



**Oxford School
Improvement**

Teaching Assistants

A guide to good practice



The effective organisation of teaching assistants

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You can make relatively straightforward changes that enable TAs to achieve maximum impact through their work.

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The purpose of this report

The aim of this report is to offer practical support and advice to school leaders and teachers about the ways in which they organise and deploy teaching assistants (TAs).

It provides an overview of, and draws on, the findings of extensive research into the deployment of TAs and their impact in schools.

The report is written to help you reflect on any relevant implications of this research for your own school and explores some approaches you might consider to ensure that the TAs in your school are successfully prepared, trained and deployed.

Inside this report you'll find:

- Guidance on how you might approach and carry out an audit in order to assess your current situation, addressing questions related to the role of your TAs, what works well and what might benefit from change.
- Advice on how you can make straightforward changes that enable TAs to achieve maximum impact through their work – helpful to teachers who are looking to review and improve classroom practice.
- Case studies from schools which have reviewed the organisation of TAs and taken steps towards changing practice to better meet the needs of pupils and staff within the school.
- Action points and practical steps to help you think about changes that may be relevant to your school, as well as key issues to consider when making decisions relating to TAs' work.





ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Professor Peter Blatchford is Professor of Psychology and Education at the Institute of Education (IoE), London. He directed the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff project and, before that, a pioneering large-scale study on the effects of class size differences in primary schools. Peter directed the Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants project and, more recently, co-directed the Making a Statement project.

What the research tells us

Teaching assistants have become an integral part of school life over the last 15 or so years. School leaders, teachers and many parents – not to mention pupils – could not imagine the classroom without them.

In 2012, TAs comprised a quarter of the primary and secondary school workforce in the UK and not surprisingly, they account for a significant proportion of the annual education budget: £4.3 billion in 2010/11¹.

Extensive research as part of the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project² suggests that the role performed by the majority of TAs has grown in recent years. The study found that many TAs spend much of their day

working with lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs (SEN). This is not surprising, as increased adult attention in small group and one-to-one contexts is largely accepted as necessary to prevent struggling pupils from falling further behind their peers.

Other findings from the DISS project suggest that changes in the way TAs are deployed and trained may be necessary to ensure that they have a consistently positive impact on children's progress. Researchers found that those pupils in the study who received the most support from TAs made less progress over the year compared with similar pupils who received little or no TA support³. This was the case even when key factors known to affect pupil attainment (SEN, EAL, prior attainment and eligibility for free school meals) and the allocation of TA support were accounted for in the analyses.

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Many TAs spend much of their day working with lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs.

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MORE ABOUT

The DISS project

The DISS project was a large-scale, five-year study carried out by the authors of this report. It explored the deployment of TAs and their impact on teachers and teaching; pupils' learning and behaviour; and how the impact of TAs is affected by school management and communications. It involved many hours' worth of classroom observations and interviews with school staff and looked at the progress of 8,200 pupils at primary and secondary level in English, mathematics and science. For a full summary of the research findings, see page 16.

How can we explain the research findings?

We must recognise of course that there are many highly trained, expert TAs who are well-deployed, well-managed and whose work is making a real difference. However, organisational factors within which TAs work, but over which they have little or no control (such as decisions about how they are trained and deployed) should be a key consideration for school leaders. On the basis of other findings from the DISS project, these factors represent sound explanations for the main results on pupil progress.

The significance of this message is particularly timely, as two recent Ofsted surveys⁴ have found that schools are seeking to extend the use of TAs through the Pupil Premium, but with variable success. The findings suggest that using TAs to provide continual support to struggling pupils is not always the most effective strategy.





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Organisational factors within which TAs work, but over which they have little or no control, should be a key consideration for school leaders.

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Using the research evidence

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Three key issues relating to TAs: deployment, practice and preparedness.

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In response to the findings of the DISS project, the research team worked collaboratively with schools on the EDTA (Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants) project⁵. This work was structured using the wider pedagogical role (WPR) model, which was developed as a way of expressing the main findings from the DISS project and as a framework for rethinking the use of TAs. The WPR model is shown in Figure 1.

The WPR model

A key feature of the EDTA project was to structure schools' work of reassessing the TA role by considering three key issues relating to TAs: deployment, practice and preparedness.

Two further components, characteristics and conditions of employment, concern TAs' backgrounds (e.g. their gender, experience and qualifications) and contractual arrangements (e.g. hours of work). Whilst important, these factors are not as central as deployment, practice and preparedness in evaluating the role of the TA, which is the focus of this report.

It [the EDTA project] has made me take a step back and be a bit more thoughtful ... Are we doing things to the best that we can, as a whole team? How can we change what we're doing to make it better? I think we've got a lot of really good things in place, but I still think there are things we can change.

Primary teacher, EDTA project

MORE ABOUT

The Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA) project

The aim of this project was to work with schools to develop and evaluate alternative ways of working in three fundamental areas relating to TAs: deployment, practice and preparedness. It involved 40 teachers and TAs from ten schools in two local authorities.

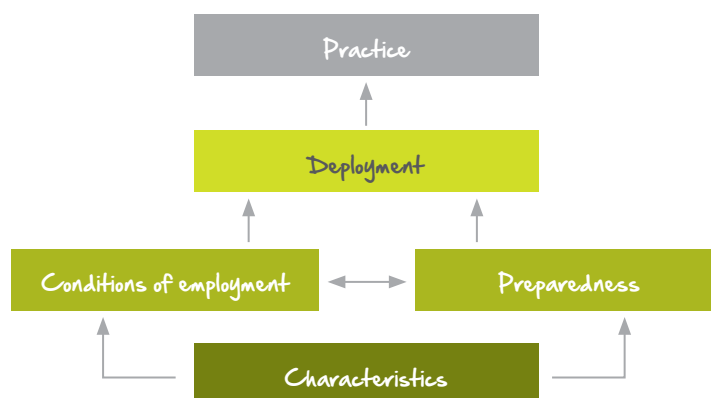


Figure 1: The wider pedagogical role (WPR) model





A process of school improvement (see Figure 2) based on the WPR model has been designed to help you review your current practice and assess whether changes may be needed, for example, in the way that TAs are trained for their roles, or whether they are deployed in ways that allow them to work most effectively.

The key to this process is an audit, a self-evaluation tool which enables you to identify your school's strengths as well as potential areas for change regarding the organisation of TAs. Before you begin, it may be useful to explain the purpose

and process of the audit to teachers and TAs and, if appropriate, assure them that their experiences and perceptions will be anonymous and confidential.

The audit process is described comprehensively in *Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants*⁶, which contains tools and suggestions on how to carry out an audit in your school. The main features of the audit are outlined in the More About feature. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate aspects of two of the key elements: the survey questionnaire and the classroom observation pro forma⁷.

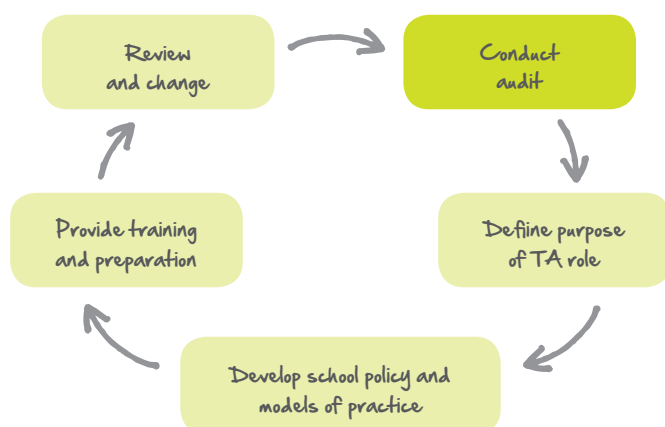


Figure 2: A process of school improvement regarding the deployment and contribution of teaching assistants

ACTION POINTS

- 1 Conduct an audit to establish the current situation in your school regarding the deployment, practice and preparedness of TAs and focus on existing evidence of impact. This will enable you to build a detailed picture incorporating a range of views on the effectiveness of current practice and will help you to reach a shared understanding of what is working well and what would benefit from change.
- 2 Drawing on the findings of your audit, work with teachers to help them develop alternative ways of working and evaluate the impact of any new strategies used.

MORE ABOUT

The audit tool

The audit tool consists of four main elements:

- a survey questionnaire for completion by individual teachers and TAs
- a list of tasks to be used as the basis of a work diary for TAs
- a classroom observation schedule pro forma for use when observing teachers and TAs in lessons
- examples of effective and less effective forms of adult-to-pupil talk.

These tools are flexible and can be edited to suit the needs of your school's audit.

1. Working in the classroom (to be completed by teachers and TAs)	
1.1 During a typical school week, estimate the proportion of time (as a %) that you spend doing the following. Only provide a percentage score for item 6 if you are a TA. Ensure that your percentages add up to 100%.	
1) Working with a pupil one-to-one	%
2) Working with a small group (up to 5 pupils)	
3) Working with a larger group (between 6 and 15 pupils)	
4) Roving the classroom	
5) Leading the class	
6) (TAs only) Listening to teacher talk to pupils	
7) Other (please specify)	
Total	

For the following eight sections, tick the statement that best matches your experience.	
3. Pre-lesson preparation	
3.1 Opportunity for teacher-TA pre-lesson communication	
1) No opportunity/time to communicate before lessons	☒
2) Communication before lessons is brief and ad hoc	☐
3) TA comes in early/stays behind after school to meet with teacher for briefing	☐
4) Teacher and TA have scheduled time to meet (e.g. time for which TAs is paid)	☐
3.2 Quality of preparation for TA (teachers' lesson plans)	
1) TA goes into lessons blind. No lesson plan provided	☒
2) TA given lesson plan. No specific information about TA role given	☐
3) TA given lesson plan. Limited information about TA role given (e.g. names of pupils to support)	☐
4) TA given lesson plan. Specific information about TA role given (e.g. specific objectives/outcomes)	☐

Figure 3: Survey questionnaire

Date:		Teacher:		Lesson details: (topic/objectives)						
Class/Year:		TA:								
Time (minutes)	Lesson part *	Predominant activity of TA					TA-supported pupil(s) (name, attainment level, SEN status)	Task differentiation for TA-supported pupils	Comments on teacher's role	Features of TA-to-pupil talk
		With pupil one-to-one	With group of pupils	Roving classroom	Listening to teacher talk	Other task (tidying/admin)				
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										

Figure 4: Classroom observation pro forma

The deployment of teaching assistants

Defining the role of the teaching assistant

The point from which all decisions about TAs are made is a collectively held and clear idea of the purpose of the TA role and the impact their work is intended to achieve. This will then feed into whole-school policy and ultimately how TAs are deployed by teachers in classrooms.

Establishing clear boundaries

As part of your audit, you will have addressed key questions about the role of TAs in your school and the impact of their work. Many TAs carry out extremely valuable work in pastoral roles, such as enabling access for pupils with physical/sensory impairments, supporting pupils' social and emotional development and helping teachers to run lessons smoothly by limiting disruptive behaviour in classrooms.

However, when their role drifts too far into that of teaching, additional demands are placed on TAs, who may not have benefitted from the same level of training as teachers in areas such as pedagogical decision-making. Research as part of the DISS project shows that some non-specialist TAs have often been given much of the responsibility for teaching pupils with SEN – from devising and delivering alternative curricula and interventions, to differentiating the teachers' tasks and instructions at short notice.

You may find it helpful to address some key questions about the appropriate pedagogical role for TAs (see Figure 5). Debating and finding answers to such questions can help define what TAs are expected to do and what they are not expected to do, and can help reach a shared understanding of the boundaries of the range of TA roles.

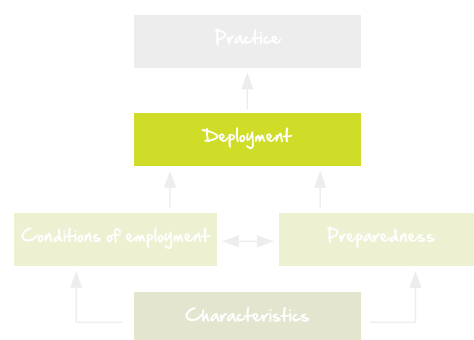
The outcomes of the DISS project suggest that, when making decisions about TA deployment, there are three

areas that require particular attention: ensuring that lower-attaining pupils or those with SEN do not miss out on their entitlement to time with the teacher; the use of intervention programmes; and making best use of TA time in class.

Lower-attaining pupils and pupils with SEN

As a result of your audit, you may find that pupils who are low attaining and/or have SEN spend a high percentage of their time with TAs. However, these are the very pupils who need to benefit from maximum time with a teacher. The DISS project results show that increased time spent with a TA can have unintended consequences – it reduces the overall amount of interaction these pupils have with their teacher, their peers and the mainstream curriculum.

In order to help these vulnerable learners, you may wish to consider ways of using TAs to free up the class teacher so he or she can spend more time working with struggling pupils.



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A collectively held and clear idea of the purpose of the TA role and the impact their work is intended to achieve.

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The overall aim of rethinking the TA role is to ensure that they 'add value' to the classroom. In other words, we must identify ways in which TAs can effectively support teaching and learning, and/or help keep classrooms running efficiently, without replacing pupils' entitlement to spend time with the teacher.

CASE STUDY

One teacher, who recognised that she spent less time with the group of lower-attaining pupils, rotated the groups she and the TA worked with each day (see Figure 6), on page 10. This way, all groups received an equal amount of her time over the week. Opportunities for collaborative group work were also introduced to make use of peer support.

One way of reworking the TA's role that you may find helpful is to have the TA 'roving' the classroom, monitoring work and behaviour and providing support for individual pupils where necessary. At the same time, the teacher can work with a small group or an individual and interact with them for a sustained period of time. Alternatively, the class can be divided into two 'zones' and each adult deployed to provide support to the groups in their 'zone'.

[The EDTA project has] made me aware of how TAs can be used in a more productive way. Rather than sticking [TA] with the lower-attaining [pupils] ... I've really enjoyed sitting with specific groups through either literacy or maths ... because I get so much more feedback ... that's been so beneficial, so positive.

Primary teacher, EDTA project

That's how our role has always been perceived: you get sat with the lower ability and you constantly work with them. Well, that doesn't happen now ...

Primary TA, EDTA project

KEY CONSIDERATION: OFSTED

The current Ofsted inspection framework asks inspectors to evaluate the use that is made of TAs by teachers⁸. Teachers are expected to ensure that provision for pupils who are not making the expected level of progress and those with SEN receive quality first teaching to meet their needs, rather than increasing 'additional provision' as a matter of course.

Intervention programmes

Research as part of the DISS project has shown that TAs have a key role in delivering curriculum interventions, typically in literacy and numeracy, and that these sessions are very often conducted away from the classroom. Other studies have found that where TAs receive high-quality training, a nominated and active link teacher, and where there are strong links between the intervention TA and class teacher (including monitoring and quality assurance of delivery and impact), pupils made good progress in curriculum interventions delivered by TAs⁹.

Should TAs be expected to be as effective as teachers without the same professional development? Or pay?

What does it mean to 'work under the supervision of the teacher'?

How should we define an appropriate boundary between the roles of teachers and TAs?

What is the limit, in terms of responsibility and accountability to parents and the school governing body, of TAs whose role involves teaching?

What are the respective roles of TAs and teachers - in planning, delivering and assessing intervention programmes?

Should teachers delegate the teaching of pupils with the most demanding learning needs to TAs?

Figure 5: Key questions about the role of teaching assistants

CASE STUDY

Arbourthorne Community Primary School, Sheffield

Arbourthorne Primary made a conscious decision some years ago to review the deployment of TAs. At the school, staff work collectively to analyse data and make decisions about which individuals will benefit from in-class support and which will benefit from additional, targeted literacy and numeracy intervention programmes delivered by TAs. Data is regularly gathered to evaluate the impact of interventions. "Once teachers saw the impact", say the school, "they began to ask for more of what is clearly working." TAs can also see the effects of their work and have become very aware of the difference they are making to children's lives. They value being treated as professionals, both through training and regular observation and feedback on their work.

What has become most clear is that the TAs are doing what the teachers ask them to do ... I need to train my staff better to look at it like that. How is that person [the TA] going to help me to get around all these children better? How can I deploy them so that I am omnipresent in this class for every child?

Primary school leader, EDTA project

However, there can be a risk that the valuable gains made through these programmes might not be reflected in wider annual attainment scores. Other studies that have examined the effect of trained TAs who deliver specific curricular interventions (mostly for literacy) tend to report that TA support has a direct positive impact on pupil progress (see Alborz et al 2009)¹⁰. Yet the DISS project results suggest that these gains fail to wash through into end of year attainment scores. One reason for this is that pupils who receive instructional input from a TA, perhaps in the school library or other quiet area, may not necessarily make links between their learning outside the classroom and what takes place inside the classroom.

To help pupils make links between these contexts, teachers need to engage with the content of input provided by a TA and with the valuable data on progress that TAs often collate. They can then make use of such data to inform their target-setting, differentiation and classroom interactions.

Another consideration is the quality of the intervention programmes themselves. High quality, proven interventions have a secure evidence base of impact on learning and progress over time. They emphasise the critical importance of making links between what goes on in the intervention and what goes on in the classroom, through a close working partnership between the teacher and TA, and explicit links made in classroom teaching.

CASE STUDY

Bordesley Green Primary School, Birmingham

At Bordesley Green, a key priority is to make sure misconceptions are resolved, through well-planned interventions where appropriate. Close liaison between those delivering an intervention and the class teacher ensures that strong links between the intervention and the classroom are established. As the assistant head teacher points out, "Intervention must be closely linked to children's day-to-day classroom experience. When a pupil shows that he or she has gained a skill, it may be necessary to challenge the class teacher's preconception and persuade them that a new skill has been learned."

Pupils who have had a programme of intervention, to deal with a specific difficulty or misconception, are monitored as a 'group' to measure their continuing progress over time and check that the intervention has been successful, or whether it needs to be reinforced. In addition, recognising that pupils should not miss out on core classroom teaching, the contracts of TAs have been adjusted so that each TA can lead a 30-minute lunchtime intervention group during the week¹¹.

Making the best use of TAs' time

A recent study found that TAs spend a third of their time listening to teachers teach¹². As teachers and TAs in the study reported, there is often no opportunity allowed to meet before lessons, so it is only during the lesson itself that TAs find out about content and tasks.

Issues concerning TA preparation are addressed on page 14, but this research finding raises questions about whether spending so much time as part of the class audience represents efficient use of TA time. Frequently, TAs do interact quietly with pupils during the teacher's whole class delivery, but much of this is what we call 'stereo-teaching': repeating teacher talk word-for-word. This form of support can increase pupils' dependence on TAs, for example, they 'switch off' because they know the TA will repeat instructions later.

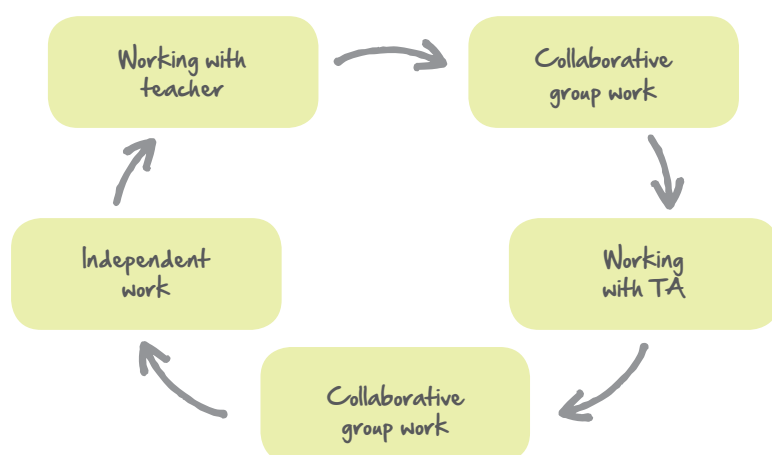


Figure 6: Rotating groups



If it is relevant to your school, one simple way of ensuring that TAs spend their time efficiently is to look at current classroom practice, perhaps as part of your initial audit. This will provide a 'baseline' from which you can think creatively about how to use TAs in ways that add value to the work of the teacher (see Case Study).

CASE STUDY

In one classroom where pupils had become dependent on the TA repeating the teacher's talk, the TA was given the job of modelling the use of equipment (e.g. a protractor) and scribing on the whiteboard, thereby allowing the teacher to remain facing the class and engage the pupils at risk of 'switching off'.



ACTION POINTS

- 1 Ensure that pupils with SEN are not routinely and unnecessarily separated from the teacher and the classroom, and that these pupils receive at least as much teacher time as others in the class. Consider the use of strategies that do not require adult support, for example peer-led group work.
- 2 Conduct an interventions 'health check'. Are you using proven intervention programmes in accordance with the guidance provided? What does your data show? Is it in line with the expected progress documented by the intervention provider? Do your findings suggest that training for TAs (and teachers) needs to be refreshed? How effective are your reporting mechanisms to teachers and how can teachers more effectively engage with programmes and progress data – e.g. is there designated time for teacher/TA liaison?
- 3 Ensure that the termly progress targets for literacy and numeracy set by teachers for individual pupils at risk of underachievement are aligned to the targets they are working towards in interventions.
- 4 Review the time that TAs spend as part of the class audience, ensuring that teachers 'fine tune' what TAs should be listening for in their whole class delivery (e.g. questioning styles, key words, etc.) so that TAs are more informed and have greater confidence when working with pupils.

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High quality interventions emphasise the critical importance of making links between what goes on in the intervention and what goes on in the classroom.

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Raising the quality of teaching assistants' practice



Effective interactions with pupils

There is a clear connection between TA deployment and the second key area of development that schools may wish to look at closely: TAs' interactions with pupils (or, as it is called in the WPR model, 'practice').

The dialogue between teachers and pupils is at the heart of teaching and learning, and central to this is the use of questioning. Where TAs have a pedagogical role, their interactions with pupils (their 'practice') will be mainly verbal in nature. Of all the tasks given to TAs by teachers, it is these verbal interactions which are potentially the most valuable and although the

overwhelming majority of TAs have not benefitted from the kind of training that teachers have received, this does not mean they cannot have a significant role in helping to 'create a positive climate for learning in which pupils are interested and engaged', something that Ofsted inspectors are looking for¹³.

Talk for learning

Research from the DISS project shows that many pupils have much longer interactions with TAs than they do with teachers; that is, there is more dialogue between TAs and pupils than between teachers and pupils. Teacher-to-pupil talk tends to be weighted towards the whole class and is less interactive. Research also shows that TAs and teachers use different kinds of language with pupils¹⁴: TAs are

more likely to prompt pupils rather than allowing them time to think, they tend to focus on making sure tasks are finished and they often supply answers¹⁵. A skilful teacher, who crucially has received relevant training, knows how to use a variety of question forms that support pupils' learning and promote thinking skills. They also know how to respond to pupils' answers with appropriate feedback, address misconceptions and extend learning by allowing pupils to work things out for themselves.

TAs can undoubtedly engage in meaningful interactions with pupils, but where necessary, must have access to focused training and support in order to develop the kind of talk for learning that enhances pupils' understanding.

It is useful to foster a shared understanding in school that the value of the TA role is not in task management and completion, but in helping and prompting pupils to work things out for themselves through the use of effective questioning techniques (see Case Study).



CASE STUDY

A number of schools in the Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA) project developed resources on effective questioning specifically for TAs and supported this with some informal training and guidance. An example of a simple questioning matrix to structure open and closed questions is shown in Figure 7. Where TAs were encouraged to use such resources, they reported being more reflective about their practice and more likely to use open questions in place of closed questions.



Complexity >>>							
<<< Complexity		Is ...	Did ...	Can ...	Would ...	Will ...	Might ...
	Who						
	What						
	Where						
	Why						
	When						
	How						

Figure 7: An effective questioning matrix

MORE ABOUT

The questioning matrix (Figure 7)

The complexity of the thinking skills required to answer the question increases from top to bottom and from left to right. So, for example, when reading a story with a child, asking questions such as 'Who is Sam?' or 'What did Sam do?' will generally be less challenging than asking 'Why did Sam shout?' or 'How might Sam feel?'

We've had two meetings with [school leader] and we've looked at the importance of questioning. Every TA has been given a selection of prompt questioning words and what might be appropriate; what might not be so appropriate; and how we can – depending on the topic or the theme that we're looking at – stimulate the children, not give them answers.

Primary TA, EDTA project

Teachers could:

- Model the use of questioning techniques with groups, individuals or the whole class. Ask the TA to observe, take notes and reflect on what they have learned. Follow this up with focused discussion with the TA.
- Provide sentence stems on cards for TAs to refer to when working with pupils, specifically when asking a variety of questions to develop and assess understanding.
- Include specific expectations for 'higher order' questioning in their lesson plans for TAs, once questioning techniques have been shared and understood.

One way in which TAs can add value in the classroom is through a form of questioning called 'knowing what to do when you don't know what to do' (see Figure 8). Essentially, this means encouraging pupils to draw on their own knowledge and understanding to find things out for themselves using the resources in the classroom. It can also be used to facilitate peer discussion. This form of talk can help TAs to support pupils in becoming more independent and engaged in tasks.



Figure 8: 'Knowing what to do when you don't know what to do' questions



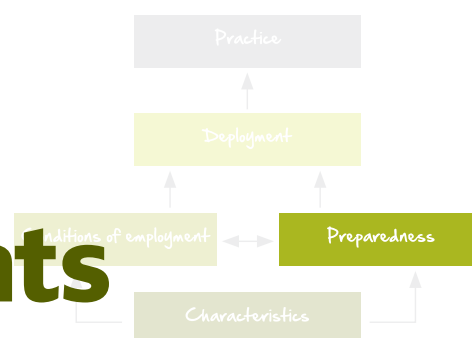
ACTION POINTS

- 1 Ensure you gain a clear picture of the nature and quality of TAs' interactions with pupils.
- 2 Provide continuing professional development (CPD) and support so that TAs can engage in productive talk and questioning with pupils.
- 3 Involve TAs in any school initiative that is designed to promote independent learning skills, such as Building Learning Power¹⁶.

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TAs must have access to focused training and support in order to develop talk for learning that enhances pupils' understanding.
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Increasing the preparedness of teaching assistants

Meeting training needs and ensuring effective communication



The final area of development outlined in the WPR model is preparedness. The decisions you make about TA deployment and practice will inform preparation; that is, you will get a clearer sense of what you are preparing TAs for.

In the DISS project, TAs frequently described 'going into lessons blind'. In contrast to the teacher, the overwhelming majority of TAs in the study had not received training related to their role and were not necessarily aware of the short- or long-term objectives of a task or lesson. In effect, they were not adequately prepared.

This lack of preparation has evident implications and, where this is the case, is an issue that should be addressed. When TAs' pre-lesson preparation is insufficient, or their specific training needs have not been met, this can increase the separation between teacher- and TA-supported pupils. Improving TA preparedness is, therefore, a critical part of making better use of TAs and enabling them to provide effective support in lessons. As the case studies from the EDTA project show, this can be approached in a number of different ways.

CASE STUDY

Challenging the notion that in order to get the best value from TAs they should spend all their available time working with pupils, the head teacher in one school amended TAs' contracts (with consent) so that they started and finished half an hour earlier each day. This created up to 2.5 hours per week of valuable time to meet with the class teacher and prepare for lessons. As a result, TAs were more prepared, hence more effective when they were working with pupils.

CASE STUDY

Where time to meet before lessons was restricted, one teacher developed a lesson plan that explicitly set out what he required his TA to do in lessons. He recognised the need for a sense of what outcomes the TA should be working towards (e.g. understanding, not task completion). The teacher also specified the feedback he wanted from the TA at the end of the lesson on the lesson plan, which was useful for further lesson planning.

CASE STUDY

One school made a video recording of a skilled Higher-level Teaching Assistant working with a group of pupils in a literacy intervention. This video provided a useful springboard for an informal TA training session about effective questioning.

KEY CONSIDERATION: LESSON PLANS

Lesson plans are often the only means of communication between the teacher and the TA before a lesson, and therefore constitute the TA's only form of preparation. If time allows, involving the TA in the lesson-planning process enables the role of the TA to be set out in detail so that the TA has a full understanding of what the teacher expects them to do and how to do it.

Whether planning takes place collaboratively or not, it is useful for a lesson plan to explicitly set out the following information for TAs:

- Their precise role and how to achieve this.
- Expected outcomes for pupils, with a focus on understanding and/or developing a skill rather than simply task completion.
- What kind of feedback the teacher would like from the TA at the end of the lesson.

The preparation time ... has totally changed my role ... Just having that time to know exactly what is expected of me every day, within the classroom, with different groups of children, with individuals ... it's just turned my job, my role, upside down – for the better; it really has.

Primary TA, EDTA project

Having the 15 minutes before school is invaluable to both the TA and me. I don't know how I'd ever cope if it was taken away!

Primary teacher, EDTA project



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Improving TA preparedness is a critical part of enabling them to provide effective support in lessons.

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Making a difference

Increasing the impact of teaching assistants

This report has looked at some of the findings from extensive research into the role and value of teaching assistants. It has explored some of the potential implications of these findings and suggested strategies that schools can use in order to improve deployment of TAs and, more importantly, the educational experiences and learning of pupils.

Perhaps the strongest message from the research is the need to ensure that TAs are part of the overall drive towards school improvement. Where school leaders have acknowledged this and begun to challenge and change the ways TAs are deployed and prepared, and how they interact with pupils, considerable change has been achieved.

The positive outcomes achieved by schools involved in the EDTA project¹⁷ are outlined in Figure 9. These schools addressed the issues of TA deployment, practice and preparedness in innovative ways, using existing staffing and financial resources.

- Changes were widespread and there was a strong sense that there would be 'no going back' to how things were before.
- Teachers spent more time with pupils with SEN, from which they derived a sense of professional satisfaction.
- Teachers made better use of TA time in lessons.
- TAs' questioning skills improved.
- The quality and clarity of lesson plans improved, thereby mitigating the effects of 'going into lessons blind'.
- TAs reported feeling more valued, appreciated and more confident about their role.

Figure 9: Outcomes achieved by schools in the EDTA project

The key findings of the DISS project are also presented to the right. Some of these may reflect current practice in your school; others may not be relevant to you. The key issue for leaders is that they are aware of the situation in their school, and can use this report to identify appropriate next steps and increase the impact of their teaching assistants.

I feel more confident with the way I deal with the pupils, because I feel more secure in what I'm expected to do. Sometimes ... when you come in cold, you feel unsure and you don't know what to say to the children so much ... So I think sharing the learning objectives and what needs to be achieved and who to focus on, just means I'm much more aware of where to be.

Primary TA, EDTA project

The more involved in the classroom my TA has become – team teaching, feeding back to children their next steps – the more respect the children have shown towards them. Better working relationships have been developed.

Primary teacher, EDTA project

“

The need to ensure that TAs are part of the overall drive towards school improvement.

”

MORE ABOUT

The DISS project – key findings

- TAs had positive effects on teachers' workload, job satisfaction and stress. For example, they gave individual attention to specific pupils and minimised disruptive behaviour.
- TAs spent most of their time working with groups or individuals, mainly those with SEN or lower-attaining children. Support from TAs for high- and middle-attaining pupils was less frequent.
- Teachers spent much of their time leading or monitoring the whole class. They spent relatively little time working with groups or individuals and tended to concentrate on pupils who did not have SEN.
- TAs were frequently given responsibility for teaching and learning tasks (in particular literacy and numeracy interventions), often taking place outside the classroom.
- Overall, pupils who received the most support from TAs made less progress than similar pupils with less TA support. This was the case even after factors like prior attainment, SEN and EAL had been accounted for.
- TAs were more likely to focus on task completion and often supplied answers, whereas teachers used more open-ended questions to promote thinking and learning, gave more feedback and spent more time explaining concepts.
- Many teachers had no planning or feedback time with TAs, nor had they received training to help them work with or manage TAs.
- TAs reported feeling underprepared and often had to tune into teacher talk to understand the tasks they were expected to support.



Helping you achieve the best results

Questions to ask to help you achieve the best teaching assistant practice in your school

YOUR QUESTIONS	LITERACY	MATHS
Are there areas where I can support my teaching assistants with their professional development?	Project X CODE training is provided by experts from the Reading Support team at Edge Hill University for teachers or teaching assistants to help ensure that TAs are skilled at delivering intervention. For more information go to http://readingsupport.edgehill.ac.uk Ruth Miskin Literacy training provides whole school training for all the staff, including TAs, on all Read Write Inc. programmes.	The Numicon activity groups are supportive, detailed and accessible, so any member of staff can use them effectively to make a difference to children's learning. Maths Makes Sense offers inspirational professional development for teachers and teaching assistants to maximise impact across the school.
Am I getting the best advice for teaching assistants from leading experts, which they can access for free?	Leading literacy experts, including Jean Gross, Di Hatchett, Ruth Miskin, Debbie Hepplewhite, Gary Wilson, Nikki Gamble and Sue Palmer, provide a range of inspiring free online videos. Find out more at www.oxfordprimary.co.uk	Leading experts, including Richard Dunne, Lynn Churchman and Tony Wing, provide a range of free professional development films at www.oxfordprimary.co.uk
Have I chosen resources for my TAs to use based on impact data?	Project X CODE is proven to raise children's reading ages – after one term pupils gained an average of 8.7 months on their phonics age and 6.8 months on their sentence reading age. Read Write Inc. raises standards for every child – 7 out of 12 schools in the HMI Ofsted report Reading by six: How the best schools do it use Read Write Inc. Phonics. Big Writing uses a proven criterion scale which has been tested and refined within many schools, to be a robust and trusted guide.	The Numicon Intervention Programme is proven through research and feedback to have an impact on those children who are struggling with maths. Impact studies and testimonials show Maths Makes Sense raises standards and improves children's confidence and enjoyment of maths.
Are my parents fully involved in helping support their child's progress?	Oxford Owl is a FREE website which helps parents to support their children with reading and maths. It includes over 250 free eBooks, advice and engaging activities. Find out more at www.oxfordowl.co.uk	



KEY TEXTS AND REFERENCES

Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants: Guidance for school leaders and teachers by Anthony Russell, Rob Webster and Peter Blatchford. Published by Routledge.

Reassessing the impact of teaching assistants: How research challenges practice and policy by Peter Blatchford, Anthony Russell and Rob Webster, describes the DISS project and its findings. Published by Routledge.

For more on this research, publications and other activities, please visit www.schoolsupportstaff.net

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ENDNOTES

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Oxford University Press is grateful to the headteachers and staff of those schools referenced in the case studies.

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