as it is being taught?

All LSAs Yes, all the time
LSA 3 I think that is part of a good LSA to be able to adapt yourself to whatever lesson you have been called to, I mean my languages are absolutely useless but I can still support because I can adapt myself.

LSA 5 I think it is good for the children to see you learning as well, then they realise that you don’t know everything and it makes you more approachable. You put your hand up and ask questions with the students, sometimes you can see a student struggling and they won’t put their hands up to ask the question. You put your hands up to ask that question and in that way the information gets across.

R2 Please tell me if I am getting it? It is good for children to see you modelling learning, so if you don’t know it they can see you trying to work it out, if you are not getting it they can see you solving what do I do when I am stuck.

All LSAs YES

R2 In subjects like that, would it be useful if the teacher works from a lesson plan for you to have some idea of what is going to be covered.

LSA 5 7 years, I have had two or three different students. I think without support in the class the majority of our students would disrupt the learning of others, not by being bad behaved. Having us there helps them access the curriculum more which stops the behaviour. I think everything has been said. Good relationships with teachers is really important, I can’t honestly say on my behalf that I have had a good relationship with my teacher, that hasn’t helped me in class to support my student. It isn’t just education curriculum wise it can go as far as toileting, social skills, mixing with their peers, making friendship groups, building confidence. It is like being a second parent really.

R2 I’ve been here. I agree with what everyone has said but I have made a few notes. One of the things I think the whole team are is positive role models for the students. That really helps them as some of them don’t have that positive role model. Being able to do that is really good, we make school for some of our students a positive place to be, where it might not have been when they first came, they may not have always had that positive image of school. What I particularly like about the job I do is that it is different everyday, every minute, I never know what is going to happen and I thrive on that, I like that. I think that the team and all of us are good at being non-judgemental with the students which helps. I think we all like learning ourselves so we are keen to pass on to students that learning is a positive thing. We make it fun and enjoyment
LSA 8 if the students can see you enjoying the lesson as well, then they will enjoy it, if you are sat there with a po face then they are going to feel the same.

S* I don’t like the term LSA, I’m not keen on it, assistant doesn’t even come close to what the team do, as they provide a real bridge between home and school between teacher and student in the classroom and sometimes a bridge between the students and other students it is just huge, so to say that they are an assistant it lessens it, it devalues it. I used to be one back in the olden days before it was a paid job. For me it is immeasurable and unquantifiable giving a child a voice given a child the ability to come in every day and not feeling sick to their stomach waking up in the morning thinking I can’t come to school. Given them back their life when they did not have one is immeasurable.

Outcomes are measured in a very narrow progress 8, and if it is not that it is not worth doing in terms of a curriculum and yet our curriculum is huge. It is cradle to grave curriculum. It is ‘yeah I know you don’t like your mum but try and see if from her point of view, yeah I know that teacher is being a bit of a cod but actually how you reacted..cuz how will you react to people in life.’ It is making the curriculum relevant to students and extending it beyond school. Making

R1 Can I write that down, to be an LSA you have to be emotionally involved.

LSA 3 An 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.

R1 You feel you don’t get paid enough but you still do it because you care for children in a way that what, teachers don’t?

LSA 4 They do care but it is different, they have to get targets and we have to get a nice rounded balanced child to go out to college.

LSA 5 we are not worried about the targets, we are worried about the child

4 social wise and how they will access college. We have one or two and they have to focus on 30.

LSA 7 The children see us in a different light as well, they see us as different to teachers. They will approach us with problems that they might be frightened to speak to the teacher about. It is more that they trust us, they tell us their personal things. 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. Even though they know we have to act on it, they will trust us to do it sensitively. They trust us as more of a parent, that a teacher we are not as official.
LSA 4 A teacher has 30 students in a class, so if the have 8 classes. We only have a small amount of kids. The teacher tries to help every child they can but they are some that slip through. We are more accessible. We pick up the ones that would slip through. We kind of do the teachers job then, cuz the teacher should make sure that every child, not just in achievement, but take out the achievement, is all ruined anyway, but because of the amount of kids that they have I don't think that happens. I think with LSAs we pick up the kids that are on the borderline of going that way.

R2 Training?

LSA 1/ 6 6,7,8

R2 Why would you give that a 5 or 6 but give personality a 10.

LSAs echo Training is text book most of the time you already know it. It is common sense, it is the stuff we are already doing.

**LSA 6 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, I do still know that. It is a confidence boost when you go.**

R2 Is it about, applying that training to your role?

LSA 7 If you go on an ASD training, they do role-plays to help you understand how and ASD child is feeling and that does bring it home. I found that quite useful to experience the sensory overload that an ASD child is feeling, so you can understand what they are experiencing in lessons with all the noise going on around them.

**R2 Is that because you know them well enough?**

**LSAs** Yes, we try to prepare the others.

**R1** On that idea of communication, you communicate with each other really well do you pass this information onto teachers?

**LSAs 7/ 6 /5** We don't see them enough to, there is very little time to d that.

**LSA 1** We try to, we pass on what we need to pass on.

**LSA 3** If some students don’t have a positive relationship with the teacher. I’ll get there ahead of time and say this student is really not having a good today. Then they will allow me to deal with it, and back off so they don’t put the student in a situation where they know they are going to be confrontational. They will say thanks for that. They will give them a bit more space.

**R2** Perhaps as you know them better you are able to anticipate what they reaction might be in a class, and it might be useful to have the time to share that information with the teachers.
**LSA 4** I do find it difficult with teachers around communication, I'll pass on anything that is relevant about 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 is someone came to me and said that.
Appendix 10 – Examples of sections of Transcribed Interviews

LSA Interview Transcribed 6

R2 My fear is that LSAs think that I am coming to judge them, and that is not it. I think there is a lot of research on LSA usually over large number of schools, but I wonder if there are other ways to get it. Not that I am saying that I am more qualified than those published researchers. I think there is a story to tell about your role that needs to be explored in this manner of observations, interviews and coming back into school often, and I think that you are the best people to tell your story and I would like to help you do that. A lot of what I am observing is you guys asking pupils those process questions, how could you do that, is there another way?

LSA 6 I think it is really good because LSAs in general are not very good at reflecting on ourselves. I am not good at saying ‘oh I am really good at this, oh I am really good at that. I am not that sort of person, so for me it is really good, if you show me what I have done then I realise it.

R2 What I observed was very much about asking them, how else can you do this, getting them to think about, varying your support. You were modelling trial and error, and working it out.

LSA I think that lesson is very different as it is ICT, as they are on the FLP group it is very different. You may have noticed the other LSA was doing completely different work from what I was doing with a group if students. Those students were doing their GCSE, so they are doing that topic which I have never done since I was at school. It is completely new software. I was feeling similar to what they were feeling, ‘oh my God what is happening here’. It took me a while to grasp it, and I don’t assume to know everything. So it is good that we are learning together really. That lesson is very different from what English, Maths, and Science would be and it is a good lesson for you to observe.

R2 So is it that in that lesson you have space to have a conversation and create a dialogue with the type of language that supports them. How does it work in other lessons?

LSA to be honest, I think spacing is, you have hit the nail on the head there. The computer room is a great big space so we are able to do that. Also with Maths, English, and Science there aren’t many of those types of questions that you can really ask, it depends on the topic. For e.g. in Maths if you were doing a sum, you could do it a particular way and while they are other ways to do it, but if they are used to do it a particular way that works best for them it is better to stick with that method for a minute, as that is what they are going to go to when they are in an exam situation. Does that make sense? With ICT there are loads of different ways, I’m playing with the computers myself trying to find out different ways and then we both come up with different ways. They
are teaching me just as much as I am teaching them, which I think is really useful.

**LSA 7 Transcribed Interview**

R2 what was your route in to becoming an LSA?

LSA I had been looking into it, when I left school I did a residential care course at college, so I used to be a nanny and I have my own family, then I worked in social services but with adults, so I have come from a care background and I just thought it would be nice to work with children for a change but in caring role.

R2 in terms of your caring role and your role now, was their training associated with your caring role that you brought into this one, or did you get specific training or a bit of both?

LSA I think it is a bit of both, I did work a lot with ASD adults when I was in Social services, but then I don’t think they had special education, they weren’t as able as they ASD children you see here, because they didn’t experience education being geared to them years ago. I think back to the adults, they were far more traumatised than the children here are, as they haven’t had that specific care. I have gone on ASD type courses here since I’ve been here, but that was more geared to adults rather than to education.

R2 When I was here for the focus group, I found the discussion where we spoke about what was more important to you as a group of professionals was your ability to draw on your experience, your ability to empathise with children. It wasn’t only about the 2 sub levels, but about seeing that young person and their whole picture, and your peer support was ranked as more important than personality. Can you tell me a bit more about that?

LSA Do you mean as a group? SENCo is really good at putting us with children who suit us, and she does tend to place us with those children we are best suited to. You can’t do it all the time but she tries.

R2 Is it about your personality as well, that was also mentioned how important the personality of the support assistant is and how key it is to your role?

LSA I think it is coming back to the SENCo knowing who to put us with, she approached me when I first started working with XXXX to say that he was going to need someone, and the children I was working with were about to leave, and she said I think you would be right for him. I was so excited because I had two lovely children but when you have been with them from year 7 all the way through and they are leaving you are sad, but she is good. I don’t think I would be good with a child who needed really strong firm structure as I am too ‘momsey’. There are other people who are really good at being much firmer and I think probably that she knows who to put us with, she suits our personalities to the children.
R2 What do you think a CT will say that your role is?

LSA I think that they class teacher on the whole would say that our role is to support the students and extend to support the teacher, I think it is kind of moral support for the teacher as sometimes we are asked to stay behind in lessons if a teacher wants to talk to a child and feels like they need another person there. I do think they do see us as valuable, I have never felt that a teacher didn’t want me in their lesson, I think they do appreciate us. They will ask us to do bits, they will always ask nicely it is not expected, they will ask could you please, so I really think we have a good relationship with teacher on a whole.

TA 3 section of transcribed interview

R2 When you say achieve, tell me more about that?

LSA 3 Achievement is not just achieving your 2 sub levels, or achieving 10 out of 10. That would be fantastic but for some children that is not going to happen. Achieving is being able to integrate into your lessons on your own, it is being able to mix with your peers, and he can go into tutor groups with his peers. They are fantastic with him as he can be difficult. It is being able to see him having a friendship group without alienating himself. He has learnt not to get into people’s faces, he has learnt about appropriate space. He can say things that are inappropriate and that is challenging. He is very vocal and will challenge everything you say. I am very thick skinned and I don’t give him an inch, if I do he will take a mile and be off. It is nice to see him achieving all of those things that people did not think he would achieve when he came.

R2 What is the most beneficial aspect of your job?

LSA 3 for him it is seeing him develop those social skills. Yes academic is important but if he can pick up two or three things from the lesson I am really happy with that but to be able to work with others, to give his opinion and listen to others, to support others using empathy which he can do sometimes, is more important for him than learning history and geography. That is important as what he hears he stores somewhere.

R2 You have said that you can implement training that you have received. Are there any barriers to implementing training?

LSA Some subjects you can’t talk to the student in the class, some teachers don’t support that well.
LSA The training was very minimal and that is something that really needs improving, and that is something that I was keen to improve years ago. Never been given the opportunity to.

R2 What does the training look like.

LSA If you start now, you are generally lucky enough to get a similar training to teachers. You can visit the classes that they put on with members of the school. You gain an insight into how the school operates. If you start in the middle of the year you would have to rely heavily on the SENCo and colleagues in the department. What we generally do is a standard format, which HR have tightened up on.

R2 In terms of training to support students with SEN, what does that look like?

LSA not as good as it could be. It is a combination of shadowing, if we are lucky enough for any courses to come up throughout the year. We do in house training, key things initially like ICT. I came here not knowing how to use a computer, nobody emailed them we used paper holder. Access to Sims data to track students’ progress. We try and put training into departmental meetings.

R2 In terms of in class support, who or what difficult do you support?

LSA Mainly ASD as I have spent, the student who I was with previously left this year. I have been with him for 2.5 years. I hadn’t really supported ASD up until that point but I took to it like a duck to water. It felt comfortable, I see a lot of ASD traits in myself, I could see a huge amount of him in me, I knew how he was feeling in certain situations he didn’t have to express himself verbally, I thought I’ve been through that. I had a dreadful time at school myself so I could see that in him. I did a lot of one to one stuff with him, and it escalated and I had an e-mail from him. So when the SENCo was looking at this year we discussed the two students that were in the class today. I was more than happy to take them on, at the moment that is my niche.

R2 Did you have support here in terms of strategies or is it drawing from your own experiences of having a difficult time in school and you were able to ‘get’ the pupil?

LSA I haven’t had any specific training outside of school.

R2 what was your training in school.

LSA I have drawn from colleagues as over the years colleagues have supported a number of students with ASD. I know how they have succeeded and I have seen them succeed with their students, we use each other for advice and I have done. I think each child on the spectrum is very different so you have to treat them all as individuals. You saw today the girl versus the lad. They are quite different, he is quite high function, very bright he just needs a little directions sometimes. A lot of the time I know that when the
tasks is started and he is equipped with what he needs to do the task he can get in with it and I can focus on some of the weaker ones.

R2 in terms of in class support, who or what difficult do you support?

LSA Mainly ASD as I have spent, the student who I was with previously left this year. I have been with him for 2.5 years. I hadn’t really supported ASD up until that point but I took to it like a duck to water. It felt comfortable, I see a lot of ASD traits in myself, I could see a huge amount of him in me, I knew how he was feeling in certain situations he didn’t’ have to express himself verbally, I thought I’ve been through that. I had a dreadful time at school myself so I could see that in him. I did a lot of one to one stuff with him, and it escalated and I had an e-mail from him. So when the SENCo was looking at this year we discussed the two students that were in the class today. I was more than happy to take them on, at the moment that is my niche.

R2 I want to reflect something back to you, and can you tell me if I am right in my thinking? Today that achievement is about the kids, you said this is because of my support, this pupil who finds communicating in English difficult was able to achieve well in French spoken lesson through preparation and practice. The teacher also acknowledged and gave you praise. In classes where you may feel not so positively about the end result, is that about you not having information from another person. It isn’t about the type of support that you give, isn’t that more about not being prepared because of the communication? I

LSA I see what you are saying.

R2 So that when you come away feeling deflated, it is not about your skills in supporting the pupil that have failed.

LSA Yes, I agree. That is exactly what I am saying. I haven’t been prepared for this and I think and I have to say schools are a very busy place with the time constraints, there isn’t that time to linger after the lesson 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 5 lessons of the day and think, I didn’t really get that, why didn’t I know that, and I will email teaching staff and say are we continuing, do I need to. even small things like I could be going to the lesson prepared with other resources, other than thinking ‘damn’ I am on the other side of the school, there is something really useful up here I could have taken that with me. You think they have quite a distance to travel.

R2 Are there times where the structure of the class, poor communication act as barriers to working in a way that you think would be more useful to support the young person?

LSA It is a whole bag of things, a mix of things, I think a big barrier is the attainment targets, teaching staff are constantly under pressure to show achievement, and to get the attainment levels up, which is disseminated. We
get that, the SENCO will get that from SLT, it is mentioned at department meetings. Yes we have to look at attainment and we have to think about achieving the next level all the time, but we are poked with that stick more than I care to mention. I think with a certain number of us it washes over us, but in the back of our minds we think that we will be asked at some stage how this student is progressing and where is the evidence and I think it used to be major concern as we used to record and log a lot of what we were doing and students attainment particularly if they were out of lessons. The last Ofsted inspections we had to know the children inside out and be fully prepared with data, and the role got lost among all that. The purpose of the role was lost, it is all about making sure know what their target grades are and what they need to do next. With students with SEN you can only take that to a certain limit, because beyond a certain point it means nothing. We can only go so far with X student or with Y student, you could maybe take it further, but it is looking at students within the group I am supporting who are doing French but shouldn’t be doing French and this is the time of year we have conversations with modern foreign languages about students we think would benefit from being pulled from the language and focusing on English and literacy skills.

LSA 5 Section of Transcribed Interview

R2 Do you think the support is different here?

LSA Yes, but when I first came, it was very strong the SLT support. The whole of the SLT has changed now and I would say that the support is not quite as strong as it was. It is still better than at other schools.

R2 You support a particular student whose needs appear to be quite complex. I observed how you support him, is that what you do on a day-to-day basis. Is that the main body of your work with him?

LSA Within the classroom situation my support is that he understands what the actual task is about. So it could be that we don’t even get to do what the teacher has set as the outcome. As long as he has understood the tasks so that he has the tools to do something within that task. I also do one to one with him, to support his S&L with him and a couple other students. It is basic, I have done it for so long that it is an automatic thing. It is hard to describe it.

R2 This is why I had a schedule to break it down so that you could talk about it. Is it about getting them to understand the task, is it also about getting him started.

LSA I do make a lot of resources for him so that he is able to have concrete materials. So he is able to access the lesson. I also help him with key words. If you can get them to understand key words they can understand most of the lesson. Basic things.

R2 If you had three magic wishes that would either improve your job or the circumstances what would it be?
LSA an iPod or laptop would be great to have in class as you could call up resources straight away, you would have something visual in front of you. Somewhere specifically to securely keep your bags, teachers have classrooms or cupboards and we have no where as our own space that we could go to sit and share experiences or have a moan if we needed to.

It is really difficult to think about us and what we do because everything that you do is an automatic process, the teacher teaches and has a lesson plan, but when we go into a lesson we never see a lesson plan only if Ofsted is coming. It is an automatic go in and get on with it.

R2 I wonder what an LSA’s lesson plan would be, would it be about a subject, would it be about supporting thinking?

LSA I think with LSAs when you first start you are very focused on what you were doing and what the child has to get out of the lesson. Whereas now it is very free flowing for me as I know what the lesson is, 20 years of doing this I have lots of resources. So many that people have said to me that I have found a fantastic resource of yours to use. I think it is something that evolves the longer you are a LSA the more resources and ammunition you have for a lesson to be able to go in and do. I always carry a big bag around but I have everything in there that I need for a lesson. It is my Mary Poppins bag.

R2 In the big focus group the team indicated that personal experience, empathy, peer support. They indicated that you can train anybody to do any job but it is about your personality and that may not be trained as efficiently as it would need to be. Do you agree with them, and if so can you tell me a bit more about it.

LSA I suppose personality is quite important within working within a classroom situation because there are students that I can get on really well with, they respond quite well. A teacher might say can you speak to him or her as I can never get anything out of them, or if I speak to them they kick off. It is really getting a rapport going. I always think it is the respect of you and the students you need that to be able to do anything.

R2 Do you think that class teachers appreciate what you do?

LSA Yes class teachers appreciate what we do because they actually come and will express that what you did was brilliant, they will acknowledge you, but SLT don’t ever speak to you or anything.
Appendix 11 – Student Focus Group (Rating Scale)
Access to me. 2
Make me feel good about myself. 1
Talk to me. 1
Talk about my feelings. 1
Help me. 1
Get it. 1
Done. 1
Read to me. 2
Teach me. 1
Nice by hand. 1
Know me well. 2
Appendix 11a – Student Ideal TA Drawing

Appendix 11b – Student Mind Maps
Friday 13th 2015

- Both teach, but I will translate words
- Break it down for understanding
- Understanding why I am angry,
  when I say horrible things, people say
  horrible things
  "Run me down, walk away"

 Helpers/LSA
Literature Review

Ysanne Marville

ID. 620030685

25.04.2014

Word Count 6557 including References
The Literature Search:

This research proposes to explore, the pedagogical role of teaching assistants. EBSCO E- Journals was the main gateway used to search journals. The key journals that I have identified for my research are, ‘Educational Psychology in Practice’, ‘Educational Research’ and the ‘Journal of Educational Psychology’. The key word searches conducted were: ‘the role of teaching assistants’, and ‘pedagogy’. From those key word searches, 7 research papers were selected, as they were viewed to be relevant to what is explored in this paper. This literature review is recursive in nature, as the findings from similar research studies, which explored the roles and effects of TAs, are discussed (Ridley, 2008). ‘The impact of teaching assistants on improving pupils’ academic achievement in mainstream schools: A review of the literature’, by Farrell, Alborz, Howes. & Pearson, is a useful integrative review of previous work exploring the role of TAs. ‘The Child Within. Taking the Young Person’s Perspective by Applying Personal Construct Psychology’, as well as ‘Solution- Focused Therapy’ are two key books that have influenced this research. I consider that Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Loughran, & Farrell are important researchers into the field of Teaching Assistants (TAs).
Introduction and Background

Due to an increasingly inclusive ethos adopted by schools, teaching assistants (TAs) have become a normal addition to classroom and school environments (Unison, 2014). They often support students who require additional intervention, by facilitating further strategies that benefit those who are finding some aspects of school difficult (Ainscow, 2005). This research paper refers to literature that discusses: the role and effects of teaching assistants, how teaching assistants are used, and the effects of teaching assistants. Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), and social cultural theory approaches are mentioned, as I believe the use of these can add to the body of literature that exists on the role of TAs. These theoretical underpinnings are also evident in research that investigates the roles of TAs. As a result, this literature review will include chapters on PCP, and social cultural theory. This term pedagogy is also explored in the literature, specifically as it relates to the types of strategies that are utilised in the classroom to support learning.

TAs can be viewed as a major historical development to education. They have a direct effect upon the day-to-day classroom experiences of children and young people, with respect to the ways in which they are taught. The role was developed as a result of the movement towards inclusive education; one of the most profound educational changes to occur in the United Kingdom has been the rapid increase in the number of school-based teaching assistants (Blatchford, Russell, & Webster, 2012). TAs were viewed as benefitting mainstream classroom teachers, by providing close support to children with complex learning and behaviour needs (Hancock, & Eyres, 2004). There was a significant increase of TAs during the 1900s and early 2000s, as a result of a focus on national literacy and numeracy targets (Hancock, & Eyres, 2004). Funds were made available through specific government spending programmes across the UK to recruit TAs to support the 1 in 4 children who were not progressing as required (Hancock, & Eyres, 2004). For the purpose of this research, it may be useful to indicate the original purpose of the TA role. In mentioning why this role was created, whether the current role has
adapted and evolved, and what has contributed to the changing TA role can be explored.

The Role and Effects of Teaching Assistants

It can be assumed that the presence of another adult, supports teachers in being able to carry out their roles more efficiently. Teachers are able to support the rest of the class, whilst TAs support the work of specific groups of pupils (Blatchford, et al, 2004). I think it may be apparent that having a TA present would facilitate a more productive classroom. However results from the large scale; sample size 8200 pupils in 153 mainstream primary and secondary schools, Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project (Blatchford, Russell, & Webster, 2012) indicates that pupils receiving the most TA support made less progress than similar pupils who received little or no TA support, controlling for factors such as prior attainment and SEN status.

The role of teaching assistants within a large college can be complex; it can often be emotionally intensive, demanding and require unrealistic expectations (Mclachlan & Davis, 2013). Understanding what it means to be a TA can be a rather complicated task, as they are often referred to by a variety of terms, including learning support assistants, teacher aides, special support officers, schools service officers, integration aides, special needs assistants and paraprofessionals (Trent, 2014). Mclachlan and Davis mixed methods study reported findings on the Enhanced Learning Support Assistant Programme (ELSAP), which offers professional development for learning support assistants who support students with additional learning needs in a college of further education in England. This project found that engaging with a professional development activity has a positive effect in participants’ confidence, sense of professional identity, as well as improving their ability to perform their role. While guidance exists to schools concerning the duties and roles of teachers, there is no such clarity in terms of TA role, which remains ambiguous and is often shaped by local context and priorities (Graves, 2014).
Prior to ELSAP 14 week intervention LSAs were found to be poorly equipped for their role, and felt their was a lack of appropriate training to prepare them for their roles supporting learners (Mclachlan & Davis, 2013). In some cases the separation of TAs from teaching is deliberate and explicit, and this might account for reports of confusion and uncertainty over the roles and responsibility of TAs (Butt & Lowe, 2012). This confusion has some impact on TAs and schools’ ability to retain them (Trent, 2014). Blatchford, Russell, and Webster (2012) insist that ‘schools have much to gain from TAs, and few, if any, would wish to lose them’.

Trent (2014) study involved developing TAs unique identity, as there needs to be a better understanding of the experiences of TAs in school-based settings. Teaching assistants views need to be listened to and their perspectives understood if a robust role is to be created for them. This study found that TAs indicated that their classroom role was often dominated by concerns for classroom management, student discipline. This qualitative multiple case study approach to exploring how teaching assistants construct professional identity, found that TAs face challenges in constructing their professional identities at institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels within Hong Kong schools.

Graves (2014) research sought to explore the evolving role of the higher-level teaching assistant (HLTA). A qualitative approach which employed case studies, 15 face-to-face semi-structured interviews, and focus groups was used. This study indicated that the TA role has evolved from parent helper to and extension of the mother role. Care work and emotional support traditionally associated with mothers tends not to be seen as productive work, particularly within the current education policy in England (Graves, 2014). I wonder whether the value imbalance between emotional support and academic development has contributed to the TA role being viewed as having little impact. It might be useful for schools to develop a more inclusive way of viewing progress in children and young people. To only focus on academic progress in students with SEN could be considered limited.
Graves (2014) argues that the conception of the TA/HLTA role as not teacher denies it a comprehensible identity within the workforce. The lack of clarity around the role can lead to exploitation, as deployment would be reliable on senior managers, whose understanding of the HLTA role can be variable across and within schools. Further, to enable best use to be made of the expertise and experience of TA/HLTAs, a more strategic approach to recruitment and deployment needs to be adopted by school leaders and managers.

Blatchford, et al (2004) studied the role of TAs in Key Stage 2 classrooms, specifically how their role was perceived by: teachers, pupils, TAs themselves, and head teachers. The rationale behind using systematic observations and case studies was to establish the extent and ways in which TAs supported pupils directly. This is also one of the methods I plan to use in my research. Systematic observations would support the exploration of the day-to-day role of TAs, and one of the main purposes of my research is to capture TAs experiences. Research indicates that TAs are satisfied with their work and are viewed as valuable by teachers when certain conditions are satisfied (Blatchford, et al, 2004). TAs are satisfied with their work when: they have a good relationship with the teacher, they are working as part of a team, and they see the progress made by pupils (Blatchford, et al, 2004).

Working systemically, exploring the views of the professionals and people who know a young person best, would be a useful when seeking to support a pupil. Being able to see the pupil at the centre of the multiple contexts in which they operate, may be best practise, as it would support the most appropriate interventions (Bronfenbrenner). I believe to fully explore the multiple contexts that TAs exist in an act upon, pupils views need to be explored. I view this as a useful step in building upon the research of Blatchford et al. (2004). TAs directly interact with pupils in classrooms to support their learning and they often support students with SEN (Blatchford, et al, 2004). Indeed, due to inclusion policy, schools often view TA support as the only way they can effectively support pupils with a wide range of needs in a classroom (Blatchford, Basset, & Brown, 2005). Having TAs in the
classroom have been shown to increase the individualised attention of all pupils, not only those with SEN, increase the occurrence of on-task behaviours, and decrease the occurrence of off-task behaviour (Blatchford, Basset, & Brown, 2005).

I am interested in how TAs operationalize their roles: what they view their roles to be and how they carry them out in the classroom. Blatchford, et. al, (2004) indicate that there was confusion concerning the specification of the work of TAs when interacting with pupils. Of course, TAs support learning, but how? Some teachers were able to identify: reiteration, repetition, and ‘drilling’ as contributions made by TAs to pupil learning (Blatchford, et al, 2004). These are contributions that I believed are easily identified and commented upon but what about other contributions and other ways of supporting pupil learning? Blatchford, et. al,(2004) indicated that there appears to be a clear mismatch between the ways TAs are deployed and their professional preparation for the support of pupils’ learning. It appears that TAs may have little control as to how they are deployed and used (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013). I will expand on this in the chapters discussing the use of TAs.

The impact of Teaching Assistants

Webster, Blatchford, and Russell (2013) studied the ways in which some schools used and deployed TAs, as a result of research that indicated there was a negative impact of TAs’ support on pupils’ academic progress. This outcome was surprising- TA support having a negative impact- indicating that there was a need for further investigation into why a ‘tool’ used to support pupils appeared to be acting as a barrier to their learning. TAs are an essential component of practice especially as they relate to supporting pupils with SEN (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013).

There can be no doubt that most schools would find it difficult to manage in their day to day operations without the use of support staff such as TAs. I believe that the practice of using TAs, to support learning within classroom is widely accepted as good policy. However, problems do emerge when TAs are
given an ill-defined remedial role (Blatchford et al, 2012). As such, this research seeks to explore the perceived role of TAs. The data generated from this research should indicate what their specific pedagogical role is. While there is evidence of the indirect effect that TAs have on pupil standards, what must take precedence is the direct effect on pupil attainment through overtly pedagogical input (Blatchford et al, 2012). TAs are not teachers but are often called upon to undertake teaching duties (Graves, 2014). This could potentially contribute to tension in classrooms, particularly if there exists varying expectations for TAs within a school environment.

It is suggested, that one of the main pedagogical roles of TAs, should be focus on pupils understanding a task, rather than simply completing a task (Blatchford et al, 2012). Research suggests that TAs are only as effective as the policy, which guides their practice (Blatchford et al, 2012). What may be useful to support more effective TA practices, are clear and specific guidelines, which highlight examples of good practice. Due to the at times ambiguous nature of the TA role, some TAs are adopting a pseudo teaching role and teachers are being de-professionalised as teaching is reduced to a series of technical interventions and strategies (Graves, 2014). Issues of TA role ambiguity, preparedness, adequacy of training and deployment impact on pupil attainment and development of the teacher role (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010).

Watson, Bayliss, and Pratchett (2013) explored the impact the teaching and learning support assistant (TLSA) role had upon those in that role. This research indicates that TLSAs are notoriously underpaid and undervalued as members of the school workforce in England. The use of the word support further adds to their poor status, and a set of social and occupational practices, which TLSAs must challenge in order to assert their professionalism in schools (Watson, Bayliss, & Pratchett, 2013). Further despite TLSAs huge variations in practice there is little coherence regarding roles, responsibilities, training, pay, and career pathways. While there has been a focus on professionalising the workforce to ensure more highly skilled staff, there is limited evidence of role clarity or increased status for TLSAs in
schools (Cajkler et al. 2006). TLSAs are often used to cover for teachers to allow them planning, preparation, and assessment time (Watson, Bayliss, & Pratchett, 2013), they were initially used to overcome the problems of class sizes, the shortage of teaching recruits, and poor teacher retention (Ofsted, 2002, DfES, 2003).

Watson, Bayliss, and Pratchett (2013) argue that a deficiency model exists for TLSAs who are expected to work in the shadow of the teacher and perform the same roles, but to a lesser standard, the TLSA is placed in the role of the less competent adult rather than a competent other. The nature of the TLSA role may cause TLSAs to view their contribution to students and education as insignificant or of lower standard; their support position may not be viewed as an important or fulfilling role (Watson, Bayliss, & Pratchett, 2013).

Their research explored TLSAs’ experiences through positioning theory by establishing a group of 12 members of staff from 6 schools in Devon. Members were recruited based on their interest and commitment to the project and included one TLSA, and one teaching or management member of staff from each school. The group met nine times to refine their ideas to the question, ‘If a TLSA is “good” what does that mean?’ Watson, Bayliss, & Pratchett (2013) found through analysing data gather in semi-structured interviews and group discussions that TLSAs were viewed as ‘pond life’ in schools. That is, they were viewed as the lowest of the low, expected to do the most menial tasks, and ‘know their place’ as subordinate to teaching staff. This research highlights gap in the literature, which focuses on people who are employed as TLSAs, beyond their training and pay conditions.

Farrell, Alborz, Howes, and Pearson (2010) carried out a review of the literature, which focused on the impact of teaching assistants on improving pupil’s academic achievement. The criterion for studies to be included in this review were: the studies commented on the work of TAs or their equivalent, studies be written in English, and studies that provided empirical data that addressed the impact of adult support on pupil learning within mainstream schools between the ages of 3 and 16. 13 papers were viewed as being
relevant to the review of the literature on TA impact on pupils’ academic attainments and were classified into targeted and non-targeted intervention studies.

All but one article indicated that trained and supported TAs, working one to one, or in a small group, helped primary aged children to make significant gains in learning when compared to similar children who did not receive TA support. When TAs are not given a specific task, and they independently construct their tasks, while their presence in the classroom—although welcomed and supportive of the teacher role—does not improve the outcomes of pupil attainment.

As non-targeted interventions appeared to have no effect upon pupils’ outcomes, it would be useful for schools to be clear and specific in how they utilise TAs. There is a need for clear objectives when appointing TAs to ensure that they are utilised optimally.

There has been an overreliance on TAs in inclusive classrooms (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010). I have observed that a significant share of work in supporting students with SEN is facilitated through TAs, often the most vulnerable children in schools are supported by the least qualified members of staff (Watson, Bayliss, & Pratchett, 2013). However, at times it appears that the pupil with SEN becomes the TA’s pupil, rather than the teacher’s and the support the pupil received becomes alternative rather than additional (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013). Pupils with increased TA support have less time with their class teacher, as they are often separated, and received less mainstream curriculum coverage. Further to this finding, TAs interactions were seen to be less academically demanding, and interactions tended to close down rather than open up talk linguistically and cognitively (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013).

An increasing number of educational settings are relying on evidenced based practice to guide the interventions that are being implemented in their schools. (Blatchford, Russell, & Webster, 2012). Schools need to be provided with
specific guidance on how to deploy TAs more effectively; this will allow them to defend against further accusation that TAs represent wasteful public spending (Webster, Blatchford, & Russell, 2013). Graves (2014) explored the development of school staff who support pupils in the classroom. The TA role often evolved from parent helpers to paid assistants, and there was often no requirement for formal qualifications or professional development beyond informal peer learning (Graves, 2014). A large part of the TA role was to ease teachers’ workload, improve their work life balance, and improve pupil performance in schools (DfES, 2003). Historically, TAs have worked in a variety of idiosyncratic ways, supporting reading, literacy, and specialist teaching.

Webster, Blatchford, & Russell (2013) engineered a collaborative research project, to develop strategies for effective TA preparation, deployment, and practice. This project sought to compare the new models of working that would be developed through this collaborative piece of work, with previously existing ways of working. The main strategy for the developmental phase of this project was to involve schools in examining the practical aspects of TA deployment. The researcher, through school visits and data collection, would then evaluate the developmental trials. The data generated from this research was based on information from audits, structured observations, semi-structured interviews, and researcher’s notes.

There are numerous results that could be mentioned as a result of this research into the use of TAs. However, this paper will only mention the outcomes that it views as contributing to the objectives of its research into the views of the pedagogical role of TAs.

From this researcher’s perspective, one of most significant outcomes of the previous study was the effect on the confidence of TAs. This was attributed to: increased preparation, clarification of their roles, tasks, and expectations. One of the quotes from the Webster, Blatchford, & Russell (2013) study reflects how important a clearer understanding of your role has a positive influence on practice.
I’ve got a clearer understanding of what my role is. And how wasted I can be if I’m not used properly… There’s a lot more discussion of what’s expected of us and how we should be consistent…. which I feel has really helped.’ (Secondary TA)

Another outcome of the study that was viewed as significant by this researcher was an increase in teacher awareness of the TA role. This is reflected in the following quote:

‘I hadn’t really thought before how difficult it must be for a TA to go between subject to subject, teacher to teacher, and sit in a classroom not really knowing what is going on…. That’s the big thing that’s probably come out of it really: awareness. (Secondary Teacher).

The results indicated that improvements were made in the three areas explored: preparation, deployments, and practice.

It appeared that improvements in the preparedness of TAs was more easily observed and reported, than improvements in deployment and practice. I am not surprised by this outcome; as the deployment of TAs, which may influence practice, may often be embedded in school culture. I think it is positive that Webster, Blatchford, & Russell (2013) acknowledged that altering entrenched attitudes will not be immediate, however schools were beginning to consider alternate ways to deploy TAs based on evidenced good practice. For example TA’s being deployed to work with other pupils, so teachers could spend more time working with low-attaining pupils may challenge pre-existing beliefs about practice. My research is interested in how TAs and teachers feel about this type of deployment. Do they think that it reflects good practice, and what do they think would be the benefits of working in this manner?

Webster, Blatchford, & Russell’s (2013) method of data collection was robust. As pre and post audits were used, change observed could be as a result of the intervention. My research does not utilise this method, as I am not evaluating an intervention. The use of structured observations supports this research in confirming that there was an improvement in the use of TAs. Observation can be an objective tool when corroborating and further
expanding on interview responses. I think that the use of structured observations, and interviews merges well with the objectives of my research, and as such I have incorporated these methods into my data collection process.

Webster, Blatchford, & Russell (2013) viewed their inability to access pupil outcomes, as one of the limitations of their paper. While that point may be valid, I also believe that a failure to incorporate pupil’s views into the initial development phase- where the conceptual and practical aspects of TA deployment were examined- is also a limitation. One of the main aims of the Webster, Blatchford, & Russell (2013) paper was to improve TA effectiveness. This paper is focusing on the impact that using TAs would have on pupil’s outcomes. As this intervention will directly influence the classroom experiences of pupils, I think it would be good practice to include them in decisions made about their learning, and educational experiences.

**Pedagogy**

Effective teaching practice includes pedagogical knowledge, critical reflection of one’s practice, and knowledge of effective practice in teaching in diverse settings, which includes children with special educational needs (De Silva, 2013). In countries such as Australia and the United States, the range of tasks entrusted to TAs includes pedagogical responsibilities (Trent, 2014). As pedagogy is a widely used term, it is important to grasp how it is being applied in a given situation to fully understand, that which is intended, and the subsequent implications of its use (Loughran, 2013). It could be expected that a person might not be expected to carry out their role, if the parameters of that role have not been explained, It could be assumed that this is an exercise in futility, and it would be understandable if anyone in this position failed to produce positive results. Yet, it appears that many TAs have been uninformed of their explicit pedagogical role. It is unfortunate that the thinking that underpins practice is rarely made explicit for others; this makes it difficult for the complex demands that a teacher must manage to be understood (Loughran, 2013).
Pedagogy focuses on understanding the relationship between, teaching and learning, and depends on a teacher making informed decisions about practice (Loughran, 2013). It would suggest that teachers are consciously reflecting and adapting their style of teaching based on how learners respond. Teaching is dynamic, and involves the serious consideration of what is to be taught, and how it is to be taught (Loughran, 2013).

Some teacher’s confidence in how to support a pupil with SEN influences their beliefs about who is responsible for that student’s progress and learning (Webster, 2014). Webster, indicates that there is little evidence in of an effective and theoretically grounded pedagogy for Statemented pupils, with the common practice appearing to be a set number of hours of individualised TA support rather than a focus on appropriate approaches for pupils with learning disabilities. The commonly held perception of a TLSA in policy and practice seems to be to either provide support for pupils with SEN or assistance for teachers that contribute to pedagogical processes that include curriculum development, classroom management, and raised educational standards (Watson, Bayliss, & Pratchett, 2013).

Webster (2014) explored how research evidence on the role and impact of teaching assistants could inform professional practice. Through detailed case studies of 48 Year 5 pupils with statements, he found that the reliance on teaching assistants to include pupils with statements of SEN in mainstream settings masks a collective, unintentional failure of educationalists to provide schools and families of children with SEN with pedagogically sound models of inclusive provision. Pupils with statements spent the equivalent of just over a day a week away from the classroom with the TA, who had the main responsibility for teaching, and delivering alternative programmes and interventions. Webster (2014) indicated that all TAs had a high level of responsibility for moment-by-moment pedagogical decision making, explaining and modifying tasks. The National Workload agreement signed by the government and most teaching unions in 2003, saw a number of tasks previously seen as preserve of teachers become permissible for TAs,
including planning and preparing lessons, delivering lessons, assessing, recording, and reporting (DfES, 2003). The terms supporting, supervising, specified work under the guidance of a teacher are ill defined and are not in accord with what is observed in classrooms (Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, Blatchford, & Rubie-Davis, 2014).

De Silva (2013) explored special educators understanding of inclusive practice, and the challenges they face when applying inclusive practices. This study posited that inclusive practices and dealing with children with particular educational needs, depend not only on teacher factors, but also on the ways in which educational institutions and schools organise the provision of education.

The concerns of the special educators were identified in this study by asking them to describe their positive, negative, and neutral encounters when practising inclusive education. De Silva (2013) was focused on how special educators managed to cope with pupils with SEN, and their concerns and dilemmas when practising inclusionary approaches. Participants in this research expressed their feelings, fears, dilemmas, knowledge gaps, and areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. I believe that this research employs Personal Construct Psychological approaches as it seeks to offer insight into how professionals make sense of their position. I share the belief that using PCP approaches to explore people’s experiences produces data rich in individual’s views and feelings.

Radford, et al. (2014) explored whether TAs could support students becoming independent learners through heuristic- scaffolding. This research suggests that TAs have an important pedagogical role in supporting learners with SEN; often verbal differentiations of teacher talk or printed materials to help students think for themselves. TAs will likely be integral to schools meeting the needs of students with SEN; however, their views on policy and practise are rarely obtained. This research argues that heuristic scaffolding is a necessary practice that should be incorporated within a TAs pedagogical role (Radford, et al., 2014). Heuristic scaffolding is a method of teaching which
allows students to learn by discovering things for themselves, learning from their own experiences, students are then empowered as they develop relevant problem solving techniques (Holton & Clarke, 2006).

This was a descriptive study of naturally occurring classroom interactions with TAs. TAs interactions from the DISS project, EDTA project, and The Interactions of Teaching Assistants in Primary (ITAP) school project were closely scrutinised. Radford et al. (2014) found that a possible strategy that could be used by TAs to support the learning of vulnerable students is scaffolding, when they are given sufficient training and under teacher supervision. Further, TAs should be briefed about the key concepts of the lesson, as well as the key learning strategies relevant to the lesson before the lesson. TAs require knowledge, understanding and skill to deliver heuristic scaffolding. If TAs are to continue to have a pedagogical function in schools, more needs to be done than modifying TA-pupil interactions. Opportunities for quality talk with appropriately trained TAs who are prepared prior to lessons will support TAs in contributing to the development of independent learners (Radford, et al. 2014).

The Da Silva (2013) study indicated that there were positive results held by teachers towards the concept of inclusion, but views varied on how it could or should be applied. This is another study that indicates some confusion about what is specifically needed to support pupils with learning challenges in classrooms. This study further indicated that teacher dedication, collaboration with young people, and experimental learning and teaching supported pupils with SEN in mainstream classrooms. This paper also suggests that the common feature in schools where inclusive education was thriving was the effective use of support staff. Pedagogical challenge lies in giving the right support at the right moment for the child to develop (Da Silva, 2013).

This paper suggests that the problem with the effective use of support staff was not the methods used by the schools to help pupils. Rather, there needs to be more collaboration with pupils when creating interventions. I believe that as much as possible, interventions should be created with pupils rather than
for them. Having their input on positive and negative encounters of school, could contribute significantly to school policy and practice. This again supports the rationale for including pupils’ views into my research.

**Conclusion**

I am surprised that my literature search did not reveal any studies, which took and explicitly PCP viewpoint when exploring the day-to-day experiences and views of TAs. While studies mentioned that students were observed, I am not aware of any study that explored pupils’ views on their TA support. It would be useful for studies to seek to understand how TAs define and perceive their role amidst an educational sector that is constantly evolving. As my research is seeking to discover what the established pedagogical role is, and what the next steps are in making that role more effective, it is hoping to collaboratively develop clear objectives and roles, with TAs, teachers, pupils, and SENCOs.

Previously mentioned research papers in this literature review spoke about heuristic scaffolding (Radford et al. 2014). The view that the language TAs use to support learning is important when seeking to understand how they support the development of independent learners is one that I hope to further develop. Utilising principles of scaffolding and mediation could contribute to good teaching practices. Vygotsky’s social cultural theory emphasises the importance of adult-child interactions, in developing a child’s intellectual skills (Vygotsky, 1978). This paper seeks to add to the literature by using a social cultural theoretical view as a method of exploring TA and pupil interactions.

The methods in the literature previously discussed, support exploring the views and experiences of professionals; as a result, similar methods of data collection will be useful when seeking to contribute to the already existing literature. The observation schedule employed by this research focuses on the language TAs use in the classroom to guide pupils through a task. Further, the questions asked in the semi-structured interviews as well as the focus group, seek to discover the types of questions that TAs ask pupils to guide, develop, and challenge their thinking. Principles of meditational
teaching styles have influenced the framework for the classroom observations, and the focus group in this research, as it has been identified as the most important and distinguishing characteristic of teachers' behaviour (Tzuriel, Kaniel, & Kanner, 1999).


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*Educational Psychology in Practice: Theory, Research, and Practice in Educational Psychology.* 28 (2), 177-186.


