Exploring the role of teaching assistants in an early literacy intervention programme

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Acknowledgements

A postgraduate friend commented that working on a PhD was an 'uncomfortable state of being' challenging the doctoral researcher - as it does - in every dimension and over a long period of time. I would add to this observation, the analogy of running a marathon – a race which requires stamina, commitment and the support of others. There are many to thank who have directly or indirectly enabled me to complete this study.

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Abstract

This study reports research into the role and deployment of teaching assistants who were implementing a literacy intervention - the Fischer Family Trust Wave 3 (FFTW3). A conceptual framework was devised to inform and support the creation, progression and interpretation of the research, drawing upon a postmodern perspective and principles associated with pragmatism and *phronesis* or practical wisdom. A multiple-case study approach was adopted, using interviews and observations, focusing on six teaching assistants across two local authorities, with the aim of exploring the teaching assistants' implementation of the FFTW3 programme. Analysis was informed by a grounded theory approach where a constant comparison of data was used to create themes. The findings are presented as case reports for each teaching assistant, followed by a cross-case analysis. Findings revealed that the FFTW3 programme provided unique opportunities for sustainable intervention practices which, it is argued, have implications beyond the boundaries of this research. Furthermore, there was considerable evidence that despite supportive structures for the implementation of the programme, barriers to effective deployment persisted in most contexts. The findings raise questions in relation to policy agendas which have not sufficiently clarified the ways in which teaching assistants should be deployed or supported. The implications from this study have relevance for both school systems and educational policy.

Table of contents

List of tables

List of figures

List of abbreviations

Departments of Education are shown in chronological order

ALS	Additional Literacy Support
BRP	Better Reading Partnership
DES	Department of Education and Science (1964 -1992)
DfE	Department for Education (1992 - 1995)
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment (1995 - 2001)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (2001 - 2007)
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007 - 2010)
DfE	Department for Education (2010 –)
ELS	Early Literacy Support
FFTW3	Fischer Family Trust Wave 3
HLTA	Higher level teaching assistant
INSET	In-Service Educational Training
LA	Local Authority
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
RR	Reading Recovery
RRT	Reading Recovery Teacher
RRTL	Reading Recovery Teacher Leader
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-coordinator
TA	Teaching Assistant

Chapter 1: Introduction - the need to research the role of the teaching assistant

In this introductory chapter I will explain the background and context to this study. I then outline my stance as a researcher and the conceptual framework that follows from this positioning is presented. In the light of this framework, I go on to discuss the approach to the literature search and the rationale for the structure of this thesis.

Background

This study arose from a desire to better understand the nature of support for children with literacy difficulties. This led me to focus particularly on the unique role that teaching assistants (TAs) play in offering such support - an interest derived from my previous professional experience as a special educational needs' coordinator (SENCO) in an English primary school where I both worked alongside and coordinated the roles of several teaching assistants. I became interested in the processes by which interventions are put in place and how they are implemented by TAs.

The word 'support' is defined by the Oxford Dictionary of English (2003) in a number of ways, all of which have some bearing on how literacy support may be conceived:

> *Bear all or part of the weight…give assistance to…give approval, comfort or encouragement to…be actively interested in and concerned for…*

Metaphors that come to mind are those of paths (guidance along), structures (enabling and ensuring stability) hands (companionship) and voice (inspiring confidence). The sense of being 'alongside' is inescapable and is at the heart of what I consider that literacy support should involve.

Questions arose at a time when a national project - *Every Child a Reader* – was being implemented within England which sought to address the needs of a large group of underachieving children in literacy through a series of layered early interventions. Reading Recovery represented the prime intervention and within this project, a number of additional interventions existed. Apart from Reading Recovery, which is implemented by qualified and specifically trained teachers, the additional interventions were implemented by teaching assistants. One such programme –

Fischer Family Trust Wave 3 (FFTWW3) – represented a unique model of intervention practice (Canning, 2007).

Teaching assistants play a crucial role in supporting class teachers in English primary schools; their role is widely valued and, since 1997, has progressively expanded (Department for Education and Skills, 1997, Department for Education and Employment, 1998b). They work closely with classroom teachers and directed by them, support a range of children often in a highly flexible manner. Class teachers have generally appreciated such flexibility; however, as I shall argue in Chapter 3, questions remain unanswered concerning the precise nature of the teaching assistant's role and deployment.

The primary focus of this study will be an examination of the role and deployment context of six teaching assistants across two local authorities who were participating in the Fischer Family Trust Wave 3 programme. By examining this model of intervention practice, I shall attempt to establish a fuller understanding of the TA context.

In a pilot study conducted in the summer of 2009, I examined attitudes to literacy support from three different perspectives: the teaching assistant, the teacher and the child. From this research, I alighted on the issues raised by teaching assistants in relation to their role and deployment (discussed at the beginning of Chapter 4). At the same time the opportunity arose to be involved in a national evaluation of the ECaR project. Reading Recovery, as the principal intervention, was the focus of this evaluation but the initiative also involved a range of additional layered interventions one of which was FFTW3, as previously noted. Through my involvement in the evaluation, I became interested in exploring the role of the teaching assistant in the context of the FFTW3 programme.

The need for this study

Questions surrounding the role of the teaching assistant (TA) have flickered in the research literature since the 1990s (Clayton, 1993, Farrell et al., 1999, Giangreco et al., 2001b). In the last decade, however, the issues have been fully ignited through radical changes in their role and deployment. Such changes were a consequence of two key policy agendas in education by the then, Labour government. The first was the determination to create a more inclusive environment in mainstream schools for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) (Department for Education and Skills, 1997) and the second was to address the growing concern

around teachers' workload and, by extension, their retention within the teaching profession (Department for Education and Employment, 1998b) . The changes culminated in the Workforce Agreement in 2003 and appeared to offer a new role and status for teaching assistants. However, it became apparent through research studies that these changes were not propelling TAs towards a trajectory that included a refined role and status within the educational workforce (Alborz et al., 2009, Hutchings et al., 2009, Cajkler et al., 2007).

Establishing a well-defined role for teaching assistants is highly important. A clearly established role determines decisions about initial training, deployment within the school community and continuing professional development. If children and teachers are to be well supported, teaching assistants need to understand what is required of them and how those requirements may be met.

The ECaR project provided a unique opportunity to examine the role and deployment of the teaching assistant within the context of the Fischer Family Trust Wave 3 intervention at a time when support for the programme was at its height, in terms of government funding for Reading Recovery and its associated interventions. Although the FFTW3 programme was little known, it appeared to offer promising opportunities for further understanding TA practice because of its emphasis on the role of the TA, within the context of a programme which aimed to consider the needs of the teaching assistant as well as those of the children who were the recipients of support.

The preliminary questions that led to this study revolved around the nature of the teaching assistants' role in relation to literacy development. As the study progressively focused on a closer consideration of the FFTW3 programme, this first research question was refined with two associated research questions. The first question was:

- Are there lessons that can be learned from the FFTW3 programme as a model of training and implementation for future consideration in terms of the role and deployment of teaching assistants?

The two associated questions were:

- To what extent do teaching assistants feel equipped to support literacy in primary schools? and

- Does the model of FFTW3 facilitate a more integrated approach to literacy support – bearing in mind that the teacher and the teaching assistant are required to attend the initial training together?

Before I outline the structure of this thesis, it is important to frame the study in terms of personal positioning relating to the research process, my ontological and epistemological beliefs and my understanding of the nature of literacy development.

Personal positioning

The notion of neutrality as a researcher is one that is no longer generally accepted within the research community. All researchers, whatever the paradigm of research adopted, have a personal history, prior knowledge and presuppositions that they bring to the research process (Seale, 1999, Caelli et al., 2008). Stating positionality is about attempting to maintain a degree of transparency and clarity; making explicit what is likely to be implicit in the motivations, intentions and actions of the researcher. It provides a basis upon which others may make better-informed judgements about the quality of the research.

Traditional notions of validity and reliability are problematic within educational research and this study is no exception. Nevertheless, I sought to consider matters of integrity by synthesising guidance from writers whose criteria for judging the relative quality of research do not presuppose an objective truth, yet assert the importance of rigour and trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Wellington, 2000, Yardley, 2000, Spencer et al., 2003).

The general guiding principle applied to this research is clarity: clarity of purpose to attempt to ensure integrity; clarity of thinking to foster reflexivity and clarity of presentation serving the need for transparency. If clarity of purpose is lost, then relevance and usefulness beyond the research community is diminished. If thought becomes clouded, then the ability to act in good faith is obscured and if clarity of presentation is compromised, so too is the authenticity of the study.

How have these aspects of clarity been observed in this study? Firstly, I have sought to present the purposes of this research in ways that demonstrate their value and relevance. Secondly, in terms of clarity of thinking, the importance of reflectivity has been upheld throughout (Cohen et al., 2007). Reflexivity, representing a more structured form of such reflection has been an integral part of this research process, although like Wellington (2000:43) I consider that this should not be overly 'confessional' in nature. Thirdly, the research is presented from careful plans,

records and, I trust, from sufficiently rich data in order that judgements about authenticity, including educational importance - educative authenticity - according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) can be readily made.

I came to this research as an educational practitioner motivated by particular interests in literacy development. My ontological and epistemological beliefs, many of which were implicitly held, needed to be explicitly laid out, examined and reviewed.

Conceptual Framework

In terms of constructing a conceptual framing for this research, I started by attempting to strip my thinking bare to fundamental ontological and epistemological tenets. There was a need to give explicit voice to implicit principles and beliefs. I found myself alighting upon words and concepts which appeared meaningful: *constructing*, *meaning-making*, *integrating*, *plurality*, *consensus*. Such words became the starting point for creating a conceptual framework. I reflected upon my role as an educational practitioner. I considered my commitment to the primacy of meaning-making in literacy in an integrated way, in a range of different contexts; I reflected upon the way in which I have responded to numerous statutory requirements, policy initiatives and professional dilemmas over many years; I re-visited a question which I have continually asked myself: how can I make this work in a way that is true to my values and the responsibilities I have to the children I teach? Such reflections, combined with a progressively selective literature review, led to the following framework which represents the way in which I have framed the thinking, development and implementation of this research study.

The conceptual framework constructed has three strands: an acceptance of postmodernism as a term which describes the current, fragmented state of affairs (Harrison and Salinger, 1998), a commitment to pragmatism as a means of bringing coherence and practical focus to multiple perspectives, and a concern that the means by which this should be brought about is based on the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* which roughly translates as 'practical wisdom' (Wivestad, 2008, Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This framework underpins the ontological and epistemological foundations of this study. It has informed my choice of questions, the methodology and research methods selected and the approach to analysis. Importantly, it frames and informs my discussion and conclusions in the light of the themes which emerged.

My thinking is best expressed in metaphor as a malleable structure in which fragments of truth and knowledge are held together in tension. This structure is characterised by the three elements identified: postmodernism, pragmatism and *phronesis.* These elements will be discussed in the section that follows. I do not presume to provide an overview of each philosophical strand, as this would be beyond the constraints of this research. I therefore confine my discussion, for the purposes of this study, to a consideration of key concepts that have impacted upon my thinking and approach to research and it is, therefore, necessarily selective.

Postmodernism

The first element of the framework is associated with postmodernism - a term widely acknowledged to be difficult to define and representing a 'diffuse cultural movement' (Sim, 2013:xii). It represents a reaction to modernity and in particular universalising theories. Jean-Francoise Lyotard, the French philosopher is widely recognised as one of the leading figures associated with the movement and his seminal text *The Postmodern Condition* (Lyotard, 1984) represents the fullest expression of the nature of the movement.

Postmodernism posits that knowledge is 'partial, fragmentary, contradictory. Our identities are diffuse, shifting and unstable.'(Potter, 2000:162). Lyotard argues that it is appropriate to be sceptical about what he terms the 'grand narrative' recognising instead the value of the 'little narrative' or '*petit recit'* where incompleteness is accepted (Lyotard, 1992, Tormey, 2004). Of course one of the problems in dispensing with grand theories or narratives is averting a descent into apathy borne of relativism, where there may appear to be no guiding framework by which to think or act. Scepticism is a hall mark of a postmodern disposition and Lyotard (1984) argues for a 'case by case' basis of decision-making arising from the '*petit recit'* and influenced by a pragmatism derived from Aristotelian philosophy.

Pragmatism

The second element is associated with pragmatism and 'the primacy of practice' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009:51). The imperative to make philosophical thinking relevant and pertinent to every field including education has always been the driving force in pragmatism and was what drew me to explore the literature in more detail. Pragmatism may be defined as an orientation which seeks to move from philosophical abstractions to practical principles that do not rely on notions of absolute truth (Malachowski, 2013).

Pragmatism, as a philosophical movement was founded by Charles Pierce (1839-1914) in America in 1878. The Metaphysical Club, where philosophical discussions took place, met in Cambridge, Massachusetts with William James being one of the group. Twenty years later, James popularised Pierce's thinking, and the term 'pragmatism' (derived from the Greek word meaning 'action') became widely used. James claimed that the pragmatic method was nothing new, citing Socrates, Aristotle, Locke, Berkeley and Hume. In his series of lectures delivered between 1906 and 1907, James made explicit the problem that many have with philosophical thinking and indeed the interface between research, policy and practice. He states:

> *The world of concrete personal experiences to which the street belongs*
> *is multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and*
> *perplexed. The world to which your philosophy professor introduces you*
> *is simple, clean and noble. The contradictions of real life are absent*
> *from it.' (James, 1995/1907:8)*

Whilst there are contemporary debates in relation to pragmatism, I shall confine myself here to a presentation of pragmatic principles as I understand them, drawing predominantly on the thinking of William James, but also John Dewey – a prominent American philosopher who also embraced pragmatism. I shall, however, make brief mention of Richard Rorty (1980), a contemporary pragmatic philosopher who through his postmodern perspective offers, I suggest, worthwhile insights into the nature of truth and knowledge and the value of consensus.

I shall consider each of the following pragmatic principles in turn: *modus vivendi,* instrumental view of truth, connectedness and practical difference – before making some general points about their relevance in educational research and more specifically to this study.

Modus Vivendi
James argued that pragmatism lacked prestige because its driving force was that of *modus vivendi:* that is, 'allowing conflicting parties to co-exist peacefully'(Soanes and Stevenson, 2003) . He suggested that we might adopt a means of operating in the theoretical and practical realm that has an authentic connection. This *modus vivendi* is possible, James (1995:8) argues, through a 'spirit of adaptation and accommodation' that is both pluralistic - respecting multiple perspectives - yet monistic - in determining on a single resolution, solution or path to pursue. Dewey (1916/1966) suggests that this allows for an inclusive way of operating which avoids 'false dualisms'.

Instrumental Truth

Pragmatists reject the notion of absolute truth; a pragmatic approach is an instrumental view of truth whereby we should always return to a key question: 'Grant an idea or belief to be true, it [pragmatism] says,' 'what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone's actual life?'' (James, 1995:77). James refers to a metaphor posited by Italian journalist and writer Papini (1881-1956) illuminating the pluralistic yet monistic way in which pragmatism may guide us:

> *It* [pragmatism] *lies in the midst of our theories like a corridor in a hotel. Innumerable chambers open out of it. In one you may find a man writing an aesthetic volume; in the next someone on his knees praying for faith and strength; in a third a chemist investigating a body's properties. In a fourth a system of idealistic metaphysics is being excogitated; in a fifth the impossibility of metaphysics is being shown. But they all own the corridor, and all must pass through it if they want a practicable way of getting into or out of their respective rooms.*

<div align="right">Papini (cited in James, 1995)</div>

The corridors of life, experience and society are inhabited by us all; beliefs, investigations and research must find a means of accessing such corridors in meaningful, useful and relevant ways. In this way, a pragmatist will welcome the views of, say, theists equally with those of atheists if the truth of their ideas demonstrates a power to work. Indeed, James suggests that there is no ultimate truth. His instrumental view of truth is that it should have the power to work, and in this sense 'truth is made' (ibid: 84). The questions that naturally arise from this point are: How do we determine what works? What principles should be implemented in the decision-making process? And, how is dissonance resolved through pragmatic precepts?

This instrumental view of truth, the notion that truth is 'made' rather than aspired to, raises questions about how knowledge is to be cultivated. How can the eclectic approach of pragmatism allow for a systematic approach to knowledge creation?

Connectedness

The pragmatic understanding of knowledge creation is grounded in everyday experience. Knowledge is seen to be cumulative: an organic and infinite process. Both Dewey (1938/1997) and James (1995) use organic metaphors to describe views on truth and knowledge building. Dewey describes growth that engenders

further growth, recognising that growth of knowledge and truth should encompass positive human universal values. James (ibid: 93) uses the metaphor of grafting to describe how truth is modified: 'Truth grafts itself on previous truth, modifying it in the process'.

Dewey was aware that a more organic approach to knowledge (and he uses the metaphor of horticultural growth extensively) begs the question: how do you ensure good growth? A decision, plan or policy might be practically useful but morally bankrupt – what then? James was also aware of the difficulties that an eclectic and inclusive approach to knowledge and belief might bring. He suggests that the fear could be that pragmatism is like 'a set of stars hurled into heaven without even a centre of gravity to pull against.' (James, 1995:101) Such eclecticism might be without strength and without focus.

Dewey (1938/1997) argues that good growth takes place as a result of connectedness. He speaks of a connection to experiences and knowledge of the past and what he calls an: 'experiential continuum' (ibid: 28) where the positive development of knowledge and ideas is a continuous and constructive process. He also asserts the importance of a connection to deep thinking and reflection or sound judgement and he discusses 'social intelligence' (ibid: 72) which I interpret as the implementation of humanistic universal values, such as justice, empathy and honesty. This links to the notion of *phronesis* which I discuss below. Dewey asserts that a sense of connectedness should lead to 'a more comprehensive and coherent plan of activity' (ibid: 64). Such growth suggests a view of truth that is more 'plastic' and malleable.

Practical Difference

The primacy of practice is a central tenet in pragmatism. Experience informs knowledge, truth is made through action, and theory must negotiate the single corridor of society. Pragmatism, for me, is a philosophical approach which focuses on the practical and the practicable; the key question from a pragmatic perspective is:

> *What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather*
> *than that notion were true? (James, 1995:18)*

There is no place for 'truth' or theories which have not been worked out, and indeed refined, in society at large with an overriding commitment to 'meliorism', that is**:** 'the

belief that the world can be made better by human effort'(Soanes and Stevenson, 2003). In this sense, pragmatism is unapologetically optimistic.

Pragmatic principles, as I have presented them, have provided a valuable way of framing my approach to this study. Educational research generally, and literacy research specifically, is characterised by complexity and it is challenging at times, to establish what might emerge from research which might be of any practical use. Determining to embrace 'the rich thicket of reality' - as James (1995:27) describes it - yet seeking clarity and parsimony provides an exigency towards relevance and practical application of research.

In acknowledging pluralism, Richard Rorty (1980) highlights the need for 'tentative consensus', which I suggest is an authentic aim in educational policy and practice. Pragmatism is a reminder to honestly acknowledge and value the experiential continuum where knowledge might be seen to grow in a cumulative and organic manner.

Dewey identified a problem in the 1930's, which is not unfamiliar today in the interface between education research and policy:

> *The crucial educational problem is that of procuring the postponement of immediate action upon desire until observation and judgement have intervened (Dewey, 1938/1997:69)*

A disjuncture between time scales can mean that proper evaluation and 'judgement' is compromised and policy becomes unhelpfully disconnected from the research field. I consider that pragmatism as a philosophical approach offers educational research important guiding principles which have the potential to sharpen the focus of researchers, policy makers and practitioners. Undoubtedly my background as an educational practitioner has impacted upon such appeal. I have implicitly embraced pragmatic principles through much of my professional life, however my research has given me the opportunity to reflect more systematically on a tradition which, as James (1995) points out, lacks 'prestige' because of its rejection of absolutism. Pragmatism enables pluralistic perspectives to co-exist and yet requires pragmatic outcomes; it provides a bridge between complexity and clarity, multi-layered research and the possibility of informing policy. As James (1995:21) suggests 'Pragmatism unstiffens all our theories, limbers them up and sets each one at work'.

Rorty's (1980) concern, echoing James and Dewey before him, is to ensure that philosophy should not be remote. He distinguishes between two types of philosophers, 'systematic' and 'edifying'. Systematic philosophers are those who are within the mainstream of Western philosophical tradition and who adhere to the traditional goals of seeking ultimate truth and knowledge. Edifying philosophers are those whose greater concern is to maintain dialogue; they are suitably sceptical of grand truths and like Lyotard, they reject grand theories. Consequently, as Rorty notes, they are sometimes, unsurprisingly, accused of relativism. He cites Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey as the three most important 'edifying' philosophers of the twentieth century because of their attempts to make philosophy 'foundational' (ibid: 5). According to Rorty (1980:377), they each brought something significantly new to philosophical debate. In his discussion of edifying philosophy he suggests that:

> *by finding a way of reducing all possible descriptions to one – is to*
> *attempt escape from humanity...the point of edifying philosophy is to*
> *keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth.*

Rorty (1980:372) considers that participating in conversations which are worthwhile requires 'practical wisdom' and this leads me to discuss the third element of this conceptual framework.

Phronesis

The third quality to be considered is *phronesis* or 'practical wisdom'. The term derives from the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who expounded the notion of three intellectual virtues *episteme* (theoretical knowledge)*, techne* (technical knowledge) *and phronesis* (prudence or practical wisdom)*.* The first two terms have found their way into contemporary vocabulary, but as Flyvbjerg points out, there is no contemporary term for *phronesis* (Flyvbjerg, 2001).This is surprising, considering that Aristotle considered *phronesis* to be the most important of the three virtues (Flyvbjerg et al., 2012) and upon which *episteme* and *techne* depend.

Phronesis is concerned with praxis in relation to values and for this reason it is variable and context-dependent. It is about judgement and experience based on the power of example eluding theoretical formulas.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:76) eloquently articulate this Aristotelian viewpoint:

> *...our moral reality is a practical reality, where truthfulness is more*
> *important than absolute truth, and where phronesis or practical wisdom*
> *– the skill of clear perception and judgement – becomes more important*
> *than theoretical understanding and the ability to use abstract*
> *procedures.*

For Rorty (1980) this was a necessary requirement for ongoing openness in dialogue. I would argue that this concept represents the means by which tentative consensus might be reached; both the foundation to the structure and the means by which it is held together. The quality, for me, is summed up in the call of Jager-Adams (1994:4) (in the field of literacy) for 'relentlessly enlightened balance'.

I hold to the hope that educational research should be edifying in the way that Rorty suggests philosophy should strive to be; namely that it offers the opportunity for 'conversation' that is continuous, grounded in wisdom and with a determination to seek practical application. Flyvbjerg (2001) argues that the social sciences have an important role in bringing matters of practical wisdom to the foreground and to this extent, I would describe myself, after Flyvbjerg, as a phronetic social science researcher.

This conceptual framework enables me to acknowledge the problematic nature of truth and knowledge from a postmodern perspective. It also allows me to draw upon pragmatic notions that are grounded in consequences and effects of actions and decisions (Pring, 2000) rather than preoccupations with possibilities of objective truth and ultimate knowledge. Such considerations have informed the research design for this study since the value of case study as an example of a 'little narrative' is upheld within such a framing; equally the imperative to draw practical application, grounded in sound judgement has provided a continued focus for the research. I attempt to establish the links between my ontological and epistemological framework and the methodological approaches adopted in Chapter 4.

The three aspects of the conceptual framework are characterised by contingency and contextuality. The relationship between postmodernism, pragmatism and phronesis is shown in figure 1.1, which indicates the way in which I perceive the epistemological compatibility between the three elements. The framework was created to support the approach to the research process and inform my thinking in terms of analysis and discussion. It does not represent a refined relationship but rather an heuristic framework allowing me to navigate through the challenges of

relativism towards assertions and propositions where pragmatic principles are applied with practical wisdom.
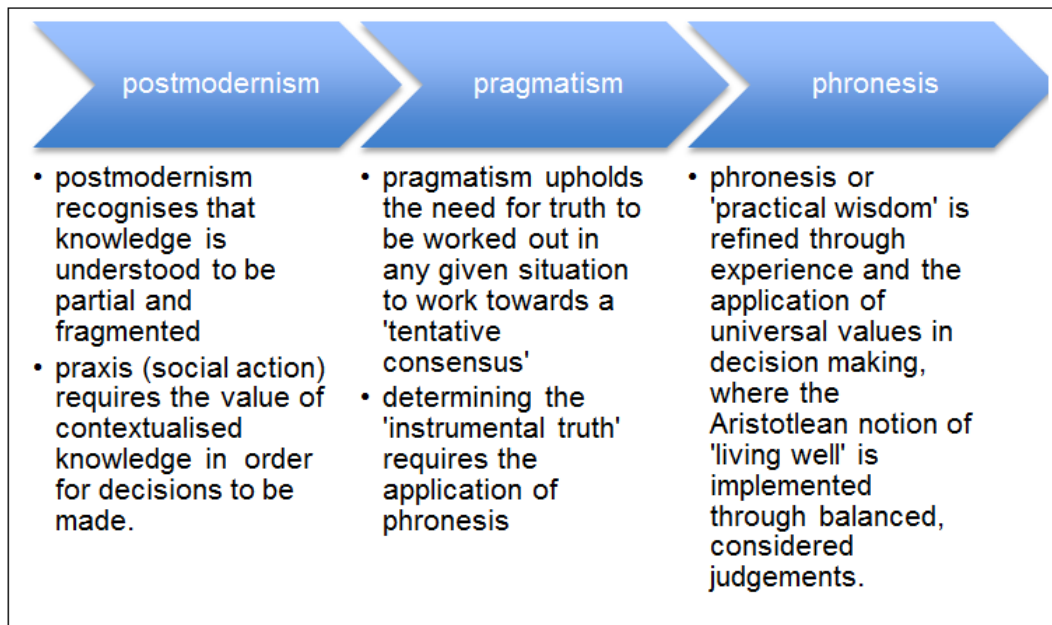
Figure 1.1: the relationship between postmodernism, pragmatism and phronesis as described in the conceptual framework

Framing literacy research

Literacy, like education, is an applied field and therefore requires, I would suggest, multiple perspectives and interdisciplinary research. The field straddles psycholinguistics, the cognitive-psychological, socio-cultural and socio-political disciplines (Hall, 2003). Exploring the field of literacy can present many challenges since every discipline potentially offers interest and relevance to practitioners. Striving to embrace valuable insights from diverse disciplinary discourses is important, I would argue, if research is to better inform policy and practice.

Fortunately there are many scholars in the field who serve as reassuring 'companions' in this striving for an inter-disciplinary overview. Beach (1994) suggests that there are four stances in approaching literacy: textual, social, cultural and disciplinary. He argues that different disciplinary perspectives serve to illuminate different aspects of the reading or literacy process and that adopting only one stance gives insufficient understanding of literacy development. Pearson and Stephens (1994:35) make a similar point which is worth stating in full:

Reading is no longer solely thought of as simply something one does or teaches, but rather is understood as a complex, orchestrated,

> *constructive process through which individuals make meaning. Reading*
> *so defined is acknowledged as linguistic, cognitive, social and political.*

This is not intended as a mandate for ill-considered eclecticism, rather an acknowledgement that there are compelling reasons both pedagogical and moral to strive for integration (Adams, 1990, Pring, 2000, Shanahan, 2000, Hall, 2003, Harrison, 2004, Snow and Juel, 2005). The alternative is that we risk forcing 'oversimplifications and orthodoxies into a system that is trying to present itself as research based' (Snow and Juel, 2005:508). As I note in Chapter 2, scholarly discourse can sometimes be shrouded in emotive rhetoric (Chall, 1967).

Scaffolding and literacy

Essentially the current partisanship in the field, which I elaborate in the following chapter, appears to centre on the extent to which literacy should be 'technicised', echoing a broader educational theme identified by Jeffrey (1999:59) in which he comments that, 'a technical appearance implies a rational and non-subjective approach that appears to simplify the process of teaching and learning, and make it more amenable to control.'

Conceiving of reading as either an artistic or a technical skill is, I would argue, a false dichotomy. Instead I prefer to conceptualise literacy teaching and learning using the notion of scaffolding, a term first used by Wood et al. (1976) in relation to tutoring, drawing upon Vygotsky's concept of the 'zone of proximal development' whereby the complex process of teaching and learning is carefully constructed and supported as a mediated activity (Daniels, 2001). I therefore see the teaching of literacy as a complex interaction of the artistic and the technical; a scaffolded process which ultimately relies on creating connections and making meaning, avoiding what Hunsberger (2007:421) describes as 'isolated parcels of instruction'. Explaining my stance in relation to literacy from the outset is important in two ways. Firstly, it explains my interest in a model of intervention which itself seeks to scaffold literacy learning – based as it is on the model of Reading Recovery (Hobsbaum et al., 1996). Secondly, the metaphor applies equally to teaching assistants who require, in common with all professional practitioners, a structure of training and support.

In this study I make use of the terms 'at-risk' and 'struggling' reader. My intention is to recognise that a child may have individual needs in relation to achieving their potential as a reader, and to use terminology that is recognised and used by

teachers and other professionals who are supporting children in reaching that potential. The use of such terms, however, is not without contention and within a postmodern framing, problematising such terms is necessary. The issue of terminology is borne of the human need to label and categorise; however, by labelling difference in education, a dual system can be created which arguably pathologises individuals who are not considered 'normal' in the trajectory of their learning or development. It also implies a delimited potential which is neither flexible nor variable (Pearson, 2009, Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007).

The particular difficulty in challenging the hegemony around labelling in special educational needs (also a contentious term) is that the very abandoning of a label may challenge the attention to social justice and equity – notions which require a sense of the 'normal' and thus, necessarily the 'other'. Fraser (1997) describes this dilemma in terms of recognition and redistribution. Essentially, the dilemma revolves around the argument that in order for a group to be treated with equity it needs to be recognised, and in order to identify a particular group, it necessarily requires a label. For this reason at a policy level (and therefore translating into pragmatic professional practice) a traditional discourse has dominated, where the binary of 'special' and 'normal' has been upheld in order that funding can be allocated in relation to different needs.

Fitch (2002) argues that affirmative or transformative practices represent two ways of responding to the dilemma of recognition and redistribution outlined by Fraser. He considers that affirming actions which do not fundamentally challenge the underlying social framework do nothing to ameliorate injustice. Furthermore, he maintains that such an approach results in 'identifying disadvantaged groups as permanently deficient and dependent, thus requiring the allocation of more and more resources.' (Fitch, 2002:471) The transformative approach advocated by Fitch requires a paradigmatic shift in perceptions of what constitutes 'normal' where binaries such as 'normal' and 'abnormal', and 'able' and 'disabled' are challenged. The need for this type of shift is also recognised by Gabel and Peters (2004) as a necessary requirement of a change in perceptions and attitudes towards those with a special need or disability. A new paradigm for framing attitudes and responses to special educational needs and disability is necessary, particularly if the postmodern complexities of special needs are recognised beyond the current medical and social models.

In this study, I touch upon questions related to the conceptualisation of children with special educational needs and how they relate to the role of the teaching assistant; however, offering an alternative paradigm would go beyond the aims of this study. For this reason, the terms 'at-risk' and 'struggling' are used for pragmatic reasons reflecting the professional use in both policy and practice. In schools and classrooms the terms are recognised and used as signifiers of individual needs relating to literacy, and whilst I recognise the shortcomings and limitations of such labels, they are used in preference to terms such as 'treatment-resistors' (which implies active resistance) (Torgesen, 2000) or 'less-able' readers (which implies a fixed ability in relation to literacy).

In whatever way children are labelled or perceived, there are some who will require additional support in order to learn to read and write. The role of teaching assistants in being involved in such support, whether individual or group needs to be critically examined and reviewed, and this study attempts to do this by reflecting upon their role with a particular intervention which was explicitly devised for their involvement.

Approach to literature searching in this study

Three main literature reviews are presented in this study. The first represents a necessarily selective review of the field of literacy and literacy support (Chapter 2), the second examines the role of teaching assistants (Chapter 3) and the third explores the methodology both of case study and grounded theory (Chapter 4). Careful consideration needed to be given to the approach to literature searching (Bryman, 2008). Search skills demand increasingly high levels of criticality in such a data-rich era. I considered it necessary to develop a systematic strategy to literature searching and selection which would make the task rigorous and comprehensive, yet manageable. I developed several approaches which were refined over the course of this research:

- accepting guidance and recommendations from supervisors as a starting point – especially in seeking 'access' to a discourse;
- referring to seminal texts and handbooks as judged by scholars in the field;
- studying reviews of the literature by prominent scholars in the field;
- using progressively targeted search terms to identify relevant peer reviewed journal articles;
- scrutinising the reference lists in the literature and targeting those which were dominant in the discourse;
- seeking guidance from university librarians where necessary.

In the field of literacy, a considerable body of literature exists which can be potentially overwhelming. I prioritised reviews by scholars who I established had been engaged in specific aspects of literacy discourse over many years. The more immersed in the discourse I became, the greater my awareness of prominent authors whose work warranted attention. For this purpose I kept a notebook throughout the course of my research where I recorded references that I wished to follow up; I then pursued these references electronically through the university library system.

Narrowing my searches systematically involved using key search terms, often as an advanced search. Refining searches involves considerable skill and there were times when search terms were not sufficiently precise or accurate. There were also difficulties relating to terminology. For example, in the United States, the term 'teaching assistants' refers to individuals who support in higher education institutions rather than in a school context. I needed to ensure that I searched either 'teaching assistants UK' or the American term 'paraprofessional' to ensure accurate results. Accessing archived government documents proved to be problematic on occasion. This resulted in searching through different channels including the library of the University of Nottingham and the search engines Google and Google Scholar. References cited in this study were stored on Endnote from the outset and any notes taken from books or articles were accompanied by page references to ensure the accuracy of citations.

Approach to the use of abbreviations and acronyms in this study

For transparency and ease of access I provide a list of the abbreviations and acronyms that appear in this study on page xiii. I follow the convention of providing the full name followed by the acronym or abbreviation in brackets on first reference in each chapter, but in the interests of style I have often interchanged the use of abbreviation or acronym and full name to improve the readability of the text.

The structure of this thesis

Chapter 2 examines literacy in both an historical and contemporary context. I consider in broad terms, both the points of contention and consensus within the research discourse and how this has impacted upon policy and practice in England. I then go on to focus on the nature of literacy support and how it is offered in English primary schools. This seemed a logical order to address the literature in order to provide the full context for a subsequent consideration of the role and deployment of the teaching assistant in Chapter 3. The chapter begins by exploring the ways in

which the TA role has changed, particularly in terms of involvement in literacy support since the inception of the national curriculum in 1998.

In Chapter 4 the research questions and aims of the study are considered and I discuss the methodology and research methods adopted. I seek to establish the value of case study by setting it within a broader discussion surrounding the relative challenges and merits of qualitative research as I understand them. Some of the issues associated with grounded theory approaches are identified – both processes and terminology. Towards the end of the chapter I examine ethical considerations and how they relate to this study.

The analysis is presented over three chapters. Chapter 5 aims to provide an insight into the working lives of six teaching assistants and I offer descriptive case reports for each individual with a consideration of the domains of role, communication and training. The context and significance of implementing the Fischer Family Trust Wave 3 intervention is established in relation to such domains. Subsequent to this, I progress into a cross-case analysis in Chapter 6 using a constant comparison of data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Charmaz, 2000). In this chapter I establish the prominence of key themes (Stake, 2006). Chapter 7 represents the third layer of analysis in which I locate my discussion within the wider literature and with reference to the conceptual framework. I offer a number of propositions relating to possible future research, policy and practice which may be applicable beyond the constraints of this study.

In Chapter 8 I revisit the research questions and reflect upon the key findings from the study. I consider the implications of the research and acknowledge the limitations before offering some final reflections.

Chapter 2: The challenge of teaching children to read

At the beginning of this chapter, the historical context of reading development in the UK is explored. I then attempt to offer an overview of where consensus exists and contention persists in the reading research field. Following such a discussion, I am better placed to review the literature relating to children who are struggling to learn to read. The nature of literacy support is considered in the context of English education policy before examining Reading Recovery and the Fischer Family Trust Wave 3 (FFTW3) interventions. The value of an integrated approach to literacy support is posited, before leading into a chapter where I review the significant role of teaching assistants in supporting at-risk readers.

Complexity characterises the field of reading research and straddles many disciplines as outlined in Chapter 1(Hall, 2003, Pearson and Stephens, 1994). Brooks (2002), in his evaluative report on phonological intervention, describes the reading research field as a 'jungle'; an analogy which, I suspect, resonates with many researchers and scholars. Cognitive-psychological literature, the discipline which focuses on the process of learning to read, often appears to be uncomfortably detached from the realities of classroom practice. As a teaching practitioner, it has been a challenge to engage with literature where, at times, I have felt myself to be an interloper. Holding children and teachers at the centre of my focus in the research process has served to continually modulate my practice. It has, and continues to be my intention that in all aspects of research undertaken, I ask the following meta-questions: What does this mean for the child? What impact might this have on teachers and teaching assistants? What impact might this have on the teaching and learning environment? What are the implications for the school? And, what does this mean for the parent or carer?

Literacy serves as a key that unlocks a world of literature, books, communication and information in a whole range of disciplines. It is an essential skill in a technologically advanced democracy (Stainthorp and Hughes, 1999); indeed, it is woven into everything that we do (Pearson and Stephens, 1994). Poor literacy skills reduce children's life chances and perpetuate disadvantage. Reading can be conceptualised as a technical skill which may be acquired and then utilised; equally it may be perceived beyond the utilitarian agenda as a means of nurturing the heart and mind, cultivating the imagination and enabling a full engagement in life, both individually and collectively (Harrison, 2004).

The socio-cultural conceptions of literacy in recent decades have highlighted that literacy is not a neutral concept. Literacy can be, by turn, 'liberating or dominating' (Hall, 2003:179). Literacy skills can enable freedom and choices, but can also constrain and repress. The arguments and theoretical constructs for an acknowledgement of, and respect for diverse cultural practices are compelling (Maybin, 1994, Street and Lefstein, 2007). Notions of 'literacy events' and 'literacy practices' have challenged a narrow and hegemonic approach to literacy as a unitary skill to be acquired (Brandt and Clinton, 2002). At the same time Hannon (2000) recognises that pluralist conceptions of literacy present particular challenges for educational practitioners working in a school context:

> *Working at the home-school literacy boundary is both rewarding and uncomfortable since it means having a critical awareness of two worlds of literacy, both of which have value but neither of which can be accepted wholly or uncritically.' (35)*

Hall (2003:194) suggests that a critical approach to literacy will enable teachers to demonstrate 'an enlightened or principled eclecticism'. They will be better placed to value different conceptions of literacy. Such critical awareness will enable practitioners to acknowledge the tensions and incongruence which may exist between the literacies represented by home and school.

Historical Background

Making sense of the historical debates around the teaching of reading is not for the fainthearted. A vast literature exists across an array of disciplines, each requiring a particular range of methodologies and each with different tensions. This historical overview will be necessarily limited but it is hoped that it will be helpful in giving an understanding of the current context. I have drawn on the reviews of eminent scholars who have documented the shifts and changes in the field and who have helped me to better understand them – notably, Harrison (Harrison, 2000) and Pearson and Stephens (1994).This review encompasses the past fifty years.

In the mid-1960's reading acquisition was regarded as a relatively straightforward process where the ability to read was dependent upon decoding and language comprehension; an approach to reading described as the simple view and one which has become prominent and, currently, predominant again in recent years – something I shall discuss in more detail later in this chapter. In the mid- to late 1960's, understanding the reading process became an interdisciplinary quest. The

work of the linguist Chomsky (1965), for example, claiming that humans are born with a 'language acquisition device' impacted on the study of language comprehension and acquisition influencing such scholars in the field of psycholinguistics as Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith. Their contribution to the field of literacy development is recognised as being highly significant.

Goodman and Smith led the field in posing questions that conceptualised reading as a 'natural' act as an extension of Chomsky's thesis. Goodman (1982, 1968) argued that in the reading process three cueing systems are in use - syntactic, semantic and grapho-phonemic - all facilitating the reader's desire to derive meaning from the text. He conceptualised reading mistakes as 'miscues' rather than errors and privileged the process of meaning-making over skill-based learning and in particular – a preoccupation with phonics. Goodman's concern (which has re-emerged in recent years) was that decoding might be seen as an end in itself and absorb a disproportionate amount of time in the teaching of reading compared with considerations of comprehension. In similar vein, Frank Smith (1995) argued that the process of reading required an emphasis on learning rather than teaching and saw little value in the teaching of phonics.

Highlighting the complexity of the reading process and its holistic dimension became known as a 'top-down' model of reading and in common parlance as a 'whole language' approach. As Pearson and Stephens (1994) note, psycholinguistics - predominantly through the work of Goodman and Smith - offered a theory of reading which was constructive in nature and a means of determining reading development through the use of miscue analysis. Furthermore, their research served the reading research community well in raising fundamental questions about the pedagogy surrounding reading development. Unfortunately, the working through of such questions contributed to an already vociferous debate within the field proving to be divisive, destructive and unhelpfully fuelled by political allegiance to a preferred pedagogy. The reverberations of this debate are still in existence today as I hope to make clear.

The nature of the earlier debate was examined in the seminal review by Jeanne Chall - *Learning to Read: The Great Debate.* Published in 1967, it represented a comprehensive appraisal of approaches to the teaching of reading and research within the field. Many of Chall's recommendations, comments and reflections on the review have surprisingly (or many might say - unsurprisingly) contemporary resonance. One of her key recommendations was that instruction should shift

towards a 'code-emphasis' form of instruction, as it appeared to produce better outcomes for all children and particularly struggling readers. Chall (1967) was keen to emphasise, however, that the dichotomy between 'meaning' and 'phonics' is merely one of emphasis and that reading for meaning is the central goal of *all* reading instruction. Her recommendations to the research community though specific to a historical period are nevertheless pertinent today.

Another review of equal significance was that by Marilyn Jager-Adams (1990). In the introduction written by David Pearson, the study was described as the most complete review since that of Chall. Adams (1990:3), in common with Chall, argued for the importance of the teaching of phonics and phonology but was equally keen to highlight the complexity in the reading process:

> *Skillful reading is not a unitary skill. It is a whole complex system of skills and knowledge.*

Adams was only too aware of the political partisanship surrounding reading instruction and called for balance, decrying the unhelpful polarisation of views which only serve to 'paralyse' the field of research (Adams, 1990:25).

Research into eye movements during reading, offered compelling evidence that readers fixate each letter when reading, however briefly (Rayner, 1998). Such research combined with an accumulation of research over more than two decades on phonological processing underlined the importance of 'bottom-up' processing in learning to read and had an impact on the reading research community of significant proportions. The minimal sampling of text as posited by Goodman (1982) appeared to be untenable in the face of such emerging research.

Since the work of Goodman and Smith, two decades of research have been conducted. At the time of Jeanne Chall's (1967) review in the 1960's, she noted that over 1,000 reading research studies were completed each year. According to Harrison (2000) in his comprehensive review of reading research in the UK, approximately 1,600 books and 4,000 journal articles were published between 1960 and 1998. Mindful of such statistics, my review can merely paint a picture with broad brush strokes. Time and space do not permit the nuances of the various discourses to be fully represented here, but an attempt is made to offer an overview of the current context - both contention and consensus.

Current context: points of consensus

As Hall (2003:2) points out: 'there is no 'one' right approach, philosophy or method of developing reading that is likely to be accepted by everyone'; nevertheless establishing points of consensus (however tentative) are essential if the field of literacy is to make an impact on policy-makers and practitioners. I focus on phonological development: an aspect of lower-level comprehension (Pressley, 2000) where consensus represents a significant move forward in the reading research field.

Systematic development of phonological skills

Writing systems have developed from speech, however imperfectly, and may represent ideas, meanings, syllables - or in the case of English - small units of sounds called phonemes. Phonemes are an abstraction in that they suggest a regularity and consistency about sounds which are not always reflected in speech and this compounds the challenge in learning to read. Furthermore, in English the orthography is confused by the fact that although there are twenty six letters in the English alphabet there are approximately forty four sounds or phonemes. This makes the alphabetic system less than transparent, and as a result, places significant cognitive demands on the reader (Adams, 1990).

Current research has converged in confirming that the systematic development of phonological awareness (the awareness of sounds in speech and how they relate to the printed word) is important in determining future success in learning to read (Ehri et al., 2001, Torgerson et al., 2006); furthermore, its importance extends to all readers and particularly those at-risk. This convergence of research, has shifted the hitherto rather polarised debate in relation to 'top-down' approaches (associated with whole language and the psycho-linguistic stance) and 'bottom up' models (focusing on word recognition from the cognitive-psychological position), to one that recognises the interactive nature of the reading process where bottom up processes are supported by top-down practices (Rumelhart, 1994).

Cognitive-psychological literature provides a consensus that phonological awareness needs to be *activated* if reading skills are to develop (Perfetti, 1999, Adams, 1990). Stage theories of development differ slightly, but if Ehri's (1999) is considered, for example, he suggests that there are four phases in the development of sight word reading: pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic and consolidated alphabetic.

In the pre-alphabetic or pre-lexical phase, phonological awareness may be present in a child to a greater or lesser degree and will facilitate the development of reading skills. A large number of studies over several decades have demonstrated this. The more implicit, pre-lexical phonological awareness appears to be associated with rhymes, syllables and onset and rime (a sub-syllabic unit, 'c-at', for example, where the 'c' is the onset and 'at' is the rime.) An accumulation of studies (Bryant and Bradley, 1985:43-50, provide a useful summary) provide considerable evidence that children find it much easier to distinguish larger units of sound than the smaller units of phonemes before they learn to read. Bruce (1964), in his widely cited study concluded that children had great difficulty in subtracting a phoneme from a word – taking the '/t/' from 'stand' to create 'sand', for example.

A study which has also been highly influential is that of Bradley and Bryant (1983). This longitudinal study, which was both carefully designed and methodologically sound, sought to establish if there was a causal link between early awareness of sounds and learning to read - something which had eluded countless other studies through methodological flaws or weaknesses in the research design (Bryant and Bradley, 1985). 400 children aged between four and five who could not read, participated in the study.

The results demonstrated a positive correlation between initial rhyming skills and subsequent progress in learning to read. Furthermore, the rhyming skills bore no relation to success in mathematics; the curriculum area which had also been tested as part of the research design. The study, though not conclusive in evidencing a causal link, (Hatcher et al., 1994, Goswami, 1999) nevertheless demonstrated a strong relationship between phonological awareness and subsequent success in learning to read.

A second aspect to this longitudinal study involved an intervention to see if explicit teaching in phonological awareness at the rhyme and alliteration level (sub-syllabic) could be enhanced and therefore improve subsequent reading skill. The training study involved four groups of children, including a control group, each of which received different forms of intervention. The groups which made the most significant progress were those which received explicit teaching on sound awareness. As Harrison (2000) points out, this study foregrounded the importance of phonological awareness in the process of reading development.

The partial alphabetic phase is the stage in reading development where only the salient letters in a word are attended to – usually the first and final letters. In order

for children to move into this phase, they need to develop phonemic awareness - a more explicit understanding of the alphabetic principle and the way in which phonemes or sounds map onto letters of the alphabet (the graphemes) (Hall, 2003, Snowling, 1996). The full alphabetic phase represents a more complete understanding of the phono-graphemic relationship and the ability to segment and blend phonemes enabling a reader to decode words that are unknown.

Comprehension

Word recognition, which includes decoding, is a vital skill for beginning readers to develop – representing, as mentioned above, a lower-order skill in relation to comprehension, along with vocabulary development - something which Pressley (2000) examines in his authoritative review of reading comprehension. He goes on to explore higher-order comprehension i.e. processes above word-level which include a reader's construction of schemata (Anderson, 1994) (defined as the way in which knowledge is organised) to make sense of what is being read. As Pressley (2000:549) states: 'the richer a child's world experiences and vicarious experiences...the richer the child's schematic knowledge base'. Another example of this higher-order comprehension is concerned with how the reader processes ideas within the text – described as propositional theory. Both schema and propositional theories underline the importance of prior knowledge in comprehending text. The importance of prior knowledge is also highlighted by Cain (2010) referring to the notions of local and global coherence, where local coherence is concerned with how ideas are related in text (integration) and global coherence, with how ideas fit together beyond the text (inference).

Irrespective of terminology, Pressley (2000) emphasises that the complexity of comprehension processes demand 'complicated educational strategy' a call which is in danger of being lost amid the continued political polemic associated with literacy instruction and the narrowing focus on decoding which, whilst vitally important, represents one aspect of comprehension.

Current context: points of contention

The Simple View of Reading (SVR)

One of the most current areas of contention is in relation to the Simple View of Reading (SVR) a conceptual framework which has attracted impassioned scholarly debate, particularly since its endorsement by the Rose Review (2006) as a replacement for the Searchlights model, which was previously part of the National

Literacy Strategy (Department for Education and Employment, 1998a) framework. The Searchlights model, showing four sources of information: semantic (text meaning), syntactic, visual (graphemes and orthography) and phonological (the sounds of oral language), was acknowledged to have shortcomings in that it did not demonstrate precisely how beginning readers become skilled readers (Stuart et al., 2008, Harrison, 2010).

Hoover and Gough (1986) argue that the so-called 'Simple View' of reading is the most parsimonious way of explicating the way in which children learn to read. They simplify the complex processes into two parts: word recognition x linguistic comprehension = reading. Hoover and Tunmer (1993:3) in continuing an exposition of the SVR, do not suggest that the process of learning to read is simple, merely that 'the complexities can be divided into two distinct parts'. Emphasis is placed on the explicit teaching of the cipher (the alphabetic system). Tunmer and Hoover (1993) argue that the cipher cannot be taught 'incidentally' challenging intervention approaches which focus on the teaching of phonics largely through writing (this would, arguably, include the Reading Recovery programme which is discussed below).

There are those who argue that an acceptance of the SVR does not require abandonment of the recognition that acquiring literacy skills is a complex process, merely an acknowledgement that reading comprehension is mediated through word recognition skills (Stuart et al., 2008, Kirby and Savage, 2008); there are those, however, who are unappeased and argue that the SVR may be extrapolated – particularly by policy-makers - to a simple view of the *teaching* of reading – which would involve a more technicised and constricted approach in the classroom (Harrison, 2010). This view has current resonance in that since May 2010, the coalition government further emphasised the importance of phonics teaching with the introduction of a phonics test for year 1 pupils (Department for Education, 2010b) in 2012.

Based on this interpretation of the literature, I would suggest that the emphasis on phonics teaching represents a consensus of empirical research accumulated over the past two decades; it is the narrowing of focus on decoding skills as opposed to word recognition skills (which includes decoding but also includes vocabulary knowledge and semantic skills) that gives cause for concern, since it would indeed be a simplification of the reading process. It is incumbent upon researchers and policy-makers alike, to resist the polarising potential of the SVR. It may be possible

to negotiate a path whereby the framework is acknowledged positively - as do Stuart, Stainthorp and Snowling (2008) - as a development of the Searchlights model, yet at the same time, heed Harrison's (2010) admonition that the Simple View is not representative of all empirical evidence concerning the process of learning to read. If reading research aspires to cumulative knowledge- building according to pragmatic principles, then a modified model of the reading process will surely, inexorably emerge - more fully representing the complexity of the reading process yet offering transparency to the policy-maker and practitioner. As a practitioner who has become a researcher, I need to believe that it may be possible to move forwards without further schisms developing within the reading research community. The dialectic process is best served when partisanship is set aside for the sake of moving towards a new synthesis.

Another point of contention, associated with the SVR relates to the form that systematic phonics teaching should take. The accumulation of evidence suggests that awareness of phonemes needs to be taught explicitly (Ehri et al., 2001, Morais et al., 1979), but whether there is a need to do so in a purely so-called 'synthetic' way is the focus of continued debate in the field (see Wyse and Goswami, 2008, for a comprehensive and rigorous synthesis of the research).

Synthetic phonics refers to the explicit teaching of phonemes (the smallest unit of sound) and the way in which they are represented as graphemes (the written form of the phoneme) whereas analytic phonics is concerned with the larger phonemic units of rhymes and syllables. The distinction between synthetic and analytic phonics and the relative importance in the teaching of systematic phonics is still widely debated and the partisanship surrounding the discourses has pedagogical and political undercurrents; synthetic phonics being associated with a more didactic, instructional form of teaching, whereas analytic phonics is seen as a less explicit, more contextualised building of phonological awareness.

Goswami (1988, 1992, 1999) has been hugely significant in building on the research base associated with phonological development through rhyme and children's use of analogy and has therefore been seen as diametrically opposed to synthetic phonics, although ironically, the term 'analytic' phonics was not one that she created (Harrison, 2004). Goswami (1999:217) considers that the debate is based on 'profound misunderstandings' of research on rhyme. Her work has contributed to the research evidence that rhyme awareness is a subsequent predictor of success in reading; furthermore she argues that the value of rhyme/rime is two-fold: firstly,

vowels are more consistent and 'stable' as a phonological unit when considered as part of a rime (in the words 'tr-ain'; 'dr-ain', 'p-ain', for example the '/ai/' is consistent in the sound that is made) and secondly, rhyme contributes to the child developing the meta-cognitive strategy of analogy whereby the patterning of one word might be recognised in a word 'family': for example, 'lotion, potion, station'.

Goswami's research suggests that utilising rhyme and analogy is simply a means of harnessing implicit, pre-school, phonological skills which children are already developing to a greater or lesser extent and this can exist alongside explicit teaching about the phoneme-grapheme relationship (Goswami, 1988, Goswami and Bryant, 1992, Goswami, 1999).

Proponents of the SVR, on the other hand, consider that analogy is a skill which is dependent on understanding the alphabetic principle and the concept of decoding or 'recoding' as it is sometimes termed. According to the SVR, the notion of analogy is not helpful to non-readers because their experience of words is so limited; in other words, the reading process is conceptualised as a phonological path from small units (phonemes) to larger units (onset and rime). Goswami (1999) accepts no such linear sequence, since such an argument suggests that children make no use of their pre-school language skills (the larger phonological chunks) in learning to read.

Harrison (2004) identifies that part of the problem with the ongoing discourse is a fundamental failure to understand that phonics and phonemic awareness are discrete skills. Phonics is associated with how letters map onto sounds whereas phonemic awareness is the meta-cognitive skill whereby a child develops a profound understanding of such sounds. According to this analysis, the debate is rendered misguided at best and irresponsible at worst.

Perfetti (1999) argues that synthetic and analytic skills develop in tandem. A polarity of views may be part of the partisanship of the research field, but for the practitioner, teaching and developing phonological awareness at all levels (the finer-grained phonemes and the larger-grained, onset and rime) makes sense. An approach that makes the alphabetic principle transparent and yet also creates links with every aspect of reading knowledge in terms of considering rhyme and analogy is, arguably, a sensible way forward.

As Wyse and Goswami, (2008) point out, the privileged status of synthetic phonics in policy has no sound research basis since no conclusions can yet be drawn as to what form of systematic phonics is best (if we accept the synthetic/analytic

dichotomy) nor how much intervention is needed (Torgerson et al., 2006). Goswami (1999:217) calls for a 'balanced approach' and considers that the dichotomy in the debate is neither helpful nor necessary.

My own stance echoes Goswami's call for balance and an example from a practitioner perspective may be helpful at this point: If I were teaching (systematically) the sounds associated with '/sh/', for example, one of the graphemes, or spelling choices is '/ti/' as in 'station'. I may introduce the grapheme '/ti/', but I would quickly move on to the analogous words with the '-tion' ending, (station, nation, ration,) since this would, I suggest, be more meaningful to the children. The lesson could comfortably and naturally incorporate both synthetic and analytic phonics in a systematic way.

Fluency

Fluency represents another area of contention in literacy development. In this brief overview I draw closely on a recent review of fluency by Rasinski et al. (2011) since it is both authoritative and comprehensive. Fluency has been given greater attention by the reading research community following the recognition by the National Reading Panel (2000:32) that it is a 'critical component of skilled reading'. Nevertheless, consensus has yet to be reached in defining the term. Clearly, there is no prospect of consensus on skill development if there is no agreement as to how fluency might be defined.

Fluency may be categorised in three ways:

- as a measurable consequence of learning pre-skills to reading (concerned with reading rate and accuracy)
- as a linguistic and development outcome (rate and accuracy plus some degree of understanding
- as a systemic processing outcome (concerned with how children's cognitive and language skills develop within the sensory and neurological system).

Having acknowledged such categories Rasinski et al. (2011:287) proceed to offer a definition of the term:

> *we define fluency as a characteristic of reading that occurs when*
> *readers' cognitive and linguistic systems are developed to the extent*
> *that they can read with sufficient accuracy and rate to allow for*
> *understanding the texts and reflecting its prosodic features.*

Kuhn and Stahl (2003) offer a similar definition incorporating the three elements of accuracy, pace and prosody.

Fluency as a construct in reading development has had a similar trajectory of peaks and troughs to phonics, over time, falling in and out of fashion. In America, fluency had a close association with a strong oral reading tradition in the home and hence its early popularity as part of reading instruction. In the context of instruction, however, emphasis was placed on elocution rather than comprehension. Gradually, oral reading fell out of favour at the beginning of the twentieth century with a move towards silent reading, reflecting both a more sophisticated understanding of reading processes from a psychological perspective and a recognition that silent reading was more 'efficient': more children could read a far greater variety of texts (Rasinski et al., 2011).

A seminal paper written by LaBerge and Samuels (1974) on automaticity in the reading process and followed by further studies in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in a new orientation towards the importance of fluency. Allington (1983), argued that fluency represented a neglected aspect of the reading process and this resulted in a gradual reorienting towards the importance of fluency.

The theory of automaticity explains the dimensions of fluency that pertain to accuracy and pace however, as Kuhh and Stahl (2003) point out; it does not attend to the place or importance of prosody. Prosody, defined as the 'embedding of melodic or expressive features of oral language into reading,' (Rasinski and Hoffman, 2006:172) is considered to be an important part of reading fluency. However, it is not clear whether prosody is a cause or consequence of comprehension.

Stahl, until his untimely death, was a key figure in contributing to an understanding of fluency and providing a voice of 'balance' in debates in which discourses around phonics teaching were predominating. In their review of fluency theory and practice, Kuhn and Stahl (2003) argue that instruction is generally effective, although more research is needed to establish whether improvements in reading ability reflect the particular types of instruction used, or that children are simply reading more texts than usual. Nevertheless, their review provides them with sufficient evidence to call for additional classroom strategies to be implemented:

To help more readers move from labored decoding to the construction of meaning, we consider it to be important that educators integrate these techniques in the classroom more frequently.

(Kuhn and Stahl, 2003:19)

Current context: at-risk readers and literacy development

The question about how children learn to read is of primary importance and assists in answering the concomitant question: How are children best supported who are struggling to learn to read? The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Twist et al., 2007) indicated that although pupils in England achieved significantly above the international mean in reading attainment there was a wide spread of scores between the most able and struggling readers; something that has been described as the 'long tail of underachievement' in both academic and media discourses. The response has been a current focus on literacy interventions for at-risk readers - precisely what developing phonological awareness involves (McLernon et al., 2007) and associated with this, a much closer consideration of issues associated with implementation (Slavin et al., 2011, Reynolds et al., 2010). In this study, the terms 'at-risk readers' or 'struggling readers' are used to encompass all children who are having difficulty in learning to read and this includes children who may be considered dyslexic.

Dyslexia (or specific learning difficulty as it is also termed) is a very important area in literacy and one that has attracted extensive empirical research across a range of disciplines (Soler, 2010). The definition of dyslexia has been viewed as problematic (Snowling, 2000), however, there appears to be broad agreement from current empirical research that the intervention needs of children identified as having dyslexia have much in common with those of children who have more general difficulties in learning to read.

For the purposes of this study, therefore, I adopt the perspective of Vellutino et al. (2004) who, from a comprehensive and cross-disciplinary review of four decades of research, argue that struggling readers share the same core phonological deficit (whether biological, experiential or instructional in origin) which impacts upon decoding skills and in turn, higher-order comprehension capabilities. Vellutino and co-authors argue that the focus in schools should be on assessing children's needs in order to implement appropriate intervention strategies rather than on labelling the nature of the difficulty that children are experiencing.

Stanovich has been instrumental in synthesising debates within the reading research field and applying them to concerns relating to at-risk readers. Two key seminal papers continue to cast a helpful light on the current discourse. Firstly, Stanovich (1980) posited an interactive-compensatory model of reading which represented a refinement of the important study by LaBerge and Samuels (1974). He also built upon Rumelhart's (1994) interactive model of the reading process, in recognising that bottom-up (phonological knowledge) processes may be supported by top-down processes (context); however, Stanovich argued that there was a compensatory dimension to this interaction. The interactive balance in reading is capable of shifting, depending upon the skill of the reader and the relative difficulty of the text. Less skilled readers, or skilled readers tackling a challenging text, will make greater use of context than decoding skills. The implications for at-risk readers is that their need to build up phonological skills is even more important if they are to maximise efficiency in reading, whereby word recognition is both rapid, automatic and context-free.

Linked to this interactive-compensatory model is a further highly significant contribution to the field by Stanovich (1986), in which he argues, from a rigorous synthesis of empirical evidence, that struggling readers find themselves in a downward spiral of impoverished reading experience; an inability to recognise words results in an overreliance on context which makes for inefficiency and unrewarding reading experiences. Exposure to print, unsurprisingly, becomes progressively reduced. This so-called 'Matthew effect', is redolent of the comments made by Jesus in the New Testament in which he observed the economic propensity for the rich to become richer and the poor, poorer.

Importantly, this downward spiral has a marked impact on cognitive capacity, since Stanovich argues that reading itself facilitates further development in higher order comprehension, general knowledge and syntactic knowledge, all of which impact ultimately on academic achievement (Stanovich, 1986). A struggling reader has less cognitive capacity available for higher-order comprehension skills and thus, in a sense, a process of atrophy persists. The implications from this study are two-fold: intervention needs to be early (Stanovich (1986:393) speaks of a 'surgical strike') and at-risk readers need to keep reading: a challenging task, if reading is already associated with frustration and failure.

From the conceptual models posited by Stanovich two key aspects of supporting children's development in reading are brought to the fore: at-risk readers need

explicit instruction in phonological awareness and they need to read as much as possible. In other words, they need systematic phonics and they require a rich language experience that motivates them to read, engage with text and develop comprehension skills. Indeed, a number of studies suggest that a combined approach offers the best support for at-risk readers (Cunningham, 1990, Hatcher et al., 1994, Snowling, 1996, Ehri et al., 2001, Torgerson et al., 2006, Wyse, 2010).

Tunmer and Hoover (1993), proponents of the Simple View of Reading, acknowledge that the 'cipher' (the alphabetic code) is not sufficient in itself; the existence of homophones (words that sound the same but are spelled differently), homographs (words spelled the same but which have different meanings) and irregular phonology (think of the word 'one' for example or the '–le' ending which is non-phonographic in English) in English orthography require an exposure to print in order for lexical knowledge to be developed.

Another aspect of facilitating automaticity in at-risk readers is concerned with developing fluency previously discussed under *Fluency,* a reading skill that is widely acknowledged as important but neglected (Stahl and Heubach, 2006). Rasinski (2004) describes fluency as the 'bridge' between word decoding and comprehension – a multidimensional process which incorporates word decoding, automatic recognition of words and meaningful interpretation.

Current context: literacy intervention

The urgency in supporting struggling readers is clearly recognised by researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. As Adams (1990:28) notes:

> *Classroom time is limited – a minute poorly spent on word recognition or any other activity is a minute robbed from education*

Applying research evidence in implementing literacy interventions is understandably complex given the volume and range of research into reading. A best evidence synthesis of early interventions in the US and UK conducted by Slavin et al. (2011:6) found that one-to-one intervention is more effective than group support and also that a qualified teacher saw more gains in children's progress in literacy than a teaching assistant (paraprofessional in the USA) or reading volunteer working one to one with a child. Such one to one instruction from a qualified teacher is described as 'the gold standard among interventions for struggling readers'.

One such intervention which would meet the criteria to be defined as 'gold standard' is Reading Recovery, to the extent that it involves highly qualified teachers and it is implemented one to one with children. It is necessary to detail the model of this intervention since it represented the prime intervention in the national initiative called Every Child a Reader which I discuss below under *Reading Recovery and ECaR.* It also provided the model on which the Fischer Family Trust Wave 3 intervention is based - the programme which forms the basis of this study in examining the role of teaching assistants in supporting literacy interventions.

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is the most widely implemented and researched one to one literacy intervention in the world, offering a balanced approach to literacy development which accords with the areas identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) namely: alphabetic – including phonemic awareness and phonics, fluency, and comprehension - including vocabulary. The programme was developed by the late Dame Marie Clay, a practitioner and scholar whose theoretical approach was constructivist in nature and broadly aligned to the whole language movement (Clay, 1979). It is an intensive, short-term intervention targeted at children aged between five and six (Key Stage 1, Year 1 – in the UK context) who are considered to be the most at-risk readers (the lowest twenty per cent) after their first year in school. The intervention involves one to one lessons, for thirty minutes a day for approximately twenty weeks with a teacher who has been highly trained in using the programme. Each lesson is tightly structured and individualised with a problem-solving approach (see figure 2.1) where the use of multiple cues are encouraged to facilitate reading and writing skills.

Reading Recovery lesson structure

Familiar text – re-reading from a previous repertoire of books.

Running record – reading the new book from the previous day, whilst the RR teacher records reading accuracy and behaviour. The information feeds into the planning for the next lesson.

Letter work – phonological awareness is developed often using a whiteboard and magnetic letters.

Writing and cutting up a story – a sentence is initiated by the child, involving a brief conversation with the RR teacher. The sentence is then written with support; it is copied and cut up by the teacher and then reassembled by the child.

Reading a new book – this involves independent reading with a degree of challenge (instructional level) with a book ideally pre-selected by the RR teacher.

Figure 2.1: Reading Recovery lesson structure

The cost of the programme is considerable in terms of the training requirements (both initial and ongoing) and the teacher time needed to work with children. Furthermore, there is still a need for other literacy programmes, both to run in parallel (for at-risk readers not selected for Reading Recovery), and to follow on, for those children who continue to need support: those who have the most persistent and sustained difficulties (Torgesen, 2000, Vellutino and Scanlon, 2002).

Reading Recovery has been the focus of many studies and it is widely accepted that it is a very difficult programme to evaluate (Shanahan and Barr, 1995, D'Agostino and Murphy, 2004). There have been questions as to whether its effectiveness has sometimes been over-stated through methodological weaknesses in the research design (Reynolds et al., 2009, Reynolds and Wheldall, 2007, Shanahan and Barr, 1995, Center et al., 1995, Brooks, 2002). Nevertheless, there is also considerable evidence demonstrating its effectiveness both in the short term (Center et al., 1995, Sylva and Evans, 1999, D'Agostino and Murphy, 2004, Schwartz, 2005) and the longer term (Hurry and Sylva, 2007, Hurry and Holliman, 2009). It was within this research context that Reading Recovery was adopted in England as part of the Every Child a Reader (Tanner et al., 2010a) project. I discuss this in more detail below, but before I do so, it is helpful to examine educational policy relating to literacy in the UK.

Current context: literacy and UK government policy

Literacy is unavoidably and inextricably bound to political agendas and in recent decades, intensely so (Snow and Juel, 2005:508). Since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, education has been highly centralised in the UK. The Labour government's intervention over literacy instruction became increasingly interventionist and prescriptive during the time of their administration from 1997.

The more systematic teaching of phonological skills became mandatory with the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in 1998 (Department for Education and Employment, 1998a). The framework for Literacy was renewed in 2006 and following the Rose Review (2006), a report commissioned by the Labour government, systematic synthetic phonics was required to be taught through *Letters and Sounds: principles and practice of high quality phonics (2007)*. Many broadly welcomed the emphasis and focus on the teaching of systematic phonics; however, as discussed earlier, concerns over the privileged status of synthetic phonics have continued - particularly since the evidence base focused upon one empirical study (Johnston and Watson, 2005) - with apparent methodological shortcomings (Wyse and Goswami, 2008). Setting aside the issue of synthetic phonics for a moment, the Rose Review (2006:35) also stated the importance of 'the inclusion of a vigorous, programme of phonic work to be securely embedded within a broad and language-rich curriculum', a point which was often neglected in the discourse surrounding the report.

Literacy support in UK schools

Given the plethora of government initiatives and the concern with underachievement in literacy it is hardly surprising that the number and range of literacy interventions in use is vast. The review by Brooks (2002) of twenty five phonological interventions implemented in various parts of the UK, was indicative of the need to provide some guidance for teaching staff about what interventions might be worthwhile.

Literacy interventions in the UK were categorised as 'waves' according to the previous *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice* (Department for Education and Skills, 2001) (a new Code of Practice was published in 2014). Wave 1 refers to good quality differentiated class teaching (Quality First Teaching). Wave 2 refers to small group interventions, which might include the Early Literacy Strategy in Year 1 or the Further Literacy Strategy in Year 5. Wave 3 is more individualised intervention that may include one to one support. At-risk readers may be in any of these waves, although those for whom literacy difficulties persist are generally

supported through small group or one to one interventions – and usually by teaching assistants.

Schools generally make individual choices about the range and type of interventions that they wish to use with struggling readers, but these decisions are likely to be based upon professional preferences within the school - dependent upon the nature of the difficulties. Ellis (2010) identifies some of the issues which surround researching and establishing models of good intervention practice. She cites one Scottish study (Boyle et al., 2007), conducted as a randomised controlled trial (RCT) where significant levels of progress were demonstrated amongst the children concerned; yet subsequent to the RCT, the impact of the ongoing intervention was significantly lower – partly because the intervention was not implemented with the same frequency over the course of the week. Models of good intervention practice are rare, and, as Ellis argues, RCT studies (upheld by some researchers and policy makers as the 'gold standard' of evidence-based practice) have limitations in naturalistic school settings where variables can rarely be controlled and where decisions may be focused upon contextual information rather than simply the effectiveness of a particular programme according to RCTs.

The ECaR project represented a highly unusual model of intervention practice in England in that schools had the opportunity to adopt a series of funded layered interventions involving access to a highly trained teacher who supported both children and staff. The model existed within a national infrastructure of support for the prime intervention – Reading Recovery.

Reading Recovery and ECaR

According to this layered framework, Reading Recovery can be described as a Wave 1 intervention. It was first introduced in Surrey in 1990, then in 1992 a further twenty additional Local Education Authorities received funding for implementation (Brooks, 2002). In 2005, Reading Recovery received national endorsement through Every Child a Reader (ECaR) , funded by a 'unique collaboration between charitable trusts, the business sector and government', and supported by the European Centre for Reading Recovery at the Institute of Education. Within ECaR, the intensive intervention (Reading Recovery) was located within a framework of other literacy interventions providing support for children whose needs were less extreme, together with ongoing support for those exiting the programme. In 2008, the project started to be rolled out nationally with the aim that 30,000 children would benefit year on year up to 2011. A large-scale research project, undertaken

between 2010 and 2011, was commissioned by the then, Department for Families and Schools (DCFS) – that became the Department for Education (DfE) in 2010 - as an independent national evaluation of ECaR and Reading Recovery (Tanner et al., 2010a) in which I had some involvement in the qualitative strand of the research.

The evaluation provided strong evidence for the impact of ECaR and Reading Recovery on the improvement in children's reading at Key Stage 1. In the second year of implementation, ECaR schools demonstrated an improvement in reading attainment by between 2 and 6 percentage points. In teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 1, there was evidence of an impact of 26 percentage points on pupils attaining level 1 or above. In ECaR's second and third year of operation writing attainment showed an improvement of between 4 and 6 percentage points. Reading Recovery also had a positive impact upon reading related attitudes and behaviours. ECaR was observed to work most effectively when Reading Recovery was aligned with other layered interventions as part of a local authority strategy.

Fischer Family Trust Wave 3.

Within this project a number of additional interventions existed all of which were implemented by teaching assistants. One such programme was developed by Jill Canning, a Reading Recovery teacher who had had considerable contact with TAs in a training context. Canning considered that TAs would welcome a programme that would better enable them to support children in the *processes* of reading and writing and not simply isolated skills or *'item knowledge'* as she called it.

Canning had seen the benefits of the 'Better Reading Partnership' (a programme also based on the Reading Recovery model but run by TAs and focusing purely on reading) but wanted to go beyond this to a programme which mirrored the Reading Recovery model where reading and writing are seen as reciprocal processes.

The development of the FFTW3 programme then, was a consequence of several imperatives as Canning understood them; firstly, she wanted to extend the benefits of the Reading Recovery programme to additional children who were finding the Early Literacy Strategy (ELS) too challenging; this was essentially a pragmatic response to the level of need that she understood to exist in schools and which teaching assistants had brought to her attention on training courses for the ELS. Secondly, Canning recognised the level of expertise that resides with Reading Recovery teachers and wanted to extend the sharing of such expertise with teachers and teaching assistants. She was aware that Reading Recovery teachers

were often isolated to a large extent in schools with little opportunity to share such expertise. Head teachers had been asking if a programme existed that utilised the skills of Reading Recovery teachers beyond the Reading Recovery programme itself to enskill teaching staff.

Table 2.1 compares Reading Recovery and FFTW3 – the programme that Canning developed. The intervention is used one to one for twenty weeks as indicated, however the Reading Recovery programme more closely integrates reading and writing tasks within a thirty minute session, whereas FFTW3 indicates discrete reading and writing sessions which are of twenty minutes duration. Canning considered that separating out reading and writing and shortening the session to twenty minutes would make it more manageable for the teaching assistants to implement yet still retain the reciprocal dimension of reading and writing.

Table 2.1: comparison between Reading Recovery and FFTW3 interventions

Intervention details	Reading Recovery	FFTW3
nature	one to one	one to one
implementation	teacher	teaching assistant
training	over one year (equivalent of 0.5 days for 20 weeks)	training for three days with the class teacher
continuing professional development (CPD)	CPD requirement of 20 half-day sessions including live lesson observation.	CPD expectation
target age	children aged 5.9 - 6.3	flexible
target level of need	lowest attaining 20% of children	next 'layer' of need above the 20% of children
time allocation	30 minutes per day	20 minutes per day
content	reading and writing	alternating reading and writing
duration	20 weeks	20 weeks

My interest in FFTW3 arose for a number of reasons. Firstly, my involvement in the evaluation of the Every Child a Reader (Tanner et al., 2010a) project made me aware of the additional layered interventions associated with the project which were little considered in the national evaluation where the focus was on Reading Recovery. Secondly, the role of the teaching assistant was of interest, having worked previously as a SENCO in a primary school where I managed the timetable of several teaching assistants. Thirdly, the integrated approach of Reading

Recovery - where reading and writing are seen as inextricably linked - has influenced the structure of the FFTW3 programme and this reflected my own stance in relation to an integrated approach to literacy support which needs to be briefly explained.

Literacy support and an integrated approach

My own positioning with respect to developing literacy skills reflects my background as a practitioner in which the cognitive-psychological dimensions to literacy acquisition are intertwined with socio-cultural aspects. Meaning-making has always been paramount in my approach and for this reason, I have been drawn to integrated approaches to literacy teaching which maximise the opportunity for pupils to make connections in their learning. The word 'integrate' derives from the Latin meaning 'to make whole or renew' and as Gavelek et al. (2000:587) suggest:

> *By their very definition, integration and integrated approaches to literacy instruction are extremely appealing. Further, integrated instruction has been thought to address three needs in education: authenticity, meaningfulness and efficiency.*

Yet as they also note: integration is one of the reading research field's 'most multi-faceted and elusive constructs' (ibid: 587). Part of the problem, they argue, is a need to clarify what is meant by 'integration'. I would also suggest that some of the difficulty lies in formulating research designs which can adequately compare integrated with discrete literacy approaches attending to validity and reliability in ways that satisfy a diverse reading research community.

In more recent years, the particular challenge for those committed to an integrated 'holistic' approach to the teaching of literacy has been in relation to the systematic teaching of phonics. Many practitioners have seen their pedagogical preferences constrained by the requirement to teach phonics in a structured way and as Torgerson et al. (2006) point out, the need to concentrate on 'delivering' phonics teaching may have eclipsed a commitment to a broader literacy approach. An integrated approach requires careful planning and a high level of subject knowledge (Gavelek et al., 2000). The challenge becomes greater in considering the needs of at-risk readers and the limited training given to those who support them – both teachers and teaching assistants (Savage and Carless, 2008).

In this chapter I have discussed approaches to reading development and have done so by focusing on points of consensus and those of contention in the literacy field. It

is only with such a foundation that the challenges of learning to read and the rationale for reading interventions may be better understood. Having navigated one possible route through the literacy landscape, it is now appropriate to consider the role of teaching assistants within such a setting.

Chapter 3: The role of the teaching assistant

In this chapter I review the literature in relation to the role of the teaching assistant (TA). I begin by exploring the policy context and note how the Labour administration between 1997 and 2010 accelerated changes to the TA role which had a significant impact on deployment. I consider the diversity of such deployment and the issues raised across the domains of training, role and communication by reviewing empirical studies, systematic reviews and policy documentation. I focus the review on teaching assistants or TA equivalents although some of the reviews had a broader remit in relation to support staff. I then go on to focus particularly on the TA role in relation to literacy support before explaining the context for this research study.

The majority of the literature focuses on England; however, I have also drawn upon international studies and reviews where I consider that a significant contribution has been made to the discussion. Where possible, I have extracted data that relates particularly to primary schools, but in some cases the reporting also includes mainstream secondary schools.

Background

In this study I use the term 'teaching assistant' to refer to those individuals who are employed as support staff in English schools under the direction of the class teacher. Historically, teaching assistants worked to provide general support in a range of subjects and activities, with many of these tasks being care oriented (Clayton, 1993). Teaching assistants have been known under a range of titles - a National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) (2005) survey, for example, reported forty-eight different job titles including: learning support assistants, classroom assistants and non-teaching assistant. Arguably the array of terms is indicative of the diversity and continuing fluidity of the role, as well as what Clayton (1993:33) describes as the 'ad hoc way' in which the role has evolved. The flexibility of their role is something that teachers have valued; yet it has been far from systematic (Tucker, 2009, Clayton, 1993).

In the Labour government green paper *Excellence for all children* (Department for Education and Skills, 1997), the range of titles for teaching assistants (termed learning support assistants (LSAs) in the document) was acknowledged alongside their diversity of role in helping with reading difficulties or supporting speech therapy programmes for example; however, no attempt was made to explicitly define their

role. The document *Working with Teaching Assistants: A Good Practice Guide* (Department for Education and Skills, 2000b) signalled the government's official adoption of the term 'teaching assistant' since it appeared to capture the 'active ingredient' (p4) of their work. By 2003, it was recognised that new developments in the TA role would involve 'pushing back the boundaries of what assistants can do in classrooms.' (Department for Education and Skills, 2003:12). In common with the previous green paper, there was no attempt to proffer a definition of the teaching assistant's role although the diversity of their deployment was acknowledged.

Teaching assistants come into the profession with a wide diversity of background skills, knowledge and experience: both professional and personal. Many teaching assistants are mothers who have had some involvement in school and decide that their personal qualities in working with children would translate well into the professional skills of a TA role. Data from the DISS project indicated that 10% of support staff had no qualification and 38% had qualifications above GCSE(Blatchford et al., 2007). According to the Department for Education (based on data from November 2012), 92% of full time equivalent (FTE) TAs are female and 87.9% are white British (Department for Education, April 2013).

Teaching Assistants and education policy

The Plowden report (1967:369) reviewing primary education in England, provides the first official mention of the need for teacher-aides - as they were described – who might take on a supportive educational role in the primary classroom. The need for 'greater flexibility in organisation' in primary schools provided the recommendation to broaden and extend the well-established National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) to include training to work with primary aged children:

> *We are also recommending that teachers' aides should be trained for employment throughout the primary stage of education and that their training should equip them for wider functions in the schools than those of welfare assistants.*

> (Plowden, 1967, paragraph 1035 p.370)

The report also indicated the nature of the teaching assistant role in supporting class teachers:

> *the development of a general class of helpers for an integrated nursery and primary system who will have a bias towards a part of the age*

> *range. They can assist hard pressed teachers and take over some of*
> *their lesser responsibilities.*

<div align="right">(ibid, paragraph 1036 p.370)</div>

The importance of recruiting both qualified school leavers and 'older women' (p.371) (men are not mentioned) is highlighted together with the need to provide appropriate training and career opportunities.

The Warnock Report (1978), a far-reaching review (which included Scotland and Wales) into the educational provision for children with special education needs - also acknowledged the role of ancillary staff - in this case in facilitating greater inclusive practices:

> *Not only do they provide care for the children but they enable teachers*
> *to concentrate their attention on individuals and small groups. Moreover,*
> *they themselves carry out important educational work with children*
> *under the direction of the teacher.*

<div align="right">(ibid, paragraph 14.32, p.274)</div>

The report recognised that ancillary staff numbers would need to increase to facilitate the recommendations of the report in relation to inclusive practices and also acknowledged that access to training alongside teachers would be an important consideration.

The policy imperative to progressively increase TA numbers in both primary and secondary sectors gained momentum from 1997 when the green paper *Excellence for all children: meeting special educational needs* (Department for Education and Skills, 1997) was published. This was followed by a further green paper in 1998: *Teachers: meeting the challenge of change* (Department for Education and Employment, 1998b) which also anticipated a projected increase in TA numbers by 20,000 from approximately 80,000. The policies represented a dual agenda: the first to enable the inclusion of more children with special educational needs in mainstream schools and the second, to address the issue of sustainable recruitment and retention within the teaching profession (Blatchford et al., 2007, Blatchford et al., 2009a) A sum of £350 billion was made available through local education authorities for this purpose with £200 million being made available to sustain recruitment and training until 2004 (Department for Education and Skills, 2000a, Ofsted, 2002).
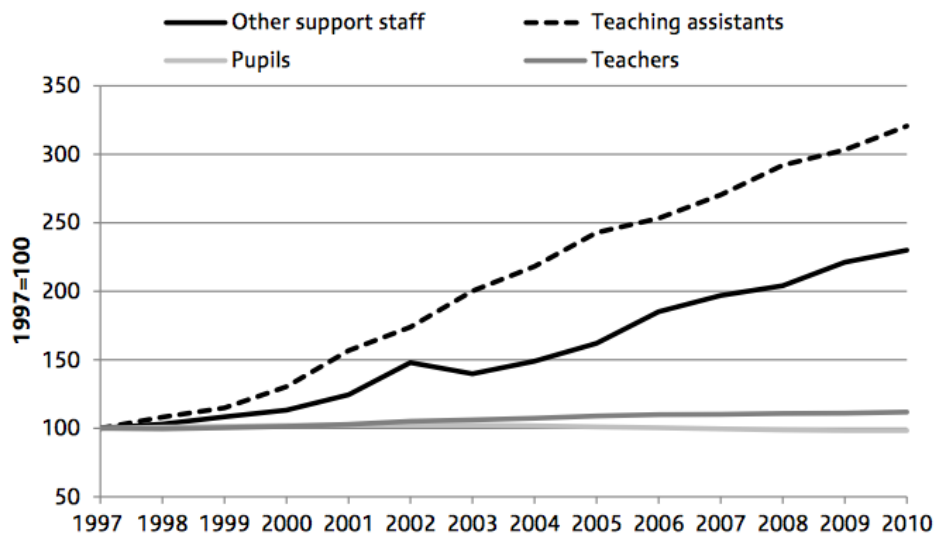
Note: Teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff represent the number of full-time equivalents.
Sources: Department for Education and Department for Children, Schools and Families, *School Workforce in England* (2010, 2009, 2007) and *Pupils, Schools and their Characteristics* (2010, 2005).

Figure 3.1: changes in the school workforce and pupil numbers over time between 1997 and 2010

By 2000, the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (2000, cited in Farrell et al., 2010) estimated that there were 80,000 TAs working in mainstream schools - both primary and secondary. There was a recognition that the dramatic increase in the numbers of TAs (see figure 3.1) had led to important issues around their deployment and role. Findings from a study conducted by Farrell et al. (1999) indicated that: there were no coherent or consistent working practices; there was a lack of planning time with the class teacher; training was inadequate; there was a need for nationally recognised and accredited training programmes, and the career structure was 'non-existent'. These findings, I shall argue, signalled what were to become recurring themes through subsequent research. There was an attempt to address the issues raised by such findings at school level, with the publication of *Working with Teaching Assistants: A Good Practice Guide* (Department for Education and Skills, 2000b). The guide signalled the four strands of support that teaching assistants could be expected to give in relation to pupil, teacher, curriculum and school. It also highlighted recommendations for the support that TAs could expect in relation to their role. These included: defining responsibilities clearly; providing clear deployment within a flexible framework; creating partnerships with teachers; creating partnerships with other people involved in education; creating partnership among teaching assistants, and reviewing performance and promoting development.

On a local authority level, there was a recognition that there would be implications for training (LGNTO, 2001) and a national framework of standards was implemented. According to John Stocks, the chair of the Local Government National Training Organisation (LGNTO, 2001:3) board at the time, the standards 'provided an excellent framework to promote best practice in all schools.' A recommendation for regularly reviewing national occupational standards and qualifications was suggested within the document but whether such a review took place is not clear.

A consultation paper followed in 2002 (Department for Education and Skills, 2002) examining the role of teaching assistants, by which time numbers had exceeded 100,000. At the same time an Ofsted (2002) report highlighted a number of important issues in relation to the role of teaching assistants. It was apparent from the report that teaching assistants were playing a vital role in implementing the national literacy and numeracy strategies (NLNS) and teachers, almost without exception, valued their contribution. The report stated that 'Teachers value the support teaching assistants provide and appreciate the benefits of having another adult in the classroom to assist them.' (ibid: 4). Furthermore it was noted that 'the quality of teaching in lessons with teaching assistants is better than in those without, albeit by only one or two percentage points in grade profiles.'(ibid: 9)

It was also evident that many TAs contributed to the wider life of the school and high levels of goodwill were reported. What was less clear, according to the report, was the way in which teaching assistants were being deployed. It was noted that:

> *few schools monitor the often fragmented work patterns of teaching assistants or include teaching assistants in their performance monitoring procedures.*

(ibid: 5)

The issue of teaching assistants working across a range of classes compounded the fragmentation and the report when on to say that:

> *Such fragmentation hinders the close working partnership between teachers and teaching assistants which is one of the key factors in ensuring that teaching assistant support is effective.*

(ibid: 13)

Only a small number of schools had received school-based training on how teachers and teaching assistants might work effectively together. Furthermore, communication between teaching assistants and teachers was commented upon as a difficulty where it was evident that very little planning or feedback time appeared to be possible within the structure of the school day (Ofsted, 2002).

Local Education Authorities were seen to be responding well in offering induction training, however, take up of the training was seen to be 'patchy' (Ofsted, 2002:5). The lack of systematic training in general was noted where training was rarely related to the TAs' needs. Training for the implementation of interventions such as the Additional Literacy Strategy (ALS) (1999) and the Early Literacy Strategy (ELS) (2001) was noted to be very worthwhile with the added advantage that teachers and teaching assistants were trained together for part of the time. The report went on to highlight the tension over competing demands associated with the TA's role, but offered no means of resolution - merely the imperative that whilst teaching assistants could be expected to provide more support in lessons, 'the level of practical and administrative support for teachers does not diminish.' (Ofsted, 2002:7).

Whilst the rhetoric focused upon the important contribution that the TA was able to make within school, the reality was a persistent ambiguity about their deployment and a distinct lack of focus on the needs of the TA within this shifting educational landscape (Wilson and Bedford, 2008). I shall argue that this ambiguity and lack of coherent focus on the needs of the TA continued throughout the educational changes.

In 2003, a National Agreement (NA) *Raising Standards and Tackling Workload* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) was reached with all but the National Union of Teachers (NUT). The document was introduced as an historic agreement between government, employers and school workforce unions 'to help schools, teachers and support staff meet the challenges that lie ahead.'(ibid: 1).The context to the agreement was an acknowledgement that two thirds of a teacher's time was being spent on activities other than teaching; furthermore, the profession was suffering from recruitment and retention difficulties.

The agreement, therefore, detailed the need for teaching assistants to take on a direct role in covering classes whilst the class teacher had planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time in school by effectively taking the class using the teachers' planning. This represented another key shift in the way in which TAs were

to be deployed and for which, arguably, TAs and schools were ill prepared (Houssart, 2013, Hutchings et al., 2009).

The re-modelling strategy was surrounded by a degree of mistrust and suspicion from both TAs and teachers. Teacher Unions argued that a changing role for teaching assistants represented nothing more than an economic imperative and represented an unhelpful blurring of boundaries between the teacher and TA role. Teaching assistants experienced similar reservations, noting that their roles and responsibilities increased with few opportunities for additional remuneration despite the introduction of such opportunities as the professional standards for Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) status (Dunne et al., 2008).

The HLTA role aimed to further develop the skills of support staff enabling them to take on additional responsibilities within the classroom (NFER, 2005) as part of the workforce remodelling and were reviewed and updated during 2006-7 (TDA, 2007) in response to research from Wilson and Bedford (2008). The handbook offered a six step model of good practice recommending that schools: take a whole-school view of staffing, consult with HLTAs about their specialist areas, develop team work, define roles and responsibilities, raise awareness of the HLTA role and ensure that the role is supported and developed.

On a superficial level the HLTA standards appeared to reflect a change in the professional standing for TAs; however, Hutchings et al. (2009) point out that confusion existed over the attainment of the standards not being recognised as a professional qualification, echoing wider issues relating to incoherence and opacity over qualifications and how they related to professional and career progression. Dunne et al. (2008:245) noted, for example, that career trajectories were still limited despite an ever-growing emphasis on additional qualifications; they argue that the focus on the nurturing role of teaching assistants suggested that they continued to operate within, 'a discourse and culture of care that potentially enables a form or exploitation.'

The dramatic increase in TA numbers and significant shift in role barely allowed time for proper reflection and evaluation; as a result, significant gaps in knowledge existed surrounding the deployment and impact of teaching assistants which needed to be addressed (Blatchford et al., 2009b). The systematic literature review conducted by Cajkler et al. (2007) was one response to this. The aim of the review was to consider how training and professional development activities were impacting on teaching assistants' classroom practice between 1988 and 2006. The

review included eighty-one studies across three countries: the UK, USA and Australia; sixteen studies were selected for more detailed analysis. Training for classroom support staff was described as 'patchy' and 'uncoordinated' (Cajkler et al., 2007:1) with no consistent or coherent practice in relation to training. In the case of the UK, the only exception was the training provided for the HLTA status, but this, as the report states, was more about attempting to raise the status of the minority rather than enskilling the majority. Incidental and on-the-job training was a familiar pattern of training reported by TAs. Pre-entry training was also noted as an undeveloped area. The study, importantly, highlighted the need for well-designed studies (bearing in mind only sixteen of eighty-one were considered sufficiently rigorous for further analysis in the review) and they indicated the need to establish 'how TAs are prepared for their communication roles in managing relationships and acting as a bridge between teachers and pupils' (Cajkler et al., 2007:15).

Another review commissioned by the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCFS) was published in 2009 (Alborz et al., 2009). It represented a follow up from an earlier review (Howes, 2003) which had been conducted before the National Agreement (2003) had come into force with the ensuing changes in TA numbers and role. The review was also deemed necessary to consider the impact of support staff on the wider school setting. Whereas the Cajkler et al. (2007) review had focused on training issues, the.Alborz et al. (2009) review researched the impact of adult support staff on pupil engagement and learning resulting from the workforce remodelling, together with a consideration of the support processes leading to such outcomes.

The systematic review identified 232 studies and of those, thirty-five were selected for further analysis across five countries (Alborz et al., 2009, Farrell et al., 2010). The review was published before the completion of the Blatchford et al. (2009a) study – which will be discussed below - and complemented the findings from their report. The key findings from this review highlighted the value of the TA role and significantly, the statistically significant contribution that TAs were able to make in pupils' attainment when implementing targeted interventions. I return to this finding from the review under *Teaching Assistants and literacy support* but before I do this, it is necessary to consider a large-scale study which has had far-reaching ramifications in the educational community, not all of which have been fully realised at the time of writing this study.

The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project (Blatchford et al., 2009a) was an empirical study which sought to address many of the issues raised in the literature and in particular the concerns raised by Giangreco et al. (2012) in the USA, that there was too much reporting on what was already known in the field. The intention was to obtain reliable data on the deployment and characteristics of support staff and establish the impact on pupil outcomes and teacher workloads of teaching assistants in particular. Many studies reported the perceived benefits of TA involvement with pupil progress but there was little empirical data.

The DISS (Blatchford et al., 2009a, Blatchford et al., 2009b) study was necessarily large scale and implemented a more robust methodology than had been noted in many of the studies considered for the Cajkler et al. (2007) and Alborz et al. (2009) reviews. It represented the largest study of TAs and other support staff conducted in the UK between 2003 and 2008. It was commissioned by the then, DCFS and the Welsh Assembly Government in 2004. A naturalistic longitudinal study was employed using mixed methods to assess the impact of TAs on pupil outcomes. The impact was considered in terms of Positive Approaches to Learning (PAL) and academic progress. The study consisted of two strands: Strand 1 comprised three biennial national surveys of schools, teachers and support staff conducted in two 'waves'; Strand 2 was a detailed analysis of deployment and impact of support staff – this took place between 2005-6.

Strand 1 addressed the characteristics and deployment of support staff, including teaching assistants (or TA equivalent category); it represented a 'solid baseline, in the context of which developments in the deployment and impact of support staff can be better understood' (Blatchford et al., 2007:14). The key developments established between Waves 1 and 2 (the research stages of Strand 1) relating particularly to TAs are pertinent to this study. Firstly, schools cited PPA as the main reason for employing additional support staff; as a result, the numbers of TAs directly supporting pupils had risen from 38% to over half. Secondly, teachers had more contact with support staff overall but this increase was only slight for TAs, with a rise from 92% to 96% as they already had considerable contact with teachers. Planning and feedback time had increased between Waves 1 and 2 in primary schools; however, the majority of teachers had not had training to help them work with support staff in classrooms despite the increase from 40 to 50% of teachers responsible for training support staff. Preparing teachers to better train and support staff was identified as a particular issue from the findings:

> *most teachers do not have allocated planning or feedback time with*
> *support staff they work with in the classroom. This is in line with most*
> *other studies and all point to this as a factor undermining good practice.*

<div align="right">(Blatchford et al., 2007:70)</div>

TAs' job satisfaction and perception of whether they were appreciated had declined slightly between Waves 1 and 2 and 64% were less satisfied with training and development opportunities available to them than had been the case in Wave 1. Attendance at training and In-service Educational Training (INSET) had remained similar between the two waves of research.

Strand 2 of the research consisted of a large-scale survey of pupil's academic progress in 100 schools followed by detailed case studies and systematic observations in a smaller sample of schools. The key findings from this strand were presented in relation to two broad themes: 'preparedness' and 'separation'. 'Preparedness' was considered in relation to training for TAs and teachers, and then with reference to planning and feedback between the teacher and TA. 75% of teachers had had no training to work with TAs, yet their involvement in training and supporting staff had increased progressively at each wave of the research. Similarly, in terms of planning and feedback, 75% teachers had no allocated time with teaching assistants. TAs felt underprepared to support pupils and had to 'tune in' to teacher's delivery in the absence of adequate time to liaise over lesson plans and pupil progress. TAs also expressed frustration that the lack of time to communicate with the class teacher resulted in teachers not acting upon feedback provided by TAs in relation to particular pupils.

'Separation' (Blatchford et al., 2009a) as a finding was examined in terms of pupils' separation from the mainstream teacher and in relation to the curriculum. It was evident that pupils who were supported by teaching assistants were missing out on contact with the class teacher as there were less 'active interactions' (2009b:681). Sometimes this absence of contact was deliberate, in the sense that teachers were delegating responsibility for particular children's learning to the TA. Such children tended to be the lower-attaining pupils and although the presence of a TA served to increase pupils' classroom engagement one of the troubling findings from the study was a negative relationship identified between the time spent with a TA and progress made – even when controlling for other variables. This finding was consistent across Waves 1 and 2 of the research.

Another finding in relation to separation was that pupils supported by a TA spent less time engaging with the mainstream curriculum and this raises issues around access to a broad and balanced curriculum – a concern also raised by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2004). The researchers acknowledged the considerable challenges in measuring effects on pupil outcomes in naturalistic conditions and recognised that one of the shortcomings of the study was that relationships were examined between TAs and the whole class rather than with the specific pupils that they support:

> *future research in this area would need to target more precisely the connections between TAs and the specific pupils they support, though this would not be an easy task.'*

(Blatchford et al., 2009a:2)

It was apparent from the study that TAs have a pedagogical role, but the nature and impact of such a role raised many questions. One strand of the findings noted, for example, that in working with children, TAs' involvement was focused on task completion rather than upon learning and understanding, and their interaction with children tended to be reactive rather than proactive.

Some of the findings from the DISS project echoed an earlier systematic review in the USA. Giangreco et al. (2001b:45) reviewed forty-three 'professional pieces of literature' associated with paraprofessionals (as termed in the USA) and coded them into six categories. There were a number of key findings reported which are pertinent to this literature review. Firstly, Giangreco and his colleagues point out that despite a progressive increase in the literature surrounding the role and deployment of paraprofessionals (reflecting an increase in paraprofessional deployment), the impact of such research has been very low. Using the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) as an indicator of the degree of impact the researchers established that the majority of the studies (88% n=15) were cited in the SSCI four times or fewer between 1992 and April 2000. Giangreco speculated that this possibly reflected the fact that findings were being reiterated over time and offered 'few new perspectives'(Giangreco et al., 2001b:57). Findings revolved around the familiar themes of deployment and training. He noted that there was an absence of a 'discernible line of research' (ibid: 58) across the studies.

Arising from the review, Giangreco et al. (2001b:58) raised some pertinent and penetrating questions:

Are models of service provision that rely heavily on paraprofessionals to provide instruction to students with disabilities appropriate, ethical and conceptually sound and effective? Does it make sense to have the least qualified employee primarily responsible for students with the most complex challenges to learning? Is it acceptable for some students with disabilities to receive most of their education from a paraprofessional, regardless of training level, while students without disabilities receive the bulk of their instruction from certified teachers.

Such questions were echoed in the UK DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2009a) particularly relating to the findings around 'separation'. Arguably, they are questions that should have been asked at governmental level before the major changes to the workforce came into force. Research, including the DISS project, was effectively responding to policy changes that had not been preceded by any attempt to conceptualise exactly what the TA role should be. I return to a number of the questions and observations raised by the Giangreco et al. (2001b) review in the light of findings from this present study in Chapter 7.

The progressive shift in the role of the TA as noted in this review so far has important implications. Firstly, there are greater pedagogical responsibilities placed on TAs, many of whom have had limited training (Savage and Carless, 2008). Secondly, there is a greater need to work collaboratively alongside the class teacher with clearer expectations in relation to teaching and learning objectives, planning, and assessment. Finally, but importantly the need for continuing professional development becomes increasingly necessary (Tucker, 2009); indeed Blatchford et al. (2004) note that the impact of training is influenced by the nature of the professional partnership with the class teacher.

It is the particular role that TAs play in supporting specific children to which I now turn, before establishing the key aspects from this review which relate most closely to my study.

Teaching Assistants and literacy support

Since the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) (Department for Education and Employment, 1998a) in England in 1998, TAs have played a significant and progressively increasing role in supporting at-risk readers in addition to their 'wider pedagogical role', as noted by Blatchford et al. (2009a). This shift in role continues to have important implications, many of which have been highlighted

through the course of this literature review. Whilst evidence is limited concerning the impact of TAs in relation to a wider pedagogical role, there is a relatively stronger body of evidence that TAs can have a significant impact on literacy attainment when specific support to children is given (Savage and Carless, 2005, Hatcher et al., 2006, Alborz et al., 2009, Slavin et al., 2011).

Savage and Carless (2005:46) argue that if interventions are only successful in highly 'rarefied' conditions, the potential for empirical studies to impact on school practice is limited. In this respect, they argue that evaluating the role of the TA in implementing 'highly structured and scripted programmes' (ibid: 59) within the naturalistic setting of the school environment may be considered a fruitful path in research terms. Children were screened and selected for the study from nine schools (n=498 was reduced to 108) and allocated to one of four intervention groups for nine weeks – one of which was a control group where children received literacy teaching but no additional intervention. Although the researchers acknowledged that the sample size was small at the post-test phase (n=104), they concluded that learning support assistants (LSAs – as described in this study) can be 'an effective additional support for children 'at risk' of literacy difficulties' (ibid: 59). It is interesting to note that TAs had received only one morning of training alongside the class teacher with little researcher support after the initial training.

A subsequent study (Savage and Carless, 2008) followed the attainment of the children sixteen months later; it demonstrated that the effects of the intervention were still evident in the children who had responded to the initial intervention (i.e. two out of the three children identified as at-risk readers); they were significantly more likely to achieve average results in nationally administered tests at the end of Key Stage 1.

Farrell et al. (2010:439) reporting on one aspect of the Alborz et al. (2009) review, which related to improved academic achievement after a period of intervention from a teaching assistant, noted that:

> *The overwhelming conclusion from all but one of [the studies] (Muijs and Reynolds), is that trained and supported TAs, either working on a one to one basis or in a small group, helped primary aged children with literacy and language problems to make statistically significant gains in learning when compared to similar children who did not receive TA support.*

The caveat to this was becoming a familiar theme in the literature:

> *'TAs can have an impact in raising the academic achievement of specific groups of pupils with learning difficulties **provided they are trained and supported in this process.**'* [my emphasis]

(Farrell et al., 2010:447)

The Alborz et al. (2009) review was cited by the DISS (Blatchford et al., 2009a:139) report as one which examined the role of TAs in a different context to the Blatchford study and highlighted that 'the research on targeted interventions also suggest that with appropriate training and guidance support staff can have a positive role to play in pupils' academic progress.'

TAs have always been involved in literacy support, but the dramatic and rapid changes in policy have resulted in far greater responsibility and accountability and with that has come a higher level of scrutiny. Tucker (2009) suggests that TAs have been largely self-determining in their role in schools and classrooms, and there is a need for a cultural change where the role of the TA is systematically valued.

Before considering the rationale for this research, it is necessary to highlight the key issues that have emerged from this review, identifying those aspects that are most pertinent to this present study.

Issues arising: training, communication and ambiguity of role

It is apparent from this literature review that changes that have taken place since 1998 have not foregrounded the role of the TA adequately, despite the rhetoric and government-led initiatives. The developments in the TA role have reflected an agenda that has focused on the needs of teachers and children: teacher workload, teacher retention and supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). As Wilson and Bedford (2008) point out, the workforce remodelling agenda was never directed at raising the professionalism of TAs themselves. Initiatives have been based on expectations rather than requirements and for that reason, although government intentions have been well intentioned in relation to TA training, implementation has been invariably 'patchy'. The HLTA status has offered no guarantee of an alternative career trajectory.

The review has also highlighted the repetitive nature of the findings in relation to the domains of TA role, communication and training. The major reviews have repeatedly highlighted the ambiguity of the TA role and inconsistency in how the role is established and developed. The DISS (Blatchford et al., 2009a) project

demonstrated that TAs clearly have a pedagogical role but the implications have not been properly established in terms of PPA cover or supporting particular children. According to Blatchford et al. (2009a:133) future research needs to:

> consider in a systematic way the management of TA deployment in relation to managerial, pedagogical and curriculum concerns.

Support structures for training teachers to work alongside teaching assistants though available through local authorities – The *Working with Teaching Assistants: A Good Practice Guide* (Department for Education and Skills, 2000b), for example, were never taken up with any consistency by schools. Burgess and Mayes (Burgess and Mayes, 2009:390) point out that:

> the role of the teaching assistant is unique and one that teachers themselves have not been prepared for in terms of mentoring.

This issue was also raised in the DISS study (Blatchford et al., 2009a) where the majority of teachers had not had training to help them to work with support staff.

Giangreco (2003) posed broader questions, as outlined above, about the role of the teaching assistant and the issue of where expertise lies in terms of working with children with special educational needs. There is a very real concern that teachers may assume that TAs have a more specialised knowledge and subsequently relinquish responsibility for working with the least able pupils. Giangreco argues that this raises ethical and – in the case of the USA - legal questions. It is noted that the most successful inclusion of children is where the teacher is 'instructionally engaged' (Giangreco, 2003:51).

How the issues informed this study

The issues arising from this literature review helped to crystallise the rationale for the present research study. Furthermore, the pilot study conducted in 2009 also served to inform my thinking focusing as it did on different perspectives of literacy support, which included teaching assistants. It echoed many of the findings in relation to the TAs' role already discussed, but also brought into sharp focus the commitment of the TAs to the pupils, together with their limited ability to communicate with the class teacher because of time pressures. I elaborate on this pilot study at the beginning of the next chapter.

Another major contribution to the shaping of this study was the Every Child a Reader (Tanner et al., 2010a) project (previously discussed in Chapter 2) where

teaching assistants were deployed as part of a framework of layered intervention within the infrastructure of Reading Recovery (RR). What is significant from the report, bearing in mind that this project consisted of a national infrastructure unique to any previous literacy intervention, was that although teaching assistants clearly had a major role in the implementation of interventions, there was no consistency over how they were trained, supported or deployed.

I started to consider the nature of the Fischer Family Trust Wave 3 (FFTW3) programme at the same time as the Alborz et al. (2009) review and the DISS (Blatchford et al., 2009a) report were published. Two key points from each study further contributed to this research formulation. In the case of the Alborz et al. (2009:2) review the evidence was compelling that:

> *Progress [of pupils] was more marked when TAs supported pupils in discrete well-defined areas of work or learning. Findings suggest that support to individual pupils should be combined with supported group work that facilitates all pupils' participation in class activities. The importance of allocated time for teachers and TAs to plan programmes of work was apparent.*

The findings were concerned with the more distinct pedagogical role of the teaching assistant as compared to the wider pedagogical role which represented the way in which Blatchford et al. (2009a) conceptualised and researched the deployment of teaching assistants.

Whilst I touch upon the wider pedagogical role of TAs in relation to the intervention in the class situation, I focus my attention on the opportunities afforded by the FFTW3 to address a number of the issues raised in the literature concerned with their deployment for a discrete intervention. Within the context of the FFTW3 intervention, TAs are expected and trained to have a clear pedagogical role. They are not 'delivering' an intervention 'package'; rather, they are trained to actively support children in becoming independent readers. The training is focused on pedagogical strategies which are derived from the model of Reading Recovery.

In the conclusion to the DISS report, Blatchford et al. (2009a:141) recommend that one way forward in future research would be to 'work with a group of schools to develop strong guidance on policy and practice, which could then be used by other schools.' Bearing in mind Wilson and Bedford's (2008) point that there are few examples of successful partnership, it appeared very worthwhile to focus research

on the implementation of a programme which appeared to present a potentially successful partnership between the class teacher and the teaching assistant. For this reason my research design represents a set of 'critical case' studies (Flyvbjerg, 2006) examining potentially effective deployment. From a pragmatic perspective, setting aside the broader and important questions raised by both Giangreco et al. (2001b) and Blatchford et al. (2009a) - but to which I shall return in Chapter 7 - if teaching assistants can impact positively on pupil outcomes in literacy in a cost-effective way, as Savage et al. (2009) suggest, then further exploration is both justified and necessary.

In this chapter I have reviewed the role of teaching assistants and how it has been informed and buffeted through significant policy changes in England. I have discussed the changes in role, including the support of children who are struggling to learn to read. Empirical evidence for the involvement of TAs in explicitly supporting the development of literacy skills is good, and with this in mind the Fischer Family Trust Wave 3 programme provides a worthwhile focus for study. In the following chapter I discuss the aims of my research, the methodological choices that I have made arising from my conceptual framework (detailed in Chapter 1) and give a rationale for the research methods employed.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Research Methods

I begin by discussing how this research study was informed by a pilot study conducted in 2009 and present the research questions and aims. I then review literature relating to qualitative research, case study and grounded theory methodology. The research design is then explained and the research methods discussed. I end the chapter by attending to ethical considerations.

A coherence should exist between ontological and epistemological positioning and methodology which should then inform the research design and methods employed (Crotty, 1998). Such coherence involves asking questions at the deepest level about the research process and what outcomes might be possible. For me, these questions are concerned with what is knowable in a postmodern age; what is helpful and important to know from a pragmatic perspective and how we judge what is helpful and important in terms of a phronetic response. My conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 1 and my positioning in relation to literacy, have informed my methodology and the choice of research methods used.

To begin with, it is necessary to give some background to this present research by briefly discussing a pilot study, conducted as part of an MA in educational research methods. This pilot project helped to inform both the subsequent doctoral research questions and the methods used. I shall then examine the reasons for deciding upon a case study approach, exploring both the challenges and strengths of case study research; some of the discussions inevitably and necessarily touch upon wider debates around the relative merits of qualitative research. I shall then go on to consider how grounded theory has informed my approaches before discussing the research methods employed: interviews and observations. Finally, the ethical considerations will be reviewed.

The pilot study

Overview

The pilot study *Multiple perspectives on literacy support: the teaching assistant, the teacher and the child* which I undertook in 2009, was an exploratory case study (Yin, 2009) in which I investigated the views of primary school teaching staff and children (aged 5-6) in relation to literacy support. The research was conducted over the summer of 2009 within two primary schools in the Midlands. Interviews took place with teaching assistants (TAs), senior teachers, head teachers, and children

receiving different forms of literacy support. Additionally, in order to add further richness to the data, observations of teaching assistants took place in both schools. Both the methodology and the themes that emerged from the data helped to shape and influence this present research study.

Findings

The key themes that emerged from the pilot study were threefold: passion, pressure and pedagogy. I used the word *passion* advisedly, considering that this best represented the enthusiasm and commitment to literacy teaching and learning revealed in the data, with TAs and senior teachers, seeking to make literacy experiences meaningful and creative. The children too, despite their difficulties, enjoyed reading and writing, with very few exceptions. Pressures, which were multifarious in nature, were evident in the data from all three groups; the pressure of curriculum demands, the pressure of time and the pressure of attainment targets. Two issues around pedagogy were evident:

- the concern about the fragmentation of literacy experiences for children
- the sometimes confusing expectations around the teaching assistants' role.

It is the two findings related to pedagogy that informed the research questions for this research project. Firstly, I noted that an integrated approach to literacy was considered important by both teachers and teaching assistants, but increasingly challenging to uphold and sustain. Secondly, it became apparent that examining and understanding the role of teaching assistants, particularly in relation to literacy, may be significant in further enhancing literacy support for the most at-risk readers.

Research questions and aims

Alongside the data from the pilot study, the literature reviews focusing on literacy development and the role of teaching assistants, (detailed in Chapter 2 and 3 respectively) revealed significant areas for further research. From the literature, it is clear that teaching assistants already have an established and increasing role in offering literacy support; it is also evident that the pedagogical value and nature of their role has been called into question (Blatchford et al., 2009a, Giangreco et al., 2010). Furthermore, in relation to literacy support, the literature suggests the need for targeted intervention providing systematic phonological input for the most at-risk readers; yet at the same time, there is considerable evidence for a continued need for broad and rich language experiences where learning is contextualised (Cunningham, 1990, Hatcher et al., 1994, Wyse, 2010). There is a need, I suggest,

to marry two pedagogical aspects of literacy development: providing effective targeted interventions whilst at the same time giving every opportunity for applying learning within a language-rich environment. The role of teaching assistants in relation to these two pedagogical goals appeared to warrant further study.

The evidence from the pilot study, coupled with the literature reviews, confirmed previous professional experiences both as a primary class teacher and as a special needs' coordinator (SENCO) whereby it was commonly observed amongst staff - both teachers and teaching assistants - that children receiving literacy interventions were often unable to apply their learning and skills within literacy lessons in the classroom.

The key research question then, for this project was as follows:

- Are there lessons that can be learned from the FFTW3 programme as a model of training and implementation for future consideration in terms of the role and deployment of teaching assistants? Two associated questions relating to this key question were:
- in what ways are TAs equipped to support literacy? And:
- to what extent can the role of teaching assistants facilitate a more integrated approach to literacy support?

Answering these research questions involved seeking:

- to gain a clear picture of the teaching assistants' place in supporting literacy in school;
- to establish whether literacy training had taken place on a general level;
- to understand whether TAs felt equipped to meet the demanding pedagogical role which the FFTW3 programme requires within a broader picture of literacy support;
- to establish whether CPD had taken place in relation to the FFTW3 programme specifically (bearing in mind that the three days of initial training was not intended by the author of the programme to be the only point of professional development);
- to determine the nature of the relationship with the class teacher with respect to the implementation of the programme and whether, if at all, it had impacted pedagogically within the classroom.

Research Methodology

This research project could have taken a number of different forms, particularly as literacy research straddles many disciplines. A large-scale survey of teaching assistants would have been one possibility, with a survey focusing on initial training, role within school, and more specifically, the role in relation to literacy. This scale of project may have had some value; however, previous studies had given attention to many of these areas (Cajkler et al., 2007, Alborz et al., 2009, Blatchford et al., 2009a) and I was aware of Giangreco's (2001b) admonitions concerning repetitious research and the consequent lack of impact from studies relating to the TA role. It was a concern that this present study should make a contribution to the literature in some way and a case study of a programme foregrounding the role of the teaching assistant within a uniquely supportive 'infrastructure' appeared to offer a fruitful way to proceed, particularly bearing in mind the research gaps identified by Wilson and Bedford (2008) and Blatchford et al. (2009a) relating to successful partnerships and models of practice. Although the ECaR (Tanner et al., 2010a) report included information on the take up of the FFTW3 programme in schools, it was intended that this research study should offer a deeper understanding of the FFTW3 programme and the model it offers, something that the ECaR evaluation was not designed to do, with its focus on the national implementation of Reading Recovery.

An ethnographic study would have served the purpose of exploring the complexity of the TAs role and dynamic within a school environment; however, in terms of generalisability, I wanted the study to take a slightly broader view, particularly as the pilot study revealed that the dynamic between TAs and teachers varies considerably from school to school, confirming my professional experience as a special needs' coordinator. I considered that a series of case studies comparing the role of the TA, using the same literacy programme in two local authorities would serve the purposes of this study as outlined above. The intention has been to examine, understand, and explain the role of teaching assistants in their implementation of the FFTW3 programme and to establish wider implications from the findings.

Case Study

From an early stage in this research then, a case study approach was adopted. I considered that such a methodology would yield the fullest answers to the research questions posed. I say more about this under *The Strengths of Case Study* in this chapter. The pilot research, as previously discussed, was exploratory, and provided a basis for a progressive focusing in this case study. Findings from the pilot study

partly informed the design of this present research and the structuring of the research questions around the domains of role, training and communication. Before examining case study more closely in relation to this research, it is important to explore the various definitions and typologies that exist examining both its particular shortcomings and strengths as a methodology.

Definitions and typologies of case study

Definitions of case study revolve around the focus on a particular instance or system that will include an in-depth study (Stake, 2000, Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, Nisbet and Watt, 1984). Sturman's (1999:103) definition for me, captures the unique value and challenge of case study with the recognition of the interconnectedness of human systems that can be better understood through such a methodology:

> *the distinguishing feature of case study is the belief that human systems*
> *develop a characteristic wholeness or integrity and are not simply a*
> *loose collection of traits.*

Alongside the various definitions of case study, a number of typologies exist. Attempts to categorise case study research are arguably an attempt to make sense of a methodology which is characterised by fluidity - a linear yet iterative process according to Yin (2009). Stenhouse (1985) identifies four types: ethnographic, action research, evaluative and educational; Stake (2000, 1995) suggests three: intrinsic (the case is of interest in itself); instrumental (the case facilitates an understanding of something else) and collective (instrumental but extending to several cases). Merriam also posits three types: descriptive (a narrative account), interpretative (developing conceptual categories inductively), evaluative (explaining and judging). These have some congruence with Yin's three categories, namely: exploratory (a pilot), explanatory (testing theories or hypotheses) and descriptive (providing narrative accounts).

I have some difficulty with Stake's notion of an 'intrinsic' case study in that like Silverman (2010), I consider that general themes are elicited from the particulars of case study and therefore every case study is 'instrumental' to use Stake's terminology. My own concern has been less with categorising and labelling this case study than with addressing important issues surrounding the particular challenges of case study methodology, to which I shall now turn.

Challenges with case study research

There has been considerable debate regarding the relative merits of case study research compared to large-scale, statistical methods – echoing broader debates around qualitative research methods. For the purposes of this study, I shall address the particular criticisms lodged against qualitative case study research, although it needs to be acknowledged that it is generally accepted that case study methods may often embrace quantitative methods (Yin, 2009, Sturman, 1999). The main issue relates to the degree to which generalisation is possible. Related concerns involve questions of validity and reliability, again, resonant of wider debates surrounding positivist and interpretivist paradigms of research which require greater elaboration.

The contrasting meta-theories of positivism and interpretivism have dominated debate in research since the mid-nineteenth century. Positivism as a philosophical term is associated with Auguste Comte, a nineteenth century French philosopher, with the assertion that:

> *all genuine knowledge is based on sense of experience and can only be advanced by means of observation and experiment.*

> (Cohen et al., 2000:8)

The term today has a multiplicity of meanings, but the residual definition is associated with the natural sciences. It is concerned with an objective reality, the world 'out there' – one that can be measured and quantified; it is concerned with laws and generalisations, with determinism (where events have causes) and realism (associated with independent existence). Positivism upholds the importance of standards and procedures loosely described as 'the scientific method' where quantitative methods of research are valued above others. The appeal of this approach to knowledge, of course, is that the world appears to be knowable. Arguably, a grip on 'reality' is more possible because the world is externalised. The relationship between researcher and researched is one of subject–object, where a degree of control may be imposed (Cohen et al., 2007).

In reality, there is no such thing as one scientific method; there may be a range of methods used in scientific research with varying degrees of sophistication. Indeed Gherardi and Turner (2002:84) point out that:

> *investigations into the sociology and the philosophy of natural science*
> *have shown it not to be the gleaming aseptic edifice promoted in*
> *developments after World War II, but to be a human enterprise, fraught*
> *with all of the personal, emotional and political difficulties displayed by*
> *any human undertaking.*

The reaction against positivism as a satisfactory way of understanding the world and society was a reaction against 'science's mechanistic and reductionist view of nature' (Cohen et al., 2000:17). Positivism, as a paradigm, is seen as less able to accommodate the complexities of human nature and social phenomena. One of the most compelling arguments, I would suggest, is offered by Roszak (1970:232) who states that the process of detaching ourselves from reality is one of ultimate alienation:

> *we subordinate nature to our command only by estranging ourselves*
> *from more and more of what we experience, until the reality about which*
> *objectivity tells us so much finally becomes a universe of congealed*
> *alienation.*

Interpretivism, then, is the antithesis of positivism; interpretivism is associated with individuality and subjectivity, with voluntarism (associated with the notion of free-will) and nominalism (where nothing is independently accessible); it emphasises ways of gaining knowledge of the world through understanding and empathy rather than through quantifying and measuring. Simply put, positivism is concerned with the objective and external - interpretivism with the subjective and internal (Cohen et al., 2007). If positivism represents 'congealed alienation' then interpretivism is, perhaps, the contrasting process of fluid engagement.

Dewey (1938/1997:6) writing in the context of education, but equally applicable to the wider debate around research paradigms, states that:

> *any movement that thinks and acts in terms of an 'ism' becomes so*
> *involved in reaction against other 'isms' that it is unwittingly controlled by*
> *them.*

Dewey describes this oppositional approach in educational research as a 'false dualism' and a great hindrance to a cumulative and integrative approach to research. This plea has been taken up in more recent times by Pring (2000:241)

who argues the 'untenability' of the philosophical positions which underpin both sides of the 'dualism' debate.

Historically, it is understandable to see why interpretative philosophies and methodologies have been embraced in the applied field of educational research, a field characterised by complex interrelationships and interdependencies. Researchers who use and value qualitative case study, for example, have taken criticisms seriously, asserting the importance of case study as a research methodology in its own right and not merely a preliminary or pre-experimental research method (Yin, 2009, Adelman et al., 1984). As mentioned above, issues of generalisability are inextricably linked with questions of validity and reliability; if no intrinsic confidence exists in the validity or reliability of a study, then it follows that possibilities to generalise are compromised.

The key question that critics raise in relation to case study research is: To what extent is it possible to generalise from a single case? Critics suggest that possibilities for generalisation may well be lost amidst the interpretive layers of researcher bias (Stake, 2000, Cohen et al., 2007). Concern is also raised that a single case (n=1) is too small a sample from which to generalise. On this particular point it is worth noting Flyvbjerg's (2006) discussion in defence of case study. He cites the example of Galileo's single experiment in which two objects of vastly differing mass were dropped from the tower of Pisa, representing a single case study which had far reaching consequences in scientific enquiry, refuting Aristotle's long held thesis on the relationship between mass and gravity. Flyvbjerg goes on to argue that the importance of this single case was that it exemplified a 'critical' case study in that the experiment was so designed that two objects of highly differing mass were used – whether it was two balls or a metal object and a feather is open to debate. Flyvbjerg's key point is that Galileo's theory was not developed through a set of randomised controlled trials but a carefully constructed single experiment or critical case and he cites examples of other scientists who used critical case study including Newton, Einstein and Darwin.

Many researchers assert that it is impossible and indeed, unnecessary to demonstrate reliability, validity or generalisability from a positivist viewpoint within qualitative research, and it is therefore incumbent upon case study researchers to demonstrate the quality of their research using other means of evaluation and demonstrate the generalisability of the research beyond the scientific paradigm (Flyvbjerg, 2006, Sturman, 1999, Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, Adelman et al.,

1984). Bassey (1984:119) argues, for example, that 'relatability' rather than generalisability is a more useful term in pedagogic practice. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) make the important point that education is in a constant state of flux making notions of replicability impossible, and generalisability limited. Indeed on this issue, Alasuutari (1995:155) suggests that 'extrapolation' better captures the typical procedure in qualitative research.

Stake (2000) posits the term 'naturalistic generalisation' as an application of generalising in qualitative case study research. The term refers to the unique importance of case study in addressing concrete issues with contextualised knowledge, yet with a malleability of interpretation partly defined by the reader and not simply the researcher. He also asserts that case study has value in refining theory, where 'understanding creeps forward' (Stake, 1995:75).

Schofield (1990, cited in Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:326) suggests that there is a consensus amongst qualitative researchers that generalisation focuses on the extent to which there is a 'fit' between a situation studied (the case) and the possible situation or situations to which the case study might be applied. She goes on to outline three useful targets for generalisation: generalising from the norm (that which is usual), generalising from what might be the case (generalising from anticipated changes) and generalising from what could be the case (generalising from a perceived ideal). In a similar vein, Adelman et al (1984) argue that generalisation is possible in different forms: from an instance to a class (that the case purports to represent), from a case to a multitude of classes and from the case itself. It is very apparent from the literature, however, that in whatever way generalisation is conceptualised - clarifying the 'case' itself is crucial.

Stake (1995:326) makes the point that:

> *what distinguishes a case study is principally the object which is to be explored, not the methodological orientation used in studying it*

Similarly, Merriam (2009) argues that part of the confusion surrounding case study is that the process of study is conflated with both the unit of study and the product of the investigation. She asserts that the defining characteristic of a case study is the need to delimit the object of study; if an object of study is not intrinsically bounded then quite simply, it is not a case.

In accord with Merriam, many scholars assert the importance of well-developed thinking in relation to case study; the more clearly bounded the case study, the greater the possibility of eliciting general themes and applications; moving from the particular to the general requires complex analysis (Merriam, 2009, Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, Adelman et al., 1984). As Atkinson and Delamont (1985:249) argue:

> *if studies are not explicitly developed into more general frameworks then they will be doomed to remain isolated one-off affairs with no sense of cumulative knowledge or developing theoretical insight*

Yin suggests that everything flows from establishing the precise questions to ask from the outset (Yin, 2009). Related to this, Silverman (2010) argues the importance of a systematic and comprehensive literature review: the more expansive the literature review, the more usefully precise the case study will be and therefore the greater the possibility for generalisation. Richness and thickness of data is also considered of great importance (Merriam, 2009, Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995).

Many scholars address the importance of explicating the processes involved in qualitative research projects. Huberman and Miles (2002:10) argue in their introduction that neglect of this issue 'leads to reports that strain the credulity of the research community.' with descriptions reduced to 'buzzword methodology'. They go on to assert the importance of all researchers taking responsibility for describing their procedures; failing to do so results in 'too few footprints to allow others to judge the utility of the work, and to profit from it' (ibid: xi). The matter is also addressed by Luttrell (2010:7-8), who in her four '**I**s' of qualitative research (implicit, interactive, iterative and imagination) asserts the necessity of making what is implicit, *explicit*.

For this reason, transparency is considered vital within case study research. This needs to include: transparency in data collection and analysis, the documentation of fieldwork and an explication of the distinction between evidence and assertion, and description and interpretation (Sturman, 1999:110). Distinguishing assertion from evidence is also vital if credible generalisations are to be accepted by the research community (Adelman et al., 1984, Nisbet and Watt, 1984).

Having outlined some of the particular challenges with case study research, I shall now examine its unique strengths as a methodology before discussing how this present case study has been conceived and designed.

The strengths of case study research

A number of scholars have contributed to advancing the status of case study as a research methodology in its own right, asserting the epistemological credibility of seeking meaning and understanding in naturalistic settings where a full variety of evidence may be considered (Stake, 2000, Flyvbjerg, 2006, Yin, 2009).

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) give a thoughtful review of the value of case study in an educational context. They argue that case study research is in many ways, 'the most appropriate format and orientation for school-based research'(Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:316) since case studies are grounded in naturalistic settings and the research can be used to test or develop theory. Merriam (2009) echoes this observation espousing the special features of case study as particularistic, descriptive and heuristic.

The holistic and naturalistic dimension to case study research is repeatedly explored in the literature. The potential for detailed examination and a better understanding of complexity is appealing to many researchers, particularly if multiple perspectives on a given issue are valued. Sturman (1999) upholds the importance of interdependencies and patterns in case study research which, he argues, supersede single variables.

Merriam (2009:51) suggests that:

> *Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers' experiences. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research; hence, case study plays an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base.*

Stake (2000:443) also offers a reminder of the value of case study in capturing the complexity of real life, since 'most personal experience is ill-structured, neither pedagogically nor epistemologically neat.' This is echoed by Nisbet and Watt (1984:73) who speak of case study offering a 'three-dimensional reality'.

Within such complexity, triangulation in qualitative research can be an important means of clarifying meaning from different perspectives to increase internal validity, rather than seeking the confirmation of a single meaning. Seale (1999) however, points out that the concept is problematic in qualitative research: multiple

perspectives may not necessarily be collapsed into a unified understanding. Spiro (1987, cited in Stake, 2000:445) speaks of 'crisscrossed' reflection which brings to mind the artistic technique of cross-hatching where an image is built up through crossing pen or brush strokes repeatedly, yet never quite in the same place. I find this analogy more helpful than triangulation when considering the value of multiple perspectives in research (Stake, 1995, Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). The aim is always to build an accurate picture and to resist imposing more pattern than actually exists (Murphy and Dingwall, 2003). Similarly, Stake (2000:444) argues that 'subjective yet disciplined interpretation' is possible within case study research.

The design of this case study

As discussed above, case studies are valuable in providing a full and detailed picture of naturalistic settings (Yin, 2009). Cohen et al. (2007:255) make the point that they can 'provide powerful human-scale data on macro-political decision-making, fusing theory and practice,' For this reason, a case study satisfied the principles of pragmatism that I am adhering to with a determination that the findings offer the potential for value and relevance beyond the particulars of the case itself.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:317) suggest a number of characteristics of case study to which I have sought to adhere, namely: rich and vivid description, a chronological narrative of events, an internal debate between description and analysis, a focus on individual actors or groups, a focus upon particular events, the integral involvement of the researcher in the case and finally, a way of presenting the case which is able to capture the complexity of the situation. Questions which needed to be posed as the study progressed were: what is distinct in this case study that is of interest? And, what general themes can be drawn which might indicate transferability? (Lincoln and Guba, 1985)

This study then, represents a multi-case study (Stake, 2006) of teaching assistants taking a significant pedagogical role which expects a greater degree of liaison with the class teacher than is usually the case when literacy interventions are implemented. The tentative hypothesis (Merriam, 2009), informed by the pilot study was that the FFTW3 programme might facilitate a more integrated approach to literacy support. This represents the third of Schofield's (1995, cited in Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) identified goals discussed above, namely: the possibility of generalising from a perceived ideal. This is echoed by Flyvbjerg's (2006) notion of a 'critical' case study where cases are selected because of their potential to give evidence, or otherwise, to particular concepts.

The case study took place between September 2010 and July 2011. I selected two authorities for this research (using pseudonyms); the sample of schools in Farnsworth had newly introduced the FFTW3 programme in the academic year 2010-11. By way of contrast, I considered that a second authority, Dalton in the north, where the programme has been embedded since 2007 would enrich the data and provide a valuable form of 'cross-hatching' through a careful comparison of data. An overview of the multi-case study is shown in figure 4.1.
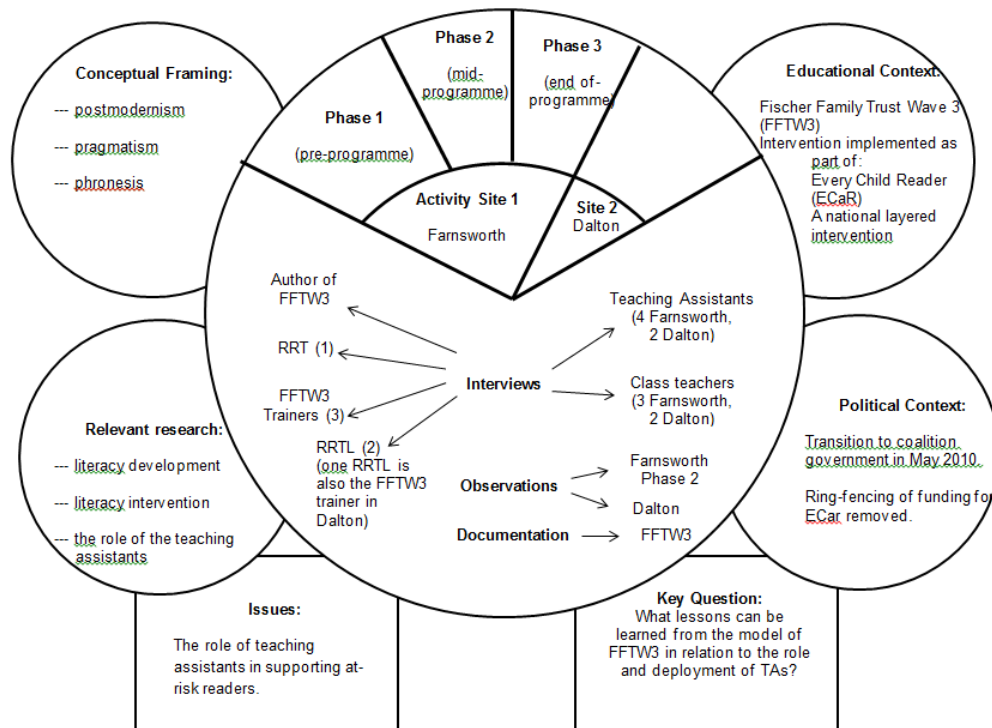
Figure 4.1: an overview of the multi-case study after Stake (2006)

Data analysis in case study

Creating 'a rich and holistic account' as Merriam (2009:51) suggests requires a thoughtful and explicitly laid out response to data analysis. The strengths of case study in relation to the richness of data can also become the potential downfall for the researcher in what Yin (2009:127) describes as 'one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies.' The quality of data analysis has a direct bearing on the issues outlined previously in relation to generalisability and usefulness.

In determining my own decisions concerning data analysis, the complexities, confusions and challenges became only too apparent. Methodologically, a grounded theory approach was attractive to me for a number of reasons. Firstly, it offers a

flexible and holistic approach to data collection and analysis; and secondly, the processes offered to support analysis are helpful, if initially rather confusing with respect to differences in grounded theory approaches and terminology.

However, I became quickly aware that there are two points of tension between case study research and a grounded theory approach. Firstly, in case study research a research question or problem has been identified *a priori* and a tentative or full hypothesis is likely to exist. In grounded theory a hypothesis does not exist *a priori* – or at least so my preliminary readings of the literature suggested. Secondly, the design of my case study was planned in advance and clearly delimited by time and cases; this appeared to be in dissonance with a grounded theory approach which requires theoretical saturation whereby data is gathered until no more data is required for theory emergence.

I established that there are differing views on the place of grounded theory in case study. Yin (2009) argues that case study is not compatible with a grounded theory approach because case studies should start with a hypothesis. Sturman (1999) by contrast, suggests that case study is an ideal method for grounding theory since the approach does not preclude a guiding theory or tentative hypothesis.

In seeking to resolve this tension I embarked on a focused literature review examining the place of grounded theory in case study research. I wanted to ensure that the process of data analysis that I adopted was fully concordant with case study. In the interests of transparency it became important to describe an authentic representation of my approach to data analysis.

Grounded Theory – an overview

A number of scholars acknowledge that the term 'grounded theory' has been used rather loosely and inappropriately in many studies (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007a). Bryman (2008) argues that grounded theory has been conflated with an inductive approach to data analysis in qualitative research. I would suggest that the misuse of the term reflects an eagerness by researchers to attach a label to their research which may be superficially reassuring for the researcher and the reader yet not fully representative of the precise processes followed.

It is clear that attaching the label of 'grounded theory' to any research, requires a full exposition and clarification of the particular form (or synthesis) of grounded theory adopted, particularly when it is noted that the two key proponents – Glaser and Strauss - diverged in the early 1990s in their approach to grounded theory; Glaser

came to describe the Straussian version as 'full conceptual description' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:513) rather than grounded theory.

The approach has its roots within a positivist paradigm in an historical research context where qualitative research was considered to be neither sufficiently rigorous nor systematic to contribute to the building of theory. The seminal text, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory; Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) describing grounded theory has transformed qualitative research methods (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007a). The authors, despite their disparate epistemological and methodological backgrounds became united in their determination to close what they described as the 'embarrassing gap' between theory and empirical research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:vii). The key features of their approach are widely recognised as; theoretical sampling, coding, constant comparison and theoretical saturation.

Theoretical sampling refers to the interconnected, recursive process of collecting, coding and analysing data which, in turn, informs the next stage of the research process allowing the theory to emerge over time. Crucially (recalling the tension with case study outlined above) the initial decisions in relation to the research are not based on a preconceived theoretical framework (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Coding is concerned with the systematic manipulation of data which demands progressively focused conceptual ordering of the data into categories. The elements of the theory arise from a comparison of the data: comparing new and existing data. Glaser and Strauss (1967:113-4) describe this process as one of *constant comparison;* the outcome of this process is, eventually, the generation of theory (either substantive or formal):

> *Using the constant comparative method makes probable the achievement of a complex theory that corresponds closely to the data.*

Theoretical saturation refers to the point at which further data collection is no longer necessary because no differences are being revealed in the iterative process of data collection and analysis. Determining such a point requires skill and sensitivity; it also requires a considerable degree of flexibility in terms of time allocated to the research. Many scholars argue that such flexibility is rarely afforded to research projects and this is something I take up in discussing my individual approach to data analysis.

The point at which Glaser and Strauss diverge in their thinking is represented in the publication of *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The heritage of grounded theory is clearly evident: the intermeshing between the collection and analysis of data; the importance of coding through comparison (although the term *constant comparison* is not used); and both progressively focused and systematic analysis leading to the generation of theory. Nevertheless differences had evolved naturally as Strauss continued to teach, research, and discuss methodology with students and scholars. One of the key differences is in the approach to the coding of data which is defined within a 'paradigm model' as opposed to Glaser's 'coding families' (Kelle, 2007).

The coding process is clearly articulated by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as taking three forms: open, axial and selective. In simple terms, open coding is exploratory and involves fragmenting the data and identifying categories. Axial coding involves making links between categories through continued comparison of the data. Selective coding represents the final stage of the analysis involving the integration of concepts around a core category and refinement of existing categories; at which point the generation or emergence of theory is possible:

> *Once concepts are related through statements of relationship into an explanatory theoretical framework, the research findings move beyond conceptual ordering to theory.*

> (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:22)

The analytic process is served through asking important questions about the data and, in common with Glaser and Strauss (1967), the writing of reflective memos is seen to be vital in developing concepts and categories.

The term 'Glaserian and' 'Straussian' were first used by Stern (1994) to distinguish between the two divergent forms of grounded theory. For any novice researcher the differences are complex, making it difficult to form a judgement as to which version of grounded theory to pursue. Kelle (2007:192) identifies that part of the problem is concerned with translating the concept of 'emergence' into tangible methodological rules; furthermore, he argues that there has been a failure:

> *to explicitly conceptualize the role of previous theoretical knowledge in developing grounded categories.*

Glaser's approach appears to require more theoretical openness in the analytical process but also demands a more advanced knowledge of grand and mid-range theories from which to draw throughout the analytic process (Kelle, 2007); thus, the notion that a Glaserian approach is more open-minded is perhaps rather simplistic. Time and space do not permit a fuller examination of the differences between the Glaserian and Straussian approaches and for the purposes of this study I consider Charmaz's contribution to the grounded theory canon of literature before setting out my own considered approach.

Charmaz (2000:510) defines grounded theory as an inductive and systematic approach to the collection and analysis of data which contributes to the construction of middle-range theories. She argues for a constructivist grounded theory offering methods which are, 'flexible, heuristic strategies rather than as formulaic procedures'. The approach posited by Charmaz represents a methodology which has evolved through practice; she recognises and upholds the pragmatic heritage of grounded theory particularly linking back to Strauss. Charmaz differentiates her approach to grounded theory as 'constructivist' - a term which requires examination.

The use of the term 'constructivism' by Charmaz (2000) appears to derive from her wish to distinguish her own version of grounded theory from its objectivist roots, particularly with regard to the Glaserian legacy. She appears to use the term in its paradigmatic sense after Lincoln and Guba (1985) which Schwandt (2000:197) articulates thus:

> *we are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge...constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience...We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, languages and so forth.*

Schwandt continues his exposition but substitutes the term 'constructivism' for 'constructionism' without explanation. This highlights the lack of clarity in the use of these two terms. Bryman (2008) for example, does not recognise the term 'constructivism' and therefore, understandably, has difficulty with Charmaz's use of the word. Irrespective of such opacity over terminology, the emphasis by Charmaz on *construction* rather than *discovery* with respect to grounded theory is perhaps the

key point in relation to her approach and, to this extent, resonates with my own ontological and epistemological stance, previously outlined in Chapter 1. Like Glaser, and Strauss and Corbin before her, Charmaz adopts the key features of grounded theory described above, but advocates theoretical sampling later in the analytical process compared to Strauss and Corbin and suggests a two-step approach to coding: initial and focused. The analytic process proceeds with a commitment to a constant comparison of the data achieved through carefully constructed questions, memo writing and the use, of what Charmaz describes, as 'active' codes. She recognises the difficulty of delimiting theoretical saturation, something which Glaser and Strauss (1967:225) also acknowledge.

Having considered the three key proponents of grounded theory, determining my own analytic approach involved adopting guidelines that would serve the purposes of this study. In doing so, I was confronted with the obvious but important question: when is a variation of grounded theory *not* grounded theory? Bryant and Charmaz (2007b:9) have clearly wrestled with this question and in their introduction to the *Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory* are unperturbed by the variations in methodology associated with grounded theory, acknowledging that 'the maturity of a method will most likely result in the development of a range of related strands'. At the same time, however, they recognise that variations and flexibility expose grounded theory to the misuse or underuse of key strategies. The need for transparency and clear elaboration of strategies adopted - important in all research - is essential in using grounded theory if the approach is to have lasting credibility.

Approach to data analysis in this study

Like Bryant and Charmaz (2007b:11), I adhere to the notion that grounded theory method represents a 'family of methods' and therefore, every researcher's distillation of the key elements are likely to be slightly different (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007b). Nevertheless, in the broadest terms grounded theory, as I understand it, involves:

> *a movement from generating codes that stay close to the data to more selective and abstract ways of conceptualizing the phenomenon of interest.*

> *(Bryman, 2008)*

> *taking comparisons from data and reaching up to construct abstractions and then down to tie these abstractions to data. It means learning about*

specific and the general – and seeing what is new in them – then exploring their links to larger issues or creating larger unrecognized issues in entirety.

(Bryant and Charmaz, 2007b)

In this study, I have adopted guidelines by Urquhart (2007:350-354) since they represent a heuristic set of principles; they are as follows:

- the preliminary literature review as orientation not defining framework
- coding for theory generation as opposed to superficial coding
- use of theoretical memos and diagrams to aid the theory building process
- building the emerging theory and engaging with other theories
- clarity of procedures and chain of evidence

My claim to the use of grounded theory is based on this set of guidelines. I recognise that by some criteria my research would fall short as an authentically grounded theory study; Weiner's criteria would be one such example (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007b:12). Nevertheless, however others may view this study, my primary concern is to demonstrate an authentic and principled approach to data analysis characterised by transparency and clarity (Burns, 2007). In the chapter that follows I will discuss the analytic process in more detail and how it relates to the presentation of the data. In accord with Charmaz (2000:513), my intention is to emphasise the 'applicability and usefulness' of this study according to pragmatist principles reflecting my conceptual framework as described in Chapter 1.

The use of terminology

Mapping the process of analysis in terms of coding to create categories or themes is challenging, not least because the terminology associated with analysis in qualitative research is represented by huge variations (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Clarifying terms of reference for this study was, for me, one of the first steps in the analytic process. Ryan and Bernard (ibid) argue for the simplification in the use of terminology in qualitative analysis - including the grounded theory approach – as a means of making qualitative analytic processes more transparent. They cite the work of Opler (1945), an anthropologist who considered that the identification of themes was a key step towards analysing cultures. He posited three principles in relation to thematic analysis. Firstly, he noted the interrelationship between themes and expressions: themes are manifestations of expressions in data, and expressions are without meaning if themes are not identified. Secondly, he argued

that some expressions of a theme are culturally agreed upon whereas others may be more subtle or idiosyncratic. Thirdly, Opler considered that cultural systems encompass groups of interrelated themes.

Ryan and Bernard (2003) favour the use of the term, not least because it is widely used beyond the confines of academic discourse. Based on their arguments, I adopted use of the terms 'theme' and 'sub-theme' and have thus deliberately avoided the use of alternative terms such as categories, codes or labels, although I have discussed some of the different terminology related to grounded theory under *Grounded theory an overview* earlier in this chapter. Simplifying the terminology, does not simplify the analytic process but I consider that it has addressed the pragmatic notion of usefulness and accessibility and therefore increased the possibilities to make a 'practical difference' (James, 1995) in terms of outcomes and dissemination of this research.

Grounded theory and this case study

I have already touched upon the particular tensions with case study research and the use of grounded theory, especially in relation to theoretical sampling and saturation. In case study research, theoretical sampling involves a degree of planning which Eisenhardt (2002:13) describes as a 'theoretical sampling plan'. Neither Glaser and Strauss (1967) nor Strauss and Corbin's (1998) respective definitions of theoretical sampling would allow for such a plan, since they describe a highly iterative process whereby the collecting, coding and analysing of data is closely intermeshed. Nevertheless, Eisenhardt (2002:7) asserts that selecting cases is a theoretically driven process enabling researchers to 'replicate or extend theory by filling conceptual categories'. I have found this rationale helpful in the context of this case study; sampling was theoretically driven (Miles and Huberman, 1994) within a research design which allowed for the planning of a multiple case study.

In relation to theoretical saturation I again defer to Eisenhardt (2002:26) who argues that 'theoretical saturation often combines with pragmatic considerations such as time and money to dictate when case collection ends.' Glaser and Strauss (1967:225) themselves, discuss some difficulty with the notion of 'saturation' suggesting that 'theory as process can still be developed further'. With this in mind, I cannot make a claim to theoretical saturation in this case study since I collected data according to a particular protocol with a set number of cases in mind (Yin, 2009). Nevertheless, it is hoped that the theoretical underpinnings of this study have served the planning of the case studies well and in this respect the importance of

this study is determined by the high degree of 'fit' between the data and emergent theory.

Case Study and building theory

In considering what this study might contribute in research terms, it has been necessary to clarify what I hoped it might offer as a case study. In this respect, I have drawn closely on the framework offered by Eisenhardt (2002:7) who offers a process of theory building. The significance of her framework is that she synthesises qualitative approaches to process and analysis by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Yin (2009) and Miles and Huberman (1994) in a heuristic manner. Eisenhardt (2002) also emphasises the importance of making explicit links with 'enfolding literature'(ibid: 24) which both agree and conflict with the case study undertaken. As she states:

> *tying the emergent theory to existing literature enhances the internal validity, generalizability and theoretical level of theory building from case study research.*

> (ibid: 26)

Eisenhardt argues that theory building from case study research may take a number of forms: developing concepts or a conceptual framework, offering propositions or creating a mid-range theory are all possible outcomes.

Research Design and Methods

The research design needed to embrace complexity and yet have the capacity to demonstrate clarity and therefore usefulness in the field of literacy as a pragmatic requirement. Cohen et al. (2000:116) speak of 'devising and using appropriate instruments...that catch the complexity of issues,' Within this case study then, I adopted a multi-method approach, focusing primarily on interviews and observations. Appendix 1 shows the three research questions with related and exploratory questions translated into the research methods adopted (Duke and Mallette, 2011).

Interviews

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) conceptualise interviewing in three ways: as a craft, as a knowledge-producing activity and as a social practice. They argue that rules of thumb, rather than objective rules are more meaningful in honing the craft of interviewing. As with any research method, interviewing has well documented

strengths and weaknesses (Bryman, 2008, Cohen et al., 2007, Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In this study, I considered that interviewing would provide the fullest account of the way in which the TAs implement the FFTW3 programme; however I have been conscious of the pitfalls and challenges.

The 'toolkit' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) developed, consisted of the following: careful preparation of interview themes, questions and probes, with the purposes of the study a constant focus; due consideration of the respondents by putting them at ease and by listening with complete focus; acknowledging the responsibility of my position as a researcher in giving appropriate voice to the respondents; and reflecting on the process of data analysis from transcribing to analysing and from verifying to presentation, aware that I am not dealing with a neutral tool but an interactive process (Fontana and Frey, 2000).

The interview schedules were prepared in the summer of 2010. The questions were derived partly from the literature and partly from the findings of the pilot study (Appendix 2 shows the TA schedule, including a rationale for the questions). The interview schedules are shown in Appendices 2 - 6. I conducted semi-structured interviews which were digitally recorded for the sake of accuracy. In the case of the mid- and end-of-programme interviews in Farnsworth, I added prompts for myself as the interviewer that linked back to other data from the previous interview in order to gain greater coherency.

Kvale and Brinkmann, (2009:192) suggest that data from interviewing can be conceived in two ways: as 'nuggets' of treasure to be discovered, or as a journey towards a constructed 'horizon of possible meanings.' Both conceptualisations are useful and are, I suggest, not mutually exclusive. It was my intention that through the interview process I would both uncover and develop fragments of truth which would contribute to the development of theory.

Pragmatic and phronetic principles derived from my conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 1, focused my aims and, after Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:20) it was my intention to produce 'knowledge worth knowing – knowledge that makes a difference to a discipline and those who depend on it.' In this sense, reflexivity and transparency throughout the process were vital to maximise the validity of the interview research data (Fontana and Frey, 2000).

Transcribing

Transcription is necessarily, a painstaking process; there is a considerable responsibility in representing someone's spoken words accurately. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest, the transcription is always an abstraction from the actual time and place of the interview. Beyond the spoken words, hesitations, repetitions, tones of voice and laughter may all contribute to inferred meaning. In my exploratory pilot study, I considered that full transcriptions were neither possible (because of time constraints) nor necessary; I found that by focusing on the themes of the study I was able to extract core elements from the data (Woods, 1986). However, in this study I have made use of full and partial transcriptions.

I have approached the transcribing process with principles informed by grounded theory. Firstly, by transcribing my own data, I have had the opportunity to immerse and familiarise myself with the data in a way that might not be possible on larger-scale research projects. Decisions surrounding full or partial transcriptions have been made according to the focus of the study. The voice of the TA is paramount in this study and as such, I considered that full transcriptions of all interviews with teaching assistants would be necessary (Appendix 7 and 8 give an overview of transcriptions in Farnsworth and Dalton respectively). Similarly, Jill Canning's interview (the author of the programme) was transcribed in full. A transcribing 'key' was modified using the symbols of Gail Jefferson (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998) this key has been used for both full and partial transcriptions (see Appendix 9).

The process of full transcription has followed a similar pattern on each occasion: a preliminary listening to the interview – equivalent to an overview; a detailed transcription of the interview; a third listening to the interview was helpful in ensuring that transcription was consistent in the use of symbols and some sections of unclear speech became comprehensible when heard as a contextualised extract. It was my intention that this systematic approach to the transcription process would ensure a high level of validity and reliability.

Observations

Observations have formed a valuable part of this case study. As Moyles (2007:237) points out, they can contribute significantly to a 'holistic approach' providing a rich data set when combined with interview data. The observations needed to be non-participatory and naturalistic, in order that I could focus on the interaction in each FFTW3 session between the teaching assistant and the child; any form of participation on my part as researcher would have disrupted the working

relationship between them. Having said this, I chose to avoid the pretence of invisibility and chose to greet each child with a smile as she entered the room; similarly, I thanked each one as she returned to class for allowing me to observe the session.

As with my exploratory pilot study, an observation schedule was informed by the recommendations of LeCompte and Preissle (1993:199-200) which provide valuable question prompts for recording field notes. For example: What is taking place? How are activities being described, justified, explained, organised, labelled? How are individual elements of the event connected? In addition, a checklist posited by Spradley (1979) proved helpful in clarifying what might be included in the observations. Spradley (ibid:192) suggests a consideration of *Space, Actors, Activities, Objects, Acts, Events, Time, Goals and Feelings.* An awareness of these domains was considered in devising the schedule (see appendix 10).

The observation schedule was further developed with reference to the schedule that was created for the purposes of the national evaluation of Reading Recovery (Tanner et al., 2010b). The observation schedule was modified to reflect the structure of the FFTW3 lesson (Canning, 2007) requiring two separate schedules for the reading and writing session respectively (see Appendix 10). As with the ECaR (Tanner et al., 2010b) observation schedule, space was created to record, not only the components of each section of the lesson (and therefore the adherence to the fidelity of the programme), but also the interactions between the teaching assistant and the child. I considered that the affective dimensions of the lesson would also be important to record, bearing in mind the importance of engagement in literacy progress (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000). Through the construction of these schedules, I wanted to focus on answering some of the following questions: Is fidelity to the FFTW3 programme being adhered to? Is the TA confident in implementing the programme? Is the child fully engaged in the session?

Observation forms an important part of the continuing professional development in the Reading Recovery intervention; Reading Recovery teachers become accustomed to observing and being observed through a one-way mirrored wall (Clay, 1993) which is set up in RR training venues. In my experience as a teacher, however, I was very aware that teaching assistants hitherto have been subject to far fewer observations than class teachers and certainly Reading Recovery teachers. For this reason, I gave careful consideration to how I presented myself, mindful of the asymmetry of power which potentially exists (Angrosino and Perez, 2000).

Having managed TAs as a special needs' coordinator in a primary school, I am very respectful of the work that TAs perform and I hoped that this would enable me to build positive and constructive relationships minimising the reactive effect of the observations (Cohen et al., 2007). I was careful to explain that I was not evaluating the teaching assistants' performance; rather, I was looking at how they implemented the FFTW3 programme.

Observations are 'inevitably filtered' (Pring, 2000:35) or selective (Moyles, 2007) Similarly, Angrosino and Perez (2000) suggest that observer bias looms large. However, as Wellington (2000:84) after Popper, argues, selectivity is 'a feature of any systematic research, not least scientific research where observation is blatantly theory-laden.' My approach to recording employed a strategy which I developed when involved in the ECaR evaluation (Tanner et al., 2010a) whereby I sought to give the fullest descriptive account of the interactions that took place, sometimes by quoting phrases from either the child or the teaching assistant, whilst at the same time focusing on key elements of the lesson and selectively recording significant activities or interactions. My experience as a practitioner facilitated my ability to interpret certain behaviours demonstrated by the child, such as reticence or task avoidance.

I aimed to follow each observation with an interview as a means of creating the fullest picture of the session: the 'cross-hatching' that I mentioned earlier under, *The strengths of case study research*. I thought that this would give TAs an opportunity to follow up on any particular events in the lesson; equally, I wanted to be able to pursue any queries that would be best addressed immediately after the intervention had taken place; establishing, for example, the reactive effect of my presence. This process was a means of contributing to the validation of data. Fundamentally, I wanted to create what Stenhouse (1979:2) describes as the 'texture of reality'.

I considered it important to keep careful and detailed records of the fieldwork undertaken with transparency throughout the process. I believed that digital or video recordings of the observations would be unduly intrusive for the teaching assistants in the light of my earlier reflections on their relative inexperience in being observed; I therefore sought to analyse observation data as soon as possible after it had been generated.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations should permeate every aspect of a research project; they are important and invariably problematic. In a postmodern era where grand narratives (Lyotard, 1984) in relation to morals and religion have essentially dissolved, the concern around ethics is reflected in a diverse and growing body of literature noted by Christians (2000).

A key question, worthy of consideration, is: if research is never value-free, what values should be upheld? In extrinsic terms, the imperative to create ethical frameworks, guidelines and checklists all serve to provide helpful direction to researchers in conducting principled research. They represent what Cohen et al. (2007:71) describe as a 'consensus of values within a particular group'. Valuable overviews of such frameworks are a useful and necessary starting point (Wellington, 2000, Cohen et al., 2007, Bryman, 2008) in embarking upon research.

Whilst Wellington (2000:57) argues that there is no room for 'moral relativism' in relation to educational research, I consider that absolutist ethics are not possible: any guideline is open to interpretation (Cohen et al., 2007). For this reason, I maintain that there has to be an intrinsic response to the question posed; there has to be a profound sense of personal responsibility and respect which underpins the research, providing intuitive and sensitive responses to situations that inevitably slip between formal guidelines. It has something to do with the 'common good' (Cohen et al., 2007), something to do with 'honesty and openness' (Wellington, 2000) and something to do with an 'ethic of care' (Gilligan, 1982).

Christians (2000:144), for me, articulates the nub of the issue:

> *Given the primacy of relationships, unless we use our freedom to help others flourish, we deny our own well-being.*

Similarly, MacFarlane (2010) speaks of a 'virtue-based' approach to ethics which goes beyond a clichéd response to a set of static principles and requires the researcher to fully and authentically embrace ethics as a way of being, demanding a greater degree of responsibility from each researcher.

Whilst upholding MacFarlane's stance, I maintain that guidelines and frameworks are valuable and necessary and in the context of this particular study I was required to seek ethical approval from my research institution. The University of Nottingham seeks to maintain the highest standards of integrity in accordance with the UK

Research Integrity Office (UKRIO). I completed and submitted an ethics statement (see Appendix 11) to the School of Education and approval was gained in April 2010 in preparation for planned interviews in the early autumn of 2010.

This approval acknowledges an adherence to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines (BERA, 2004) which are underpinned by the principles of respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values and the quality of educational research. There is also a consideration of the various responsibilities – to the participants, the sponsors of the research and the community of educational researchers (BERA, 2004). The ethical approval also incorporates adherence to the requirement of the *Data Protection Act* (1998) with particular consideration to seeking consent for interviews to be digitally recorded and the subsequent storage of data.

Access to schools and therefore teaching assistants and class teachers was sought through a letter sent via the key person with whom I had already secured agreement for the research. In Dalton, the second local authority, I gained access through the author of the FFTW3 programme with whom I had made contact. Seeking the support of gatekeepers was very helpful in the context of this research. The Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders (RRTLs) held established and trusted contacts with a network of Reading Recovery teachers and teaching assistants who could be approached on my behalf.

There were a number of ethical issues that required consideration. Seeking informed consent, for example, is a notion that is problematic. Flewitt (2005) offers the term 'provisional consent' as an alternative, since it is impossible to anticipate all outcomes of a research project and therefore the extent to which the study might impact upon the participants. Provisionality allows for participants to modify or withdraw consent based on new information about the research. I was aware that consent from the author of the FFTW3 programme would be important in conducting the research and this was sought and provided in spring 2010. Additionally, an interview was agreed, for July 2010. Also, I needed to ensure that consent was sought from parents or carers and head teachers to enable observations of FFTW3 interventions (Appendix 12). As a result of this process, no concerns were raised with me either directly or indirectly. Another issue concerned the release of teaching assistants to be interviewed; I anticipated that this might be problematic. To this end I offered teaching time as a form of *quid pro quo* in the event that any school felt unable to release a teaching assistant through timetable pressures. As it turned out,

no schools took up the offer of teaching time and class teachers facilitated the TA interviews by foregoing their class support and similarly, teaching assistants taught the class during the class teacher interview.

I made a point of seeking to liaise directly with teaching assistants via their personal email or through the school office. Before the interviews took place, I checked that TAs had received the research information (Appendix 13) - sent ahead of the planned interview date - and gained their signature on the consent form (Appendix 14) provided, at the first meeting prior to interview. Teaching assistants are not in a position of power within a school setting and I therefore considered that protecting anonymity was necessary. None of the TAs wanted to create her own pseudonym, so I confirmed that I would do this. I was very aware that the early minutes of the interview were vital in creating an atmosphere where the TAs felt comfortable and at ease. It was at such a point that I fully appreciated the significance of the researcher as an integral part of the research process.

I recognised that the observations might potentially be stressful for both teaching assistants and children. Teaching assistants are generally not used to being observed as frequently as teachers (as previously noted), and children who have literacy difficulties can be very self-conscious about reading aloud. During early contact with the teaching assistants, I took the opportunity to reassure them about the process and what I hoped to learn. I wanted them to be clear that the purpose of the observation was not to make judgements about their teaching, rather to note how they were able to implement the FFTW3 programme. It was important to explain my background as a SENCO and why I was interested in the intervention and their role in the implementation of the programme.

Teaching assistants were asked to talk to the children about the observation (phase 2 in Farnsworth) and were able to reassure them that I was interested to see what was involved in the FFTW3 programme – the observation was not a test of the children's ability. In adherence to the BERA (2004) principle concerning respect for the individual, an observation would have been halted at any point, had I sensed that a child or teaching assistant was becoming unduly anxious or distressed by my presence. As I mention under *Observations* in this chapter, the decision to greet the child as he or she entered the room before the observation was a protocol I adopted, particularly since I was aware that the space for the intervention was likely to be small and my presence would be far more conspicuous than would be the case in a classroom environment.

The commitment to report outcomes of the research to the teaching assistants was made clear and opportunities for disseminating the research for different audiences has been considered important. In particular, I had in mind a teaching assistant conference in one local authority, as one possible platform for sharing the findings from my research. Unfortunately in seeking to pursue this opportunity in 2013, I established that the conference no longer takes place and the need to explore other TA training events became a priority.

Having presented a discussion of the methodology and methods which informed this study, I am now in a position to present the findings in Chapter 5. The first stage of the analysis is presented as descriptive, structured case reports. The intention is to present a full picture of each of the six teaching assistants across the two local authorities to better understand their role and to give them a voice which is rarely heard.

Chapter 5: Case reports from six teaching assistants

The case study analysis is presented over the following two chapters. In this chapter I begin by presenting narratives of the six teaching assistants as case reports, identifying their key experiences more broadly in relation to literacy interventions and then more specifically in relation to the FFTW3 programme. In the case of Farnsworth, this details the TAs through the course of their training and implementation. In the case of Dalton the experiences are presented in a contrasting context where FFTW3 had been established for four years.

The process of transcription, though necessarily time-consuming was, I considered, the first step in the analytic process. Transcribing involved listening to the interview data on several occasions and over many days (my approach is described in more detail in Chapter 4 under *Transcribing*). The familiarity with the data that resulted from this process cannot be underestimated and my engagement with the participants was heightened through the transcriptions (Appendix 7 and 8). On first listening to the data in December 2010, I made notes on recurring themes and significant phrases. This enabled me to gain an invaluable overview of the data. This 'holistic approach' is one that Dey (1993) clearly elaborates. He uses the analogy of a jigsaw puzzle to describe the process of analysis which involves interpreting and explaining the data. One of the skills in analysis is recognising how best to take the data apart before creating a new coherent picture. Dey (1993:40) states that:

> *Our data start as a seamless sequence, from which we ourselves must first of all cut out all the bits of the puzzle. We must cut them out in ways which correspond to the separate facets of the social reality we are investigating, but which also allow us to put them together again to produce an overall picture.*

The 'cutting' process in this chapter has involved structuring the data from the interviews as narratives while seeking to present coherently the domains of training, role and communication.

Although the next stage of analysis is presented in Chapter 6, I consider it helpful to highlight the key aspects here in order to represent the process as a whole. The stages beyond this descriptive chapter involved a close reading of the interview data analysing the data several lines at a time. As I did this, I highlighted the text

(preferring to work with paper copies), making comments in the margin of the transcripts and making extensive use of concept mapping to develop and refine my understanding of the themes which emerged. Each concept map was dated and filed chronologically, to track the development of ideas, themes and connections. This was accompanied by reflective notes dated and recorded in my research journal as part of the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000, Urquhart, 2007). I then drew upon guidance from Stake (2006) pertinent to multiple case study analysis; this is shown in figure 5.1.

analyse interview data chunk by chunk from TAs and teachers looking for themes

↓

create a case report for each school

↓

study each case report for the prominence of themes

↓

identify examples from case studies to illustrate themes

↓

discuss findings from the case studies

↓

identify high importance findings

↓

link findings to the the literature

↓

form generalisations

↓

offer propositions

Figure 5.1: showing the process of analysis in multiple case studies

With the recurrence of particular themes each case study was analysed for their relative prominence – this is taken up again in Chapter 6. The nature of the analytic process means that the presentation of the descriptive data in this chapter is already shaped by some of the themes that emerged.

Case reports

For each teaching assistant, I describe her background and context, her role in school, the nature of continuing professional development, the form that communication takes in school and describe her involvement in the FFTW3 programme; in the case of Farnsworth (Fry, Fox, Fell and Foster schools), this was over the three phases – pre-, mid-, and post intervention. In Dalton (Dillingham and Duckworth), where FFTW3 was already established, teaching assistants were interviewed on one occasion.

My aim is to present the first 'picture' (Dey, 1993) of analysis, placing the teaching assistants in the foreground. In order to facilitate familiarity with the case reports, I provide a list of the key individuals for each school in table 5:1 to ensure greater concision and clarity.

Table 5.1: table of characters in case studies

Local Authority	School	TA	Class teacher	RRT (present)	RRTL (FFTW3 trainer)
Farnsworth	Fry	Anna	Jean	yes	Ros and Jo
	Fox	Emily	Stella	yes	
	Fell	Carolyn	Zoe	yes	
	Foster	Theresa	Sandra	yes	
Dalton	Dillingham	Lynn	Kath	yes	Evelyn
	Duckworth	Liz	Amy	Miriam	

Anna (Farnsworth, Fry Primary)

Interview dates: pre-intervention: 10.11.10 mid-intervention: 16.3.11 and post-intervention: 22.6.11

<u>2011</u>

School size: 349

Free School Meals (FSM): 12% (national average 19.2%)

SEN: 3.2% (national average 8%)

Background

Anna recognised that she enjoyed working with children and before becoming a mother herself had attended college to gain the NNEB qualification which she completed over two years. When her own children started nursery school, Anna started helping in school and decided to become a teaching assistant. She worked as a supply teaching assistant for five years and had then worked in Fry school for three years.

Initial Training

In terms of training, Anna had enjoyed the NNEB training which consisted of learning about children's development from birth to eight years old. The course followed a pattern of alternating between a week in college and a week's placement in a nursery and school (alternately). Anna felt that the NNEB qualification focused on the caring and development aspect of children and less on preparing for working with children in a school context. Anna's memory of school preparation for literacy was possibly one module and probably included mathematics too. In any case, her memory of training in developing literacy skills during the course was that it was brief.

Role in school

Anna described her role in school as *'sort of bits of anything really'* [phase 1, page 2, lines 44-45]. She mentioned working with individuals, with withdrawn groups, supporting the class teacher with groups in class and taking the whole class. She considered that she enjoyed every dimension of her role as a teaching assistant and that the main challenge was in wanting to know more in order to help the children. She stated that *'you can never know enough'* [Anna, phase 1, page 2, line 63]

When asked about changes in her role, she described how a change in senior leadership meant that she found herself working more in class supporting groups with the consequence that she was better informed about the teaching and learning context. Anna felt that her relationship with the class teacher was a mutually supportive one and suggested that working more consistently in class meant that *'it's like your class as well...so it gives you more...ownership.'* [Anna, phase 1, page 3, lines 81- 82]. I asked Anna if there was one thing that she would like to change about her role and unequivocally she stated that more time to do the job would be the most significant improvement.

In relation to literacy support specifically, Anna described her involvement in facilitating several interventions including the *Five Minute Box* and Acceleread/Accelerwrite, supporting two literacy groups in class and taking groups for the Early Literacy Strategy (ELS). In addition she had recently completed Aural-Read-Respond-Oral-Write (*Arrow*) training. Implementation of interventions was directed by the teacher. Effectively Anna supported literacy activities either all morning or all afternoon every day. Anna described how she particularly enjoyed working alongside the class teacher in the classroom, working on the same activities and supporting different groups. The particular challenge relating to literacy for Anna was in developing the children's reading skills. Having moved from Year 3 and 4 into KS1 she felt she needed to remember how to move the children along who were struggling. She cited an in-service education training (INSET) event led by the FFTW3 trainer that she had found particularly helpful.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
In relation to continuing professional development Anna mentioned that this was largely through INSET days and some staff meetings which might include outside trainers or teaching assistants sharing their ideas. Anna stated that requesting training was something that she would indicate on her performance management form and if an appropriate course arose then she would be permitted to go. She suggested that a training event would have to be beneficial to school in order to attend. Anna considered that the biggest training need related to children's reading; she felt that children's low levels in reading within the school meant that she was always looking to better support children who were struggling.

Communication within school
Anna had a positive relationship with school colleagues including the class teacher, the special needs' coordinator (SENCO) and the senior leadership team (SLT). In

terms of liaising with the class teacher, Anna stated that this was largely informal and *'sort of, when and where you need to'* [page 6, line 226-227].

Early response to the FFTW3 (phase 2 interview)

Anna was invited to attend the FFTW3 training by the class teacher who was convinced of its value as part of the Every Child a Reader (ECaR) initiative. Anna had no concerns about being trained alongside the class teacher, and in the phase 2 (mid-programme) interview, was extremely positive about the training and the impact that she was already seeing with the children with whom she was working. Anna described the training as giving *'loads and loads of ideas'* [page 1, line 15] she also said that the intervention was more enjoyable than other interventions with an element of flexibility within the structure:

> *it depends on the child you can change it. It's very flexible what you can*
> *do. You can come up with your own stuff to fit in with it which is good.*

> [Anna, phase 2, page 1, lines 30-32]

It also provided an opportunity to integrate previous knowledge and other people's ideas, which Anna saw as a good thing.

Training alongside the class teacher afforded them discussion time during the training, which developed into an ongoing professional dialogue in school, about children's literacy skills and development. The class teacher ensured that Anna was working alongside her during literacy lessons. Anna felt equipped to implement the programme, finding the training folder to be very comprehensive. In addition, the FFTW3 trainer offered support. Anna recognised the responsibility that rested with her:

> *Once I'd had a play with it [*the FFTW3 programme] *I was fine. 'Cause*
> *we knew what we needed to do. It's just getting to know the individual*
> *child and what works with them...and it's taking it from there really.*

> [Anna, phase 2, page 3, line 83-86]

Anna found that very quickly she had had to order higher-banded book sets for children who were making surprisingly rapid progress. She noted that one child had taken ownership of the session by helping to set out resources, and she described another child who had gone from a completely disengaged writer to one who was highly motivated; ironically, his re-engagement with literacy in class meant that he

no longer wished to attend the intervention session, lest he miss out on writing activities.

When asked about how the intervention was impacting on the children in the classroom, Anna commented that they were demonstrating better concentration, greater confidence and a willingness to participate in literacy activities:

> *Huge improvement in all their work – concentration: writing: huge*
> *improvement. Everything [to do] with reading the books - a child who*
> *wouldn't read at all now sits down and will read a whole book.*

[Anna, phase 2, page 4, lines 119-122]

Anna appeared confident and animated in discussing the programme and was clearly enjoying the children's rapid progress. She commented on the tangible support offered by the Reading Recovery (RR) teacher, who used the same resource room in the morning. She would often offer resources and demonstrated a willingness to answer Anna's queries.

The opportunity to pursue an accredited qualification through Edge Hill University (something which was advertised on the first page of the FFTW3 resource folder) had not been taken up, because Anna had had no time to think about it. At the close of the phase 2 interview, Anna asked if I would like to look at her working folder which I was pleased to have the opportunity to do.

Later response to the FFTW3 programme (phase 3 interview)
(June 2011)

Anna was unequivocal in describing the FFTW3 programme as the best intervention that she had ever used. Her commitment and enthusiasm appeared strong in the phase 2 interview and was in no way diminished by the summer in the phase 3 interview which took place towards the end of the programme. This enthusiasm derived from both the rapid progress that the children had made, together with their markedly improved attitudes to reading and writing. Anna described the transformation in Evan:

> *he's a lot more confident now, before, he thought that he couldn't do it*
> *and he knew that he couldn't pick a book up and read it - he knew that*
> *himself – so he didn't try – whereas now he'll try any book, he'll pick one*
> *up and he knows there's words that he can read in that book...*

he's the one who – you know you leave it to the end of the sentence to correct them? – he wants to do it, he wants to sort that out himself and if you're about to say to him, he'll say: 'No, I've got it wrong!' and he'll go back and try and sort it out.

he'll sit and he'll read a book and he'll read a book to his friends

[Anna, phase 3, page 1, lines 19-30]

Anna noted that one of the key positives in relation to implementation was that her time as a TA was being protected to implement the programme. This, she commented, was because the class teacher had championed her key role in the intervention, something which the following transcript extract highlights:

Gill: *Have there been any particular challenges for you with this programme, compared to others? Or is it all positives?!*

Anna: *Mostly positives – yeah. Because it's been set up so I have my afternoon and I do not get pulled from anywhere…*

Gill: *And who protected that time for you?*

Anna: *That was Jean ((the class teacher)). She was like deadly serious. You do not cover class, anything=*

Gill: *=and was that decision – it must have been supported by the senior leadership team?*

Anna: *Oh yeah, yeah, definitely*

Gill: *And that was because Jean had spoken to them?*

Anna: *Yeah, yeah, they ((the FFT trainers)) said the only way for it to work is to do it every day – it's got to be done.*

Gill: *That's very interesting. So how would you summarise this programme then=*

Anna: *I think it's brilliant.*

[Anna, phase 3, page 4, lines 124-141]

The intervention had provoked lots of interest among other TAs in school, having seen the children's rapid progress, and Anna, together with the class teacher, intended sharing some ideas from the FFTW3 with the TAs and additionally, with

parents and carers. Anna was in a position where she knew that the programme would continue into the next school year. They had already purchased a large selection of banded books, and as Anna said, *'it would be silly not to carry it on, because it works and we've got all the stuff.'* [page 5, lines, 173-174].

Anna felt that the key difference with the FFTW3 programme was represented by the class teacher training alongside her in the programme. This meant that the class teacher was aware of the importance of the intervention taking place every day and therefore championed this within school.

In terms of ongoing liaison with the class teacher Anna stated that the discussions about children continued to be brief conversations of five minutes or so, *'whenever'* [page 6, line198] as she put it; however, the joint training had led to mutual understanding which Anna considered to be a huge benefit.

Anna had continued to feel supported by the Reading Recovery teacher (RRT) and said that she had been *'brilliant'* [page 6, line 219]. She had also received support from the Reading Recovery teacher leader (RRTL) who had helped with book ordering. No observations had taken place during the implementation of the FFTW3; Anna felt that this reflected the class teacher's trust in her. She had, however, been invited to observe the RRT:

> *I haven't been observed, but we felt that there's been no need to,*
> *because I felt confident in what I was doing and Jean could see that it*
> *was working and we know we both work well in class doing the same*
> *stuff...Next week I'm going to observe X ((the RR teacher)) you know, in*
> *the afternoon, when they do the thing behind the screen so I'm going to*
> *watch her do that.*

[Anna, phase 3, page 6, lines 230-236]

Emily (Farnsworth, Fox Primary)

Interview dates - pre-intervention: 11.11.10, mid-intervention: 5.4.11; post-intervention; 17.6.11.

2011

School size: 192

FSM: 58.4% (national average 19.2%)

SEN: 9.9% (national average 8%)

Background

Work experience as a teaching assistant had led Emily to decide to become a TA. Fox Primary was where Emily completed all her placements and where she was employed on a supply basis until a position had become available. At the time of the first interview she had been a teaching assistant for one year.

Initial training

Emily trained as a TA part-time whilst also working on a supply basis at Fox school. She qualified after one year with an NVQ level 3. Emily found that being on placement in the school was where she benefited the most:

> *I found getting into placement the biggest benefit of it all... it's all right there in theory but until you're actually doing it, it's just, you don't get it, you don't understand it as much, so when you are actually in school doing the job – it's a lot better...*

> [Emily, phase 1, page 2, lines 39-43]

Emily commented that learning children's developmental milestones, as part of the training course, had been helpful in a school context, making her alert to children's individual needs. Although Emily remembered completing modules on subjects such as literacy, maths and special educational needs; she could recall nothing of the training. She mentioned that she was taught phonics in the school environment and was given *Letters and Sounds* in order to familiarise herself with the resources. Emily felt that supporting literacy with little training was *'very difficult'* [page 2, line 70] and that the initial training should have included more content on teaching and supporting literacy.

Role in school

Emily's role included supporting two children with Autistic Syndrome Disorder (ASD) – one in the morning (during literacy and numeracy) and one in the afternoon (during topic). She also supported a Year 1 guided reading group in literacy and a phonics group in the morning. Having been a qualified TA for only a year, Emily had not seen any changes to her role as a TA. Emily felt that the biggest frustration to her work was where children with behavioural difficulties refused to work. She also commented that there was a constant battle with time.

CPD

Emily stated that she attended all staff meetings and INSET days and saw this as beneficial since, *'what the teacher's need to know, we need to know anyway, so because we support their teaching, so we've got to sort of know if things are changing'*

[Emily, phase 1, page 6, line 225-227]

Attending every staff meeting involved staying on beyond her contractual hours; Emily accepted that this was necessary: *'we just get on with it!'* [page 8, line 272] She felt that approaching any member of the senior leadership team to discuss the possibility of attending identified training events would not be problematic. Emily had not had any formal training in literacy since becoming a TA.

Communication within school

Emily stated that communication in school with teaching colleagues was generally informal, although there were occasions where teachers and teaching assistants might meet more formally after school for half an hour, between 3.15 and 3.45pm; this was during contractual working hours. Emily felt that all staff members were approachable; she mentioned that the SENCO would make herself available on her non-contact day or after teaching hours if necessary.

Emily had no knowledge of the FFTW3 programme or what the training involved; as she said, *'I was given a letter saying this is the training, this is what you're going to do!'* ((She laughs)) [page 8, lines, 29-30]. Despite, the lack of information, Emily was quite happy to attend the training because she was keen to develop her professional skills and teaching strategies. Although happy to train alongside the class teacher, with whom she had a positive working relationship, Emily then qualified this:

to some extent, it's a little bit scary because you think, there, d'you know
what I mean, when you do your group in a class with them they're off
doing their own group and they don't actually look how you teach or how
you do things...and then when you're being trained alongside them and
there's something you don't know...quite tricky, but...yeah, I'm alright
with it.

[Emily, phase 1, page 9, lines, 330-336]

Early response to the FFTW3 (phase 2 interview)

Emily was very enthusiastic about the content of the FFTW3 programme and felt
that FFTW3 had equipped her to implement the training with confidence: *'...to say*
I've only been doing it for three weeks, I am quite confident with it I'm enjoying it, it's
instantly rewarding.' [page 1, line 7-9]. Later in the interview she revealed, however,
that initially the programme was challenging to implement; she gave the example of
judging readability levels correctly with children where a particular book had been
memorised. In this instance, support from the RRT had been very helpful. She also
highlighted the 'running record' (the reading assessment based on miscue analysis)
as a challenging skill to acquire initially.

Emily considered that many of the approaches and strategies to use with children in
developing their reading skills, were particularly helpful; she cited two examples: the
first, where children are encouraged to re-read their own sentence to foster
independence and the second, a multi-sensory technique for developing phonemic
awareness. Emily felt that the programme heightened her awareness of simple
strategies that she could use every day to support children.

Emily was pleased that she and the class teacher had trained together:

[Training together was] [r]eally good, because she then realised how
important this intervention is because she did the training with me. So, if
anything, she was the one pushing for it to start and she was the
one...she supports me a lot more now. Because she knows how
important it is and she's making sure I've got all my resources; I've got
my time and I've got...the children have got everything they need...and
at the levelling and things like that. It was worth it – her coming with me
– just for that support...and I think, if she hadn't have done it, it would
have been like, 'oh well, you just go and do what you've got to do'

[Emily phase 2, page 2, lines 72-82]

Emily considered that in this respect, FFTW3 differed from other interventions in that knowledge and awareness of the programme by the class teacher had resulted in rearrangements to accommodate the implementation of the programme, which resulted in less additional and spontaneous demands on her time as a TA. Such awareness, however, did not extend to the senior leadership team who were still likely to call on Emily at short notice.

Emily considered that the assessment process within the FFTW3 was rather complicated and required considerable explanation to the senior leadership team, for example, when discussing a child's assessment profile. In this respect, the RRT had been helpful in providing an assessment summary sheet which Emily had found useful.

The intervention had impacted on the whole class, according to Emily, since she and the class teacher, were using strategies in the classroom that had been introduced during the training. She gave the example of a Talk for Writing activity, where the children now might be asked to re-order cut up sentences before writing – a strategy which the class teacher would not have previously used.

Emily remarked on the level of progress that she had observed in three weeks. All three children had moved up three book bands in three weeks (equivalent to approximately two National Curriculum sub-levels) - the expected level of progress with Reading Recovery (according to the National Curriculum in place at the time). Emily commented that two of the children had been placed on a level below their instructional level, in order to develop their confidence and reading strategies that would facilitate future independence.

At the time of the phase 2 interview, Emily had not been offered any CPD; however, as mentioned previously, she had received support from the RRT and had found discussions about implementing the programme to be very reassuring. Liaising with the class teacher tended to be daily but informal, although Emily commented that at the end of the week they would usually *'sit down and have a good chat Friday night'* [page 5, lines 209-10].

Later response to the FFTW3 (phase 3 interview)

By phase 3 when the FFTW3 programme was coming to an end, Emily had worked with five children; all, except one, were being discontinued from the programme.

Emily described the progress by most children as 'accelerated' rather than good, since such children had progressed two sub-levels in literacy since the implementation of the programme (such progress might be ordinarily expected over the course of one academic year). Emily was in a position where she was following children back into the classroom to support them in literacy lessons and initially children were not necessarily applying skills learned in the FFTW3 sessions in the classroom. However, Emily had recognised the importance of prompting, reassuring and encouraging the children to apply their knowledge in the classroom context:

> *what I tend to do with them is: 'you know this, you've done this! We do this in an afternoon' and that helps them because <u>then</u> it encourages them to apply it in class and I'm there to encourage them to do that. Whereas a lot of the time you'll find that they'll do what they do in here and they'll go back to class and totally forget about it, but because I'm there that is a <u>big</u> help*

[Emily, phase 3, page 2, lines 50-57]

Emily was very positive about the intervention since she felt that the problem-solving approach facilitated independence serving the children well in the classroom, even if some prompting was needed. Emily stated that the class teacher had been extremely positive about the programme noting huge differences in the children with whom the intervention was used. Unfortunately, this same class teacher had taken up a new position in another school for the summer term and the newly appointed teacher had not been trained in the FFTW3 intervention.

When asked about the particular challenges of the FFTW3, Emily commented that *'getting your head around it is a <u>big</u> thing!'* [page 4, line 115] This was largely because the programme needed to be adapted to the needs of each child so that they were learning individually. The challenges, though significant, had not been insurmountable, largely because she had enjoyed more support in terms of implementation than experienced in using other programmes where she was generally left to her own devices and - *'had the training and got on with it.'* [page 4, lines,136-137] Emily valued the advice that she had received from the RRT and had both observed a RR lesson, and been observed (at Emily's request).

Although the RRT, as literacy coordinator, was a member of the senior leadership team, Emily had received limited support from the SLT as a whole. This manifested itself in the fact that Emily was required to cover classes with no provision for

FFTW3 being made; this, despite the best efforts of the class teacher with whom she had originally trained (who was not a member of the SLT) at the phase 2 (mid-programme) stage. I discuss this further in Chapter 6 under *Farnsworth Phase 3: Role* and *Agency.*

The liaison with the class teacher over the intervention had been sustained through the course of implementation and according to Emily had been greater because they had trained together. The class teacher understood the programme, recognised its importance and planned for it appropriately in terms of mapping out Emily's support role with the class; this required 'dropping' other interventions in order to prioritise FFTW3 and *'give it a fair go'* [page 7, line 266]. Emily made it clear that the class teacher, with whom she participated in the training, had never required her to cover: *'This was a priority in the afternoon she'd never take me back into class for anything she'd go and search for another TA.'* [page 5, lines 189 -191] The current class teacher, having not trained in the programme, was not aware of the importance and need to sustain the intervention on a daily basis.

Emily understood that Reading Recovery was likely to continue for another two years, however, she was uncertain whether FFTW3 would be continuing in the autumn term 2011, despite the significant progress of the children.

Carolyn (Farnsworth, Fell Primary)

Interview dates - pre-intervention: 12.11.10; mid-intervention: 6.5.11; post-intervention: 23.6.11

2011

School size: 535

FSM: 39.5% (national average 19.2%)

SEN: 2.6% (national average 8%)

Background

As a teenager, Carolyn was involved in caring for her younger siblings and it was at this point that she realised that she wanted to work with children. As a consequence, Carolyn chose a number of childcare options at school which eventually led on to the completion of the NNEB qualification. Carolyn had been a TA for approximately eleven to twelve years, working both in a supply capacity and in a private day nursery before taking up her current position in school.

Initial training

Carolyn's training consisted of block placements in schools – both mainstream and special - a nursery setting and a children's hospital ward. Such placements allowed her to build up strong bonds with staff and children. Placements were then followed by time in college – a pattern of training which Carolyn enjoyed, enabling her to put into practice what she had learned. As Carolyn says:

> *It sinks in more when you're learning it from a book and then going and doing it practically. So I really enjoyed the course.*

> [Carolyn, phase 1, page 2, lines 53-56]

At the time that Carolyn trained, there was the opportunity to use the NNEB qualification as a stepping stone into further professional training, to teach or to nurse; Carolyn, however, was content to continue as a TA in school.

In the initial training, there was little time devoted to supporting children's literacy development. As Carolyn reflected on the question she suggested that a greater input on literacy would have contributed to greater confidence in working with children and the terminology associated with literacy lessons.

Role in school

Carolyn worked fifteen hours each week focusing on the support of literacy and numeracy on a daily basis, additionally she was involved in supporting a child on a one to one basis, with communication difficulties. The remainder of her time was taken with hearing children read (those who had not read at home), facilitating a 'booster' phonic session and a half hour 'booster' session with Year 2 children which was flexible, depending upon the teacher's request.

Carolyn particularly enjoyed the diversity of the role and the satisfaction in playing a part in children's learning development:

> *to see this person grow and you know, it's like, well I had a part of that and that's a big satisfaction...they've learned, they're moving on, they're growing up and you've been part of that...you know, I think, that's the most rewarding, that they came in they couldn't read, they're going and they're reading green books and off they go and go through...you know, it's lovely!*

> [Carolyn, phase 1, page 4, lines, 167-174]

When asked about what constituted the biggest challenge, Carolyn suggested that building relationships with unfamiliar children and teachers was difficult. Carolyn considered herself fortunate in working with Zoë, the class teacher for the past two years and felt that they were at a stage where *'we just know what each other's thinking'* [page 5, lines 184-185].

Carolyn considered that the TA role had changed considerably in the time that she had been working, describing it at as *'very academic now'* [page 5, line 194]. The pressures and expectations were greater on the children, so whereas in years past, Carolyn might have taken some children for a cookery session, she was now conscious that the children were expected to participate in, say, a literacy lesson for forty minutes as one part of an intensively planned daily curriculum. She also suggested that the pace of lessons was extremely fast, reflecting the fast pace of society in general. Such pace and intensity extended to the number of interventions implemented which Carolyn articulated and questioned with passion and humour:

> *they want you to implement so many different things if you had either
> less things to implement and just focused on one thing instead of saying
> right: can you do booster phonics, can you do ELS* ((Early Literacy
> Strategy))*, can we do this, can we do that, all in one day instead of
> saying 'right can you just do ELS all week?' you've just got that pressure
> took off I think because they want everything that comes. [When] every
> new idea come[s], we try it out and you just haven't got enough hours in
> the day to do everything plus your ((laughs)) literacy and numeracy and
> you think: where are you best to be? You know? You want to do the
> best, what is the best thing? I'd rather do one thing really well than do
> ten things and think you're half-hearted...maybe some people don't keep
> up!*

> [Carolyn, phase 1, page 7, lines 279-292]

Carolyn commented that the biggest improvement to her role would involve having more time to better support the children, which would be partly addressed if there were less expectation on her to cover the class. Carolyn was expected to teach the class in a supply capacity if the class teacher was unwell. This was something that she was happy to do out of loyalty to the class teacher but was reluctant for such a role to expand.

When asked about frustrations in relation to her role, Carolyn cited communication as problematic. Communication difficulties were present over children entering school as new starters with previous schooling records sometimes not being readily available to ensure a smooth transition.

CPD

Performance management had been introduced in the school for TAs but according to Carolyn did not appear to be embedded practice. School based training was cited as the main source of CPD, usually in the form of INSET days, but also involving the Grade 4 senior TA in cascading information from staff meetings. Carolyn cited the example where additional demands on her time had been made to support the class teacher in marking children's work; however, as a TA, she had not received the same training that the class teachers had received – relying on cascaded information from the senior TA. Carolyn was reliant on Zoë for guidance and reassurance on the new marking initiative as her main source of training and feedback. Carolyn considered that difficulties in finding supply cover for TAs, restricted the options for CPD in school time. Professional development for Carolyn in terms of further qualification did not appeal to Carolyn since qualifying at a Grade 3 level would then result in an expectation of more class cover – a role which Carolyn was reluctant to increase:

> *if you wanted to do Grade 3 or anything but that then [means] going to*
> *more covering classes and being more of a teacher area which is...I*
> *have covered Zoë and I don't mind it [as a] one off, but at the end of the*
> *day it's working with children. I didn't want to get into that. It's being with*
> *these small groups who want 'boostering', to make a difference...at the*
> *end of the day I love what I do and I'd rather stay with what I do!*

> [Carolyn, phase 1, page 10, lines 445-455]

Carolyn was made aware of the FFTW3 training through the class teacher; she had no prior knowledge of what was involved - in common with the class teacher. Nevertheless, she was happy to learn something new for the sake of benefiting the children. As she says:

> *I mean one thing might work with one child and it might not work with*
> *another so if you've got different ideas and things in your head then you*
> *can try all sorts. I think it's good to know lots of things. Because not one*

thing works for another child does it? Everything's different so...try anything.

[Carolyn, phase 1, page 13, lines 575-581]

She was comfortable in training alongside the class teacher detailing the importance of continuity or as Carolyn put it: *'coming from the same page'* [page 13, line 591].

Communication within school

Carolyn stated that her relationship with the class teacher was strong and supportive, having worked together for two years. Zoë communicated school initiatives effectively, such as the marking procedures already discussed. Liaison occurred *'all the time with the class teacher'* [page 12, line 514]. Communication with the SLT, referred to by Carolyn as 'Management' was less strong and largely indirect via the senior TA who, as previously mentioned, attended all staff meetings. Carolyn suggested that she would feel comfortable to raise issues with the SLT via the senior TA, or with the SENCO whom she had got to know through organising a Boccia team.

Early response to the FFTW3 (phase 2 interview)

Fell school's interview data was supplemented with a training diary which Carolyn had been willing to keep. The request to keep a brief log reflecting on training was not part of the original research design, but arose when thinking about the delay between the TA training and the phase 2 interviews. As it turned out, only Carolyn returned a diary. Carolyn's diary was overwhelmingly positive with respect to the training. She noted on several occasions the challenge of learning when to stand back and when to intervene with children. Carolyn was rather daunted by the running record, but noted that it became easier with practice during the training session. She commented on the fast pace of the training but was pleased that ongoing support was offered from the trainer. What was also clear from Carolyn's comments was that she recognised benefits for all children, not simply those who needed literacy support.

Carolyn felt that three full days' training would have been preferable to the six half days which created additional pressure to an already fast-paced course; nevertheless, she described the training as being fast but good. The course allowed for professional reflection, which Carolyn considered was made more possible by the presence of the class teacher; furthermore she could see how the programme

would incorporate her prior professional knowledge. Both she and the class teacher could immediately think of children who might benefit from the programme.

Carolyn had no qualms about training with the class teacher in the phase 1 interview and this was borne out in phase 2. Carolyn considered that more courses should involve joint training with the class teacher for mutual support, confidence and continuity. According to Carolyn, training jointly in the FFTW3 programme, had resulted in changes to classroom practice in literacy lessons.

The positive aspects of the programme involved the highly structured, fast moving, multi-sensory approach which allowed for regular, individualised learning. The particular challenge of the programme for Carolyn revolved around the need to create and respect regular time and space in school. In this respect, Carolyn felt that the class teacher was able to champion her cause for a quiet space to work uninterrupted so that it wasn't simply, as she put it, *'a quiet voice of a TA'* [page 3, lines 119-120].

There had been a delay in initiating the programme through a combination of disruptive circumstances in school. Such disruptions included snow - resulting in a delay to the completion of the FFTW3 training - and severe school flooding leading to closure and the subsequent relocation of all KS1 children to the junior building; this had impacted on space available to work with children on the FFTW3 programme. As if this were not enough, Carolyn had been required to cover - firstly, for a personal care assistant who was working with a child with special educational needs and secondly, for a teacher who had taken maternity leave. Yet another layer of challenge involved one of the selected children for the intervention having extended time off school through illness and the class teacher being absent for several weeks. Carolyn was not confident that the disruptions would diminish until they were installed in the new school building. This delay had impacted on Carolyn's confidence and she admitted to being rather nervous in starting to use the programme. Two children were selected through a discussion between the class teacher and the Reading Recovery teacher. Such nerves were quickly replaced by positivity in seeing the children's response to the intervention, plus the fact that the class teacher, on returning after her absence, had wholeheartedly embraced many of the general principles and strategies of FFTW3 in classroom practice, adding a dimension of continuity which Carolyn had found to be very encouraging; she considered that this had made a significant impact in class: *'We feel like everybody is benefiting in some way through it'* [phase 2, page 7, lines 273-274].

Support had been initially offered by Ros, the FFTW3 trainer; however, the many disruptions previously described, meant that inviting the trainer into school had proved difficult. Carolyn commented that she would appreciate being observed by the trainer when they had settled into the new building. She also noted that the class teacher had not been able to observe her teach FFTW3 as a result of her extended absence; nevertheless, Carolyn had felt very much supported over the implementation of the programme, as she says:

> [T]his is what is good about the course because you've done that course together, you get that bond, you know where you're coming from, you can talk about it and move forward, you feel like you're not holding things back.

[Carolyn, phase 2, page 8, line 333-336]

Carolyn reiterated how she would like to be observed by the FFTW trainer, not only for her own benefit, but partly because she was keen to share her knowledge about the programme with other teaching assistants and to this end was willing to be observed by them.

Later response to the FFTW3 (phase 3 interview)

Carolyn had persevered with the FFTW3 programme despite the numerous and considerable disruptions experienced and previously outlined in phase 2. She had implemented the intervention over five days where possible – on three afternoons and two mornings.

Carolyn described one of the boy's confidence as previously so low that he *'wouldn't look at a piece of paper'* [page 1, line 39]; however, Zoë had shared a piece of writing by this same boy who had written half a page unaided. She commented that both boys' difficulty in literacy had previously impacted on their behaviour, but since involvement in the intervention they were asking for help and accepting support, resulting in a developing confidence and independence. Such independence as facilitated by prompts in class such as: *'Where's our resource on the wall?'* and '*What've we got in our room?'* page 2, lines, 68-9] The link between the intervention and the modifications to classroom practice by the class teacher in response to the FFTW3 training enabled a degree of continuity which Carolyn had also mentioned in the phase 2 interview. The prompts were better informed in class by what had happened within an intervention session and were offered by both the class teacher and Carolyn since there appeared to be a continual dialogue around the children's

aims and progress in the withdrawn sessions. Again, Carolyn highlighted the value in having trained together in the FFTW3 programme:

> *we're on the same sheet...you're doing the same thing you're thinking the same, so it's all focused on that. Whereas when we've done interventions [in the past] you go out, and take a child out and do something and then come back you don't have the time to relate to the teacher to know what it is and obviously if it's not done then in class, you don't always work with that child again throughout the day and ...it just gets forgotten.*

[Carolyn, phase 3, page 3, lines 99-106]

The class teacher, with Carolyn's support had changed her way of working in literacy to incorporate mixed ability groupings. Although daunting at first, they persevered for a month, and began to see distinct benefits such as an increase in peer support and improved behaviour. Such was Carolyn's confidence with the ways in which she felt that the classroom was operating during literacy that she believed that other staff might want to observe how the strategies of FFTW3 were being used in class. Carolyn considered that the degree of liaison between herself and the class teacher was continual and she suggested was more focused on the specific needs of the boys involved in the intervention because of the shared knowledge.

Carolyn's overall assessment of the intervention was that it was: *'Brilliant!...I think everybody should do it!...I think the teacher's had it and TAs as well, it's a good thing that you're doing something together.'* [Carolyn, phase 3, lines 172-178] She liked the holistic nature of the intervention with regard to the attention paid to reading as well as writing.

Reluctantly, Carolyn had no choice but to abandon the programme early because of the imminent move into a new building, together with the fact that she was going to be required to cover a class for a number of weeks. Carolyn was unsure whether the intervention would continue into the next school year. She stated that no one from the SLT had enquired about the intervention, nor asked for feedback. Whilst she understood that the SLT had had many challenges to face, Carolyn's concern was that FFTW3 would be seen as yet another intervention to implement and from which the school would then almost inevitably move on to another programme:

I mean we thought...somebody might have come in to observe how the class is working with the mixed ability to see how well it has, but we've not really so I think that way I've been a bit downhearted really, because it has done well but I'm hoping we've still got a few weeks left they might look at it. I don't know if next year it will [continue] I'm hoping it will because we've got the evidence even in a short space of time...

[Carolyn, phase 3, page 6, lines 226-233]

Theresa (Farnsworth, Foster Primary)

Interview dates – pre-intervention: 15.11.10; mid-intervention: 12.5.11; post-intervention: 8.7.11.

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2011

School size: 354

FSM: 21.1% (national average 19.2%)

SEN: 2% (national average 8%)

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Background

Theresa had known that she wanted to work with children from an early age, but was unclear how. She had completed an NVQ3 and started to work as a nanny twenty years previously. It was only when she had had a child that she started to help out in the school environment as a way of combining family life with her interest in working with children. Initially she helped out on a voluntary basis and then took up a paid position as a TA and had been working in the role for two years. Theresa was unequivocal about her vocation:

I loved every single minute of it so as soon as a position came up, it was like, that's what I want to do. And I do, I enjoy every single day that I do it. It's fantastic.

[Theresa, phase 1, page 1, lines 15 -17]

Initial training

Theresa enjoyed the training and had no difficulties with the course that she could recall. The course followed a pattern of four days on placement and one day in college. Later, this changed, for reasons that Theresa could not recall, to five days on placement and a twilight session in college. Theresa was readily able to make

the necessary connections between the theoretical and the practical. Her perception was that the same course – the NVQ3 - had changed dramatically and become increasingly difficult since her own training, with attendance to such areas as policy documents which was not something she had had to consider.

Theresa commented that the course that she completed was more generalist in terms of preparing an individual to work with children of any age, including babies and infants. It was the fact that Theresa had chosen to do her particular placement in the school environment which enabled her to recognise her desire to work as a teaching assistant in such a context. Theresa was clear that any literacy knowledge or training she had had was what the school had provided, since the qualification she had completed was more focused on the care and development of children rather than teaching.

Role in school

Theresa's role in school was varied. She was currently, but only temporarily supporting a child in the Foundation Stage in the afternoons, who required one to one support. Every morning involved supporting a designated group for a week in each of literacy and numeracy. Theresa mentioned several target children for whom she was responsible and for whom she was expected to demonstrate progress. Theresa was looking forward to the spring term where she would be based entirely with the Year 1 children with whom she felt more naturally drawn to work, than those in Foundation Stage: *'I'm looking forward to January and being back to knowing exactly what I'm doing, on what day and who I'm doing it with.'* [page 3, lines 119-120]

Supporting a particular group over the course of the week in each of literacy and numeracy provided a valuable continuity according to Theresa which impacted on the type of prompts she was able to give the children and what degree of support she was able to provide. Theresa acknowledged that the particular challenges of her role related to the occasions when there was a lack of continuity: occasions when she was required to step in to cover for other staff, for example. As she stated: *'At the moment, it's jumping from here to there and not being able to see the process through'* [page 4, lines 149-50].

Theresa felt that the role had changed in the two years that she had been working as a TA; although she provided the caveat that it depended upon the teacher with

whom she was working – since every teacher worked differently. In her first year as a TA, Theresa felt that she had been rather passive:

> *the first year was, sort of, me sitting and waiting to be told what d'you need me to do; being careful not to step on anybody's toes and waiting...which was probably the wrong thing to do, but I remember not knowing, not daring to ask what should I do next, what should I do next. But I suppose now the more that I've done it, the more I know what comes next and the teacher that I'm with now I've been with for two years so...she just lets me go with whatever...we sort of know what each other's thinking and [the teacher says] 'that's your group now – off you go!' So, I am given more to do.*

[Theresa, phase 1, page 4-5, lines 173-183]

The role of TA for Theresa had gone beyond what she described as the *'tapping somebody on the shoulder'* [page 5, line 191] form of supporting the teacher in behaviour management and was now, she considered, to be *'a lot more involved'* [page 5, line 193]. She suggested that she felt like a teacher rather than simply a helper, although she felt the need to qualify this:

> *obviously I can't say that it's an equal role but it does seem like an equal role with the teacher...she'll go and do the input on the carpet but then after that it's like: 'you go and do it with them – and I'll go and do it with them, so it does feel like an equal role...*

[Theresa, phase 1, page 5, lines 207-211]

Theresa clearly appreciated the professional trust and freedom that she enjoyed within the current partnership with the class teacher and also commented on how satisfying she found it to see children make progress, knowing that she had taken some part in that.

Theresa was involved in covering for the class teacher when necessary and stated that she didn't mind doing this, although inevitably thoughts around the fairness of the situation would arise from time to time especially if the cover required was more frequent; as Theresa noted: *'sometimes you feel a little bit undervalued'* [page 6, lines 241-242]

In reflecting on what would constitute the biggest improvement in her role, Theresa raised the issue of working hours being cut (although she considered herself one of the fortunate ones in losing only three hours per week from her contract) and again reiterated how relieved she would be in January when a more predictable working pattern would be possible again.

Theresa's role also extended to facilitating a phonics group which had run in the previous school year and was due to start again in the New Year using the ELS. Phonics teaching was something she felt confident and comfortable to teach especially with Key Stage 1 children. Theresa felt less confident about how she might support older children in Key Stage 2, partly because of the technical language used which, she felt, challenged her own subject knowledge.

CPD

Theresa felt that the most professional development in literacy was offered on INSET days, but beyond these training days, little had been offered by way of CPD. The RRT based in the school had put her forward for the ELS training as well as the FFTW3 training; in this sense, Theresa considered the teacher to have championed her cause in relation to CPD in a way that had not happened with other staff members. Theresa also suggested that she had not been proactive in asking about whether she could attend particular courses. She cited the reluctance to appoint cover for TA staff as one reason why she felt uncomfortable asking for time to attend courses. She mentioned that with the ELS strategy, apart from one afternoon session, she had felt the need to take the programme home to go through the materials in her own time.

TAs were invited to attend particular staff meetings – especially literacy or numeracy related; however, if they wished to attend other staff meetings this would be in their own time. Theresa felt that staff meeting time was valuable in sharing ideas with the class teacher; she considered that communication was compromised when new initiatives were cascaded down from the class teacher.

Communication within school

Theresa felt that she could approach the SENCO or the SLT if she needed to, although her first port of call would generally be the class teacher. Communication with the class teacher was largely informal unless a situation arose which demanded a more formal meeting. The usual way of keeping up to date involved giving each other feedback after each session, together with discussions over lunch.

When asked about how she was approached in relation to the FFTW3 training, Theresa laughed and said, *'I daren't say!'* [page 12, line 522]; the reason being that she had been asked by the RRT, a matter of days prior to the phase one interview and knew nothing about the training other than that she had been put forward to do it and that the class teacher would also be attending the course. Theresa was happy to participate in the training alongside the class teacher and felt that it represented an *'added bonus'* [page 12, line 547]. Despite the fact that she knew nothing about the training, Theresa was hopeful that she would gain something that would benefit the children.

Early response to the FFTW3 (phase 2 interview)

Theresa found the FFTW3 training very helpful. Some of the approaches were familiar because she had received training in an authority devised programme, based on the FFTW3 model, which she had originally found very interesting. She mentioned that the running records appeared daunting and felt pleased that they had had an opportunity to revisit this through the course of the training. Theresa compared the ELS programme, where she had been given very little training compared to the FFTW3 intervention.

Theresa confirmed that training with Sandra, the class teacher, was very beneficial and in fact acknowledged that she had had more prior knowledge of the approaches, based on her training in the Better Reading Partnership (BRP) than the class teacher. After the training, Theresa found it reassuring that she could query particular points with Sandra, although opportunities to continue such discussion over implementation had become very limited through a lack of time. Nevertheless, Theresa felt that Sandra was well informed as to the progress of the children since she would take the FFTW3 records in to show the class teacher.

Theresa was very positive about the programme. She felt that the pattern and pace to the sessions was beneficial to the children. Theresa particularly liked the writing element to the intervention because it represented a balance to the group work in school on phonics and reading, enabling her to focus on letter formation and sentence construction with individuals separate from literacy lessons.

Theresa suggested that the programme differed to others that she had used in that a stronger continuity between the intervention and the classroom was possible, provided that the TA supported in the class from which the children were accessing the intervention. She gave the example of how she might, with greater assurance,

challenge a child to offer more in a class context, based on her knowledge of the child's progress in the one to one session. Similarly, she might encourage a child to to respond to a question from the teacher in class, confident that he would be able to respond. Theresa was unsure how other children were applying their developing skills from the intervention in classes where she was not supporting, since she had no time to follow this up; however, she had received some positive feedback informally.

Theresa found having the RRT in school to be a huge benefit and approached her, in the first instance, as a matter of course if she had any queries. She recognised that she may have consulted her FFTW3 resource file more frequently if the RRT had not been so readily accessible. Observations, at this stage, had not been carried out by either the RRT or the class teacher; as Theresa pointed out, this was largely because covering the class would be very difficult to arrange –Theresa, herself, would normally be the one to provide cover. However, Theresa was aware that the RRT could overhear her FFTW3 sessions when working from the Reading Recovery room and was happy for her to offer comments or suggestions.

Such was Theresa's determination to develop her skills that she conducted a pilot programme with four children who were above the target ability range for FFTW3. All four children made accelerated progress in the four weeks, giving Theresa confidence to use the programme with less able children. The selection of children was given a great deal of thought and included some consideration of school attendance and reflection on those who might respond most positively to the one to one sessions. Parents were approached at the school gates and appeared to be very positive about their children receiving one to one support. Theresa had offered parents the opportunity to observe an FFTW3 session, although that offer had not been taken up.

Time was given over to the FFTW3 sessions each afternoon and this worked well in terms of Theresa supporting classroom literacy and numeracy. Theresa was relieved that she was again working with Year 1 children and had returned to more familiar routines. As she said: *'I know exactly what I'm doing and what day I'm doing it and where I am, whereas before I'd be coming in and it was like, 'what am I doing?'*' [Theresa, phase 2, page 7, lines 286-288].

The intervention had been running for five weeks at the time of the second phase interview with the pilot running for four weeks prior to that in January 2011. Theresa had some concern that attendance issues might impact on children's successful

completion of the programme, even though they had taken this into account when selecting children for the intervention.

Theresa attributed her confidence in implementing the FFTW3 programme to the support that she felt was readily available from the RRT and class teacher: *'that's probably why I feel so confident about it because I know there's somebody just there to ask them 'am I doing it OK'* [page 9, lines 377-379].

Theresa felt that the intervention complemented the phonics programme used in school and provided something more for those children who were particularly struggling:

> *I would just sell it [to other TAs] as something that's fantastic for the kids because I really do think it's...if it was my child that was struggling a little bit and she'd got this opportunity to do this...you'd steal it with both hands really...it's reading; it's writing, listening to the different sounds, understanding about print, which is something, to be fair, I'd never thought about before.*

> [Theresa, phase 2, page 10, lines, 417-423]

Despite Theresa's confidence in the implementation of the programme and the progress that she had already witnessed, she had no confidence that the intervention would continue in the autumn because of job uncertainty.

Later response to the FFTW3 (phase 3 interview)

Theresa was ready to complete an end of year assessment on the three children who participated in the FFTW3 programme at the time of the phase 3 interview in July 2011. Even without completing the assessment, Theresa was confident that one child had made accelerated progress, one had made good progress and the child whose progress was less certain had nevertheless increased in confidence having previously been very reserved and withdrawn. Only approximately sixty sessions had been possible out of the maximum of 100 sessions (over twenty weeks). Theresa considered that two out of the three children applied their learning in the classroom. One of the class teachers, who Theresa did not work with in class, commented that the child was writing independently in class and using finger spaces which represented a huge step in progress. The child who Theresa did support in class had developed the ability to work independently and was able to read back what he had written; she felt that he had progressed exceptionally well.

Theresa commented on the nature of the intervention being one to one. She felt that this benefited the children and enabled her to get to know the individuals better. Theresa also noted how valuable the reading time proved to be:

> *when they're reading in the book bus (in class) for five minutes and it's like 'quick, quick, next child' because they've got to see through so many children so when they can actually sit and read for ten minutes a book from beginning to end and understand it because usually it's a page a week - nobody can read a page a week and understand the story!*

[Theresa, phase 3, page 3, lines 97-103]

Theresa's time had been protected to implement the programme: *'all afternoon, every afternoon'* [page 3, line 119]. She considered that there was a respect for her working space, although she had particularly enjoyed working in the Reading Recovery room when that had been available.

The RRT had continued to be available for guidance, and had responded to Theresa's request to be observed. Such support from the RRT meant that Theresa had had less need to discuss queries with the class teacher. Nevertheless liaison with and support from Sandra had continued throughout the intervention with Theresa maintaining that training together had increased the amount of liaison (though still largely informal) and degree of support:

> *She understands what I'm supposed to be doing, whereas there's a lot of these interventions that are put into place that don't involve the class teacher and you can go 'Oooh, such and such has done that!' because they've not got a clue what you're doing. So at least she knows what I'm supposed to be teaching these children...*

[Theresa, phase 3, page 4, lines 143-148]

Theresa did not feel that support had been forthcoming from the SLT. Despite the fact that one member of the team came over to the building (from another site) regularly, there had been no questions directed to Theresa as to how she felt the intervention was progressing. Nevertheless, the programme was to continue in September, suggesting implicit support for the intervention, bearing in mind that the status of the intervention (and Theresa's job) had been unclear at the time of the

phase 2 interview. As Theresa acknowledged, the SLT would have seen all of the tracking documents and recognised the good progress that children had made.

Lynn (Dalton, Dillingham Primary)

Interview date: 26.5.11

2011

School size: 235

FSM: 59.1% (national average 19.2%)

SEN: 19.6% (national average 8%)

Background

Lynn started going into nursery on a voluntary basis when her second child started school. Alongside the voluntary work, Lynn also participated in maths and literacy through a family learning centre which led on to completing an NVQ level 2 teaching assistant qualification. The NVQ3 qualification was completed whilst Lynn was working in school and she was released for one day each week to continue the course which she had already started before the job opportunity arose.

At the time of the phase 1 interview, Lynn had been working as a TA for approximately seven years, the last three of which had been working with year 2; she had therefore started to feel that she was skilled in working with this particular age group. Most recently she had been in the process of working towards her Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) status and was awaiting the outcome of the assessment at the time of the interview.

Initial training

Lynn spoke very positively about the NVQ3 training, describing it as covering all aspects of working with children including literacy skills and preparing lesson plans. She mentioned that there was lots of report writing and cross referencing involved. Lynn considered that completing the course represented the gateway to the HLTA, not simply as a requirement but in terms of equipping her with the confidence to eventually pursue the higher qualification. Lynn encouraged other TAs to access the training because it had had such a significant impact on her own confidence. The NVQ3 course, according to Lynn, had a large literacy-based content although they also covered maths, science and other curriculum areas. This focus on developing literacy skills to better support children was also continued within the school

environment with access to training in Wave 3 programmes such as the Better Reading Partnership*.*

Role in school

Lynn's role in school was varied and involved considerable levels of responsibility; she was however based in the same class '*all day, every day'* [page 12, line 527]. Lynn led a guided reading group in the morning followed by supporting literacy and numeracy in class working with groups that had been previously arranged and discussed with the class teacher. There were occasions where she would be required to help calm and support a child with behaviour difficulties with whom she had built up a positive relationship.

Lynn's role extended to conducting reading assessments on a termly basis using information from running records to inform whether children would be moved between reading groups. Lynn was also involved in facilitating a spelling test which took place in June. Covering the class regularly, with the support of another TA was the norm for Lynn and something which she welcomed since she felt it provided better continuity for the children.

Lynn described her involvement in supporting SATs preparation alongside the supply teacher when the class teacher was absent:

> *Recently, two weeks ago we've just done the year 2 SATs which I was highly involved with because a lot of literacy was based on that...unfortunately the teacher was ill at that time...and it was a long process, so we had another teacher within school came into the class, so I updated her on what we should be teaching ready for them to get ready for the SATS. So I helped plan the lessons within that so that the children would be able to do the SATS fluently and to the best of their ability really. So I do, when I'm talking to you I'm thinking...I do a lot!*

[Lynn, page 5, lines 220-231]

Immediately after lunch Lynn would implement the FFTW3 intervention. She felt that group intervention after lunch would not work, but a one to one intervention was possible. This was timetabled for three afternoons each week.

After school, once a week, Lynn, together with another TA facilitated a family cookery club which she described as being as much about literacy as cooking:

*We do that (cookery club) every Thursday night with parents and we
choose the parents and children more who need that support because
you know the children that get that support at home, you know the
children you don't, so we sort of lead it that way and say, 'would you like
to come to a cooking club – we're starting a cooking club – with your
children. Would you like to attend?' And the response has been
fantastic. And the children are reading the recipe as well as the parents,
because obviously the parents sometime have difficulties within reading
and there is one parent who did find reading difficult. I just sat with them
and read it, but asked the child to read it.' Right, come on, you know
what that says!'*

[Lynn, page 7, lines 296-308]

The selection of the families was carefully thought through and staff tried to invite families with two or more siblings, so that the club represented family involvement in reading and cooking recipes.

CPD

Lynn spoke very highly of the head teacher who wanted all the TAs to be highly skilled and, as a result, she felt that CPD was very strong. There was every opportunity to attend training courses, sometimes as a group and sometimes individually, with the expectation that the training would be shared with the rest of the TA team during an INSET session. Such support meant that Lynn considered that all TAs in school were highly skilled and willing to participate in training. Lynn had been encouraged to take part in the HLTA training by the class teacher with whom she had a good relationship.

Lynn attended every staff meeting although she was not required to do so. TAs were paid to attend a set number of meetings – particularly focus meetings based on literacy or numeracy. Lynn suggested that the head teacher made it clear that they were welcome to attend any additional staff meetings.

Communication within school

Positive and supportive relationships existed in school according to Lynn which appeared to be based on mutual professional respect and trust. Apart from the focus staff meetings, TAs also attended staff briefings, which took place three mornings each week. The head teacher was readily available if needed and Lynn described an ongoing dialogue with the class teacher based on a close working

relationship. The positive relationships were facilitated by very effective communication between staff. Lynn gave a recent example of such communication when she had been forced to miss a team meeting:

> *I wasn't feeling very well yesterday. I didn't stay for the team meeting. This morning I got fed back [to] straight away, as to what went on. I haven't had to go and chase them and say 'hey, what happened or...I didn't know about that'. They come straight to you and feedback straight away what you've actually missed.*

[Lynn, page 11, lines, 504-509]

Lynn considered that her relationship with the RR teacher was very good and again, she exemplified this. Lynn had not run an FFTW3 programme in the previous year and in restarting the intervention, approached the RR teacher to request that she observe a session to refresh her skills. This request was greeted very positively and resulted in Lynn observing two Reading Recovery lessons. Lynn had also been observed by the RR teacher at her own request when participating in the HLTA training. This Lynn found very reassuring, especially if other TAs were then going to observe her using the FFTW3 programme. Lynn felt that she was '*very, very lucky*' [page13, lines 586-587].

Lynn was very comfortable and confident in her relationship with Kath, the class teacher with whom she had worked for four years. The relationship appeared to be one of mutual professional support. This close and trusting professional relationship had led to concern about anticipated changes in the autumn of 2011:

> *I'm hoping the teacher who I do work with will allow me to show my skills and my experience of what I've been taught and gained within Key Stage 1...I mean, the thing is, the teacher I have, is...well I've worked with her for four years. She knows what I'm like. I've learned a lot from her, I find her...she's encouraged me to do the HLTA and all that sort of thing and...all the staff are lovely they are...I just...I'm a bit apprehensive, I think of when I go into the next class as if to say...you're only a TA...and I don't think we will have that because our TAs are highly valued and highly skilled...but I don't know how they are in there ((Key Stage 2)).*

[Lynn, page 8, lines 345-361]

Despite a clear sense of Lynn's respected role within the school there was still a lurking anxiety about the fragility of her status which was, to some extent, dependent upon the class teacher in Key Stage 2, with whom she would be working. Overall, Lynn felt that communication was excellent.

Lynn remembered that she became aware of the FFTW3 programme through a leaflet that came into school. At the time, Lynn was working in KS2 and had already participated in the KS2 equivalent to FFTW3 called Write Away. Lynn put herself forward for the training with the expectation that she would be working in Key Stage 1 in the next academic year. Her request was accepted.

Response to the FFTW3

Lynn found the training to be very good. The course involved lots of 'hands on' experience, with an introduction to many resources and ideas to use with children at whatever level was appropriate for their need. Lynn mentioned the value in observing Reading Recovery lessons behind the screen, which allowed her to see how the various approaches and ideas could be brought together into one lesson; she realised from the observations that you would not use all ideas or resources with a child in every lesson. Lynn appreciated attending with the class teacher since their shared knowledge of the children meant that they could start forward planning in terms of selection of children and timetabling. Lynn was keen to start the intervention straight away because, '*it's in my head. We can't leave it weeks'* [page 15, lines 681-682]. Also, both she and the class teacher were equally enthusiastic to start the intervention.

Lynn particularly valued the link between reading and writing in the FFTW3 programme because it made for meaningful connections in the children's minds. This opinion was shared by other TAs in school. The challenge for Lynn related to the time constraints. She felt that if she kept easily to time, for example, it might reflect an inappropriate book choice (i.e. too easy and therefore quick to read) so keeping to time was always difficult.

Lynn was fairly confident that she would be using the programme in September with both Year 3 children, with whom she would be based, and possibly a Year1/2 class. Lynn said that she would be speaking to the teacher to *'tell them how brilliant it's working'* [page 16, lines 752-753]. She liked the fact that FFTW3 could be used with children who had been discontinued from Reading Recovery as a way of

maintaining some degree of support. FFTW3 was the only Wave 3 intervention that Lynn was involved with in literacy and was happy for this to continue.

Lynn suggested that the relationship with the class teacher and the RR teacher facilitated the implementation of the intervention through discussion about individual children. Lynn gave the example of an ethical dilemma where a child (whom I observed in the FFTW3 session) was not making discernible progress. Both Lynn, the RR teacher and the class teacher recognised that the child had other needs that required further assessment; nevertheless, they decided on balance that the child concerned should continue with the intervention in the hope of, at least, maintaining the literacy skills and strategies that she had already acquired.

Liz (Dalton, Duckworth Primary)

Interview date: 29.6.14

<u>2011</u>

School size 241

FSM 26.2% (national average 19.2%)

SEN 17.4% (national average 8%)

Background

Liz became a TA by 'default', having worked with adults with a learning disability for many years. A change in her husband's work circumstances meant that Liz had to give up her position and started helping in her children's school. The head teacher encouraged Liz to train as a TA which she felt happy to do.

Initial training

Liz started the training in 2002 and gained a qualification as a Specialist Teaching Assistant (STA) level 3. The course involved twenty hours in school and one day a week at college. The placement also involved a swap into another school to broaden the work experience. Initially, Liz found the return to study very hard, but she benefited from the help and support of tutors and started to increasingly enjoy the training. The course involved training in the Wave 3 Better Reading Partnership, which Liz considered to be highly valuable because of the similarities with the Fischer Family Trust programme. Liz commented that the BRP training gave her a greater critical awareness of books and literacy development. She cited the

example of learning to understand the value of pictures and in turn encouraging children to develop their visual literacy skills.

Role in school

Liz was based in Year 4 supporting mainly in literacy and maths, with some ICT. She came out of class to implement the FFTW3 programme for four mornings a week. In addition, she facilitated the school council meeting with year 6 pupils and *'anything else a TA is supposed to do'* [page 2, lines 85-86]. Liz was involved in no other interventions within school. Liz enjoyed her role as a TA, finding it rewarding and satisfying. She cited the biggest frustration as *'getting things dropped on you.'* (page 3, line 111):

> *When you set off to do your Wave 3 and you've got your hour and ten minutes in a morning – that you've set in your brain and then for some reason, the teacher that you work with is off or there's a child come into school with a problem and something else happens and you get taken away from it and you think, 'no, I want to go and do that' so that's frustrating...it doesn't happen every day. It doesn't happen every week but it is frustrating and thinking 'please just don't ask me again' ((both laugh))*

[Liz, page 3-4, lines 112-129]

Liz considered that in the nine years that she had been a TA her role had changed from *classroom* assistant to *teaching* assistant with the associated demands, workload and responsibilities. Liz compared demands on her time when she first started as a TA to her current role stating that, *'When I first started there could be some times in the day when you'd think, 'Oh I wish I had something to do.' Now you think, 'I wish I had five minutes!'* [page 4, lines 144-146].

Liz commented that one of the biggest improvements to her role would be a quiet, uninterrupted place to work, similar to the RR teacher. The resource room where the FFTW3 programme was implemented was noisy on all sides with the potential for children to be distracted; nevertheless, it was still preferable to sitting in a corridor where other interventions were required to take place in school.

CPD

The TAs, including Liz, had received in-house literacy training and were also able to attend external courses - funding permitting. Such a course might be suggested by

a teacher, or TAs themselves could request attendance at a particular course. Liz noted that you could, of course, attend courses in your own time too. TAs were only required to attend particular staff meetings for which they were not remunerated. Liz mentioned that because TAs had varying contractual hours this led to an inequity in the proportion of time that some were giving up compared to others, during staff meeting or twilight training sessions. Liz claimed that there was an acceptance of this example of inequity: *'[it's] just the type of job that you're in and you just have to take it and carry on with it'* [Liz, page 6, lines 251-252]. Liz also commented that missing out on training was not desirable because missing training was likely to impact on the children; she also noted that schools *'play on that sometimes - but that's in every school'* ((laughs)) [page 6, lines, 254-255]. Liz maintained that the head teacher was very understanding, if time off was needed during the school day and this, for Liz, balanced out the inequity over twilight training: '*you get your time back one way or the other'* [Liz, page 7, lines 261-262].

Liz suggested that she was fortunate in having Planning, Preparation and Assessment time (PPA) time for one afternoon each week during schools hours; this represented an acknowledgement of her additional responsibilities which included facilitating the school council and updating the FFTW3 records.

Communication within school

Communication in school was largely informal; Liz would liaise with class teachers at break times or after school. Liz considered that they were very fortunate in that there was a TA in every room which meant that if she needed to speak to a teacher urgently, her TA colleague would cover the class for the brief time required. Liz had a very good working relationship with Amy, the class teacher with whom she trained in the FFTW3 and with Miriam, the Reading Recovery teacher.

Response to the FFTW3

Liz had been put forward by a class teacher to participate in the FFTW3 training whilst working in Year 2; funding had been available and Amy, another KS1 class teacher, was happy to participate in the training.

Liz spoke very positively about the FFTW3 training stating that it was *'very good'* [page 9, line 348] and well thought out; she also commented on the 'calmness' of the training and the fact that there was sufficient time to ask questions and opportunities to revisit and recap key information:

I just like the way it was delivered. It was calm and it was gentle and…some training you go on and you think, 'it's lunchtime and I haven't understood a word you've said' because you've gone so fast through everything. This was really gentle.

[Liz, page 9, lines 364-369]

Liz and Amy were equally enthusiastic to start using the programme. Liz considered that the joint training strengthened their professional relationship.

The programme was implemented with three children, four times each week; Liz commented however, that there were many more children who would benefit from the intervention. Liz was no longer based in Year 1 which meant that she had to make time to liaise with both Amy and the other Year 1 teacher.

Liz liked the one to one nature of the intervention and the fact that a discrete space had been set aside in school to implement the programme; this differed from other interventions, as previously mentioned, which often took place in corridors outside classrooms. The programme was used in school as an additional layer of Wave 3 support alongside Reading Recovery and the Better Reading Partnership.

Liz considered the biggest challenge was in managing the timing of the session. Liz used a timer, but found that a fifteen minute session was too pressured and had therefore adjusted the session to last twenty minutes. As a result, the session was calmer and less rushed.

Following the training, Evelyn the FFTW3 trainer had visited school on several occasions; Liz noted the constructive nature of the support offered:

And it was very nice how they offer you help; it doesn't make you feel small and incompetent or inadequate, it's really nice how they do it.

[Liz, page 11, lines 444-447]

Evelyn, the FFTW3 trainer had continued to make herself available and would offer hints and advice, particularly in relation to a child whose literacy ability was very low. Liz considered that Amy, the class teacher with whom she had trained, had been the greatest source of ongoing support, but she also commented that Miriam, the RR teacher was also helpful and supportive.

Liz felt that the Year 1 teacher, who had not trained in the FFTW3, whilst being supportive, did not have the same sense of the programme's importance and potential significance. When Liz first implemented the programme, she had followed the children back into their Year 1 class and was aware that some of the children were starting to apply their learning to class literacy activities. In working in Year 4 (as Liz was at the time of the interview) Liz did not have the opportunity to follow the children back into class and therefore had to make a more deliberate effort to liaise over children's progress with the respective class teachers. Liz had been greatly encouraged in recognising the sustained progress of the children in Year 4 who had been recipients of the FFTW3 programme when in Year 1; Liz was pleased by their literacy skills, which appeared to be at least two sub-levels above children of a similar ability who had not received the intervention.

Case Reports – key points

In this chapter I have foregrounded the voice of the teaching assistant considering the domains of role, training and communication. Each TA's context is unique, yet there are common patterns which can be identified from the case reports:

- All teaching assistants have diverse and sometimes unpredictable roles.
- All TAs have positive, professional relationships with class teachers but the extent to which they have felt valued by the Senior Leadership Team appears to vary considerably.
- All TAs demonstrated a significant commitment to the support of children with literacy difficulties.
- The joint training of the TA and the class teacher was mutually valued in all schools.
- The implementation of the FFTW3 appeared to facilitate greater continuity of support for children
- All TAs applied themselves to implementing the FFTW3 programme without reservation.
- TAs in Farnworth felt ill-equipped from their initial TA training to support literacy.
- TAs in Dalton considered themselves to be better equipped from their initial training to support literacy, partly because they had received training in the Better Reading Partnership programme.
- Most TAs were included in staff meeting training, particularly if the meeting focused upon literacy or maths.

- CPD was highly variable between schools in terms of actual or perceived accessibility to training.
- All TAs reported that communication was good – if rushed - with the class teacher.
- Communication was variable between the SLT and the teaching assistants in each school – ranging from very good to very limited.

These patterns across the domains are explored in more detail in the chapter that follows, where I frame the analysis along a continuum of fragmentation and integration before discussing the prominence of three themes which emerged in relation to this continuum, namely: agency, affiliation and sustainability.

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Chapter 6: Cross Case Analysis - key themes and their implications for improving and sustaining good practice

This chapter represents the second layer of data analysis. Having presented descriptive and narrative case reports focusing on the experiences and contexts of the teaching assistants, I now progressively compare the data, drawing upon additional empirical data that corroborate or contrast with the data description presented in Chapter 5. In part one of this chapter I compare and contrast data from teaching assistants; in part two the analysis is presented thematically and includes data from class teachers, Reading Recovery teachers (RRTs) or FFTW3 trainers and the author of the FFTW3 programme, Jill Canning. It is hoped that such a constant comparison of data, informed by a grounded theory approach will offer the most complete picture of the role of teaching assistants in implementing interventions.

The process of analysis and the prominence of themes.

In the interests of transparency as discussed in Chapter 4, it is important to explicate the process by which the themes were identified. In the previous chapter, the approach towards analysis and the use of memos in the form of a research journal was outlined. I also discussed the grounded theory approaches that I have drawn upon (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, Charmaz, 2000), the criteria as posited by Urquhardt (2007) and the guidance drawn from Stake (2006) concerned with multi-case study analysis (see Chapter 5, figure 5.1) This process was developed into a progressive comparison of data.

From the empirical data presented in the case reports in Chapter 5, the diversity and flexibility of the teaching assistant's role, access to training and structures of communication were unsurprising given the range of six schools and two local authorities. Such diversity was largely accepted by the teaching assistants as part of the job and in some respects, welcomed; however, in some cases it was presented as a barrier to workable and effective intervention practices with children.

In preparing the case reports for Chapter 5, it was evident that in each domain (training, communication and role) there was evidence of, what I shall argue to be, a fragmentation or integration of the teaching assistants' practice. I am retaining the domains in the first part of this chapter, but develop the analysis by exploring them along a continuum from fragmentation to integration – something I discuss below. At the point where I compare the two authorities in the context of FFTW3 (part two of

this chapter), I introduce the themes of agency, affiliation and sustainability; these themes are examined across the domains (see figure 6.1).

In part one of this chapter, I compare the data from Farnsworth chronologically across the three phases to reveal patterns of fragmentation and integration. I briefly compare the data between the two schools in Dalton (where FFTW3 was embedded) before developing the analysis thematically in part two. At this stage, I have drawn upon other data sources such as the observations and interviews with other professionals where I consider that further comparison gives good evidence to the prominence of themes (Stake, 2006).
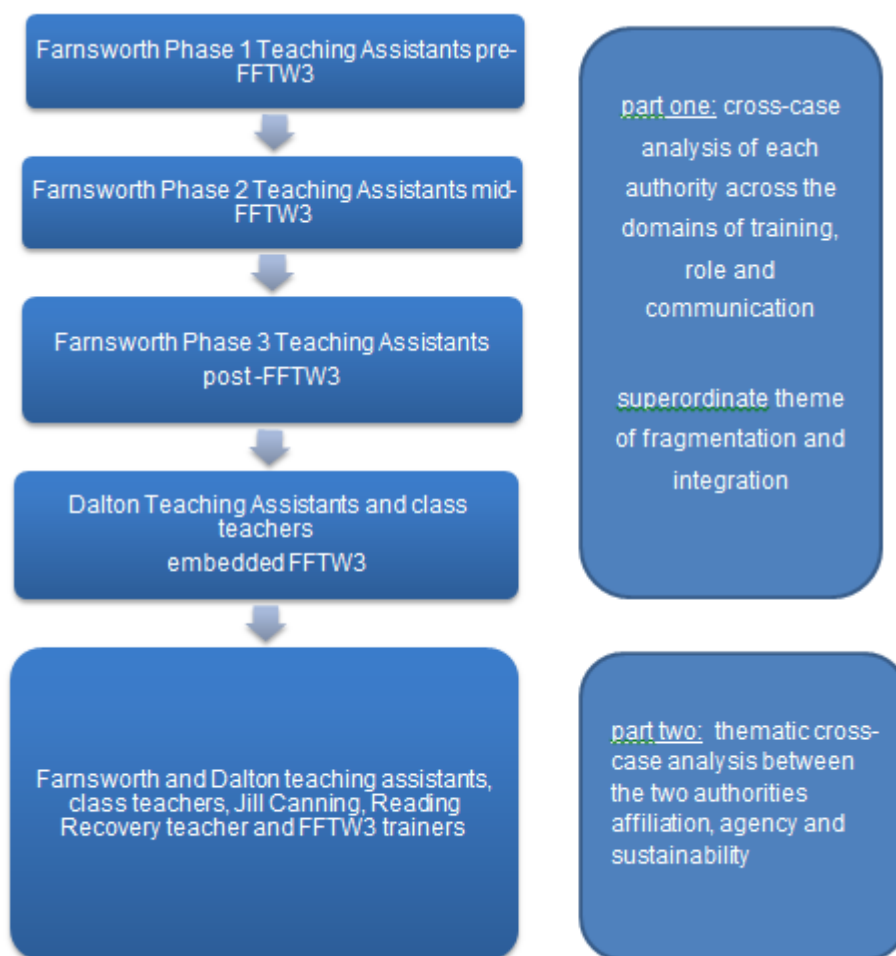
Figure 6.1: the progressive comparison of data

The comparison with Dalton allows for a different perspective (the 'cross-hatching' I describe in Chapter 4, *The strengths of case study research*) where FFTW3 has been well established. Different and complex pictures emerge in each school and between authorities; nevertheless towards the end of this chapter under *Summary*, I have sought to identify the clear patterns and the common trends distilled through the analysis in preparation for the broader discussion in Chapter 7.

I use the term 'fragmentation' to describe diversity where there is evidence that the teaching assistant's effectiveness in working with children is compromised. I use the term 'integration' for those cases where there is evidence that the teaching assistant's role, though diverse, demonstrates integration in that the 'component elements [of the role, training and communication] combine harmoniously'(Soanes and Stevenson, 2003). The overarching theme of integration is discussed on different levels: the integration of provision between the teacher and the teaching assistant and the integration of the TA within the school community as a whole. Additionally, integration is explored in relation to the transformative potential of the FFTW3 programme. The indicators of integration and fragmentation as I characterise them are shown in table 6.1.

Table 6.1: indicators of integration and fragmentation

Indicators of integration	Indicators of fragmentation
TA has access to good quality CPD on an ongoing basis	TA feels unable to access training for CPD
TA perceives that support is available if needed	TA perceives that support is minimal or unavailable
TA has good communication with the class teacher and is linked to a particular member of staff	TA has little communication with the class teacher
TA has good communication with the SLT	TA has little or no communication with the SLT
TA perceives that her voice is heard.	TA perceives that she has no voice.
TA has clear timetable and is largely able to keep to it.	TA has timetable but this is frequently abandoned.
TA perceives that she is valued and respected.	TA perceives that she is not valued and respected.
TA feels 'in control' despite flexibility of role	TA feels out of control within the flexibility of the role.

The point of unique interest in this multi-case study, as outlined previously, is the nature of transformations evidenced in connection with the implementation of FFTW3 (in the case of the Farnsworth schools) or ongoing use of FFTW3 (in the case of Dalton). As discussed in Chapter 4, *Challenges with case study research*, I have argued that the introduction of FFTW3 represents a context whereby the role of each TA in implementing the programme, can be presented as a 'critical' case study according to Flyvbjerg's typology (2006:230) whereby 'If this is valid (not valid) for this case, then it applies to all (no) cases'. I assert this claim for three reasons: firstly, the FFTW3 requires explicit class teacher support for the teaching assistant. Secondly, the training requires a commitment from the SLT and thirdly, there is an expectation that the intervention will be implemented on no less than four days per week, thereby requiring a continuity of provision. Such requirements and expectations were integral to the programme, according to Canning, and were intended to facilitate effective and sustainable intervention practices. For this reason, I judge that there is much to learn about the integrated deployment of TAs if barriers persist in the context of FFTW3 and interrogate why this might be so.

As a preliminary to the analysis and by way of providing a context to literacy training, I summarise the teaching assistants' reflections on their initial teaching assistant training in literacy in both authorities.

Initial training in Farnsworth and Dalton

All 4 TAs in Farnsworth acknowledged that they had received very little initial training in literacy. Anna stated that *'we did some, but it was very brief'* [phase 1, page 1, line 33] whereas Theresa, having only been a TA for two years, was clear that *'everything I've got from literacy is what I've picked up in school'* [phase 1, page 2, lines 71-72]. Emily, who had qualified a year prior to the interview considered that literacy training *'was not really within the course'* [phase 1, page 2, line 55]. Emily's response was particularly surprising, given that her training was relatively recent and that the role of teaching assistants has progressively involved supporting children with literacy difficulties; one might have expected TA training to reflect this significant shift.

By contrast, in Dalton, the teaching assistants considered that the training had prepared them for supporting literacy in the school setting. Lynn felt particularly well equipped from her NVQ3 qualification to support literacy, stating that the course was 'very literacy based' [page 3, line 95]. Liz felt that she was equipped largely through being trained in the Better Reading Partnership (BRP) programme which is based on the model of Reading Recovery. Liz felt that the BRP programme gave her a greater critical awareness of children's books especially in relation to visual literacy (children 'reading' the pictures in books). Both Lynn and Liz appeared to be highly motivated (in common with the TAs in Farnsworth) and both had undertaken further qualifications in their own time; in Lynn's case a GCSE in English to enable her to embark on the Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) status and Liz had completed a GCSE in Maths for her own professional development.

Part One: fragmentation and integration

Farnsworth phase 1: training

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Although all teaching assistants relied on INSET days and staff meetings for their Continuing Professional Development, the data present a varied picture of how this CPD was provided in each school. Accessing CPD courses outside school was particularly variable. Anna (Fry) considered that she would be permitted to attend a

course if it were useful to the school. By contrast, Carolyn (Fell) acknowledged that attending courses was problematic because of the cover needed. Attending the local authority's annual TA conference, for example, had to be organised on a rotational basis with TAs not able to attend together. Theresa (Foster) stated that she had not really been offered any training beyond INSETS and staff meetings, and had taken materials home when necessary. She gave the example of the Early Literacy Strategy (ELS) resources with which she had familiarised herself in her own time.

Staff meetings

All TAs attended staff meetings in Farnsworth; however the expectations as to which staff meetings would be attended varied considerably. Emily (Fox) was required to attend all staff meetings whereas Anna, Carolyn and Theresa attended those that were directly relevant to their practice. In Fell Primary, a cascade model had been used to introduce a new marking policy; the senior TA had attended the staff meeting and then disseminated the information to all other TAs. Whilst Carolyn understood the reason for this, she considered that the training was insufficient for the level of responsibility in marking that was currently expected. I discuss this further under *Farnsworth Phase 1: Role* below.

The involvement in INSET days and staff meetings provided the TAs with an adequate level of CPD according to the interview data, but there was little sense that CPD was readily accessible for personal professional development – particularly in literacy. In this sense, I would argue that the picture of CPD at this phase of the research is characterised by fragmentation across cases in Farnsworth.

Farnsworth phase 1: communication

Understanding the TAs' perceptions of the nature of communication in Farnsworth before the introduction of FFTW3 was important for later comparisons within and across the authorities after the implementation of the programme.

Communication with class teachers

All teaching assistants liaised with the class teachers informally. Anna (Fry) said it was *'when and where you need to'* [phase 1, page 6, lines 226-227] and similarly Theresa (Foster) noted that: '*most of it, to be honest, is informal unless I see that there's a problem*.'[page 10, lines 462-3] Carolyn (Fell) considered that liaison was happening *'all the time'* [page 12, line 515] because she worked so closely with the

class teacher. The predominantly informal and almost continuous nature of the contact with the class teacher appeared to allow for the necessary communication over the needs of children and future planning or assessment requirements. In this context, the communication process although informal, appeared to provide the necessary channels of communication and in this sense presented an integrated picture of dialogue and discussion.

Communication with SLT

The communication with the SLT in phase 1 also revealed a predominantly positive picture (with the exception of Fell Primary), where TAs felt that colleagues – especially the Special Needs' Coordinator or Literacy Coordinator – would make time to discuss any queries with them. This perception of positive communication with the SLT contrasts with later evidence when I present the data from phase 3 (see *Farnsworth Phase 3: Communication*). Fell Primary proved the exception in phase 1 where communication with the SLT (described consistently by Carolyn as 'Management') was presented as both indirect and inadequate.

Communication over FFTW3 training

Communication over attending the Fischer Family Trust training was very limited in Farnsworth. Anna and Emily like Carolyn (Fell) were invited by the class teacher to attend the training, although it is worth noting here that Zoë (the class teacher with whom Carolyn worked most closely) knew little of what the programme involved. Emily (Fox) had no knowledge of the programme and was told that *'this is the training; this is what you're going to do'* [page 9, lines 299-300]. Theresa's (Foster) response when asked how she was told about the course was: *'I daren't say!'* [page 12, line 522]. Her reluctance to answer this question suggested to me that communication had been less than good and professional loyalty prevented her saying as such.

The lack of notice over the FFTW3 training in all schools in Farnsworth, suggests a lack of forethought over literacy provision needs within the schools. FFTW3 was presented as a unique opportunity to access a training programme for TAs that complemented Reading Recovery provision and the training was funded through the ECaR consortium. The last minute arrangements and lack of discussion with the teaching assistants suggest that the decisions made by the SLT were opportunistic and not based on systematic provision mapping despite the national profile of the intervention.

Farnsworth Phase 1: Role

The flexibility of the teaching assistant role was striking. Teaching assistants supported children in a variety of contexts both in and out of the classroom and in a variety of group sizes including one to one. Emily's (Fox) role included support of a child with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) in addition to her role in supporting literacy and numeracy. In Fell Primary, as well as supporting in class, Carolyn was involved in one to one reading, 'booster' phonic group work and one to one support for children with special educational needs. Similarly, Theresa (Foster), supported literacy and numeracy groups in class and had, in the previous academic year, worked using ELS and additional phonic materials as interventions to support appropriate groups.

Apart from Emily (Fox), who had only been a TA for a year, all TAs considered that their role had changed over time. Anna (Fry) considered that she *'worked more in class'* [page 2, lines 70-71] and therefore knew more in terms of the children's needs and ways of supporting them. This observation was an example of a greater integration of Anna's role, as she understood it. Carolyn (Fell) felt that her role had become more *'academic'* [page 5, line 194] and Theresa (Foster) echoed this saying that *'I am given more to do'* [page 5, line 183]; she stated that: '*I feel like a teacher a lot more*' [page 5, line 194]. Such comments reflected a generally positive approach to the changes and arguably a move towards a more integrated role in working alongside the class teacher. A notable exception to this picture is in Carolyn's case where she gave marking as an example of her changing role amounting to greater responsibility and accountability. She expressed some frustration that additional demands (which equated to those of a class teacher) were not met with the same level of training that teachers received; the TAs were often reliant on the senior TA cascading information from staff meetings to the TA team. The insufficient training resulted in a search for reassurance from the class teacher:

> *I had two lots of marking…and then to go and <u>mark</u> and then thinking –*
> *well, is this right what they're asking us – you know Management have*
> *changed things and I'll say to Zoë [the class teacher], is this right, am I*
> *doing this right?*

> [Carolyn, phase 1, page 6, lines 258-263]

Another significant change in role related to covering the class when required. Carolyn reluctantly accepted this role, but was unequivocal that she preferred to

work with groups in a supporting role. Participating in the HLTA training was not an option that Carolyn had considered since she felt that the expectation to cover classes would be greater and therefore prevent her from continuing in the role that she most enjoyed, as she says: *'at the end of the day I love what I do and I'd rather stay with what I do!'* [page 10, lines 454-455]. Carolyn's example of not pursuing further qualification for fear of being asked to take the class on a regular basis suggests a fragmentation of role linked to CPD options that were unacceptable to her.

Although Theresa (Foster) welcomed the greater responsibility, she commented that her role shifted according to which teacher she was working alongside. She had been working with the current teacher for two years creating a strong professional bond. Theresa had worked with other teachers where her role had been more passive reflecting a fluctuating sense of role and identity. In this sense her role was fragmented through a lack of professional consistency in how she was deployed.

Farnsworth Phase 2: Training

The FFTW3 training took place over six afternoons although severe weather conditions resulted in two of the sessions being conflated. The FFTW3 trainer would have preferred to facilitate training over three days as had been the case in the previous academic year; however, her other work demands meant that this had not been possible. I attended the three day training in order to familiarise myself with the programme. This was not part of my formal observational research, so it is not appropriate to discuss the training in depth. However, I can comment that the training was highly structured and fast-paced whilst allowing time for revisiting knowledge and materials. The trainers, furthermore, offered ongoing support at the end of the training. All four teaching assistants were extremely positive about the FFTW3 training when interviewed mid-programme. They found the training to be intensive, but extremely valuable and considered that they had been well equipped for implementing the programme. This was borne out by evidence from the observation data which corroborated the TAs' perception of the training that they had received.

Observations took place in all four schools during phase 2 of the fieldwork. Apart from Fry Primary, two sessions were observed – one reading and one writing. In Fry Primary, a second observation was possible at phase 3 and in Fox Primary a third observation opportunity was offered and accepted - also during phase 3. An overview of the observations undertaken is shown in table 6.4. I also discuss the

training in FFTW3 more fully, comparing the two authorities over quality of training and implementation. I argue from the data, that FFTW3 offers an integrated approach to training since the knowledge and understanding is embedded through practical tasks in the classroom and is reinforced through discussions with the class teacher and Reading Recovery teacher (RRT).

Farnsworth Phase 2: Communication

In all cases in Farnsworth, the teaching assistants were very positive about the additional dimension of communication afforded them as a result of the class teachers having attending the training. The shared knowledge base became a platform for a greater depth of discussion about individual children. Such discussion continued to be predominantly informal and as Theresa (Foster) pointed out, was often restricted by time; nevertheless she could see the potential for a greater integration of literacy teaching between the class and the intervention programme as a positive outcome of increased communication. In all schools, communication with the RRT was proving extremely valuable, TAs found that they had a useful and accessible point of contact where considerable expertise was available to draw upon; this meant that contact with the FFTW3 trainer, though welcomed, was not taken up. The picture presented, without exception, was one where a greater quality of communication existed enabling a more integrated picture of intervention implementation between the one to one session and the class environment.

This positive picture, however, did not extend to improved communication with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Despite the SLT being required to include the FFTW3 as part of their school improvement plan, there had been no enquiries or discussion with members of the SLT (except where the class teacher was a member of the team), according to the data. It was Zoë, the class teacher rather than the SLT who secured a quiet space for Carolyn to work in Fell school. This gave Carolyn little confidence that the SLT was actively supporting the implementation of the programme. As I will discuss in more detail when I compare the two authorities, this lack of explicit support from the SLT, created a degree of fragmentation that impacted on the role of the TA and the extent to which the FFTW3 could be successfully implemented.

Farnsworth Phase 2: Role

At this stage I only wish to touch upon the changes in role evidenced from the interview and observation data during phase 2, and take up the discussion more fully when I consider phase 3. A general point to make in relation to all the interview

data was a shared enthusiasm, determination and genuine satisfaction expressed by the TAs, in being able to implement the programme. This was evident in all interviews with TAs, irrespective of context or particular challenges. The TAs appeared more confident and relaxed in the interview situation during phase 2; this can be explained by the fact that they felt more familiar with both me and the interview process, but I also maintain that this confidence resulted from the training they had received – evident from the interview and observation data.

In all cases, the TAs considered that starting to implement the FFTW3 programme was highly challenging, but at the same time, they felt equipped to do so. The words 'challenging', 'confident', and 'support' reoccurred in every interview. Carolyn (Fell) was slightly more nervous because of the unavoidable delay in launching the intervention (this impacted on her confidence in remembering all that she had learned during the training). All TAs stated that they felt highly supported by the class teachers and RRTs and that this appeared to galvanise their confidence and determination. For Theresa (Foster) this support coincided with a positive change in role in working exclusively with Year 1, which had resulted in her having a far greater control over her working day.

The confidence and agency demonstrated by the TAs in the interview was corroborated through the observation data. Although I develop this more under *Agency,* there are a number of points that are appropriate to mention here. Firstly, despite the nervousness of the TAs in being observed, they demonstrated great confidence and competence when working with the children where they appeared to quickly forget my presence as an observer. Secondly, they had all built up positive relationships with the children and in all cases the structure of the FFTW3 intervention was clearly recognisable indicating a high level of fidelity to the programme. There were indications of greater integration of role then, during phase 2, to the extent that TAs were equipped, prepared and supported to implement the programme.

Farnsworth Phase 3: Training

None of the TAs had received ongoing CPD at the time of the phase 3 interviews. However, all TAs felt that support was continuous and readily accessible through the class teacher and the RRT. Only Emily (Fox) had been formally observed by the RRT, at her own request. She had also had the opportunity to observe a RR lesson. Thus all training was noted to be informal and initiated by the TA according to need. Despite the lack of formal CPD, Anna (Fry) was already keen to share knowledge of

the FFTW3 with other TAs, who had expressed an interest in the programme. Carolyn reiterated points that she had made during the phase 1 interview about the significance of training alongside the class teacher, this was described under *Later response to the FFTW3 (phase 3 interview)* in Chapter 5 and will be discussed in more detail under *Affiliation*. The data presented an integrated picture of CPD evidenced by the structures of support provided by the FFTW3 trainer, the RRT and the class teacher.

Farnsworth Phase 3: Communication

In all cases, the TAs considered that the liaison over FFTW3 was continuous, but remained as an informal arrangement. It was clear that the joint training had facilitated a deeper, more focused conversation about children's learning needs. One aspect of the communication involved the class teacher championing the requirements of the TA with the Senior Leadership Team. In Fry, Fox and Foster this resulted in time being protected for the interventions; the exception was Fell Primary where implementing FFTW3 was not considered a priority by the SLT compared to other school issues. Sustained support was more apparent where the class teacher, herself, was a member of the SLT; this was the case in Fry and Foster. In both schools it had been communicated that FFTW3 would continue in the new school year. In Fox and Fell, by contrast, they had no idea whether FFTW3 would continue. In all four schools contact with the SLT had been very limited. Both Carolyn and Theresa expressed disappointment and some degree of surprise that the SLT had not shown more immediate interest in the intervention, considering the investment of time and resources in implementation. Emily's contact with the SLT had been restricted to a request asking her to explain the tracking documentation - but beyond that - interest appeared to be limited. Communication therefore, during this phase, presented a mixed picture. The data revealed a high level of integration based on communication at TA and class teacher level; however, there was no significant improvement in communication with the SLT if the class teacher was not a member of the management team. I take up this point in part two, when I discuss *Sustainability*.

Farnsworth Phase 3: Role

Anna's role appeared to have been further enhanced, from the data. Her time was protected to implement the intervention and this was sustained over the course of the programme. This allowed her to see significant progress in the children who took part.

For Emily, there was a stark contrast in her role from the point at which Stella, the class teacher, with whom she had trained, took up a position in another school. Stella championed and protected Emily's implementation of the programme, despite not being a member of the SLT (previously discussed in Emily's *Early response to the FFTW3 (phase 2 interview)* in Chapter 5). After Easter, the new class teacher was not able to give the same level of support and Emily considered that this was because she had not trained in the programme. Henceforward, protected time for the programme was gradually eroded away through other demands and it was only Emily's determination and focus which ensured that the programme was seen through to the end of the academic year. I discuss this below under *Agency*.

For Carolyn, the data revealed a further integration of role in working alongside the class teacher, which had been a key point of motivation for continuing the programme. The transformations in children's attainment and behaviours in literacy was a further motivation at phase 3. I describe this in Carolyn's *Later response to the FFTW3 (phase 3 interview)* in Chapter 5. More generally, Carolyn's frustration in her wider role related to the way in which interventions were generally adopted; she considered that there were too many initiatives implemented, representing little continuity or coherence with classroom literacy and little communication with the class teacher in relation to progress.

> *when we've done interventions [in the past] you go out, and take a child out and do something and then come back - you don't have the time to relate to the teacher to know what it is [they have been doing] and obviously if it's not done then in class, you don't always work with that child again throughout the day and ...it just gets forgotten.*

> *[Carolyn, phase 3, page 3, line 101-106]*

I develop this point further under *Sustainability*.

For Theresa (Foster), her role appeared to be more integrated in a number of ways. Firstly, she was working with Year 1s exclusively, which naturally focused her role more closely; secondly, her time for implementing FFTW3 was fully protected and the space in which she implemented the programme was respected by others – both staff and children. Thirdly, the level of support gave Theresa a sense of encouragement and connection that appeared to have enhanced her professional confidence and capabilities.

Dalton: Training

I have previously presented descriptive case reports on both Lynn and Liz in Chapter 5. I want to briefly compare the data from the two schools framing the discussion in terms of the continuum of integration and fragmentation as I did with Farnsworth, before comparing the data across both authorities in Part Two.

Both TAs participated in INSET days that were focused on their professional needs, sometimes as Liz (Duckworth) described, this might involve input from an external trainer. This was the means by which both TAs received the majority of CPD – in common with the TAs in Farnsworth.

Lynn (Dillingham) stated that teaching assistants were paid to attend a set number of staff meetings and attendance at other meetings was voluntary. Attendance at Key Stage team meetings was required but not part of her contractual hours. Liz commented that TAs were required to attend staff meetings that were directly relevant to their practice and she was accepting of this despite not being paid to attend. The main issue was the lack of equity in relation to contractual hours, which meant that some teaching assistants were giving up more of their own time than others. Liz accepted that if training was missed then *'you miss out on an awful lot of your own development to help the children as well'* [page 6, lines 253-254].

In Dillingham, opportunities for continuing professional development appeared to be exceptionally good for Lynn. If she wanted to go on a course and the funding was available then teaching assistants would be permitted to go. As she noted:

> *if the money's there, or the opportunity's there, our Head is absolutely fantastic and she'll allow us to just get on with it and do it, because she wants us to be highly skilled.*

[Lynn, page 1, lines 28-31]

Lynn also commented that if it wasn't possible for all TAs to attend a course, then staff meeting time would be planned in order to feedback to others. She noted that she had been supported in completing her Higher Level Teaching Assistant status, and was awaiting news of her result at the time of the interview. Liz presented a similar situation where it was possible to request to attend training courses that either she or a teacher had highlighted in the training course bulletin. Lynn, in particular, presented an integrated picture of training where she felt fully included in

the CPD of the staff and additionally, felt able to access training beyond what was provided in school.

In relation to FFTW3, Lynn found the training to be very good and enjoyed the introduction to so many ideas and approaches; this was consolidated for her when she had the opportunity to observe RR lessons behind the screen. Similarly, Liz found the training to be very helpful, she made particular mention of the structure of the training with the numerous opportunities to revisit and recap knowledge and understanding.

Lynne's role, despite its many facets, appeared to be completely integrated according to the indicators (see table 6.1); Liz's role had many elements of integration but the one to one support in FFTW3 (where children were withdrawn from the classroom) was not continued into class which compromised communication; this fragmented Liz's role in terms of her wish to liaise with the class teacher over children's progress.

Dalton: Communication

As described in Lynn's account in Chapter 5, *Communication within school*, communication in Dillingham was very coherent and integrated. Lynn was presented with information without having to seek it out. Furthermore, the liaison with the class teacher was particularly strong partly because they had worked together for four years and partly because the class teacher had trained in Reading Recovery.

In Duckworth, Liz stated that liaison with staff was generally informal and usually took place in break times, lunch times or after school. Communication over FFTW3 was slightly more fragmented because Amy, the class teacher who had trained in the FFTW3, worked in Year 1, whereas Liz supported classes in Year 4. Nevertheless, Amy was committed to the success of the programme and Liz felt that it would be possible to arrange a meeting with the teacher, or with the RRT if needed.

Dalton: Role

Both Lynn and Liz had diverse and varied roles in school. Liz supported literacy and numeracy in a Year 4 class and was engaged in implementing the FFTW3 programme for four mornings each week. She also facilitated the school council. Liz commented that the pace and demands of her role had progressively increased (See Liz's account of her *Role in school*, Chapter 5).

Lynn's role, as a particular example, was hugely varied. The diversity of her roles included: a guided reading session each morning; supporting literacy in class (planning was communicated beforehand) working with different groups; responding to children with behavioural difficulties if needed; supporting numeracy in class; supporting with a creative curriculum each afternoon; administering assessments (a termly reading test and a spelling test in June); supporting with the Year 2 SATs; planning lessons for the covering teacher; facilitating one to one sessions for three days per week using FFTW3; running an after-school cooking club with parents/carers and children and finally covering the whole class regularly when required (with support from another TA). This diversity and range of roles was presented by Lynn as part of a coherent plan of provision.

Part Two: The transformative potential of the FFTW3 programme in Farnsworth and Dalton.

In this section, I develop the analysis further by introducing themes that emerged from the data in the context of FFTW3. The data revealed that the implementation of FFTW3 became a vehicle for greater integration of the TAs' role across all cases and I discuss the transformative potential of FFTW3 through three themes: agency, affiliation and sustainability. I do this across cases and across the domains of training, communication and role. I found it helpful to represent the cases and themes graphically as posited by Stake (ibid: 49) and shown in table 6.2.

Table 6.2: prominence of themes (high/medium/low) after Stake (2006:49)

Themes	Case 1 Fry	Case 2 Fox	Case 3 Fell	Case 4 Foster	Case 5 Dillingham	Case 6 Duckworth
fragmentation	M	M	H	M	L	M
integration	M FFTW3	L FFTW3	H FFTW3	H FFTW3	H FFTW3	M FFTW3
Added multi-case themes in the context of FFTW3						
agency	H	H	H	H	H	H
Affiliation	H	M	M	M	H	M
sustainability	H	L	L	M	H	H

The table shows that fragmentation was prominent in all cases except Dillingham (Dalton) where the data gave evidence of Lynn's high status as a TA. The picture of integration in the context of FFTW3 in both authorities was generally high, except Fox (Farnsworth) where the class teacher had left and Duckworth (Dalton) where the TA was supporting a class in KS2 and therefore not supporting the children participating in FFTW3 in class. The table also shows the added multi-case themes which emerged through analysis. The agency of the TAs was high without exception in relation to the FFTW3 programme. Affiliation was also moderate to very high, but this depended upon school and class structures. Sustainability of the programme was low in both Fry and Fox where the data revealed a lack of explicit support from the SLT. Each theme will now be discussed in turn.

Agency

There was a high prominence of agency across all cases in the context of FFTW3. The quality of the initial training appeared to facilitate a high manifestation of this theme – evident across both authorities and particularly noticeable in Farnsworth where a comparison could be made prior to and following the implementation of FFTW3. Table 6.3 shows both the response to the FFTW3 training and to the opportunity of training alongside the class teacher.

All six TAs in both Farnsworth and Dalton made positive comments about the Fischer Family Trust training and although the training was fast paced, all TAs felt equipped to implement the programme, indeed their enthusiasm was very evident. This has already been presented in Chapter 5 in the case reports. The evidence for *how* the quality of training translated into a high level of agency derives from the observation data.

Table 6.3: TAs' response to training

TA	School	FFT training: Response to programme	Response to training with class teacher
Anna	Fry	Very positive. Couldn't wait to start.	Helpful. 'we were discussing together' 'Can't wait to try this and what shall we do with this child?
Emily	Fox	Felt equipped from the training. Very enthusiastic. Likes simple strategies.	Training with teacher good. Teacher recognized importance led to greater support.
Carolyn	Fell	Training fast but good	Could think of children to place on programme. Consistency, bond should happen more on courses
Theresa	Foster	Found running records daunting, but training was good. Felt equipped.	Good training with class teacher. Mutually supportive.
Lynn	Dillingham	Enjoyed 'hands on' nature of the training. Enjoyed becoming familiar with the resources.	'It was fine'
Liz	Duckworth	Really enjoyed the training. Appreciated the recapping of information and the pace of the sessions.	It worked well – got to know her better.

Observations took place in both authorities – during phase 2 of fieldwork in Farnsworth and as part of the visits to Dalton. The observation schedules (see Appendix 10) were based on the structure of the FFTW3 sessions, which as noted

previously, are divided into a reading and writing session respectively and alternated each day. This differs from the Reading Recovery structure where reading and writing is integrated into one session each day.

Observation prompts which were noted on the schedule, included the possibility of commenting on engagement, enjoyment, explicit praise, rapport, pace, appropriate book levels, appropriate response to what the child was doing, appropriateness of the questions asked by the TA, appropriateness of intervention and use of time. Some of the prompts were taken from official guidance (dated June 2009) used by Reading Recovery leaders (based in the Institute of Education in London) in formal observations of RR trainee teachers (Tanner et al., 2010a).

An overview of the observations undertaken is shown in table 6.4. The intention was to determine fidelity to the FFTW3 programme – a term familiar in evaluations of literacy programmes or interventions; indeed, it was used as part of the national evaluation of Reading Recovery in Every Child a Reader (Tanner et al., 2010a). The concept of fidelity is important for several reasons. Firstly, it is a means of establishing whether the training has been effective; if the programme is recognisable in structure and approach then the training and resources may be shown to be effectual. Secondly, if fidelity to the programme is demonstrated, then this suggests that the programme is valued and respected. Thirdly, fidelity facilitates consistency over a longer period. Significant changes to the programme would indicate that either the TA had not received sufficient training, or that she considered that changes to the structure and approach were unimportant. I was also interested to see if there was evidence of broader professional experience being brought to bear on the sessions and whether, beyond fidelity, the TAs demonstrated confidence in implementing a programme which relies on an individualised teaching approach – in other words, a high level of agency.

One final point of interest was the affective dimension to the FFTW3 sessions, bearing in mind that they are one to one; I wanted to observe how relationships with the children had been established and whether this was impacting on motivation and engagement. Although data was generated on this aspect of the observations, I can only touch upon it in this study in order to retain the focus upon the role of the TA.

As evident from table 6.4, the level of fidelity to the programme was very high across all cases. The three instances of a missing component to the lesson, was an entirely pragmatic decision based upon the realities of time constraints. I would

suggest that such a considered decision by the TAs was not a challenge to the fundamental fidelity of the programme. The table also shows how, in all cases, TAs demonstrated a high level of confidence during the session, both in their subject knowledge and in the way in which they worked with children.

The interview data with Emily (Fox) revealed a heightened sense of agency in the context of FFTW3. Emily did not receive the same level of support after Stella, the FFTW3 trained teacher had left the school at Easter and although Emily was resigned to the change in attitude to the FFTW3, she appeared determined to continue the programme:

> *I get taken away a lot of time to cover. But then, what I will do then, is I will work through my time to get it [the programme] finished. So there's been many a time when there's not been a TA in class, so I've moved all my things and put them in class in a quiet area and done it within class...And also I've done it in two steps over assembly times or if on a Friday it's a big assembly, like it has been today, I'll do it over assembly time to catch a child up...so I still get taken away quite a lot but because of the importance of it and I think...it has to look...if they stop making progress...it looks like I'm not doing my job properly so I need to be pushing them as much as I am. So when it comes to figures at the end of it, it doesn't look like at any point I've slacked at doing what I need to do, so I push them as much and squeeze them in...as much as I can*

> [Emily, phase 3, page 4-5, lines 149 -163]

Table 6.4: overview of observations

SCHOOL	Teaching Assistant	Date of observations	Venue	Evidence of an understanding of and respect for the FFTW3 model and principles	Evidence of skill and confidence in implementing the programme	Evidence of a positive relationship with the child, facilitating accelerated progress	Evidence of links with the school/class curriculum	Evidence of adherence to the fidelity of the FFTW3 model	Evidence of deviations from the FFTW3 model and reason other than duration.
1	Anna	16/3/11	A small dedicated resource room also used by the RR teacher	√	√	√	X	√	No deviations
1	Anna	22/6/11		√	√	√	Mention of 'sentence openers'	√	Missing components. Child extremely tired.
2	Emily	5/4/11	A large, light, multi-purpose room	√	√	√	X	√	No deviations
2	Emily	5/4/11		√	√	√	X	√	No deviations
2	Emily	17/6/11		√	√	√	X	√	No deviations.
3	Carolyn	6/5/11	A library and multipurpose room	√	√	√	X	√	No deviations.
3	Carolyn	6/5/11 ›		√	√	√	X	√	
4	Theresa	12/5/11	A large, light, multipurpose room	√	√	√	X	√	Missed component. – over-running.
4	Theresa	12/5/11		√	√	√	X	√	No deviation
5	Lynn	26/5/11	A light, modern, multi-purpose room	√	√	√	Mention of 'Fred-talk' for sounding out.	√	No deviation.
6	Liz	29/6/11	A small, multi-purpose room with no natural light	√	√	√	X	√	Component missing – over-running.
6	Liz	29/6/11		√	√	√	✻	√	Component missing Over-running

Emily was noticeably animated when sharing this information; such a spirited response appeared to reflect her determination to sustain the programme not only for the benefit of the children but also for her own professional pride and sense of accountability; she wanted to be able to demonstrate that the children had made good progress.

Carolyn (Fell) was another example of where agency was evident in the light of FFTW3 but within a context of challenging circumstances. Carolyn was not convinced that the senior leadership team knew enough about the programme to facilitate its implementation, even in simply providing and protecting working space with children. Carolyn suggested that, '*I feel you do have to sort it yourself basically.*' (phase 2, page 4, lines 6-7). It was remarkable that Carolyn and the class teacher had been able to implement the FFTW3 at all bearing in mind the severe disruptions (detailed in Carolyn's *Early response to the FFTW3* in Chapter 5*) –* including snow, flooding and illness - which had impacted on the school as a whole and the implementation of FFTW3, in particular. Carolyn's determination to implement the intervention was evidence of a sense of agency fuelled by an apparent eagerness to implement the intervention.

In Foster Primary, Sandra, the class teacher, recognised that teaching assistants were *'a very valuable resource in school'* [page 6, line 228] with a high level of skills. Higher expectations needed to be matched with good levels of training: contrasting with, what had been in the past, a general supporting role:

> *It's upping their skill level and giving them that importance instead of the*
> *old days where it was - TAs are there to wash the paint pots – they're*
> *not anymore*

> [Sandra, phase 3, page 6, lines 231-234]

The significant difference for Sandra in the implementation of FFTW3, was that she saw herself as a supporter of Theresa who had become the 'expert' on the intervention.

In Dalton, Lynn (Dillingham) talked about the value of a shared knowledge base which inevitably arose from the training; this led to discussion about particular children within the class who might benefit from the programme. Kath (class teacher) explained that the shared training *'gives you a common language'* [page 5, line 180]. Kath considered that FFTW3 engendered a greater sense of autonomy

because the intervention demanded an individualised response from the TA. According to Kath this meant that TAs experienced a greater sense of the complexities of teaching and learning, which in turn facilitated their professional development more closely alongside the class teacher – as Kath states '*you're more of a professional pair'* [page 5, lines 186-187]. Kath noted that the training had afforded Lynn greater confidence and agency which was apparent in the many conversations about children's learning.

This perception was corroborated in data from the interview with Lynn. She gave an account, for example, of why Evie (the child observed) was accessing FFTW3 support. Evie had been unsuccessfully discontinued from RR without making the required progress; she appeared to have complex learning needs and the school had referred her for further assessment. The ethical dilemma for Lynn and Kath revolved around Evie accessing support that could have potentially been offered to another child. The way in which Lynn had evidently engaged and comfortably discussed this issue with Kath and was able to voice her opinion to the RR teacher, illustrated the way in which she was fully integrated into the decisions around children's needs and learning goals.

Similarly, Liz (Duckworth) noted that there had been a deepening of the professional relationship which would not have been possible without the joint training whilst Amy (class teacher) observed how the dynamic in the relationship changed over time with Liz growing in confidence, needing less support and quickly being able to take the lead on running the programme. Indeed, Amy felt that she was in a position where she, herself, would welcome a 'refresher' course. Again, this perception was borne out from interview data with Liz, who described the FFTW3 as '*her baby'* [page 5, line 178] since she had taken it on and made the programme her own by developing her own style in implementation. Liz liked the very structured, yet flexible nature of the programme.

Jo, one of the FFTW3 trainers in Farnsworth, noted that the quality of the training supported the teaching assistants in thinking more deeply about literacy and contributed to their sense of agency. This was echoed by Evelyn in Dalton who was aware that FFTW3 was appreciated by teaching assistants allowing them to develop their understanding in ways that previously had not been possible.

Affiliation

The theme of affiliation emerged from the interview data across all cases. The term was adopted since it reflects the nature of the TAs' relationships and connections - evident in the grounded analysis of the interview data. The requirements of the FFTW3 in terms of joint training fostered ongoing dialogue which, though remaining informal in nature, appeared to be more focused in relation to each child's learning needs. Furthermore, support structures, though nascent in Farnsworth, engendered a sense of affiliation which TAs welcomed and utilised.

Training alongside the class teacher was greeted with as much enthusiasm as the training itself. Enthusiasm for the value of this training model, was corroborated by the class teachers in all cases (except Fox Primary where an interview had not been possible). Anna (Fry) spoke of how she and the class teacher were discussing which children might benefit from the programme. Jean (the class teacher) noted that the training model '*needs to be like that'* [page 3, line 117] if teachers and teaching assistants are to work as a team. Emily (Fox) made the point that the teacher better recognised the importance of the programme, having been involved in the training and this had led to greater support in school. Similarly, Carolyn (Fell) spoke of how she and the class teacher discussed which children to place on the programme, noting the value of consistency of approach as a result of training together. She also suggested that such joint training should happen more often. Zoë (class teacher) commented upon how the shared training had provoked discussion and reflection as to how best to support particular children. Theresa (Foster) was convinced that the joint training represented an '*added bonus'* [page 12, line 547] and was mutually supportive, with Sandra (class teacher) valuing the opportunity to have time to discuss and collaborate.

In every case, TAs drew upon the advice, guidance and support of the RRTs within the school setting. For example, in Foster Primary, the Reading Recovery room opened onto Theresa's resource base allowing for impromptu discussions with the RR teacher with whom she had built a supportive working relationship. Additionally, Theresa appreciated the support from Sandra, the class teacher, having trained together:

> *she (the class teacher) understands what I'm supposed to be doing,*
> *whereas there's a lot of these interventions that are put into place that*
> *don't involve the class teacher…she knows what I'm supposed to be*
> *teaching these children*   [Theresa, phase 3, page 4, lines 143 - 148]

Theresa suggested that because understanding of the programme was shared, the support was far greater than usually experienced with intervention programmes. This was corroborated in the interview with Sandra who stated that whilst Theresa held the key responsibility in running the FFTW3 programme, she, as class teacher, had adopted a supportive role which involved continual dialogue about the children involved in the intervention.

In Dillingham, the sense of affiliation was apparent from all the data sources. The striking diversity of Lynn's role has already been exemplified under *Dalton: role.* Lynn was flexible to respond to needs that arose but had a timetable which she created in collaboration with the class teacher Kath, and to which she was generally able to adhere. She supported the same class each day and had a close working relationship with the class teacher. It was clear that Lynn felt valued and respected as a member of staff and this was confirmed in the interview with Kath:

> *…our teaching assistants are just parts of our staff, they're just*
> *members of staff...they are an absolutely crucial part of the school,*

[Kath, Dillingham, page 3, lines 76 - 81]

Kath was also part of the SLT and it was evident that respect for teaching assistants extended throughout school. An informal conversation with the head teacher corroborated this observation from the interview data:

> The head teacher sees everyone as having a unique skill set and those
> skills need to be utilised.

[researcher, field notes: 25.5.11]

What became apparent through the course of the interviews with both Lynn and Kath, was that Lynn's role had not changed significantly with the introduction of the FFTW3 rather it had been further enhanced.

A challenge to this picture of greater affiliation was presented in Duckworth where the teacher trained in FFTW3 was not based in the same class as Liz. I mentioned above that this created a rather more fragmented picture of communication; yet, because FFTW3 was part of a programme of layered intervention, the support was still readily available within school from both the class teacher and the RR teacher. I had the opportunity to interview Miriam, the RRT, and she stated that working as a team in implementing interventions was essential; she commented on the value of a

'*common framework*'. Miriam also noted, in common with all other cases, that no formal time was available to discuss FFTW3 specifically, but that they allocated time for professional dialogue. The presence of the RRT teacher effectively mitigated the issue of the TA working apart from the teacher with whom she had trained and ensured a greater sense of affiliation for the TA within the layered approach.

The sense of personal and professional affiliation evidenced in all cases, created meaningful support structures which existed from the RR programme. The introduction of FFTW3, as another layered intervention appeared, from the data, to ensure that the structures of professional support and development became more integrated into the school community. The shared terms of reference contributed to an increase in the quality of professional dialogue. This observation echoes Canning's intention that the joint training should facilitate a more integrated approach to the implementation of interventions. As she states:

> *it's actually the responsibility of the teacher to help the child transfer the skills that they have learned in the one to one into the classroom, that it doesn't just happen*

[Jill Canning, page 7, lines 251-252]

All three FFTW3 trainers recognised the value of FFTW3 as part of a layered approach providing a support network for teaching assistants. Evidence from their data corroborated interview data from both the TAs and class teachers, noting the benefits of shared training and the resulting championing of the TAs' role in implementing the intervention. Evelyn (Dalton) conceded that the professional dialogue was most likely to thrive where a positive relationship already existed - since no formal planning time was arranged in any of the FFTW3 schools - as far as she was aware. It concerned both Jo (Farnworth) and Evelyn that funding constraints meant that they could not visit TAs in schools as frequently as they would like. Evelyn recollected one year where funding became available to employ a Reading Recovery teacher to visit, monitor and support TAs in schools – this she recognised to be an '*ideal model'* of support which was not repeated.

Sustainability

Enhanced sustainability

The FFTW3 training in all cases across the six schools facilitated a greater degree of sustainability in terms of TAs being enabled to implement an intervention within a

coherent plan. Even in the schools where training opportunities were good for teaching assistants, FFTW3 appeared to have offered another dimension of integration and coherence which the TAs welcomed and implemented. The evidence from interviews across both authorities corroborated Canning's intention that the intervention should have the capacity for continuity and sustainability. She recognised that training TAs in the RR model over three days was a considerable challenge – compared to the RR teachers who are trained over the course of a year to masters' level. For this reason, Canning intended that the initial training should be followed up by CPD and mentioned that there were opportunities to attend follow up sessions together with training DVDs which were available to purchase by the schools. Furthermore, she expected that RRT expertise should be drawn upon extensively by the TAs and indeed, the schools more broadly.

The data presented an interesting pattern of CPD in the context of FFTW3. In all six schools, no formal CPD had been offered in relation to the Fischer Family Trust programme; however, all TAs indicated that they felt that support was available from the FFTW3 trainer and the RRT. I discussed this above in relation to *affiliation* however there is clearly an overlap with *sustainability*. In Fell Primary, for example, Zoë noted that the RRT teacher had been '*very, very supportive*' which meant that neither she nor Carolyn had needed to contact the FFTW3 trainer even though they had been given contact details. In Dillingham, Lynn had been observed (at her request) by the RRT and found this to be very helpful in developing her practice. In Duckworth, Liz had been observed on a number of occasions by Evelyn, the FFTW3 trainer. In the early stages of implementing the programme, Evelyn came in once a term and this had reduced to once a year. Amy considered that the programme ran smoothly because support was readily available if needed and they all felt equipped to run the course with the RRT providing an ongoing source of advice.

In Fry Primary, Anna's enthusiasm for FFTW3 was matched by Jean, the class teacher's determination to protect the time for implementation of the programme:

> *I managed to sell it [FFTW3] to our senior leaders because Anna*
> *originally was timetabled to do cover work in different classrooms but*
> *actually senior leaders throughout school actually gave me cover time to*
> *free Anna up to do Fischer Family Trust so we could have four children*
> *on this scheme – uninterrupted, protected time – and that's been really,*

really important so that continues and we've actually stood by that as a school.

[Jean, class teacher, phase 3, Fry Primary, page 4, lines 144 -151]

This corroborated Anna's observations in the phase 3 (end of programme) interview, that Jean had been instrumental in protecting time for the intervention to be implemented: '*She [Jean] was like deadly serious: 'You do not cover class, anything*'' [phase 3, page 4, line 132].

Such a commitment to the programme appeared to have wider benefits in the classroom. Although Jean noted that TAs and teachers worked closely as a team, the joint training in FFTW3 had facilitated a more effective working relationship:

…everything that we learned on the training we could implement on a day to day basis in our literacy session as well as guided reading so we had fantastic tools to work within our day to day lessons.

[Jean, class teacher, phase 3, page 3, lines 126 - 129]

For Lynn in Dillingham, it became apparent through the course of the interview that the range of roles had not led to a sense of fragmentation. Indeed, Lynn presented the most complete picture of integration in her role as a teaching assistant across the case studies. Within this school, teaching assistants had a significant role within the staff group; they were highly valued and effectively deployed. Interventions were sustained within a coherent layered structure.

The school was in the position of having an established RR teacher where Reading Recovery had been running for many years. Kath, herself, had trained in the programme as part of her own CPD in literacy so the support that Lynn was able to access in relation to implementing FFTW3 was very strong according to the data. Although FFTW3 had been running in the school since 2007, Lynn had not used the programme in the previous academic year and was able to observe the RR teacher on a number of occasions to re-establish her skills and confidence again. Because Lynn's timetable was discussed and arranged in consultation with the class teacher the time for FFTW3 was protected for three days each week.

In the cases of Fry and Foster in Farnsworth and Dillingham in Dalton, the commitment by the schools to the implementation of the programme had resulted in a reduction in other demands on the TAs' time. In all three schools, the class

teachers were also members of the SLT. It was evident that protecting the TAs' role ensured that the intervention was effectively implemented and necessarily fewer additional demands were made on the TAs' time.

Canning's vision for an integrated approach ensuring, arguably, greater sustainability was based on the intervention being implemented in a context where there were strong connections between the withdrawn intervention and classroom application and reinforcement of learning:

> *You don't have any link between what's going on in the one to one or*
> *the group intervention and the class, and one of the things we stress on*
> *training is that whatever is happening in the one to one – that should*
> *also be supported by the teacher in the classroom*

[Jill Canning, page 6, lines 242-245]

All three FFTW3 trainers were equally convinced of the value of the intervention for making explicit links with classroom practice. Ros gave the example of a class that had a noticeboard where children could simply add a post-it note indicating what they were working on, in the one to one session. This could then be noted and acted upon by the class teacher allowing new knowledge to be applied and embedded within a class context.

Such a vision of integration depended upon professional partnership since Canning considered that FFTW3 was too demanding for TAs to implement alone. As she states:

> *we are not expecting TAs to work in isolation they should be working*
> *under the supervision of a RR teacher who can help them make*
> *important decisions about where to take the child next or they should be*
> *working closely with the class teacher who can also support them.*

[Jill Canning, page 11, lines 459-462]

The envisaged strength of the intervention was that it is set within a layered, coherent and thus potentially sustainable structure. Nevertheless three of the six cases demonstrated barriers to sustainable practice which require discussion in the section that follows.

Barriers to Sustainability

For Emily in Fox Primary, time to implement the programme had originally been protected (see this chapter, *Farnsworth Phase 3: Role*) but had deteriorated after Easter when Stella, the class teacher, left the school to take up a new position. Emily was able to contrast the way in which her time was protected before Stella left, with the time afterwards in working with a new class teacher who had not been trained in the intervention:

> *…she [Stella] knew how important it was and she knew the difference it would make and just the little things and she applied that in class she then planned that in for me in my literacy groups and phonic groups and she knew that I'd be able to carry it out, because I'd done the training with her and things like that and then she also made this a priority when Stella was here. This was a priority in the afternoon she'd never take me back into class for anything she'd go and search for another TA.*

[Emily, phase 3, page 5, lines 183 -191]

Emily describes a situation where her implementation of the programme was not only protected but valued by the class teacher to the extent that small learning goals were noted by the teacher and applied with children in the classroom context; additionally, the teacher would seek other staff to support in an afternoon rather than disrupt Emily's intervention sessions. Despite the fact that the RR teacher in the school was the literacy coordinator and part of the SLT, such a coherent and protected picture of support did not continue after Easter suggesting that the role of the class teacher was important in championing the sustained implementation of the intervention.

Emily's case is notable because it highlights a distinct contrast in attitudes to the implementation of the programme before Easter (when the class teacher with whom she had trained was available to support) and after Easter where the implementation structure began to fragment. There were two key factors for this: the new class teacher did not afford the same importance to the continuation of the programme and therefore did not champion the TA's role within it. Secondly, the SLT did not give priority to the implementation of the programme. This lack of concrete, explicit support from the SLT was also evidenced in Carolyn's case.

The successful implementation of the FFTW3 programme, despite the major disruptions, bore testament to the determination and persistence of Carolyn and the

class teacher. Zoë considered that the SLT had very little understanding of the programme and had not been supportive over its implementation. The RR teacher, by contrast, had been very supportive of both Zoë and Carolyn. Zoë's persistence with the programme despite the challenging circumstances reflects her positive response to the FFTW3 training and the programme itself:

> I _will_ say the training that I've had for this has had more of an impact on my teaching than any other training that I've ever had.

> [Zoë, page 2, lines 63-65]

Zoë had been a teacher for about twenty years and had considerable and varied experience as both a SENCO and literacy coordinator. Her enthusiasm for the training and conviction about the FFTW3 approach resulted in a commitment to implementation which ensured support for Carolyn in continuing the intervention sessions and also resulted in changes to her own classroom practice in which Carolyn was able to support. Such changes reflected aspects of the training that Zoë found most significant – largely facilitating independent work in class literacy lessons through mixed ability groupings and using FFTW3 strategies such as the phoneme frame on a practice page within the children's writing books.

Zoë's commitment meant that Carolyn's role had far greater cohesion than would otherwise have been possible. Indeed, the data suggest that without Zoë's support, the implementation would have disintegrated altogether, bearing in mind the challenging school circumstances and the lack of support from the SLT. Zoë summed up the tension and contradictions over priorities:

> 'yes, we're doing this programme it's supposed to be in the afternoons, we've timetabled it in the afternoons and then at half term she[Carolyn] was taken off to cover a maternity leave…so you know, it comes back to the understanding that yes, OK we think it's important but not as important as covering – you know!

> [Zoë, phase 3, page 8, lines, 316-321]

Carolyn, like Zoë, could see the potential for a more coherent, sustainable approach to intervention offered by FFTW3. Such potential was not fulfilled in her school context partly because of the unfortunate challenges presented but Carolyn also considered that the SLT were unaware of the importance of the programme and suggested that she and the class teacher would have benefited from greater

support in terms of protecting a regular time and a quiet space. As Carolyn suggests:

> if we're going on this course – you know really this has got to have sort of things in place like you've got to make sure there's a room, so we're not having to fight for an area

[phase 2, page 3-4, lines 130-132]

After the phase 3 interview Carolyn made some impassioned comments about the intervention which I then requested she allow me to record:

> [U]sually in the past you've had a programme you do it for a year everybody's enthusiastic and then it's moved to the back burner and we move on to something else. I don't want Management to come in and think 'right, you've done that for a year, right you've done that, let's try something else.' No, let's stick with this. This works. This is right. The kids are getting this, let's stick with it...you can go different areas with it...you can bring it into class, you can do one to one. It's not just one little set programme – it benefits everybody...definitely.

[Carolyn, phase 3, page 8, lines 336-345]

In both Carolyn and Emily's cases, sustainability of the programme was threatened where the SLT did not offer meaningful support or identify the programme as a priority. This heightened the TAs' sense of agency in implementing the programme despite the challenges, but this did little to ensure that what was identified as an effective intervention in terms or pupil outcomes had any degree of sustainability.

In Dalton, where FFTW3 was a more established programme, the ongoing commitment to the programme appeared to result in fewer Wave 3 interventions being used in school but this did not automatically result in time being protected for the teaching assistant. In Dillingham, time was protected for the session, but in Duckworth, this was not always the case. Liz stated that one of the most frustrating aspects of the job was '*getting things dropped on you'* [page 3, line 111]. She commented that a change of plan to, say, registering the children would have implications for her whole working day with a need to 'catch up'. This case highlights the challenge to intervention practices even in a school where the intervention was embedded alongside Reading Recovery.

On a broader level, Evelyn (Dalton) made similar observations. She noted that:

You train people and you get them all up and running and then they go off and the schools put them somewhere else in the school or doing a different task and it seems to me a waste of that training and of that knowledge.

[Evelyn, 25.5.11: 47.08 - 47.22]

From the data, then, I would argue that FFTW3 existed within a unique context where sustainability of the intervention was more possible. The provision of good quality training enabled, empowered and equipped the TAs to implement the programme – in all cases - with enthusiasm and determination.

The lack of formal CPD was mitigated by the existence of a tangible and accessible support structure where TAs were able to draw upon the RRTs' expertise as well as advice from the class teacher. Furthermore, the support from the class teacher was welcomed and highly valued in all cases; and in the instances where the teacher was also a member of the SLT, the TA's role was protected to ensure the intervention could be maintained within the multifarious demands of a primary school environment.

The professional partnership benefited the TA, the class teacher and the children. The joint training in FFTW3 allowed for greater teaching and learning links between the one to one session and classroom activities thus creating a virtuous circle; children were learning in the one to one session and were then being encouraged to apply or reinforce their learning within the classroom. All this was made possible through deeper professional dialogue between the TA and the teacher, which was mutually valued in all instances.

With the factors described having such a positive impact on the integration and sustainability of the intervention, the fact that barriers persisted in some cases are, I have argued, illuminating. The sustainable structure was challenged in three main ways: firstly, where the class teacher was not able to champion the requirements of the TA to implement the programme – the protection of time for the TA was not made. Secondly, where the SLT did not see FFTW3 as a priority compared to other demands; and thirdly, where the SLT appeared to lack an active commitment to the programme.

Summary

TAs hold diverse roles which they largely embrace. Such diversity can lead to a fragmentation of role where demands on the TAs' time are not clearly delineated and become so disparate that deployment becomes less effective. Equally, diversity of role can lead to integrated practices where such diversity has a coherence which facilitates effective working with teachers and children.

The implementation of the FFTW3 programme clearly provided a unique potential for maximising an integrated approach to the deployment of the TA through the requirements and expectations of the intervention. The intervention equipped TAs to implement the programme with a considerable degree of determination facilitated by high quality training and ongoing support. The existing structures in place for RR, afforded the TAs a ready-made support structure which they all felt able to draw upon. The commitment to the FFTW3 by the TAs and class teachers appeared to give the TAs a heightened sense of agency to ensure the programme continued, even when circumstances were challenging.

The FFTW3 programme facilitated a greater quality of dialogue over children's needs but there was no additional time provided for such dialogue. The class teacher's insight into the importance of the intervention caused her to advocate on the TA's behalf and the class teacher's advocacy was generally effective where she was a member of the SLT. The sense of affiliation ensured that TAs maintained enthusiasm, commitment and determination. The model for the training in, and implementation of FFTW3, provides lessons for the future development of the TA role and the way in which interventions are implemented – particularly in relation to the quality of training and continuity of support - affording the TA a greater sense of agency and thus facilitating a greater degree of sustainability.

The findings from this study do not exist in a vacuum. To ensure the connectedness, in pragmatic terms (relating to the building of knowledge), it is important to locate the findings from this study within the existing knowledge base. I aim to do this in the chapter that follows, by revisiting the literatures relating to the role of the teaching assistant.

Chapter 7: Confused agendas, fragile structures and the possibility of sustained support

Having adopted a grounded theory approach I considered it important to do three things in this chapter: firstly, to give due prominence to the themes which emerged from the data, those of fragmentation and integration, with the prominent themes of *agency*, *affiliation* and *sustainability* emerging from the cross-case analysis; secondly, to re-examine the wider literature in the light of my findings and thirdly, to frame the discussion by revisiting the conceptual framework as outlined in Chapter 1. For each theme then, it is my intention to cast two spotlights - one focusing on the wider literature - and one focusing on my epistemological stance.

I argue that this study offers some worthwhile opportunities to reconsider the work of teaching assistants in relation to the particular ways in which they support children with literacy difficulties; furthermore, significant questions emerged from my findings which extend beyond the school community and into the domain of educational policy.

The three aspects of the theoretical conceptual framework help to frame my discussion. The acknowledgement of a postmodern perspective means that the notion of 'local' solutions and partial truths is accepted as part of my epistemological positioning. I offer this discussion as partial truth: one perspective of many that could be taken in relation to this study. At the same time, I seek to rescue this study from relativistic inertia by upholding pragmatic principles. In order to establish a pragmatic perspective, I pose questions derived from the conceptual framework - namely: the pragmatic principles of *modus vivendi*, connectedness, instrumental truth and practical difference (Dewey, 1938/1997, James, 1995, James, 2000) (see Chapter 1, *Conceptual Framework*). The questions posed as I focused on each theme were: How can conflicting perspectives be brought together successfully (modus vivendi)? What truth can be created from the findings (instrumental truth)? How does this build on previous truth(s) (connectedness)? And, what difference would this make to teaching assistants and their role in supporting literacy (practical difference)?

Layering the concept of *phronesis* - the third strand of my conceptual framework - onto these pragmatic principles is a way of upholding the checks and balances which practical wisdom necessitates (Flyvbjerg, 2001, Flyvbjerg, 2006, Flyvbjerg et al., 2012). It is about making sound judgement in the light of the findings. I attempt

to do this throughout the chapter, however there will be a particular focus when I broaden the discussion and distil from the findings a set of 'relatable' (Bassey, 1984) propositions (after Flyvbjerg et al. (2012)) based on this study and consider possible ways forward for practice, policy and research.

The notions of fragmentation and integration, emerging from the case reports and further developed in the cross-case analysis in Chapter 6, run through the thematic discussion in the manner of a *leit motif.* They represent the superordinate themes which emerged from the analysis. My findings suggest that the role of TAs in the primary classroom sits along a continuum of fragmentation and integration within and beyond the school community. Their position on this continuum is dependent upon how a school interprets their professional role, which in turn impacts upon how they are deployed. I have argued that the FFTW3 intervention provided a vehicle for greater integration of the TA role and thus, potentially, more sustainable intervention practices. My findings also give evidence to the argument that significant barriers persisted within the school community in three of the six schools. Locating these findings within the wider literature suggests that such barriers include but may also extend beyond the school context.

Agency

My findings across the six schools indicated that the FFTW3 programme facilitated a higher level of agency as evidenced and corroborated across three data sources (TA interview, TA observation, class teacher interview). The high expectations of the TAs in implementing the programme required a reviewing of the different ways in which their role is perceived. TAs rose to the challenge of implementing an intervention which allows for greater agency and initiative than many other content-driven intervention 'packages'. The high quality training described in Chapter 2, *Fischer Family Trust Wave 3*, suggested that although expectations relating to the programme implementation were high, they were not unreasonable. The data revealed that TAs were equipped for the task and, importantly, were aware of a support structure upon which they could draw.

My findings complement those of many other studies that have demonstrated that given a good level of training, TAs can be highly effective in supporting children's learning (Farrell et al., 1999, Department for Education and Skills, 2000b, Ofsted, 2002, Cajkler et al., 2007). What is also clear, however, given the decade of changes precipitated by the workforce remodelling, is that training has been neither consistent nor coherent (Ofsted, 2002, Cajkler et al., 2007, Alborz et al., 2009).The

induction training provided by the DfES (Department for Education and Skills, 2000a) which pre-dated the workforce remodelling, was only taken up by one third of schools according to a survey conducted on behalf of the Training and Development Agency (TDA) (2006) in spring 2001. Furthermore, in the autumn of that same year, one third of schools were unaware that the training existed for teaching assistants.

The document *Working with Teaching Assistants: A Good Practice Guide* (Department for Education and Skills, 2000b), provided, I would suggest, a very valuable framework for thinking beyond the specific training of the TA to a consideration of their position within the school workforce. Despite the positive response by local authorities to offer training, the TDA evaluation (2006) noted that take up of training had been compromised by a lack of funding and the difficulty in readily finding cover for TAs – particularly when they worked with children with challenging individual needs. Such a situation in terms of professional training would not be acceptable for fully qualified teaching staff given the degree of professional changes and additional expectations and yet the literature repeatedly signals the inadequacy in continuing professional development (CPD) for teaching assistants (Ofsted, 2002, Cajkler et al., 2007, Alborz et al., 2009). My study revealed that TAs were generally satisfied with continuing professional development (CPD), but there did not appear to be transparent systems and processes in place in terms of entitlement to training in every school.

This study has highlighted that the good quality training offered by FFTW3 ensured a high level of TA agency, which led, without exception, in the case of data collected for this study, to highly effective working practices with children. It also revealed the potential for sustaining these intervention practices where support structures are in place. However, it also demonstrated that despite the expectation of FFTW3's author, Canning, CPD associated with FFTW3 was not offered to TAs in any formal sense. This was mitigated by the support structure that the ECaR layered intervention afforded in terms of access to well-trained Reading Recovery teachers, and for this reason the TAs felt neither isolated nor exposed. In Fox and Fell schools, for example, I noted the extent to which Emily and Carolyn ensured that the interventions continued despite significant - and in the case of Fell school – almost insurmountable challenges (see Carolyn's *Early response to the FFTW3 (phase 2 interview)* in Chapter 5). Such commitment and sense of agency were woven through the interview data.

The lack of coherent practices in training TAs has been repeatedly highlighted in the literature (Cajkler et al., 2007) yet largely ignored in policy terms (despite the documentation seeking to facilitate the workforce remodelling). It is hardly surprising then, when findings from studies such as Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) point to limitations in TAs' pedagogical skills and shortcomings in being proactive in teaching and learning environments. Such limitations would exist for any practitioner without appropriate training or CPD. What is more surprising and disappointing is the inability of government to act upon research – particularly systematic reviews. This study revealed that good quality training led to a high level of agency within a programme that has high pedagogical demands on the TA within a clear framework.

From a pragmatic position the conflicting perspectives relating to the agency of the TA role are indicative of the issues surrounding the persistent and continued ambiguity of the teaching assistant's role. Implicitly, often with limited training, TAs have been asked to straddle two highly challenging and, sometimes, mutually exclusive agendas relating to supporting children - the drive to raise standards and the imperative to create inclusive school environments. Working towards a resolution requires a clearer definition and conceptualisation of the TA role which I discuss further under *Conceptualisation of the teaching assistant role.*

My findings set within the wider literature suggest that barriers to the developing agency of the TA role are closely linked to shortcomings in adequately supporting TAs within the educational community. Giangreco et al. (2001b) argue that such shortcomings reflect a repeated failure to adequately conceptualise the role of TAs. How can teaching assistants be effectively trained and deployed if their professional role has not been precisely established? A range of penetrating and pertinent questions have been posed in the literature which suggest the need to locate the discourses surrounding the role of the TA within the broader discourse of inclusion (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2007, Giangreco et al., 2012). This discussion is developed further when issues of *Sustainability beyond school* are considered below.

In locating my findings within the wider literature, it is possible to assert that TAs are lacking in neither commitment nor agency. Agency is only limited to the extent that TAs are constrained by incoherent and inconsistent training and deployment practices (Cajkler et al., 2007). Addressing concerns raised by researchers such as Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) may only be resolved when steps are taken to make a practical difference to the professional role of TAs. Causton-Theoharis et al. (2007)

insist that answers are required to more probing questions if we are to resolve what
currently appear to be intractable problems.

There has been a marked lack of connectedness relating to the development of the
TA role in terms of agency. Recommendations from research which pertain to
enhancing the TA role have had little impact (Cajkler et al., 2007) . My findings
strongly suggest that agency was strengthened because of the clear structure, good
training and support network provided by the FFTW3 as part of the ECaR (Tanner
et al., 2010a) project; such a structure, however, is not commonly found in schools.

A role characterised by a high degree of agency is only possible when the role itself
is clearly defined and located within the professional educational workforce. My
findings suggest that when the role is clear and expectations are high, as is the
case with the implementation of FFTW3, a high degree of agency ensues, provided
that support structures are in place. TAs' sense of agency was most challenged
where support from the senior leadership team (SLT) was passive – or at worst -
absent.

Affiliation

The sense of affiliation ensured that TAs maintained enthusiasm, commitment and
determination. In this sense there is an overlap with some of the discussion
concerned with *Agency*. The affiliation afforded by the FFTW3 programme and
ECaR (Tanner et al., 2010a) structure has been presented descriptively in the case
reports and thematically through the cross-case analysis.

The joint training of the TA and class teacher provided the first point of affiliation,
which both parties considered noteworthy for its immediate and ongoing value. The
shared training challenged class teachers to reconsider and review their
understanding of the reading process alongside TAs, facilitating a depth of dialogue
about both professional understanding of the reading process and children's
learning needs. Such a dialogue, as I argued in Chapter 6, started at the training
sessions and continued throughout the implementation of the programme. My study
suggests that it is hard to overstate the importance of the teacher and teaching
assistant training together. The common language created, and the shared
knowledge base, provided a solid foundation for implementation. Furthermore, as I
have stated elsewhere, the class teacher's insight into the importance of the
intervention caused her to advocate on the TA's behalf and this advocacy was
generally effective where she was a member of the SLT.

The requirement that teaching assistants and teachers train together is unusual in the context of literacy intervention. The value of training together was noted by the DfES (Department for Education and Skills, 2002) report in relation to the Advanced Literacy Strategy (ALS) and Early Literacy Strategy (ELS), but there is no evidence from my study or the wider literature that this has been common practice. The UK government has acknowledged the importance of the relationship between the class teacher and the TA (Department for Education and Skills, 2000b) yet the Training and Development Agency (TDA) (2006) evaluation noted that fewer than 25% of mentors attended the induction course with TAs when joint attendance was considered desirable.

The importance of communication between the teacher and teaching assistant has been consistently remarked upon in the literature and persistently neglected in policy terms. Cajkler et al. (2007:15) noted in their review that there was a need to better prepare TAs for their important communication role acting as a 'bridge' between teachers and pupils. The important link between teacher and TA impacts upon the relationship with, and learning environment for, the children who are supported.

As I argued in Chapter 6, the affiliation afforded by the FFTW3 intervention extended beyond the TA-class teacher relationship, to the broader structure of support provided by the Reading Recovery teacher. The ability to access such a highly valued source of support was unanimously appreciated by the teaching assistants. Reading Recovery teachers were willing to advise, support and in some cases, observe TAs and this was appreciated by the teaching assistants, but there was little time to make the most of such an opportunity. Other studies, notably the ECaR (Tanner et al., 2010a) evaluation have noted examples of where the expertise of the Reading Recovery Teacher (RRT) can often be under-utilised and it was certainly one of Canning's intentions that the FFTW3 intervention would enable TAs to draw upon the extensive knowledge and skills of the RRT.

Evidence from the interviews with the class teachers presented in Chapter 5 and 6, suggested that the quality of dialogue with TAs had increased as a result of the shared knowledge base. However, this dialogue continued to be *ad hoc* and rushed, in common with other liaison time. This lack of professional liaison time has been a constant refrain in the literature (Alborz et al., 2009). My study demonstrated that a sense of affiliation was a huge strength of the FFTW3 intervention. The requirement that teachers and TAs train together differs from almost all other intervention

training programmes. The structure of support provided by the layered approach of ECaR (Tanner et al., 2010a) further contributed to this sense of affiliation. The weakness in the structure is exposed where requirements are replaced by expectations - in relation to CPD and professional liaison time. I return to this point when I discuss *Policy* below.

In terms of moving towards a pragmatic resolution or *modus vivendi* in this matter, resourcing needs to be given due attention. According to the evidence, liaison time as it currently stands, is largely dependent upon the goodwill of the TA and the class teacher. Unless TAs are paid beyond their contractual contact hours with children, liaison time will never be sufficiently consistent or systematic. An *ad hoc* arrangement founded on goodwill is not a satisfactory base for sustainable, ongoing dialogue about children who are often those most in need of support and who often require the highest level of professional expertise. I argue that this lack of resourcing may be traced back to an ambiguity about teaching assistants' professional status about which government policy has had a persistent blind spot. I take up this argument further when I consider *Sustainability beyond school*, towards the end of this chapter.

A significant practical difference would result for teaching assistants, if affiliation were professionally established on a formal basis within school communities. TAs are reliant on how a school constructs their professional standing. Conflating flexibility of deployment with flexible professional status is problematic. TAs have little agency on any professional level to engender strong networks of affiliation, since there is no statutory requirement upon which they can draw.

Sustainability

When I began the research for this study I had anticipated that the FFTW3 programme would possibly foster closer professional links between the TA and the class teacher resulting from the requirement for shared training. I had not anticipated the significance of sustainability, both actual and potential, which emerged from the data. The prominence of this theme was established in Chapter 6. I assert that sustainability is desirable in the context of literacy intervention and has a number of dimensions. It pertains to:

- the way in which the role of the TA is sustained in order to implement the intervention;
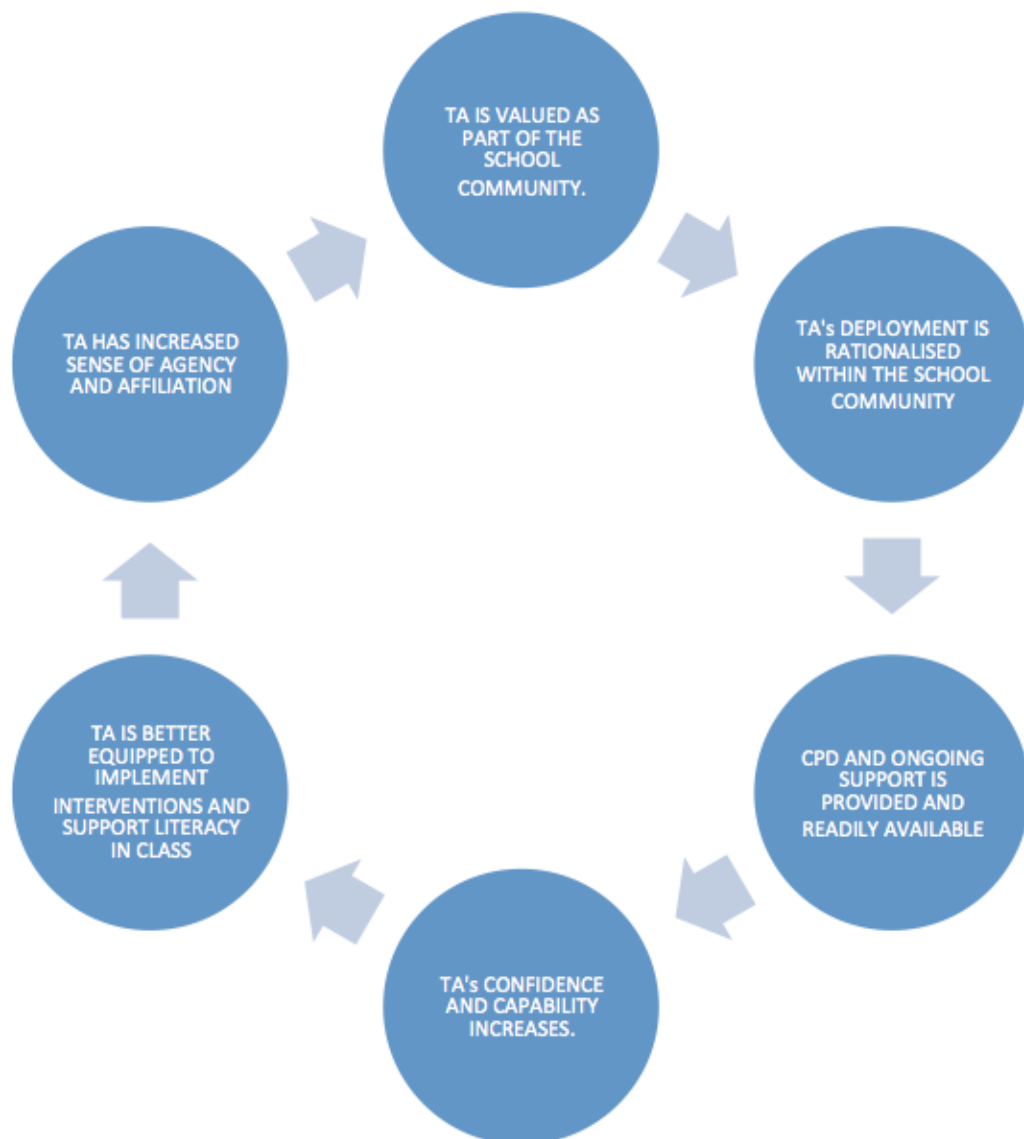
- the way in which the knowledge base may be sustained between the TA and the class teacher;

- the application of a child's learning to the classroom context to ensure that progress is sustained;

- the infrastructure which supports the continued implementation of the intervention in school;

- the infrastructure which supports the school implementation.

My findings gave evidence to aspects of the FFTW3 intervention which facilitated support of the TA and thus ensured a degree of sustainability within the school context. Questions were also raised, however, in relation to factors beyond the school community which impact upon sustainable interventions and consequently the effective deployment of TAs in this discrete role. The discussion that follows reflects these observations.

Sustainability within school

The requirements of the FFTW3 intervention aim to promote sustainable intervention practices within the school setting; the key elements of which are: quality training for the TA alongside the class teacher, a shared knowledge base and a greater integration of practice between the intervention and the classroom. The high quality of the training and shared knowledge base was corroborated through three data sources and sustainability resulted in terms of the teaching assistants' confidence and capability in implementing the programme, even where there had been a delay in starting the intervention. I have discussed these two dimensions in relation to agency and affiliation in Chapter 6. My findings indicated that a greater degree of agency combined with strong affiliation permitted greater sustainable practices.

The third dimension of sustainability mentioned above is demonstrated through a far greater integration of learning from the intervention alongside classroom practice; this is not possible with intervention packages where the TA 'delivers' a package to which the class teacher is not privy. I argue that a virtuous circle (see figure 7.1) is created where a sustainable intervention promotes greater integration with classroom practice because of the shared knowledge and understanding between teaching assistant and class teacher.

The circle diagram contains the following elements arranged clockwise:

- TA IS VALUED AS PART OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY.
- TA's DEPLOYMENT IS RATIONALISED WITHIN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY
- CPD AND ONGOING SUPPORT IS PROVIDED AND READILY AVAILABLE
- TA's CONFIDENCE AND CAPABILITY INCREASES.
- TA IS BETTER EQUIPPED TO IMPLEMENT INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORT LITERACY IN CLASS
- TA HAS INCREASED SENSE OF AGENCY AND AFFILIATION

Figure 7.1: virtuous circle of TA deployment

Although my evidence is not conclusive, the findings from both Fell and Fry indicated that learning from FFTW3 was being applied in the classroom context. In Chapter 6, I discussed how Zoë (Fell), the class teacher, had transformed her teaching practice in the light of the FFTW3 training. It meant that when Carolyn supported in class, the shared 'common language' was sustained and children with individual needs were particularly familiar with the language and approaches used. In Fry, the quality of dialogue was noted by both the TA and class teacher as one of the factors in facilitating greater applied learning from the intervention to the classroom setting. Another notable example was in Duckworth school where it was possible to successfully sustain the intervention, despite the fact that the TA was

largely supporting in Key Stage 2 and so not in the class where FFTW3 was implemented. The TA had an opportunity to liaise with the RRT and this ensured the sustainability, and indeed, fidelity to the programme.

There is little in the literature which explores the 'cross-over' between intervention and classroom practice partly because of the difficulty in creating research designs within naturalistic settings which allow the impact of integrated interventions to be measured (Gavelek et al., 2000). More research is needed to add to existing studies to build a cumulative knowledge base (Hatcher et al., 1994, Hatcher et al., 2004, Savage et al., 2009).Further research is also necessary to explore how children, who are most at risk in their reading, can most effectively apply their learning from an intervention programme to their class learning. From a pragmatic perspective I have already identified that adequate resourcing is vital in moving towards a *modus vivendi* in terms of training and communication needs for TAs. I have also argued that connectedness in terms of building upon previous truths from research has been largely absent.

If intervention practices are embedded within the school community within a cohesive structure they are more likely to be sustained and will arguably have more impact in the classroom through a shared knowledge base and common understanding. It also allows for meaningful reviews of the programme and assessment processes of children's progress to be implemented. Structures of support would make a considerable practical difference to the working practices of TAs and to the discharging of interventions. I explore this further under *Sustainability beyond school: a sustainable structure.*

Barriers to sustainability within school

The barriers to sustainability relating to the implementation of the FFTW3 intervention were discussed in Chapter 6. They included:

- a failure to protect the TA's time;
- the inability of the class teacher to successfully champion the role of the TA;
- the failure of the SLT to see the intervention as a priority and
- a lack of active commitment to the programme by the SLT.

Although my findings offered a picture of greater sustainability - both actual and potential - there was compelling evidence from Carolyn (Fell) detailed in the case report in Chapter 5, indicating a high level of frustration with intervention implementations generally, which, as far as she could perceive, were as readily

abandoned as they were taken up within the school. Significantly, this frustration
was expressed most articulately in the end of programme interview with Carolyn
(Fell). She had demonstrated considerable resilience in implementing the
intervention – in the face of numerous challenges - and had seen good results;
despite this, Carolyn was not sure whether the intervention would continue in the
following school year. She had received no tangible support from the SLT, even
though the team had made an initial commitment to the intervention (a requirement
by all schools). The members of the SLT had expressed no interest in the
programme and communication had been minimal. Of course, the SLT had had
many pressures to contend with including the pending relocation of the school;
nevertheless Carolyn and Zoë were both disappointed and surprised by the lack of
interest. Whilst most schools utilise a range of intervention approaches within some
form of provision mapping, Carolyn's comments echoed the findings from the
Cajkler et al. (2007:12) study noting the 'unsystematic' nature of TA deployment and
the DfES report where deployment in relation to interventions was described as '*ad
hoc*' (Hutchings et al., 2009:36).

In Chapter 6, I noted that in all cases where the class teacher was a member of the
SLT, the sustainability of the programme was far greater. Although all class
teachers advocated to protect the TAs' time and venue for FFTW3, it was the class
teachers who were also a member of the SLT whose voices were heard, ensuring
the implementation of the programme was maintained.

The document *Working with Teaching Assistants: A Good Practice Guide*
(Department for Education and Skills, 2000b) (Good Practice Guide hereafter)
offered opportunities to properly address the role and support of teaching assistants'
in schools. The guide acknowledged the diversity of the TA role and indicated the
four strands of support that could be expected by the school in relation to pupil,
teacher, curriculum and school; however the document (ibid:8) was also keen to
point out the responsibility of schools to provide support for the TAs themselves:

> *these four strands of support are only one part of the story. They can be
> regarded as the support provided by the TA. At the same time **the
> school has a responsibility to support the TA in fulfilling the
> expectations of the role.** This is the support provided for the TA. This
> obligation calls for consideration both of the way TAs are managed and
> of their professional development needs: management support should
> enable them to perform the job to the best of their abilities, and they*

> *should be encouraged to develop their skills and potential.'* [my emphasis]

The school's responsibility is described as an 'obligation' and this is where I consider the fundamental barriers to sustainability are rooted; the recommendations are persistently presented as expectations rather than statutory requirements. I discuss this further under *Policy*. The guide also described a 'virtuous circle' (ibid: 80) of support for pupils facilitated by teaching assistants, yet the support structure for the supporters themselves was never adequately or systematically fulfilled over the decade that followed. The wider literature repeatedly refers to unpredictable, *ad hoc* and incoherent training practices (Cajkler et al., 2007, Alborz et al., 2009).

The Ofsted report (2002) highlighted issues that directly impacted on sustainable working practices. The report noted the competing demands on the TAs' time where they were navigating an unchartered route from a traditional supporting role to a broader pedagogical role; furthermore the fragmentation of working practices was remarked upon where TAs were deployed to support too many classes. This fragmentation was compounded by a lack of training which was 'seldom based on any systematic identification of teaching assistants' own needs.' (ibid: 15).

The HLTA status provided TAs with an opportunity for additional training and increased responsibility within school (Hutchings et al., 2009). However, the role incorporated the requirement that HLTAs might cover classes as well as work with designated children or groups. This, I would argue, created a barrier rather than an opportunity for greater sustainable practices. By further diversifying and fragmenting the TA role, greater ambiguity has resulted (Cajkler et al., 2007). Furthermore, the pattern of TA deployment for class cover has meant that TAs without HLTA status have also been required to do short term cover (Hutchings et al., 2009). The review of the national agreement in 2010 (Department for Education, 2010a) urged that the deployment of HLTAs should be 'balanced against the educational desirability of regularly removing them from planned activities with the teachers to whom they are normally assigned' (paragraph 90).There is little evidence from the findings of this present study or the wider literature that such a balance has been struck.

Sustainability beyond school: a sustainable structure

I argued from my findings that the requirements for the implementation of FFTW3 as a programme, challenges the way in which interventions are often implemented in schools. The intervention was introduced within a pre-existing infrastructure of

support with Reading Recovery as the key intervention. This infrastructure was, arguably, more robust during the Every Child a Reader project since it attracted both government and charitable funding. The infrastructure meant that the teaching assistant not only had the support of the class teacher with whom she had trained but also access to the FFTW3 trainer (who has generally trained as a Reading Recovery teacher) and the Reading Recovery teacher if based in the school.

The principles, I suggest, that lead to sustainable practices beyond the school context and which are relatable beyond this study are:

- high quality initial training alongside the class teacher;
- a structure of ongoing support upon which to draw (within and beyond the school);
- an opportunity to participate in CPD (not evidenced in my study) yet strongly recommended by the author of the programme and
- active support from the SLT.

There are no examples in the literature that offer models of intervention practice, where training for TAs is provided within an infrastructure of professional support. Wilson and Bedford (2008), for example, noted that there were no examples of successful partnerships between class teacher and teaching assistant. For this reason, I suggest that the ECaR structure provides a valuable model which offers possibilities from which to generalise. A layered (three wave) intervention structure is part of a provision mapping process in many schools. What is consistently missing is the systematic provision mapping of training and CPD for teaching assistants (and class teachers) in relation to such interventions.

My study gave evidence to the implementation of FFTW3 facilitating greater integrated practices within all six school settings, but fragmentation was still part of the *modus operandi* especially in the schools where the class teacher was not part of the SLT. ECaR offered a good structure of support, yet ongoing support was entirely dependent upon the agency of the school in facilitating the programme. My findings echo those of the ECaR (Tanner et al., 2010a) evaluation, where TAs commented on how much they valued support in the instances where senior staff allowed ECaR interventions to be prioritised.

The policy documentation creates a narrative which suggests connectedness in pragmatic terms, yet the research literature provides a contrasting and dissonant narrative indicating that policy changes have made little practical difference to the

working practices of schools in deploying or training support staff with any system, coherence or view to sustainable intervention practices. Such dissonance suggests that although the role of the TA has changed dramatically, the corresponding support structures recommended by the Labour government of the time have been largely insubstantial and unsustainable.

Fundamentally the structure of layered intervention and in particular the ECaR model within which the FFTW3 model sits, provides a good model of sustainable intervention yet even here the structure proved unsustainable. A change of government in the spring of 2010 resulted in a removal of ring fencing for the funding of the ECaR project. Uncertainty resulted for many schools around funding further ECaR interventions with which they may have otherwise continued. The issue is much bigger than I had fully appreciated, namely: the issue of the TA's professional identity and status linking to broader issues around inclusion. This I would argue, has not been sufficiently explored in the literature (Giangreco et al., 2001a, Giangreco, 2003, Causton-Theoharis et al., 2007, Giangreco et al., 2012).

The failure I identify to adequately support TAs, extends to a broader picture of inclusion. A persistently fragmented notion of inclusion is reinforced by a repeatedly fragmented deployment of teaching assistants. Giangreco et al. (2001b:59) posit that the most 'at-risk' children are supported by practitioners who for all their commitment and dedication are generally the least qualified and have the least power:

> *it is somewhat ironic, if not surprising, that students with disabilities and paraprofessionals would come to be linked as they are. Both groups might reasonably be considered to include some of the most marginalized people within school hierarchies. As a result, assigning the least powerful staff to the least powerful students may be perpetuating the devalued status of both groups.*

A group of children with, arguably, the quietest voices are supported by adults with a voice that is neither properly considered nor consulted; powerlessness is mirrored between children and teaching assistants with both groups requiring support. I assert that truly integrated or sustainable intervention practices are not likely to exist for the most at-risk children, unless integrated and sustainable support structures are created for the professional staff who support them. A fundamental paradigmatic shift is required in how teaching assistants are situated within the professional

community (Giangreco et al., 2001b, Mansaray, 2006, Causton-Theoharis et al.,
2007, Giangreco et al., 2012).

This explicit link between the deployment of TAs and broader issues around
inclusion was also raised in the Alborz et al. (2009:2) review. They noted that:

> *Support, embedded as 'standard' school practice, with the type and*
> *extent of support provided planned on an individual basis, has*
> *implications for the destigmatisation of supported pupils.*

In order to adequately consider the barriers to sustainability beyond the school
context it is necessary to focus on two interrelated matters: the conceptualisation of
the TA role and matters pertaining to policy.

Barriers to sustainability beyond school.

Conceptualisation of the teaching assistant role

Mansaray (2006) argues that part of the strength of the TA role is its very flexibility,
ambiguity and liminality; however, my findings suggest that this also serves as a
weakness for a professional group (of predominantly women) who effectively 'fall
through the cracks' of the current professional structures. Yet there is considerable
evidence that their role can be vital in supporting a group of children who are often
described as the 'tail of underachievement' (Alborz et al., 2009, Savage et al.,
2009). There is little in the literature which seeks to theorise the work of teaching
assistants (Mansaray, 2006) and Giangreco et al. (2001a:58) observe that an
expansion in the paraprofessional role is surprising given the 'lack of conceptual
foundation'. Unless the TA role is adequately theorised, their professional
contribution within the teaching community will fail to be fully realised.

It is undisputed in the literature that the TA role is valued by teachers and school
communities, but the question persists: how should the role be conceived? An
adequately theorised answer to this question will ensure that from a pragmatic
perspective, research has connectedness, and policy starts to make a practical
difference to the professional lives of teaching assistants and the children they
support.

Questions around how to better train and prepare teachers to work with teaching
assistants will persist until the nature of the relationship between class teachers and
TAs is more clearly defined (Blatchford et al., 2007, Alborz et al., 2009). Burgess
and Mayes (2009) note the uniqueness of the TA role and highlight the difficulty

which teachers have faced in the mentoring of teaching assistants – a role for which they have been ill prepared. The lack of time for communication is an obvious challenge to successful mentoring, but the root difficulty, I argue, relates to the nature of the TA role. Into what role, precisely, are TAs being mentored? At times they are seen as generalists who have, according to Blatchford et al. (2009a), a wider pedagogical role (WPR); at other times they are perceived as 'specialists' in relation to interventions (especially literacy) (Savage et al., 2003, Hatcher et al., 2006). Sometimes, especially as HLTAs, teaching assistants take on the role of class teacher; sometimes they take on the role of classroom auxiliary – being required by class teachers to ensure the smooth running of the classroom. Their role is both flexible and multi-faceted.

The teaching assistant role may be analogous to an apprenticeship but such an analogy suggests that all TAs might enter the teaching profession, which is not the case. The analogy of the sous chef proposed by Causton-Theoharis et al. (2007) is perhaps closer to the reality of the situation. The TA is under the authority of the class teacher and in time may choose to pursue the opportunity to become a teacher. Equally, the teaching assistant may choose to remain at the second-in-command level (analogous to a sous chef). A sous chef has had culinary experience in all the different aspects of the chef role in the kitchen and from such experience they are then able to take on the sous chef position. If the TA role is analogous to this, then it is necessary to ask: what range of experience is it possible to assuredly say that all TAs have had, before they take on this second-in-command role? The answer from my findings and from the wider literature is that no assurance is evident of a consistent exposure to training or range of experience which would equip TAs for such a role. So whilst the analogy is more accurate than that of apprenticeship, it falls down when the range of training that TAs should receive to qualify them for such a status is considered, with arguably, the exception of HLTAs.

It is evident from the literature that the ambiguity of the TA role, including HLTA status, has resulted in a degree of exploitation which may be unintentional but is nevertheless apparent. The UNISON (2007) report noted workload as a key issue with 43% of respondents reporting that they worked regular overtime. Very few received additional payment for such work. Importantly, the report articulated that support staff 'appear to have accepted the sort of open-ended working time embodied in the school teachers' pay and conditions document, but without having the corresponding status or reward' (p. 60). This report mirrors the review findings of

Giangreco et al. (2001a) in the United States, where the failure to pay a living wage to paraprofessionals was in dissonance with professional expectations which were not dissimilar to those of a qualified class teacher.

It is unsurprising given this context, that Hutchings et al.(2009) noted evidence of increased stress levels (according to the perception of head teachers) alongside the general agreement amongst TAs that they considered that they had more work to do than previously, in the same number of hours. The ambiguity of the HLTA status can also be traced back to the failure to adequately theorise the TA role and I will return to this in considering the interrelated issue of policy.

Policy

There are two key points in relation to policy which I want to highlight in this section that have impacted on the role of the teaching assistant. Firstly, as discussed in the previous section, the conceptualisation of the TA role has never been properly established in policy terms. Secondly, the agenda has never substantially focused upon TAs as a professional group. The consequence of these two observations is that TAs have been deployed for over a decade with an ambiguity of role manifested through well-meaning but essentially confused policy agendas. I intend to evidence these two points by referring to a selective list of significant policy documents which serve to highlight this ambiguity.

The green paper *Excellence for all children: meeting special educational needs* (Department for Education and Skills, 1997:65) set out an ambitious programme for extending the inclusion of children with special education needs (SEN) in mainstream schools and it was noted that such a programme recognised that teaching assistants were 'central to successful SEN practice in mainstream and special schools.' It was apparent from the document that training TAs more consistently was considered important; the key question posed, for example, relating to TAs was: 'What action should we take to improve the training and career structure of learning support assistants?' (ibid: 66). The question focuses on training and career structure rather than role, perhaps because at this stage the nature of the supportive role was not considered necessary to re-evaluate. Additionally, in this green paper, the term 'learning support assistant' appears to define the role in an unambiguous way. It is interesting to note that between the two green papers the term changed from 'learning support assistant' to 'teaching assistant': arguably suggesting an implicit, yet unstated change in role.

The green paper which followed in 1998 (Department for Education and Employment, 1998b) was again ambitious in its intent with a set of objectives which recognised low morale and excessive workload in the teaching profession and therefore focused on seeking to develop and modernise the education system, recognise the role of teachers in raising standards and improve training opportunities for the profession. No explicit mention is made of teaching assistants in these objectives and yet a few pages earlier in section 7, the TA role in enabling and facilitating change is clearly indicated:

> *In the end, however, it is the quality of teaching and the support available to teachers which will make the difference. The increasing numbers of teaching assistants and support professionals in schools will change approaches to teaching and learning. With trained assistants, teachers can choose between large groups and small ones, assigning additional staff to provide extra assistance to those with special educational needs or to help push on the gifted or those with particular talents.*

> (Department for Education and Employment, 1998b)*.*

The need to explore how training and qualifications might best 'fit together' (ibid: 136) by working with Local Education Authorities is rightly acknowledged in the paper. There was a clear recognition that TAs might wish to specialise (in Early Years, SEN, literacy, numeracy or ICT) and it was clearly stated that all teaching assistants should have access to good quality training. The paper conceded that the vast expansion in the number of teaching assistants, which had grown by almost 50% since 1997, had not been matched with sufficient training opportunities.

Such training came from the Labour government of the time, in the form of the Good Practice Guide (Department for Education and Skills, 2000b:15) and Estelle Morris (the then, secretary of state for Education) stated that:

> *To perform well you need to know what it is you are supposed to be doing. Clarity is therefore needed in the deployment of any member of staff. Because the role of the TA has been evolving, and as it varies according to the school and the experience and qualifications of the TA, the task may well require more thought than it does for other members of staff whose role is better established. It may also require more monitoring and follow-up.*

The document posited a set of good practice indicators accompanied by a series of audits which schools could utilise. Indicator 1, for example (42) encouraged discussion around roles and responsibilities which included consideration for time to plan and liaise with other members of staff (see Appendix 15). I would suggest that if all schools had been required to undertake such an audit, much of the confusion and ambiguity that has persistently surrounded the TA role might have been avoided; the 'clear deployment within a flexible framework' (Department for Education and Skills, 2000b:20) may have been a more likely outcome from the radical changes that ensued.

The agenda of the National Agreement (NA) *Raising Standards and Tackling Workload* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) previously discussed in Chapter 3, was largely dependent upon the remodelling of the workforce and the dramatic shift in role for teaching assistants; in particular to enable the provision of planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time to reduce the workload for teachers. Support staff generally, and teaching assistants in particular, were considered fundamental to the agreed changes and it appeared that careful consideration would be given to appropriate professional constraints that the role should have, including the necessary training and levels of remuneration.

Under *Barriers to sustainability in school* in this chapter, I argued that the HLTA status and associated deployment has represented a barrier to the sustainability of intervention and thus fully integrated deployment. The fact that HLTAs were associated with raising standards and reducing teacher workload rather than inclusive practices may be at the root of the problem.

Although the National Agreement (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) made reference to HLTA specialisms 'they may specialise in working across a particular subject area;' (point 61, page 12) - the discourse appeared to be in the context of class cover (in relation to PPA) rather than opportunities to specialise in intervention practices with SEN groups. This is in dissonance with the green paper of 1998 (Department for Education and Employment, 1998b) where there was a clear suggestion that TAs may wish to specialise in SEN, for example.

I have sought to demonstrate throughout this chapter that the research reviews have proffered a consistent and repeated finding that training for TAs has been patchy and inconsistent and there is no evidence that TAs or HLTAs have had clear opportunities to access training to develop specialisms relating to children with SEN.

Such ambitious changes to the workforce demanded ambitious support structures to be put in place for the group of individuals whom the NA had readily acknowledged were key to the remodelling process. Despite the induction materials, Good Practice Guide (2000b) and the agreed good response of LAs, the development of the TA role and deployment has been severely impaired through framing the changes in relation to expectations rather than requirements.

Propositions

The pragmatic and phronetic stance of this study requires me to consider the usefulness and prudence of these discussions for wider application beyond this multiple case study. The following propositions are presented, after Flyvbjerg et al. (2012), who identify phronetic principles to apply when considering the wider application of case study research. The questions he identifies are: Where are we going? Who gains and who loses and by which mechanisms of power? Is it desirable? And, what should be done? (Flyvbjerg, 2001:60). Such propositions are offered with the primary consideration of what will make the greatest practical difference to the role of teaching assistants in terms of research, policy and practice.

Research-focused propositions

Research is needed to identify how TAs are to be viewed as professional 'partners'.

It is necessary to attend to the long-standing concerns from researchers in the United States (Giangreco et al., 2001b, Causton-Theoharis et al., 2007) and the UK (Blatchford et al., 2009a, Webster et al., 2011) and properly establish a conceptual frame within which TAs can establish their professional identity and role. Even if flexibility is valued, the TA role should be characterised by identifiable practices and requirements within the school workforce which allow for agency, affiliation and sustainable practices to flourish.

Research about inclusive practices and interventions needs to consider more explicitly the role of the TA alongside the class teacher.

If TAs are to be involved in intervention practices, research relating to the support of at-risk readers and more broadly, children with SEN, needs to explore the role that TAs play alongside the class teacher. Equity of children's entitlement to class teacher time is important and has implications for the continuing professional development (CPD) of qualified teachers as well as teaching assistants.

Policy-focused Propositions

At the point where a conceptual framework for the role of the TA is established (see research-focused proposition), statutory requirements are needed for coherence and consistency in initial training, CPD and working practices.

Evidence suggests that statutory requirements are needed if there is to be any likelihood that TAs will be deployed effectively, consistently and within an integrated and sustainable environment. Fragmentation is likely to persist until policy creates a statutory framework in which TAs (and therefore the children whom they support) can thrive.

School-Focused Propositions

Setting aside any commitment to the theoretical underpinnings of Reading Recovery to which schools may or may not subscribe, there are some broad principles of successful intervention, both adoption and implementation, derived from my findings which may be relatable to other school contexts. My findings suggest that emulating such a model of layered interventions creates much better possibilities for sustainable and integrated practices.

Create a culture where TAs are properly established within the school workforce

The role of the senior leadership team (SLT) in deploying and supporting TAs determines the extent to which their role in school becomes fragmented or integrated. Sustainable practices are possible but not where deployment lacks clarity and coherence.

Train the teacher and the TA for every intervention used.

An intervention which involves the class teacher and the teaching assistant ensures that a shared knowledge base exists from the outset which serves to strengthen the professional relationship. Dialogue becomes increasingly more explicitly focused on the progress of children, in and beyond the intervention session.

Allow TAs to straddle intervention groups and class literacy lessons to enable a better integration and application of learning for children.

The shared knowledge base between teachers and teaching assistants appears to allow for a much more explicit and coherent expectation that skills and knowledge learned in the intervention sessions will be applied in the classroom (especially if the

TA is supporting the same class from which the children are taken for the intervention).

Allow time for, and access to, professional support and training

The pre-existing support network available to the teaching assistant through the ECaR project ensured that professional support and advice was available on an ongoing basis – even when no formal CPD was available. Replicating such a structure would ensure that TAs are well supported; however, ongoing support should not be a substitute for an allocation of time for CPD.

The school-focused propositions will be more possible if the research and policy focused propositions are sufficiently attended to; however, my findings suggest that much can be learned from the model of FFTW3 as a vehicle for integration which does not rely entirely on development in research and policy – such developments will inevitably take considerable time, resources and political will.

In this chapter I have extended the discussion concerning the role of teaching assistants by situating the findings from the data within the wider literature. The themes of agency, affiliation and sustainability which emerged from the empirical data were thus re-examined and developed. In particular, the theme of sustainability was demonstrated to have significance within and beyond the school context. Towards the end of the chapter, I considered it important to highlight the usefulness and application of this study by offering propositions from three different perspectives – research, policy and school.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In this concluding chapter I aim to summarise the study by revisiting the research questions, the key findings and the implications. I also examine the shortcomings and limitations of the study before offering recommendations for further research.

The research questions

This study began with broad questions around the nature of literacy support in primary schools. A pilot study conducted in 2010 helped to crystallise the questions surrounding the role of the teaching assistant in supporting struggling readers, and the extent to which interventions might be better embedded within classroom literacy learning. A unique opportunity arose to explore answers to these questions through the national Every Child a Reader (ECaR) (Tanner et al., 2010a) project, where the Fischer Family Trust Wave 3 programme (Canning, 2007) was one of a range of layered interventions. It was a programme that appeared to warrant further study for the model of training and support offered to teaching assistants. Canning, the author of the programme, began with the pragmatic and modest intention of widening children's access to support by adapting a model of intervention to which she was professionally and pedagogically committed - Reading Recovery. I considered that evaluating aspects of this intervention in the form of a multi-case study might offer worthwhile and relatable findings for wider application. By examining the implementation of FFTW3 within two contrasting local authorities (one where ECaR was established and one new to ECaR) I sought to compare the way in which the TAs were deployed and how the intervention was used with children.

As my research became more focused around the FFTW3 programme, I was able to explore how TAs saw their role in relation to literacy support. I wanted to establish the nature of the training that they received alongside the class teacher and I wanted to determine if ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) was available. I also sought to establish if links between the intervention and classroom literacy learning were impacted by the joint training. Finally, I aimed to gain an understanding of the nature of TAs' deployment within the school and the extent to which they felt supported within the context of a nationally funded project.

Key findings

Answers to the research questions were sought predominantly through interview and observation. Informed by a grounded theory approach, a constant comparison

of data resulted in two of the three strands of analysis (Charmaz, 1995, Charmaz, 2000, Urquhart, 2007). Firstly, through the structured narrative of the case reports where I explored the domains of role, training and communication, I sought to give teaching assistants a voice; a voice which they often lack within the educational community (Wilson and Bedford, 2008). Additionally, the profile of each teaching assistant served to highlight similarities and differences which contributed to the second layer of analysis.

Secondly, through cross-case analysis – the prominence of several themes emerged (Stake, 2006). My findings demonstrated that TAs' deployment was experienced as part of a continuum ranging from fragmentation to integration. Beneath these superordinate themes, the prominent themes of agency, affiliation and sustainability emerged. I established that when the TAs' role is most integrated within the class and school community, intervention practices are most sustainable. FFTW3 emerged as a vehicle for such integration and sustainability.

The first question addressed was: are there lessons that can be learned from the FFTW3 programme as a model of training and implementation for future consideration in terms of the role and deployment of teaching assistants? My research demonstrated that the model of FFTW3 offered a model of training and implementation which has application beyond the programme itself; in particular, the joint training of the TA and class teacher appeared to enable a more collaborative response to children's literacy needs together with ongoing support for TAs; this was highly valued by the TAs and recognised as important by the class teachers. The additional support offered by the FFTW3 trainer and Reading Recovery teacher provided a form of professional scaffolding which ensured TAs felt valued and enabled.

The model of FFTW3, though potentially robust, is impacted upon by the way in which the TA's role is seen within each school community. Where the SLT appear to value and respect the role of the TA in supporting interventions, the model of the programme was sustained and upheld. This resulted in a highly integrated sense of role for the TAs, despite FFTW3 being one of many aspects of their work. Where the SLT did not explicitly uphold the professional role of the TAs in implementing interventions, the teaching assistants were faced with additional challenges in order for the programme to continue. The barriers faced in school by TAs raised further questions about how their role was articulated and presented nationally at the inception of the workforce remodelling, and this became the focus of Chapter 7.

The second question concerned training for teaching assistants: to what extent do teaching assistants feel equipped to support literacy in primary schools? This study revealed that TAs' training in literacy, both initial and ongoing is very varied. A lack of consistency in initial and ongoing CPD impacts upon TAs' sense of their role within schools. Those who considered that they were well trained and who had (or perceived they had) good access to training had, unsurprisingly, a positive integrated sense of their role within the school professional workforce. Those whose access to training opportunities was less clear were less secure in their understanding of their role. All TAs considered that they were well equipped to initiate the FFTW3 programme (despite the pedagogical demands on the TA) because of the high quality of the training and support they received. Further questions were necessarily raised about how the TA role is conceptualised and it became apparent that at policy level a distinct lack of clarity has existed and persists.

The third research question was concerned with the implementation of the intervention: does the model of FFTW3 facilitate a more integrated approach to literacy support – bearing in mind that the teacher and the teaching assistant are required to attend the initial training together?

An interest in integrated and holistic practices of literacy support meant that I was interested in the extent to which the FFTW3 programme facilitated a more integrated approach to literacy support, with literacy activities straddling the intervention (where children are withdrawn from class) and classroom activities. This study gave some evidence that the model of FFTW3 engendered more integrated practices between interventions and classroom literacy activities; however, further research is needed to focus on this aspect of the model, incorporating a research design which allows the researcher to track children from the intervention back into the classroom over an extended period of time.

This multi-case study has demonstrated that the implementation of a school based intervention with a simple but clear requirement that the teacher attends initial training with the TA, impacted significantly on the TAs' sense of agency and affiliation within the school structure. The model of FFTW3 intervention offers a challenge to consider effective ways of deploying TAs (particularly in relation to literacy intervention). The joint training also impacted upon the way in which the intervention was valued, implemented and sustained within the school environment.

In the six case study schools, the quality of the training ensured that TAs gained confidence and a much stronger sense of agency. The location of the intervention within a supported structure (ECaR) enabled TAs to have a sense of affiliation with other practitioners - including class teachers and Reading Recovery teachers (RRTs) - in contrast to most other interventions used in schools. The potential sustainability of the intervention served to raise further questions, which went beyond the active support of the senior leadership team (SLT) to a broader consideration of the conceptualisation of the TA role and matters relating to policy. Such questions were explored through the discussion chapter, representing a third layer of analysis where I located my findings within the broader literature and explored the issue of sustainability in greater depth. I noted a dissonance between the policy and research literature. I argued through the course of the chapter that a persistent blind spot in policy pertaining to the precise nature of the TA role has contributed to an ambiguity of status and deployment which is, as yet, unresolved. Such ambiguity, I have argued, was mitigated through relationships established within the FFTW3 programme and in this respect the programme can be upheld as a 'critical' case study according to Flyvbjerg's typology (2001:78) in terms of having 'strategic importance in relation to the general problem.' I have argued that my study represents a critical case to the extent that fragmented practices (a symptom of ambiguity) persisted within the implementation of FFTW3 (which represented an integrated programme of intervention) suggesting that barriers to sustainability were in existence beyond the school context.

The findings from this study have contributed to the literature in a number of ways. Firstly, casting a spotlight on the role of the teaching assistant in relation to the FFTW3 model of intervention has highlighted the importance of teaching assistants and class teachers training together in interventions: it is valuable for both parties. Such joint training appeared to create greater confidence within the teaching assistants and resulted in a greater sense of agency. Although this form of training has often been recommended in the literature (Department for Education and Skills, 2000b), there is little evidence that such training has been taken up.

The support structures which existed from the ECaR project ensured that TAs felt a much stronger sense of affiliation. There was a coherence to the support offered within ECaR which was unusual and welcomed by the TAs. The literature has often spoken of fragmented working and training practices (Ofsted, 2002, Cajkler et al., 2007); the FFTW3 programme, within the EcaR structure offers a coherent model of good practice. I have argued that such affiliation can be replicated if sustainable

and integrated intervention practices are part of a whole school approach with the explicit and active support of the senior leadership team.

I have also argued that FFTW3 represents a critical case study, according to Flyvbjerg (2006), in terms of sustainable practice, yet despite the value of the model, barriers to sustainable and integrated practices were revealed which caused me to re-examine the literature in the light of my findings. The concerns originally raised by Giangreco et al. (2001a) in the USA relating to the conceptualisation of the TA role and the nature of their deployment in relation to inclusion, emerged as holding considerable significance and I maintain that these concerns have not been sufficiently addressed in the UK context.

Implications of the findings

The implications of my findings exist on different levels. On a school level, there is much to be learned by distilling the elements of the FFTW3 model and applying them in schools – I argue that they represent a relatable model of good practice. In particular – high calibre joint training combined with ongoing access to support from the class teacher and other professionals (the Reading Recovery Teacher (RRT) in the case of ECaR).

On a level beyond school, there are a number of implications. If sustainable, integrated intervention practices are valued, support has to extend beyond school to a far clearer conceptualisation of the TA role combined with legislation allowing for sufficient training and appropriate deployment within such a frame. Ambiguity can only be resolved by tackling the issue at a policy level.

The implications for research and policy are framed within pragmatic and phronetic principles (James, 1995, Dewey, 1938/1997, James, 2000, Flyvbjerg, 2001). I maintain that research has neither impacted policy over the past decade, nor made any practical difference to the working lives of a group of practitioners who are generally seen to be invaluable within the school community. The very flexibility of TA deployment that is valued within the school context, has also contributed to a flexibility of status – a symptom of the failure to adequately theorise the role of the teaching assistant.

I argue that once a theoretical frame has been established for the deployment of teaching assistants, legislation would then be required to ensure that they are located clearly within the education professional workforce. The role of TAs has always been contingent upon agendas characterised by ambiguity.

Limitations of this study

As a researcher I have sought to be transparent and explicit about the research processes adopted; nevertheless I acknowledge that explicating every stage of qualitative research holds considerable challenge. I recognise that 'blind spots'(limitations) and 'blank spots' (shortcomings) exist in this study (Wagner, 1993, Kamler and Thomson, 2006) which will need to be addressed in future research.

Whilst every attempt has been made to present findings grounded in the data and to maximise the relatable principles from this study, the sample size of six teaching assistants limits the potential for generalising from this research. Future research with a larger sample size would be worthwhile in terms of studying FFTW3 as a model of good practice. Also, the potential for comparison of data across the two local authorities was reduced because of the difficulty in locating schools in Dalton where FFTW3 had been established for more than two years (the criteria for sample selection). Arguably, this issue in itself, added to questions around sustainability of practice.

Although my research design did not allow me to properly establish the connections between the literacy intervention and classroom literacy, this study provided some evidence from TA and class teacher data; however this requires further study as noted under *Recommendations for further research.*

I have not sought to make grand claims about truth or knowledge in this study in consonance with my epistemological and ontological stance as expressed in the conceptual framework (see Chapter 1). Whilst I offer propositions in Chapter 7 which refer to policy level, I do so by locating my findings within the wider literature (Eisenhardt, 2002) attempting to ensure that the findings have a 'connectedness' to previous educational research and policy documentation as one of the guiding pragmatic principles identified in Chapter 1.

Recommendations for further research

My findings suggested that the quality of dialogue between the TA and the class teacher facilitated greater coherence of learning across the intervention and the classroom. Further research is needed to theorise the role of the teaching assistant within the context of inclusive practices in schools. It is clear that there would be considerable value in establishing how learning gained in intervention sessions might be applied more effectively in the classroom setting.

At a national level, research that addresses the broad questions around how teaching assistants are explicitly and unambiguously located within the educational workforce would be worthwhile. This, I suggest, would represent a significant progression in developing and refining the teaching assistants' role.

Final reflections

Evidence is unequivocal that TAs are valued by class teachers and the wider school community, yet their professional status is almost entirely dependent upon their school context. They can be deployed from facilitating an intervention, to all manner of classroom tasks in an unsystematic way. The flexibility of the teaching assistant's role needs to be upheld; however, the ambiguity of such a role in professional terms can no longer be regarded as acceptable. We do both teaching assistants and children with individual needs a huge injustice by accepting such a situation. Sustainable intervention requires a group of TA practitioners who are, themselves, professionally supported - mirroring the support structures in place for teachers and the children with whom they work. My findings suggest that if teaching assistants are to be involved in sustainable intervention practices, then better support structures are needed for the TAs themselves, to ensure that they are able to flourish professionally; this in turn will allow children to develop within an inclusive framework, where TAs have a clear and unambiguous role. There is the potential for a virtuous circle to be created, allowing for sustainable, integrated intervention practices in ways which have yet to be substantially envisioned and enacted.

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Appendix 1: research questions and appropriate methods

Research Questions	Associated questions	Research methods
1. Are there lessons that can be learned from the FFTW3 programme as a model of training and implementation for future consideration in terms of the role and deployment of teaching assistants?"	Why was the FFTW3 programme adopted within the ECaR framework of interventions? Background?	Interview data – with Jill Canning. Documentation scrutiny of ECaR purposes.
	Do TAs feel equipped to implement the FFTW3 programme after the initial training?	TA/Jill Canning - Interview data. Observation data – to establish fidelity to the FFTW3 programme.
	Given that there is an expectation that liaison/professional dialogue should exist in relation to the FFTW3 programme – to what extent does this happen?	Post-programme interviews with TAs and class teachers in Farnsworth. Interviews with TAs and class teachers in Dalton (established FFTW3 programme) Ask TA to keep diary of liaison time? (manageability? Reactivity an issue?)
2. To what extent do teaching assistants feel equipped to support literacy in primary schools?"	How does the historical role of TAs, impact on their status today in schools?	Literature review including international reviews and UK/English government documentation particularly dating from 1997 – the inception of the National Literacy Strategy. Interview data – establish how TAs consider that their role has changed.
	Is there evidence to suggest that TAs can effectively support children in literacy interventions?	Literature review including Hatcher, Savage and Carless and Blatchford. Refer to pilot study 2008. Observation and interview data in relation to FFTW3.
	Does TAs' initial training equip them to support children with literacy difficulties? How confident do they feel?	Documentation on TA training from targeted research reviews and policy documentation. Interview data – establish the quality of initial training.
	What are TAs' experiences of CPD in relation to literacy pre-ECaR? (What level of CPD are schools required to provide for TAs?)	Literature review including policy documents and systematic reviews. TA Interview questions to establish nature of CPD in Farnsworth and Dalton independent of FFTW3. Interviews in Farnsworth pre-ECaR.
3. Does the model of FFTW3 facilitate a more integrated approach to literacy support – bearing in mind that the teacher and the teaching assistant are required to attend the initial training together	Where liaison has happened regularly, has this made intervention more effective for the child?	Interview data from TAs and class teachers in Farnsworth and Dalton.
	Can the FFTW3 programme serve to straddle the divide between targeted individualised intervention and classroom literacy where skills might be applied in a language-rich environment?	Interviews in Farnsworth (post-programme) and Dalton (established programme).

Appendix 2: TA interview schedule, Farnsworth, phase 1

The rationale for interview questions is shown.

November 2010

[Give information sheet and consent form (needs to be signed) Remind TA about confidentiality and anonymity. Need pseudonym.]

<u>Introduction:</u>

Name

Background

limited training? (Savage and Carless, 2008)

Becoming a TA

diversity of background (professional experience as a SENCO)

How long a TA

Diversity of role over time (Clayton, 1993)

Qualifications

Savage and Carless (2008)

<u>Training:</u>

Training in general

Tucker (2009)

Length

Value

Literacy

Questions emerged from pilot study: do elements of initial training equip TAs for their growing role in literacy?

Increasing pedagogical role (Blatchford et al. 2009)

In pilot study (2009) in Larchwood school, TAs very reliant on 'in-house' training.

<u>Role:</u>

Current role in school?

What aspects of role most enjoyable?

What aspects of role most challenging?

How has your role changed?

Clayton (1993); a discourse and culture of care (Dunne et al, 2008)

How do you see role alongside teachers?

Professional experience and pilot study (2009).

Any frustrations/tensions in relation to role?

Pilot study (2009) and professional experience

What would constitute the biggest improvement to your role?

Pilot study (2009) in relation to seeking more consistency – less 'trouble-shooting'.

Role in relation to Literacy support:

In what ways are you involved in literacy support?

Professional experience, policy changes in relation to Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) Raising standards and tackling workload: a national agreement (DfES, 2003)

How much on average in a week (cf. maths)?

An increase in responsibility – (Blatchford et al. 2009)

In what aspects of literacy support do you feel most confident?

Issues around initial training/CPD professional experience; pilot study 2009 –levels of confidence seemed high despite limited CPD; measureable gains in literacy with TA involvement (Savage and Carless, 2005; Hatcher et al. 2006).

Least confident?

Questions around impact (Blatchford et al. 2009)

What programmes/interventions have worked particularly well in your experience?

Links to question re. confidence/training

CPD in literacy?

Valuing of TAs in a more systematic way should include CPD (Tucker, 2009)

 Pilot study – over-reliance on 'trickle-down'? pilot study, 2009

Sufficient?

Courses?

Staff meetings?

Budget/time constraints – professional experience and pilot study, 2009.

INSET?

More training – what areas? Literacy or other areas?

Liaison:

> Impact of training influenced by relationship with class teacher (Blatchford et al. 2004)
>
> Questions which emerged from pilot study analysis, 2009 in relation to straddling the dual pedagogical goals of targeted intervention and enabling engagement in classroom literacy.

Opportunities to liaise?

Informal?

> Largely self-determining role in schools (Tucker, 2009)

Formal?

With class teachers?

With SENCO?

With Literacy Coordinator?

With RR teacher (if different to above)?

With SLT (if not SENCO)?

> FFTW3 Training: links to questions around CPD and government policy re. Every Child a Reader, seeking to address the 'tail of under achievement'.

How were you approached about FFTW3 training?

What are your thoughts on being involved?

What do you hope to gain from the training?

What are your thoughts on being trained alongside the class teacher?

> Emerging questions from pilot study (2009) in Rowan School: TA quite isolated through time constraints.

What professional difficulties/possibilities does this raise?

Anything else that you would like to tell me that has not already been covered in relation to your role?

Thank TA for her time.

Appendix 3: TA interview schedule, Farnsworth, phase 2.

May 2011

<u>The FFTW3 training</u>

How did you find the training?

Useful/helpful/anything new/ training alongside the class teacher [said it would be an 'added bonus' in the last interview']

What did you particularly like?

Is there anything that you don't think will work well?

Does it differ from other programmes that you have used?

How did the class teacher respond to the training?

Were you offered any ongoing support?

<u>Starting to use the programme</u>

How did you decide which children to implement this programme with?

Are any your target children from group work?

How many children?

When did you start using the programme?

How confident did you feel when you started?

Keeping to time?

How confident did you feel today?

Any follow up points re the session observed.

Support from the class teacher?

Liaison with the class teacher?

FFTW3 trainer?

Ideally, what CPD would you like to help you in implementing this programme?

Appendix 4: TA interview schedule, Dalton, May 2011

[Give information sheet and consent form (needs to be signed) Remind TA about confidentiality and anonymity.]

Introduction:

Name

Background

Becoming a TA

How long a TA

Qualifications

Training:

Training in general

Length

Value/relevance

Literacy – preparation to support

Role:

Current role in school?

What aspects of role most enjoyable?

What aspects of role most challenging?

How has your role changed?

How do you see role alongside teachers?

Any frustrations/tensions in relation to role?

What would constitute the biggest improvement to your role?

Role in relation to Literacy support:

In what ways are you involved in literacy support?

How much on average in a week (cf. maths)?

In what aspects of literacy support do you feel most confident?

Least confident?

What programmes/interventions have worked particularly well in your experience?

CPD in literacy?

Sufficient?

Courses?

Staff meetings?

INSET?

More training – what areas? Literacy or other areas?

Liaison:

Opportunities to liaise?

Informal?

Formal?

With class teachers?

With SENCO?

With Literacy Coordinator?

With RR teacher (if different to above)?

With SLT (if not SENCO)?

FFT Training:

How were you approached about FFT training?

What were your thoughts on being involved?

How did you find the training?

Useful/helpful/anything new/ training alongside the class teacher/

What did you particularly like?

Is there anything that you don't think works well?

Does it differ from other programmes that you have used?

How did the class teacher respond to the training?

Were you offered any ongoing support / CPD after the initial training?

If yes, was that followed through? [Support from the RR teacher?]

Starting to use the programme:

How did you decide which children to implement the programme with? [RR in school?]

How many children?

Did you drop any other interventions to make 'space' for FFTW3?

When did you start using the programme?

How confident did you feel when you started?

Keeping to time?

Any follow up points re the session observed.

How confident did you feel today?

Has the FFTW3 programme impacted on your professional working relationship with the class teacher in any way? [support; liaison]

[Has there been much opportunity to liaise with the FFTW3 trainer/RR teacher?]

Anything else that you would like to tell me that has not already been covered in relation to your role?

Thank TA for her/his time.

Appendix 5: class teacher interview schedule

Interview schedule – class teacher

[Hand out the information sheet and the consent form]

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. Please decide on a pseudonym to retain your anonymity.

Introduction:

Could you give a thumbnail sketch of your career in education to this point?

What concerns have you had about children's literacy difficulties as a class teacher over the course of your career?

Were you aware of the FFTW3 interventions before the ECaR project?

The programme and the training:

How were you approached about the FFTW3 training?

How did you find the training?

Useful/helpful/training alongside the TA/Literacy teaching skills

What are your thoughts on the educational value of the FFTW3 programme compared to other literacy support programmes?

What do you consider to be the strengths of the FFTW3 training programme?

Are there elements of the programme that don't work well in your opinion?

Has the programme impacted in your classroom in any way beyond those receiving the intervention?

[How do you see FFTW3 working alongside RR? If an RR school.]

Your role/TA role in relation to FFTW3:

What was your sense of the TA's response to the FFT training?

Did the implementation of the FFTW3 programme impact on your professional working relationship with the TA with whom you trained in relation to literacy support?

How do you see your role in relation to the successful delivery/implementation of the programme?

Is there any requirement for liaison time, between you and the teaching assistant, or is that up to you both to organise?

Do you think that there are any barriers to involving TAs in more systematic programmes like FFTW3?

Does the FFTW3 programme complement the phonological work that you do in class?

Have you received any support/CPD in relation to FFTW3 in this authority?

What degree of support have you had from the SLT? Consistent? Re. RR?

Do you have any record, or sense of children's responses to the FFTW3 programme?

<u>Final comments:</u>

Do you have anything else that you would like to add about FFTW3 that hasn't been covered in the interview?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix 6: TA interview schedule, Farnsworth, phase 3

The programme and progress made:

Have you come to the end of the FFTW3 programme? How many children participated this year in total?

Did you see a good or accelerated level of progress?

Has learning been applied in the class setting would you say?

What are your thoughts on the programme overall, having seen it through one cycle?

Positives, challenges, reflections

Liaison and support:

Has time been protected for you to implement the programme?

Did training alongside the class teacher impact on the extent to which you liaised over the programme?

Has it resulted in more liaison with the class teacher compared with other programmes/interventions would you say?

Have you been observed or offered professional support explicitly related to the FFTW3 programme since we last spoke?

What support/interest have you had from the SLT – directly or indirectly?

The future of the programme in school:

Will the programme continue next year?

If yes, why?

If no, what are the reasons for the discontinuation of the programme?

Data on children who have participated.

Data on school profile/FSM/attainment in literacy.

Appendix 7: overview of transcriptions in Farnsworth

Interviewee (pseudonym)	role	school	date of interview	duration	words transcribed
Anna	TA	Fry	10/11/10	17.20	2397
Emily	TA	Fox	11/11/10	18.33	2990
Carolyn	TA	Fell	12/11/10	35.36	5999
Theresa	TA	Foster	15/11/10	29.53	5761
Anna	TA	Fry	16/3/11	10.13	1793
Emily	TA	Fox	5/4/11	16.47	2911
Carolyn	TA	Fell	6/5/11	20.11	3460
Theresa	TA	Foster	12/5/11	22.32	4486
Zoe	CT	Fell	6/5/11	6.35	1195
Anna	TA	Fry	22/6/11	13.31	2367
Jean	CT	Fry	22/6/11	36.07	5289
Emily	TA	Fox	17/6/11	14.26	2474
Carolyn	TA	Fell	23/6/11	17.48	3287
Zoe	CT	Fell	23/6/11	23.22	3792
Theresa	TA	Foster	8/7/11	11.49	2200
Sandra	CT	Foster	8/7/11	24.06	3304

Appendix 8: overview of transcriptions in Dalton

Interviewee (pseudonym)	role	school	date of interview	duration	words transcribed
Lynn	TA	Dillingham	26/5/11	55.13	9054
Kath	CT	Dillingham	26/5/11	25.41	3577
Liz	TA	Dalton	29/6/11	33.37	5968
Amy	CT	Dalton	29/6/11	27.27	5127
Miriam	RRT	Dalton	29/6/11	19.36	2937

Appendix 9: transcription table

Transcription Symbol	Description of symbol usage Jefferson symbols (cited in Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998)	Modification to symbol	Additional symbol
(0.5)	A micro-pause in tenths of a second	(p) indicating a significant pause of more than 1 second	
(.)	pause in talk less than 2/10 second		
=	Latching between utterances	Overlapping speech is recorded in some instances as an approximation of the overlap if the dialogue is difficult to distinguish after at least three attempts to transcribe.	
[ ]	Onset and end of overlapping speech		
.hh	speaker in-breath. The more hhs the longer the in-breath		
hhh	out-breath - the more hhhs the longer the out-breath		
(( ))	non-verbal activity also transcriber's comments		
!	animated or emphatic tone		
( )	unclear fragment of talk		
(guess)	best guess at an utterance		
.	fall in tone - not necessarily the end of a sentence		
?	question or rising inflection - not necessarily a question		
under	underlined fragments or words - indicate speaker emphasis		
(...)			the use of an ellipsis showing the intentional omission of speech from the transcript that represents either a false start, a hesitation or hedging and which it is judged does not detract from the overall meaning of the speech.

Appendix 10: observation schedules – reading and writing

School:	Date:	Child:	TA:	Week:	Book Level:	Venue and Resources:

Component of FFTW3	T	Elements	Summary and comments: TA and child activity
Re-reading a familiar book (4-5 mins) *May include Running Record (x1 p.w.)*		Child on left of TA Strategy check Independent reading Return to the text Reading fairly fluently	
Fast Letter work activities (3 mins)		Up to 3 activities Sorting letters/digraphs Making words (reading) Writing words	
Book introduction and first reading Independent reading at instructional level (6-8 mins)		Book introduction/ orientation: (taking the 'bugs out of the text') Walk through the book. Discussion, vocabulary, structures, model blending Child reads to adult	
Cutting up sentence from the book (2 mins)		Sentence from the book. Cut up by TA Reconstructed by child Sentence re-read Take home?	
Learns a new word from the book (ideally from cut–up sentence) (2 mins)		Whiteboard and trace word. Child traces, closes eyes, describes word, looks again, writes word, LCWC	

OBSERVATION PROMPTS:

May wish to comment on: Engagement, Enjoyment, Explicit praise, Rapport, Pace, Appropriate book levels, Appropriate response to what child is doing (materials selected, techniques used, progressions for acceleration)*; Appropriateness of questions (self-monitoring, searching for specific sources of information)*; Appropriateness of intervention (helping, waiting, encouraging independence)*; Use of time* [*IoE guidance: Evaluation of Teaching Session RRNN June 2009]

FFTW3 TA Reading Observation Schedule March 2011

School:	Date:	Child:	TA:	Week:	Book Level:	Venue and Resources:

Component of FFTW3	T	Elements	Summary and comments: TA and child activity
Re-reading *yesterday's* **new book.** **(4-5 mins)** *May include* **Running Record** *(x1 p.w.)*		Child on left of TA Strategy check Independent reading Return to the text Reading fairly fluently	
Revising word(s) previously learnt. (2 mins)		up to 5 different words (not visually similar) speeding up existing slow responses checking word knowledge	
Composing and writing a sentence based on a picture or stimulus from the book (8-9 mins)		Stimulus Support in creating a sentence Child repeats sentence Use of work book 'have a go' page Use of a phoneme frame White stickers over errors	
Learning a spelling from the writing (2 mins)		Selection of appropriate word Look, remember, child reads, child writes (and reads at same time) finds on page, prompt for remembering?	
Reconstructing a cut-up sentence taken from the writing (2 mins)		Adult writes sentence on paper. Child reads as cut-up and reassembles, minimal support model if needed	

OBSERVATION PROMPTS:

May wish to comment on: Engagement, Enjoyment, Explicit praise, Rapport, Pace, Appropriate book levels, Appropriate response to what child is doing (materials selected, techniques used, progressions for acceleration)*; Appropriateness of questions (self-monitoring, searching for specific sources of information)*; Appropriateness of intervention (helping, waiting, encouraging independence)*; Use of time* [*IoE guidance: Evaluation of Teaching Session RRNN June 2009]

FFTW3 TA Writing Observation Schedule March 2011

Appendix 11: ethics statement

Research Aims:

I shall be investigating the role of teaching assistants (TAs) in supporting at-risk readers in primary schools in two local authorities. I want to explore the training of TAs and to what extent they feel equipped to teach and support literacy in relation to: initial training; specific training to deliver a literacy support programme (Fischer Family Trust) and continuing professional development (CPD).

I also want to explore the pedagogical partnership between the teacher and the TA in using the FFT literacy support framework; such a mode of working may have wider implications for the way in which literacy support is organized both pedagogically and strategically in the UK.

Investigating the use of the Fischer Family Trust (FFT) programme in a second authority where its use is well established, will provide a valuable contrast with the midlands LA through which I can compare the levels of confidence of TAs in supporting literacy through the use of FFT and to what extent CPD has facilitated such confidence.

Data Generation

Sampling will be purposive in nature. The Midlands LA is part of the national project *Every Child a Reader* where a number of initiatives are being used to support the development of literacy, one of which is the Fischer Family Trust (FFT) literacy programme.

Research methods will be mixed. I intend to **interview** up to 4 teaching assistants in 2 local authorities in three phases: before FFT training; during FFT training and after delivery of the programme has been completed with identified children. I will also interview the class teacher(s) to whom the teaching assistant is 'attached' in relation to the FFT programme. **Observations** of teaching assistants working with children will take place whilst the FFT programme is in use and will be followed immediately with the second phase interview. In addition, prior to the TA interview, I shall be interviewing the author of the programme as well as key persons associated with FFT in the two LAs.

Access:

I have already made contact with key persons within one LA who have agreed in principle to the research being conducted. Contact is yet to be made with the second local authority. If access in one LA is not possible for any reason, there are at least two other authorities which I can approach where the FFT programme is well established.

Access to schools and therefore teaching assistants and class teachers will be through a letter sent via the key person with whom I have already secured agreement for the research. In the second local

authority I intend to secure access through the author of the FFT programme with whom I have made contact.

Documentation:

This will include

> ➢ A permission letter requesting access to schools and participants
> ➢ An information letter for schools and participants*
> ➢ A consent form for schools and participants*
> ➢ An information sheet that a school may wish to send out to parents/carers prior to observations of the FFT sessions.

* documents included with this ethics statement as drafts.

Appendix 12: letter requesting consent for child observation

Gill Johnson, Postgraduate Research Student

School of Education,The Dearing Building

Jubilee Campus

Wollaton Road

Nottingham NG8 1BB

ttxg4@nottingham.ac.uk

Tuesday, 15 March 2011

Dear Parent/Carer

I am writing to ask if I may observe your child participating in a literacy session at school.

I am a qualified primary school teacher with many years of experience and currently a doctoral researcher based at the University of Nottingham. I have a special interest in children's literacy.

My study will greatly benefit from observing your child involved in their literacy programme, and in turn, I hope will benefit other teachers and researchers through what is learnt.

Your child will not be identified in my research by their real name or by the name of the school.

If you are willing for your child to be observed, please complete and return the slip below as soon as possible.

If you have any queries, I will be happy to answer them. Please contact me on the email address shown above.

Thank you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully

Gill Johnson

Postgraduate Research Student, University of Nottingham

_____

I agree to my child_____(name and class)

being observed for the purposes of a research study. I understand that my child will not be identified in any way.

Signed_____(parent/carer)

Appendix 13: participant information sheet

AIMS OF THE PROJECT

The aims of this project are to explore the ways in which Teaching Assistants (TAs) support children in literacy with particular reference to the Fischer Family Trust Wave 3 literacy programme. Issues associated with literacy training and continuing professional development will be explored. No judgements will be made about TAs or the quality of their teaching.

Interviews will be conducted at a mutually convenient time and will not exceed 45 minutes.

Observations of literacy group lessons will be arranged with prior agreement and no more than 3 sessions per TA will be observed.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Confidentiality and anonymity will be protected at all times. Pseudonyms will be used for the school and the participants and only the broad geographical area would be named in order to contextualise the research.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Information will be stored securely. Access to information will only be given to my supervisors, Dr Edward Sellman and Professor Colin Harrison of the University of Nottingham, for the purpose of advising on this research project.

PARTICIPATION

Participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you would be at liberty to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Digital recordings of interviews will only take place with prior permission and anonymity and confidentiality will be respected.

Throughout the project you will be treated with respect, honesty and consideration. Queries or concerns will be dealt with promptly and thoroughly.

CONTACT DETAILS

 Doctoral Research Student: Gill Johnson: mobile: **07982 257003**

                                               email: **ttxgj4@nottingham.ac.uk**

Supervisors: edward.sellman@nottingham.ac.uk; colin.harrison@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix 14: participant consent form

Project title: An exploration of the role or teaching assistants in supporting at-risk readers using the Fischer Family Trust Literacy Programme.

Researcher's name: GILL JOHNSON

Supervisors' names: DR EDWARD SELLMAN AND PROFESSOR COLIN HARRISON

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be digitally recorded during the interviews.
- I understand that data, both hard and electronic copies will be stored securely by the researcher in a locked cabinet. Access will be limited to the researcher and supervisor.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research*.*

Signed ………………………………………………………………………… (research participant)

Print name ……………………………………………………………… **Date** …………………………………

Contact details

Researcher: Gill Johnson – email: ttxgj4@nottingham.ac.uk

Mobile: 07982 257003

Supervisors: edward.sellman@nottingham.ac.uk; colin.harrison@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinators:

educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix 15: audit example of good practice in deploying TAs

Indicator 1: Schools have clear policies outlining the roles and responsibilities of TAs	Mainly	To Some Extent	Rarely	Need More Information
See Part Two, Section 1				
Please add comments as you go along				
Does the school provide appropriate job descriptions for TAs?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Does the school involve TAs in drawing up the job descriptions?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Do the job descriptions reflect a balance of TAs' responsibilities: support to teachers, the curriculum, pupils and the school?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Are TAs given time within their contracts for preparation, meetings, other administrative tasks and training?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Is the school's staff development plan inclusive of TAs' staff development needs?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Are TAs' training achievements recognised in the responsibilities they are given?	☐	☐	☐	☐
Does the school's staff development plan target the needs of teachers and managers in understanding their role in managing TAs?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Working with Teaching Assistants: A Good Practice Guide (2000b:42)