BG Research Online

Clarke, E. Visser, J. (2019). Teaching assistants managing behaviour – who knows how they do it? Agency is the answer. *Support for Learning.*

This version may differ slightly from the final published version.

For enquiries about BG Research Online email bgro@bishopg.ac.uk.

Teaching assistants managing behaviour – who knows how they do it? Agency is the answer

Emma Clarke and John Visser

Dr Emma Clarke

Senior Lecturer in Education

Bishop Grosetteste University

Longdales Road,

Lincoln LN1 3DY

emma.clarke@bishopg.ac.uk

Professor John Visser

School of Education

University Drive,

Northampton NN4 8RR

john.visser@northampton.ac.uk

Dr Emma Clarke, Senior Lecturer, Bishop Grossetetse University, Longdales Road, Lincoln, LN1 3DY* corresponding author

After teaching in mainstream primary schools for almost 18 years, **Emma Clarke** now teaches on a primary PGCE course. Her interests include research methodologies, approaches to managing behaviour, and challenging behaviour in primary schools. Her PhD thesis considered the tensions experienced by teaching assistants in mainstream primary schools when managing behaviour. She has presented her research nationally and internationally, as well as publishing both in books and peer-reviewed journals.

John Visser is currently visiting professor in special and inclusive education at the University of Northampton. He was previously at the University of Birmingham where he was lead tutor for diploma and Masters programmes in the education of children and young people with behavioural difficulties. John worked closely with Professor Harry Daniels and Dr Ted Cole on a variety of national and international research projects. His published work and professional commitments in the field of behaviour are widely known.

Abstract

This paper <mark>revisits a previous</mark> publication which questioned how Teaching Assistants (TAs) manage behaviour in mainstream English primary schools (Clarke and Visser, 2016). That paper highlighted the lack of specific research in the area and noted, that despite increases in research on TAs work, there remained a lack of understanding in relation to how TAs supported children's non-academic or 'soft skills'. Following on from that, this paper details the findings of a doctoral research project that investigated factors that constrained and supported TAs' management of behaviour. Using the findings from that research, this paper offers suggestions to the to the question I outlined in the previous paper 'Teaching Assistants managing behaviour - who knows how they do it?' (Clarke and Visser, 2016). Concepts including TAs' understanding of their 'place', the impact of agency and how consistency in a range of areas influenced the agency TAs experienced in managing behaviour will be discussed.

Keywords

Teaching assistants (TAs); behaviour management; teachers; relationships; agency; place.

Introduction

Teaching Assistants (TAs) in English primary schools have seen a significant change in their working lives in school - most evident in expectations of their work with children. Ofsted (2004) raised the first note of caution about TAs' increasingly direct pedagogical role and suggested that it required investigation. Nevertheless it continued to increase, outweighing any other aspect of their deployment (Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown and Martin, 2007; Trent, 2014). Rose and O'Neill (2009) proposed that;

> It is evident from the data that many [TAs] now perceive themselves to be part of a teaching partnership engaged in collaboration with teachers on a range of pedagogical activities. (p.225)

The evolution from historic descriptions of TAs' role as 'a bit of money for housewives' (Smith, Whitby and Sharp, 2004) to current definitions of TAs as both para-professionals and pedagogues has resulted in a lack of a cohesive understanding of the role. Quicke (2003) suggested TAs were 'left in an ambiguous position with no clear boundaries', supported by later research suggesting a lack of clarity on 'roles', 'autonomy' and 'professional identity' (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown and Webster, 2009).

Research on TAs' work has seen a significant increase, in the main utilising data collected for the 'formidably extensive' (Fletcher-Campbell, 2010) Deployment and Impact of Support Staff report (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2012). Nevertheless, there has been little investigation of how children's 'soft-skills' including behaviour are supported, despite calls for research in this area (Clarke and Visser, 2016; 2017; Giangreco, Suter and Doyle, 2010; Graves, 2013; Howes, 2003; Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou and Bassett, 2010; Sharples, Webster and Blatchford, 2015). The paucity of specific study is concerning given expectations in government publications that TAs play a key role in managing behaviour (DfES, 2002; 2003; 2006; DfE, 2013, 2016). Others have also reiterated the 'pivotal role' TAs have in managing behaviour (Blatchford *et al.*, 2007; Groom, 2006; Groom and Rose, 2005; HMI, 2002; Kerry, 2005). Mansaray (2006) contended that TAs provided invaluable 'support for behaviour issues', and were often 'the extra eyes and ears' for teachers. Groom and Rose

(2005) also found many schools had an 'overwhelming perception' that part of TAs' role was supporting the management of behaviour;

> Implicit in this role is the support for promoting classroom rules, reminding pupils of expectations, dealing with conflict and keeping individual pupils on task. (p. 25)

This reflected Mansaray's (2006) assertion that TAs' 'surveillance function is implicitly assumed' - by both TAs and teachers. It can be argued that the range of roles TAs fulfil, even when not unequivocally associated with managing behaviour, often encompass aspects of it. This makes understanding how TAs engage with the role and how they can be facilitated in managing behaviour an important consideration.

Research project

The suggestions this paper outlines are based on the findings of my (used in reference to the first author) doctoral research, undertaken to answer the question: How do TAs view their role in managing behaviour in relation to a whole school behaviour policy and what are their points of tension in fulfilling this role? The study involved two discrete groups of TAs working in mainstream English primary schools. Group one were all employed in the same primary school, whilst the second group of TAs were employed across a range of primary schools. The research was qualitative and conducted from a social constructionist, feminist viewpoint using a pragmatic, pluralist methodology.

The research was rooted in social constructionism, as it understood knowledge to be 'socially and culturally constructed' (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). Burr (2003) proposed this recognition that individuals constructed 'social meaning and shared reality' through 'interactions' naturally lent itself to research with a focus on the exploration of individual's 'construction of meaning' (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). The study also adopted a position that did not 'add' women in 'but begins from their perspective' and was 'grounded in the daily experiences of women' (Letherby,

2003). The desire to 'highlight the overlooked experiences and practices of women' (Kohli and Burbules, 2013) also provided a feminist context for the research as well as the entirely female cohort of the first group of TAs (sample 1) and the largely female dominated role (with ninety five percent of all TAs being female [DfE, 2017]).

Devecchi (2005) stated that her research into TAs traversed 'diverse areas' which she noted, necessitated a range of 'epistemological requirements'. 'Casts' (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013) or overtones from a range of different methodologies were drawn on for this research. Goodbody and Burns (2011) noted the challenges they faced in finding a methodology that was 'epistemologically and ontologically consistent' with the aims of their research, whilst Frost and Nolas (2011) discussed how a pragmatic approach addressed some of these issues by allowing them to utilise a 'combination of ontological positions'. Under a pragmatic research umbrella it is possible to combine several different approaches and methodologies (Caelli, Ray and Mill, 2003) and this pluralist perspective was able to limit some of the issues concomitant with discrete methodologies (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005). In this research, pragmatism was used to connect the constructivist and feminist epistemological perspective with data collection techniques that enabled a focus on hearing and maintaining the participants' voice, and their understanding of the tensions they experienced (for a more detailed consideration see: Clarke and Visser, 2018; Clarke, 2019).

Data was collected from interviews, a focus group, questionnaires and the analysis of a behaviour policy. The figure below (figure 1) shows the chronology of data collection.

Figure 1: Chronology of data collection across both groups of participants
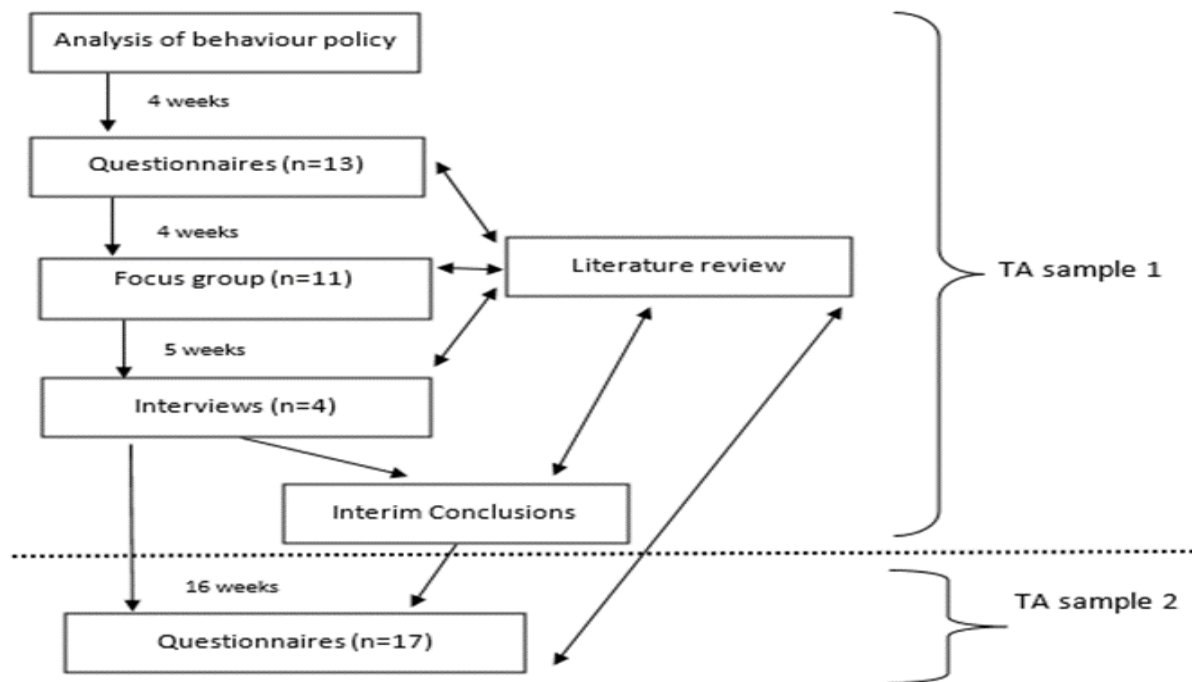
Research depicts the 'average' TA as having a specific set of characteristics. Contextual information collated from some of the questions in the questionnaire given to participants in group 1 was compared with that from published research to ascertain how closely my respondents were comparable with the wider TA population. The collated data is from TAs in group one is shown in table two below.

Table 2: Table comparing features of TAs in sample 1 with those from research

Research suggested the average TA was… (Bach, Kessler and Heron, 2006; Blatchford *et al.*, 2007; DfE, 2017; HMI, 2002; Quicke, 2003; Smith *et al.*, 2004)	Participants in sample 1 (TAs A – M)
Largely female (95%)	Female (100%)
41 – 50 years old	21 – 30 = 8%
	31 – 40 = 8%
	41 – 50 = 46%
	51+ = 38%
9 or more years' experience	0 – 4 yrs. = 23%
	5 – 9 yrs.= 31%
	10+ yrs. = 46%
Family commitments	All mothers

After the data from TAs in sample one was analysed, all identifying initials were replaced by single letters to provide anonymity. TAs A – M all participated in the questionnaire, TAs A – K took part in the focus group and TAs A – D were interviewed.

Table two shows that the participants in sample one had many key features in common with the 'average' TA depicted in research. Although it is erroneous to suggest that the findings from my research are generalizable to all TAs, the representativeness of participants in sample one suggests that there may be what Sim (1998) considered 'transfer' to TAs in other contexts. Bassey (1999) similarly proposed 'fuzzy generalisations' may be more appropriate than generalisability due to their focus on 'possibility' rather than 'certainty'. It is 'possible' that TAs working in other contexts may also experience some, or all of the tensions TAs in my research did, but it is not a 'certainty'. As findings from my research largely mirror the tensions highlighted for TAs by the review of literature, the 'possibility' of some of the tensions in managing behaviour being generalisable exists, but they cannot be a 'certainly' due to the impact of TAs' context.

As noted, there is a scarcity of extant research focused explicitly on how TAs manage behaviour, consequently generic constraints were gathered from published literature on TAs' at the beginning of the research as a starting point. It was anticipated that there would be some alignment between factors which were generically disadvantageous for TAs, and those which specifically constrained their behaviour management. Many similarities were identified between the data collected and extant literature. Table two below details the themes from my data and general constraining factors from published research.

Figure 2: Table showing key themes emerging from the literature and data

Emerging themes from literature review as generic constraining factors for TAs	Emerging themes from data analysis (group 1 and 2) as constraining factors for TAs' management of behaviour
Role clarity	Role creep, role definition
Training	Experience and mothering
Power	**'Know your place'**, undermining the teacher, support from SLT
Whole school approaches	Communication, consistency
Deployment	Deployment, knowing and relationships with children
Social practices	Experience, deployment, relationships with teachers
Teacher/TA relationship	Relationship with teachers, helping and supporting the teacher

Many of the issues raised by my participants were intertwined and echoed the themes drawn out from published research. TAs in my research highlighted the range of inconsistencies they experienced in role clarity, training, deployment, relationships with teachers and children, and the whole school behaviour policy as constraining their ability to manage behaviour. One new theme, which will now be discussed, was produced by my participants that was not well reported in the research reviewed - need for TAs to 'know their place'.

<u>Findings</u>

One of the key themes that emerged, in the focus group and interviews, was the self-described requirement for my participants to 'know their place'. This understanding of 'place' was echoed by all interviewees, with TA D stating that teachers should be shown 'respect' and that TAs needed to 'be very careful not crossing a line'. All of my participants were conscious of the boundary that they felt existed between the teacher and TA - expressed as the need to 'know your place' - delineating the

difference between the roles in managing behaviour as TAs perceived it. Watson, Bayliss and Pratchett's (2013) research, which also focused on TAs' experiences, was alone in including the concept of 'know your place', with the term also being contributed by TAs in their study. This may be due to the atypical nature of the response which is not generalisable to the wider TA population. Conversely, it may be that published research has not focused on the experiences of TAs, who remain 'voiceless', despite repeated calls to address this (Gilbert, Warhurst, Nickson, Hurrell and Commander, 2012; Lehane, 2016; Roffey-Barentsen and Watt, 2014; Trent, 2014).

Reflecting on the contributions of my participants, specifically their references to 'place', a new theme emerged during the latter phases of the data analysis. This was the concept of agency, which had not been discussed in published research on TAs (see [Graves, 2013; Lehane, 2016; Watson *et al.*, 2013] as exceptions). The term agency had been used in discussions between myself and my supervisory team but not explicitly by TAs themselves. An overview and definition of agency will now be shared.

Agency and TAs

Agency was a pervasive theme in the data for my research, but one not explicitly articulated. This may be due to challenges in defining this 'slippery' term (Edwards, 2015; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Hitlin and Elder, 2007) which, despite being 'widely debated' (Robinson, 2012) and 'romanticised' remains 'elusive' (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Difficulties in understanding how agency affected TAs were compounded by the challenges of the equivocal definition of agency but also by 'little research or theory development' concerning teacher (assumed to be the most related field) agency (Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2015; Priestley, Edwards, Priestley and Miller, 2012; Toom, Pyhältö and Rust, 2015; van der Heijden, Geldens, Beijaard and Popeijus, 2015).

Despite the difficulties surrounding a clear definition, some distinct ideas about the nature of agency did emerge. Robinson (2012) suggested agency encompassed 'internalising choices' and 'analysing and reflecting' on 'past experiences and future trajectories'. Other influences stated to impact on agency included the 'expectations and assumptions' of the agent and others, as well as the 'external culture' (Biesta *et al.*, 2015; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Robinson, 2012). Considering of the impact of structure on agency was pertinent as TAs in my research highlighted structural aspects which they suggested constrained their ability to manage behaviour. These included their deployment across a range of classes and with a number of teachers, which impacted on their relationships with the children and staff they worked with and reduced communication time. Participants also raised issues of support from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) for any decisions they made in relation to behaviour management. Giddens's (1984) structuration theory considered agency, as Pantić (2015) also noted, as 'contingent with social structures'. Others (Bandura, 2000; Hitlin and Elder, 2007; van der Heijden *et al.,* 2015) also cited the 'mutually constitutive and highly interdependent' relationship between agency and social context, supporting Bandura's (2006) emphasis on the 'reciprocal interplay' between 'interpersonal, behavioural and environmental determinants' on agency. Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) definition of agency proposed it was 'intrinsically social and relational' and;

> …both reproduces and transforms those structures and interactive response to the
> problems posed by changing historical situations.' (p. 970)

Considerations of agency including historical, social, relational and structural facets links to TAs' evolving role and expectations of them (Blatchford *et al.*, 2012; DfEE 1997; DfES, 2000; 2001; 2003; 2006; DfE, 2010; Smith *et al.*, 2004).

The TA population is also overwhelmingly female (95% in 2017 [DfE, 2017]) and Davies (1991) asserted that from a feminist perspective, agency was 'the exception rather than the rule' for women. This allied with Graves's (2011) argument that TAs' role was 'powerfully gendered' limiting 'choices'

and 'agency'. Davies (1991) argued that any definitions of agency that existed were underpinned by 'masculine and elite' assumptions which did not acknowledge the 'normative interactive nature of agency'. Abrams (1999) feminist definition of agency also understood it as 'intersecting' a wide range of interrelated areas, mirroring the intertwined nature of the tensions identified for TAs from the review of literature.

The lack of a clear definition of agency resulted in selecting one that seemed most appropriate from extensive reading. Toom *et al.* (2015) proposed that teacher agency was associated with;

> …active efforts to make choices and intentional action in a way that makes a significant difference. (p. 615)

It will be used as the definition of agency in this paper as it encompasses the key issues for TAs that emerged through the review of literature and highlights TAs' ability to make choices and act intentionally are often constrained by structural, social and historical factors.

Agency as a factor that constrains TAs managing behaviour

The influence of agency permeated many of the responses from TAs in my research, often described by the actions TAs took (or didn't take) to manage behaviour. All participants in my research concurred that they had a 'vital role' (TA K) in managing behaviour; yet their responses noted the importance of 'taking the lead from the teacher' (TA B), being 'low key' (TA A) and supporting the teacher without 'undermining them' (TA D).

> I would do it in a subtle way (.) in any case I wouldn't want to undermine a teacher because sometimes I think if you go in really heavy handed that might not be the way that teacher would deal with it (.) and I think (.) I'm not a teacher in the classroom, I'm a TA (.) I feel I just need to assist. (TA C).

Perceptions that TAs' actions might undermine the teacher appeared to be linked with the view that their role was an auxiliary one, with all respondents noting they were there to 'support' the teacher.

I think it's ultimately the teacher in the classroom, it's their responsibility to deal with behaviour. I would only do that if I was in the role of HLTA and the teacher wasn't there so the decision was mine. (TA A)

Reflecting published research, TAs in my research suggested that their title defined their role as a supporting or 'assisting' one (Graves, 2013; Harris and Aprile, 2015; Roffey-Barentsen and Watt, 2014; Trent, 2014). Watson *et al*. (2013) in their research suggested that the term 'papa-professional', now commonly used to describe TAs, alluded to them as 'not professional' and implied a lack of status, as '*be-coming* or *not-quite* professional';

Part of the claim to being powerful is that professions have a distinct body of knowledge that others are excluded from, so to be a para-professional surely delimits the knowledge, and power an occupational group can claim. (p.107)

Participants also perceived implicit power relations between the teacher and TA, placing themselves in a supporting position in relation to managing behaviour, rather than feeling they had the autonomy, agency or authority to manage behaviour in the teacher's classroom. Links between TAs' autonomy and role clarity were highlighted by previous research (Blatchford *et al*., 2009) and, in line with Blatchford *et al's*. (2007) findings, the 'fluidity', flexibility, or 'grey' area in definitions and boundaries within TAs' role caused tensions for my participants. This was reiterated by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) who proposed that boundaries were 'places of potential misunderstanding' and that confusion may be the result of 'different regimes of competence, commitments, values, repertoires and perspectives'.

Soini, Pietarinen, Toom and Pyhältö (2015) proposed agency could be understood as 'identities in motion', where schools 'offer positions and identities for individuals to inhabit' influencing how they 'engage'. The idea of flexible and changing identities allies with TAs' evolving role in schools. From this perspective, the shifting 'positions' and 'identities' given to TAs by schools and individual teachers could influence TAs' agency and therefore, the actions they take to manage behaviour. TA C noted how

'some teachers take their role more seriously' and saw themselves 'differently' - the implication in this difference was that teachers were 'above' TAs.

> I think some teachers are like 'yeah I'm a teacher but I am willing to learn and I am open to ideas and suggestions' and other teachers (.) 'I am the teacher'. (TA C)

As a result of these implicit differences in teachers' perceptions of their own status and role, TAs were left unclear about their 'place' or identity. TA A contended that they were 'not sure how to deal with things, because it is not something that is discussed'. The uncertainty in relation to teachers' expectations of them in managing behaviour was expressed by TA K; 'I sometimes wonder what teacher's expectations are…what point I'm going to go to'. Participants in my research found it challenging developing any 'ownership' or agency in behaviour management as;

> …often we don't know what our role is (.) in some classrooms you go 'I'm going to be doing that', it makes it a lot easier and you automatically feel more comfortable, because you know what your role is and what's expected of you. (TA C)

Edwards (2011, p.34) defined relational agency as 'working with others to strengthen purposeful responses to complex problems', suggesting that it was a fluid and twofold process. She proposed that it required a recognition of the 'motives and the resources that others bring to bear' through their interpretation of situations, and to 'aligning one's own responses' to those made by other professionals. It can be seen by my participants' responses that without opportunities to understand teacher's 'motives' in managing behaviour, it was challenging for them to 'align their responses'. It could be suggested that for TAs in my research their agency was constrained by a lack of understanding their 'place' in managing behaviour. This was recounted by TA D, who stated;

> Sometimes it's about knowing your place (.) some teachers might not want you to have that input because they are the ones that should actually be disciplining the class, so there is a line that you don't want to cross which I think affects how you deal with things.

Despite the importance participants put on 'knowing their place' to guide their management of behaviour, they were in the challenging position of *not* knowing their place, a theme mirrored by Watson *et al*.'s (2013) findings;

> Many of the TLSAs [TAs] worked with more than one teacher and managed their different relationships accordingly… in all cases TLSAs [TAs] felt the need to be reassured that they were behaving in accordance with others' expectations of them. (p.108)

The inconsistency in teachers' expectations and the uncertainty this resulted in was exemplified in a participant's statement that 'it's a personality thing' - that expectations of TAs managing behaviour relied on individual teachers. Maguire, Ball and Braun (2010) highlighted the variation in perceptions that mediated an 'understanding' of managing behaviour;

> …the professional dispositions of various members of staff seemed to provoke differences in understanding and pedagogy in the field of behaviour management. (p. 159)

The need for TAs to understand these 'professional dispositions' and to act accordingly reflects my participants concerns over undermining teachers. This allied with research (Graves, 2012; Quicke, 2003) arguing the lack of clarity in TAs' roles left them 'dependent' on the 'predilections' of teachers. Developing an understanding the teachers' 'predilections' and their expectations of TAs managing behaviour was mediated by my participants use of 'common sense' and 'inference' as well as their 'experience' with that teacher. TA B commented that with a teacher she knew well she would feel comfortable taking a more active role;

> Someone I've not worked with before I'd find it quite tricky (.) so with them I'd perhaps take a back seat and just wait for a while, until I knew what was going on. I wouldn't just jump in. So I don't do the same with all teachers (.)

This mirrored the 'telepathic' nature of TAs' relationships with teachers identified in Barkham's (2008) research and Thomas's (1992) assertion that TAs' roles and boundaries were not 'defined' but were 'assumed'.

My participants 'low key' strategies, 'sitting back' and passivity, as opposed to intervening and engaging in managing behaviour, led to feelings of 'helplessness';

Sometimes you walk in and the class will be in chaos and nothing is being done about it and you feel that you would normally have that nipped in the bud straight away, but you feel that as a TA you don't want to override the teacher because that would make them feel inadequate. (TA D)

Edwards (2011, p.35) suggested that 'practices that were being protected by the boundary may themselves be destabilised by your actions'. Despite TAs' 'frustration' (TA A), their concerns that boundaries between teachers' and TAs' roles would be 'destabilised' and teachers would be undermined, resulted in them remaining 'observers' (TA C) rather than agents in managing behaviour. This supported Thomas's (1992) assertion that 'fraternity' was highly important and used as a 'substitute for role definition'. Barkham (2008) also proposed 'family metaphors' and 'personal friendships' went some way towards 'mediating tensions' between teachers and TAs. Soini *et al.*'s (2015) research also found that 'the quality of peer relations' impacted on agency.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to provide some ideas, rather than a definite answer to the question 'Teaching Assistants managing behaviour – who knows how they do it?' One of the key areas related to answering that question - agency - has remained largely unexplored in extant research on TAs. For participants in my research a range of tensions interconnected to reduce their agency in managing behaviour, centring on overarching issues of consistency and 'place'. The figure below (figure 3) illustrates how these key themes enacted a central role in TAs' management of behaviour.

Figure 3: Links between emerging themes cited in data collection as constraining participants in managing behaviour
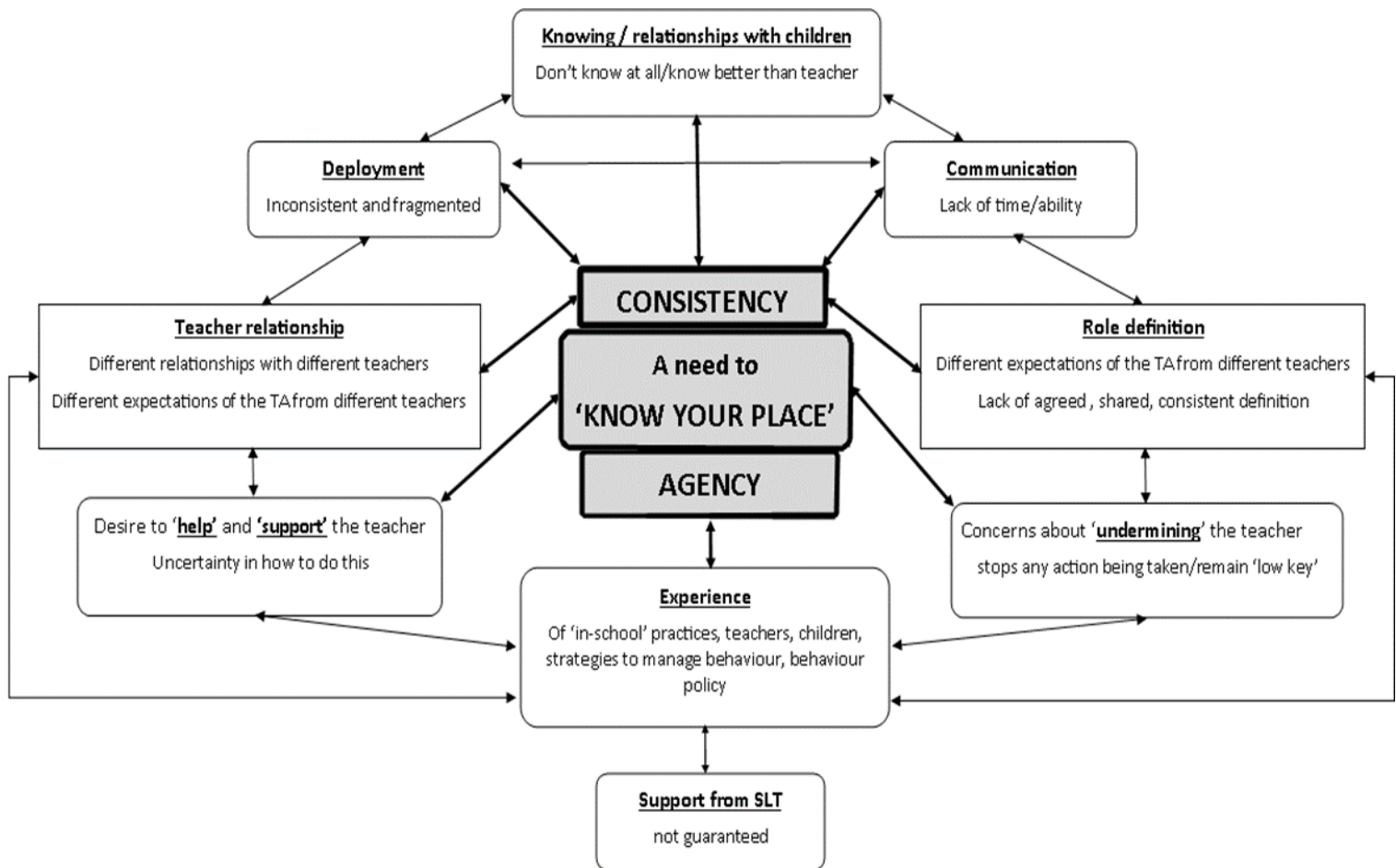
In my research, TAs' constrained agency resulted in them becoming observers in the classroom and not 'stepping in' due to concerns over undermining the teacher. Considered from Bandura's (2006) view that any action taken was contingent on the 'level of agentic resources, types of activities and situational circumstances', it follows that reduced agency or 'agentic resources' reduced the actions TAs took to manage behaviour.

For TAs in this study, the tensions they experienced in defining their 'place' was associated with difficulties in framing their identity as TAs and in understanding how to 'engage' with teachers or children in managing behaviour. As a result, TAs' agency in 'interactive situations' (Burke, 2004) such as managing behaviour was challenged, as they were unsure of their role compared to that of the

teacher and therefore, how to legitimately act in that role. TAs' lack of understanding of their 'place' in managing behaviour due to limited communication with teachers, and at times the children they were asked to work with, constrained their 'judgement in professional practices' and as a result, 'agency in interpreting problems' (Edwards, 2012). The necessity of communication and collaborative relationships in the development of agency were cited in research (Abrams, 1999; Biesta *et al.*, 2015; Edwards, 2012; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Eteläpelto *et al.*, 2015; Priestley *et al.*, 2012; Quinn and Carl, 2015; Robinson, 2012; van der Heijden *et al.* 2015).

> As soon as we erase plurality we deprive others of their actions, and as a result we deprive ourselves of our possibility to act and hence to be an agent. (Biesta and Tedder, p.24)

This research proposes that participants' agency was constrained by their restricted opportunities to gain an insight into teachers' expectations of TAs' role in managing behaviour. This was reflected, particularly in Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) conceptualisation of agency, where they highlighted the;

> …importance of intersubjectivity, social interaction and communication as critical components of agentic processes: agency is always a dialogical process by and through which actors…engage with others… (p.974)

Supporting Abrams's (1999) findings, my research highlights the 'multiple' and interrelated factors that impact on TAs' agency in managing behaviour. It affirms the argument of others (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2013; Clarke and Visser 2016; 2017; Giangreco, 2013; Giangreco *et al.,* 2010; Graves, 2013; Howes, 2003; Rubie-Davies *et al*., 2010) calling for further research into TAs' 'soft skills'. Developing an understanding of how TAs support children's non-academic development may be a starting point to develop conversations in schools that afford TAs greater clarity in their roles and relationships, and as a result – greater agency.

References

Abrams, K. (1999). From Autonomy to Agency: Feminist Perspectives on Self-Direction. *William and Mary Law Review*, *40*(3), pp.805–846.

Bach, I., Kessler, S. and Heron, P. (2006). Changing job boundaries and workforce reform: the case of teaching assistants. *Industrial Relations Journal.*, *37*(1), pp.2–21.

Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *9*(3), pp.75–78.

Bandura, A. (2006). Toward a psychology of human agency. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *1*(2), pp.164–180.

Barkham, J. (2008). Suitable work for women? Roles, relationships and changing identities of "other adults" in the early years classroom. *British Educational Research Journal*, *34*(6), pp.839–853.

Bassey, M. (1999). *Case Study Research in Educational Settings.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Biesta, G. and Tedder, M. (2006). How is agency possible? Towards an ecological understanding of agency-as-achievement. *Learning lives: Learning, identity, and agency in the life course 44*, pp.1–40.

Biesta, G., Priestley, M. and Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *21*(6), pp.624–640.

Blatchford, P., Russell, A., Bassett, P., Brown, P., & Martin, C. (2007). The role and effects of teaching assistants in English primary schools (Years 4 to 6) 2000–2003. Results from the Class Size and Pupil–Adult Ratios (CSPAR) KS2 Project. *British Educational Research Journal*, *33*(1), pp.5–26.

Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P. and Webster, R. (2009). The effect of support staff on pupil engagement and individual attention. *British Educational Research Journal*, *35*(5), pp.661–686.

Blatchford, P., Russell, A. and Webster, R. (2012). *Reassessing the Impact of Teaching Assistants.* Oxon: Oxon: Routledge.

Blatchford, P., Russell, A. and Webster, R. (2013). *Maximising the impact of Teaching Assistants*. London: Routledge.

Burke, P. J. (2004). Identities and social structure: the 2003 Cooley-Mead Award Address. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *67*(1), pp.5–15.

Clarke, E. and Visser, J. (2016). Teaching Assistants managing behaviour - who knows how they do it? A review of literature. *Support for Learning*, *31*(4), pp. 266-280.

Clarke, E. and Visser, J. (2017). How do teaching assistants view their role in managing behaviour and cultivate their learning and understanding in relation to managing behaviour? *TEAN Journal*, *9*(1), pp.66-79.

Clarke, E. (2019). Paint pot washers or pedagogues? Is gender an issue for teaching assistants? *Educational Review*, 1–16.

Clarke, E., & Visser, J. (2018). Pragmatic research methodology in education: possibilities and pitfalls. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 1–15.

Davies, B. (1991). The concept of agency: a feminist poststructuralist analysis. *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, (30), pp.42–53.

Devecchi, C. (2005) Teachers and TAs working together in a secondary school: should we be critical? In: *BERA research conference: University of Glamorgan*. Retrieved from http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/170933.doc.

DfEE. (1997). *Excellence in Schools. White Paper.* London: DfEE.

DfES. (2000). *Working with Teaching Assistants: A Good Practice Guide*. London: DfES

DfES. (2001). *Schools Achieving Success*. London: DfES.

DfES. (2002). *Developing the Role of School Support Staff.* London: DfES.

DfES (2003). *Developing the Role of Support Staff – What the National Agreement Means for You*. London: DfES

DfES. (2006). *Raising Standards and Tackling Workload Implementing the National Agreement.* London: DfES.

DfE. (2010). *The Importance of Teaching: The School's White Paper 2010*. London: DfE.

DfE. (2013). *Behaviour and Discipline in Schools: Guidance for governing bodies*. London: DfE.

DfE. (2016). *Behaviour and Discipline in Schools: Advice for Head Teachers and school staff*. London: DfE.

DfE (2017). *School Workforce in England November 2017*. London: *DfE*.

Edwards, A. (2011). Building common knowledge at the boundaries between professional practices: Relational agency and relational expertise in systems of distributed expertise. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *50*(1), pp.33–39.

Edwards, A. (2015). Recognising and realising teachers' professional agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, *21*(6), pp.779–784.

Emirbayer, M. and Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, *103*(4), pp.962–1023.

Fletcher-Campbell, F. (2010). Double standards and first principles: framing teaching assistant support for pupils with special educational needs: a response. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *25*(4), pp.339–340.

Frost, N. and Nolas, S. (2011). Exploring and expanding on pluralism in qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *8*(2), pp. 115–119.

Giangreco, M. (2013). Teacher assistant supports in inclusive schools: research, practices and alternatives. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, *37*(2), pp.93–106.

Giangreco, M., Suter, J. and Doyle, M. (2010). Paraprofessionals in inclusive schools: a review of recent research. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *20*(1), pp.41–57.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gilbert, K., Warhurst, C., Nickson, D., Hurrell, S. and Commander, J. (2012) New initiative, old problem: classroom assistants and the under-valuation of women's work. *Industrial Relations Journal*, **43**(1), pp. 22–37.

Goodbody, L. and Burns, J. (2011). A disquisition on pluralism in qualitative methods: The troublesome case of a critical narrative analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *8*(2), 170–196.

Graves, S. (2011). Performance or enactment? The role of the higher level teaching assistant in a remodelled school workforce in England. *Management in Education*, *25*(1), pp.15–20.

Graves, S. (2012). Chameleon or chimera? The role of the higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) in a remodelled workforce in English schools. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, *41*(1), pp.95–104.

Graves, S. (2013). New roles, old stereotypes – developing a school workforce in English schools. *School Leadership and Management*, *34*(3), pp.255–268.

Groom, B. (2006). Building relationships for learning: the developing role of the teaching assistant. *Support for Learning*, *21*(4), pp.199–203.

Groom, B. and Rose, R. (2005). Supporting the inclusion of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in the primary school: the role of teaching assistants. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, *5*(1), pp.20–30.

Harris, L. and Aprile, K. (2015). "I can sort of slot into many different roles": examining teacher aide roles and their implications for practice. *School Leadership and Management*, *35*(2), pp.140–162.

Hitlin, S. and Elder, G. (2007). Time, self, and the curiously abstract concept of agency. *Sociological Theory*, *25*(2), pp.170–191.

HMI. (2002). *Teaching Assistants in Primary Schools an Evaluation of the Quality and Impact of their Work.* London: HMI.

Howes, A. (2003). Teaching reforms and the impact of paid adult support on participation and learning in mainstream schools. *Support for Learning*, *18*(4), pp.147–153.

Kerry, T. (2005). Towards a typology for conceptualizing the roles of teaching assistants. *Educational Review*, *57*(3), pp.373–384.

Lehane, T. (2016). "Cooling the mark out": experienced teaching assistants' perceptions of their work in the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream secondary schools. *Educational Review*, *68*(1), pp.4–23.

Maguire, M., Ball, S., & Braun, A. (2010). Behaviour, classroom management and student "control": enacting policy in the English secondary school. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, *20*(2), pp.153–170.

Mansaray, A. (2006). Liminality and in/exclusion: exploring the work of teaching assistants. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, *14*(2), pp.171–187.

Ofsted. (2004). *Reading for Purpose and Pleasure: An Evaluation of the Teaching of Reading in Primary Schools*. London: Ofsted.

Onwuegbuzie, A. and Leech, N. (2005). On becoming a pragmatic researcher: The importance of combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *8*(5), pp. 375–387.

Pantić, N. (2015). A model for study of teacher agency for social justice. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *21*(6), pp.759–778.

Priestley, M., Edwards, R., Priestley, A. and Miller, K. (2012). Teacher agency in curriculum making: agents of change and spaces for manoeuvre. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *42*(2), pp.191–214.

Quicke, J. (2003). Teaching assistants: students or servants? *FORUM*, *45*(2), pp.71–74.

Quinn, R. and Carl, N. (2015). Teacher activist organizations and the development of professional agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, *21*(6), pp.745–758.

Robinson, S. (2012). Constructing teacher agency in response to the constraints of education policy: adoption and adaptation. *Curriculum Journal*, *23*(2), pp.231–245.

Roffey-Barentsen, J. and Watt, M. (2014). The voices of teaching assistants (are we value for money?). *Research in Education*, *92*(1), pp.18–31.

Rose, R. and O'Neill, A. 2009. Classroom Support for Inclusion in England and Ireland: An Evaluation of Contrasting Models. *Research in Comparative and International Education 4*(3), pp. 250–61.

Rubie-Davies, C., Blatchford, P., Webster, R., Koutsoubou, M. and Bassett, P. (2010). Enhancing learning? A comparison of teacher and teaching assistant interactions with pupils. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *21*(4), pp.429–449.

Savin-Baden, M. and Howell Major, C. (2013). *Qualitative Research the Essential Guide to Theory and Practice*. Oxon: Routledge.

Sharples, J., Webster, R. and Blatchford, P. (2015). *Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants: Guidance Report*. London: Education Endowment Foundation.

Sim, J. (1998). Collecting and analysing qualitative data: issues raised by the focus group. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *28*(2), pp.345–352.

Smith, P., Whitby, K. and Sharp, C. (2004). *The Employment and Deployment of Teaching Assistants*. NFER: Slough.

Soini, T., Pietarinen, J., Toom, A. and Pyhältö, K. (2015). What contributes to first-year student teachers' sense of professional agency in the classroom? *Teachers and Teaching*, *21*(6), pp.641–659.

Thomas, G. (1992). *Effective Classroom Teamwork: Support or Intrusion?* London: Routledge.

Toom, A., Pyhältö, K. and Rust, F. (2015). Teachers' professional agency in contradictory times. *Teachers and Teaching*, *21*(6), pp.615–623.

Trent, J. (2014). 'I'm teaching, but I'm not really a teacher'. Teaching assistants and the construction of professional identities in Hong Kong schools. *Educational Research*, *56*(1), pp.28–47.

van der Heijden, H., Geldens, J., Beijaard, D. and Popeijus, H. (2015). Characteristics of teachers as change agents. *Teachers and Teaching*, *21*(6), pp.681–699.

Watson, D., Bayliss, P. and Pratchett, G. (2013). Pond life that "know their place": exploring teaching and learning support assistants' experiences through positioning theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *26*(1), pp.100-117.

Wenger-Trayner, E. and Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015). Learning in a landscape of practice. In B. Wenger-Trayner, E., Fenton-O-Creevy, M., Hutchinson, S, Kubiak, C. & Wenger-Trayner (Ed.), *Learning in Landscapes of Practice: Boundaries, Identity and Knowledgeability in Practice-based Learning* (pp. 13–30). Oxon: Routledge.