How do teaching assistants view their role in managing behaviour and cultivate their learning and understanding in relation to managing behaviour?

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Abstract

This paper will consider how teaching assistants' (TAs') roles are changing from the historical 'mum's army' (Bach Kessler & Heron, 2006) of paint-pot washers, as some considered it pre-national curriculum, to the developing conception of the TA as a 'paraprofessional'. Contemporary issues arising from the loosely defined current expectations of TAs' wider pedagogical role will also be discussed. Consideration will be given to how and why managing behaviour has become an expectation and a necessity for TAs in their current deployment in schools, and why learning about managing behaviour differs for TAs and teachers. Additionally, the paper will reflect on the specific challenges facing TAs in managing behaviour. How TAs learn from each other in communities of practice, as well as from teachers and senior leaders, will be explored. Furthermore, how behaviour policies and policy implementation generally can influence TAs' opportunities to promote their own learning will be reviewed.

Keywords

The term teaching assistant (TA) is used within this paper to define roles which include Higher Level TAs (HLTAs), classroom assistants and learning support assistants.

Background to the research

Prior to the landmark 'Deployment and Impact of Support Staff' (DISS) publication (Blatchford, Russell & Webster, 2012), which was the largest piece of research conducted into TAs worldwide, exploration of TAs had been relatively 'small scale', lacking in empirical research and mainly focused on 'describing at the classroom level' what TAs did (Cremin, Thomas & Vincett, 2003; Devecchi 2005). Research into TA's efficacy at improving educational standards and deployment have increased, particularly since the seminal DISS findings (HMI, 2002; DfES, 2003; Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown, & Martin, 2007; Alborz, Pearson, Farrell & Howes, 2009; Hammersley-Fletcher & Adnett 2009; Hammersley-Fletcher & Qualter 2009; Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown & Russell, 2011; Blatchford *et al*., 2012; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Graves, 2013; Russell, Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Webster 2014; Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, & Blatchford, 2015; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Sharples, Webster, & Blatchford, 2015; Blatchford, Russell & Webster, 2016). However, research undertaken on TAs, in the main, considered their influence on measurable attainment and has often failed to take into account other aspects of learning. Thirteen years ago Howes (2003) suggested that research had been focussed too narrowly, and had not considered the broader support for 'soft-skills' TAs offered, including their role in managing behaviour. This continues to be the case with calls for further research into this area (Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou, & Bassett, 2010; Sharples *et al*. 2015). Sharples *et al*. (2015) described

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research into TAs' impact on 'soft' non-academic development as 'thin', and suggested that evidence was rooted in 'impressionistic data' rather than empirical research. Others (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010; Graves, 2013) also highlighted the persistence of 'key deficiencies in this body of research'. Further research in this area is therefore both timely and pertinent as the effects of managing behaviour in schools for children, teachers and TAs cannot be underestimated (Lewis, 1999).

There is evidence from research which supports the view that managing behaviour is a key part of the TA role, but none looking at either how TAs perceive or fulfil this role. Research (Bowers 1997; Groom 2006; Webster *et al.*, 2011; Butt & Lowe 2011; Graves 2012; 2013) showed that TAs often fulfilled the role of teachers, and that their most frequently cited functions by children were that of help for the teacher, as well as their 'disciplinary function'. The DfES (2003) stated that TAs were expected to have 'advanced roles in relation to behaviour and guidance', and as part of the consultation on 'Developing the Role of Support Staff' (DfES, 2002) specific 'routes' for TAs were proposed. One of which was the 'behaviour and Guidance Route', where it was proposed TAs could become a 'behaviour and guidance manager', take on responsibility for the 'co-ordination and management of the behaviour team' or be a 'behaviour policy co-ordinator'. This clearly shows that TAs were explicitly expected to play a senior whole-school role in managing behaviour. TAs' responsibility for managing behaviour was also reiterated in more recent government documents (DfE, 2013; DfE, 2016) but with the additional caveat of 'unless the head teacher says otherwise' which appears to provide less, rather than more, clarity.

Context

A key issue in contextualising TAs' responsibility for managing behaviour is the lack of shared understanding of what constitutes their role, beyond the agreed 'multifaceted' nature of it (Moran & Abbott, 2002; Smith, Whitby & Sharp, 2004; Kerry 2005; Collins & Simco, 2006; Fraser & Meadows, 2008; Graves 2013). Tucker (2009) suggested TA roles were 'self-determined' with 'discernible tension' felt in discussions on future developments of TAs. Graves (2013) cautioned the role was defined only in the negative, that TAs 'are not teachers', which obscures 'what exactly the nascent role is'. Sharples *et al.* (2015) called for schools to 'rigorously define' the TA role, however others (Tucker, 2009; Hancock *et al.*, 2010; Graves 2013) supported Thomas' prior (1992) assertion that the cultural norms, particularly of primary schools, did not support 'clear role definition'. Blatchford *et al,* (2016) highlighted how 'quiet' and 'hands-off' government policy which directly affects TAs has been, actively transferring responsibility from Whitehall to schools, which compounds the problem.

Research (Thomas, 1992; Rose, 2000; Moran & Abbott, 2002; Mansaray, 2006; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Hancock, Hall, Cable, and Eyres, 2010; Butt & Lowe, 2011; Webster *et al.*, 2012) shows little uniform understanding of teacher: TA role boundaries. Collins and Simco (2006) found TAs were able to clearly demarcate their roles and responsibilities from those of the teacher, yet that neither children nor parents took account of these differences.Hancock *et al.* (2010) noted TAs 'boundary crossing' and found them 'moving in and out of their own and teachers' roles'. This is reflected in Mansaray's (2006) view that TAs' liminal role and boundary crossing between being 'teacher and not teacher' also 'implied an ambiguous relationship to authority and possibly discipline' that TAs were able to exert. He concluded that there is the possibility of the TA 'occupying the role of teacher' yet, 'they must be ready to vacate this role'. However, the parity perceived by some masked real differences between the roles, for example, in Rubie-Davies *et al's*. (2010) research on interactions. This found that whilst teachers set 'clear expectations' or used 'strong statements' to manage behaviour, TAs focused on 'requests for compliance' and 'weaker statements'. The interactions recorded (16 'lesson length' periods) were split into 'pedagogically appropriate' and 'pedagogically inappropriate' responses. Transcripts showed that teachers responded in 'pedagogically appropriate' ways sixty percent of the time, whilst the figure was only forty percent for TAs. This is particularly

pertinent when children, TAs and parents saw part of the TA role as being involved in behaviour management (Tucker, 2009; Butt & Lowe, 2011).

Research (HMI, 2002; Mansaray, 2006; Blatchford *et al.*, 2007; Armstrong, 2008; Whittaker & Kikabhai, 2008; Rubie-Davies *et al.* 2010) also showed differences in the relationships TAs formed with children. These were categorised as 'less formal and more intimate', where the TA could take on the role of a 'friendly adult' (HMI, 2002), which may in part explain some of the differences between teacher and TA interactions. This view was supported by Dunne, Goddard and Woolhouse (2008) who suggested that TAs had fundamentally nurturing roles, as opposed to pedagogical ones, which was seen as indicative of the 'mothering identity' 'intrinsic' to TAs (Kerry, 2005; Barkham, 2008; Mackenzie, 2011; Graves 2013). These 'soft skills' and the 'nurturing' roles, which often pertain to women and most pertinently to mothers, are recurring themes in the 'maternal discourse' of research (Blatchford *et al.*, 2004; Dunne *et al.*, 2008; Graves, 2013). Bland and Sleightholme's (2012) research illustrated this, with children noting not TAs' pedagogical contribution, but the fact that they were required to 'fetch coffee and biscuits for the teacher'. This 'softer' role has implications for managing behaviour - is it possible to be both a 'friend and mediator' and 'disciplinarian' (Blatchford *et al.*, 2007)?

Howes (2003) believed that schools were encouraged to adopt a 'management relationship' between teachers and TAs. He suggested there was a 'core-periphery model' in use within policy to describe teacher: TA relationship, where TAs were very much operating at the margins. This reflected Mansaray's (2006) belief that TAs were 'separate and peripheral'. Dunne *et al.*, (2008) viewed the teacher role as imbued with 'power and authority' and found that this led to their role inescapably becoming 'managerial and corporate' regardless of the efficacy of the model. Quicke (2003) questioned whether the relationship between teacher and TA was that of; 'manager and managed', 'tutor and trainee', 'expert and novice' or even 'master and servant'. The choice between fulfilling the 'novice' or 'servant' role that Quicke (2003) identified relied on the teacher's willingness to develop TAs' 'autonomy', through a process of 'inclusion' and 'empowerment'. Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter's (2009) later research came to similar conclusions and found how teachers 'choose to see themselves' dictated the relationships they formed with TAs. They found that teachers either viewed themselves as exclusively meeting pupils needs through 'controlling' aspects such as planning and delivery, compared to those who espoused an 'expanded view of professionalism'. They proposed that staff 'self-confidence' mediated how changes linked to the workload remodelling took place and that teachers' confidence needed 'supporting' when considering issues linked to 'professional identity' and 'status'. Findings from Webster *et al.* (2012) demonstrated that, given the 'opportunity to reflect', teachers could forge a 'meaningful understanding of the TA role', as well as how they influenced it, either positively or negatively. This was furthered by Cockroft and Atkinson's (2015) research which found 'supportive teachers contributed to how effective they [TAs] could be'. Even so, research (Thomas, 1992; Blatchford *et al.*, 2007; Anderson & Finney, 2008) showed that teachers were not trained to manage other adults and lacked the requisite skills, with three quarters of teachers in Blatchford *et al.*'s (2007) research receiving no training in working with TAs. Indeed, it was the 'managerial' aspect of the teacher: TA relationship which caused the greatest contention. Devecchi and Rouse (2010) asserted that the conceptualisation of TAs as 'apprentices' or even 'servants' was not in line with an espoused framework of 'democratic and participatory principles' and negated the participation and agency which research (Thomas, 1992; HMI, 2002; Tucker, 2009; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Devecchi *et al.*, 2011; Mackenzie, 2011; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Radford *et al.*, 2015) showed was the cornerstone of effective collaborative relationships.

Access to formal training may also influence TAs' ability to manage behaviour. Research (DfEE, 1997; O'Brien & Garner, 2002; Smith *et al.*, 2004; Groom & Rose, 2005; Gerschel, 2005; Ofsted, 2008; Tucker, 2009; Symes & Humphrey, 2011; Sharples *et al.*, 2015) showed a 'mismatch' between the

level of training TAs received and their increasingly demanding role. Without training Galton and MacBeath (2008) found TAs resorted to using 'common sense and family experience', with one respondent suggesting that she had 'drawn on her experience as a mum' to plug gaps in training. Cockroft and Atkinson (2015) also found that 'limited training led to inaccurate implementation', for example, of a whole-school behaviour policy. This is particularly apposite when behaviour management was an area TAs identified as one in which they required more training (Butt & Lowe, 2011; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). However, the type of training available causes additional difficulties. It was proposed (Edmond & Price, 2009; Graves, 2013) that HLTA standards based on competence indicators, as opposed to 'higher education', made the assumption that all necessary training could be gained 'on the job', conflicting with professional development in the wider 'children's workforce'. This dichotomy between 'occupational' and 'professional training', which as Ofsted (2008) noted varied considerably in effectiveness (with 'induction, training and appraisal' being 'unsatisfactory' in half of the schools they visited) has implications. This 'professionalisation' of the TA role highlighted, rather than ameliorated status differences between teachers and TAs which 'precludes inter-professional dialogue and joint decision making' (Edmond & Price, 2009), therefore actively constraining TAs in managing behaviour. Deployment can also impact on TAs' ability to implement a whole-school behaviour policy and manage behaviour, as it dictates which members of staff they work with, and are able to learn from. It was highlighted by Graves (2011), that despite being 'highly valued' by participants in her study, this method of informal learning lacked the acknowledgement necessary for 'professional conversations' and reflections with colleagues to take place. TAs instead described their observations, and therefore opportunities to learn from teachers as 'clandestine' and 'surreptitious'. This does not help TAs move from 'habitual' to 'informed' practice, (Graves, 2011) however, research (Hayes, Richardson, Hindle, & Grayson, 2011) on video coaching demonstrated that providing the opportunity to reflect made TAs more 'aware of their own responses' which supported the development of behaviour management skills.

Ofsted (2008) also found that schools had continued to recruited staff to ensure the requirements of the workload agreement were met, as opposed to with a carefully considered view of how TAs' evolving role could contribute to whole-school development. The absence of a clear, whole-school defined TA role continued to result in 'variation', 'inconsistent' deployment (Webster *et al.*, 2012) and the 'fragmentation' identified by HMI (2002) previously. These all stalled 'the close working partnership' between teachers and TAs which were envisaged (HMI, 2002). This pattern of deployment also runs contrary to Rose's (2000) earlier judgement that TAs' deployment with a single teacher could enhance 'effective collaborative procedures for classroom management', and Groom's (2006) findings that effective deployment depended on 'the quality of partnership formed with teachers'.

An additional aspect of TAs' ability to manage behaviour and implement whole-school behaviour policies is linked with social groupings within the school's culture. Datnow and Castellano (2000) stated that staff 'subcultures' were based on 'ideological similarities or common interests' which viewed policy differently. Coburn and Stein (2006) stated staff's 'professional communities were a crucial site for implementation' or not, and that these collaborative groups exerted a strong influence on the 'degree and manner of implementation' (Coburn & Stein, 2006). This is supported by other research (Smylie & Evans, 2006) which found that implementation was influenced by an individual's collaboration with others. Wenger (1999) suggested this affected not only actions, but also 'who we are and how we interpret what we do'. One facet of this social aspect of comprehension is the 'sociocultural learning theory', also known as the 'communities of practice perspective'. A 'community of practice' can be defined as groups with 'shared' and 'common practices' (Coburn & Stein, 2006). It is the 'ongoing negotiation of meaning' within these communities that influences the end product of a policy (Coburn & Stein, 2006). This interaction not only happens within communities of practice but also between them and it is possible for individuals

to belong to multiple, and at times competing communities of practice. This results in exposure to a range of viewpoints and norms and therefore a range of different perspectives and understandings of policy. Much research promoted consistency in policy application (Galvin & Costa, 1995; Visser, 2007; DfES, 2009; Taylor, 2011; DfE, 2013; DfE, 2014; Ofsted, 2014; DfE, 2016) as opposed to the inconsistency and idiosyncrasy which was found (McLaughlin, 1991b; Jennings, 1996; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Spillane, *et al.*, 2002 Coburn, 2005; Spillane, Reiser & Gomez, 2006; Maguire, Ball, & Braun, 2010).

It can be seen from the literature considered that there are myriad factors which influence how TAs are able to managing behaviour. These include the behaviour policy itself, issues related to policy implementation, the school's culture, relationships with other members of staff as well as TAs' own views and beliefs.

Methodology
The research took place in a larger than average primary school (NOR=478) with nineteen teachers (f=17, m=2) and sixteen TAs (f=16). TAs were deployed to work across classes and key stages daily, with the researcher working with seven different TAs each week. The research question arose from 'hands-on' experience in the school as a teacher. It appeared both anecdotally and from observations, that there were issues regarding how TAs were either enabled or constrained when managing behaviour. Research was undertaken from a qualitative paradigm which Braun and Clarke (2013) stated are built around the understanding that there is more than one version of knowledge, which is contextual and therefore varied. This view of knowledge as context based also fits with the constructionist epistemology chosen. However, a criticism of social constructionist research is the lack of objectivity, one which can be levelled at all research which does not follow positivistic and scientific formulations. It has been argued that bias is 'inevitable' and a more fruitful aim would be to make it 'visible' (Letherby 2003), Others (Blair, 1994; Griffiths, 1998; Carr, 2000; Lumsden, 2012; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; White, 2013) suggest that neutrality is a 'myth' (Finlay, 2002) with personal 'histories and memories' always used to filter all analysis and interpretation (Blair, 1994).

The research undertaken, in order to answer the question sits within different approaches, and takes 'casts' (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) or 'hues, tones, and textures' (Sandelowski, 2000) from a range of paradigms including ethnography, phenomenology and grounded theory but does not wholly fit within one. The research therefore, falls within pragmatic qualitative research, or what Johnson, Long and White (2008) described as 'British pluralism'. It has been suggested (Sandelowski, 2000; Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) that pragmatic research is now the most commonly used form of qualitative research in many fields, including education, with others (Johnson *et al.* 2008) suggesting the method is 'not only sensible, it is increasingly inevitable'. Janesick (1994) raised concerns about 'methodolatry'; a 'preoccupation with selecting and defending methods', however, within pragmatic research the necessity for 'slavish devotion' to a specific method is removed, freeing the researcher to choose methods and methodologies which best address the question. Taylor (2002) cited freedom from 'methodological identities' as a factor to improve educational research which his research showed were felt to 'stifle debate and critique'. This was echoed by others (Thomas & James, 2006) who championed the 'unconstrained' 'collection, use and analysis' of knowledge.

Research was conducted from a 'feminist standpoint' which Letherby (2003) defined as 'adopting a position which does not 'add' women in but begins from their perspective'. Within feminist research the 'messiness' (Letherby, 2003) of the process is acknowledged, which connects with the 'eclectic' pragmatic research paradigm which, as with feminist research, highlights the importance of 'naturalistic' investigation (Sandelowski, 2000). Nielsen (1990) defined feminist research as

'multimethodological', again linking to the pragmatic research approach. This was supported by Atkinson, Delamont and Hammersley (2003) who stated that 'British studies' have used a range of qualitative methods which 'draw their inspiration from feminism' as opposed to a specific 'discipline or method'.

Data were and will be collected from two purposively sampled discrete populations of TAs, one within the organisation researched (n=17) and one (yet to be undertaken) outside it (n=approx20). This second planned sample of TAs are undertaking Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and therefore represent a sample with both commonalities with and differences from the first sample (two of whom were engaged in ITT). Figure 1. illustrates the data collection process.
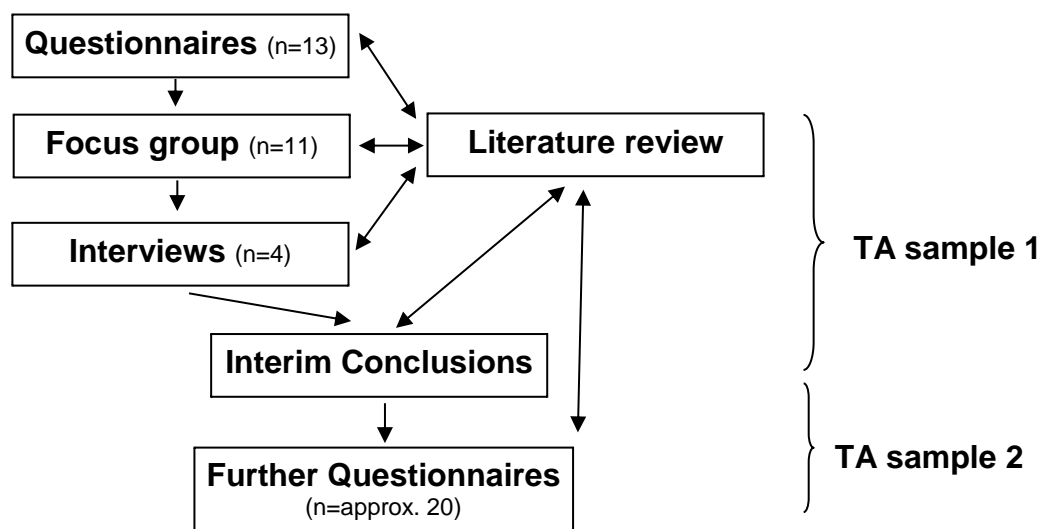
Figure 1. Overview of interlinked, iterative data collection.

Data collection will be dovetailed with questionnaires which contain a range of questions (n=22) including closed and open questions, as well as the opportunity for respondents to add notes. All TAs in the school were invited to complete an anonymous questionnaire, which Kitzinger (1995) suggested generates qualitative data elucidating 'how people hold certain opinions'. The questionnaires used generated small amounts of quantitative data, (i.e. age, years employed) but their main aim was to produce qualitative information. Individuals who chose to participate further were invited to attend a focus group discussion then semi-structured interviews. By using a questionnaire to begin collecting data a wide spread of general opinions was gained, which were then developed in a focus group, and refined further in individual semi-structured interviews. It is suggested (Kitzinger, 1995; Punch & Oancea, 2014) that focus groups are an important tool for investigating 'workplace cultures' and invaluable for 'exploring people's knowledge and understanding'. It has been stated (Wilkinson, 1998) that focus groups provide 'a valuable methodological tool' in feminist research methods due to their ability to explore issues which are relevant and pertinent to the 'person-in-context'. The eleven participants in the group aligned with Sim's (1998) ideal group size of between eight and twelve, but more than Morgan's (1997) maximum of 10, above which he suggests the group is 'difficult to control'. This element of 'control' was managed using nominal group techniques such as the focus on an individual task (Sink, 1983) to start, which helped all group members to contribute as they had generated ideas to discuss. A planned period of reflection followed the focus group before individual semi-structured interviews began. Oakley (1981) suggested that interviewing followed a 'masculine' approach and when used in feminist research is 'morally indefensible', however, a proposed strategy to circumvent this 'lack of fit' between 'theory and practice' was to ensure 'personal investment' in a 'non-hierarchical'

situation between interviewer and interviewee. This was partly achieved by friendly relationships between the researcher and participants, but 'hierarchical' issues may still have been present due to the nature of teacher and TA relationships. However, at the time of interviewing the researcher was employed elsewhere which may have begun to ameliorate some of these issues.

In order to comply with the ethics guidelines from the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2011) and the University where the research is taking place, it was necessary to gain informed consent from the head teacher to undertake the research within the organisation, and from individual participants. Care was taken to explain the purposes of the research, including who the final audience would be, and that TAs understood that they were able to withdraw at any time. Careful consideration was given to the amelioration of power issues which TAs may have perceived, this was partly addressed by a providing a full understanding of the purposes of the research and affording anonymity to all participants in the final document. The confidentiality of all data generated during the process was highlighted. In order to ensure that all TAs had a full understanding of the purposes of the research, a briefing meeting was arranged, where oral and written explanations were provided to how and why the research was being conducted.

Findings

At this point findings require further supporting data from the second sample of TAs. However, preliminary coding of the interviews, focus groups and analysis of questionnaires from the first sample of TAs shows key themes emerging which are allied to those discussed in the review of literature, including:

- Role definition;
- Support for the teacher
- Communication
- Policy implementation
- Deployment
- Relationships with children and teachers

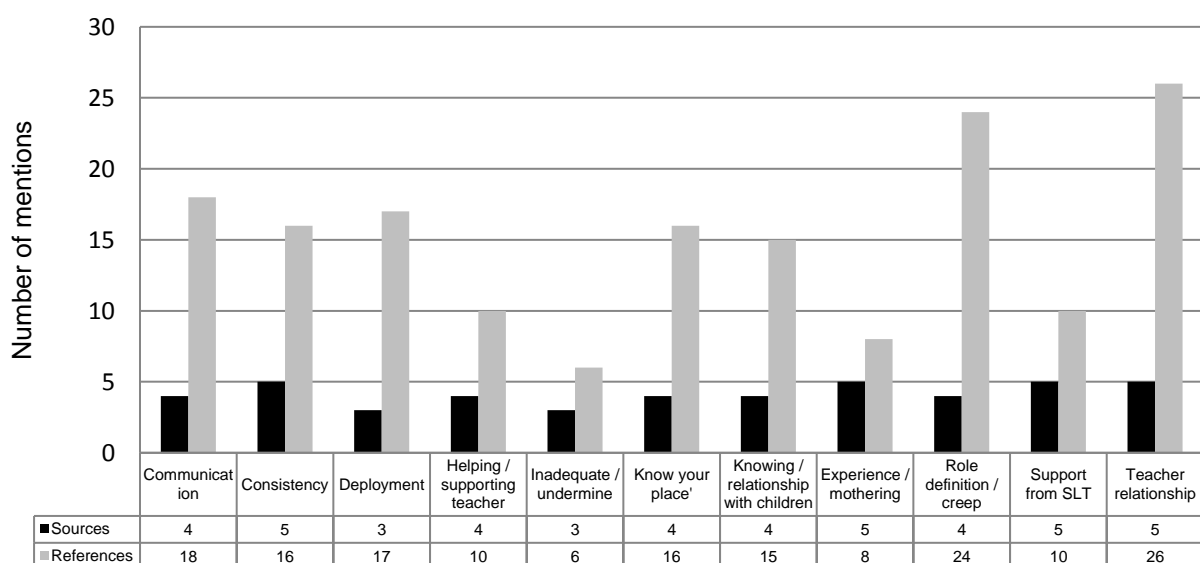|	Communication	Consistency	Deployment	Helping / supporting teacher	Inadequate / undermine	Know your place'	Knowing / relationship with children	Experience / mothering	Role definition / creep	Support from SLT	Teacher relationship
Sources	4	5	3	4	3	4	4	5	4	5	5
References	18	16	17	10	6	16	15	8	24	10	26

Figure 2 below shows references to themes and the number of sources in which they occur, represented graphically for clarity.

Figure 2. Initial themes emerging from focus group and interviews.
Data collection is not yet complete and there are several limitations to the findings of this study. For example, due to the small sample size the research will show the findings of specific TAs in a specific school at a specific time, and will not be generalisable to all schools. However, when considered in line with the literature explored, the findings may be used to support existing research or provide a starting point for further, more detailed research.

Discussion of findings
The initial findings show some tentative areas of tension. These appear to be conflicts between 'helping and supporting the teacher' which TAs stated, in both the focus group and individual interviews, was a key part of their job, and the necessity of knowing 'your place'. This dichotomy was commonly cited and was mentioned by all of the TAs interviewed (16 references in total). 'Joy' stated:

> If I see children that aren't listening or are being silly, I would intervene with that, but I would never undermine the teacher.

'Penny' exemplified the issue:

> I feel that with some teachers need you to remember who you are and know your place, if you see something and tackle it teachers are sort of thankful because they rely on you to get on with what you're doing, but some don't like that. I think you've got to be very careful not crossing a line and make sure you respect them.

This can be seen to be allied to a lack of clear definition of the TA role (24 references) inconsistency (16 references) and uncertain relationships with teachers (26 references). In an interview 'Sue' suggested:

> …it is the relationship you have with somebody, I do you think it varies because what people expect is very different.

Whilst 'Sally' stated:

> Working in different classrooms with very different set ups has opened my eyes a little bit. In one classroom I would be happy, and I know the teacher would be happy, for to me to say 'be quiet', but in the other classroom the teacher would take that as me sticking my nose in, so it very much comes down to personality.

One of the main findings at this stage, associated with literature, appears to be the myriad of conflicts which exist for TAs when managing behaviour. It can be seen that many of the issues raised by research participants are interlinked. Figure 3 below aims to illustrate the links between some of the emerging themes.
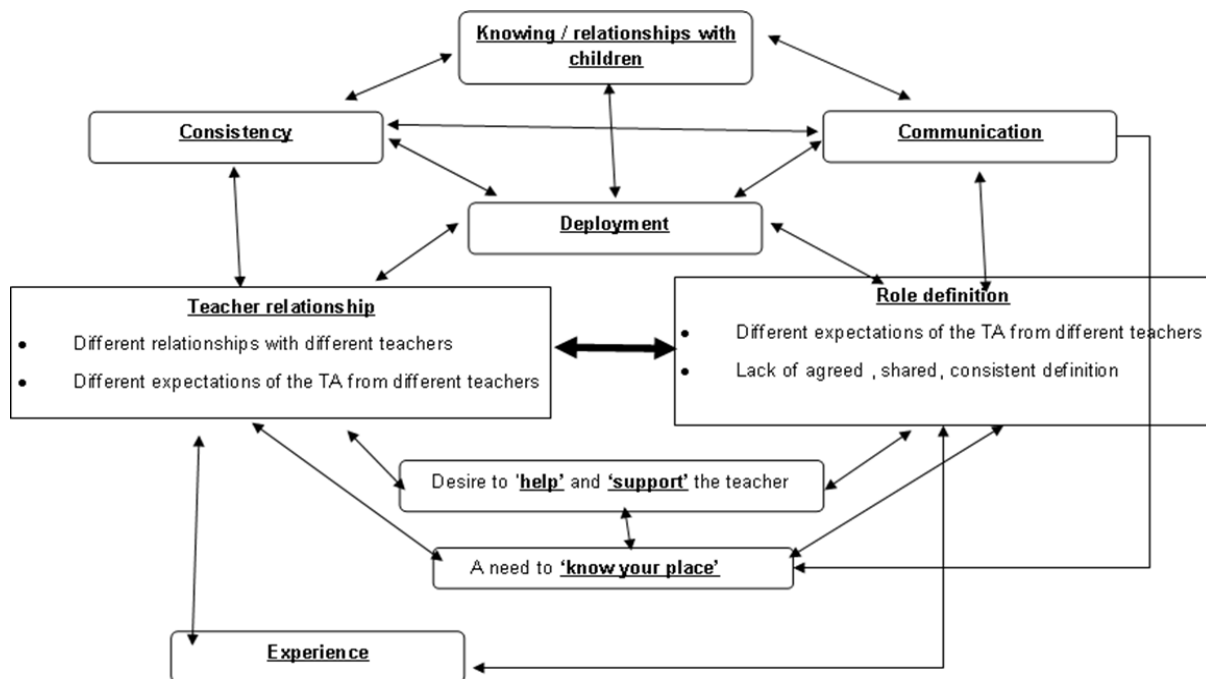
Figure 3. Linkages between commonly cited themes.

Conclusions

Data collection and analysis is not yet completed however, emerging themes echo those in literature suggesting this is a complex and little understood area. Themes from the data analysed appear to coalesce into two overarching and interlinked issues; inconsistent relationships with teachers and lack of clear job boundaries. The lack of clarity and consistency in these key areas appears to be compounded by additional factors, for example variability in deployment. Inconsistent working patterns negatively influence communication, and highlight the need for clear job boundaries and consistent expectations from teachers. TAs commented in interviews and in the focus group how important it was to know children to effectively manage their behaviour however, lack of consistency in teacher's expectations and TA deployment made this challenging, and therefore managing behaviour harder.

The lack of clarity over teacher expectations and TA role definition placed further tension on TAs' desire to 'help and support' teachers without 'undermining' them. Not knowing what 'their place' is, and what is expected of them, both by the school and individual teachers makes this fine line very difficult to tread. It would appear that whole-school discussion is required to agree a workable context-specific definition of the TA role which is detailed enough to ensure all members of staff understand what could be involved. Groom and Rose (2005) suggested that the greater the uncertainty about the role, the less effective the TA was, highlighting the need for agreement in roles, as role clarity is viewed as an essential ingredient in the success of the teacher: TA team (Rose, 2000; Gerschel, 2005; Devecchi *et al.*, 2011; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Radford *et al.*, 2015; Sharples *et al.*, 2015; Blatchford *et al.*, 2016). However, the school definition would need to be one which was flexible enough to work in busy and at times unpredictable classrooms since, as Devecchi *et al.* (2011) noted 'fluidity' in the definition of the TA role was both a blessing and a curse, being simultaneously necessary and disadvantageous. Hammersley-Fletcher and Qualter (2009) also found that teacher's self-confidence mediated their 'reconsideration of approaches to teaching and learning', and therefore may need addressing in order to promote greater consistency both in

relationships with, and expectations of TAs they work with. This coupled with more stable and less 'fragmented' deployment may start a virtuous cycle where increased consistency led to improved relationships, expectations and communication between teachers and TAs. This in turn could enable TAs to better know the children they work with, and understand more fully how to support the teacher they are deployed with.

These tentative conclusions are based on incomplete data collection, but do reflect the prevailing views and outcomes of other research. However, further large-scale study would be beneficial in order to understand exactly how TAs view their role in managing behaviour and how the points of tension that exist can either be ameliorated or overcome.

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