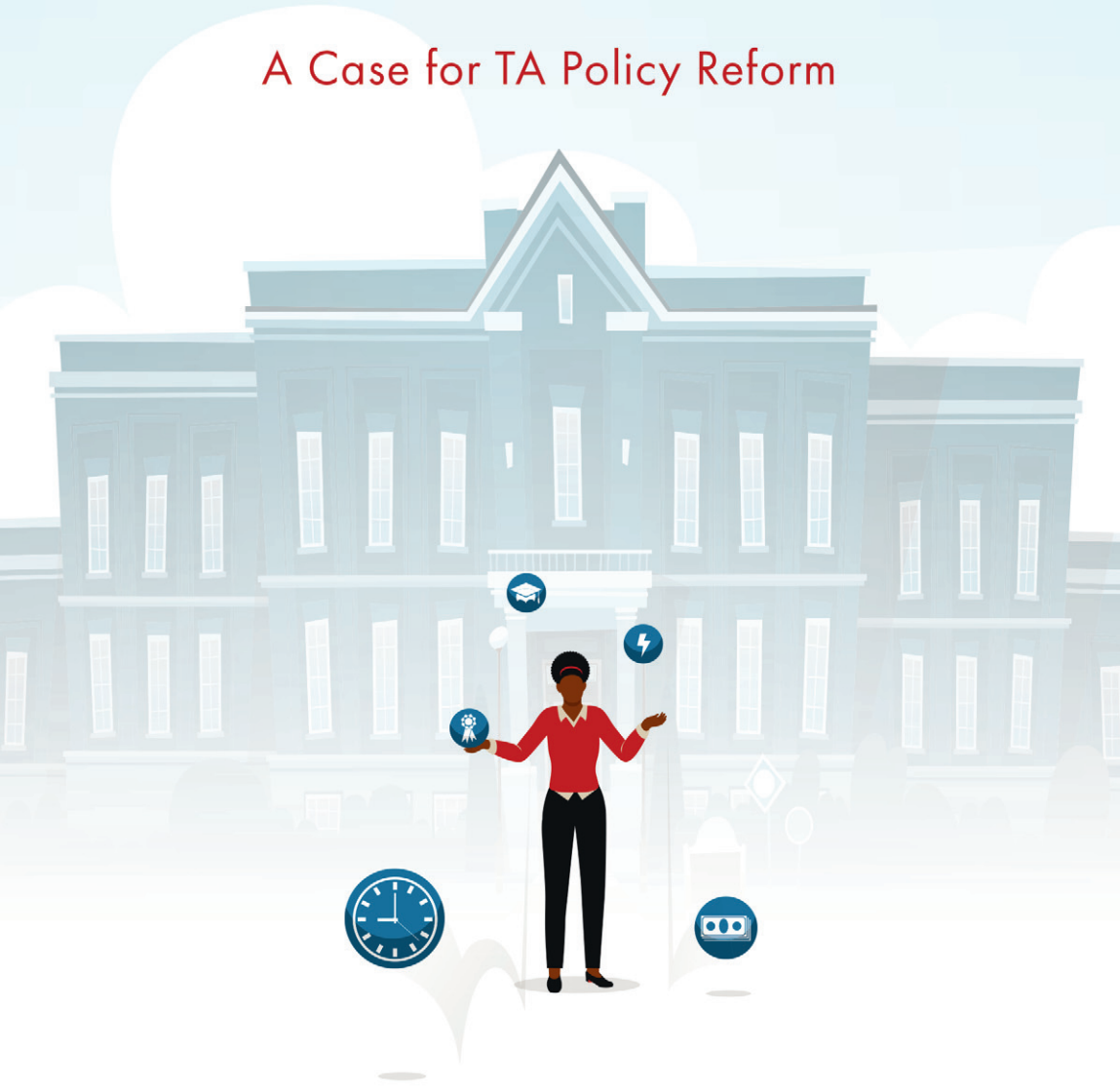


# **GIVING VOICE TO** THE TEACHING ASSISTANT DILEMMA

A Case for TA Policy Reform



**STEPHEN WILLOUGHBY**  
**PAMELA DUNKLEY**

# **Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma**

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# **Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma: A Case for TA Policy Reform**

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# Contents

List of Figures and Tables	vii
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms	ix
About the Authors	xi
Preface to <i>Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma</i> Professor Chris Brown	xiii
Preface to <i>Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma</i> Charlie Owen	xv
Acknowledgements	xvii
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1 The State of Play for School Teaching Assistants</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 2 TA Voice Within Hybrid Distributed Leadership</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Chapter 3 School Improvement Planning, Strategies and Tactics</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Chapter 4 TA Professional Development</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Chapter 5 Conditions of TA Bounded Empowerment</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Chapter 6 TA Employment Conditions Within Schools</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Conclusions and Solutions</b>	<b>145</b>

*vi Contents*

Appendix	149
References	151
Index	157

# List of Figures and Tables

## **Chapter 1**

Fig. 1.	TA and Teacher Development Cycle.	21
---------	-----------------------------------	----

## **Chapter 2**

Fig. 2.	Distributed Leadership Aspects.	24
Fig. 3.	Leadership and Management Continuum.	25

## **Chapter 5**

Fig. 4.	The Balance of Boundary and Empowerment – The Balance May Change Over Time.	99
---------	--	----

## **Chapter 8**

Fig. 5.	Joint Teacher/TA Planning, Delivery and Review.	146
Fig. 6.	TA CPD National Programme.	147

## **Introduction**

Table 1.	Teaching Assistant Interview Questions.	4
----------	---	---

## **Chapter 2**

Table 2.	Models of Distributed Leadership.	35
----------	-----------------------------------	----

## **Chapter 3**

Table 3.	Audit Format.	58
----------	---------------	----

## **Appendix**

	TA Interviewee Within Case Study Schools.	149
--	---	-----

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## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
COVID	SARS-CoV2 virus – Viral disease
CPD	Continual Professional Development
DdE	Educational Doctorate
DfE	Department of Education
DL	Distributed Leadership
EAL	English as an Additional Language
(EHC) plan	Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching Assistant
HT	Head Teacher
IFS	Institute of Fiscal Studies
INSET	Inservice Training
IT	Information Technology
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked After Children
LEA	Local Education Authority
LGC	Local Government Chronicle
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
MP	Member of Parliament
NATH	National Association of Head Teachers
NET	National Education Trust
NEU	National Education Union
NUT	National Union of Teachers
Ofsted	The Office for Standard in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate of Education
PHSE	Personal, Social, Health Education

*x List of Abbreviations and Acronyms*

PPA	Planning Preparation and Assessment
QCA	Qualifications, Curriculum Authority
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
SATs	Standard Assessment Tests
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SIP	School Improvement Planning
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
STRB	Schools Teachers Review Body
TA	Teaching Assistant
TEAMS	Microsoft TEAMS: Online Meeting Platform
TES	Times Educational Supplement
UNISON	British Trade Union
Zoom	Zoom: Online Meeting Platform

## About the Authors

**Stephen J. Willoughby** has been a teacher since 1981 and has wide experience of working in FE, mainstream and special schools. More recently, he worked for an inner-city LEA as an equalities consultant, advising on policy including EAL with a special focus on special educational needs and then as a private Consultant for schools. His main research areas are school equalities policy, governance/governing approaches to Teaching Assistant professional development and the development of research learning networks. He completed an initial degree on Policy in 1980: an MA (1996) and a doctoral thesis on *School Leadership Within the Context of School Equality Policy* (2017). He regularly reviewed and reported to specific schools from 2010 to 2020. During 2021/2023, he worked with Durham University and two other researchers on the voice, conditions and remuneration of the TA. Dr. Willoughby has been a member of BELMAS since 2016 and is an Education Governor of a Specialist College.

**Pamela Dunkley** worked in mainstream and special schools in London, Surrey and the West Country. Her teaching career began in 1960 working as an Art Specialist and Form Teacher at a co-educational boarding school run on the lines of A.S. Neal's Summerhill. From 1965, with ILEA teaching Art and English. Following re-training for the primary sector, she became a classroom teacher in Hackney. In 1971, she moved to the West Country to work in specialist co-ed boarding provision for students with specific learning needs and dyslexia. She co-wrote a phonics programme and returned to London in 1983 to take up a position in an all-age special school. Her senior management roles included Head of Primary and outreach to Queen Elizabeth Hospital School. She developed and lead whole-school staff in-house CPD, specifically Language and Literacy; Phonics; English as a second language; Equality policy; SEN advice and support for three Local Authority primary schools. Later as Senior Lead Teacher in Secondary School, was instrumental, along with the School Principal in introducing GCSE examinations in a Hackney Special School.

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# **Preface to *Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma***

*Professor Chris Brown*

Southampton Education School, University of Southampton

The role of teaching assistants (TAs) has undergone a significant evolution in schools, yet their voices remain under-represented in both academic literature and educational policy discussions. In response, this book – *Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma: A Case for TA Policy Reform* – provides an important and original contribution to the field: addressing a critical gap in understanding the experiences, challenges and contributions of TAs within schools, while offering a road map for much-needed reform in the areas of policy, training and remuneration.

In today's educational landscape, TAs are indispensable, playing crucial roles in supporting teachers, managing diverse classrooms and addressing the needs of students, particularly those with special educational needs (SEN) and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, despite their essential presence, TAs often encounter significant obstacles – low pay, unclear job descriptions, insufficient training and limited career development pathways. Their professional lives are characterised by 'bounded empowerment': they are empowered to take on crucial responsibilities but are often restricted by systemic limitations in time, resources and recognition. Tackling this head on, this book doesn't just merely represent a critique of the status quo; it is a call to action. The importance of *Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma* lies in its focus on TA perspectives. By amplifying the voices of those who have long been at the periphery of education reform discussions, it correspondingly hopes to shift the conversation towards actionable policy change: doing so in a number of ways. Important foci thus include highlighting the complexity of TA roles, which go beyond classroom assistance to include behaviour management, individualised student support and administrative duties. Likewise – despite their significant contributions – the book showcases the challenges faced by TAs: such as low pay, insufficient professional development and limited career advancement. The book also advocates for urgent policy reforms, including a national pay structure for TAs and their inclusion in school improvement planning and professional development. It furthermore explores the concept of distributed leadership, arguing that leadership in schools should involve all members, including TAs, whose insights are crucial for effective school leadership. Vitaly, the authors propose practical steps for fostering a more collaborative and inclusive school culture so as to truly value TA contributions.

I hope readers of this book will leave with a deeper appreciation for the complex and multifaceted roles that TAs play in schools. The book highlights the

dedication and professionalism of TAs while also shedding light on the systemic issues that hinder their ability to fully contribute to educational outcomes. Policymakers, educational leaders and researchers will find this work valuable as it challenges current assumptions about TAs and calls for a re-evaluation of their roles within the educational hierarchy.

Above all, however, *Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma* seeks to inspire change. It offers a detailed analysis of the problems facing TAs today, but it also provides a vision for a future where TAs are fully integrated into the educational framework. This future is one where TAs are properly compensated, professionally developed and respected for the vital contributions they make to schools.

I also hope – as do Steve and Pam, that this work serves as a catalyst for policy reform and as a resource for those who are committed to creating more equitable and effective schools. Through the voices of TAs, we can reimagine a more inclusive and supportive educational system – one that values the contributions of all its members.

# **Preface to *Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma***

*Charlie Owen*

IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society

According to the School Workforce Census (SWC) (Department for Education, 2024), there were 282,900 full-time equivalent (FTE) teaching assistants (TAs) in publicly funded schools in England in 2023. That compares to 468,700 FTE teachers, so a ratio of about 1.7 teachers to TAs. This high ratio would be a surprise to most people, as we hear a lot about teachers but very little about TAs. The FTE of teachers in 2011 was 438,000 and TAs 219,800, a ratio of 2.0. (2011 was the second SWC but the first time with reliable data for TAs.) This indicates that the number of TAs has been growing faster than the number of teachers. So, again, it is surprising that we hear so little about them.

There has, though, been quite a lot of research on TAs, though nowhere near as much as on teachers. Evidence-based guidance on the use of TAs has been produced by the Education Endowment Foundation (2021): 'This guidance is aimed primarily at headteachers and other members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) . . . Class teachers should also find this guidance useful' (p. 4). It then adds, 'although this guidance is not specifically intended for TAs it is hoped they will also find it of relevance and interest, given they are often directly involved in the change process' (p. 4).

This shows the typical pattern, that research is done about TAs, not with them. A welcome recent addition to the research is a report of research commissioned by the DfE (CFE Research, 2024), which included a survey of a nationally representative sample of 2,715 TAs in England.

This book, *Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma*, is different to most of the research in that gives a voice to TAs. The book summarises the body of TA research but also draws on original research. You will see from the acknowledgements that I was involved in that research. So I am hardly a neutral commentator. However, I am honoured to be associated with the research and with this book. It has been put together with meticulous care and a respect for TAs, not just those who took part in the research, but TAs in general.

The book starts by acknowledging the important role that TAs play in education but draws attention to the low pay of this group. The Office for National Statistics Annual Survey of Hours and Earning for 2023 reports median gross earnings for primary teachers as £37,523 and secondary teachers as £40,625, but for TAs it was £15,476 (Office for National Statistics, 2023). The book suggests that this low pay is at a crisis point for the profession: the work, while intrinsically rewarding, is very demanding: there is always the temptation to switch to a less

demanding but better paid job. However, it is not just the pay that emphasises their low status: as the book shows, TAs report that their contributions are rarely sought or welcomed. As the Education Endowment Foundation guidance notes, ‘Communication between teachers and TAs is largely ad hoc, taking place during lesson changeovers and before and after school. As such, conversations rely on the goodwill of TAs’ (p. 9). This pattern of behaviour is constantly noted throughout this book. TAs are committed to their role, but their goodwill is exploited, while they are not given time or opportunity to express their views. The book argues that TAs are part of a teaching team, although they tend to be left out of discussions on teaching.

One of its conclusions is that the TA voice needs to be heard more widely. That is particularly true in schools, but also in the wider context of education, including the DfE when policy is being made on schools in general and TAs in particular.

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## Acknowledgements

From our decision to produce this book on *Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma: A Case for TA Policy Reform*; to the journey and conclusions, we would like to give thanks and strong acknowledgement to all the school and TA participants who took part in our research, particularly in taking part in one-to-one semi-structured interviews post COVID lockdown. We also give belated thanks for TAs who agreed interviews during EdD process up to 2017. Without their frank, positive and open voice, we would not have been able to complete this book. Other people who have supported our work include Professor Chris Brown, who has given long-term support during the research period. He has been a support during drafting and ongoing critical friend. Dr. Steve Hannon has also given early and ongoing support and encouragement. He particularly reviewed our early papers including our interview questions and also reviewed our publisher proposal. Similarly, Charlie Owen (UCL and EdD tutor) has supported the TA research and the outcomes of the book from its conception to completion. Our friend Andy Parkes has taken time to meticulously review all the chapters of the book from an outsider view, particularly around clarity and objectivity. This is a detailed and long-term task, and we thank him deeply for this. We would also like to thank the team at Emerald Publishers who have given us ongoing support and helpful suggestions during the development to publication of our manuscript. Special thanks to the positive and patient input by Kirsty Woods, our editor. Finally, we thank our friends and family who have put up with us going on and on about it over the last couple of years.

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# Introduction

The genesis of this book was that of *Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma: A Case for TA Policy Reform*. The book aims to highlight the problems of unclear conditions and poor pay at national and local levels and suggest some positive ways forward. It is intentional that TA voice is prominent throughout the book, and we strongly state that all chapters will provide data direct from TAs garnered from recent research and direct data from the thesis data by Willoughby (2017).

In this book we consider ‘The teaching assistant dilemma’ from the TA viewpoint. Indeed, we suggest that the present difficult funding puts the question do they stay, or do they go? Our combined teaching histories of over 80 years suggest that teaching assistants (TAs) are an absolute school necessity in the present educational age. Primary schools tend to have over 30 students in a class. Most schools have numbers of disadvantaged students on their roles and many need specialist TA support. Essentially TA history shows the need to directly support teachers and students. However, there are major problems of limited training, empowerment, time and pay. The evidence is that TA training is mixed at best and doesn’t lead to a clear career development pathway. TA professional empowerment both within and outside the classroom is also problematic within the current time and cash strapped climate in schools. For instance, we found that many TA participants noted pressures of time as a central problem including time to meet with other staff to plan, review and assess students. Finally, there are major concerns around TA pay and conditions. A House of Commons Petitions Committee debate (July 2023) notes that pay for a full-time TA can be below £13,000 a year and that only 1% rose above £26,000. Indeed, as we write, most schools have both qualified teaching and TA vacancies that they cannot fill. We argue that this is a travesty that needs urgent attention if schools are to retain and attract new TAs into the workforce.

To begin with, TAs are defined as those working in schools supporting teachers and students during lessons and breaktimes. Many also have other duties such as support after school, or lunchtime supervision. A useful definition is that TAs are a support but are not fully qualified teachers (Blatchford et al., 2012). Professional TA practice within most schools is managed and reviewed exclusively by senior leadership; whereas here it is argued that good quality support for students

## 2 *Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma*

requires both TA and leader voice input. Why? Because TAs are currently an undervalued and valuable human resource; they hold a wealth of knowledge and understanding of the students that they serve and can bring useful additional perspectives to school improvement planning. It is further argued a top-down view that does not ask for or consider the voice of TAs is exclusive and consequently reduces the depth and quality of distributed leadership within schools. Most importantly, from the TA position, determination of their training needs and future career prospects lack their voice and is detrimental to TA morale.

It is noted that there is some effective research on school TAs' impact and policy from the position of senior leadership; examples include research by Skipp and Hopwood (2019) and Webster et al. (2016, 2021). Skipp and Hopwood examined 'The deployment of teaching assistants in schools'. It used a sample of 60 schools and the views of senior staff such as SENCOs through semi-structured phone call interviews. Whereas Webster begins with School Vision and audit but again this is viewed from the position of senior leadership policy for TAs. They suggest that good policy begins with an effective audit of TA work within the school prior to TA deployment, preparedness and practice. Here, we consider Webster's model within schools, from the position of TA voice rather than simply that of senior leadership. There are some examples of research around TA voice. Noble, for instance, considers TAs' views on their preparedness for teaching, following implementation of 'evidence-based' changes to their role in school. This area is based on work in a particular school and gives a high degree of depth; whilst Holt and Birchall (2022) examine 'Violence towards teaching/classroom assistants in mainstream UK schools Research findings and recommendations'.

As said above, there is some research and modelling for SLTs to use when developing TA policy and practice including recruitment, deployment and practice. Webster (2024) include TA views in a recent survey on SEN support. There is recent guidance for primary classroom teachers by Alston (2023) particularly around joint teacher TA communications, planning, delivery and review, but again this is from the qualified teacher point of view. However, here we focus on TA views and understanding of working conditions in schools.

We suggest that there is now a crisis within TA practice which requires further consideration from the TA voice perspective, particularly the present state of play, clear identification of the positives, and problems specifically around pay and conditions, induction and CPD now and in the future. In the following chapters, we focus on their voice and hear of their past, and present practice particularly around planning, delivery and review of pedagogic support for teachers and students as well as their contribution to the wider school community.

### **Resource Gathering and Linked Methodology**

This research focussed on TA voice. Our sources include secondary but important specialist documentary materials such as recent guidance to TAs 'at every level', and qualified teachers on effective TA practice, Bentham et al. (2019); or Blatchford et al. (2012) research around maximising TA practice within schools.

These types of resource are very important; having said this, our primary data are from two separate pieces of research: a resent focus on the TA dilemma and earlier EdD thesis data by Willoughby (2017). Both pieces of research were based on a mixed method approach where they use quantitative descriptive tables; but the main focus was on qualitative semi-structured interviews. In the two instances, the data were collected from three primary schools, the resent data were taken from an inner city, urban and a country school, whereas the earlier data were assessed from three inner city primary schools.

The schools agreed the interviews and data were gathered from seven TA interviews in School A: five in School B and nine in School C. There were 13 interview questions which are set out below to cover particular areas of the TA dilemma. These included TA duties, training and CPD. Supplementary data were gathered from Willoughby 2017 thesis including 10 further TA interviews from Schools D, E and F. The responses from TA interviewee samples were coded, themed and analysed around the central TA dilemma. The outcomes and selection of TA statements are placed within this book at pertinent places.

*Consent, anonymity and range audience:* in both primary research sources, consent was directly asked from the Head teacher and then individual interviewees prior to the interview proper. The recruited case study schools were given a summary of the research, the questions and a copy of the consent 'research agreement letter', sent prior to the visit. The letter was signed by the interviewee and the interviewer with copies to each.

Initially anonymity of both research studies began with single letters for the particular sample schools followed with a specific number for each participant. Before completion of the manuscript, we chose to identify each school by letters, (A–F). Random first names were selected for all interviewees taken from a wide cultural list. These are the names used in this book.

We wrote this book to give voice to TAs with the intention of highlighting the dedication and care that TAs provide in schools across this country. This is essentially their book.

The intended audience of the book is educational policymakers, specialist academics and teaching professionals within schools including the TAs.

In response to the questions in [Table 1](#) above, certain TA statements highlighted, and gave linked examples including detailed views on re-structuring, staff shortages, lack of time for TA/Teacher Planning and Review, TA training and pay. Though main outcomes bring us back to the central TA dilemma about school provision of support for the students and teachers.

Willoughby (2017) focussed on 'Leadership within the Context of School Equality Policy', and particularly included the views of specific TAs. This EdD research study involved a mixed method approach, quantitative numeric descriptions of school characteristics and the qualitative examination of documentary evidence and detailed one-to-one interviews with teaching staff within the schools. In addition, we use excerpts from detailed responses of 10 TAs on school leadership which was useful particularly around their perspectives on the degree of leadership that they were allowed in the exercise of their school duties.

Table 1. Teaching Assistant Interview Questions.

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**Teaching Assistant (TA) Views on Professional Needs**

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- (1) Does your school need TAs? Why? Give an example?
  - (2) What are the typical duties/roles of a TA in this school?
    - What needs do they address?
    - Are there particular pressures within teaching that they alleviate?
    - Can you give examples?
  - (3) What is your specific role in the school, can you give examples of what you specifically do?
  - (4) What types of students do you support? For example, do they have special educational needs, English as an additional language and/or of higher ability students?
  - (5) What are students you support, an individual, group or whole class? Can you give a short description of the students you support?
  - (6) What subjects do you support students in the core subject? How and why? Can you give examples?
  - (7) Do you feel that the support is effective? Why, giving possible examples?
  - (8) What are material resources you use with the students you support? Can you give examples?
  - (9) Is there TA training/continued professional development (CPD) at the school? What types and how often?
  - (10) What future CPD might be helpful?
  - (11) Do specific learner groups and/or teaching staff benefit from TAs? If so, who are these groups and in what ways do they benefit from TAs?
  - (12) What are the decisions making processes for deploying TAs at the school?
  - (13) How many TAs are currently deployed in the school?
- 

*Source:* Stephen J. Willoughby and Pamela Dunkley (2024).

## **Chapter Summaries**

*Chapter 1 - The State of Play for School Teaching Assistants:* discusses the present state of play for TAs in schools. We begin with a short commentary on the local history of TA development from the ‘cleaning of paint pots’ to the present deployment of specialist teaching assistants. Our summary of the present situation includes a discussion about limited initial and on-going continued professional development (CPD) for TAs; little time for planning and review of students with teachers; effective empowerment within the classroom and concerns around remuneration.

*Chapter 2 - TA Voice Within Hybrid Distributed Leadership:* We use the conceptual model of hybrid distributed leadership in schools (Gronn, 2009a, b) which can move from single leader to team depending on the particular situation where the three elements of leaders, followers and situation interact over a clear period of time. Our main focus is the use of hybrid distributed leadership in relation to the TA followers. What is their position and how might it be improved?

*Chapter 3 - School Improvement Planning, Strategies and Tactics:* The description and discussion of the SIP is broken down into sections around definition, school evaluation, TA audit and external Ofsted. Of course, it is important to consider the background of a SIP, but the main point is that there is limited input from TA voice. We also consider the main pedagogic TA strategies and tactics developed for SIP targets.

*Chapter 4 - TA Professional Development:* Here we consider TA training induction, INSET, CPD and career pathways. Our literature review and research analysis suggest that TA training is mixed at best. Early on, there had been examples of TAs attending external CPD to become HLTAs where the courses are paid by the LEA or School. More recently TAs are left to pay for TA qualifications. Moreover, there is little career development beyond Level Three – why is this?

*Chapter 5 - Conditions of TA Bounded Empowerment:* It can be argued that TAs have a degree of empowerment within lessons particularly when they cover whole classes or lead an intervention. However, we particularly suggest that negative boundaries ensue due to lack of provision of time for planning themselves or to jointly participate in the process of effective lesson review. We also suggest that there are wider school environmental issues such as TA voice in relation to their deployment, review or agreed monitoring of professional tasks beyond the classroom.

*Chapter 6 - TA Employment Conditions within Schools:* It is important to consider TA remuneration against their professional responsibilities; therefore, this chapter contains a discussion about pay including the lack of a national formula and structure set by the government similar to that of qualified teachers. In fact, we consider pay and conditions both at the national and local level hence we try to consider local TA views on pay and conditions although this was not a central tenant of our own earlier research.

*Conclusions and Solutions:* In this final section, we put forward our own suggestions for reversing the problematic position of TA's. The possible ways forward would include a national pay formula reviewed similarly to that of qualified teachers; agreed national and local time for TAs to meet with teachers around the lessons they are involved with; and finally, they have a clear career path where CPD is paid partly by the employer.

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## Chapter 1

# The State of Play for School Teaching Assistants

### Introduction

This chapter considers the present professional state of play for Teaching Assistants (TAs) as part of the wider picture of Giving Voice to the Teaching Assistant Dilemma: A Case for TA Policy Reform. First, we outline the development of the role of the TA taking us from the early days of the Teacher's classroom helper for a few hours a week to the diverse role's TAs undertake within professional teams of the present time. We then consider the problems voiced by TAs, and within schools. This will begin to outline the dilemmas that schools and TAs have to contend with.

It is important to define our concept of the TA. Specialists like Noble (2020) and Skipp and Hopwood (2019) note that there are a wide range of terms or titles; Noble noted 46. Both of these writers consider the general term 'TA' as describing a person whose principal duty is to focus on teacher/student support during lessons and breaktimes; although Webster, 2016, p. 34 notes some may undertake administrative and school environment roles. On the face of it, there are many similarities between the teachers' and TAs' position; particularly in the work within a lesson; however, the main difference is that a TA does NOT have an Education Degree, or Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE). Hence, they do not have a DfE teacher number and therefore, cannot obtain a qualified teacher status (QTS). Thus, in theory, we might say the QTS is the main difference between a teacher and TA. There are currently three main categories or array of titles, in most schools; Higher-Level TA (HLTA), Classroom TA and Learning Support Assistant (LSA) who normally supports a particular student. The HLTA would have completed national TA certified courses and have experience working in schools with a range of teachers and students, whereas the classroom TA may have a degree of experience with teachers and students but no further teaching qualifications. The LSA usually works with individual students. We also note that there are many TAs working in schools across the country who hold high level qualifications in other arenas.

*TA Characteristics:* Specialist authors like Smith et al. (2004, p. 6) suggest the following national background characteristics of ‘title, age, gender, language. They found that the main terms from the data were TA, age 41–50, female, English and have caring responsibilities outside school e.g., care of an elderly parent or relative’. Whereas Blatchford (2012) set out age, gender, ethnicity, qualifications and experience (reproduced by Webster et al., 2016, p. 19). More recently Noble (2020) included the background characteristics of gender and class as well as other factors such as living near the school or external care responsibilities. We further note that, Smith et al. (2004) and Noble (2020) include TA voice. It can be argued that Smith’s research took a more comprehensive approach where Headteachers, teachers and TAs are all part of the sample, whereas Skipp and Hopwood (2019) on the ‘Deployment of TAs in schools’ samples Senior leadership. Willoughby (2017) ‘Leadership within the context of school equality policy’ includes TA voice, and like the present research the samples tend towards a qualitative model considering depth rather than width. A further point to make is that researchers have similar characteristics such as age and gender. For instance, Smith’s findings suggest that the majority of the TA sample tended to be ‘female, with nearly half between 41 to 50, a minority had a second language; and there was a range of external responsibilities outside the job such as childcare or support for a relative’. Similarly Noble examined gender and external responsibilities; however, they also consider ‘class’ as a characteristic or identity. Interestingly, in Willoughby (2017), there was only one male TA interviewed whereas the present tranche had no male participant. Finally, Blatchford et al. (2012) add length of experience in the field and qualifications as TA characteristics. Now these are very useful because some TAs may have qualifications within the field such as TA certificates or a degree; or in a different field of work such as qualifications as a healthcare assistant or driving instructor. Certainly, Willoughby and recent work shows that experience is an important characteristic, for instance, our recent research suggests that particular participants had been at their school for 30 years; understood the situation of the school well and were able to help both within the classroom and beyond, supporting students on school trips or driving the school coach.

### **The National Level**

*The Conservative Governments (1979–1997)* Prime Minister Thatcher and the Education Secretary Kenneth Baker introduced the first National Curriculum Legislation under the Education Reform Act (1988). Outcomes included a set core and wider curriculum; a clear syllabus and curriculum from entry into maintained primary schools to the end of state secondary education. The national curriculum has been regularly reviewed, challenged and changed in some measure over the last 36 years. The government approved the introduction of the national watchdog Ofsted in 1993. From that point, Ofsted inspections took place within schools and have continued to the present day. Although the national curriculum and Ofsted inspections provided a clear open structure for public appraisal,