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A step towards clarifying TA ambiguity: A Q Methodological Study to Elicit the Views of Teaching Assistants Regarding Their Current and Ideal Roles.

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Abstract

Over the last 15 years there has been an increase in the number of Teaching Assistants (TAs) employed by schools to support children and young people (Tucker, 2009). It is recognised that TAs can impact on the educational (Webster et al, 2010), social (Webster et al, 2013) and emotional (Alborz et al, 2009) experiences of children and young people, whom they support. However, some of the literature alludes to this as not always being positive and suggests that practice of TAs can, in fact, hinder progress. However, these studies either did not, or only very briefly, incorporated TAs in their research. Studies related to the impact of TAs tend to focus on the views of children, parents and teachers, with few studies focussing entirely on TAs themselves.

The aims of this research are to consider how TAs view their current role, how they would prefer it to look in the future, as well as considering the implications of these views for schools and Educational Psychologists (EPs). As a result of the desire to capture the voice of the TA, in order to explore curiosity around the subjectivity of the role, Q methodology was identified as being the most appropriate method to use. Both primary and secondary TAs were invited to participate; Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA) have a different role, incorporating different responsibilities, so did not contribute. In total, 38 TAs, from four schools, participated and were presented with 64 statements relating to the role. They were asked to sort them into a pre-arranged frequency distribution, twice. The first Q sort explored their views about their current role and the second focussed on how they would like the role to look in the future. The completed Q sorts were then analysed, using factor analysis, to identify shared viewpoints. Analysis of the current role identified a two factor solution and a five factor solution emerged for the ideal role.

Findings are discussed in relation to existing literature before considering how they may impact on schools and EPs. Limitations of the study are also presented prior to suggesting how these viewpoints might encourage future research and how they are to be applied in to my practice.

Contents Page

Figures

Tables

Chapter One

Introduction

The aim of this research was to elicit the viewpoints of Teaching Assistants (TAs) about their current and an ideal role. It does not include those with Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) status, as this is a different role, incorporating different responsibilities, to that of general TA practices (Attwood and Bland, 2011). My interest centred on whether or not commonalities, and indeed differences, exist within perspectives of both current and ideal practice, as well as between them, through the identification of shared viewpoints. The emergence of such viewpoints leads to considerations regarding enhancing the role, with this having particular implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs), who collaborate with school staff regarding effective classroom practice.

There is a vast amount of literature outlining TA responsibilities, with some authors concluding that the current methods of practice have concerning implications for the children whom they support, especially with regards to academic progress (Webster, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin and Russell, 2010; Webster, Blatchford and Russell, 2013). A review of the literature also highlighted that whilst the voices of children and teaching staff are somewhat represented, the voices of TAs are marginalised, with some concluding that they are almost disregarded (Basford, Butt and Newton, 2017). Their practice has been reviewed and critiqued, following methods that measure functional aspects of the role, such as how many interactions TAs have with children (Webster and Blatchford, 2017) and through evaluation of their effectiveness in terms of pupil progress (as expressed in Basford et al, 2017). Attempts to elicit their views have begun to appear, through the use of questionnaires (Russell, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown and Martin, 2005) and Likert Scales (Mahmoud, 2011), as well as small-scale interviews (Abbott, McConkey and Dobbins 2011; Houssart, 2013). Whilst useful, these issues steered me to exploring the subjective perceptions of the role (McKeown and Thomas, 2013), particularly as many studies fail to address how variables, such as feelings and experiences, impact on personal points of view.

As well as the gaps within the literature, my main rationale for selecting this area of research has arisen from my own experiences of being a TA, as well as working alongside them for many years. Throughout my first year of training on the Educational Psychology (EP) course, I heard SENCOs suggesting that children needed additional funding through the EHCP process, in order to secure them 'a body'. I reflected on this and considered that sometimes there is an assumption that the only way to progress learning, social understanding and emotional development is through the use of a TA, which I considered a huge responsibility for them. Indeed, there has been an increase in the number of TAs employed by schools to support children and young people, over the last 15 years (Tucker, 2009). I have seen TAs 'velcroed' to children and then heard staff complain that the same children have no independence, thus reinforcing my desire to further explore what TAs understand the role to be and whether or not they have ideas about how they would prefer to practice.

As mentioned, my aim was to gain the views of TAs about their role currently and ideally. In order to achieve this, Q Methodology was deemed to be the most appropriate choice as this allows for "by person analysis in which participants' constructions are the focus of the analysis and their subjectivity is operant" (Ramsey, Cowell and Gersch, 2018, pg. 4). Thus, I was able to present participants with statements that were reflective of the role, so that they could consider them as a whole, ranking them according to personal saliency, from most agree to most disagree. Analysis of these responses and interpretation of emerging factors has provided an understanding of, "how their experiences, social meaning, ideas and decisions made can have causal impacts" on the role (Fletcher, 2017, pg. 185). This contributes to the literature by providing an opportunity to understand how the identity construction of the TA, and their views associated with the role, affect how they feel and practice (Trent, 2014).

This research includes a critical review of the literature, helping the reader to understand the current picture with regards to TAs. I will also outline and justify the rationale for my research, explaining why I feel it is of importance and how it adds to the literature. The methodology used to capture the voices of TAs is

explained, as well as how this was applied to the current study. The views elicited are then presented in the analysis chapter, which outlines how the data was analysed before being interpreted and discussed in relation to the literature, in order to answer the research questions. Included within the discussion chapter are my personal reflections noted throughout my research journey, limitations of the study and how these findings impact upon schools and Educational Psychologists (EPs).

Chapter Two
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter considers relevant research, informing the body of literature, with regards to the employment, effectiveness and implications of the practice of TAs. In referring to Kerry's (2005) view, Bignold and Barbara (2012) state, "the term teaching assistant is now widely recognised by staff in school, by those working in the wider children's services and by the children and families they work with" (pg. 366), reinforcing the premise for using this title hereon in.

Initially, the chapter will focus on the changing nature of the role, in order to embed an understanding of the early underpinnings from which it has evolved. It is important to acknowledge the legislation, government guidance and political impact on the role, in order to appropriately consider how it has progressed. I will then discuss the role in the present day and how these changes have impacted on the duties undertaken, within differing settings.

Following this, a review of the literature will inform the chapter as to how research previously undertaken within the chosen area has explored the effectiveness of TAs, with regards to their impact on learning and development, social emotional and mental health, as well as independence, for children and young people (CYP). I will also discuss the impact of TAs for teachers, before considering the suggestions made within the literature to improve the overall picture.

To close, a summary of the presented literature will inform themes identified for further exploration, supporting the rationale for the specific research questions.

2.2 The Traditional Role

> *"For many years, primary schools have drawn on parents, predominantly mothers, to assist in the classroom on a voluntary basis" (Bach & Kessler, 2004, pg. 2).*

2.2.1 Premise for Historical Considerations

The employment of TAs has long been viewed as a necessary addition to the school system (Bignold and Barbara, 2012). Whilst there was an increase in the employment of support staff, following the implementation of the Education Act (1981), it is important to consider how TAs have been integrated into the system as a whole (McVittie, 2005). Reflecting on the initial development and the changing nature of the role allows for a thorough understanding of how this has adapted and shaped into "the emerging pedagogical arrangements that we see today" (Tucker, 2009, pg. 292). The titles, by which TAs are known, also signifies particular information to children, parents and Local Authorities (LAs) (McVittie, 2005). The fluctuating discourse around TAs, and the number of alternative titles, in different schools, reinforces the diverging degree of duties and responsibilities that they are required to undertake, highlighting the necessity to consider the development of the role, prior to considering what it has evolved into. Indeed, Bignold and Barbara (2012) state "when support staff working with teachers were called by a variety of titles, that often led to confusion and inhibited professional visibility as a group and individuals" (pg. 366).

2.2.2 The Historical Development of the Role of the TA

Within school systems, there has been a vast increase in the number of TAs employed by schools over the last 15 years; this picture is reflected throughout schools worldwide (Trent, 2014). TAs now make up approximately a quarter of the workforce in schools (Webster et al, 2013). Historically, TAs were hired to work with the teacher as general support, being specifically managed by them; the Plowden report (1967) promoted this idea by claiming that TAs would be useful in the classroom to support teachers rather than carrying out administrative jobs such as "washing glue pots and sharpening pencils" (McVittie, 2005, pg. 26). The publication of the Warnock report (1978) suggested that TAs should help children by delivering interventions as planned and set out by the class teacher, advocating a shift from the duties and expectations associated with the early role. Bach, Kessler and Heron (2006) add that the general modernisation agenda of the labour government prompted the emergence of the number of support staff employed, highlighting the importance of these assistants in aiding other professionals. It is

also noted that TAs were traditionally parents working voluntarily within the school, leading to an "organic" progression into the role (Basford et al, 2017, pg. 299). The introduction of the Education Act (1981), which presented the term special educational needs (SEN), outlined the initiation of funding to support children, prompting necessary consideration of the role, especially with regards to the impact on employment opportunities for TAs, rather than simply being voluntary work (McVittie, 2005). The election of the labour government (1997) ignited the rise in the profile of the TA, depicting it as primarily support for children with additional needs. However, wider responsibilities were also portrayed such as, managing behaviour, aiding the teacher with assessment and data, general classroom management and allowing the teacher to have time to plan lessons. The government also promoted a career pathway for TAs for those wishing to progress onto HLTA courses or teacher training (DfES, 2004a: 41). This was an important step in nurturing their continued professional development, as well as promoting training opportunities. However, this was also rationalised and presented as a means of protecting and retaining teachers in schools, leading me to query the genuine motives underpinning the agenda.

TAs have played an important part in the success of schools ensuring inclusion for CYP, as well as raising numeracy and literacy standards, supporting national agendas (Bach et al, 2006; Alborz, Pearson, Farrell and Howes, 2009; Abbott et al 2011). However, most conclusions are founded on research focussing on the effectiveness of TAs in primary schools. Bach et al (2006) justify the solitary evaluation of TA practice in primary schools, as a result of them being more integral within the workforce than secondary TAs. It would be interesting to see if the same results and conclusions would have been evident had this study included secondary TAs and explored secondary schools as systems.

2.3 Where Are We Now?

> *"The delineated paraprofessional, who may or may not be specifically trained, is constrained by boundaries of operation within which some elements of pupils' learning are included, and others are excluded; the role*

remains substantially about support to pupil and teacher" (Kerry, 2005, pg. 382).

2.3.1 Features of the Role

TAs are now recognised as being important in supporting the learning of all pupils within a setting (Alborz et al, 2009) and have clear, direct pedagogical responsibilities (Webster et al, 2013). Webster et al (2010) also claim that TAs have become responsible for the education of children with SEN. Webster et al (2013) went on to reframe their involvement as 'alternative support' rather than 'additional support' (pg. 80). This is significant following the later publication of the SEND Code of Practice (2015), which is discussed further in 2.3.2. Thus, it could be argued that the appropriateness of their role should be questioned, especially with regard to considering TA responsibilities, given that they are predominantly being tasked with supporting children with SEN.

Earlier government guidelines outlined the responsibilities of TAs as supporting the child, the teacher, the school and the curriculum (DfES, 2000, pg. 8). Kamen (2008) suggests that duties at each level might include:

Child	➢ supporting learning ➢ fostering independence ➢ praise and reward.
Teacher	➢ preparation and maintenance of productive learning environment ➢ giving feedback about lessons (including behaviour) ➢ feedback to help evaluate pupil progress.
School	➢ work as part of a team ➢ attendance at staff meetings ➢ liaison with parents ➢ seek to develop own skill set ➢ reflection regarding own skills and abilities.
Curriculum	➢ knowledge of pedagogy ➢ understand the curriculum ➢ knowledge of national strategies for literacy and numeracy.

McVittie's (2005) study established that the TAs who were interviewed felt that they were aware of these government guidelines (DfES, 2000) regarding responsibilities to support the pupil, the teacher, the school and the curriculum, achieving these in their day-to-day practice. Whilst this research explored awareness and clarity of the role, questions were not asked with regards to how, and if, TAs were consulted, in school, about their responsibilities or how they achieved them. Questions focussed on retrieving information about the functional aspects of the role, such as whether or not they undertake group work or support children with SEN, rather than opinion with regards to developing it. Whilst these TAs expressed a sense of role clarity, the author questioned in her conclusions whether or not there is consistency of practice amongst schools nationwide. This could imply that the role is dynamic in nature, where practice is not fixed within a set of specific expectations, blurring the "identity construction" of the TA (Tucker, 2009, pg. 299). Trent (2014) supports this view and reinforces that there is still real uncertainty about the roles and responsibilities associated with the practice of TAs. Consistent within the literature is a notion of 'role ambiguity' (Webster et al, 2013, pg. 79).

2.3.2 The SEND Code of Practice (2015)

The implementation of the SEND reforms in 2014 (Children and Families Act, 2014), and subsequent publication of the SEND Code of Practice, 2015 (SEND COP) had implications for LAs and school settings with regards to SEN. Included within this were the implications for TA practice. The SEND COP (2015) asserts that the responsibility of learning for children with SEN remains with the class teacher. It is the responsibility of the class teacher to ensure that children make progress, not the TAs. Additionally, the LA should have strategic oversight of SEN provision, implying that LA support staff, such as EPs have a duty in supporting and contributing towards appropriate provision for SEN (Basford et al, 2017).

2.4 The Impact and Effectiveness of TAs

> *"Some kind of help is the kind of help that helping's all about. And some kind of help is the kind of help we can all do without" (Silverstein, 1974, pg. 101 in Giangreco, 2010).*

2.4.1 Overview

The overall picture of the impact, value and effectiveness of TAs is disappointing (Giangreco, 2010). Literature and research focussing on their effectiveness (Radford, Bosanquet, Webster and Blatchford, 2015; Webster et al 2010), interactions (Webster et al, 2013), and aiding of social and emotional development (Alborz et al 2009) question the benefits for children identified as requiring their support. Webster et al (2010) claim that some earlier research, such as McVittie's (2005), demonstrates a positive outlook, especially with regards to clarity of the role. However, they claim that former research regarding TA effectiveness is not without limitations as there were "significant gaps in knowledge regarding their preparation and training, deployment and practice" (pg. 320), which were not considered as part of their conclusions. This implies that researching the effectiveness of the role is not as simple as focussing on achieving the broad expectations but should consider additional variables, such as the impact of preparedness, quality of training and how they are deployed. When focussing on the impact of the role, subsequent research has indicated poor outcomes, such as those presented by Webster et al (2010), which can easily be seen to reinforce the view that TAs are 'high cost, low impact" (Basford et al, 2017, pg. 293).

Additionally, the terms 'effectiveness' and 'poor outcomes' are also without issue. The impact of TAs has been narrowly measured against pupil progress (Webster et al, 2010), without consideration of additional and alternative variables that impact on this data, which is problematic (Basford et al, 2017). Thus, how valid is it to suggest that attainment and academic progress sufficiently form a base for TA scrutiny and evaluation? TA responsibilities incorporate much more than solely supporting children with their work. Therefore, academic progress should only be acknowledged as a partial indicator for the 'impact' of TAs and conclusions should not merely focus on this one dimension of the varied role. The TAs in the Webster et al (2010) study perhaps had made 'impact' for the children that they support, in other ways, such as by promoting confidence and inclusion, yet these were not measured. When evaluating 'effectiveness' the role should be considered holistically, acknowledging and accounting for the varied responsibilities that TAs

have, rather than measuring impact in discrete areas, as the aforementioned researchers have done.

TA practice and deployment is underpinned by perceptions of their role and while there is uncertainty about this, there are likely to be issues with regards to how they are utilised in schools (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2011). Tucker (2009) also acknowledged that little thought "appears to have been given to what is expected of the TAs, the priorities that should be attached to their work and how that work needs to unfold in practice" (pg. 293). This is likely to negatively shape their effectiveness, their understanding of their role, how they should function in the school system and how they perceive their value within it (Tucker, 2009). Whilst information derived from the literature is useful in painting a picture of the impact of TAs, highlighting *what* needs to change, there appears to be little effort invested into considering *how* this can be achieved.

2.4.2 Painting a Different Picture

Amongst the growing body of literature critiquing the effectiveness of TAs, there are some helpful attempts to address why the overall picture may not be positive. Balshaw (2010) expresses the view that concern regarding TA effectiveness is unsurprising, considering the reasons why such findings are emerging. Whilst early national guidance sets out direction for TA practice (DfES, 2000), Balshaw (2010) asserts that it does not provide sufficient direction as to how this can be implemented and achieved effectively. This is important considering that TAs have long since felt that the role has evolved and their responsibilities increased (Russell et al, 2005). Additional to this, schools have formed different models of working, for TAs, that sometimes vary from class to class, in response to meeting need (Mahmoud, 2011). This has been made more difficult as the guidance available, from the government, has been delayed (Basford et al, 2017). In the meantime, the role has continued to evolve into practices that are specific to the settings within which TAs work. Therefore, recommendations made by Webster et al (2013) for a broad description of what the role should be, and entail, may be easier said than done.

Without such guidance from the government, schools construct a TA role that is personally suitable for them (Basford et al, 2017). It is little wonder that without such clarity, there may be tensions surrounding the profession, especially when TA effectiveness is evaluated and scrutinised within the literature. This has deep implications for them given times of austerity, with schools continually looking to make cuts to their budget (Basford et al, 2017). Indeed, Radford et al (2015) state, "TAs are not to blame for this state of affairs because they are regularly expected to perform tasks for which they are not qualified" (pg. 1). A clear example of this could be how schools still deploy TAs to support individual pupils, especially within secondary settings (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell and Webster, 2009). This goes against national guidance on how best to effectively utilise TAs and research as far back as the late 1990s highlighted and indicated that this mind-set required deliberation (Lorenz, 1998). Balshaw (2010) affirms this concern by stating,

> "despite the recommendations of various national guidance documents many schools continue to 'velcro' TAs solely to individual or small groups of pupils, leaving teachers to concentrate on the rest of the class" (pg. 337).

Lorenz (1998) reported that most TAs sit with one child and rarely move to help others, resulting in total dependence on the adult, fostering a learned helplessness. Recommendations made at the time included TAs supporting children by showing them how to use resources, independently, to support their learning; hence, a facilitation process. However, as Balshaw (2010) states, these recommendations outline best practice but do not necessarily state how schools can and should develop their systems to ensure that TAs achieve these endorsed standards. It is interesting how recommendations made in 1998 are still not established consistently within practice, even though these were deemed to be the best methods to support children positively (Lorenz, 1998). Despite these concerns, TAs continue to be widely used in this manner (Radford et al, 2015), leading to me to question why, and how, this is still the case.

2.5 Implications of TA Practice for Children

"What children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone" (Lev S Vygotsky, 1930, Mind in Society).

2.5.1 Cognition and Learning

TAs aid primary aged children with literacy difficulties enabling them to bridge gaps in their learning (Alborz et al 2009) and "sensitive" TAs can also help with pupil engagement in learning and social activities (Alborz et al, 2009 pg. 1). This implies that TAs should be of a certain temperament and have particular characteristics, in order to be able to achieve this. TAs should have an awareness of when CYP need direction and when they should be able to independently access tasks; thus making autonomous decisions during a variety of situations (Tucker, 2009). These statements clearly have implications with regards to accessing appropriate training. Literature suggests that this is a concern amongst researchers, who find that TAs do not, and have not, received enough training to effectively care for and support the children with whom they work (Kerry, 2005; Butt and Lowe, 2012). This is particularly evident when supporting children with Autism (Symes and Humphrey, 2011).

With regards to academic achievement, the literature broadly suggests that TAs have no positive effect on learning (Giangreco, 2010). Particularly, Webster et al (2010) found that when assessing the impact of TA support on learning, 16 out of 21 results indicated a negative effect on academic achievement, implying that TA support does not aid academic progress. Worryingly, children with a higher level of support made less progress than those of a similar ability receiving no support. Importantly, this study was conducted throughout primary and secondary age groups, suggesting that the outcomes were consistent across different key stages. In discussing why this may be the case, Webster et al (2010) suggest that the characteristics of pupils were not a factor, as these were all accounted for through statistical analysis. Rather, they implicate levels of experience and qualifications of TAs supporting them. Interestingly, these conclusions are not evidenced through data correlations between TA qualifications and pupil progress, simply serving as

an assumption to potentially explain the findings. Webster et al (2010) also propose that how TAs are deployed, and how well they are prepared for the role, shapes their practice, and suggests that these are ultimately considerations for the senior leadership team (SLT) and not the TA. However, Webster et al (2010) did not explore any of these assumptions with TAs. This study narrowly framed the role of the TA and focussed on what they do (features of the role) rather than considering whether or not their personal feelings, understanding or perceptions affect how they practice. It was these features of the role that were focussed on and viewed by the researchers as being fundamental in helping to raise standards and reduce teacher workload (Fletcher–Campbell, 2010). Their decision to exclude TAs from their research may be understood through their comment where they state that evaluation, "is best understood in the context of wider, interlinking factors, concerning the decisions made about, rather than by, TAs" (pg. 319). Dismissing their views could be argued to be the missing link, suggesting gaps in the literature and promoting direction for future research. As is evident within the literature, the role encompasses much more, with real uncertainty about what it should entail (Trent, 2014). Interestingly, these researchers went on to describe TA 'role ambiguity' (Webster et al, 2013, pg. 79) in their later work, acknowledging this concern.

Contrary to these findings, Farrell, Alborz, Howes and Pearson (2010) found that TA intervention could have a positive effect for children with difficulties in early literacy and language skills. CYP in their study were found to make significant improvements. The main differences between the Webster et al (2010) and Farrell et al (2010) studies were with regards to their methodologies. Mainly, the intervention groups in the Farrell et al (2010) study accessed support consistently, for a longer period of time, which was delivered outside the classroom, whereas, the Webster et al (2010) study focussed on support within the classroom. Complementary to this, Webster et al (2013) later noted that when TAs deliver interventions, that they have trained and are prepared for, outcomes are more positive. These results again highlight the necessity for appropriate intervention, training of TAs and collaborative working, which impact on the success when aiding and facilitating learning (Farrell et al, 2010).

2.5.2 Independence

When children have access to a TA to support them there is a concern that this can result in them becoming less interactive with others within the environment, as well as being less motivated to independently access their work (Lorenz, 1998; Webster et al, 2013). Tucker (2009) reinforces this view by stating, "the attention of a TA can in fact act as a cocoon, shielding pupils from both learning challenges and integration with peers" (pg. 293). Issues again highlight the necessity to capture the perceptions of TAs with regards to their responsibilities. Webster et al (2013) state that TAs are "less academically demanding" and have "greater stress on completing tasks" in their interactions with children, rather than opening them up to wider conversations to expand their knowledge (pg. 80). Why is task completion deemed to be more important for the TA? Once more, this was not explored with them to determine why this is the case.

According to Radford et al (2015), supporting children with their work should involve the following:

- general support in terms of promoting behaviours for learning, such as ensuring children are on task.
- aiding children when they are finding activities difficult, focussing on learning and maintaining independence by explaining tasks.
- encourage children to use their own strategies to support their learning, which also promotes the frequency of the child's interactions with others, thus addressing concerns raised by Webster et al (2013).

These corroborate opinions (Lorenz, 1998) that TAs should be facilitating learning by having an understanding of mediation (Vygotsky, 1930) and learning styles, as well as how children access tasks, rather than working directly and collaboratively on them, highlighting the shift to pedagogical and instructional responsibilities that they may not have been trained for (Trent, 2014).

2.5.3 Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)

Supplementary to the aims of supporting children and young people with their learning, thus, raising academic achievements, TAs are instrumental in promoting

inclusion (Blatchford et al, 2009). Indeed, schools use TAs to ensure inclusion of children with SEN (Trent, 2014) to meet legal obligations. They are often asked to support those presenting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, in school, in order to aid their access to education. Groom and Rose (2005) state, "the role of the TA is perceived as crucial to the effective inclusion of pupils with SEBD in mainstream classrooms" (pg. 20). However, Alborz et al (2009) suggest that literature alludes to the unsuccessful attempts of TAs when addressing emotional and therapeutic needs through delivery of interventions, resulting in little impact for CYP. Their conclusions, founded on the results from multiple studies of different practice, in different settings, imply that in some cases the use of a TA hindered the interactions between children with SEN, their peers and staff, undermining opportunities for self-determination. However, in four of their studies, TAs were seen to promote engagement and aid peer communication, if they had been trained appropriately. This has clear implications for necessary training opportunities and development of policy around the role.

2.5.4 Perceptions of the Child

> *"A good teaching assistant needs to be respectful and understanding. Also, they have to be smiley, bubbly, cheerful and fun. They need to be patient, imaginative and helpful, assertive but not too assertive. As well they have to be thoughtful and caring towards the pupil" (Pupil D, Bland and Sleightholme, 2012, pg. 174).*

Children's views of the TA are significant; they offer insight into how they perceive the role, how it impacts on them, as well as the characteristics that they believe good TAs should possess (Fraser and Meadows, 2008). Additionally, understanding the views of children with SEN, such as those with hearing impairments, regarding how they would like to be supported and treated is important, as identified by Massey (2010). Findings from Bland and Sleightholme's (2012) study affirmed that children do value TAs and feel that having a TA in class fosters their confidence in themselves. Children have a sense of respect for TAs even though they perceived them to be, and thought they should be, less educated than teachers. Children interviewed by Fraser and Meadows

(2008) spoke about a vast array of jobs that they feel the TA is responsible for, showing a broad understanding of the role. Most children felt that TAs help with work, help individual children, listen when upset, help the teacher, mark work, photocopy work and help children feel confident, views which were later mirrored in the Bland and Sleightholme (2012) study. The variety of jobs that children perceive the TA to do further outlines the array of responsibilities that they have, as these were all roles that the children had witnessed TAs undertaking. However, these opinions are solely representative of children in primary schools so did not incorporate views of those accessing secondary education.

2.6 Implications of TA Practice for Teachers

> *"A shift in the role of the TA from classroom 'housekeeping' (putting up classroom displays, washing up paintpots, etc.) to the provision of direct pedagogical support to the teacher in the classroom. A recognition of growing teacher stress and workloads has meant increasing pressure on schools to use other adults than teachers to support the delivery of the curriculum" (Edmond, 2003, pg. 114).*

2.6.1 Stress

Teachers feel more supported when they have another adult present within the classroom, alleviating stress arising from general classroom management (Alborz et al, 2009; Blatchford et al, 2009). Having a TA makes teachers feel more comfortable knowing that there is additional help, in terms of supporting the children, when they require guidance. This team-teaching approach, as described here, can help promote and aid an inclusive ethos (Alborz et al, 2009). However, Webster et al, (2010) would argue that this statement is flawed, as they found TA involvement to have the opposite effect in terms of promoting inclusion.

Bach et al (2006) also infer that the role of the TA contributes to reducing the workload and stress of teachers; hence, they are seen as beneficent for teachers' working conditions, potentially minimising the importance of the role in its own right. This could create a mentality that TAs are there to assist other "professionals", creating and reinforcing a power dynamic within the school

system. This may be why some persistently refer to TAs as "paraprofessionals" (Webster et al, 2010; Webster et al, 2013). Fraser and Meadows (2008) note that children identified this power differential between the role of the TA and the teacher. Perhaps this suggests that, whilst their title indicates these duties, it reinforces such power dynamics and is not entirely reflective of the responsibilities that they are now charged with, having implications on their identity, including how they are viewed within the school system.

2.6.2 Pupil Engagement and Classroom Management

TAs support the teacher with pupil engagement in the classroom and in social situations as well as, "allowing teachers to engage pupils in more creative and practical activities and to spend more time working with small groups and individuals" (Alborz et al, 2009, pg. 1). Blatchford et al (2009) also outline the benefits of having a class based TA with regards to general classroom management by reinforcing how beneficial they are in supporting children's behaviours for learning, keeping them on task. Webster et al (2013) assert that teachers have better opportunities to deliver quality teaching when they have a TA present in the classroom, implying that behaviour management and general classroom support does have positive implications for both children and teachers. However, as Fletcher-Campbell (2010) queries, how vital is it that teaching is endorsed? Does this imply that *teaching* is linked to increased *learning* opportunities for children? Thus, are TAs indirectly promoting academic progress?

2.6.3 Voice of the Teacher

Bach et al (2006) found that, generally, teachers value TAs and feel that they assist in the delivery of quality teaching and learning, as they are available to help CYP by ensuring that they are all comfortable with their work, are following the lesson content, as well as supporting with behavioural concerns. These views corroborate statements made by Webster et al (2013) (in 2.6.2). Tucker (2009) also asserts that teachers reported that they felt that by having a TA, they gained more time for planning lessons and focussing on teaching, rather than spending time on other "non pedagogical tasks" (pg. 295) that could be delegated to others.

The opinions of teachers, within different settings vary widely. Particular variation was evident with regards to teachers' expectations of the TA, with some feeling that they should be more aware and in tune with regards to what they want them to do, as well as using their own initiative to support teaching and learning (Bach et al, 2006). Quite a balance to achieve. Some stated that they preferred TAs to view working relationships as a partnership rather than assisting them, solely working under direct instruction. However, TAs have been noted to be critical about changes and whilst their role has become more extensive, this has not been reflected in their pay (Russell et al, 2005). Perhaps this has implications on their views and subsequently their practice? In line with this, teacher expectations of the TA may require more consideration in terms of exploring how explicit these are and whether or not there are unrealistic expectancies, which are not outlined in their job descriptions (Butt and Lowe, 2012). Teachers also voiced their concerns about TAs being left in charge of classes, as they felt this undermined their education and post graduate qualifications, as well as heaping too much responsibility onto the TA who should not be required to undertake this work. They also reflected that TAs are not paid enough to undertake such duties (Bach et al, 2006), sharing TA views.

2.7 What are the Recommendations?

TAs are most effective when they are genuinely part of the school system, when they feel valued, when they are given voice and when they can work co-operatively with regards to how they feel they should and could support CYP (Collins and Simco, 2006). Generally, it is agreed that TAs are most effective when they have received appropriate training and are supported in delivering interventions to small groups or on a one to one basis; consistency with regards to implementation is key (Alborz et al, 2009; Farrell et al, 2010). "If TAs and HLTAs are to tap into that pedagogical understanding they need to be involved in the dialogue with the teachers in planning the lessons so that they are fully conversant with learning outcomes" (Attwood and Bland, 2011, pg. 83). They should also foster independence (Radford et al, 2015) and promote inclusion of children (Mansaray, 2006). TAs can promote an inclusive environment for children with learning disabilities when they have received appropriate training (Symes and Humphrey,

2011). The structure of the school day should facilitate collaborative working (Ofsted, 2012), such as identifying appropriate times to look through planning and evaluations to ensure effective team teaching, which elicits the best results (Wilson and Bedford, 2008).

Whilst this appears to set out what 'best practice' might look like, it is important to consider how this might be achieved.

2.7.1 Senior Leadership (SLT)

The attitudes of SLTs are instrumental in decisions around how the TA is deployed within the setting (Webster et al, 2013) and what expectations of them are. Those who value TA contributions, acknowledge their skills and have confidence in their work, use them more resourcefully (Balshaw, 2010). Shifting mind-sets from thinking of the role as solely supporting CYP with SEN to 'narrow the gap' between them and their peers, to viewing TAs as contributing to teaching and learning standards, more broadly, ensures that opportunities for TAs are maximised (Alborz et al, 2009). However, responsibility of line management of TAs is sometimes unclear and TAs themselves often do not know who their line managers are, creating dissociation for them, fostering a sense of "otherness" (Basford et al, 2017, pg.305). In the wake of the SEND reforms, SENCOs and teachers are named as having responsibility for the line management of TAs; however, teachers would like training on how to effectively manage TAs (Basford et al, 2017).

2.7.2 Working Collaboratively

In terms of implications for practice, if TAs have the opportunity to work collaboratively with teachers, jointly planning and preparing lessons, this positively affects the overall learning opportunities for all children (Wilson and Bedford, 2008). Ofsted (2012) also recommend that time is allocated for such collaboration, as well as TAs having time to plan and prepare themselves for their duties. It also reinforces and ensures that the class teacher has overall responsibility for all pupils rather than inappropriately transferring responsibility for those with SEN onto the TA (Mansaray, 2006). Webster et al (2013) also conclude that opportunities to prepare and feed back with the teacher results in

better quality of learning for children. Without such communication, TAs are likely to be left working with insufficient knowledge and understanding (Butt and Lance, 2005).

Whilst the evidence is clear, there are implications for this being achieved. Wilson and Bedford (2008) assert that the hierarchical nature of schools, as well as presumptions about the skills and quality of education of TAs, should not hinder them in their contributions. However, concerns have been raised with regards to the evolving role in terms of the number of duties and expectations that they are required to undertake (Butt and Lowe, 2012). This has led to the role and responsibilities of the TA being unclear (Butt and Lowe, 2012). Additionally, the views of teachers regarding TAs (presented in 2.6.3) might imply a sense of them being "subordinate" (Trent, 2014, pg. 30), reinforcing a power dynamic that cannot be dismissed when considering the feasibility of collaboration.

2.7.3 Clear Expectations

As discussed, the practice of TAs differs substantially depending on the setting, level of direction and attitudes of SLT in terms of shaping the role. Data gathered across two LAs illuminate this:

- 46% of TAs state they do whatever the teacher asks them.
- 40% undertake group work using teacher led activities.
- 7% provide one to one support.
- 7% undertake administrative tasks.
- 83% hold the view that they are still used to support low attaining pupils. (Basford et al, 2017)

This highlights the varied nature of the day to day tasks that TAs undertake, in different settings, further emphasising how misconceptions about the role can impact on how they are deployed and practice (Blatchford et al, 2011). Again, this reinforces the need to ascertain what TAs think their role does, and should, entail, in order to contribute their views in addressing these wider concerns.

2.7.4 Continued Professional Development (CPD)

Russell et al (2005) state that "a number of studies have identified difficulties concerning the boundaries between teaching and non-teaching roles and the existence of grey areas where there is uncertainty" (pg. 176). The role has definitely extended to having pedagogical responsibilities (Trent, 2014), which implies the need for appropriate training in itself. Additionally, Abbott et al (2011) also reinforce that TAs are now expected to support children with wide ranging SEN, that they should also be trained for, as well as having appropriate salary progression linked to these responsibilities. It is these expectations that Basford et al (2017) conclude has led to the confusion and the blurring of boundaries with regards to responsibilities. This uncertainty impacts on the perceptions of both teachers and TAs in terms of what can be and is expected of them. As a result of uncertainty around the skills required to undertake the role, there is a lack of quality training offered to TAs (Butt and Lowe, 2012). TAs should receive opportunities for CPD and be part of a shared vision, including how they feel they can develop their role (Balshaw, 2010). As TAs "spend more time working with students with special needs than teachers do" (Butt and Lowe, 2012, pg. 208), access to training seems imperative. This is especially important considering examples of research such as Wellington and Stackhouse's (2011), which highlights that teachers feel ill equipped to educate children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). We know that TAs are regularly asked to support children with SEN, further reinforcing the importance of appropriate training. Thus, it feels appropriate to conclude that, in light of the increased pedagogical responsibilities, "regular on going skills-based training would be desirable for all TAs to ensure they keep up to date with best practice methods for assisting students with special learning needs" (Butt and Lowe, 2012, pg. 215).

2.8 What About the Voice of TAs?

The voice of the TA is an important thread running through many of the strategies that are presented in Balshaw's (2010) work, whereas, others reporting disappointing findings appear to marginalise voice through their research (Webster et al, 2010; Webster et al, 2013). Mansaray (2006) also emphasises that

there are few studies focussing on the perceptions of TAs, concluding that, "TAs perspectives are absent from policy debate" (Mansaray, 2006, pg. 183) and that "an understanding of TAs perceptions and practices can enrich and unravel the multi-dimensional nature of inclusion and its ironic aspects" (Mansaray, 2006, pg. 184). Furthermore, Collins and Simco (2006) valued TA voice in terms of exploring their research questions, which were centred on reflective practice, clarity of the role, status within the school and collaborative working. Wilson and Bedford (2008) also highlight the necessity of capturing the voice of TAs in aiding researchers to begin to understand their views about the role. These studies further advocate the importance of capturing TA voice to establish and explore these key areas of interest. Whilst there have been some attempts to include TAs views in research, Basford et al (2017) state that the, "utility of exploring TA experiences has been underplayed" (pg. 295), further reinforcing the necessary contribution of this research in the literature.

2.9 Summary and Conclusions

"TAs have untapped potential" (Webster et al, 2013, pg. 80).

As presented, there is clear opinion within the literature of how TA support can and should be maximised, as well as how this support should look (Lorenz, 1998; Balshaw, 2010). Yet, the overall picture of TA effectiveness remains bleak. The reasons underpinning this have been presented and explored, with most of the literature focussing on the functional aspects of the role, TA performance and impact on pupil attainment (Basford et al, 2017). This research has not incorporated the voice of the TA and has not seen the benefits in doing so. Similarly, it has not explored their views regarding personal feelings, perceptions and TA self-efficacy. Those offering advice on how their effectiveness can be improved have sought to include TAs, to a degree (Balshaw, 2010) and have found the addition of their views to be useful. However, there is little focus on ascertaining holistic, subjective views of TAs with regards to their profession, to contribute to the literature. In times of austerity, the continued evolution of the role and lack of government guidance, understanding perceptions of their duties,

how they feel about them, as well as how they think they should practice seems pertinent.

2.10 Research Questions

Based on the conclusions from my literature, my desire was to capture the views of TAs with regards to their role. As such, the research questions for the current study were as follows:

1) How do Teaching Assistants (TAs) view their current role?
2) How would TAs prefer the role to look in the future?

    2b) What are the implications of these views for Educational Psychologists (EPs), who may work with school staff, with regards to effective classroom support?

My intention was to keep these questions as clear-cut as possible, as recommended by Watts and Stenner (2012). This is because participants will be required to independently access the Q sort through having a good understanding of the aims of the study, from the research questions. The questions should therefore, "avoid ambiguity and the inclusion of multiple propositions" (Watts and Stenner, 2012, pg. 53).

The purpose of the first research question was to explore TAs' understanding of their current role, as well as establishing how they feel in relation to their experiences and responsibilities that they are given. This is reinforced by the fact that there is uncertainty about TA expectations, embedded within the literature (Butt and Lowe, 2012). Ascertaining their current views allowed me to see if this is the case for these TAs. It also provided me with a foundation to learn more about my participants, before I asked them to consider the second research question, focussing on an ideal role. Having viewpoints related to both also allowed me to establish whether or not they perceive an ideal role as one that is different to their current interpretations of it.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter will outline the methodology selected to explore the views of TAs about their current and an ideal role. A discussion around the chosen methodology, Q methodology, will inform the reader of how this research methodology is undertaken. In order to achieve this, the structure of the chapter is as follows:

- An outline of my positionality with regards to the study, including a discussion of how this encouraged and impacted upon the choice of research topic.
- The philosophical position regarding ontological and epistemological assumptions, associated with the chosen methodology.
- An introduction to Q methodology incorporating its' origins and aims.
- Strengths and limitations of Q methodology.
- Summary.

3.2 Positionality

Before entering into a narrative about the chosen methodology, it is important to explicitly outline my position with regards to this study. It would be naïve not to disclose my previous professional experience, indicating how this could have affected the research. This is especially important for me as I often reflect on the impact that my previous experience has had on my thoughts, hypotheses and formulations, whilst practicing as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP).

3.2.1 Previous Experience

The main rationale for selecting this area of research has arisen from my previous experience of being a TA, as well as working alongside them for many years within both primary and secondary settings. Reflection on this experience has often focussed on observation and inference that TAs are often dictated to with regards to not only where they are deployed, but also how they should practice, from both class teachers and the SLT. I considered how, as at TA, I rarely felt able to share opinions about how best to support children I was tasked to work with and felt, at

the time, that these were missed opportunities to contribute. Similar practice was also observed in previous roles working alongside TAs. This was especially the case in secondary school, where they were very much micro-managed by the SENCO, yet also often challenged for not using their own initiative. Considering these reflections, coupled with the disquieting literature surrounding their effectiveness, this has driven my desire to centre my research on the role. This decision was also reinforced upon reading the documented increase in the number of TAs employed by schools to support children and young people, over the last 15 years (Tucker, 2009), as well as them being heavily relied upon (McVittie, 2005; Bignold and Barbara, 2012).

3.2.2 As a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP)

Throughout my placements, whilst training on the Educational Psychology (EP) course, SENCOs have been heard to suggest that children need additional funding through the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process, in order to secure them 'a body'. It appears that there is an assumption that the only way to progress learning, social understanding and emotional development is through the use of a TA. Thus, this promotes my view that it could be argued that TAs are thought of as a resource, rather than as professionals. TAs have been observed to consistently sit beside children, potentially in line with their perception of their duties, yet line managers often complain that the same children have no independence. Recent studies have confirmed that TAs sit beside children, inhibiting interactions between these children with their peers and class teacher (Webster and Blatchford, 2017). Consequently, these reflections also reinforced a desire to explore further what TAs understand the role to be and whether or not they have ideas about how they would prefer to practice.

To summarise, the rationale for this research stems from my own experiences of undertaking the role, reflections from working alongside and observing TAs, as well as knowledge gained through being a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), working with many SENCOs. Previous experience has been shared to ensure that I have been transparent about how choices made whilst undertaking this research might have been impacted upon by my views.

3.3 Introducing Q Methodology

As a result of the desire to capture the voice of the TA, in order to explore curiosity around the subjectivity of the role, a methodology was selected that would provide opportunities to gain further insight into feelings, views and opinions associated with it. Hence, Q methodology stood out to me as being the most appropriate method to use, in order to answer the research questions. Q methodology (the procedure of which will be discussed in depth later in the chapter) involves participants' engagement and consideration of items associated with a particular subject, or topic (Watts and Stenner, 2012). It can be used to, "ascertain perspectives, feelings, views, values, attitudes as well as exploring experiences, such as stress…." (Akhtar-Danesh, Baumann and Cordingley, 2008, pg. 759). As a result of its practicality and its complimentary use of statistical analysis, Q methodology is becoming more widely used in research (Akhtar-Danesh et al, 2008).

3.3.1 Subjectivity

Subjectivity is defined as, "the quality of being based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or, opinions; the quality of existing in someone's mind rather than the external world" (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/subjectivity). Akhtar-Danesh et al (2008) also describe their view of subjectivity as being, "judgement based on individual personal impressions, feelings and opinions, rather than external facts" (pg. 759). It is with regards to these definitions, and the understanding that subjectivity involves personal human constructions of the social world (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011), that I refer to when presenting the term 'subjectivity' within the current study, as this most appropriately represents my understanding of the term. These definitions are also in keeping within the context of Q methodology, in that such subjective viewpoints are "communicable" (McKeown and Thomas, 2013, pg. ix).

3.3.2 Origins of Q Methodology

Q methodology was introduced in 1935 by William Stephenson in a letter written for the journal *Nature* (Brown, 1991) and can be described as a discursive, constructivist methodology (Stenner, Watts and Worrell, 2008). Stephenson was

educated at the university of Durham before moving to London, initially studying with Charles Spearman, prior to becoming an assistant to Sir Cyril Burt (Brown, 1991). It was during his time in London that Stephenson worked on factor analysis with Spearman, setting out to create a methodology, which would allow for factor analysis to be used in an inductive approach, rather than the traditional deductive way that had it had been used historically (Angelopulo, 2009).

3.3.3 Aims of Q Research

As discussed, Q methodology enables researchers to elicit the subjective viewpoints of participants, in a systematic way (Watts and Stenner, 2012). This is based on the premise that subjectivity is communicable, meaning that viewpoints can be shared with others (McKeown and Thomas, 2013). Q methodology has been used to study a range of topics within a broad range of professions and schools of study, such as health (Akhtar-Danesh et al, 2008; Farrimond, Joffe and Stenner, 2010), geographical research (Wright, 2013) and parenting (Butler-Coyne, Hare, Walker, Wieck and Wittkowski, 2017). However, it is mainly used within psychology (Danielson, Webler and Tuler, 2010), increasingly within the school of Educational Psychology (Massey, 2010; Hughes, 2016).

As discussed, Q methodology seeks to explore and capture a range of viewpoints about a topic, providing participants with an opportunity to express their personal opinions about it, without being influenced by the researcher (Dziopa and Ahern, 2011). In his paper, written in 1993, Stephenson describes Q methodology as, "recognising, for the first time in history, the fundamental significance of this self-referential proliferation" (pg. 5). Thus, being a methodology, which identifies and highlights a range of viewpoints, related to a certain subject (Stenner et al, 2008). It is the views that participants hold about a subject which are of importance to the Q researcher (Wright, 2013).

As subjectivity is, "a person's communication of a point of view on any matter of personal or social importance (McKeown and Thomas, 2013, pg. ix)" it could be argued that Q methodology fits within the qualitative research paradigm. However, others argue that the combination of studying subjectivity through the

use of statistical data analysis render it a mixed-methods design (Ramlo, 2016). As a result of this, researchers are often careful in explaining their view regarding whether or not they believe Q to be quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods, as there are evidently arguments for each (Ramlo and Newman, 2011). Some find the term qualiquantology to be helpful (Ramlo, 2016), as this differs somewhat to describing Q as mixed methods in that it acknowledges that Q methodology is far more unique than a simple blend of qualitative and quantitative designs (Stenner and Stainton-Rogers, 2004). Rather, Q allows us to amplify the subjective nature of data, by quantifying qualitative information (Stenner, 2011). Thus, factor analysis helps the researcher to organise human experience. Regardless of this paradigmatic debate, it is my philosophical view that there exists a real world, as well as one that is constructed through human perception (subjectivity), which Q seeks to explore (Ramlo and Newman, 2011). In light of this brief presentation of the philosophies underpinning Q, my viewpoint, with regards to the ontological and epistemological position of the current study, is now presented.

3.4 Ontology and Epistemology

Prior to presenting my ontological and epistemological position, a definition of each is described to serve the purpose of outlining my understanding of these terms.

Ontology refers to the, "assumptions about the nature of reality" (Cohen et al, 2011, pg. 3). Thus, what can we know? What is in existence? (Thomas, 2009)

Epistemology is concerned with, "ways of researching and enquiring into the nature of reality and nature of things" (Cohen et al, 2011, pg. 3). So, how can we know? Do different kinds of knowledge exist? How can we go about uncovering knowledge? (Thomas, 2009).

3.4.1 Philosophical Position

The philosophical position of the current research is that of ontological Critical Realism with epistemic relativism. Critical Realist ontology elucidates that our experiences are impacted upon by mechanisms and structures that underlies

them, such as economic and social structures (Willig, 1999). Epistemic relativism describes how, "the same object may be known under a number of different descriptions" (Scott, 2010, pg. 44), meaning that our constructions of knowledge and perceptions about it are affected by and are "socially constructed through discourse" (Burr, 2015, pg. 113). I will now go on to discuss each of these further to explain my understanding of these philosophical positions before outlining how they relate to my research.

3.4.1.1 Critical Realism

Critical Realism, being a blend of both positivism and relativism (Easton, 2010), emerged in the late 1970s through the work of Roy Bhaskar (Fletcher, 2017), addressing naiveties associated with pure positivism and pure relativism (Fletcher, 2017). Simplicities associated with pure realism centre around the belief that the 'truth' can always be accessed; that is, that everything is causal (Sayer, 2000). Similarly, naiveties have been identified with regards to pure relativism, as this asserts that knowledge is infallible, as it is personally constructed. Critical Realism addresses these limitations through an alternative ontological position.

3.4.1.2 Critical Realist Assumptions

Scott (2010) describes Critical Realism as incorporating the ontological realist view that 'real' objects exist regardless of whether or not knowledge can ever be constructed about them. Whilst this ontological description enables us to consider what one might know, Critical Realism also incorporates a relativist epistemology, which acknowledges fallible knowledge constructions and descriptions of such realities (Scott, 2010). Thus, Critical Realist researchers acknowledge constructionism when describing how explanations of knowledge might exist. Zachariadis, Scott and Barrett (2013) also share this view by stating that interpretation is necessary when attempting to understand phenomena within the empirical world. However, they note that Critical Realism does not dismiss causality, as constructionists do, stating that social, causal structures remain.

3.4.1.3 Critical Realist Ontology

Bhaskar states that Critical Realism has a transcendental realist ontology (Collier, 1994), which incorporates three specific layers (Fletcher, 2017). These three layers are labelled as empirical, actual and real. The following information is presented in figure one below:

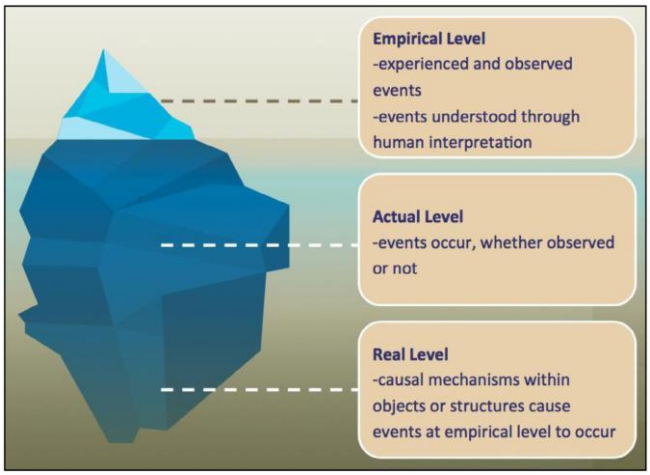

Figure One (Fletcher, 2017).

Using the metaphor of an iceberg to explain the stratified ontology, the 'empirical' level is that, which can begin to be understood and experienced, through subjective interpretation. The 'actual' level implies that *some* events, which occur, may not ever be observed, but still exist and impact on the phenomena in the empirical level (Fletcher, 2017). Finally, the 'real' level involves events that may not be capable of being observed (Easton, 2010). Reinforcing this point, Zachariadis et al (2013) state the 'real' level, "includes objects and structures with inherent causal powers and liabilities, which result in mechanisms that may not be visible" (pg. 857).

To summarise, Critical Realism assumes that humans cannot claim to have an objective or definite knowledge of the social world. Various, and valid, accounts may exist to explain this knowledge, which should be accepted (Maxwell, 2012). Whilst interpretation is accepted by Critical Realists, it is important to note that the assumption of causality remains. Causality exists separate from discourse (Burr, 2015 citing Parker, 1992). Thus, mechanisms, that cannot be observed, impact on human perceptions, observations and knowledge construction within

the empirical level. This philosophical position fits well with the current study, as I wanted to elicit how TAs have come to subjectively construct knowledge of the role, impacting on their views about it.

3.4.2 Epistemic Relativism

As presented, the epistemological position of this research is that of relativism, as introduced previously within the dialogue of Critical Realist ontology. Here, an account of relativism is presented, as the espoused theoretical position associated with this research.

'Extreme relativism' imparts that no external reality exists outside of human knowledge (Robson, 2002). It is important to note that this is not my assumption in presenting relativism here. The following information is presented as a means of explaining the Critical Realist view that 'reality' is constructed subjectively, as a result of social discourse and 'practices', which affect the construction of knowledge (Al-Amoudi and Willmott, 2011). As Harré (2009) states, if one is referring to something that is material then that presupposes ontology. Thus, I am not presenting a dichotomous philosophical position, as there is an acknowledgement that the focus of the current research is around the existence of a 'real' role (involving mechanisms and structures), which has a causal impact on what can be accessed and known, with regards to subjective views, feelings and perceptions associated with it.

I present here that humans make sense of their world, as a result of constructions that they make between themselves (Burr, 2015). Views surrounding a chosen topic of interest are created due to, "daily interactions of people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated" (Burr, 2015, pg. 4).

The following statements are widely accepted when considering relativism:

- Humans are located in society
- Humans are part of social groups and systems
- Language and discourse have influence
- Research undertaken within this paradigm should seek to promote social change and challenge dominance.

(Gough and McFadden, 2001)

These assumptions are accepted and are deemed appropriate for the current research, as they fit with the overarching aims of seeking views of, and promoting voice amongst, a particular group of people, who may or may not be marginalised.

3.5 Overview of a Q Methodological Study

The following section outlines the rationale for selecting Q methodology, bridging together the information shared with regards to its origins along with my philosophical view. Here, I aim to present what a Q study looks like, explaining each of the stages undertaken in this specific methodology. This is especially significant in ensuring the reader has clarity around my understanding of Q, as it is sometimes used eclectically and incoherently, neglecting the fundamental principles of the methodology (Dziopa and Ahern, 2011).

3.5.1 Why Q Methodology?

As expressed, the aims of Q research involve the elicitation of a variety of subjective perceptions of the world, from a point of self-reference (McKeown and Thomas, 2013). Participants' views are subjective as they represent their feelings and opinions with regards to a topic of interest (Akhtar-Danesh et al, 2008). It is these self–referential perceptions that I sought to obtain rather than 'objective' facts (Stephenson, 1980). Thus, seeking subjective voice, about a specific 'real' role, as shaped and constructed through experience and language.

To recapitulate, the aims of the current research were to gain the viewpoints of TAs with regards to their current and a prospective role, before considering the influence of this information for the EP profession. In order to answer the

research questions, I anticipated the potential for a range of common viewpoints to arise, through seeking views of those with knowledge around the chosen subject, who undertake the role. Q methodology allows for researchers to systematically compare views, in order to gain an understanding of the common ways in which a topic of interest can be, and is, understood (McKeown and Thomas, 2013).

Thus, I was interested in the communality of viewpoints, from those who experience this work, all of whom have involvement undertaking the role of the TA, in order to better understand their knowledge of it.

"Not looking for a stick in the mud but the blossom
that grows on a cherry tree – the subjective spread"
(Stephenson, 1993).

3.5.2 Undertaking Q Methodological Research

Appropriate use of Q methodology involves the completion of a sequence of stages (McKeown and Thomas, 2013). Each of the key stages, associated with undertaking this research methodology, is outlined, including a subsequent discussion of the activities related to each of them. These key stages are as follows:

***Stage one**:* Identify the concourse

Stage two: Create the Q sample

Stage three: Select research participants (P set)

Stage four: Collect data through Q sorting

Stage five: Enter data

Stage six: Analyse data

Stage seven: Interpret factors.

(Akhtar-Danesh et al, 2008)

3.5.2.1 *Stage One*: Identify the Concourse

The initial stage, when undertaking Q methodology, is to identify what is known as the concourse; the concourse being the name associated with the broad range of views that might exist regarding a chosen topic (Angelopulo, 2009). Thus, the concourse becomes the "raw material for Q studies by supplying the 'self-referent' notions informing the methodology's perspective on subjectivity" (McKeown and Thomas, 2013, pg. 3). Understanding the wide range of views, regarding a chosen subject is essential before these can be refined to the final Q set; that is, the final items for participants to sort (Dziopa and Ahern, 2011).

In order to develop the concourse, the Q researcher could employ a variety of means of acquiring information and viewpoints. Such methods might include; conducting focus groups, holding individual interviews, consulting literature, referring to transcripts of first hand accounts regarding a debate or phenomena, as well as looking towards media portrayals of the chosen topic (McParland, Hezseltine, Serpell, Eccleston and Stenner, 2011).

3.5.2.2 *Stage Two*: Create the Q Sample

Once the concourse has been established, the researcher must then undertake a process of refining this down to a final set of items that are reflective of an array of views (McKeown and Thomas, 2013). Items can be presented as statements, pictures, photographs, smells, posters, music and advertisements, to name a few (McKeown and Thomas, 2013). Hughes (2016) suggests that 40 to 60 statements are manageable; Danielson et al (2010) recommends that there should be three to five statements per participant, as a guide. As Watts and Stenner (2012) point out, there is no right or wrong way of undertaking this task. However, the final Q set must, "be tailored to the requirements of the investigation and to the demands of the research question it is seeking to answer" (Watts and Stenner, 2012, pg. 57). As Cohen et al (2011) state, "a pilot is needed to ensure that the categories are comprehensive, exhaustive and representative" (pg. 384). Angelopulo (2009) also recommends using "theoretical modelling" (pg. 24) to ensure that all theoretical categories are covered by the Q set. This involves categorising items into relevant themes, in order to further check that a divergence of viewpoints is incorporated

for each one. Stenner et al (2008) also discuss how items for the Q set can be theoretically guided when themes are derived from the literature to help hone the concourse. Therefore, as participants are asked to sort and rank the Q set according to their views, the final Q set must be representative of a wide range of viewpoints (Stenner and Marshall, 1995). This also reduces the possibility of the participants' views not being fully included by the Q set, inhibiting subjective responses (Watts and Stenner, 2012).

3.5.2.3 *Stage Three*: Select Research Participants (P set)

The P set is the name given to the group of participants undertaking the study (Wright, 2013). When recruiting participants, the researcher should not undertake a random sample, as those who undertake the study should be relevant to the research topic (McKeown and Thomas, 2013). Rather, strategic sampling techniques should be used to target specific groups, who may have experience of, be linked to, or have knowledge of the chosen issue (Watts and Stenner, 2012). Ultimately, the final P set should be representative of a large demographic of participants, who are able to subjectively respond to, and consider, the Q set, providing relevant viewpoints associated with the chosen area of research (Watts and Stenner, 2012).

3.5.2.4 *Stage Four*: Collect Data through Q Sorting

Participants are provided with a set of statements (Q set) pertaining to a particular topic, issue or phenomenon that is being studied (Stenner and Marshall, 1995). As well as this, participants are handed a condition of instruction, which clearly highlights the research question, as well as instructions of how to undertake the sorting of the Q set (McKeown and Thomas, 2013). Participants are also given a forced choice frequency grid or have opportunity for free distribution (Watts and Stenner, 2012). A forced choice distribution grid explicitly states how many items should be ranked under a specific value, whereas a free distribution grid allows the participants to rank as many items as they like under each one (Watts and Stenner, 2012). Whichever option the researcher selects, participants are still asked to rank statements, usually from most agree to most disagree, in relation to one another (Stenner and Marshall, 1995).

Once participants have the necessary resources they can then begin to consider the items and sort them with regards to how they each value their significance, in relation to one another, according to their inferences of the items presented (Angelopulo, 2009). This is called the Q sort (Ramlo, 2015), which allows for an understanding of, "how their experiences, social meaning, ideas and decisions made can have causal impacts" on their ranking of the statements (Fletcher, 2017, pg. 185). This is based on the premise that, "items arranged into a configuration (Q sort) that, taken as gestalt, reflects a relevant subjective dimension (eg. personal degree of agreement with them)" (Stenner et al, 2008, pg 216). Participants are asked to rank statements according to the criteria, usually on a dimension, such as from most agree to most disagree, recording their responses onto the distribution grid (Ramlo, 2015). Following the completion of the Q sorts, participants typically participate in a post sort interview. This provides them with an opportunity to expand on why they sorted the statements as they did, if they wish to share. It also provides an opportunity to voice any views they feel were not incorporated within the Q set (Burke, 2015).

3.5.2.5 *Stage Five*: Enter Data

In order to undertake the data analysis, the researcher usually uses a computer package; typically used software includes PQMethod (Schmolk, 2002) or PCQ for Windows (Ramlo, 2015). Alternative software packages that are available (such as SPSS) do not provide the researcher with opportunities to perform the necessary analysis to provide factor extraction and rotation (Ramlo, 2015). Thus the software package chosen must allow for identification of factors and then provide an opportunity to explore these further using factor rotation functions (Watts and Stenner, 2012).

3.5.2.6 *Stage Six:* Analyse Data

Once the data has been entered into the chosen computer package, the software analyses the data completing factor extractions and then offering opportunities for manual rotation. Factor analysis seeks to find patterns of how participants sorted the statements in the Q set (Danielson et al, 2010). The function of factor analysis also highlights how participant responses correlate across the sample of

statements. This is done through a by-person factor analysis (Farrimond et al, 2010). A Principle Component Analysis (PCA) allows for components to be identified solely through mathematical and statistical means (Wright, 2013) that the researcher should accept. This differs from 'R' studies as 'R' studies aim to correlate statements across a sample of participants (Danielson et al, 2010), which are based on individual differences, whereas Q seeks to explore, "the saliency of feelings and beliefs" (Stephenson, 1980, pg. 882). A Centroid Factor Analysis (CFA) will analyse the Q sorts and allow for rotation of factors on a theoretical basis. It also allows the researcher to study output, allowing for additional rotations to deliver the 'best solution' (Watts and Stenner, 2012, pg. 99). Rotation can be achieved using a varimax rotation or manual hand rotation. A varimax rotation is used when the researcher has no theoretical presuppositions and is seeking the best mathematical fit. Thus, seeking to ensure that each Q sort has a high factor loading onto at least one factor (Watts and Stenner, 2012). A manual hand rotation allows the researcher to manipulate the output based around themes (Ramlo, 2015).

3.5.2.7 *Stage Seven:* Interpret Factors

This stage allows for a description of the viewpoints elicited from the data analysis, which is related to qualitative research (Ramlo and Newman, 2011). Each of the factors is presented as a qualitative narrative, portraying the statements, which are reflective of the viewpoint elicited (Wright, 2013).

3.6 Strengths and Limitations of Q

As with any research methodology, there are associated strengths and limitations. However, it is vital that the chosen methodology is suitable in that it is able to produce data that will answer the research questions, allow access to necessary participants and is fit for purpose (Cohen et al, 2011). Here, I present some of the strengths and limitations associated with Q, in order to demonstrate how I considered the appropriateness of this methodology for the current study. These points are not exhaustive and are included here to further reinforce the appropriateness of the chosen methodology.

3.6.1 Strengths of Q Methodology

McKeown and Thomas (2013) state that one of the strengths associated with Q methodology is with regards to the pragmatics of undertaking a Q study. A Q methodological study follows a clear process, which can permit researchers to explore complex situations and contentious topics of interest in a structured way (Plummer, 2012) providing, "a systematic means to examining human subjectivity" (McKeown and Thomas, 2013, pg. 5). Thus, Q methodology allows participants to share and express their views about the researcher's topic of interest without, "researcher interference" (Danielson et al, 2010, pg. 94), meaning that the data can also be completed remotely, further promoting practicality. This was especially important to me given my previous experiences of being a TA, resulting in personal views and beliefs about the role.

Q research is democratic as all participants are able to individually express their views, making this a 'respectful' process (Hughes, 2016). Consequently, if a topic of interest is being researched amongst a group where there may be dominant voices, this barrier is eliminated, as responses are individual and private (Danielson et al, 2010). Depending on the analysis selected and aims of the researcher, minority voices can be captured (Plummer, 2012). Participant feedback also indicates a positive response to using Q methodology, as it allows for different perspectives to be understood before analysing these for shared views (Danielson et al, 2010). Thus, the researcher can gain, "socially shared accounts" (Farrimond et al, 2010, pg. 979) from the emergence of multiple viewpoints, which can highlight less dominant views within a culture (Farrimond et al, 2010).

As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) note, with regards to questionnaires, "there is often an assumption that respondents will have the information or have an opinion about the matters in which researchers are interested" (pg. 383). Q methodology acknowledges this assumption, allowing participants to express whether or not statements have any significance for them, in relation to one another, providing space to sort them neutrally if they do not.

With regards to participant access, Q methodology can be used flexibly so that any complications concerning participation can be acknowledged, addressed and potentially eliminated. The cards that are used in the Q sort can be presented in a variety of ways, including single words, statements, phrases or pictures (Hughes, 2016). This means that there can be less reliance on language, enabling participants with language difficulties to also take part (Hughes, 2016).

3.6.2 Limitations of Q Methodology

An acknowledgement of some the limitations surrounding Q methodology are discussed here to highlight the recognition of potential barriers, which could impact research grounded in this methodology.

It should be acknowledged that the identification of factors (viewpoints) is limited to participant responses to the Q set provided. Additional potential viewpoints, which might exist about a topic, could be excluded if the P set does not hold or represent the full range of views associated with it. Hence, social perspectives may not be fully acknowledged (Danielson et al, 2010). However, the statements should be entirely representative of the population domain (Watts and Stenner, 2012) and a process of strategic selection, of the final Q set, should counter this by ensuring that they "come very close to capturing the full gamut of possible opinion and perspective" (Watts and Stenner, 2012, pg. 58).

Additionally, viewpoints elicited from the study can only be attributed to the sample of participants involved in the study and cannot be generalised (Wright, 2013), as they are only representative of the context in which they were generated (Butler-Coyne et al, 2017). However, Q methodology does not seek to create generalisable results to populations. It strives to explore the varied viewpoints of a group of participants, which it does, making it a valid methodology, in this respect (Watts and Stenner, 2012).

Participant responses are subject to participant bias; this means that responses may be representative of what participants perceive to be culturally and socially acceptable rather than being reflective of individual subjective views (Butler-

Coyne et al, 2017). Measures can be taken to counteract this somewhat through consideration as to how participants access the Q sort. A code can be given to each participant so that their responses remain anonymous and viewpoints are presented as factors, without acknowledging who sorted the items in a particular way (Watts and Stenner, 2012). Ethical considerations can also address this (ethics is discussed further, with regards to the current study, in the procedures chapter).

As discussed, undertaking Q methodology incorporates two main stages with the first being the process of the P set completing the Q sort and the second being the by-person factor analysis of the data (Stenner and Marshall, 1995). Whilst the first stage takes time and consideration, Danielson et al (2010) note the potential difficulties associated with the analysis. They state their view that skilled researchers need to undertake the analysis (Danielson et al, 2010), suggesting that the use of Q methodology should be limited to those who are able to use the software. However, Watts and Stenner (2012), amongst others, have provided step by step instructions of how to undertake this analysis, coupled with theoretical premises for each stage, to further aid researchers in using Q methodology, making it more accessible.

3.7 Rejected Approaches

Reminder of the research questions:

1) How do Teaching Assistants (TAs) view their current role?
2) How would TAs prefer the role to look in the future?

2b) What are the implications of these views for Educational Psychologists (EPs), who may work with school staff, with regards to effective classroom support?

Once I had settled on the area of interest for this study, the research questions were subsequently considered and refined. Following this process, I had to contemplate how these could best be answered, taking into account my philosophical position. Questions I asked myself included:

- How could I achieve my aims?
- How will the findings be used?

- What is my worldview with regards to ontology and epistemology and how might my chosen methodology fit with these?
- What methodology is fit for purpose?
- What sort of research study would I like to conduct?

Identification of the chosen methodology affects the method actively used to gather the data (Thomas, 2009). Therefore, I spent time critically considering the research approach; in doing so, the following methodologies were identified before eventually being rejected:

- Narrative
- IPA
- Thematic Analysis

In selecting Q Methodology, I returned to my view that the topic and role of the TA is complex and one that, according to the literature, is not always clearly understood. I also wanted to engage participants in considering their personal feelings associated with it and thought that a methodology that would allow participants to express their own views was most important. As Q is "a vehicle for the controlled expression of subjectivity" (Stenner et al, 2008, pg. 218) and allows for individual responses to be analysed, portraying common viewpoints, I felt this best fit the aims of my study.

3.8 Summary

Throughout TEP training, TA practice has been observed in both primary and secondary settings, encouraging a critical consideration of the impact that they have on the learning, as well as the social and emotional development of children. Being a reflective practitioner, I also regularly thought about how I might have undertaken the role in similar circumstances and attempted to draw on such insight, in order to inform advice, guidance and decision-making at such times. My conclusions have always returned to questioning whether or not the TA fully understands the role, whether or not they have the resources and knowledge to support CYP, as well as whether or not they have had any input into the way they work. The successes of any recommendations that professionals make centre on the quality of their implementation, by all staff, inclusive of TAs. Hence, having

more clarity on the subjectivity associated with the role, as well as insight into the decisions that TAs make whilst they practice, for me, have absolute relevance in the current climate. These points personally highlight the relevance and importance of this study in contributing to the literature on TAs.

Q methodology was deemed the most appropriate choice as I was interested in exploring multiple viewpoints regarding the role of TAs. As alluded to in the previous chapter, TAs' voices are marginalised in the literature; it is noted that Q methodology is especially useful when the researcher is concerned about gaining the views of marginalised groups (Hughes, 2016). Q Methodology also enables researchers to systematically study human subjectivity, in a respectful (Hughes, 2016) and pragmatic way (Plummer, 2012), which is theoretically coherent with my philosophical view.

The application of Q methodology, to the current study, will now be discussed in the following chapter. This explicitly outlines the procedure and the way in which each of the stages, involved in Q methodological research, were applied, in order to answer the research questions.

Q methodology: "For what is behind the eyes, as well as before them" (Stephenson, 1993, pg.3).

Chapter Four

Procedure

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the procedure for gaining the data for the study. The purpose for outlining the method is to provide clarity, enabling readers interested in this area to replicate the study should they wish. Key dates and stages of the research methodology are explained as well as personal decisions made at each phase.

4.2 Preparation for My Q Study

4.2.1 Preparation

Before any data collection takes place in a Q study, time and detail should be afforded in the preparation stages. The items that participants are given to sort should require consideration and should be relevant to the topic of study (Rattray and Jones, 2007). Statements were used in my study so I will use this term hereafter. The processes involved in preparing for this research are outlined here to indicate the work undertaken to achieve the data collection.

4.2.1.1 Timeline

Dates	Activity
September 2016 - November 2016	Literature review – what was this telling me regarding the current picture of TAs?
December 2016	Identification of themes, voices, stories and information regarding practice emerging from the literature.
December 2016- January 2017	Construction of the concourse from the literature – statements drafted.
February 2017	Ran a focus group with TAs in a primary school to elicit their views with regards to the role.
March 2017 – April 2017	Added information from the focus group to the concourse – additional statements created.
May 2017	Refined Q set into themes to ensure a range of views were covered and to identify any duplications – sorted statements according to their themes (see appendix C).
June 2017	Carried out the pilot study in a primary school and took feedback regarding the process, space needed, the statements, time given to complete the Q sorts and the post sort questions.

4.2.1.2 Creating the Q Set

The Q set statements were generated from a range of sources. These were as follows:

1. *Literature*
2. *TA focus group*

In consideration of my closeness to the research, due to my previous experiences, I wanted to ensure that the statements were, "comprehensive in their representation of the subject phenomena" (McKeown and Thomas, 2013, pg. 18) and not solely an exemplification of my inferences of the role. Therefore, a range of statements were generated and presented regardless of whether or not they were coherent with my own thoughts and opinions. I was conscious of not prioritising my own self-referent views, constructed by own personal experience, when producing the statements. This led me to arrange a TA supervision session, run as a focus group, to contribute to the statements generated from the literature. I was also aware that practice is likely to have moved on since my own personal experience of being a TA, so my reflections of the role that I undertook may now be less valid. Thus, I decided to complete the ideal Q sort myself, in order to further understand how my views might relate to those of the participants. This was not included in the analysis; rather, it was completed to ensure further reflexivity and is included in the appendices (see appendix N).

4.2.1.3 Focus Group

The focus group commenced in a primary school in the north east of the LA. TAs came to the session prepared to discuss their views about their role. Interestingly, some of these TAs were much more vocal, perhaps because they individually felt confident enough to speak out or because they knew that their comments would not be formally presented and in the main, could 'stay within those four walls'. What was useful was listening to their conversations, noting what they felt their strengths were, listening to how they constructed their understanding of their roles and how these related to the views of others. Some queried others' perceptions of their duties and shared that they had different experiences working in different classes. Some of the comments that they made encouraged me to consider statements that I had not included into the concourse, specifically around

preparedness and readiness for the role. Some TAs talked about the curriculum moving on and said that they had not refreshed subject knowledge to help them support children. When asked what they meant by this, they gave examples of mathematical processes being different now than what they had learned when they were in school. Some said that they were effectively learning these with the children as they supported them because they had not had time prior to the lesson to understand the tasks, often because they were dealing with behavioural incidents or preparing resources for the teacher.

I also noted that some of the TAs did not have space to speak and offer their views, due to dominant voices, and this also reinforced the value in using a method that would allow and permit all voices and views to be expressed.

4.2.1.4 Refining the Concourse

As Q sets should be "comprehensive in their representation of human phenomena and viewpoints possibly implicated" (McKeown and Thomas, 2013, pg. 18), it was important for me to find a way of refining the concourse to ensure that I had achieved this as much as possible. With this in mind, I decided to group them together into themes. This allowed me to see if I had any duplications, if any could be merged and if any were missing (see appendix C). Whilst honing the concourse to create my final Q set, I was mindful of the number of items and tried to ensure that I had covered as much as possible without over facing the participants with statements. The final Q set was made up of 64 statements related to the role.

4.3 Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study in order to test out the statements included within the Q set. I asked a small group of TAs to answer the two research questions, using the statements. This allowed me to ensure that they were clear, did not contain double negatives and were inclusive of the broad spectrum of views. This is a similar process to the construction of multiple-choice questionnaires. As Cohen et al (2011) state, "a pilot is needed to ensure that the categories are comprehensive, exhaustive and representative" (pg. 384). The TAs in the pilot study were asked if they felt that there were particular statements missing, which were then to be

considered for the official data collection. It was also important that the concepts underpinning the statements and the language used were carefully considered when constructing them (Cohen et al, 2011). The pilot study provided an opportunity to ensure that the statements were clear and accessible to participants, in order for them to sort the items appropriately, according to their views.

4.3.1 The Participants

Following a discussion with a number of SENCOs, three TAs working with a local primary school volunteered to participate in the pilot study. The school's SENCO was also interested in the TAs taking part in the study and particularly liked the idea of the TAs contributing to ideas about the process and statements, as she looks to collaborate with staff with regards to their roles and sees this as being important within her school.

4.3.2 What Did I Learn?

The TAs taking part in the pilot study showed interest in the research and volunteered to participate. They were given the information sheet to read and completed the Q sorts, as I had planned, so that I could gauge the time taken to complete both. The TAs discussed their thoughts about the statements as they completed the Q sorts and were also asked about the process afterwards. Some points from the discussion, which I took note of, included:

- *The condition of instruction needed to be clearer for the second Q sort (ideal role)*

TAs said that they had to keep reminding themselves that they were thinking ahead to the future. For example, statements such as, 'I have opportunity to feedback to teachers' is straightforward when thinking about the current role. However, when thinking about an ideal role, they consistently looked for reassurance that the statements were representative of what they think *should* happen. Thus, I changed the condition of instruction from 'when I consider an ideal TA role, I think of it as one where…..' to… 'when I consider an ideal TA role, I

think of it as one where I should…..' They said that this made their consideration of the statements much easier.

- *Some TAs are hired to specifically support children on a one to one basis*

They reminded me that not all TAs are hired for the same purposes. Of the three in the pilot study, one said she was hired as a one to one, another as general classroom support and the third was an SEN TA. I was aware that the role would be different depending on the school, the level of need within the school, as well as how different schools feel it best to deploy support staff. This reinforced the idea that statements needed to encapsulate the wide range of duties, as I had anticipated from the literature. For example, including specific statements, such as with regards to supporting children with SEN, to incorporate the varied responsibilities.

- *Environmental considerations*

As Q methodology requires participants to consider a range of statements in relation to each other, it is also important to consider the environment within which the data collection takes place. Participants should have sufficient space to spread the cards out and have room to lay their markers (+5 to -5) so that they can place the items according to the frequency diagram (McKeown and Thomas, 2013). This became apparent in the pilot study as the staff room was used for convenience in the school, yet this was not comfortable for the TAs. Therefore, when I liaised with SENCOs regarding the data collection, I requested classrooms or spaces where the TAs could sit comfortably.

4.3.3 Considerations Regarding the Q Set

Some of the statements contained double negatives that I had missed when I reviewed and refined the concourse. The suggestions that the TAs made were as follows:

Item 29 - this was changed from 'I do not work directly with children' to 'I work directly with children'. The TAs said the initial wording was confusing so recommended I changed it to the latter.

Item 8 – 'I support children with additional needs' was changed to 'I support children with special educational needs'. When listening to the TAs, as they discussed this statement, they thought it should be explicitly clear that I meant SEN opposed to 'additional needs'. The rationale was that some staff are recruited specifically to work with children with SEN, whereas 'additional' could mean any child needing support beyond quality first teaching, as discussed in 4.3.2. The subjectivity associated with the term 'additional needs' was considered to be an issue for the TAs in the pilot study.

4.4 Participant Information

4.4.1 Recruitment

The EPs working within the LA, where I am on placement, contacted their SENCOs with regards to my study, sending on the information sheet (see appendix A) to help them understand the aims and purpose of it. I also spoke to the SENCOs in my schools, who all showed interest. However, when I explained the process, some felt that they would not be able to release their TAs for one hour to participate, even when alternative options were offered about how this could be achieved. Of those who were interested, the SENCOs contacted me directly to arrange dates and times for data collection. In total, 38 TAs participated in the study; eleven worked in a primary school and the remaining 27 in secondary schools.

4.4.2 Information Provided to the Participants

All schools were sent an information sheet, along with a consent form, with the original email sent by the EPs. The information sheet and consent form are included as appendices (appendix A and appendix B respectively).

4.4.3 Ethical Considerations

Prior to agreeing to take part, participants were given the information sheet, which outlined my research, my rationale for it and how they would be participating. On the day of the data collection, I offered the opportunity to ask any questions, to withdraw at the beginning and reminded them of the right to withdraw throughout. Some TAs wanted to know more about the data and I was able to show them some output from another Q study I had been involved in. Seeing this

numerical output, including participant codes as identifiers, rather than names, reassured them, as did my explanation that factors (viewpoints) would be generated from the total P set. Participants signed a consent sheet (see appendix B) and were reminded that they could request to remove their data up until 1st October 2017.

4.4.4 The P Set

The P set consisted of 38 TAs working in one primary and three secondary schools within one LA. Information regarding the schools is presented below:

Table 4.1 School Demographics

School Code	Area of the Local Authority	Number of Pupils on Role	SEN Information
P	South East	436	Proportion of children with SEN is in line with national average.
S1	North East	551	Proportion of children with SEN is below average.
S2	South East	1543 (241 on role in 6th form)	Proportion of children with SEN is above the national average.
S3	Central	735	Proportion of children with SEN is in line with national average.

As discussed, TAs involved in the pilot study reinforced that roles can differ depending on whether or not they are specifically employed to work with children with SEN. To reflect this (as previously conveyed in 4.3.3), the original statement, which included the term 'additional needs', was changed to 'SEN'. Following analysis, item 8 (I support children with special educational needs) was found to be a distinguishing statement between the two current factors, providing me with further information about the present roles of the P set, with regards to whom they support. This information is presented in Table 4.2, highlighting which TAs work with children with SEN (S), those who do not (N) and those not distinguishing between factors (ND), implying that their role is not as defined, as they significantly loaded onto both factors.

Table 4.2 P Set Information

Participant Code	SEN support (S), non SEN support (N) or not distinguished (ND)
TAFP1C1	S
TAFP1C2	ND
TAFP1C3	N
TAFP1C4	S
TAFP1C5	ND
TAFP1C6	S
TAFP1C7	S
TAFP1C8	ND
TAFP1C9	N
TAFP1C10	N
TAFP1C11	N
TAFS2C1	S
TAFS2C2	S
TAFS2C3	S
TAFS2C4	S
TAFS2C5	S
TAFS3C1	ND
TAMS3C2	S
TAFS3C3	S
TAFS3C4	S
TAFS3C5	N
TAFS3C6	N
TAFS3C7	S
TAFS3C8	S
TAFS3C9	S
TAFS3C10	S
TAFS3C11	S
TAFS3C12	S
TAFS3C13	ND
TAFS3C14	S
TAFS4C1	S
TAMS4C2	S
TAFS4C3	S
TAFS4C4	ND
TAFS4C5	S
TAFS4C6	N
TAFS4C7	S
TAMS4C8	ND

4.5 Data Collection

4.5.1 Timeline

As discussed, the data was collected in four schools, three secondary and one primary. This was achieved following consultation with SENCOs and planned around their preferences. All of the data was collected in my presence and undertaken in a group. Dates of the data collection are presented in table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Data Collection Information

Date	School Code	Group Size
17/07/2017	P	11
07/07/2017	S1	5
13/07/2017	S2	14
21/07/2017	S3	8
Total		38

Unfortunately, many of the SENCOs within primary schools who were approached about the study fed back that whilst they were interested in the research, they did not feel it feasible to release their TAs for one hour to participate. Multiple options were offered, such as seeing one TA at a time and coming after school but they still declined. One SENCO stated that their TAs are needed full time to support CYP with SEN and that she did not have any cover to allow them to participate.

4.5.2 The Process

Participants completed two Q sorts, initially answering the first research question and then the second. As "Q methodology seeks to encourage the active engagement of its participants, rather than to capture their passive responses" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, pg. 65) they were given 25 minutes to complete each Q sort. The pilot study confirmed that this was sufficient time to produce a Q sort for each of the research questions. The sub question was,

> *2b) What are the implications of these views for Educational Psychologists (EPs), who may work with school staff, with regards to effective classroom support?'*

This was addressed through the analysis of the factors and how they link to the literature around TA practice.

4.5.2.1 Steps to Completing the Q Sort

The stages of completing the two Q sorts were as follows:

Table 4.4 Stages of Q Sorting

Stage	Action
One	TAs were presented with 64 statements relating to the role and asked to sort them into a fixed distribution ranging from -5 (strongly disagree) to +5 (strongly agree). They completed this based on how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements in relation to one another, with regards to their views about their current role. The condition of instruction for this aspect of the study was, 'when I reflect on my current role, I think that…'
Two	The second Q sort was completed in the same way, using the same 64 statements and another fixed frequency grid. This time they were asked to sort them according to how they thought the role should be and how they would like the role to look in future; thus, their ideal role. The condition of instruction for this aspect of the study was, 'when I consider an ideal TA role, I think of it as one where I should…..'.
Three	Finally, they were asked to complete some post sort questions, which provided me with an opportunity to explore reasons why items were sorted in the manner in which they were and what their thoughts were about the statements. This provided rich qualitative information to support and potentially reinforce the findings.

4.5.2.2 The Frequency Grid

A forced choice quasi-normal distribution grid was selected for participants to sort their Q sets (see appendix D). I decided on forced choice, rather than free choice, as this allowed me to ensure that participants' responses were standardised in that they placed the same number of items under each number along the continuum (from -5 to +5). However, this has been criticised, as participants are highly

unlikely to naturally sort the statements in a quasi-normal way, which could be perceived to restrict their views when forced to sort them in a manner determined by the researcher (Brown, 1971). However, as Nimmo and Savage (1975) found, a similar number and types of factors are generated regardless of forced or free choice sorting, leading to their conclusion that a forced choice frequency might be more attractive to the researcher for practical reasons. Watts and Stenner (2012) also note that a fixed distribution is the most pragmatic way for participants to sort the Q set, as this reduces ambiguity for them, as well as removing additional choices that they have to make regarding how to sort them.

Whilst there is debate about using forced or free distribution grids, I personally felt that a forced choice was more appropriate. This decision was based on the key points noted by Watts and Stenner (2012) about the practicality for both myself and the P set and also following the conversations TAs had during the pilot study. They made comments about wanting to 'put them all' under strongly agree (+4/+5), especially when considering an ideal role, and I wanted them to really consider which of the statements were more important for them rather than having a general consensus that they agree with them all. I felt this prompted deeper contemplation about how they felt about the statements, in relation to one another, which ultimately is what I interpret to be the aims and benefits of Q Methodology.

4.5.2.3 Post Sort Interview

Following the Q sort, participants were asked to comment on the following questions:

1) Having completed the card sort, please write in the spaces below, three statements which you feel were missing from the cards which you were provided with (which may be a view that you did not feel was represented).

2) Please feel free to make some notes on your reasons for choosing to place the statements at the extreme left and right of the grid.

3) Any other comments?

I also asked participants if I could make notes of some of the conversations that they were having whilst completing the Q sorts to add to the interpretations. However, they were reluctant for me to do this. Some did add comments in response to the post sort questions and made further statements, which were helpful additions to the interpretations of the factors. It is important to note the general concern that the participants had with regards to their contribution, especially about what the implications might have been for them in sharing their views. This was apparent in all of the settings, not just one of the schools, where the data collection occurred. Some made comments about their concerns whilst completing the Q sorts even though they were fully aware that personal responses would be anonymous. Whilst they were aware of their rights to withdraw, they continued with the Q sorts whilst making such comments. Some said that they felt it important that TAs voices are heard and represented in the literature but were only taking part because the statements were standardised and knew that their names would not be attributed to the findings. Participants were also conscious of who would see the results, so I had to explain about my thesis eventually being available online.

<u>*Reflection*</u>

Participant comments and reactions to the study reinforced to me that using a Q sort was more appropriate than interviews. Due to their reluctance in allowing me to represent their words / narratives about the role, interviews may not have been fruitful in answering the research questions. Also, some of the themes included within the Q set might not have been discussed comfortably, such as topics about support, pay, happiness and value etc… Having standardised statements provided a level of comfort that facilitated them in sharing their views.

4.6 Data Analysis

Following the literature review, a number of themes were generated to ensure that the statements were as broadly representative of the role as possible (see appendix C). I did not intend to use these themes to guide my analysis, as I decided to "stick to a logic of exploration and discovery" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, pg. 96). I also wanted to ensure that I represented as many viewpoints as I possibly could to

maximise TA voice. As a result, I used a CFA for the reasons outlined in 3.5.2.6. Being led by the data ensured that factors were fully explored and none inhibited or excluded.

Further information about how I analysed the data is presented in the next chapter, as well as information about judgements made regarding the analysis.

Chapter Five

Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will guide the reader through the process of analysing the data to show how the factors were generated, prior to revealing the final interpretations of each one, representing TA views on both their current and prospective roles.

5.2 Analysis

In order to analyse the data, a CFA was run using PQMethod (Schmolk, 2002). A decision was made to run the CFA as this permits the researcher to explore the data, cast a judgmental eye over the output and allow the most informative and meaningful solution to be achieved (Watts and Stenner, 2012). This is congruent with my aims of maximising voice, rather than simply relying on a mathematical best fit. Following the CFA, a varimax and then subtle manual rotations were run to allow me to settle on what I perceived to be the "best solution", meaning, for me, that I had as many Q sorts loading on to at least one factor as possible (Watts and Stenner, 2012, pg. 99).

5.3 The Current Role

As presented within the procedure chapter, the participants completed the Q sort twice, primarily focussing on their views about their current role and then subsequently on an ideal role, with the rationale for this outlined in 2.10. Thus, the analysis involved two stages. Initially, the individual Q sorts for the current role were inputted into PQ Method and a CFA was run to identify statistically significant factors. A level of judgement is required when running the analysis; the first being related to deciding how many factors to ask the software to identify (Webler, Danielson and Tuler, 2009). My aim was to find as many significant factors as possible in an attempt to maximise voice (Watts and Stenner, 2012). With this in mind, guidance was referred to in order to explore the data to find the best possible solution. The following suggestions were used as a starting point for this process:

Table 5.1 Factor Extraction Guidance

Number of Q sorts	Number of factors to extract
<12	1 or 2
13-18	3
19-24	4
25-30	5
31-36	6
>36	7

(Watts and Stenner, 2012, pg. 197)

As the P set included 38 participants, a CFA was initially run on seven factors. The output was then analysed to see how many Q sorts significantly loaded onto them. The significance value (significance level of <0.01) was calculated using the following equation (Brown, 1980), as recommended by Watts and Stenner (2012):

2.58 x (1 ÷ √ no. of items in Q set)
= 2.58 x (1÷ √64)
= 2.58 x (1 ÷ 8)
= 2.58 x 0.125
= 0.3225 rounded to ±0.32.

A decision was made to increase this significance level to ±0.40 (significant at P<0.01), in order to maximise the number of sorts loading onto at least one factor. This is in line with my aims to maximise voice and present as many different viewpoints as possible for both current and ideal roles.

Following each CFA, a varimax rotation, and subsequent by hand rotation, was run to "produce the factor solution that maximises the amount of variance explained on as few factors as possible" (Webler, et al, 2009, pg. 10). A varimax rotation is appropriate to use when the researcher is using an inductive approach and when seeking to represent the majority of views of the P set (Watts and Stenner, 2012), as is the aim of the current research. This process was repeated and refined until at least two participants significantly loaded onto one of the factors. I was unable to further rotate the factors to load further Q sorts due to them significantly loading onto both factors, thus being confounded. This left a two factor solution, which satisfied the Kaiser-Guttman criterion (Guttman, 1954) whereby each factor

has an eigenvalue of 1.00, as a basal level. This two factor solution also ensured that at least two participants loaded onto one of the factors to ensure that individual perspectives were not being presented (Webler, et al, 2009). The analysis produced the rotated factor matrix, shown in table 5.2.

Table 5.2 The Final Rotated Factor Matrix – Current Role.

Individual participant code (Participant number)	Factor 1 loading (CF1)	Factor 2 loading (CF2)
TAFP1C1 (1)	0.4861X	0.2235
TAFP1C2 (2)	0.4800	0.4779
TAFP1C3 (3)	0.2601	0.4119X
TAFP1C4 (4)	0.4044X	0.3040
TAFP1C5 (5)	0.4899	0.4573
TAFP1C6 (6)	0.6506X	0.3013
TAFP1C7 (7)	0.6975X	0.3113
TAFP1C8 (8)	0.5133	0.4080
TAFP1C9 (9)	0.3269	0.7897X
TAFP1C10 (10)	0.3683	0.6055X
TAFP1C11 (11)	0.2100	0.6980X
TAFS2C1 (12)	0.5703X	0.3895
TAFS2C2 (13)	0.6201X	0.1865
TAFS2C3 (14)	0.6741X	0.0329
TAFS2C4 (15)	0.5577X	0.0129
TAFS2C5 (16)	0.4863X	0.2946
TAFS3C1 (17)	0.5077	0.4324
TAMS3C2 (18)	0.4298X	0.2487
TAFS3C3 (19)	0.6374X	0.0185
TAFS3C4 (20)	0.6628X	0.2627
TAFS3C5 (21)	0.2071	0.5978X
TAFS3C6 (22)	0.3927	0.5253X
TAFS3C7 (23)	0.7330X	0.0283

TAFS3C8 (24)	0.5150X	0.2521
TAFS3C9 (25)	0.8188X	0.0148
TAFS3C10 (26)	0.7551X	-0.0802
TAFS3C11 (27)	0.7395X	-0.1126
TAFS3C12 (28)	0.6834X	-0.0292
TAFS3C13 (29)	0.6829	0.4528
TAFS3C14 (30)	0.6586X	0.3410
TAFS4C1 (31)	0.5936X	0.3598
TAMS4C2 (32)	0.7211X	0.1178
TAFS4C3 (33)	0.4128X	0.3847
TAFS4C4 (34)	0.5060	0.5397
TAFS4C5 (35)	0.5237X	0.0661
TAFS4C6 (36)	0.2479	0.4033X
TAFS4C7 (37)	0.6618X	0.3244
TAMS4C8 (38)	0.5212	0.5055
Eigenvalue	11.78	5.32
Variance	31%	14%

NB: The 'x' indicates a statistically defined sort, with a significance of .40 (<0.01)

Key:

Significant loading onto the factor	
Confounding q sorts	

Eigenvalues were calculated using the following equation:

EV= variance x (no. of Q sorts in study/100)

EV = V x 38/100

EV = V x 0.38.

As can be seen in table 5.2, 24 participants loaded onto factor one and seven participants loaded onto factor two. Cumulatively, the two factors account for 45% of the study variance for the current role of the TA. Table 5.3 highlights how many of the sorts were confounding by setting type.

Table 5.3 Number of Confounding Sorts According to School Type

School Type	Number Confounding	Percentage (%)
Primary	3	27.27
Secondary	4	14.81

The correlations between factor scores are presented in table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Final Rotated Correlations Between Factors

	FC1	FC2
FC1	1.000	0.5471
FC2	0.5471	1.000

These figures show the relationships between each of the factors to help determine whether or not each one represents a different view or is simply an "alternative manifestation of a single viewpoint" (Watts and Stenner, 2012, pg. 141). As these factors were statistically correlated, it warranted an inspection of the factor arrays, for each factor, in order to determine if they were also qualitatively alike, as well as being statistically significant. I also referred to the distinguishing statements for each factor to see if there were subjective differences between each that were too important to dismiss. With my aims of maximising TA voice in mind, I also looked at the number of Q sorts loading onto each factor and considered the percentage of the study variance that the factor explained. As Kline (1994) suggests, total variance in excess of 35 – 40% is usually considered to be a "sound solution" (Watts and Stenner, 2012, pg. 105). Cumulatively, the two factors account for 45% of the study variance, with factor two representing 14%; thus, I felt it important to include.

5.3.1 Factor Arrays

Following completion of the data analysis, factor arrays were created to present the ranking of the statements for each factor. Factor arrays show the Q sort values of statements, presented from those ranked most positively to most negatively, for each factor (Watts and Stenner, 2012), based on their Z scores. This information allowed me to "characterise" the factor (Watts and Stenner, 2005, pg. 562)

allowing an interpretation of what each one informs us about the views of TAs about their current role.

Table 5.5 Factor Arrays Current Role

Statement	FC1	FC2
1. I have opportunity within my working hours to read and research, in order to extend my knowledge.	-4	-2
2. I am expected to teach a whole class on my own.	-3	-4
3. I collaborate with the class teacher with regards to the lesson plans.	0	-1
4. I contribute to SEN review meetings by completing written feedback of my experiences of supporting a child.	-3	-3
5. I only work with one child.	-4	-4
6. I am clear about the lesson objectives when I support children with their work.	2	2
7. I have a good understanding of the curriculum.	1	2
8. I support children with special educational needs.	4	1
9. I have opportunity to feedback to teachers.	0	0
10. I attend SEN review meetings.	-4	-3
11. I undertake group work.	3	2
12. I have opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before I support children with their work.	-1	2
13. I need time to refresh my subject knowledge, so that I understand the content of the work.	1	-2
14. I respond to children when they display inappropriate behaviours.	4	3
15. I make suggestions about how to meet a child's needs.	2	0
16. I contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children and young people.	-1	-3
17. I am asked to help all of the children in the class.	2	0
18. I feel prepared to deliver group work.	1	-1
19. I feel well qualified to undertake my role.	3	4
20. I support children with emotional and social needs.	3	3
21. Information is shared with me so that I am well informed.	-4	1
22. I have a voice, which is heard.	-2	0
23. When I am in class, the teacher is present.	1	1
24. My line manager manages my workload.	-1	-1

25. I have opportunities to access supervision.	-1	-2
26. I have a good understanding of my role.	3	3
27. I attend staff meetings.	2	1
28. The teacher's views are more important than mine.	-1	-3
29. I work directly with children.	5	5
30. I contribute to planning my duties.	-1	0
31. I have opportunities to attend training events to continue my professional development.	-2	2
32. I am clear about what is expected of me.	1	4
33. I am well supported by my line manager.	0	2
34. We should all be heard equally.	5	4
35. I complete work for children.	-2	-4
36. My workload is manageable.	0	3
37. I am confident in my role.	4	4
38. My pay reflects my level of responsibility.	-5	-1
39. I could help children achieve more if teaching staff knew about my expertise.	2	-3
40. I feel valued.	-3	3
41. I support children with their work by explaining what they need to do to complete the task.	5	3
42. I get my full breaks without interruption.	-2	0
43. I worry when a child, who I support, does not complete an expected amount of work.	3	-2
44. I contribute to school development plans.	-5	-5
45. I feel appreciated.	-3	5
46. I promote independent learning once I have explained the task.	3	2
47. I am line managed closely.	0	0
48. I feel personally responsible for the progress made by a child that I support.	2	-3
49. I contribute to updating school policies.	-4	-5
50. I am happy in my job.	1	5
51. I differentiate work for children so that they can access it.	4	1
52. I worry when a child I support does not make progress.	4	-2
53. The teacher prescribes the way that I work.	0	-2

54. I make suggestions with regards to developments with my role.	-2	0
55. I have a sense of belonging in the school.	-2	4
56. I support children with well-differentiated work, which is provided by the class teacher.	-1	-1
57. I have sufficient resources to do my job.	0	1
58. I prepare resources for the teacher.	0	-1
59. I feel undermined.	-2	-4
60. I complete marking for the class teacher.	-3	-5
61. I am able to make decisions independently without needing to seek consent.	1	-1
62. When a child behaves inappropriately, I am expected to respond.	2	1
63. I would rather be a teacher.	-5	-4
64. I get time to refresh my subject knowledge, prior to supporting children with their work.	-3	-2

A crib sheet (see appendix E) was then used to organise and sort the statements for each factor. Crib sheets provide an opportunity to set out the statements that were ranked at the extreme ends of the distribution grid (-5 and +5, in this instance). The remaining statements are then sorted depending on whether or not they ranked higher in each factor than the others. Consensus and distinguishing statements are also recorded separately. These crib sheets then formed the basis for interpretation of the factors ensuring clarity, ease and organisation in the process (Watts and Stenner, 2012). The crib sheets for both of the factors elicited for the current role are included in the appendices (appendix F for factor one and appendix G for factor two).

5.3.2 Factor Interpretations for Current Role

Following the analysis, the two factors for the current role were interpreted and are presented here. Each factor interpretation was constructed using the following information:

- Factor arrays, as outlined in the crib sheets.
- Distinguishing statements.

Distinguishing statements were included as these indicate the items that are significantly different in each factor, contributing to the subjectivity associated with that view (McKeown and Thomas, 2013).

- Participants' comments, where appropriate.

Each factor interpretation is presented consistently and takes the form of:

- Factor title
- Factor information, including P info, eigenvalue and variance, to provide further understanding
- Full factor interpretation.

5.3.2.1 Factor One Current (CF1) Interpretation

Factor Title:

A demanding role driven by responsibility for progress of children with SEN.

Factor Information:

Factor one has an eigenvalue of 11.78 and accounts for 31% of the study variance. Twenty two female participants loaded onto this factor along with two of the male TAs who participated. Of the participants who loaded onto factor one, 20 worked in secondary schools and four worked in primary. As there was a large difference between participants based in primary and secondary schools, the following table indicates the percentage of TAs who loaded on to this factor. These figures were calculated using the following equation:

Number of TAs (per school type) loading onto this factor ÷ total number of TAs participating (per school type) x 100.

So, taking the primary TAs an as example:
4 ÷ 11 x 100 = 36.36.

Table 5.6 Percentage of TAs Loading on to CF1

School Type	Number of Ps	Percentage (%)
Primary	4	36.36
Secondary	20	74.07

Full Factor Interpretation:

These TAs agree that they work directly with children (29, +5) and tend to support those with special educational needs (8, +4). They are also more inclined to have to teach whole classes (2, -3). When working with children, they explain what they need to do to complete tasks, by way of supporting them with their work, to promote independent learning (41, +5; 46, +3). TAs holding this viewpoint also indicate that they differentiate work that is provided for children, so that they can access it (51, +4), sometimes collaborating with the class teacher about lesson plans (3, 0). This can extend to occasionally completing marking (60, -3). They feel it is important to have time to refresh subject knowledge, so that they understand the content of the work (13, +1), especially as they have limited opportunity to clarify what is expected, do not have such a good understanding of the curriculum or have little time to speak to the class teacher about tasks before supporting children (32, +1; 7, +1; 12, -1; 64, -3). However, they are not given time to do this (64, -3). Additionally, they currently do not have time within their working hours to read and research, in order to extend their knowledge (1, -4). Opportunities to attend training events to continue their professional development are limited (31, -2), which may be why they feel less qualified to undertake their role (19, +3).

As well as providing general support with classwork, for all children in class, TAs undertake group work, which they feel prepared to deliver, although they are less certain that they have the necessary resources for this (17, +2; 11, +3; 18, +1; 57, 0). They are also required to prepare resources for the class teacher (58, 0). Participant 30 affirmed this by saying,

> *"I am expected at times to do duties that a teacher would such as gather and source resources which isn't in my job description or within my pay grade".*

As well as supporting children with work, the TA role extends to behaviour management, as they are expected to, and do, respond when children display inappropriate behaviours (62, +2; 14, +4).

The impact of supporting children with SEN results in these TAs feeling personally responsible for their progress (48, +2), worrying when children do not make advancements academically (52, +4). This worry also extends to day-to-day activities, such as when a child, who they support, does not complete an expected amount of work (43, +3). Perhaps this leads them to being more inclined to complete work for them (35, -2)? TAs neither agree nor disagree that they have a workload, prescribed by the class teacher, which can feel unmanageable (53, 0; 36, 0). However, whilst they feel more able to make decisions without needing to seek consent (61, +1), such autonomy does not extend to contributing to planning their duties (30, -1), they are less likely to make suggestions about developing their role (54, -2) and do not always feel supported by their line manager (33, 0). They do, however, have greater opportunities to access supervision (25, -1).

These TAs feel that they could support children better if teaching staff knew more about their expertise (39, +2). They do make suggestions about how to meet a child's needs (15, +2) and are more able to contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children and young people (16, -1). However, they are less likely to attend SEN review meetings (10, -4) and information is not shared with them to ensure that they are well informed (21, -4). Reinforcing this, participant 30 said,

> *"we do not contribute to planning with individual students or attend SEN meetings, which I believe we should".*

These TAs are more likely to attend general staff meetings (27, +2). TAs do not participate in the creation of school plans and policies, but may contribute to updating these (44, -5; 49, -4).

These TAs do not feel that they have a voice that is heard, which leaves them feeling devalued, unappreciated and not having a sense of belonging in school (22, -2; 40, -3; 45, -3; 55, -2), which is perhaps why they also feel more undermined (59, -2) and unhappier in their job (50, +1). Additionally, they do not feel that their pay reflects their level of responsibility (38, -5) and they do not have their full breaks without interruption (42, -2). Whilst these TAs are more likely to think that teacher's views are more important than theirs, ultimately they feel that everyone

should all be heard equally (28, -1; 34, +5). All things considered, these TAs would still not rather be teachers (63, -5).

5.3.2.2 Factor Two Current (CF2) Interpretation

Factor Title:

A valued and well-supported role for which TAs are prepared.

Factor Information:

Factor two has an eigenvalue of 5.32 and accounts for 14% of the study variance. Seven participants loaded onto this factor and were all female. Of the participants that loaded onto factor two, three worked in secondary schools and four worked in primary. The following table indicates the percentage of TAs loading onto this factor, using the same calculation described in 5.3.2.1:

Table 5.7 Percentage of TAs Loading on to CF2

School Type	Number of Ps	Percentage (%)
Primary	4	36.36
Secondary	3	11.11

Full Factor Interpretation:

These TAs work directly with children (29, +5) but do not necessarily always support children with special educational needs (8, +1). They feel that they have a better understanding of the curriculum and are well qualified to undertake their role (7, +2; 19, +4). Whilst they are more likely to have time within their working hours to read and research, to extend their knowledge (1, -2), they do not feel that they specifically need, or get, time to refresh their understanding with regards to curriculum content (13, -2; 64, -2), as they feel prepared and well resourced to undertake the role (57, +1). These TAs have more opportunities to attend training events to continue their professional development (31, +2). However, they have fewer opportunities to access supervision (25, -2).

These TAs are not expected to differentiate work for children, prepare resources or complete marking for the class teacher (51, +1; 58, -1; 60, -5). Those holding

this viewpoint have more opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before supporting children with their work (12, +2). However, they are less likely to collaborate with the class teacher with regards to the lesson plans (3, -1). These TAs are also less likely to make suggestions about how to meet a child's needs or contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children (15, 0; 16, -3). However, they are more likely to attend SEN review meetings (10, -3). They also do not feel that it would be helpful for teaching staff to know more about their expertise (39, -3). These TAs are clear about what is expected of them and have more of a sense that their day-to-day workload is manageable (32, +4; 36, +3), perhaps facilitated by this clarity. Whilst they are less likely to attend staff meetings (27, +1), information is shared with them resulting in a sense of these TAs feeling more informed (21, +1). Participant 11 affirms this by saying,

> "*I agree with what is expected of me and I have a good understanding of my role.*

With regards to their tasks, these TAs are less likely to teach whole classes and do not always help all of the children in the class (2, -4; 17, 0). They also feel that there is less expectation for them to respond to inappropriate behaviours (62, +1) but acknowledge that they sometimes do (14, +3). These TAs are also less likely to, but do, undertake group work (11, +2); perhaps this is why being prepared for delivering group sessions is less important for them (18, -1). Those holding this viewpoint do not worry as much when children they support do not make progress (52, -2), which is maybe why they feel less personal responsibility for the progress made (48, -3). Contributing to this, these TAs do not worry when children do not complete expected amounts of work, meaning that they do not complete it for them (43, -2; 35, -4). Interestingly, they are less likely to promote independent learning, once tasks have been explained (46, +2), even though they have less concern with regards to the implications of slower work rate, for them. They are also less likely to explain what children need to do to access their work (41, +3).

These TAs feel more appreciated and are happier in their jobs (45, +5; 50, +5). They also feel well supported by their line manager (33, +2) and feel valued (40, +3), which is likely to contribute to them feeling that they have a sense of

belonging in school (55, +4). Supplementary to having a greater sense of being heard (22, 0), these TAs are slightly less likely to think that all staff should be heard equally (34, +4). These TAs are also more able to contribute to planning their duties and make suggestions about how to develop their role (30, 0; 54, 0), potentially reinforcing views about voice. However, they do not contribute more systemically to school development plans or updating school policies (44, -5; 49, -5). Whilst they feel that their work is less prescribed and managed by the teacher (53, -2), they still do not feel able to make decisions independently, without needing to seek consent (61, -1). Interestingly, they do not feel as strongly that the teacher's views are more important than theirs (28, -3), which is maybe why they also do not feel undermined (59, -4).

These TAs are more likely to have their full breaks without interruption and feel that their pay is more reflective of their duties (42, 0; 38, -1), perhaps contributing to them being happier in their role? However, they are slightly more likely to want to be a teacher (63, -4).

5.4 The Ideal Role

Having ascertained the views of TAs with regards to their current role, the focus turned to considering how they would like their profession to be. As previously stated (4.5.2), TAs used the same statements to answer the second research question, focussing on an ideal role.

Research question for this aspect of the study:

2) *How would TAs prefer the role to look in the future?*

The same principles were used to analyse the ideal Q sorts. Analysis was again undertaken, running a CFA to extract factors. Five factors were obtained, following a varimax rotation and then subtle manual hand rotations, to ensure as many Q sorts loaded on to at least one factor. The rotated factor matrix for the ideal role is presented below (in table 5.8), showing the Q sorts loading onto each one.

Table 5.8 The Rotated Factor Matrix for the Ideal Role

Individual participant code (Participant number)	Factor 1 loading (IF1)	Factor 2 loading (IF2)	Factor 3 loading (IF3)	Factor 4 loading (IF4)	Factor 5 loading (IF5)
TAFP1I1 (1)	0.3687	0.4345X	0.1891	0.1084	0.0496
TAFP1I2 (2)	0.3077	0.5672X	0.3144	0.1538	0.0850
TAFP1I3 (3)	0.0853	0.5325X	0.1208	0.1923	0.2143
TAFP1I4 (4)	0.0897	0.2821	0.0245	0.4386X	0.3600
TAFP1I5 (5)	0.4034	0.5319	0.1101	0.1399	0.3132
TAFP1I6 (6)	0.5305X	0.3924	0.0286	0.2338	0.3269
TAFP1I7 (7)	0.2992	0.4911X	0.3155	0.2880	0.3895
TAFP1I8 (8)	0.3044	0.4787	-0.0950	0.0878	0.4737
TAFP1I9 (9)	0.5235X	0.3898	0.2927	0.3632	0.3772
TAFP1I10(10)	0.2061	0.5136X	0.2356	0.0496	0.3819
TAFP1I11 (11)	0.1563	0.2959	0.4836X	0.1387	0.2046
TAFS2I1 (12)	0.0403	0.0576	0.5277X	-0.0513	-0.1160
TAFS2I2 (13)	0.6488X	0.1672	0.3038	0.0339	0.3118
TAFS2I3 (14)	0.7724X	0.3679	0.1848	-0.0705	0.1663
TAFS2I4 (15)	0.5614X	0.2808	0.0811	0.3446	-0.0997
TAFS2I5 (16)	0.2524	0.1388	0.2871	0.4893X	0.2261
TAFS3I1 (17)	0.5184X	0.2071	0.1469	-0.0857	0.2155
TAMS3I2 (18)	0.3499	-0.008	0.4774X	0.3028	0.2316
TAFS3I3 (19)	0.5379X	0.2513	0.3903	0.1305	0.2697
TAFS3I4 (20)	0.5497X	0.3022	0.2230	0.1960	0.0637
TAFS3I5 (21)	0.5787X	0.0946	0.0572	0.2438	0.2364
TAFS3I6 (22)	0.2191	0.3376	0.2939	0.1688	0.3960X
TAFS3I7 (23)	0.5530X	0.0205	0.1177	0.1529	0.0594
TAFS3I8 (24)	0.2091	0.6051X	0.2611	0.1867	0.0117
TAFS3I9 (25)	0.2560	0.2253	0.6097X	0.3898	-0.0471
TAFS3I10 (26)	0.1993	0.1736	0.5999X	0.1235	0.0956

TAFS3I11 (27)	0.5591X	0.3922	0.2932	0.3060	0.0382
TAFS3I12 (28)	0.3916	0.1750	0.7304X	0.1007	0.0720
TAFS3I13 (29)	0.4138	0.6000	-0.1371	0.3224	0.1060
TAFS3I14 (30)	0.2578	0.1468	0.3862	0.5609X	0.1352
TAFS4I1 (31)	0.1353	0.0900	-0.0707	0.1935	0.4214X
TAMS4I2 (32)	0.3169	0.1268	0.4228X	0.0769	0.3547
TAFS4I3 (33)	0.1032	0.3696	0.1760	0.4717X	-0.0586
TAFS4I4 (34)	0.2961	0.2692	0.2220	0.2786	0.5198X
TAFS4I5 (35)	0.0112	0.1362	0.1204	0.4261X	0.1413
TAFS4I6 (36)	0.2178	0.1237	0.0790	0.5690X	0.1512
TAFS4I7 (37)	-0.0736	0.5146X	0.2630	0.3247	0.3726
TAMS4I8 (38)	0.0334	0.5562	0.1776	0.5828	0.1830
Eigenvalue	5.32	4.56	3.8	3.42	2.66
Variance	14	12	10	9	7

NB: The 'x' indicates a statistically defined sort, with a significance of .40 (<0.01)

Key:

Significant loading onto the factor	
Confounding Q sorts	

Once again, the eigenvalues were calculated using the following equation:

EV= variance x (no. of Q sorts in study/100)

EV = V x 38/100

EV = V x 0.38.

Of the total 38 Q sorts, 34 loaded significantly onto five factors, four Q sorts were confounded and none were non-significant. Cumulatively, the five factors account for 52% of the variance. Table 5.9 shows how many, and which, Q sorts loaded onto each of the five factors.

Table 5.9 Q Sort Loadings

Factor Number	P number	Total	Cumulative total
1	6, 9, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 27	11	11
2	1, 2, 3, 7, 10, 24, 37	7	18
3	11, 12, 18, 25, 26, 28, 32	7	25
4	4, 16, 30, 33, 35, 36	6	31
5	22, 31, 34	3	34
Confounding	5, 8, 29, 38	4	38
Non-significant	n/a	0	38

The number of confounding sorts for each of the settings is shown below:

Table 5.10 Number of Confounding Q Sorts According to School Type

School Type	Number Confounding	Percentage %
Primary	2	18.18
Secondary	2	7.40

5.4.1 Factor Arrays

Once more, the factor arrays are presented to highlight the Q sort values of statements, presented from those ranked most positively to most negatively, for each factor (Watts and Stenner, 2012). The factor arrays for the ideal role are presented in table 5.11.

Table 5.11 Factor Arrays 'Ideal' Role

Statement	IF1	IF2	IF3	IF4	IF5
1. I have opportunity within my working hours to read and research, in order to extend my knowledge.	-1	-1	3	-3	-3
2. I am expected to teach a whole class on my own.	-5	-4	-5	-4	-3
3. I collaborate with the class teacher with regards to the lesson plans.	0	0	-2	-4	0
4. I contribute to SEN review meetings by completing written feedback of my experiences of supporting a child.	-1	-3	-1	1	4
5. I only work with one child.	-3	-4	-4	-1	-3

6. I am clear about the lesson objectives when I support children with their work.	1	1	0	4	2
7. I have a good understanding of the curriculum.	3	-2	2	-1	1
8. I support children with special educational needs.	3	1	3	3	3
9. I have opportunity to feedback to teachers.	0	2	3	0	-2
10. I attend SEN review meetings.	-1	-3	-3	4	1
11. I undertake group work.	2	1	-2	-3	3
12. I have opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before I support children with their work.	0	1	0	0	-1
13. I need time to refresh my subject knowledge, so that I understand the content of the work.	4	0	-2	0	-2
14. I respond to children when they display inappropriate behaviours.	-2	0	-1	1	2
15. I make suggestions about how to meet a child's needs.	2	2	0	2	0
16. I contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children and young people.	-1	-3	-2	-5	-4
17. I am asked to help all of the children in the class.	-2	3	0	0	-2
18. I feel prepared to deliver group work.	2	0	-1	-4	4
19. I feel well qualified to undertake my role.	4	3	3	3	5
20. I support children with emotional and social needs.	1	4	0	4	3
21. Information is shared with me so that I am well informed.	-1	2	2	0	0
22. I have a voice, which is heard.	0	-1	4	2	-2
23. When I am in class, the teacher is present.	-3	1	1	4	0
24. My line manager manages my workload.	-2	-1	-3	-1	-4
25. I have opportunities to access supervision.	0	-3	-1	-1	-3
26. I have a good understanding of my role.	4	4	4	2	4
27. I attend staff meetings.	0	1	-1	2	0
28. The teacher's views are more important than mine.	-4	-2	-4	-2	-3
29. I work directly with children.	5	-2	1	4	2

30. I contribute to planning my duties.	-1	-3	1	-3	3
31. I have opportunities to attend training events to continue my professional development.	1	2	0	0	1
32. I am clear about what is expected of me.	2	2	2	3	3
33. I am well supported by my line manager.	3	2	2	0	2
34. We should all be heard equally.	3	5	3	2	5
35. I complete work for children.	-5	-5	-4	-1	-4
36. My workload is manageable.	2	0	2	1	0
37. I am confident in my role.	5	2	4	2	5
38. My pay reflects my level of responsibility.	4	0	5	3	2
39. I could help children achieve more if teaching staff knew about my expertise.	0	-2	-2	-2	2
40. I feel valued.	3	3	5	3	-1
41. I support children with their work by explaining what they need to do to complete the task.	2	4	0	5	4
42. I get my full breaks without interruption.	-3	-1	2	-3	1
43. I worry when a child, who I support, does not complete an expected amount of work.	-4	-2	-3	0	-2
44. I contribute to school development plans.	-2	-4	-5	-4	-2
45. I feel appreciated.	3	5	5	3	1
46. I promote independent learning once I have explained the task.	1	4	0	2	4
47. I am line managed closely.	-2	-2	1	1	-4
48. I feel personally responsible for the progress made by a child that I support.	-4	-3	-3	-2	-4
49. I contribute to updating school policies.	-4	-4	-5	-5	-1
50. I am happy in my job.	5	5	3	5	0
51. I differentiate work for children so that they can access it.	-2	3	-2	5	3
52. I worry when a child I support does not make progress.	-3	-1	-4	-3	-1
53. The teacher prescribes the way that I work.	-2	-2	-3	1	-2
54. I make suggestions with regards to developments with my role.	1	-1	1	-2	-1

55. I have a sense of belonging in the school.	0	4	4	1	1
56. I support children with well-differentiated work, which is provided by the class teacher.	1	1	-1	1	1
57. I have sufficient resources to do my job.	4	0	1	-2	-1
58. I prepare resources for the teacher.	-1	-1	-2	-3	-5
59. I feel undermined.	-4	-5	4	-1	0
60. I complete marking for the class teacher.	-5	-4	-3	-4	-5
61. I am able to make decisions independently without needing to seek consent.	1	3	2	-2	-1
62. When a child behaves inappropriately, I am expected to respond.	-3	3	-1	-1	2
63. I would rather be a teacher.	-3	-5	-4	-5	-5
64. I get time to refresh my subject knowledge, prior to supporting children with their work.	2	0	1	-2	-3

Further information relevant to the data analysis includes the correlations between factor scores, which are important in highlighting the relationship and similarity between each of the factors. These can be seen in table 5.12.

*Table 5.*12 *Final Rotated Correlations Between Factors*

	FI1	FI2	FI3	FI4	FI5
FI1	1.000	0.6783	0.6450	0.5443	0.5796
FI2	0.6783	1.000	0.5931	0.6118	0.5613
FI3	0.6450	0.5931	1.000	0.5328	0.4554
FI4	0.5443	0.6118	0.5328	1.000	0.5432
FI5	0.5796	0.5613	0.4554	0.5432	1.000

The figures show that all factors are significantly correlated with each other leading to further inspection of the distinguishing statements and the factor arrays for each. As McKeown and Thomas (2013) highlight, caution should be applied when focussing solely on statistical criteria to inform decision making about factors, as each may have a different substantive meaning. I concluded that the

way that the statements had been considered, in relation to one another, provided differences with regards to subjectivity associated with them. For example, factors one and two have the highest correlation, yet the interpretation of these show differences with regards to views around pay, levels of confidence and subtleties regarding personal feelings of worth. As such, each interpretation describes qualitatively different views that are equally of importance and are each reflective of an alternative gestalt of the role.

It was also important for me to ensure that as many Q sorts loaded on to at least one factor, as possible. To reiterate, one of the aims of my research was to try and maximise the voices of TAs, so presenting as many factors as I could, satisfying the Kaiser-Guttman criterion (Guttman, 1954), was pertinent for me when analysing the data. I also endeavoured to present as many factors as possible, accounting for maximum variation (Brown, 1980). Cumulatively, the five viewpoints account for 52% of the variance, reinforcing the importance of all five factors.

5.4.2 Factor Interpretations for Ideal Role

Consistent with the current role, the factors presented here were generated using the crib sheets (see appendices H to L) and the distinguishing statements for each (appendix M). They also follow the same structure as presented for the current role, each containing:

- Factor title
- Factor information
- Full factor interpretation.

5.4.2.1 Factor One Ideal (IF1) Interpretation

Factor Title:

Prepared, in every sense.

Factor Information:

Ideal factor one (IF1) has an eigenvalue of 5.32 and accounts for 14% of the overall study variance. Of the participants holding this viewpoint, 11 were female and none male. Nine worked in secondary schools and two worked in primary. The

following table indicates the percentage of TAs who loaded on to this factor, using the same calculation as described in 5.3.2.1:

Table 5.13 Percentage of TAs Loading on to IF1

School Type	Number of Ps	Percentage (%)
Primary	2	18.18
Secondary	9	33.33

Full Factor Interpretation:

Ideally, these TAs would be happy and confident in their jobs (50, +5; 37, +5). They also believe that they should not feel undermined (59, -4). However, they are not as concerned about having a sense of belonging in school (55, 0), so perhaps their contentment is related to confidence rather than belonging. These TAs would also prefer to feel that they are supported by their line manager (33, +3), as well as having more opportunities for supervision (25, 0). Importantly for these TAs, they feel that they should be well qualified to undertake the role (19, +4). In relation to this, they feel that their pay should reflect their level of responsibility (38, +4).

In an ideal world, TAs holding this view feel that they should be prepared to effectively undertake the role by having sufficient resources to complete tasks (57, +4), including having access to well differentiated work, which they do not feel they should be responsible for producing (51, -2). As well as having necessary resources, these TAs think it is important to have a good understanding of the curriculum (7, +3) and would also welcome time to refresh their subject knowledge, when needs be, so that they have a good understanding of the work before supporting children (13, +4; 64, +2). Participant 8 shared,

> "*no-one should be put in a position that they feel uncomfortable with or be expected to teach if they feel they are not confident in what the lesson entails*".

Thus, highlighting why preparedness is important.

Whilst they think they should work directly with children (29, +5), including those with SEN (8, +3), they do not think that they should complete work for them (35, -

5). Perhaps this is why they are also of the view that they should not worry when children, whom they support, do not complete expected amounts of work (43, -4). This may be linked to the fact that they do not think they should feel personally responsible for the progress made by children (48, -4). Interestingly, they are less likely to promote independent working, in an ideal world (46, +1). These TAs also feel that they could help children achieve more if teachers knew about their skills and expertise (39, 0).

With regards to their day-to-day role, these TAs do not think that they should, or be expected to, respond to children and young people displaying inappropriate behaviours (62, -3; 14, -2). This may be why they are less inclined to think that they should work with children with social and emotional difficulties (20, +1). These TAs feel more so that they should have opportunities deliver group work (11, +2) and feel prepared to deliver these group sessions (18, +2). Having a workload, that is manageable, is also important for these TAs (36, +2).

With regards to information sharing, these TAs are less concerned about being kept well informed (21, -1). However, they are more likely to want to contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children and young people (16, -1).

Whilst these TAs are slightly more likely to want to progress into teaching (63, -3), they do not think that as TAs they should complete tasks that teachers do, such as teaching whole classes independently or marking work (2, -5; 60, -5). However, they do not think that the class teacher should always be present (23, -3), perhaps differentiating teaching from classroom management.

5.4.2.2 Factor Two Ideal (IF2) Interpretation

Factor Title:

A well-defined and directed role, focussed on general classroom support.

Factor Information:

Ideal factor two (IF2) has an eigenvalue of 4.56 and explains 12% of the overall variance. Seven TAs hold this viewpoint, all of which are female. Of these TAs, five

work in a primary school and two in a secondary setting. The percentages for each, as calculated in 5.3.2.1, are shown below in table 5.14.

Table 5.14 Percentage of TAs Loading on to IF2

School Type	Number of Ps	Percentage (%)
Primary	5	45.45
Secondary	2	7.40

Almost half of the primary based TAs hold this viewpoint, regarding their ideal role, whilst only two of the secondary based TAs concur with them.

Full Factor Interpretation:

TAs holding this view feel that voice is important and that as part of a school team, everyone should be heard equally (34, +5). However, they are less inclined to think that *their* voice should be heard (22, -1). Similarly, they are also more likely to think that the teacher's views should be more important than theirs (28, -2). These TAs think that they should feel appreciated (45, +5), perhaps underpinned by feeling that they should not feel undermined (59, -5). Reinforcing this, Participant 8 stated,

"everyone should feel appreciated in their role from TAs to teachers".

These TAs also think that they should be able to make decisions independently without needing to seek consent (61, +3). These TAs are also less concerned about their workload being manageable (36, 0). However, it is felt more important for these TAs that line managers should manage their workload (24, -1). They also do not think that they should contribute to planning their duties (30, -3) but do feel that they should have a clear understanding about what is expected of them (26, +4). These TAs feel that pay, reflective of responsibility, is less important (38, 0). However, having a sense of belonging in school is more important (55, +4).

Ideally, these TAs would not complete work for children (35, -5). Rather, they think that they should explain what children need to do to complete tasks (41, +4) to promote independent learning (46, +4). Supplementary to this, they also think

that they should have opportunity to feedback to teachers (9, +2). They would also like opportunities to speak to the class teacher about tasks, prior to supporting children with their work (12, +1), which is felt to be more important than having an increased understanding of the curriculum (7, -2).

With regards to support, these TAs think that they should help all of the children in the class (17, +3) and should be expected to respond to inappropriate behaviours (62, +3), including supporting children with social and emotional needs (20, +4). However, they do not perceive the role as being predominantly about working directly with children (29, -2), especially individual pupils (5, -4), including those with special educational needs (8, +1). Conceivably this is why they do not feel that they should have a role in contributing written feedback for SEN meetings (4, -3) or attending in person (10, -3).

These TAs would like to have opportunities to attend training events to continue their professional development (31, +2) but they would rather not be a teacher (63, -5). Perhaps because, ideally, they would be happy in their role as a TA (50, +5).

5.4.2.3 Factor Three Ideal (IF3) Interpretation

Factor Title:

Hear the voices of TAs and appreciate what they do.

Factor Information:

Factor three has an eigenvalue of 3.8 and accounts for 10% of the overall variance. Seven participants hold this view with one working in a primary school and the remaining six in secondary schools. Of these seven participants, five were female and two male. Again, the table below shows the percentage equivalents by school type, as per the calculation in 5.3.2.1.

Table 5.15 Percentage of TAs Loading on to IF3

School Type	Number of Ps	Percentage (%)
Primary	1	9.09
Secondary	6	22.22

Full Factor Interpretation:

These TAs think that it is important to feel valued and appreciated (40, +5; 45, +5) but are less concerned about being happy (50, +3). These TAs also think it is important to have a sense of belonging in school (55, +4). Participant 36 linked these to job satisfaction and said,

"you need to be valued in your job to enjoy it".

These TAs would also ideally like their pay to be reflective of their level of responsibility (38, +5), as well as having their full breaks without interruption (42, +2). Whilst they feel they should have a voice that is heard (22, +4), they also think that they should feel undermined (59, +4).

These TAs think that they should have opportunity in their working hours to read and research, in order to extend their knowledge (1, +3). This also extends to having time to refresh subject knowledge prior to supporting children with their work (64, +1). Perhaps, collectively, this would enable them to have more of an understanding of the curriculum and feel confident in their role (7, +2; 37, +4). However, they do not think they should be expected to teach whole classes alone (2, -5). These TAs do not feel it as important to be provided with well-differentiated work to support children (56, -1). They do, however, feel it more valuable to have access to sufficient resources to undertake their job (57, +1). They also think that they should have more opportunities to feedback to teachers (9, +3).

These TAs think they should have more of a say when planning their duties (30, +1); this could be why they do not think teachers should prescribe their work (53, -3). They do feel more so that duties should involve marking work (60, -3). Having a manageable workload is more important for these TAs as is having a good

understanding as to what it entails (36, +2; 26, +4). Participant 7 reinforces this view by stating,

"*I feel TAs should have input in to their role".*

However, collaboration does not extend to contributing to and updating school development plans and policies (44, -5; 49, -5) on a more systemic level. Whilst having a voice about their role is important for these TAs, they are less concerned about attending staff meetings (27, -1) perhaps because they think that information should be shared with them to ensure that they are well informed (21, +2). These TAs also think they should have more opportunities to attend training events, to continue their professional development (31, 0).

These TAs hold statements related to direct working with individual children (5, -1) as being less important. They do not think that they should have to be as clear about lesson objectives (6, 0), maybe because explaining what children need to do to complete tasks and promoting independent learning is less important to them (41, 0; 46, 0). This may be associated with their view that TAs should not worry when children do not make progress (52, -4). They also do not think that they should specifically support children with emotional and social needs (20, 0). However, they do see their role as supporting children with special educational needs (8, +3).

5.4.2.4 Factor Four Ideal (IF4) Interpretation

Factor Title:

A pedagogically positioned role.

Factor Information:

Factor four has an eigenvalue of 3.42 and accounts for 9% of the overall study variance. Of the 38 participants, six hold this viewpoint. One of these participants works in a primary school and the remaining five in secondary settings. The percentages are shown in the table below, calculated using the equation in 5.3.2.1:

Table 5.16 Percentage of TAs Loading on to IF4

School Type	Number of Ps	Percentage (%)
Primary	1	9.09
Secondary	5	18.51

Full Factor Interpretation:

These TAs see an ideal role as working directly with children (29, +4), especially with only one child (5, -1). They also think that they should work with children with SEN (8, +3). This may be why they feel that being prepared for and working with groups of children should be a less important feature of the job (18, -4; 11, -3). According to these TAs, support should entail differentiating work so that children can access tasks, as well as explaining what they need to do to complete them (51, +5; 41, +5). As such, they feel that they should be clear about the lesson objectives before they work with children (6, +4).

These TAs also think that they should be more inclined to complete work for children (35, -1), which may be why they are less likely to think they should promote independent learning (46, +2). This may be underpinned by them being more inclined to feel responsible for progress that children make and more likely to worry about their work rate (48, -2; 43, 0). These TAs also think they should attend staff and SEN review meetings (27, +2; 10, +4), as well as contributing written feedback regarding their experiences of supporting a child with SEN (4, +1). However, they do not think they should contribute to setting targets and outcomes for them (16, -5). As participant 20 shared,

> "*I should be able to access all SEN documentation relating to the students that I support*".

In terms of being prepared for the job, these TAs think that having time to refresh subject knowledge, prior to supporting children with their work, is less important (64, -2). They are also less inclined to think that they need to have a good understanding of the curriculum (7, -1) or think that they should collaborate with teachers with regards to lessons plans (3, -4). Interestingly, they also do not think that it is as important to have sufficient resources to do their job (57, -2).

These TAs also feel that it is important to be happy in their job (50, +5) and think that they should have a voice, which is heard (22, +2). However, they do not feel as strongly that all voices should be heard equally (34, +2) but that they should have a sense of feeling valued (40, +3). They do not feel that they should make suggestions with regards to developing their role (54, -2) and having a good understanding of it is less important (26, +2). However, these TAs do feel that they should have a good understanding of what is expected of them (32, +3).

These TAs think that their work should be prescribed by the teacher (53, +1). They also feel that it is less important that they are well supported by their line managers (33, 0). These TAs believe that they should respond to children who display inappropriate behaviours (14, +1) supporting those with social and emotional needs, in particular (20, +4). When they are in class, they think the teacher should be present (23, +4) and in line with this, they would not like to progress into teaching (63, -5). Furthermore, they do not think that they should make decisions independently without seeking consent (61, -2). These TAs do not see that they have a wider role in contributing to updating school policies (49, -5).

5.4.2.5 Factor Five Ideal (IF5) Interpretation

Factor Title:

TAs should be qualified and confident professionals.

Factor Information:

Factor five has an eigenvalue of 2.66 and accounts for 7% of the overall variance; three Q sorts significantly load onto this factor. Of the participants who hold this view, all three were female and all work in secondary settings. The following information was calculated using the equation in 5.3.2.1:

Table 5.17 Percentage of TAs Loading on to IF5

School Type	Number of Ps	Percentage (%)
Primary	0	0.00
Secondary	3	11.11

Full Factor Interpretation:

TAs holding this view feel that it is important that they are well qualified to undertake the role (19, +5) and that class teachers should be aware of their expertise so that they can help children achieve more (39, +2). These TAs also think that they should have opportunities to attend training events to continue their professional development (31, +1) but they would not like to progress in to teaching (63, -5). Perhaps access to training will enable them to feel more confident in their role (37, +5). Additional to this, participant 6 said,

"*TAs should be seen as professionals due to their qualifications."*

These TAs think that it is important that staff are all heard equally and that they have opportunities to contribute to planning their duties, as well as being offered opportunities to contribute more widely to help update school policies (34, +5; 30, +3; 49, -1). It is important for these TAs to have a good understanding of their role (26, +4). Participant 32 felt that not only should all staff be heard equally but so should the students and said,

"*all staff and students should be heard equally to promote cohesion within the school to create a safe and effective learning environment*".

These TAs are less concerned with their individual voice being heard (22, -2) perhaps because feeling personally valued, appreciated, happy and having a sense of belonging are less important to them (40, -1; 45, +1; 50, 0; 55, +1). They also do not think that they should be line managed closely or that their workload should be set by their line manager either (47, -4; 24, -4).

These TAs are more likely to think that they should teach whole classes on their own (2, -3), which also includes responding to children when they display inappropriate behaviours (14, +2). They also think that they should be expected to undertake group work, which they should be well prepared to deliver (11, +3; 18,

+4). It is also of more importance for these TAs that they are clear about lesson objectives prior to sessions, so that they can support children with their work by explaining what they need to do to complete tasks before promoting independent learning (6, +2; 41, +4; 46, +4). Perhaps being clear about lesson objectives is important because they think they are less likely to have time to speak to the class teacher about tasks prior to supporting children with their work (12, -1). However, they do not think they should get time to refresh their subject knowledge prior to supporting children (64, -3). These TAs do not think that it should be their role to ensure the class teacher is organised by preparing resources for them or helping them by marking work (58, -5; 60, -5).

It is less important for these TAs to feedback to teachers about lessons (9, -2). However, they would ideally like to attend SEN review meetings (10, +1) or provide written feedback at the very least (4, +4) and hold this form of information sharing in higher regard. However, they do not think that they should contribute to setting outcomes for children and young people (16, -4).

Chapter Six

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The following chapter will discuss the factors for both the current and ideal roles, in relation to the literature, before highlighting how these associate with one another. I also want to share some personal reflections, outline the impact of these findings for both schools and EPs, as well as address the limitations of the study before making suggestions for future research. With these aims in mind, the chapter takes the form of:

- summarising the literature
- discussion of the current factors, including consensus amongst the P set
- consideration of multiple ideal factors
- discussion of the ideal factors, including consensus amongst the P set
- what we can learn from the current and ideal factors
- implications for schools
- implications for EPs
- use of Q Methodology
- limitations
- personal reflections
- future research and application of findings.

6.2 Summary of the Literature

To provide a brief reminder of the literature, this paints an overall picture, regarding TA effectiveness, that is concerning (Giangreco, 2010), although, some studies implied that TA intervention can be positive for children with findings being attributed to the quality of intervention, the consistency of approach, training of staff and collaborative working (Farrell et al, 2010). Not only are educational outcomes measured with regards to the effectiveness of TAs, social and emotional outcomes are also scrutinised. Again, much of the literature, focussing on these areas of development, is critical of TA intervention (Alborz et al, 2009), with only a minority of authors alluding to positive effects (Groom & Rose, 2005). Whilst exploring the impact of TAs' work, some studies have elicited the views of children receiving their support (Fraser & Meadows, 2008; Bland &

Sleightholme, 2012). These are useful in terms of unpicking how children feel about the support that they receive and how they think that adults should practice (Massey, 2010). Other studies have chosen to focus on teachers' perceptions of having a TA (Bach et al, 2006; Blatchford et al, 2009). Findings from these studies tended to focus on the impact TAs have on teaching staff, with whom they work. Discussions focussed on how TAs reduce teacher stress and support with general classroom management (Bach et al 2006). However, wanting within the literature is the voice of the TA (Basford et al, 2017). Wilson and Bedford (2008) concluded that this is an area, which requires additional consideration, in order to further our understanding about how TAs feel about the role, reinforcing the premise for this research.

6.3 The Obtained Viewpoints and How They Relate to the Literature

As the aims of the study centred on two research questions, one focussing on the current views of TAs and the second regarding an ideal role, I will present the viewpoints for each research question, in relation to the literature, before discussing what we can learn from consideration of them all.

6.3.1 The Current Role

Only two factors emerged regarding the current role. This is interesting given the consistent view that the role of the TA is ambiguous and varied within the literature (Webster et al, 2013; Trent, 2014). Prior to discussing the distinctions of the two current factors, the consensus statements amongst the P set are presented to highlight that some aspects of the role, and feelings associated with it, were held in similar regard. The consensus statements for the current role are presented below in table 6.1 and then discussed in relation to the literature.

Table 6.1 Consensus Statements for the Current Role.

Items	CF1	CF2
4. I contribute to SEN review meetings by completing written feedback of my experiences of supporting a child.	-3	-3
5. I only work with one child.	-4	-4

6. I am clear about the lesson objectives when I support children with their work.	+2	+2
9. I have opportunity to feedback to teachers.	0	0
20. I support children with emotional and social needs.	3	3
23. When I am in class the teacher is present.	+1	+1
24. My line manger manages my workload.	-1	-1
26. I have a good understanding of my role.	+3	+3
37. I am confident in my role.	+4	+4
47. I am line managed closely.	0	0
56. I support children with well-differentiated work, which is provided by the class teacher.	-1	-1

TAs agree that they currently feel confident in their role, which is perhaps underpinned by having a good understanding of it. This notion of clarity refutes those who suggest that the role requires further consideration as to what is expected of TAs (Tucker, 2009) but supports the findings of McVittie (2005), who found that TAs have an understanding of the functional aspects of the role.

TAs neither agree, nor disagree, that they are closely line managed and slightly disagree that their line manager manages their workload. This makes me wonder whether or not there is clarity about who is responsible for their management. The consensus, across both primary and secondary settings, regarding these statements supports the conclusions of Basford et al (2017) that the responsibility for the line management of TAs is still unclear.

With regards to their day-to-day experiences, there is consensus that TAs do not solely work with one child and are sometimes in the classroom with the whole class without the teacher being present. This is interesting given that the statement relating to working with children with SEN distinguished between the two current factors. Perhaps this implies that TAs work with a number of children with SEN and are not 'velcroed' to one child, as the literature suggests they might be (Lorenz, 1998; Blatchford et al, 2009). TAs felt that they are mostly clear about lesson objectives when supporting children with their work, which is significant considering that they do not entirely agree that they are provided with well-

differentiated work from the class teacher. As well as aiding children with their work, TAs agree that the role extends to supporting children with social and emotional needs, reinforcing the importance of TAs in promoting inclusion within the classroom (Blatchford et al, 2009; Trent, 2014).

With regards to communication, TAs feel that they do not always have opportunity to feedback to teachers and this also extends to providing information for SEN meetings, especially written feedback of their experiences. Communication with teachers is key, as this promotes opportunities to review progress and also reinforces that ultimately, the responsibility for children with SEN rests with the class teacher (Mansaray, 2006; Wilson and Bedford, 2008). Ofsted (2012) also recommended that time should be allocated for opportunities to communicate and collaborate. The positioning of these statements, being placed neutrally and negatively, respectively, implies that these recommendations have not been transferred to practice.

6.3.1.1 The Current Factors

Following the presentation of the consensus statements, the nuances of each factor are now discussed in relation to one another, as well as how they associate to the literature. The interpretations for each factor reinforce different current viewpoints regarding personal feelings, knowledge, training opportunities and day-to-day tasks (functions) associated with the role. It appeared, following interpretation of these two factors that they distinguished between those who are expected to assist children with SEN and those who are not. I had anticipated there to be differences with regards to expectations of TAs, following the comments made during the pilot study (as expressed in 4.3.2). I also thought it most interesting that TAs who provide support for children with SEN (CF1), were the ones who feel most unhappy in their role and have a greater sense of responsibility for children's progress. This supports the views of those who conclude that TAs are responsible for children with SEN (Webster et al, 2010; Webster et al, 2013), highlighting how this is still often the case. This is especially significant given that the SEND Code of Practice (2015) has been available for three years and explicitly outlines that responsibility for children with SEN should

remain with the class teacher, implying that this has yet to be fully translated into practice.

In total, 31 TAs loaded on to one of the two factors with CF1 representing the view of 24 TAs and seven holding the view of CF2. Interestingly, 20 (83%) of the TAs holding the viewpoint expressed in CF1 work in secondary schools. Conversely, only three secondary TAs loaded onto CF2. Given that there were more secondary based TAs participating in the study than primary based TAs, I did wonder if these results could have simply been attributable to the nature of the Q sample. However, when looking at loadings of the eleven primary TAs, this showed an even spread with four holding the viewpoint of CF1 and four loading onto CF2. When interpreting this information, I considered that primary and secondary schools are very different settings that are systemically different in the way that staff are deployed. Indeed, Bach et al (2006) state that primary TAs are more integral within the workforce than secondary TAs. I had also considered that as primary schools are much smaller settings, with less staff, opportunities to achieve some aspects of the role, as outlined in the statements, may naturally be more achievable, such as communicating about work or providing feedback. Similarly, classes rotate in secondary schools whereas the same staff tend to teach the same class for the duration of the day within primary schools, which again might lend itself to promoting ways of working that TAs are happier with. However, when returning to the literature to comprehend these findings it is clear that secondary TAs are still utilised in ways that potentially explain the number of secondary TAs loading onto CF1. In their Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA) project, Webster et al (2013) noted that secondary school teachers deployed TAs and had a belief that TAs were responsible for working with children with SEN, which potentially explains why so many secondary TAs loaded onto CF1. Following the completion of their project with schools, to challenge this way of working, Webster et al (2013) found that this mind-set and practice was still evident, with these researchers concluding that TAs also contributed to the lack of change regarding their role. In conclusion, Webster et al (2013) identified that changing mind-sets would likely take time but that consideration had to be afforded to moving from a system where teachers are becoming more separated

from children with SEN and in some cases, transferring responsibility for their progress on to the TA. The viewpoints elicited here imply that this has still yet to be achieved and given that the two current factors are distinguished between those who work with children with SEN and those who do not, responsibility for children with SEN is likely to underpin many of the associated negative perceptions that TAs (CF1) have with regards to their role.

Whilst Ofsted (2012) and DfES (2000) guidance outlines the necessity for TAs and teachers to have time to collaborate with regards to planning and reviewing learning, these TAs still have few opportunities to communicate with the class teacher about their support, regarding tasks. The SEND reforms (2015) also clearly outline that responsibility for progress rests with the class teacher, yet the TAs (those loading onto CF1) in this study feel personally responsible for the progress that children make academically and also about day-to-day tasks. This sense of responsibility may explain why Webster et al (2013) found that TA interactions with children were mainly focussed on task completion; had they explored this with TAs themselves, it may have provided more insight into their findings, enhancing their conclusions. In contrast, TAs holding the view of CF2 feel less responsibility for the progress that children make and also with regards to ensuring that they complete expected amounts of work. However, they do not work with children with SEN, as much as those holding the view of CF1. The interpretation of CF2 appears to fit more with Alborz et al (2009) view that TAs support all children within the setting. However, TAs holding the view expressed in CF2 assert that they have much less responsibility for pupil progress, have opportunities to collaborate with the class teacher and are much happier in their jobs. The interpretation of this viewpoint broadly fits with the recommended practice outlined by the DfES (2000), with regards to TAs supporting children, the teacher and the curriculum. It appears that this is facilitated through opportunities for communication with the class teacher. These TAs (CF2) feel well qualified to undertake the role but maybe this is because they have fewer responsibilities, especially for children with SEN.

Due to the two differing viewpoints associated with the current role, I did consider whether or not these distinct factors support the general view that responsibility for children with SEN has shifted onto TAs, as Mansaray (2006) stated. I wondered whether or not the feelings of the TAs, holding the view of CF1, in this study, are linked to personal experiences of working with certain members of staff, implying that this issue may lie within certain teachers' understanding and expectations of TAs, which can vary (Wilson and Bedford, 2008; Webster et al, 2013; Basford et al, 2017).

The factor interpretation for CF1 outlines how varied the role is in terms of day-to-day practice, supporting the notion of 'role ambiguity', as those loading onto CF1 are less clear about what is expected of them than the TAs holding the viewpoint of CF2 (Webster et al, 2013). Tucker (2009) argues that TAs are confused about what they should and should not be doing, with the uncertainty expressed in CF1 reinforcing this view. Additionally, Tucker (2009) relates role ambiguity as a variable affecting how valued TAs feel. The key features of CF1 include TAs feeling de-valued, undermined and unhappy in their jobs, reinforcing Tucker's (2009) link between role ambiguity and personal feelings of relatedness with other members of staff. In contrast to CF1, the TAs holding the view of CF2 feel that they are clear about their expectations, refuting the literature that claims that they are blurred (Tucker, 2009; Trent, 2014). Perhaps then, it is also clarity of the role that promotes the effective deployment of TAs, as Blatchford et al (2011) claimed to be the case, with CF2 supporting their view. Trent (2014) discussed how the 'blurred lines' of expectations affect the identity construction of the TA. The TAs loading onto CF2 are happy in their role and feel well supported by their line managers, implying that clarity regarding expectations also promotes their identity.

As little research has focussed on TA voice (Basford et al, 2017) it is difficult to thoroughly compare or contrast the personal views of these TAs with other studies, to consider alternative possibilities underpinning their feelings. The TAs loading onto CF1 in this study, certainly think that they are unheard and have little opportunity to communicate their views about their job, reinforcing a sense of 'otherness' (Basford et al, 2017), whereas the TAs loading onto CF2 contradict this

view. Perhaps it is these limited opportunities to express their views, as experienced by those loading onto CF1, that resulted in many of them feeling anxious about participating in this study and in most cases, reluctant to engage with the post sort interview? As Trent (2014) found, TAs are 'positioned' by others, such as teachers and students, which can imply a hierarchy of professionalism, also emphasising a sense of 'otherness'. It is important to consider the feelings of TAs who hold this viewpoint as,

> *"social categorisation helps to formulate our ideas about who we think we are, how we want to be seen by others, and the groups to which we belong. In this case, TAs often felt themselves under-valued, under-used and (in extreme circumstances) worthless – clearly a controlled, 'other' group. When TAs felt valued, and perceived themselves to be making a difference, they were often more productive and willing to contribute positively to the school."* (Basford et al, 2017, pg. 305-306).

The role of the TA is one that continues to evolve with levels of responsibility increasing (Basford et al, 2017), so the lack of communication regarding views about this are likely to impact on their feelings. TAs holding the view of CF1 feel that their workload can be unmanageable and is more likely to be prescribed for them by the class teacher. They have little input with regards to their role. This further highlights how the TA profession continues to evolve without their input (Basford et al, 2017). However, TAs loading onto CF2 have more opportunity to discuss their role with their line managers, so potentially have had opportunities to influence a particular way of working, which results in them having more autonomy, perhaps leading to them feeling less undermined. This would support Tucker's (2009) view that "there is a desire to strategically reconfigure classroom roles and relationships" (pg. 293).

Few researchers have attempted to include TAs in their work (Tucker, 2009; Collins and Simco, 2006; Mahmoud, 2011; Basford et al, 2017) with Collins and Simco (2006) also concluding that TAs are most effective when they feel valued.

Thus, there must be advantage in linking clarity of expectations with personal feelings of worth. TAs holding the view of CF1 shared that they do not feel that their pay reflects their level of responsibilities. This is in keeping with Russell et al (2005) who also stated that this was the case, showing how this opinion has not changed in the last 13 years.

The role of the TA involves direct pedagogical responsibilities (Trent, 2014), such as supporting children with SEN, delivering group work, as well as general class management, including responding to behaviour. This is consistent with the viewpoint represented in CF1 in this study. However, these TAs do not say that they are 'velcroed' to children as Lorenz (1998) and Balshaw (2010) assert is often the case. Importantly to the TAs in this study, they aim to promote independent learning, as Lorenz (1998) outlined that they should. However, these TAs have no time to prepare for and are not well resourced to deliver group work, so the impact of these is likely to be affected, as Webster et al (2013) found.

6.3.2 The Ideal Role

The analysis resulted in multiple factors becoming apparent with regards to the ideal role. In total, five viewpoints were elicited, implying that TAs have different beliefs about what they think the role should entail. This may be underpinned by subtle differences with regards to their current responsibilities, as well as how the contexts, in which they work, affected personal subjectivity regarding the meanings communicated through the statements (McKeown and Thomas, 2013). For example, some identify themselves as 'one to ones' and others said they were general classroom support. Reasons why they entered the profession will also impact on how they would like to see the role progress (Basford et al, 2017).

These subjective viewpoints are all helpful in considering how TAs think the role should look, especially as recommendations about how it can be more effective have been presented for a number of years, with little impact being mostly reported.

6.3.2.1 Multiple Factors

The emergence of multiple factors, regarding an ideal role is interesting and highlights that the quest to seek definition of what the role should entail is not straightforward. Indeed, Trent (2014) states, "understanding what it means to be a TA is a challenging task" (pg. 29). This has significance given the views that the government has yet to explicitly set out how the role of the TA should differentiate from that of the teacher (Radford et al, 2015), with expectations still being blurred, especially regarding responsibility for children with SEN, as found in CF1, reinforcing the consistent findings of others (Webster et al, 2013).

6.3.2.2 The Ideal Factors

In total, five factors were acquired regarding an ideal role, which were each qualitatively different from one another, even though statistically correlated (as discussed in 5.4.1). This reinforces the notion that the role is one that is complex (Butt and Lowe, 2012), a view that is concurred with following worldwide research, such as in the USA (Giangreco, 2010), Australia (Butt and Lowe, 2012) and Hong Kong (Trent, 2014). It also shows how the reality of the role has become, and is perceived to be, subjectively different for those who experience it, with varied and valid accounts being salient (Maxwell, 2012). Whilst there were differences in how the P set sorted the statements in relation to one another, resulting in the emergence of multiple factors, some items were sorted typically by all participants. These consensus statements are presented here to outline the shared views regarding certain aspects of the ideal role that are common across the P set. The consensus statements are presented in table 6.2, followed by a subsequent interpretation of each in relation to the literature.

Table 6.2 Shared Perceptions of the Ideal Role Across all Five Factors.

Items	IF1	IF2	IF3	IF4	IF5
2: I am expected to teach a whole class on my own.	-5	-4	-5	-4	-3
12: I have opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before I support children with their work.	0	+1	0	0	-1
26: I have a good understanding of my role.	+4	+4	+4	+2	+4

32: I am clear about what is expected of me.	+2	+2	+2	+3	+3
60: I complete marking for the class teacher.	-5	-4	-3	-4	-5

Ideally, the P set all agreed that as a TA, they should not be expected to teach whole classes on their own (item 2). This was ranked towards the 'most disagree' end of the continuum, with participants sorting it at -3, -4 or -5, implying a consensus that the role of the TA should not incorporate this responsibility. Similarly, they all felt that they should not be expected to complete marking for the class teacher (item 60). Again, this item was placed at the extreme end of most disagree, with ranked between -3 and -5. This reinforces the idea that TAs do not feel that they should be completing jobs that they do not see as their responsibility. Undertaking tasks, such as these, certainly have implications over pay (Russell et al, 2005), as well as training and qualifications.

Having the opportunity to talk about tasks before supporting children with their work (item 12) is less important for the P set. This item was placed neutrally from -1 to +1. Perhaps the subjective variation of importance held regarding related items, such as being prepared (item 18), having necessary resources (item 57), having time to refresh their subject knowledge (item 13) and having a good understanding of the curriculum (item 7) are seen as being more pertinent to them, in ensuring that their support is effective.

Finally, the P set were all in agreement that as TAs, they should have a good understanding of the role (item 26) and be clear about what is expected of them (item 32). The ranking of item 26 places it at +4 with only one factor array showing a sorting position of +2, highlighting that all TAs agree that such clarity is pivotal, supporting the literature, which also highlights the necessity for such explicit guidance (Trent, 2014). Linked to having an understanding of the role, is clarity regarding expectations. These two items hold similar significance for the P set. Perhaps this implies that day-to-day expectations may not always currently match their understanding of their job description, which is why both items potentially have significance for the participants, ideally.

Having discussed the emergence of multiple factors, as well as the consensus between each of them, I will go on to describe how each of the nuanced factors specifically relate to the literature regarding an ideal TA role.

6.3.2.3 Factor IF1: Prepared, in every sense.

This factor focuses on the feelings of the TA, with particular salience with regards to confidence and having a good support network. These are interesting, considering the view that TAs should posses certain characteristics, which ultimately impact on their practice (Alborz et al, 2009). These TAs appear to agree that factors, such as confidence and happiness are important, reinforcing this view somewhat. This is perhaps underpinned by feeling integrated within a team and as Collins and Simco (2006) assert, this is also an important factor in ensuring better outcomes with regards to TA effectiveness. Similarly, Mahmoud (2011) found that TAs think that team work is important, supporting the views of the TAs here.

As well as personal feelings being significant, other features of the role are also considered to be important, such as having a good understanding of the curriculum and having time to ensure that they are prepared for tasks. This is also of substance for Webster et al (2013), who conclude that TA practice is shaped by how well they are prepared, ensuring positive impact, especially when delivering well planned interventions. Having responsibility for the curriculum is not deemed to be part of the role of the TA (Mahmoud, 2011), so the views of these TAs, regarding curriculum knowledge, might be undermined somewhat by this statement. Irrespective of this, the role of the TA is increasingly becoming pedagogical (Tucker, 2009); these TAs appear to acknowledge this and think that understanding the curriculum is now, and should be, of importance.

These TAs also feel that they should be well qualified to undertake the role, creating another debate about opportunities for securing necessary accreditation. They do agree that they should work with children with SEN, but do not feel that they should be responsible for their progress, as outlined in legislation (SEND COP, 2015). Whilst TA training is important (Giangreco, 2010), Mahmoud (2011) states

that different levels of qualifications, for TAs, creates confusion and further blurrs the lines about their duties. However, Tucker (2009) earlier attributed role confusion to the expectations and functions of the role, with training opportunities being implicated as one aspect of TA role identity. Perhaps Basford et al's (2017) comment that TAs are hired, in some cases, as 'specialists' for children with SEN reinforces that TAs are employed with different levels of experience and training to start with.

Mahmoud (2011) has the view that collaboration with class teachers leads to democratic working but acknowledges the potential threat to achieving this due to power imbalances. Having duties that are closely aligned to those of the teacher's may prove challenging, especially given the view that some teachers see the role as being 'subordinate' to theirs (Trent, 2014, pg.29). However, these TAs seek democracy and think that it is important that they have a say with regard to planning their duties and setting targets and outcomes for children. This is certainly in contrast to Webster et al (2010) who think that decisions about TAs should be made for them rather than by, or with them.

TAs holding this view do not think that they should work with children on a one to one basis, so refute the notion of being 'velcroed' to children (Lorenz, 1998; Balshaw, 2010). However, they consider group work to be of more significance, so their viewpoint lies between that of Balshaw (2010) and Alborz et al (2009), who found that TAs should support all children in the setting. However, as Webster et al (2013) state, TAs only typically deliver group sessions for approximately thirty minutes per day, implying that these TAs see the delivery of group work as being much more pertinent to their role than brief periods of intervention.

6.3.2.4 Factor IF2: A well-defined and directed role, focussed on general classroom support.

The focus of this viewpoint is also related to TA feelings. However, there are subtle differences in that these TAs prioritise voice and being appreciated as more pertinent, rather than feelings of confidence and support, as those in IF1. These TAs also think that maximising opportunities for communication is essential. Such

communication includes discussion with class teachers regarding tasks as well as providing feedback following completion of tasks. As Butt and Lance (2005) conclude, feedback is vital for teachers in ensuring that they have an understanding of how well children accessed and achieved tasks, thus supporting their planning. In contrast to IF1, these TAs feel their knowledge should be focussed on tasks rather than the wider curriculum. Having knowledge of tasks appears to be more directive than collaborative, as these TAs do not feel that they should work together with regards to planning. It is more important that they know what they are doing rather than having a say in what they are doing. This fits with Attwood and Bland's (2011) view that TAs should have clarity about tasks so that they can support children better.

With regards to the day-to-day aspect of the role, these TAs see it being more classroom based and think that they should have a role in supporting all of the class, with less responsibility for those with SEN. Firstly, class based support is considered to be useful (Blatchford et al, 2009; Radford et al, 2015) in terms of promoting behaviours for learning and keeping children on task, which in turn supports the class teacher through their presence (Abbott et al, 2011). However, as Fletcher-Campbell (2010) asserts, the role should not solely be seen as helping to raise standards and reducing teacher workload. Providing better opportunities for teaching does not automatically mean that children have better learning opportunities. Thus, the importance of class-based support could be questioned considering these comments. Similarly, Webster et al (2013) assert that TAs are most effective when they are delivering well planned and robust interventions, further critiquing this view.

Opportunities for training and CPD are also important for these TAs but they do not wish to progress into teacher training. This highlights that not all TAs wish to further their career into the teaching profession, but want to be appropriately trained for their ever-increasing duties. This fits with Abbott et al's (2011) view that the professional needs of TAs are also changing, in line with the increased demands of the role. As such, training should centre on the complex needs of children, as well as focussing on how they learn (Abbott et al, 2011), highlighting

that it should not be solely linked to career progression but preparedness for the role. As participant 26 also stated, "CPD should not be pay related", further reinforcing this view. However, if TAs are class based, as these TAs think they should be, how relevant is CPD when they are more directed and supervised? Should training be focussed on learning and pedagogy, so that TAs are better able to use their initiative with regard to the level of support they offer, as Alborz et al (2009) think they should? This would also enable them to make decisions without needing to seek clarification, which is also important for these TAs.

6.3.2.5 Factor IF3: Hear the voices of TAs and appreciate what they do.

The viewpoint held by these TAs makes me consider their view of the role as being more closely aligned with that of a teacher, especially as they are more inclined to want to teacher train. These TAs are less concerned about being given well differentiated work, for example, perhaps because they feel that by having opportunities to collaborate with regards to the lesson plans they will have a better understanding of tasks. Butt and Lance (2005) agree that communication regarding activities and tasks results in better outcomes for children, as it promotes effective adult support. TAs also think that as well as having a good understanding of tasks, they should also have knowledge of the curriculum. This supports the notion that the role is, and should be, in the views of these TAs, more pedagogically placed (Webster et al, 2013; Trent, 2014).

However, these TAs have clear views in that they do not think that they should work with individual children or deliver group work. Similarly, promoting independent working is less important for these TAs. This is interesting given that the literature implies that TAs do, and should, encourage children to use their own strategies to support their own learning (Radford et al, 2015). Similarly, Mahmoud (2011) found that the TAs involved in his study thought that they had a role in encouraging learner independence and rewarding pupils for their efforts, which are not in line with the opinions held in this viewpoint.

As well as collaboration regarding tasks, these TAs think that they should be involved in planning their duties. This is in line with the view of Butt and Lance

(2005), who also think that this should be the case. As Bach et al (2006) highlight, teachers would like TAs to be more in tune with what they would like them to do. If they are not included in outlining or planning their duties then this does not allow a sense of clarity around the role; thus, TAs may have to second guess what is expected of them. In line with this, these TAs do not think they should have to seek consent when decision making, so this would also potentially be facilitated through clarity of the role. This has more significance when considering Mahmoud's (2011) view that decisions made by TAs impact on the support offered to children, potentially strengthening the view that TAs should be involved in planning their duties.

Important for these TAs is feeling valued and appreciated. Indeed, Bland and Sleightholme (2012) found that TAs are valued by children who they support. Feelings of value are linked to self-efficacy and having opportunity to contribute and share their views is also significant for these TAs. Mahmoud (2011) states that collective decision making promotes a sense of being valued, further reinforcing the importance of this view. Thus, the desire for their inclusion in planning and decision-making may also be underpinned by these reasons, as well as in the desire to seek clarity of the role. Interestingly however, they think that they should feel undermined. This is not in line with any of the literature and I wondered if this is representative of a lack of understanding of the vocabulary, or through an error made when completing the Q sort, as this statement contradicts others held of significance in this factor. Participant comments, of those who loaded onto this factor and rated the statement of feeling undermined so highly, also commented on the importance of feeling trusted, being treated like adults and being seen as members of staff, further highlighting that this is likely to be in error. However, I did also consider that they may have simply accepted that there is a hierarchy and are content with their identity and positioning of themselves within it (Trent, 2014), perhaps feeling almost as though they should be undermined, that this was somehow legitimate.

Whilst these TAs think that they should offer class based support, they do not think that they should teach whole classes. They feel that their responsibilities should

be reflected in their pay, supporting the Russell et al (2015) view of TAs. They also think that they are entitled to their full breaks without interruption, perhaps reinforcing the notion of appreciation and entitlements. Whilst offering class based support, these TAs do think they should be expected to respond to inappropriate behaviours but do not see this as supporting children with social and emotional needs; thus, potentially not creating a link between the two or viewing behaviour in isolation rather than being linked to need. This potentially reinforces the necessity for training around SEN, supporting Abbot et al (2011) and Symes and Humphrey's (2011) views. This is especially important considering that TAs are deemed to have an important role in promoting inclusion for pupils with SEMH needs (Groom and Rose, 2005). Similarly, Alborz et al (2009) found positive outcomes for children with SEMH needs when supported by TAs.

6.3.2.6 Factor IF4: A pedagogically positioned role.

TAs holding this view share a very different role to the ones outlined in the alternative ideal factors. They see the role as providing one to one support and think that this is what their primary duties should entail. This view corresponds within Kamen's (2008) outline of the role, fitting solely within the pupil level, potentially highlighting the view that TAs think they should attach themselves to one child (Balshaw, 2010). It also implies that they do not see the role as working at other levels including the school and curriculum levels (Kamen, 2008). Similarly, Blatchford et al (2009) states that TAs are usually assigned to individual pupils in secondary settings, which may explain why five of the six TAs holding this view work in secondary schools. This leads me to wonder whether or not these TAs are sharing their perceptions of a different role or simply outlining that these responsibilities are personally more important for them, than those expressed in different viewpoints. Indeed, only 7% of TAs involved in the Basford et al (2017) study said that they offer one to one support, whereas 28% of the participants held this view in this study.

These TAs also think that they have a role in supporting children with SEN, with five of the six participants initially loading onto CF1, implying that they do not see this as something that should change. This is important given that TAs often

promote inclusion (Abbott et al, 2011), allowing children with SEN to access mainstream education, as they are entitled (Children and Families Act, 2014). However, these TAs also feel that they should be personally responsible for the progress that children make and are also more inclined to complete tasks for them. This gives weight to the Webster et al (2013) view that TA interactions with children are more task focussed. They are likely to be if they have a strong sense of responsibility for ensuring task completion, as expressed by these TAs. This may also provide an explanation as to why views exist within the literature that children are less motivated to complete work independently when supported by a TA (Lorenz, 1998; Webster et al, 2010; Webster et al, 2013). Perhaps further consideration should have been afforded to finding out why this is the case, rather than simply stating that it is. It is through gaining TA views that we can start to unpick how their perceptions affect their practice. It also interests me as to why TAs think they should be held responsible for children with SEN, considering that accountability rests with the class teacher in ensuring that they make progress (SEND COP, 2015). Similarly, teachers should not abdicate responsibility for children with SEN onto TAs either (Mansaray, 2006), yet this viewpoint implies that TAs still think it should, potentially founded upon current experience (as heavily supported by the number of these TAs loading on to CF1).

6.3.2.7 Factor IF5: TAs should be qualified and confident professionals.

The final factor expresses a role that I infer to be more closely akin to that of a HLTA. Abbott et al (2011) found that three fifths of TAs, included within their study, wished to progress to HLTA status, further adding saliency to my view. The DfES (2000) frame the role of a HLTA as being a 'step up' from that of TA, reinforcing that there are different levels of support, each requiring different qualifications. However, Mahmoud (2011) found the duties associated with a TA and HLTA to be insignificantly different, apart from line management responsibilities. However, the notion of a 'step up' further illuminates a power structure, which contradicts the views that democratic practice is most effective (Mahmoud, 2011). Irrespective, TAs holding this viewpoint think that they should be viewed as professionals, regardless of whether or not they are HLTAs, as the TAs involved in the Abbott et al (2011) study also felt. This contradicts views that

TAs should be described as 'paraprofessionals' (Kerry, 2005; Webster et al, 2010). Participant 6 reinforces this view in their comment that, "TAs should be seen as professionals due to their levels of qualifications".

These TAs think that they should be well qualified and have expertise that the teachers should be aware of, so that they could potentially have more of an impact when supporting children. This, for me, refers back to the importance of the SLT having a thorough understanding of the support that TAs can offer, which ultimately impacts on how they are deployed (Webster et al 2013). Interestingly, these TAs think that they should fit more within the school level (Kamen, 2008), supporting and collaborating with regard to their duties, as well as school polices on a more systemic level. Involved with this, they see the role as fundamentally supporting and teaching whole classes, as well as delivering group work. However, these duties do not extend as far as marking work or preparing resources, which further lead to a sense of 'role ambiguity', as many TAs do not see their responsibility as teaching whole classes. Similarly, class teachers do not see this as the role of the TA and feel that it would undermine their professional qualifications (Bach et al, 2006). However, it is acknowledged within the literature that TAs are being asked to cover classes (Houssart, 2013).

These TAs also think that they should have access to training events, which is supported in the literature (Kerry, 2005; Butt and Lowe, 2012). Abbott et al (2011) also found that TAs want training opportunities. They also reported that teachers feel that TAs are not fully trained, or qualified, for the responsibilities that they are given, further reinforcing this need. I felt this rather ironic given the view that they frequently transfer responsibility for the most complex children (those with SEN) on to the TA (Webster et al, 2013). Abbott et al (2011) feel that TAs should be offered specific training around SEN, so that they are aware of changes regarding inclusion and link this training to TAs being confident enough in the role to improve their practice of supporting learning and behaviour management.

6.4 What Can We Learn from the Current and Ideal Factors?

The viewpoints elicited from the analysis are interesting. Only two factors emerged regarding the current role with most of the TAs agreeing that they feel that their role varies from supporting individual children with SEN to delivering group work and administrative tasks. Most of these TAs (CF1) currently feel that they are less likely to have a sense of belonging in school, are unhappy, do not think their pay reflects their responsibilities and have little opportunities to ensure they are informed or well trained to undertake their duties. These TAs predominantly work with children with SEN. Conversely, some TAs held an alternative current viewpoint, in that they feel happy, valued, have clarity over their role, feel they have a voice and have less sense of responsibility for children's progress. Interestingly, multiple viewpoints emerged from the data with regards to ideal practice, showing how perspectives regarding a future role are much more varied. In considering the factors for both current and ideal role, it is pleasing to see that whilst TAs, in the main, currently describe a concerning view, few of these think this is how the role should be, implying that they perceive scope for it to improve.

6.4.1 How the Current and Ideal Factors Relate

Aspects of the current factors were represented in the ideal viewpoints, showing consensus between what TAs currently feel and how they would ideally like to see the role progress. Particularly, statements relating to working with children with SEN was a heavy feature of CF1. Similarly, aside from one ideal factor (IF2), they all highlight that this is an important aspect of an ideal role. Thus, TAs, in the main, very much see that they have a role in supporting children with SEN in the future. However, the ideal viewpoints differ from CF1 with regards to associated statements related to SEN support. Currently the TAs holding the view of CF1 feel that they do not have prospects to contribute or share their views regarding children with SEN but ideally they would like to have more opportunity for this. Those loading onto CF1 also express that they are currently more likely to complete work for children whereas ideally, none of the TAs felt this should be the case. Interestingly, the TAs holding the view of CF1 currently feel responsible for the progress that children with SEN make, worry when they do not complete as

much work as expected and are differentiating work for them, as they are not provided with well differentiated work by the class teacher. Most TAs loading onto CF1 agree that they should not feel responsible for their work rate or progress made, in an ideal role. They also feel that the teacher should provide well differentiated work for them so that it is not their responsibility to adapt tasks. These ideal views are very much in line with the SEND COP (2015), whereby responsibility for children with SEN should remain with the class teacher and should not be transferred onto TAs.

Of the four ideal factors identifying SEN support, as being important in a future role, only one represented a more comparable view to CF1. Those holding the view of IF4 agree that they should feel responsible for children's progress and work rate. This suggests that whilst the dominant view in the literature is that TAs 'velcro' themselves to children and have assumed responsibility for educating children with SEN, most TAs in the present study do not think that this should be their role. These viewpoints are encouraging in that they reinforce that TAs want to see change with regards to their practice and how others perceive their responsibilities. Of the 38 TAs participating in this study, six load onto factor (IF4). However, 18 of the TAs holding the current view of CF1, loaded onto other ideal factors, that do not represent a role that is consistent with that presented within the literature, with regards to assumed responsibility for SEN, showing the potential for change when we collaborate with them.

With regards to the functional aspects of the day to day role, TAs do not think that they should always work directly with children, with exception of those holding the views of IF1 and IF5, implying that in an ideal world, this is not as an important feature of the role. At present, all TAs shared that they do work directly with children (loading at +5 on the factor arrays for both CF1 and CF2). Similarly, with the exception of those holding the view of IF4, who are more inclined to, TAs do not feel that they should work with only one child. Both current viewpoints indicate that TAs do not predominantly work with individual children, highlighting how, mostly, they do not think this should change. Currently TAs also broadly agree that they are not expected to teach whole classes and also do not feel that

they should be expected to, in an ideal world. TAs currently agree that they deliver group work but differ in their views about whether or not they are prepared for this form of support. In an ideal world, some of the TAs felt that delivering group work should be part of the day to day role (those loading onto IF1, IF2 and IF5), emphasising how views about ideal practice differ. Similarly, in an ideal role, TAs do not all agree that they should provide general classroom support to all children in the class. Only those holding the viewpoint IF2 feel that this should be part of their expectations. Again, this differs from the current role in that the TAs loading onto CF1 feel that they do presently offer this level of support. Currently TAs neither agree nor disagree that they prepare resources for the class teacher but disagree that this should be a feature of a future role, with those holding the view of IF5, expressing the most disagreement with this task.

TAs currently do not get time to refresh their subject knowledge. Those holding the viewpoint of CF1 feel that they do need this time whereas those holding the view CF2 do not. In relation to an ideal role, only those loading onto IF1 and IF3 agreed that time set aside to refresh subject knowledge would be useful. Similarly, the TAs holding these two ideal views (IF1 and IF3) also feel that they should have a good understanding of the curriculum. Those holding the remaining three ideal viewpoints feel it more useful to understand the lesson objectives and feel that they should be able to support children by having knowledge of, and being able to explain, tasks instead.

TAs holding the viewpoint CF1 currently feel that their workload is unmanageable, whereas those holding the view of CF2 disagree and feel that their workload is manageable. Ideally, this holds importance for TAs loading onto IF1, IF3 and IF4, with the other two factors highlighting that a manageable workload is less important. What does hold importance for all TAs, both currently and ideally, is having a good understanding of their role. Similarly, TAs would ideally like to be clear about what is expected of them. Currently, only those holding the view of CF2 feel this is the case with the majority of TAs (CF1) feeling less certain about this. With regards to understanding who manages their workload, TAs disagree that this currently rests with their line manager. However, they do not entirely

agree that the teacher prescribes their workload either, reinforcing the view in the literature that TAs often do not know who is responsible for their line management and direction of tasks (Basford et al, 2017). As such, TAs currently express that they do not contribute to outlining their duties and do not make suggestions regarding their role. Interestingly, TAs feel that, ideally, line managers should not manage their workload and neither should teachers, with exception of those holding the view of IF4, who would prefer such direction. However, some TAs (IF3 and IF5) would like to be involved in planning their duties, whilst others would ideally like to be able to make suggestions about it (IF1 and IF3). What is most important for all TAs, however, is that they are recognised for what they do and this be reflected in their pay. Currently, TAs do not feel that their wage reflects their level of responsibility, with those holding the view of CF1 agreeing with this the most.

What was clear from the two current factors is that the majority of TAs (those loading onto CF1) are unhappy in their job, do not feel valued, do need feel appreciated and do not have a voice. Conversely, those holding the view of CF2 expressed the opposite with regards to these feelings, which is encouraging. All TAs agree, to varying amounts, that they feel that everyone should be heard equally. They also feel ideally, that as TAs, they should be happy in their jobs, with exception of those holding the view of IF5, who feel this less important than having a sense of confidence and being appropriately qualified. All TAs agree that in an ideal world they should feel appreciated and valued, again with exception of those loading onto IF5, who did not prioritise statements regarding personal feelings related to the role. Personal feelings of happiness and worth, as expressed in four of the ideal viewpoints, are congruent with the views of TAs holding the viewpoint expressed in CF2.

This comparison of current and ideal factors is both interesting and encouraging in that it perhaps gives a sense that the views of an ideal role can be partially, if not totally achieved in the future, as some of these current experiences (those holding the view CF2) imply that barriers can be removed to achieving better working conditions.

6.4.2 Conclusions Following Comparison

My overall sense following interpretation and discussion of these five ideal viewpoints are that TAs are fundamentally describing different roles, that all currently fit under the 'umbrella' term of TA. This has implications for those seeking to define and evaluate the role. The notion of 'role ambiguity' (Webster et al, 2013) currently seems fitting to me, as the vast array of tasks and responsibilities that schools direct TAs to undertake (Abbott et al, 2011) are so different that it seems impossible to ensure coherency and consistency. Without clear government guidance, TA practice is ultimately shaped by schools, further reinforcing the need for SLT to have more of an appreciation and understanding of the role and the staff, whom they employ to undertake the positions (Basford et al 2017). It is concluded that with clarity of expectations comes effective practice (Blatchford et al, 2011). However, it is my view that the voices of TAs are pivotal in seeking to address the critique and while ever these are marginalised in the literature (Basford et al, 2017), the overall picture of effectiveness is not going to change. As Wilson and Bedford (2008) state, "researchers need to listen to the voices of TAs to understand their views" (pg. 149). The TAs in this study contributed their perceptions and ideas about how they would like to practice, which I consider to be more helpful than outlining what they do not do, or are not good at.

6.4.3 Contribution to TA Literature.

This study went beyond exploring the features of the role, in terms of everyday activities, as heavily represented in the literature (Alborz et al, 2009; Webster et al, 2010; Webster et al, 2013), including statements about how TAs feel and how they are managed, in order to explore the impact of their responsibilities for them. As Basford et al (2017) state, previous research has narrowly focussed on TA performance and their impact, which has been measured by looking at pupil attainment, which is problematic. These evaluative studies have subsequently informed policy, with some being government funded, to inform recommended practice regarding TAs, such as the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project (Webster et al, 2010) and the Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA) project. However, TA participation, in these projects, was minimal, with

their views being neglected in the research. The inclusion and sole focus of TAs in this study exploring *their* experiences and views of the role address these limitations and provide alternative perspectives when considering TA practice.

Additionally, this study also goes beyond looking at current experiences, adding to the literature by highlighting how they perceive an ideal role, something that I could not see represented among the research. The emergence of multiple factors shows that there is a range of viewpoints about an ideal way of working and that each of these are important when considering future TA practice. As critiqued within the literature review, assumptions have been made about TAs by researchers and conclusions have been presented to underpin their views that TA practice is ineffective, in the main (Webster et al, 2010; Webster et al 2013). This study differs in that it prioritises the voice of TAs and seeks to explore what their views are, in order to further understand how their constructs of the role may affect their practice. Thus, it could be argued that it goes some way to acknowledging conclusions made by Trent (2014) who stated, "there are calls for research to focus on the experiences of TAs in schools" (pg. 30).

As the majority of the literature focusses on the functional aspects of the role, such as monitoring how many interactions TAs have with children (Webster and Blatchford, 2017) and measuring the impact they have with regards to academic attainment (Webster et al, 2013), I felt it important to acknowledge other variables, such as feelings and experiences associated with it. Indeed, Fletcher-Campbell (2010) is also of the view that research has focussed on their impact and effectiveness, especially from the perspectives of children and teachers, also questioning how existing research and literature affects TA efficacy and emotions. When I presented my aims of the research to the TAs they were all pleased that I was giving them opportunity to contribute to the literature and some were particularly aware of studies that did not paint them in a good light (Webster et al, 2010; Webster et al, 2013). Thus, I felt that this gave them a vehicle to have their say and provide constructive views, consistent with the aims of Q research, further reinforcing the appropriateness of the application of this methodology in this study (McKeown and Thomas, 2013).

With regards to voice, it is clear that TAs have views regarding what they currently do and should do in the future. However, the scope of the role potentially highlights the lack of guidance that they are given as agreed by a number of researchers (Radford et al, 2015; Basford et al, 2017). Even with this lack of clarity, they are able to subjectively construct an idealised way of working that is useful for researchers to know. It further reinforces the saliency of collaborating with TAs with regards to shaping job descriptions. I concur that all of these issues presented within the literature (clarity of role, politics, power imbalances, training opportunities, day to day experiences and collaboration) affect their identity, which ultimately impacts on their practice (Trent, 2014).

6.5 Implications for Schools

The implications for schools are clear. At present, most of the TAs who participated in this study are not happy in their jobs, feel undermined, unappreciated and feel that their role has little value. These feelings are important to acknowledge given that their responsibilities are increasing and that they are currently supporting children with the most complex needs (CF1). Whilst this viewpoint was held by most of the TAs, they clearly had ideas about how they think the role should look in the future, which ideally would not result in them feeling this way. Some of the literature emphasises that TAs should be able to collaborate in planning their duties (Butt and Lance, 2005; Mahmoud, 2011); should have opportunities to plan and prepare before delivering group work (Ofsted, 2012); should not be responsible for the progress of children with SEN (SEND COP, 2015) and should work with children at different levels (individual, group and whole class) (Balshaw, 2010; Radford et al, 2015). The viewpoints associated with the ideal role add further weight to these recommendations given that TAs also consider aspects of these to be pertinent to the role. Therefore, schools should consider:

- The job title, as this may be underpinning the ambiguity of the role (Trent, 2014) and reinforcing a power hierarchy. How TAs are framed can be an issue, with those holding the view of IF5 strongly feeling that TAs should be seen as qualified professionals.

- Including TAs in planning their duties to ensure clarity and consensus with regards to their responsibilities, reducing the sense of 'otherness' (Basford et al, 2017). TAs holding the views of IF1 and IF3 feel that they should have opportunity to make suggestions about how they practice. Similarly, they think that they should contribute to planning their duties, a view that is concurred with by those holding the view IF5. Ultimately, if opportunities are provided, decisions can be made by TAs about how involved they wish to be, in keeping with their own personal points of view.
- Ensuring that TAs have time to communicate with the class teacher prior to and after lessons (as recommended by Oftsed, 2012). Two ideal factors (IF2 and IF3), incorporating the views of both primary and secondary TAs, held this in high regard, reinforced by the literature, highlighting the pertinence of this (Wilson and Bedford, 2008).
- Ensuring they are well resourced and prepared for delivering interventions, which will ensure better impact (Webster et al, 2013), which was especially important for those holding ideal views IF1, IF2 and IF3.
- Supporting their professional development by providing opportunities for training, in line with the increasing demands associated with the role (Abbott et al, 2011). Not only is this heavily advocated within the literature (Balshaw, 2010; Butt and Lowe, 2012) but also agreed with, to varying degrees, by all TAs when considering an ideal role.
- Supporting them personally by allowing them to have a voice. Democratic working elicits better outcomes and more effective working (Mahmoud, 2011). All TAs think that ideally, everyone should be heard equally. They also feel that they should be appreciated and valued, with the exception of those loading onto factor IF5.
- Inviting TAs to staff meetings, which is likely to mean addressing their working hours to accommodate this need. Most TAs would ideally like to be kept informed and attend staff meetings.

The key message following Trent's (2014) work is that schools ultimately have to consider the role of the TA, as well as the identity construction of this group of professionals, if they wish to retain staff. The need for this is further reinforced by

the majority of TAs who currently express that they are unhappy and feel de-valued. Ideally, TAs would not feel like this; with exception of IF5, all TAs valued statements related to their feelings and held these in high regard when considered in relation to other statements. The TAs holding the ideal viewpoint, expressed in IF5, reflect that TAs should be viewed as qualified professionals.

Radford et al (2015) also assert that as the government have not been clear about defining the role of the TA, schools have been left with the responsibility of deploying them as they best see fit. However, these decisions should be underpinned by research, evidence and guidance to support decision-making (Radford et al, 2015). Time should be afforded to consider how the SLT construct the role and for what purpose they think TAs could and should be utilised. As presented here, the views of TAs are imperative and add salient, personal perceptions of how they think they should practice, and should be involved in the construction of the role. The emergence of multiple factors, related to an ideal role, also reinforces the need to collaborate with TAs regarding how they would like to see the role shaped in the future. It cannot be assumed that one preferred way of working, as decided by the SLT, will be commensurate with all TA views. Similarly, TAs may have expertise (as expressed in IF5) that can be utilised more effectively, which may only become known through effective communication with them.

Schools should also ensure that it is clear for TAs who they are line managed by and who defines their responsibilities; this would also ensure that TAs know who they can speak to if they have suggestions about their role. This clear structure also promotes opportunities for TAs to access support, should they feel the need to.

Similarly, it may be of interest, and importance for schools to ascertain the different perspectives of candidates during the employment of TAs. As noted, the way TAs position themselves and the feelings that they hold, affect how they work, with 'entrenched attitudes' (pg. 88) being difficult to change (Webster et al, 2013). For example, if prospective TAs fundamentally believe that they should provide

one to one support, as outlined in IF4, this is likely to affect their practice. Thus, the ideal views elicited here can help SLTs understand the varied perceptions that exist about the role, also encouraging them to consider how they would like TAs to work in their schools.

6.6 Implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs)

Key to this research is considering the implications for EPs. However, this is not particularly evident in the literature and the link between evaluation of TA practice to the work of the EP has not been given much consideration. However, I feel it essential, given that EPs work with children and families, who are often heavily supported by TAs (Mahmoud, 2011). Decisions that TAs make, as well as their ability to undertake the role, impact directly on the children they support. As a TEP, I am often asked to provide training to schools on effective classroom support. I have also been asked to run sessions about supporting children with SEN, where TAs are voicing that they are struggling, which I have subsequently reflected upon and wondered if I have indirectly reinforced the view that TAs should be responsible for them. Whilst the responsibility for children with SEN should remain with the class teacher (SEND COP, 2015), in reality I see TAs being responsible for their day-to-day educational experiences, often teaching them in quiet areas, such as school libraries. Their viewpoints associated with the current role also reinforce that this is the case, with many feeling personally responsible for the progress that children make (CF1). Ascertaining the views of TAs with regards to an ideal role reinforces to me that most of them, with the exception of those holding the viewpoint represented in IF4, do not think they should be undertaking one to one work. Therefore, they do not think they should be assigned to individual children (Balshaw, 2010). The knowledge gained from this research is useful when considering the work of the EP at different levels.

6.6.1 Individual Assessments

It is useful to have an understanding of who is providing what level of support to the child before making recommendations. As outlined in the current factors, TAs feel, at present, that they have responsibility for children with SEN but do not think that this should entirely rest with them. Ideally, they all agree that a fundamental

aspect of the role should be to support children with SEN, but not constant focussed work with one child. Thus, are EPs reinforcing this way of working with the specificity associated with recommendations, using language such as 'constant adult support', especially when completing statutory assessments.

Similarly, EPs make suggestions about particular interventions that should be delivered. With the exception of IF4, all TAs agree that they should not work solely with one child. Thus, the length and duration of implemented interventions require consideration, as TAs may not feel that this is something that they think should be part of their role. Similarly, recommending specific resources to support learning, assumes that the SLT will ensure that staff are appropriately trained and prepared to use these appropriately. Specific programmes of interventions *are* highly likely to be led by TAs (Webster et al, 2013).

6.6.2 Group Interventions

Knowing whether TAs are prepared and well resourced for these is essential in considering their impact on the rate of childrens' progress. Interventions have the most impact when TAs are prepared and have a good understanding of the sessions (Webster et al, 2013). Of the ideal viewpoints, only three (IF1, IF2 and IF5) expressed a view that TAs should deliver group work. The likelihood of TAs running interventions is high, which is reinforced by their current views about the role, with all TAs agreeing that they do deliver this form of support. As expressed, most TAs think that they should deliver group work, so this is likely to be something that they would welcome, through associating this with the role. However, it is important for EPs to provide clear guidance around the requirements of the TAs in delivering sessions, as well as considering 'readiness' for the delivery of them, potentially being a factor affecting pupil progress.

6.6.3 Training

Training offered to schools should also be opened up to TAs. Training around effective classroom support should acknowledge the views of TAs as, in my experience, this usually attempts to address how they can most effectively support children with their learning rather than looking at other needs, such as specific

SEN. TAs may require and want specific training on understanding SEN, particularly Autism, as Symes and Humphrey (2011) found. All TAs would ideally have a sense of feeling confident in their role. However, TAs loading on to only three of the ideal factors (IF1, IF2 and IF5) express that training is important for them. However, the TAs holding the views of IF3 and IF4 feel more so that they should be line managed closely, so perhaps this is what would foster their confidence, resulting in them not seeing as much value in accessing training events. However, whilst these TAs would all predominantly rather be based in the classroom, or delivering group work, they should still have an understanding of SEN, the curriculum and how best to support children in accessing it. These views are in line with Abbott et al (2009) who also assert that TAs should contribute to teaching and learning more broadly. TAs are in need of appropriate training opportunities in line with the ever-increasing demands of their role (Abbott et al, 2011) and ensuring that this is the case is beneficial for children, school, families and EPs, so that when recommendations are made, they are more likely to be implemented appropriately, having more impact.

Training should also be considered for teachers and SLT regarding how TAs are deployed, especially as the legislation outlines that the responsibility for TAs rests with both teachers and SENCOs (SEND COP, 2015). Basford et al (2017) also reinforce that teachers would like training on how to effectively manage TAs. Interestingly, the TAs in this study did not particularly agree that their work should be prescribed by the teacher, or by their line manager, perhaps implying that a joint training event with both TAs and teachers, which is underpinned by the legislation, as a basis for discussing effective and collaborative working, might also be necessary. This would also allow TAs to have a sense that they are contributing to shaping their role, which is important for some. Similarly, it promotes collaborative working through allowing multiple viewpoints, of teacher, SLT and TAs, to be heard, promoting their voice. Ultimately, an event such as this, led by an EP, would result in SLT, teachers and TAs having a better understanding of their role and what is expected of them, which is important for all TAs participating in this study.

6.6.4 Supervision

All TAs were less concerned about receiving supervision but voiced a sense of feeling supported. Most TAs asked what the term supervision meant, so perhaps being unsure about this type of support network resulted in them feeling it less significant than some of the other statements, when considered in relation to one another. However, opportunities to access supervision should be explored, with this potentially being a role for the EP in providing reflecting teams or solution-oriented consultations, for example, especially if TAs feel they are not able to share their views or problem solve with their line managers. This would help to formalise and create a healthy support network for TAs, whereby any ideas discussed can be reflected back to SENCOs, with their permission.

6.6.5 Summary

Underpinning all of these considerations is the knowledge that TAs have different constructs of an ideal role. It is important for EPs to understand that different viewpoints exist with regards to the profession, especially as these viewpoints impact on how TAs think they should work, which in turn have implications on how they feel and practice. Reflection of these views will enable EPs to consider how these beliefs may impact upon the ways that TAs work, how they see themselves positioned within the school structure, as well as prompting them to consider how they can work with TAs and schools in the future.

6.7 Use of Q Methodology

Q Methodology was used as a vehicle to express TA views (Stenner et al, 2008) without them having to find and use their own words, which they said they found to be better than an interview. Thus, I felt that if I had used a method that had resulted in a discussion or narrative, TAs might have been reluctant to participate. Similarly, the focus group reinforced that group interviews would not have been appropriate, due to dominant voices. Reinforcing the use of Q, one TA said that she was only participating because all TAs were working with standardised statements.

As the items were derived from the literature, I felt that they provided something different and offered alternative statements that were also important to consider. The complexity associated with the role meant that creating a Q set that was exhaustive of their views was never going to be achieved. However, I wanted the Q set to be as representative as possible, with most TAs confirming that their views had been covered, meaning that my aims of contributing their voice to the literature was somewhat achieved through this methodology. The structure of the methodology also allowed for me to add in some potentially provocative statements, such as whether or not they wanted to be teachers, views regarding pay, as well as personal feelings of worth, that TAs certainly quibbled over when considering how much they agreed or disagreed with them. However, I felt that they were central to the study and were important aspects of the undertakings and perceptions of the role.

6.8 Limitations of this Research

As with any piece of research, there are limitations that should be acknowledged. Particular limitations to this study are presented here to show how I have acknowledged and reflected upon how these may have impacted on the findings and practicality of this research. It is also useful to note how these limitations could potentially be addressed in the future, should the research be replicated.

The first limitation rests with the post sort interview. These are incredibly useful in helping the researcher to further infer why participants value statements over others and contribute to the interpretations (Watts and Stenner, 2012). However, some participants involved with this study were not happy to contribute beyond completing the Q sort. Some answered the post sort questions and as such, their comments were added to the factor interpretations. Whilst I was conscious that I had not been able to capture further insight into their subjective views about the statements, I was happy that I had been able to elicit a range of viewpoints that were interpreted using the entire factor arrays, enabling methodological holism (Watts and Stenner, 2012, pg. 167).

Feedback throughout the data collection phases, from some participants, was that they felt the forced choice frequency grid restricted them (see appendix O). Some made comments about wanting to put them all under +5 and one TA attempted to do this, ignoring the instruction to use the shape of the grid. However, when instructed to use the shape of the grid, she did. Whilst I reflected on this and thought that I might use free sorting in the future, I returned to the literature around Q and felt reassured that I was unlikely to have inhibited voice (as described in 4.5.2.2), which would not have been in keeping with the aims of the research.

Thirdly, I had considered all of the participants able to access a language based Q sort and had thought about the vocabulary used when constructing the statements, as outlined by Rattray and Jones (2007). However, as outlined in IF3, five TAs thought that it was important that they felt undermined when considering an ideal role. As discussed (in 6.3.2.5) this is not a statement that is consistent with others expressed within the viewpoint. Thus, the level of language used may have impacted upon participant access to the statements. Participants did ask what some procedural terms meant, such as supervision, but were perhaps less confident about asking about semantics of other words.

Finally, I have to acknowledge the demographics of the participants as more women participated than men. However, it is important to note that there is a higher ratio of females working as TAs than males, with 91% of the workforce being women and only 9% male (National Statistics, 2016). Perhaps this is one limitation that could not be avoided. I was certainly pleasantly surprised to find that of the four schools, I was able to capture the views of three males.

6.9 Personal Reflections

Throughout the research process I gave myself space to reflect upon each of the stages, due to my previous history working as a TA. Whilst engaging with the literature I felt a sense of disappointment that it depicted a negative view of the effectiveness of TAs. I was also unpleasantly surprised by the sparse representation of their views and the manner in which they were framed. Whilst

this spurred me on to want to elicit their voice, I also had to be mindful that this might not have painted a different picture and that the outcomes might not have been personally satisfying for me in wanting to present something more useful and positive.

Throughout the data collection, I was also concerned about their comments and their apprehension about what the potential implications of sharing their honest views might have been. I had been open with them that SENCOs were interested in seeing the overall thesis, so that they could make an informed choice regarding consent. I had wondered what might have happened if this had not been the case, had SENCOs not been interested in the findings. Whilst I did consider if this had influenced the way in which they approached the Q sorts, the factors emerging for the current role certainly show a clear difference between those who are happy in their roles and those who are not, potentially affirming that they sorted them according to how they personally felt, rather than how they thought they thought their SENCOs might want them to. Regardless of this, it was of utmost importance to me that they felt comfortable enough to participate.

6.10 Future Research and Application of Findings

Some authors conclude that there is a lot to learn from gaining the views of TAs (Abbott et al, 2011; Basford et al, 2017). In line with this, I hope to have added to this view by highlighting that they do have salient opinions and that by listening to them and acknowledging their voice, we can learn more about their perspectives of the role. My study has also contributed to the gaps in the literature with regard to presenting what they think they currently do as well as linking this to what they think they should do. Whilst this outlines their views, it would seem sensible to now consider the next steps regarding how we can go about enhancing TA practice, through the inclusion of TAs, as expressed in this study. Where I am currently working, this is something that, as an EP service, we are going to look at in the near future.

Given the multiple factors that presented, it might also be worth exploring whether or not there is scope in differentiating the role, involving different job descriptions,

or at least considering the impact that the title 'TA' has with regards to how it is constructed (Trent, 2014). These views could be presented back to participants to see whether or not they are in agreement with my inferences from the interpretations of their beliefs. Similarly, these could be extended to seeking the views of school staff (such as SENCOs) and external agencies (such as EPs) in response.

Finally, it is important to note that one of the schools who participated in this study has begun to work with me, using these ideal views, to look at how the role can be adapted to ensure better outcomes for all, including TAs. At the time of writing, TAs have been deployed to curriculum areas, rather than being 'assigned' to individual pupils, to allow for communication regarding lesson plans and opportunities to gain more knowledge about specific curriculum areas. In the near future, training for teachers will also be delivered to help them understand how they can utilise and deploy TAs to ensure effective pupil support, which will be heavily underpinned by the legislation around SEN (SEND COP, 2015) and these ideal views.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

To conclude, the aims of this study were to elicit the views of TAs regarding their current and an ideal role, providing opportunity to compare the viewpoints associated with each. The factors were then considered with regards to implications for schools and EPs who work with them at different levels. Analysis of the current role resulted in two factors emerging showing alternative views with regards to tasks, personal feelings and support. Conversely, multiple factors emerged with regard to an ideal role, each reinforcing the consensus of the literature that there is ambiguity associated with the profession. Upon comparison of the factors for both current and ideal roles, it was apparent that TAs wish to see change, resulting in better outcomes for all. Aspects of the current role aligned with characteristics of ideal factors, implying that features of these 'ideal roles' can be realistically achieved. Future research may focus on applying these findings to considering how TAs views can be used to help construct a clearer definition of the role, ultimately impacting on associated factors, such as how they feel and consider themselves to be valued. This would also be a welcome addition to the literature, which in the main, is disappointing, especially when narrowly measuring TA effectiveness through pupil progress (Webster et al, 2013).

Q methodology was used to elicit the views of the TAs enabling the emergence of shared viewpoints and multiple factors. TAs said that they felt comfortable using statements that had been prepopulated and standardised, which enabled them to share their thoughts in a safer way. It was not my intention to produce viewpoints that are representative of all TAs; rather, I intended to see what views there are amongst my study sample, which hopefully encourage and prompt further questions and research about the role.

It was important to me to provide TAs with a voice and an opportunity to have their views represented within the literature, which is currently wanting. I hope that this research promotes a sense of empowerment and reinforces to TAs that they are professionals, who have salient views that should be acknowledged. This may encourage researchers in this field, who are also passionate about the practice

of TAs, to include their voice, potentially making them reflect upon their research methodologies and decisions to overlook them from their research.

Ultimately, “retaining the status quo regarding TA deployment is no longer an option” (Webster et al, 2013, pg. 80).

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Appendix A

The University Of Sheffield.

01/04/2017

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please get in touch with me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to participate.

Thank you.

The Research

1. **Research project title:** Eliciting the views of teaching assistants about their current and prospective roles.

2. **Who is undertaking the research and why?** My name is Rachel Cooper and I am a third year Doctor of Child and Educational Psychology student studying at the University of Sheffield. I am currently on placement with Wakefield Educational Psychology Service. As part of my studies, I am required to write a thesis, following the completion of a research project.

3. **The aims of the research:** The aim of the research is to gain your views, as a teaching assistant, about your role as it currently is. I would also like to gather your views about how you would like the role to look in the future.

4. **Why have you been chosen:** You have been chosen to participate because you are currently employed in a role, which may be encapsulated under the generic title of teaching assistant. You are employed within the local authority, where I am on my doctoral training placement.

5. **Do you have to participate?** You are under no obligation to participate in the research project. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You can withdraw at any time without it negatively affecting you in any way. You do not have to provide me with a reason for your withdrawal; this will be accepted as part of your rights as a participant.

6. **The data collection process:** If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete two card sorting activities. These should take a maximum of 25 minutes each. I anticipate you completing these one after the other, with a short break in between. Once you have sorted the cards, based on how important you feel they are, you will be asked to write the item numbers of each card onto a distribution diagram, so that I can see how you sorted them. Following these card sorts, you will be invited to participate in a very short interview, in order to elaborate on any key points that you wish to discuss, following the card sorts. Once you have completed these, you will not be required to participate in any further activities. Therefore, I anticipate that your total direct involvement will last for no longer than one and a half hours. I will negotiate the data collection time with you and your SENCO in order to minimise any inconvenience and will strive to arrange the data collection during the school day.

7. **Are there any benefits of taking part?** Whilst there are no immediate benefits for participation in the project, it is hoped that this work will promote the importance and value in listening to those who undertake the role when evaluating impact, looking at the effectiveness of teaching assistants or when looking to redevelop the role.

8. **Are there any risks if I choose to take part?** There are no risks associated with your participation in the research. I will request that your SENCO and senior leaders do not attend the data collection sessions in order to further protect your anonymity. Please see below with regards to confidentiality of your data.

9. **Will my participation remain confidential?** Yes, you will be given a participation code, which will be used when running your individual data through a data analysis computer package. I will have a copy of your name and your associated code, in order to quickly identify your data, should you choose to withdraw before the 1st October 2017. This information will be destroyed following this deadline. Information about the data collection and analysis is discussed below.

10. **What will happen to my data?** I will use your completed diagrams of the card sorts to run analysis using a computer package. Your participation code will be added into the computer package and not your names. This computer package will show me the most common viewpoints that participants felt were the most significant. This will also show me how each participant sorted the cards (only identifiable by the participant codes). I will be looking for the statements that were most commonly sorted and that were the most significantly shared viewpoints. Your responses to the post sort interview will also only be identifiable by your participant code. These views will be incorporated into my discussion about the analysis of the card

sorts and will not be directly attributable to you, further protecting your anonymity.

11. **What will happen with the results?** Once the data has been analysed (as previously explained) the most common shared viewpoints will be presented and discussed in my thesis. Individual responses will not be analysed and as such individual participants will not identifiable in the thesis. These viewpoints will be discussed in relation to the literature and will then be presented as potential ways forward with regards to acknowledging and valuing teaching assistants' voice when looking to enhance the role.

12. **Has this research been ethically approved?** Yes, this project has been assessed through the process of a thorough research proposal by my university tutor and has also been reviewed through The University of Sheffield Ethics board.

13. **Who should I contact for further information?** In the first instance, you can contact Rachel Cooper on the following e-mail address:

rcooper4@sheffield.ac.uk

Alternatively, you can contact me at the Wakefield Educational Psychology Service on 01924 307403.

My research supervisor is Dr Martin Hughes, based at the University of Sheffield and he can be contacted on the following e-mail address:

m.j.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk

Thank you for taking time to consider your participation in my research; it is much appreciated.

Rachel

Appendix B

The University Of Sheffield.

Participant Consent Form

Research title: Eliciting the views of Teaching Assistants about their current and prospective roles.	
Name of Researcher: Rachel Cooper	
Participant identification code:	
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet, dated March 2017, for the above project and have had the opportunity to contact the researcher to seek further clarification and ask questions.	(Please tick the boxes) ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw for the research at any point, throughout the data collection, without giving reason and without experiencing any negative repercussions for doing so.	☐
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw my data from the research, without giving reason, by the 1st October 2017.	☐
4. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.	☐
5. I agree to take part in this study.	☐

……..	……	…….....
Name (participant)	Signature (participant)	Date
……	……	…….....
Name (researcher)	Signature (researcher)	Date

Appendix C

Training/Knowledge	Responsibility	Collaboration	Voice	Day to Day Practice	Organisational considerations
I have opportunity within my working hours to read and research, in order to extend my knowledge.	I am expected to teach a whole class on my own.	I collaborate with the class teacher with regards to the lesson plans.	I contribute to SEN review meetings by completing written feedback of my experiences of supporting a child.	I only work with one child.	I am clear about the lesson objectives when I support children with their work.
I have a good understanding of the curriculum.	I support children with additional learning needs.	I have opportunity to feedback to teachers.	I attend SEN review meetings.	I undertake group work.	I have opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before I support children with their work.
I need time to refresh my subject knowledge, so that I understand the content of the work.	I respond to children when they display inappropriate behaviours.	I make suggestions about how to meet a child's needs.	I contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children and young people.	I am asked to help all of the children in the class.	I feel prepared to deliver group work.
I feel well qualified to undertake my role.	I support children with emotional and social needs.	Information is shared with me so that I am well informed.	I have a voice, which is heard.	When I am in class, the teacher is present.	My line manager manages my workload.
I have opportunities to access supervision.	I have a good understanding of my role.	I attend staff meetings.	The teacher's views are more important than mine.	I do not work directly with children.	I contribute to planning my duties.

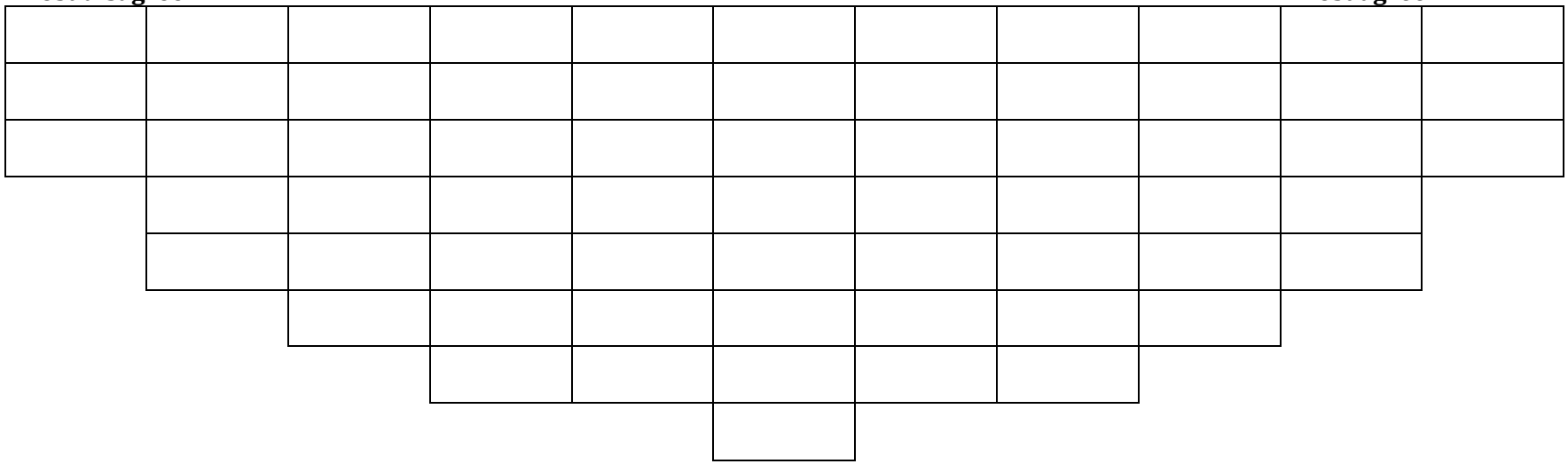
Training/Knowledge	Responsibility	Collaboration	Voice	Day to Day Practice	Organisational considerations
I have opportunities to attend training events to continue my professional development.	I am clear about what is expected of me.	I am well supported by my line manager.	We should all be heard equally.	I complete work for children.	My workload is manageable.
I am confident in my role.	My pay reflects my level of responsibility.	I could help children achieve more if teaching staff knew about my expertise.	I feel valued.	I support children with their work by explaining what they need to do to complete the task.	I get my full breaks without interruption.
I get time to refresh my subject knowledge, prior to supporting children with their work.	I worry when a child, who I support, does not complete an expected amount of work.	I contribute to school development plans.	I feel appreciated.	I promote independent learning once I have explained the task.	I am line managed closely.
	I feel personally responsible for the progress made by a child that I support.	I contribute to updating school policies.	I am happy in my job.	I differentiate work for children so that they can access it.	The teacher prescribes the way that I work.
	I worry when a child I support does not make progress.	I make suggestions with regards to developments with my role.	I have a sense of belonging in the school.	I support children with well-differentiated work, which is provided by the class teacher.	I have sufficient resources to do my job.

Training/Knowledge	Responsibility	Collaboration	Voice	Day to Day Practice	Organisational considerations
	I prepare resources for the teacher.		I feel undermined.	I complete marking for the class teacher.	
	I am able to make decisions independently without needing to seek consent.		I would rather be a teacher.		
	When a child behaves inappropriately, I am expected to respond.				

Appendix D

Record sheet for card sort (enter the numbers of the statements in the correct box, there are 64 boxes in the grid)

Most disagree **Most agree**



Post sort interview notes:

1) Having completed the card sort, please write in the spaces below, three statements which you feel were missing from the cards which you were provided with (which may represent a view that you did not feel was represented):

a

b

c

2) Please feel free to make some notes on your reasons for choosing to place the statements at the extreme left and right of the grid:

Any other comments:

Appendix E

Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor

red-ranked equally with other factors

blue-dist statement

Other

+5

Items Ranked Higher in Factor Array than in Other Factor Arrays

Items Ranked Lower in Factor Array than in Other Factor Arrays

-5

Not used:

Appendix F

Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 1 Current

high disagreement (diff of 3)

highest disagreement (diff of 5)

+5

29. I work directly with children. (5, 5)

34. We should all be heard equally. (5, 4)

41. I support children with their work by explaining what they need to do to complete the task. (5, 3)

Items Ranked Higher in Factor 1 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

2. I am expected to teach a whole class on my own. (- 3, - 4)

3. I collaborate with the class teacher with regards to the lesson plans. (0, - 1)

8. I support children with special educational needs. (4, 1)

11. I undertake group work. (3, 2)

13. I need time to refresh my subject knowledge, so that I understand the content of the work. (1, - 2)

14. I respond to children when they display inappropriate behaviours. (4, 3)

15. I make suggestions about how to meet a child's needs. (2, 0)

16. I contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children and young people. (- 1, - 3)

17. I am asked to help all of the children in the class. (2, 0)

18. I feel prepared to deliver group work. (1, -1)

25. I have opportunities to access supervision. (- 1, - 2)

27. I attend staff meetings. (2, 1)

28. The teacher's views are more important than mine. (- 1, - 3)

35. I complete work for children. (- 2, - 4)

39. I could help children achieve more if teaching staff knew about my expertise. (2, - 3)

43. I worry when a child, who I support, does not complete an expected amount of work. (3, - 2)

46. I promote independent learning once I have explained the task. (3, 2)

48. I feel personally responsible for the progress made by a child that I support. (2, - 3)

49. I contribute to updating school policies. (- 4, - 5)

51. I differentiate work for children so that they can access it. (4, 1)

52. I worry when a child I support does not make progress. (4, - 2)

53. The teacher prescribes the way that I work. (0, - 2)

58. I prepare resources for the teacher. (0, - 1)

59. I feel undermined. (- 2, - 4)

60. I complete marking for the class teacher. (- 3, - 5)

61. I am able to make decisions independently without needing to seek consent. (1, - 1)

62. When a child behaves inappropriately, I am expected to respond. (2, 1)

Items Ranked Lower in Factor 1 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

1.I have opportunity within my working hours to read and research, in order to extend my knowledge. (- 4, - 2)

7. I have a good understanding of the curriculum. (1, 2)

10. I attend SEN review meetings. (- 4, - 3)

12. I have opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before I support children with their work. (- 1, 2)

19. I feel well qualified to undertake my role. (3, 4)

21. Information is shared with me so that I am well informed. (- 4, 1)

22. I have a voice, which is heard. (- 2, 0)

30. I contribute to planning my duties. (- 1, 0)

31. I have opportunities to attend training events to continue my professional development. (- 2, 2)

32. I am clear about what is expected of me. (1, 4)

33. I am well supported by my line manager. (0, 2)

36. My workload is manageable. (0, 3)

40. I feel valued. (- 3, 3)

42. I get my full breaks without interruption. (- 2, 0)

45. I feel appreciated. (- 3, 5)

50. I am happy in my job. (1, 5)

54. I make suggestions with regards to developing my role. (- 2, 0)

55. I have a sense of belonging in the school. (- 2, 4)

57. I have sufficient resources to do my job. (0, 1)

64. I get time to refresh my subject knowledge, prior to supporting children with their work. (- 3, - 2)

-5

38. My pay reflects my level of responsibility. (- 5, -1)

44. I contribute to school development plans. (- 5, - 5)

63. I would rather be a teacher. (- 5, - 4)

Confounding Statements - Not Used:

4. I contribute to SEN review meetings by completing written feedback of my experiences of supporting a child. (-3, -3)

5. I only work with one child. (-4, - 4)

6. I am clear about the lesson objectives when I support children with their work. (2, 2)

9. I have opportunity to feedback to teachers. (0, 0)

20. I support children with emotional and social needs. (3, 3)

23. When I am in class the teacher is present. (1, 1)

24. My line manager manages my workload. (-1, -1)

26. I have a good understanding of my role. (3, 3)

37. I am confident in my role. (4, 4)

47. I am line managed closely. (0, 0)

56. I support children with well-differentiated work, which is provided by the class teacher. (-1, -1)

Appendix G

Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 2 Current

high disagreement (diff of 3)

highest disagreement (diff of 5)

+5

29. I work directly with children. (5, 5)

45. I feel appreciated. (5, - 3)

50. I am happy in my job. (5, 1)

Items Ranked Higher in Factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

1. I have opportunity within my working hours to read and research, in order to extend my knowledge. (- 2, - 4)

7. I have a good understanding of the curriculum. (2, 1)

10. I attend SEN review meetings. (- 3, - 4)

12. I have opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before I support children with their work. (2, - 1)

19. I feel well qualified to undertake my role. (4, 3)

21. Information is shared with me so that I am well informed. (1, - 4)

22. I have a voice, which is heard. (0, - 2)

30. I contribute to planning my duties. (0, - 1)

31. I have opportunities to attend training events to continue my professional development. (2, - 2)

32. I am clear about what is expected of me. (4, 1)

33. I am well supported by my line manager. (2, 0)

36. My workload is manageable. (3, 0)

38. My pay reflects my level of responsibility. (- 1, - 5)

40. I feel valued. (3, - 3)

42. I get my full breaks without interruption. (0, - 2)

54. I make suggestions with regards to developing my role. (0, - 2)

55. I have a sense of belonging in the school. (4, - 2)

57. I have sufficient resources to do my job. (1, 0)

63. I would rather be a teacher. (- 4, - 5)

64. I get time to refresh my subject knowledge, prior to supporting children with their work. (- 2, - 3)

Items Ranked Lower in Factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

2. I am expected to teach a whole class on my own. (- 4, - 3)

3. I collaborate with the class teacher with regards to the lesson plans. (- 1, 0)

8. I support children with special educational needs. (1, 4)

11. I undertake group work. (2, 3)

13. I need time to refresh my subject knowledge, so that I understand the content of the work. (- 2, 1)

14. I respond to children when they display inappropriate behaviours. (3, 4)

15. I make suggestions about how to meet a child's needs. (0, 2)

16. I contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children and young people. (- 3, - 1)

17. I am asked to help all of the children in the class. (0, 2)

18. I feel prepared to deliver group work. (-1, 1)

25. I have opportunities to access supervision. (- 2, - 1)

27. I attend staff meetings. (1, 2)

28. The teacher's views are more important than mine. (- 3, - 1)

34. We should all be heard equally. (4, 5)

35. I complete work for children. (- 4, - 2)

39. I could help children achieve more if teaching staff knew about my expertise. (- 3, 2)

41. I support children with their work by explaining what they need to do to complete the task. (3, 5)

43. I worry when a child, who I support, does not complete an expected amount of work. (- 2, 3)

46. I promote independent learning once I have explained the task. (2, 3)

48. I feel personally responsible for the progress made by a child that I support. (- 3, 2)

51. I differentiate work for children so that they can access it. (1, 4)

52. I worry when a child I support does not make progress. (- 2, 4)

53. The teacher prescribes the way that I work. (- 2, 0)

58. I prepare resources for the teacher. (- 1, 0)

59. I feel undermined. (- 4, - 2)

61. I am able to make decisions independently without needing to seek consent. (- 1, 1)

62. When a child behaves inappropriately, I am expected to respond. (1, 2)

-5

44. I contribute to school development plans. (- 5, - 5)

49. I contribute to updating school policies. (- 5, - 4)

60. I complete marking for the class teacher. (- 5, - 3)

Consensus Statements - Not Used:

4. I contribute to SEN review meetings by completing written feedback of my experiences of supporting a child. (-3, -3)

5. I only work with one child. (-4, - 4)

6. I am clear about the lesson objectives when I support children with their work. (2, 2)

9. I have opportunity to feedback to teachers. (0, 0)

20. I support children with emotional and social needs. (3, 3)

23. When I am in class the teacher is present. (1, 1)

24. My line manager manages my workload. (-1, -1)

26. I have a good understanding of my role. (3, 3)

37. I am confident in my role. (4, 4)

47. I am line managed closely. (0, 0)

56. I support children with well-differentiated work, which is provided by the class teacher. (-1, -1)

Appendix H

Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 1 Ideal Role

Key:

red- ranked equally with other factors

blue- distinguishing statement

statements placed higher **or** *lower* than other factors

+5

29 I work directly with children.

37 I am confident in my role.

50 I am happy in my job.

Items Ranked Higher in Factor 1 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

7 I have a good understanding of the curriculum (+3).

13 I need time to refresh my subject knowledge, so that I understand the content of the work (+4).

16 I contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children and young people (-1).

25 I have opportunities to access supervision (0).

33 I am well supported by my line manager (+3).

57 I have sufficient resources to do my job (+4).

63 I would rather be a teacher (-3).

64 I get time to refresh my subject knowledge, prior to supporting children with their work (+2).

Items Ranked Lower in Factor 1 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

14 I respond to children when they display inappropriate behaviours (-2).

21 Information is shared with me so that I am well informed (-1).

23 When I am in class the teacher is present (-3).

43 I worry when a child, who I support, does not complete an expected amount of work (-4).

55 I have sense of belonging in school (0).

62 When a child behaves inappropriately, I am expected to respond (-3).

-5

60 I complete marking for the class teacher.

2 I am expected to teach a whole class on my own.

35 I complete work for children.

Confounding:

1 I have opportunity within my working hours to read and research, in order to extend my knowledge (factors 1 & 2).

3 I collaborate with the class teacher with regards to the lesson plans (factors 1, 2 & 5).

4 I contribute to SEN review meetings by completing written feedback of my experiences of supporting a child (factors 1 & 3).

5. I only work with one child (factors 1 & 5).

6. I am clear about the lesson objectives when I support children with their work (factors 1 & 2).

8. I support children with special educational needs (factors 1, 3, 4 & 5).

9. I have opportunity to feedback to teachers (factors 1 & 4).

12. I have opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before I support children with their work (factors 1, 3 & 4).

15. I make suggestions about how to meet a child's needs (factors 1, 2 & 4).

17 I am asked to help all of the children in the class (factors 1 & 5).

26 I have a good understanding of my role (factors 1, 2, 3 & 5).

27 I attend staff meetings (factors 1 & 5).

28 The teacher's views are more important than mine (factors 1 & 3).

31 I have opportunities to attend training events to continue my professional development (factors 1 & 5).

32 I am clear about what is expected of me (factors 1, 2 & 3).

34 We should all be heard equally (factors 1 & 3).

36 My workload is manageable (factors 1 & 3).

40 I feel valued (factors 1, 2 & 4).

42 I get my full breaks without interruption (factors 1 & 4).

44 I contribute to school development plans (factors 1 & 5).

45 I feel appreciated (factors 1 & 4).

47 I am line managed closely (factors 1 & 2).

48 I feel personally responsible for the progress made by a child that I support (factors 1 & 5).

49 I contribute to updating school policies (factors 1 & 2).

51 I differentiate work for children so that they can access it (factors 1& 3).

52 I worry when a child I support does not make progress (factors 1 & 4).

53 The teacher prescribes the way that I work (factors 1, 2 & 5).

54 I make suggestions with regards to developments with my role (factors 1 & 3).

56 I support children with well-differentiated work, which is provided by the class teacher (factors 1, 2, 4 & 5).

58 I prepare resources for the teacher (factors 1 & 2).

Other

10. I attend SEN review meetings [-1] (more than 2 & 3) but *less than 4 & 5*).

11. I undertake group work [+2] (more than 2, 3, 4 but *less than 5).*

18 I feel prepared to deliver group work [+2] (more than 2 , 3, 4 but *less than 5*)

19 I feel well qualified to undertake my role [+4] (more than 2, 3, 4 but *less than 5*)

20 I support children with emotional and social needs [+1] (more than 3 but *less than 2, 4, 5*).

22 I have a voice, which is heard [0] (more than 2 & 5 but *less than 3 & 4).*

24 My line manager manages my workload [-2] (more than 3 & 5 and *less than 1 & 4*).

30 I contribute to planning my duties [-1] (more than 2 & 4 but *less than 3 & 5*).

38 My pay reflects my level of responsibility [+4] (more than 2, 4, 5 but *less than 3*).

39 I could help children achieve more if teaching staff knew about my expertise [0] (more than 2, 3, 4 but *less than 5*).

41 I support children with their work by explaining what they need to do to complete the task [+2] (more than 3 but *less than 2, 4, 5*).

46 I promote independent learning once I have explained the task [+1] (more than 3 but *less than 2, 4, 5*).

59 I feel undermined [-4] (more than 2 but *less than 3, 4, 5).*

61 I am able to make decisions independently without needing to seek consent [+1] (more than 4, 5 but *less than 2, 3*).

Appendix I

Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 2 Ideal Role

Key:

red- ranked equally with other factors

blue- distinguishing statement

statements placed higher **or** *lower* than other factors

+5

34 We should all be heard equally

45 I feel appreciated.

50 I am happy in my job.

Items Ranked Higher in Factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

12. I have opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before I support children with their work.

17 I am asked to help all of the children in the class.

31 I have opportunities to attend training events to continue my professional development.

61 I am able to make decisions independently without needing to seek consent.

62 When a child behaves inappropriately, I am expected to respond.

Items Ranked Lower in Factor 2 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

4 I contribute to SEN review meetings by completing written feedback of my experiences of supporting a child.

7 I have a good understanding of the curriculum.

8. I support children with special educational needs.

29 I work directly with children.

38 My pay reflects my level of responsibility.

-5

35 I complete work for children.

59 I feel undermined.

63 I would rather be a teacher.

Confounding:

1 I have opportunity within my working hours to read and research, in order to extend my knowledge (factors 1 & 2).

2 I am expected to teach a whole class on my own (factors 2 & 4).

3 I collaborate with the class teacher with regards to the lesson plans (factors 1, 2 & 5).

5. I only work with one child (factors 2 & 3).

6. I am clear about the lesson objectives when I support children with their work (factors 1 & 2).

10. I attend SEN review meetings (factors 2 & 3).

13 I need time to refresh my subject knowledge, so that I understand the content of the work (factors 2 & 4).

15. I make suggestions about how to meet a child's needs (factors 1, 2 & 4).

19 I feel well qualified to undertake my role (factors 2, 3 & 4).

20 I support children with emotional and social needs (factors 2 & 4).

21 Information is shared with me so that I am well informed (factors 2 & 3).

23 When I am in class the teacher is present (factors 2 & 3).

24 My line manager manages my workload (factors 2 & 4).

25 I have opportunities to access supervision (factors 2 & 5).

26 I have a good understanding of my role (factors 1, 2, 3 & 5).

28 The teacher's views are more important than mine (factors 2 & 4).

30 I contribute to planning my duties (factors 2 & 4).

32 I am clear about what is expected of me (factors 1, 2 & 3).

33 I am well supported by my line manager (factors 2, 3 & 5).

36 My workload is manageable (factors 2 & 5).

37 I am confident in my role (factors 2 & 4).

39 I could help children achieve more if teaching staff knew about my expertise (factors 2, 3 & 4).

40 I feel valued (1, 2 & 4).

41 I support children with their work by explaining what they need to do to complete the task (factors 2 & 5).

43 I worry when a child, who I support, does not complete an expected amount of work (factors 2 & 5).

44 I contribute to school development plans (factors 2 & 4).

46 I promote independent learning once I have explained the task (factors 2 & 5).

47 I am line managed closely (factors 1 & 2).

48 I feel personally responsible for the progress made by a child that I support (factors 2 & 3).

49 I contribute to updating school policies (factors 1 & 2).

51 I differentiate work for children so that they can access it (factors 2 & 5).

52 I worry when a child I support does not make progress (factors 2 & 5).

53 The teacher prescribes the way that I work (factors 1, 2 & 5).

54 I make suggestions with regards to developments with my role (factors 2 & 5).

55 I have sense of belonging in school (factors 2 & 3).

56 I support children with well-differentiated work, which is provided by the class teacher (factors 1, 2, 4 & 5).

58 I prepare resources for the teacher (factors 1 & 2).

60 I complete marking for the class teacher (factors 2 & 4).

Other

9. I have opportunity to feedback to teachers (more than1, 4 & 5 but *less than 3*).

11. I undertake group work (more than 3 & 4 but *less than 1 & 5).*

14 I respond to children when they display inappropriate behaviours (more than 1 & 3 but *less than 4 & 5*) .

16 I contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children and young people. (more than 4 & 5 but *less than 1 & 3*).

18 I feel prepared to deliver group work (more than 3 & 4 but *less than 1 & 5*).

22 I have a voice, which is heard (more than 5 but *less than 1, 3 & 4).*

27 I attend staff meetings (more than 1, 3 & 5 but *less than 4*).

42 I get my full breaks without interruption (more than 1 & 4 but *less than 3 & 5).*

57 I have sufficient resources to do my job (more than 4 & 5 but *less than 1 & 3).*

64 I get time to refresh my subject knowledge, prior to supporting children with their work (more than 4 & 5 but *less than 1 & 3).*

Appendix J

Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 3 Ideal Role

Key:

red- ranked equally with other factors

blue- distinguishing statement

statements placed higher **or** *lower* than other factors

+5

38 My pay reflects my level of responsibility.

40 I feel valued.

45 I feel appreciated.

Items Ranked Higher in Factor 3 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

1 I have opportunity within my working hours to read and research, in order to extend my knowledge.

9. I have opportunity to feedback to teachers.

22 I have a voice, which is heard.

42 I get my full breaks without interruption.

59 I feel undermined.

60 I complete marking for the class teacher.

Items Ranked Lower in Factor 3 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

6. I am clear about the lesson objectives when I support children with their work.

20 I support children with emotional and social needs.

27 I attend staff meetings.

41 I support children with their work by explaining what they need to do to complete the task.

46 I promote independent learning once I have explained the task.

52 I worry when a child I support does not make progress.

53 The teacher prescribes the way that I work.

56 I support children with well-differentiated work, which is provided by the class teacher.

- 5

2 I am expected to teach a whole class on my own.

44 I contribute to school development plans.

49 I contribute to updating school policies.

Confounding:

4 I contribute to SEN review meetings by completing written feedback of my experiences of supporting a child (factors 1 & 3).

5. I only work with one child (factors 2 & 3).

8. I support children with special educational needs (factors 1, 3, 4 & 5).

10. I attend SEN review meetings (factors 2 & 3).

12. I have opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before I support children with their work (factors 1, 3 & 4).

13 I need time to refresh my subject knowledge, so that I understand the content of the work (factors 3 & 5).

15. I make suggestions about how to meet a child's needs (factors 3 & 5).

17 I am asked to help all of the children in the class (factors 3 & 4).

19 I feel well qualified to undertake my role (factors 2, 3 & 4).

21 Information is shared with me so that I am well informed (factors 2 & 3).

23 When I am in class the teacher is present (factors 2 & 3).

25 I have opportunities to access supervision (factors 3 & 4).

26 I have a good understanding of my role (factors 1, 2, 3 & 5).

28 The teacher's views are more important than mine (factors 1 & 3).

31 I have opportunities to attend training events to continue my professional development (factors 3 & 4).

32 I am clear about what is expected of me (factors 1, 2 & 3).

33 I am well supported by my line manager (factors 2, 3 & 5).

34 We should all be heard equally (factors 1 & 3).

35 I complete work for children (factors 3 & 5).

36 My workload is manageable (factors 1 & 3).

39 I could help children achieve more if teaching staff knew about my expertise (factors 2, 3 & 4).

47 I am line managed closely (factors 3 & 4).

48 I feel personally responsible for the progress made by a child that I support (factors 2 & 3).

51 I differentiate work for children so that they can access it (factors 1 & 3).

54 I make suggestions with regards to developments with my role (factors 1 & 3).

55 I have sense of belonging in school (factors 2 & 3).

62 When a child behaves inappropriately, I am expected to respond (factors 3 & 4).

Other

3 I collaborate with the class teacher with regards to the lesson plans (more than 4 but *less than 1, 2 & 5).*

7 I have a good understanding of the curriculum (more than 2, 4 & 5 but *less than 1).*

11. I undertake group work (more than 4 but *less than 1, 2 & 5).*

14 I respond to children when they display inappropriate behaviours (more than 1 & but *less than 2, 4 & 5*)

16 I contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children and young people (more than 2, 4 & 5 but *less than 1*).

18 I feel prepared to deliver group work (more than 4 but *less than 1, 2 & 5*).

24 My line manager manages my workload (more than 5 but *less than 1, 2 & 4).*

29 I work directly with children (more than 2 but *less than 1, 4 & 5).*

30 I contribute to planning my duties (more than 1, 2 & 4 *but less than 5).*

37 I am confident in my role (more than 2 & 4 but *less than 1 & 5*).

43 I worry when a child, who I support, does not complete an expected amount of work (more than 1 but *less than 2, 4 & 5).*

50 I am happy in my job (more than 5 but *less than 1, 2 & 4*).

57 I have sufficient resources to do my job (more than 2, 4 & 5 but *less than 1).*

58 I prepare resources for the teacher (more than 4 & 5 but *less than 1 & 2*).

61 I am able to make decisions independently without needing to seek consent (more than 1, 4 & 5 but *less than 2).*

63 I would rather be a teacher (more than 2, 4 & 5 but *less than 1*).

64 I get time to refresh my subject knowledge, prior to supporting children with their work (more than 2, 4 & 5 but *less than 1).*

Appendix K

Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 4 Ideal Role

Key:

red- ranked equally with other factors

blue- distinguishing statement

statements placed higher **or** *lower* than other factors

+5

41 I support children with their work by explaining what they need to do to complete the task.

50 I am happy in my job.

51 I differentiate work for children so that they can access it.

Items Ranked Higher in Factor 4 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

5. I only work with one child.

6. I am clear about the lesson objectives when I support children with their work.

10. I attend SEN review meetings.

23 When I am in class the teacher is present.

27 I attend staff meetings.

35 I complete work for children.

43 I worry when a child, who I support, does not complete an expected amount of work.

48 I feel personally responsible for the progress made by a child that I support.

53 The teacher prescribes the way that I work.

Items Ranked Lower in Factor 4 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

3 I collaborate with the class teacher with regards to the lesson plans.

11. I undertake group work.

18 I feel prepared to deliver group work.

26 I have a good understanding of my role.

33 I am well supported by my line manager.

34 We should all be heard equally.

54 I make suggestions with regards to developments with my role.

57 I have sufficient resources to do my job.

61 I am able to make decisions independently without needing to seek consent.

- 5

16 I contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children and young people.

49 I contribute to updating school policies.

63 I would rather be a teacher.

Confounding:

1 I have opportunity within my working hours to read and research, in order to extend my knowledge (factors 4 & 5).

2 I am expected to teach a whole class on my own (factors 2 & 4).

8. I support children with special educational needs (factors 1, 3, 4 & 5).

9. I have opportunity to feedback to teachers (factors 1 & 4).

12. I have opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before I support children with their work (factors 1, 3 & 4).

13 I need time to refresh my subject knowledge, so that I understand the content of the work (factors 2 & 4).

15. I make suggestions about how to meet a child's needs (factors 1, 2 & 4).

17 I am asked to help all of the children in the class (factors 3 & 4).

19 I feel well qualified to undertake my role (factors 2, 3, 4)

20 I support children with emotional and social needs (factors 2 & 4).

21 Information is shared with me so that I am well informed (factors 4 & 5).

24 My line manager manages my workload (factors 2 & 4).

25 I have opportunities to access supervision (factors 3 & 4).

28 The teacher's views are more important than mine (factors 2 & 4).

30 I contribute to planning my duties (factors 2 & 4).

31 I have opportunities to attend training events to continue my professional development (factors 3 & 4).

32 I am clear about what is expected of me (factors 4 & 5).

37 I am confident in my role (factors 2 & 4).

39 I could help children achieve more if teaching staff knew about my expertise (factors 2, 3 & 4).

40 I feel valued (factors 1, 2 & 4).

42 I get my full breaks without interruption (factors 1 & 4).

44 I contribute to school development plans (factors 2 & 4).

45 I feel appreciated (factors 1 & 4).

47 I am line managed closely (factors 3 & 4).

52 I worry when a child I support does not make progress (factors 1 & 4).

55 I have sense of belonging in school (factors 4 & 5).

56 I support children with well-differentiated work, which is provided by the class teacher (factors 1, 2, 4 & 5).

60 I complete marking for the class teacher (factors 2 & 4).

62 When a child behaves inappropriately, I am expected to respond (factors 3 & 4).

Other

4 I contribute to SEN review meetings by completing written feedback of my experiences of supporting a child (more than 1, 2 & 3 but *less than 5).*

7 I have a good understanding of the curriculum (more than 2 but *less than 1, 3 & 5).*

14 I respond to children when they display inappropriate behaviours. (more than 1, 2 & 3 but *less than 5*).

22 I have a voice, which is heard (more than 1, 2 & 5 but *less than 3*).

29 I work directly with children (more than 2, 3 & 5 but *less than 1).*

36 My workload is manageable. (more than 2 & 5 but *less than 1 & 3*).

38 My pay reflects my level of responsibility (more than 2 & 5 but *less than 1 and 3*).

46 I promote independent learning once I have explained the task (more than 1 & 3 but *less than 2 & 5*).

58 I prepare resources for the teacher (more than 5 but *less than 1, 2 & 3*).

59 I feel undermined (more than 1 & 2 but *less than 3 & 5*).

64 I get time to refresh my subject knowledge, prior to supporting children with their work (more than 5 but *less than 1, 2 & 3).*

Appendix L

Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 5 Ideal Role

Key:

red- ranked equally with other factors

blue- distinguishing statement

statements placed higher **or** *lower* than other factors

+5

19 I feel well qualified to undertake my role.

34 We should all be heard equally.

37 I am confident in my role.

Items Ranked Higher in Factor 5 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

2 I am expected to teach a whole class on my own.

4 I contribute to SEN review meetings by completing written feedback of my experiences of supporting a child.

11. I undertake group work.

14 I respond to children when they display inappropriate behaviours.

18 I feel prepared to deliver group work.

30 I contribute to planning my duties.

39 I could help children achieve more if teaching staff knew about my expertise.

49 I contribute to updating school policies.

Items Ranked Lower in Factor 5 Array than in Other Factor Arrays

9. I have opportunity to feedback to teachers.

12. I have opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before I support children with their work.

22 I have a voice, which is heard.

24 My line manager manages my workload.

40 I feel valued.

45 I feel appreciated.

47 I am line managed closely.

50 I am happy in my job.

64 I get time to refresh my subject knowledge, prior to supporting children with their work.

- 5

58 I prepare resources for the teacher.

60 I complete marking for the class teacher.

63 I would rather be a teacher.

Confounding:

1 I have opportunity within my working hours to read and research, in order to extend my knowledge (factors 4 & 5).

3 I collaborate with the class teacher with regards to the lesson plans (factors 1, 2 & 5).

5. I only work with one child (factors 1 & 5).

8. I support children with special educational needs (factors 1, 3, 4 & 5).

13 I need time to refresh my subject knowledge, so that I understand the content of the work (factors 3 & 5).

15. I make suggestions about how to meet a child's needs (factors 3 & 5).

17 I am asked to help all of the children in the class (factors 1 & 5).

21 Information is shared with me so that I am well informed (factors 4 & 5).

25 I have opportunities to access supervision (factors 2 & 5).

26 I have a good understanding of my role (factors 1, 2, 3 & 5).

27 I attend staff meetings (factors 1 & 5).

31 I have opportunities to attend training events to continue my professional development (factors 1 & 5).

32 I am clear about what is expected of me (factors 4 & 5).

33 I am well supported by my line manager (factors 2, 3 & 5).

35 I complete work for children (factors 3 & 5).

36 My workload is manageable (factors 2 & 5).

41 I support children with their work by explaining what they need to do to complete the task (factors 2 & 5).

43 I worry when a child, who I support, does not complete an expected amount of work (factors 2 & 5).

44 I contribute to school development plans (factors 1 & 5).

46 I promote independent learning once I have explained the task (factors 2 & 5).

48 I feel personally responsible for the progress made by a child that I support (factors 1 & 5).

51 I differentiate work for children so that they can access it (factors 2 & 5).

52 I worry when a child I support does not make progress (factors 2 & 5).

53 The teacher prescribes the way that I work (factors 1, 2 & 5).

54 I make suggestions with regards to developments with my role (factors 2 & 5).

55 I have sense of belonging in school (factors 4 & 5).

56 I support children with well-differentiated work, which is provided by the class teacher (factors 1, 2, 4 & 5).

Other

6. I am clear about the lesson objectives when I support children with their work (more than 1, 2 & 3 but *less than 4*).

7 I have a good understanding of the curriculum (more than 2 & 4 but *less than 1 & 3).*

10. I attend SEN review meetings (more than 1, 2 & 3 but *less than 4).*

16 I contribute to setting targets and outcomes for children and young people (more than 4 but *less than 1, 2 & 3*).

20 I support children with emotional and social needs (more than 1 & 3 but *less than 2 & 4*).

23 When I am in class the teacher is present (more than 1 but *less than 2, 3 & 4).*

28 The teacher's views are more important than mine (more than 1 & 3 but *less than 2 & 4*).

29 I work directly with children (more than 2, 3 but *less than 1 & 4).*

38 My pay reflects my level of responsibility (more than 2 but *less than 1, 3 & 4*).

42 I get my full breaks without interruption (more than 1, 2 & 4 but *less than 3).*

57 I have sufficient resources to do my job (more than 4 but *less than 1, 2 & 3).*

59 I feel undermined (more than 1, 2 & 4 but *less than 3*).

61 I am able to make decisions independently without needing to seek consent (more than 4 but *less than 1, 2 & 3*).

62 When a child behaves inappropriately, I am expected to respond (more than 1, 3 & 4 but *less than 2).*

Appendix M

Ideal Role

Factor	Theme	Item numbers	Distinguishing statement (factor array position)
1	Preparedness	13*	I need time to refresh my subject knowledge, so that I understand the content of the work. (4)
		57*	I have sufficient resources to do my job. (4)
		25	I have opportunities to access supervision. (0)
		62*	When a child behaves inappropriately, I am expected to respond. (-3)
		23	When I am in class, the teacher is present. (-3)
		59*	I feel undermined. (-4)
		43	I worry when a child, who I support, does not complete an expected amount of work. (-4)
2	General support – not 1:1	17*	I am asked to help all of the children in the class. (3)
		8	I support children with special educational needs. (1)
		29*	I work directly with children. (-2)
	Responsibility	4*	I contribute to SEN review meetings by completing written feedback of my experiences of supporting a child. (-3)
		59*	I feel undermined. (-5)
3	Voice/Contentment	38	My pay reflects my level of responsibility. (5)
		40	I feel valued. (5)
		22*	I have a voice, which is heard. (4)
		59*	I feel undermined. (4)
		1*	I have opportunity within my working hours to read and research, in order to extend my knowledge. (3)
		50	I am happy in my job. (3)
		41*	I support children with their work by explaining what they need to do to complete the task. (0)

4	Informed	51	I differentiate work for children so that they can access it. (5)
		23*	When I am in class, the teacher is present. (4)
		10	I attend SEN review meetings. (4)
		27	I attend staff meetings. (2)
		53*	The teacher prescribes the way that I work. (1)
		35	I complete work for children. (-1)
		3*	I collaborate with the class teacher with regards to the lesson plans. (-4)
		18*	I feel prepared to deliver group work. (-4)
5	Autonomy	19	I feel well qualified to undertake my role. (5)
		30	I contribute to planning my duties. (3)
		50*	I am happy in my job. (0)
		40*	I feel valued. (-1)
		49*	I contribute to updating school policies. (-1)
		9*	I have opportunity to feedback to teachers. (-2)

* significant at $p<0.01$.

Consensus statements, which do not distinguish between any pairs of factors:

Item Number	Item
2	I am expected to teach a whole class on my own.
12	I have opportunity to speak to the class teacher about tasks before I support children with their work.
26	I have a good understanding of my role.
32*	I am clear about what is expected of me.
60	I complete marking for the class teacher.

Appendix N

My 'Ideal Role' Q Sort

Most disagree										**Most agree**
59	52	49	24	39	27	14	07	09	22	40
63	43	51	58	10	31	19	12	21	45	50
35	60	62	25	57	04	17	33	37	29	26
	48	05	53	03	11	13	38	32	46	
	28	44	47	42	08	61	34	56	55	
		02	16	23	36	18	41	06		
			01	54	20	30	15			
					64					

Appendix O

Participant Comments Regarding the Q Sorts

Participant 6 – Regarding the current role:
"I tried to use my knowledge of working in two schools. My disagree columns would have needed to have been much larger if I was using my experience of my past school!"

Participant 19 – Regrding the current role:
"It's really hard to put all of these into these boxes – I needed more space for disagree".

Participant 19 – Regarding the ideal role:
"I needed more agree spaces for this one as I feel it is important to feel valued".

Participant 34 – Regarding the current role:
"I feel that I agree with more of these but there isn't space". When I asked her if the grid was restiricting her views, she said that it was.

Participant 37 – Regarding the ideal role:
"In an ideal world they would all go under the most agree apart from the negatives e.g. feeling undermined. We are all an equal team".

Appendix P

The University Of Sheffield.

Approved: 27/04/2017
Rachel Cooper
Registration number: 150107727
School of Education
Programme: Doctor of Child and Educational Psychology

Dear Rachel
PROJECT TITLE: Eliciting the Views of Teaching Assistants About Their Current and Prospective Roles.

APPLICATION: Reference Number 013503

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 27/04/2017 the above-named project was approved on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

University research ethics application form 013503 (dated 31/03/2017).
Participant information sheet 1029214 version 1 (31/03/2017).
Participant consent form 1029215 version 1 (31/03/2017).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt
Ethics Administrator
School of Education