

'Yes, but . . .': rhetoric, reality and resistance in teaching assistants' experiences of inclusive education

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This research examines the role of teaching assistants (TAs) working with children with special educational needs (SEN) in an increasingly complex and diverse context. The role of the TA has been given more attention recently, partly due to the increased focus on their effectiveness within an inclusive education system in a time of workforce reform. The research takes a life history approach to examining the experiences of TAs within inclusive contexts and focuses upon how their backgrounds impact upon their role within the classroom, as well as how their experiences demonstrate ambiguity, tension and contradictions. Rather than a focus on pupil and institutional outcomes, the article analyses the tensions between the policy and institutional frameworks of inclusion and how TAs experience this. TAs' contradictions, tensions, resistance and also pleasures within their work are explored from their own perspectives. The personal interpretations, understandings and day-to-day implementation of inclusion are the focus.

Key words: inclusion, special educational needs, teaching assistants, higher level teaching assistants, models of disability.

Introduction

This article examines the role of teaching assistants (TAs) working with children with special educational needs (SEN) in an increasingly complex and diverse context. The role of the TA has been given significant attention in the last two decades, partly due to the increased focus on their effectiveness within an inclusive education system (Howes *et al.*, 2003; Cajkler *et al.*, 2007a, 2007b; Blatchford *et al.*, 2009) in a time of workforce reform (Gunter *et al.*, 2005; Groom, 2006; Burgess and Shelton Mayes, 2007, 2009). This study uses qualitative data to examine the experiences of TAs within inclusive contexts and focuses upon how their backgrounds and experiences impact upon their role within the classroom, as well as how their experiences within inclusive classrooms demonstrate ambiguity, tension and contradictions.

Rather than a focus on pupil and institutional outcomes, it is the intention of this article to analyse the tensions between the policy and institutional frameworks of inclusion and how TAs experience this. TAs' experiences of contradictions, tensions, resistance and also pleasures of their work will be explored from their own perspectives. The personal interpretations, understandings and day-to-day implementation of inclusion will be the focus (O'Brien and Garner, 2001; Sikes *et al.*, 2007).

This study builds on and extends previous research and takes a case study approach to presenting the findings to focus on: how TAs' life experiences influence their work in the classroom; relationships with other staff; the impact of gender on the TA role; TAs' understandings of inclusion; motivations to carry out the role; perceptions of their status; and tensions between official policy on inclusion and their own practice on the ground.

The policy context

TAs have long been employed in the primary classroom, particularly to support the needs of pupils with special educational needs, and more recently they have been involved in supporting the now defunct national literacy and numeracy strategies (Hancock *et al.*, 2010). The numbers of TAs have grown since the 1990s and there are 178,900 full-time equivalent TAs employed in English mainstream and special schools, an increase from 70,300 in 1999 (DCSF, 2009). The role of the TA is shifting to include work that would previously only have been carried out by teachers, such as teaching, planning and assessment (Blatchford *et al.*, 2009), and in the case of higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs), the covering of classes (Burgess and Shelton Mayes, 2007, 2009; Hancock *et al.*, 2010).

This shifting of occupational boundaries has led to a widely noted lack of clarity about the TA role and to TAs moving closer to the role of the classroom teacher (Adamson, 1999; Howes *et al.*, 2003; Cajkler *et al.*, 2007a) together with concerns that TAs need effective management, training and a clear career structure (Alborz *et al.*, 2009) (a concern that has been discussed for some time). An emerging body of research is examining the impact of TAs on achievements (Blatchford *et al.*, 2009) and although Hancock *et al.* (2010) assert that the impact of TAs is comparable to that of

teachers, Blatchford *et al.* (2009) did not find any impact of TAs on the academic achievements of pupils with special educational needs (although the research did find other benefits of the TA role).

The voice of the TA

The article is inspired by the approach of O'Brien and Garner (2001) and their concerns about the TA role, such as the possible marginalisation of TAs within schools, uncertain contractual arrangements and poor pay. These working conditions were seen to undermine the important work that they do with children with very complex and challenging needs (O'Brien and Garner, 2001). O'Brien and Garner purposely interviewed TAs about their experiences; often previous research tended to be about TAs without including their own perspectives. O'Brien and Garner's research was a way to bring back the unacknowledged 'voices' of TAs into the debate, an approach that this article seeks to emulate.

TAs very often have a strong commitment to their work and an emotional connection to the people they work with. They have 'strong and principled' views on the work that they do and can give valuable input into how inclusion can work successfully (O'Brien and Garner, 2001, p. 4). However, it is well documented that their status within school is often poor (Hammett and Burton, 2005). Within policy, there is little guidance on mutual collaboration; TAs appear to have little say in what should happen to them, and appear to be often excluded from discussions about the children of whom they have expert knowledge. Despite recent research demonstrating positive collaboration between TAs and teachers (Groom, 2006; Devecchi and Rouse, 2010), generally collaboration appears to be difficult to achieve (for example Moran and Abbott, 2002; Hammett and Burton, 2005; Malipant, 2008).

This article is an attempt to acknowledge the voice of the TA and present TAs' stories in their own words as far as possible, 'recognising that empowerment of the "researched" is the most potent (ethical?) position to adopt' (O'Brien and Garner, 2001, p. 6). However, it is recognised that any account of TAs' views will be partial and subject to the selective processes inevitable in research of this length. It is also recognised that drawing out themes, commonalities and implications of the responses will inevitably involve the interpretations and subjectivities of the researcher (Lawson *et al.*, 2006; Sikes *et al.*, 2007).

Understandings of inclusion: 'yes, but'

Research has found that teachers and TAs often do not have congruence in how they view their roles in the classroom. One area in which there has been a lack of shared understanding is in teachers' and TAs' understandings of inclusion (Lawson *et al.*, 2006; Sikes *et al.*, 2007). While it

is unsurprising that each account of inclusion is individual, what is interesting in Sikes *et al.*'s research is that although participants may have had a definition of inclusion that seemed to chime with some aspect of government, local authority or institutional definitions, people's own stories about inclusion were more likely to focus on the human and personal aspects of daily involvement with pupils, often couched in terms of 'care and support' (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002, in Sikes *et al.*, 2007 p. 359; Avramidis *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, rhetorical expressions of inclusion and the reality of it in the day-to-day life of the classroom were only tenuously linked.

Participants in Sikes *et al.*'s study often illustrated what the researchers called the 'yes buts' of inclusion, for example: 'Yes, inclusion is a good thing. *But* the money for doing it properly isn't there' (Sikes *et al.*, 2007 p. 360). Participants also mentioned tensions between the principle of inclusion and an inappropriate curriculum, the lack of effective training for teachers, and meeting the needs of the rest of the class. Respondents often expressed contradictory aspects within their own thinking; a support for inclusion in principle but also experiencing ambivalent feelings about the practice. There was a clear tension between the ideal of inclusion and their own subjective experiences and personal understandings of inclusion (see also Croll and Moses, 2000). This study attempts similarly to analyse TAs' 'yes, buts' around inclusion, particularly around the tension between inclusive policy and actual classroom practice.

Methodology

The sample comprised 13 TAs all working in schools in east London. The data were collected through interviews (three respondents) and four focus group discussions (ten respondents). The sample of TAs was taken from a wider study of professionals' experiences working with children with special educational needs (total sample is $n = 44$). The focus groups were mixed and comprised these various professionals due to the availability of respondents on particular dates. Following on shortly after the focus groups, semi-structured life history interviews were carried out with three different respondents. Like Cole (2004), the study used an opportunity sample based on responses to an advert placed in two major special needs magazines and an electronic request which went to all students in the university in which the author was working. The respondents were all working in east London schools, and were following degree courses in education at the author's university. This makes generalisation difficult, and it may be the case that the participants' experiences are typical only of working in schools in London (Mackenzie, 2009, in Ang *et al.*, 2009).

Like O'Brien and Garner (2001), I tried to apply a general overarching criterion for the selection of the stories to include in this article, which was whether the stories offered the reader a new or alternative insight or perspective into their work. I also attempted to select stories that might be

informative for future practice. I hope the stories do reflect these criteria but I accept that the selection will reflect my own interpretations of what is interesting and significant and there will inevitably be a degree of selection when presenting the stories.

The respondents were all volunteers, which may mean that they were perhaps more motivated to work in SEN than in other groups, or at least had more intense or significant experiences than other TAs. Therefore, questions can be raised about the representativeness of the sample. As the respondents were all known to the researcher as current or former students, it could be argued that they might be more likely to give a more positive account of inclusion (or at least, a more censored account) although this does not appear to be the case in this study. It is also possible that the status differences between the researcher (as the students' current or former lecturer) and the respondents may have affected the responses although it is difficult to ascertain what effect this had, if any.

The transcripts of the focus groups and interviews produced the data for analysis via the software programme NVivo. The programme was used to analyse the focus group and qualitative life history data, as it was suitable for a very detailed study using relatively small amounts of data. Initial themes emerged after reading the transcripts and NVivo was used to help to draw those threads together.

Ethical issues

It has been argued that most projects involving focus groups pose few ethical issues (Morgan, 1998). However, privacy remains the central ethical concern in focus group research. The first step was to restrict access to information that revealed the participants' identities, and therefore anonymity and confidentiality needed to be addressed. Few focus groups qualify as offering true anonymity (Morgan, 1998) and indeed in this research many of the respondents knew each other. Instead, confidentiality was promised, which meant that identifying information was gathered, but it was carefully protected. Participants' names were changed and any identifying school or local authority markers were removed.

Findings

The findings are presented as five individual case studies which gave a new or alternative insight into experiences of inclusion and were drawn from respondents working in different phases and different types of setting. Points of commonality and difference will be drawn out in the discussion section.

Jill: 'they set unrealistic expectations'

Jill is a TA in the Early Years sector who was also following a part-time degree course. She began working with children

with special educational needs because her step-brother had global developmental delay and a brother with ADHD and so she had always grown up around people with special educational needs. Jill's mother works with children with special educational needs, and two years ago Jill started a summer holiday play scheme job for children with very complex disabilities which encouraged her to work in the field.

Jill's major concern regarding working in mainstream schools was that both she and the mainstream staff had a lack of training on SEN issues. In her setting, the SENCo role had gone to the manager solely because she was already in the role of a manager. The SENCo role was seen as just '*a label . . . a bit of a badge*' without the required knowledge and training being attached to the role.

Jill believed that the pressures on teachers to meet Government targets were leading to bad practice within the classroom:

'A lot of teachers especially in this country feel so much pressure to hit those league tables and prove that they are doing all these things that they think, "I haven't got time to deal with the SEN children" [sic].'

TAs therefore ended up '*propping up*' inclusion, but the TA role could also cause tensions within the classroom between children:

'So that child [with SEN] gets one-to-one help and nobody else does, so they're getting positively discriminated because they're not as bright as everybody else. That's not fair because then the other children think, "what's going on? They get someone sat with them all day helping them; they get someone sharpening their pencils".'

Jill was generally supportive of inclusion but believed that expectations of what children with special educational needs could achieve were unrealistic.

'I think some teachers are unrealistic about expectations. I mean the child I was talking about before [who has Down's syndrome] their LSA has been told that they are not allowed to hold her hand and I'm thinking "why, why?" . . . They are not allowed to sit her on their lap and I think it's a bit sad, because she is not of the maturity yet to understand. It's not expected of other children and I just think they are still little. They are only 4 years old anyway, and I don't think that should be expected of any of them especially someone with a special need'.

Jill believed that it was important to have more mature and experienced staff working with children with special educational needs, particularly SENCos, who have lived through the shifting ways in which the needs of pupils have been met

in recent history and were more knowledgeable about how to meet the needs of children with special educational needs.

Jill felt that young SENCos were sometimes ‘*shoved into posts*’ without the knowledge or the experience to carry out the role. She commented on the female-dominated nature of the profession. In particular, she believed that children see women as ‘*being more approachable generally especially with young children*’. She noted how men within the profession were in a minority and were often seen as a novelty.

Jane: ‘what I don’t like is working with teachers’

Jane initially began working as a TA by supporting a child returning to school after a long illness. This then led her to follow a degree in education after completing an Access course. Her eventual goal is to become a teacher, something that she had always wanted to do.

One of the most uncomfortable aspects of her TA role was her relationships with others, particularly dealing with the ‘*stupid politics*’ in school. There was a hierarchy of TAs in the school, with those being there for a long time who ‘*know how to work the system to their advantage*’. Communication problems were also common, with TAs often not being invited to meetings and not being paid if they did attend.

This lack of communication and collaboration was her major concern with how inclusion was working in mainstream schools. Jane found it particularly difficult to work with teachers:

‘I never get lesson plans. You’ve got to think on your feet, you’ve got to adapt material when you don’t even know what they’re doing. You have to listen to what the teacher is teaching the class so that you understand everything. But at the same time you are meant to be out of the class changing all the materials. You don’t get any time to change or adapt things’.

She also felt unsupported after being attacked by a pupil and was expected to carry on working with that child without counselling or support after the event.

Jane believed that problems of collaboration were often to do with gender, with all-female environments being prone to hierarchies of status and characterised by ‘*cattiness*’.

Jane did give an example of good collaboration with a teacher, particularly when the teacher had already differentiated the lesson plan. ‘*Good*’ teachers were seen as ‘*fair, firm, adapting the curriculum, understanding the needs of the classroom, making sure that the kids love you and empowering them so that they become active learners*’.

Jane also had concerns about TAs’ working conditions and role, particularly as they had few breaks and were expected also to do playground duty. TAs also had a lack of support

and guidance, and when TAs reported difficulties, they were told: ‘*it’s your job, get on with it*’. Despite the challenges, Jane still wanted to work in SEN because of ‘*making a difference . . . and watching them grow and develop*’.

Angela: ‘it’s very physically and emotionally demanding’

Angela had just finished her degree and was also working in special schools where she had been employed for seven years in a peripatetic role helping pupils in the transition to mainstream school. She has a son who attends a special school, and a brother who has ADHD. Growing up with her brother sparked her interest in special needs. What inspired her to work as a TA was her feeling that teachers could not meet the needs of pupils with emotional and behavioural problems. She now mainly works with pupils with physical disabilities but she finds working with children with high dependency needs largely unfulfilling, as she felt that their needs would largely remain unchanged, whereas working in behaviour management enabled her to see more progression with particular pupils.

She feels that many teachers are not able to meet the needs of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and are more comfortable working with pupils with physical and medical needs. Angela found her role isolating, particularly as she had a peripatetic role and so found it hard to build relationships with staff.

Angela was particularly concerned about teachers’ view of children with behaviour problems:

‘I think a lot of teachers see behaviour as just naughty children. They never looked beyond being naughty. My son goes to a special school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and he went to a mainstream primary. It was a split placement, but my experience with him was very much “he’s just being naughty, it’s just for attention”. They didn’t look for any environmental factors, he was just a naughty child, and sometimes if you look beyond that it’s a very different picture’.

Angela found the role of a TA ‘*demanding, very physically and emotionally demanding*’, particularly trying to find the balance between meeting the needs of children with special educational needs while also promoting their independence. Angela also found that ‘*it is hard not to get emotional*’, particularly when children were ill:

‘It is hard not to get emotionally involved especially when you have worked with the same child for a long time. You’ve got that bond with them, and then when they do get ill, it is quite hard’.

The greater need for TAs to meet the needs of children with special educational needs led Angela to believe that the role now has higher status. However, she believed that working

in SEN is still not seen as an ‘intellectual job’: ‘you are just classed as an extra pair of hands . . . a carer’. However, Angela was sceptical about the role of qualifications and experience:

‘[qualifications don’t] actually teach you how to deal with a child with autism in the classroom. It doesn’t actually give you that hands-on experience of how to deal with all the different needs. It might give you the theoretical side of it but it doesn’t actually teach you in practice what to do if a child has a fit in a classroom how do you deal with it’.

Angela believes that more men should be working in SEN, especially in the areas of behaviour management:

‘I think that for a lot of boys especially secondary aged, especially black boys, they would have more respect for a man doing the job. Somebody else to relate to. I think that especially for older boys, a lot of them tend to have their Mum but I think for a lot of them it is positive to see a man doing that job. I think they can get different things from a man as a SENCo as well . . . my sons related better to the male SENCos and the male teachers. They have that bond because they’ll talk about football before they really get to the root of the problem and I just think that if there were more men in the role of the SENCo, for older boys it would be more positive’.

Like all of the other respondents, Angela had encountered some difficult experiences with SENCos. Many she saw as:

‘working their way up the ladder. In my experience I’ve come across some really good SENCos but equally I’ve come across some very bad ones. You can see that they are there purely because they wanted to step up the ladder as opposed to wanting to do what’s best for the child’.

She saw some SENCos as using the role to ‘hide’ from the classroom and found that SENCos were frequently unavailable: ‘you can never get hold of her’.

Una: ‘at the end of the day I could pull my hair out but I love my job’

Una is a learning support assistant in Essex. She has been in the role for nine years and is also an undergraduate student. She has always wanted to be an infant teacher.

Una described how behavioural issues had made her job more challenging. Children’s behaviour problems had become more frequent and more complex over the years in which she had been in post. Despite an increase in behaviour problems, Una found these aspects of the job rewarding:

‘I get on with children that I now know are “special educational needs” [sic]. Those with behaviour prob-

lems, they will come and talk and I can get on with them all right. That has opened my eyes really to how they are, and look beyond why they are like that, why they do this behaviour, and I find it really interesting’.

Una did not want to work in a special school with children with more complex needs: ‘I don’t know if I could cope with that’. She remained committed to working with children with special educational needs, despite the emotional demands of the job.

Like some of the other respondents, Una also exhibited elements of a care discourse when discussing her role:

‘a lot of these children have issues. Where we live is not the most affluent area, and I just sometimes feel that I want to take all the children home. You get that sense that you just want to look after them. Maybe that’s the wrong attitude to have, I don’t know, but I do like the naughty children’.

Despite her concerns about behaviour and the frustrations of the role, Una still wanted to work with children with special educational needs: ‘Sometimes at the end of the day I could pull my hair out, but I love my job, I love the children. I love my job even if they’ve driven me around the twist’. She particularly wanted to work with children with behaviour needs, perhaps in a Pupil Referral Unit, despite recognising the difficulties of that role.

Moira: ‘for a lot of the children, the help is not enough’

Moira is a TA and an undergraduate student who originally came from Malaysia. She was unhappy with the isolation that children with special educational needs in Malaysia experienced, as SEN issues were not sufficiently recognised. In the future, Moira would like to have her own special school, particularly for children with more complex needs, to focus particularly on their artistic and creative skills. Since coming to England, Moira has worked in inclusive settings but had experienced isolation, partly due to people’s reactions to her ethnic background.

Despite largely enjoying her work in mainstream, Moira was not convinced that inclusion was working:

‘I don’t think that mainstream schools actually provide enough help for children. There’s not enough resources, enough help for them for the children especially. I work with teachers who have many, many years of teaching experience there is a lack of experience to help the children with special needs . . . the help is not enough. I am the only one here, I can’t support the whole group. The TA role is quite difficult. We have to work with the whole group of children but for the individual support worker it is easier because they work one-to-one but still it’s not enough’.

Moira particularly found supporting children with behaviour difficulties to be challenging and believed that the causes of behaviour problems lay in 'family background', particularly 'broken homes'. Moira described the after school club and lunch and break time activities for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties she was involved with but believed that there were not enough staff involved to support them.

Moira described the lack of training she experienced: *'the TA is not trained properly to help the SEN children [sic]. I'm not very confident; I do not have the ability to help them understand'*. Despite enjoying some aspects of her work, Moira did not want to work in mainstream education:

'I will work in a mainstream school if the funding is right, if the resources are right. I won't do it unless they sort it out. It is very difficult for these special needs children [sic], a lot of these children need help, they have not been identified or not been given enough support'.

Despite the difficulties in mainstream education, Moira found particular aspects of the role rewarding, for example when working with a child who had a problem with his fine motor skills after a stroke:

'My husband has seen me working with children before and he says "you are a different person when you are working with children". Even though they can be noisy or naughty or whatever, they achieve something when you help them, they achieve and the feeling is . . . you can't explain it'.

Like the other respondents, Moira also had problems when collaborating with teachers and outside agencies. Teachers were sometimes negative and unco-operative about including children with special educational needs, and outside agency support was difficult to access. Moira ended up being 'Velcro'd' to a child with high support needs and believed that the rest of the class suffered as a consequence.

She believed that mainstream teachers were too focused on the National Curriculum at the expense of meeting the needs of children with special educational needs. In contrast, teachers in special schools were different:

'It is entirely different to the teachers in the mainstream school. [Special school teachers] have more empathy and they are more tolerant as well. They are more patient because their whole teaching is for the children'.

She believed that it was important for staff to have empathy with children, and was very critical of those who did not. She also believed that working in SEN was not something to drift into, but something one must have a vocation for.

Discussion

TAs are seen as central to the successful operation of inclusion within schools. The responses of the TAs in this study

demonstrate that working in SEN is partly characterised by contradictions, tensions and ambiguity about how inclusion is operating in practice (see also Pearson, 2009, on the similar experiences of trainee teachers).

On the whole, TAs felt ambivalent about inclusion. Most respondents were supportive of inclusion in principle, but were less certain about how it worked in practice, expressing reservations about inclusion in the same way as respondents in Sikes *et al.*'s study ('Yes, but ...'). Indeed, only one respondent was unreservedly committed to working in inclusive education (Jane) and even she had concerns about the knowledge and experience of staff. Other issues that the TAs highlighted included internal exclusion within classrooms and that the role of units attached to mainstream schools exacerbated exclusionary practices.

In line with Sikes *et al.*'s (2007) study, respondents' understandings of inclusion were full of tensions. For Jill, staff had unrealistic expectations of what children with special educational needs should be able to do; many respondents felt that mainstream schools could not cope with children with challenging behaviour and had negative perceptions about teachers' ability to meet the needs of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (Avramidis *et al.*, 2002).

In line with O'Brien and Garner's (2001) study, TAs were concerned with their roles and poor status within schools, particularly Jane, Angela and Moira, and reservations were expressed about being used mainly in terms of supporting children's medical needs rather than for academic support.

This study did not find the positive examples of collaboration that Devecchi and Rouse (2010) describe and respondents were almost wholly negative about their relationships with teachers and fellow TAs. There were particular tensions between TAs and 'ineffective' SENCOs and between TAs and teachers who did not have adequate training, or who had less positive attitudes towards inclusion (Avramidis *et al.*, 2002). There were also emerging tensions within and between groups of TAs (see also Burgess and Shelton Mayes, 2009). It is difficult to know if these negative relationships reflect the pressures of working in London (Mackenzie, 2009, in Ang *et al.*, 2009), if they reflect wider tensions within the workforce, or if they are just particular to these respondents and their schools.

TAs tended to discuss children with special educational needs in terms of a 'caring' discourse (Avramidis *et al.*, 2000) and often talked about 'looking after' and 'caring' for the children that they supported. 'Caring' and 'love' for children were seen to be a major part of TAs' and teachers' role and they were particularly critical of those who were seen not to 'care'. TAs also almost uniformly used a more medicalised, category approach to discussion of children with special educational needs with expressions such as 'special needs children' being common, and children were

often discussed in category terms (such as ADHD, dyslexia, Down's syndrome and EBD) (see Pearson, 2009).

All respondents either had personal experience of SEN in their own family (see also Cole, 2004) or had early work experience that influenced their decision to work with children with special educational needs. It is possible that their adoption of 'caring' and 'medicalised' discourses is a result of growing up with children or siblings with special educational needs and experiencing them as the recipients of medical support, diagnosis and intervention. Many saw their role in terms of one-to-one support for particular pupils (although two respondents – Jane and Moira – were ambivalent about this) and it could be argued that this way of working added to their more medicalised, individualised view of SEN and disability (Jordan and Stanovich, 2003). It is possible that TAs' partial adherence to a medical model of disability had led them to be less positive about inclusion, and most believed that special education would be most appropriate for some pupils (as above, only Jane remained totally supportive of mainstream education).

TAs also tended to see their work in somewhat stereotypical ways, in that 'caring' was seen as a natural characteristic of women with men being more suited to working with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Although some respondents expressed ambivalence about this and some disquiet that SEN was seen as the preserve of women, many accepted unquestioningly that SEN was naturally a very female-dominated profession.

Conclusion

Devecchi and Rouse (2010) highlighted examples of positive collaboration between teachers and TAs. Although this study had a different focus, it did not find the same examples of positive collaboration. Indeed, relationships between TAs and teachers in the study were full of tensions, misunderstandings and even antagonism. All of the TAs remained committed to working with children with special educational needs, but they experienced ambiguities and conflicts around inclusion, and only one remained totally dedicated to working in mainstream education.

TAs also appear to hold a medicalised and individualised 'category' approach to children with special educational needs, particularly reflected in their language and their view of the importance of special education and one-to-one support for children. This appears to demonstrate an ambiguity towards inclusion ('yes, but . . .'). In a time of perhaps changing policy on inclusion, TA training needs to take a different approach to the role of the TA in a whole school context as this role does appear to be moving away (in policy terms) from a one-to-one approach to support. Schools could examine how to promote a more collaborative approach (Devecchi and Rouse, 2010); policy and schools need to value the role more highly; and perhaps training needs to be revisited.

The study also highlights that the impact of inclusive policy should not be measured solely in terms of policy outcomes but also on the ways it impacts on TAs in personal, subjective and emotional ways. If inclusion is to be successful, the ambivalence that TAs feel about policy and practice needs to be explored further. This means directly addressing some of the issues that have led to this ambivalence. It is hoped that the forthcoming Green Paper will address these concerns together with addressing the tensions engendered for those who support the principles of inclusion but who have doubts about how it currently operates within schools and local authorities (DfE, 2010).

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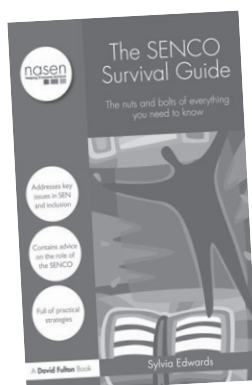
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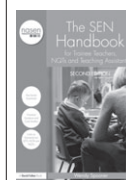
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