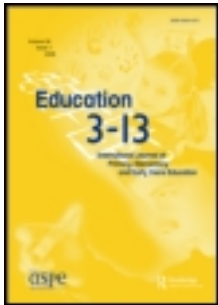


This article was downloaded by: [Oxford Brookes University]

On: 13 November 2012, At: 05:43

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rett20>

### 'I am not the teacher!': some effects of remodelling the roles of teaching assistants in English primary schools

Graham Butt <sup>a</sup> & Ann Lance <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Education, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK  
Version of record first published: 27 Jul 2009.

To cite this article: Graham Butt & Ann Lance (2009): 'I am not the teacher!': some effects of remodelling the roles of teaching assistants in English primary schools, *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, 37:3, 219-231

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03004270802349430>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## **'I am *not* the teacher!': some effects of remodelling the roles of teaching assistants in English primary schools**

Graham Butt\* and Ann Lance

*School of Education, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK*

*(Received 29 April 2008; accepted 7 June 2008)*

Remodelling the roles, responsibilities and working practices of all school staff has been central to the government's modernisation agenda for English state schools. This is typified by a determination to review and change the distribution of tasks undertaken by teachers and teaching assistants (TAs). Whilst there has been a substantial increase in the numbers of TAs employed in schools there is still a lack of clarity about their roles and about the impact of remodelling on the working lives of both teachers and assistants. Evidence from the Transforming the School Workforce: Pathfinder Project, conducted immediately prior to the launch of the National Agreement in 2003, indicates that initial concerns about the ways in which TAs were being deployed are still very apparent. Here the authors focus on management and professional development issues arising from TAs adopting more pedagogical roles in schools.

**Keywords:** teaching assistant; higher level teaching assistant; modernisation; remodelling

### **Introduction**

In this paper we consider how modernisation and remodelling of the workforce in English primary schools are reflected in the shifting roles of both teachers and teaching assistants (TAs).<sup>1</sup> By considering a case study of four Shropshire primary schools who took part in the Transforming the School Workforce: Pathfinder Project (from 2002 to 2004) – a national project which introduced schools to a range of strategies designed to reduce teacher workload – we highlight some of the impacts of deploying TAs in para-professional and teaching roles. The views of both teachers and TAs are central to this analysis, using data that have been collected through questionnaire surveys and face-to-face interviews. In the light of the effects of the implementation of the National Agreement in 2003 we reflect on aspects of the current management and professional development of TAs.

The New Labour government in England has believed for some time that with appropriate training and leadership the deployment of greater numbers of TAs and Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) in schools will help to drive up standards and reduce teacher workload. Its initial investment, between 1999 and 2002, of

---

\*Corresponding author. Email: [g.w.butt@bham.ac.uk](mailto:g.w.butt@bham.ac.uk)

around £350 million to support recruitment and training, to provide new qualifications pathways and to clarify the roles of TAs reflects a confidence in their capability to enhance school improvement. From 2001 to 2004 a further £200 million was made available annually by the government to sustain the recruitment and training of TAs, who now comprise around 25% of the education workforce in English schools (Staley 2005; Bedford et al. 2006). This represents a deliberate policy shift: heralding the diversification and professionalisation of the roles and responsibilities of TAs.

In 2000 three Foundation degrees for TAs were piloted in England, followed in 2004 with the launch of the HLTA qualification by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) – a competence-based award which recognised the new responsibilities and status that some TAs were aspiring to (see Milner 2008). This signified a major strand of the government's intended education workforce reforms, designed to raise standards of pupil achievement in part through the remodelling of the work of support staff. The HLTA award had been swiftly developed following initial consultation in 2002, when the TTA outlined the government's preferred areas for future action:

- recruitment of more support staff to schools;
- introduction of a framework for teacher–support staff relationships;
- improvement of training, qualifications and career progression opportunities, and the promotion of higher level roles, for support staff;
- support for headteachers and governors in managing change and deploying support staff effectively. (Teacher Training Agency 2002)

The complementary links between the standards for those qualifying to teach (Teacher Development Agency 2007) and those working to achieve HLTA status (Teacher Development Agency 2006) are readily apparent, underlining the government's expectation that some HLTAs would progress further and attain full teacher status. This attempt to forge clearer role definitions for TAs and HLTAs, moving them away from their traditional domestic and administrative work towards fuller pedagogical responsibilities, also indicated a wish to create greater coherence between the work of teachers and their assistants.

### **Modernising and remodelling the roles of TAs**

The guidance provided by the government to schools concerning modernising the use of their TAs was initially rather disjointed – being underpinned merely by the publication of exemplars of practice (see, for example, Department for Education and Skills 2000), rather than through the promotion of unambiguous national policies, guidelines or research evidence. *Time for standards* (Department for Education and Skills 2002) formalised the expected contributions of TAs to forthcoming modernisation, celebrated the importance of their work, highlighted their access to new training and suggested more transparent career pathways for assistants. There was also a clear indication in this document that some TAs would be encouraged to adopt much fuller pedagogical roles, being trained:

to work at a higher level than other teaching assistants to enable them to undertake some of the tasks traditionally associated with the role of the teacher. (Milner 2008, 297)

Previously the growth in the number of TAs employed by schools had been largely unplanned and organic: Loxley and Swann (1998) report that in the 1990s, following the passing of legislation introducing Local Management of Schools (Department for Education and Employment 1990), headteachers in primary schools simply employed increasing numbers of TAs to help deliver policy initiatives linked to the introduction of the national curriculum, National Strategies, Special Educational Needs support and inclusion. More strategic growth has subsequently resulted in a certain nervousness about the extent to which modernised TAs might take over the roles and responsibilities of qualified teachers (Wilkinson 2005). Indeed, even as far back as 2000, Estelle Morris, the then Secretary of State for Education, sought to allay fears by asserting that ‘the greater involvement of trained TAs in the learning process in no way detracts from teachers’ own unique professional skills and distinct responsibilities. In fact, it reinforces the teacher’s role’ (Department for Education and Skills 2000).

Reform, modernisation and remodelling of the school workforce have been key priorities for schools following the signing of the National Agreement (Department for Education and Skills 2003a) between the government, employers and unions (except the National Union of Teachers). This legislation represents but one element of much wider governmental reforms of England’s public sector workforces, particularly visible within the ‘Agenda for Change’ visited on the National Health Service. Three years after its launch the timetable for implementation of the Agreement in schools was completed, but expectations of what TAs and HLTAs should do continue to vary. The aims of the reforms were to reduce bureaucracy in schools; to free teachers to focus on teaching and learning; to shift ‘non-teaching’ work to support staff (such as TAs, administrators, midday assistants, clerical assistants, technicians and bursars); and to change the working culture of schools – the traditional working practices of schools and their staff were to be challenged and subsequently altered. This was best highlighted by the original ‘24 tasks’ that teachers were no longer routinely expected to undertake, as outlined by the National Remodelling Team in 2003. Although these tasks do not necessarily *all* fall to TAs there have been substantial, sometimes unexpected, changes in the work that assistants are now required to carry out as a result of the workforce reforms. These changes include their increased use in pedagogical roles.

Gunter (2004) has reflected on the contradictions and tensions apparent within the remodelling agenda. She highlights the positives of schools working more effectively through greater role clarification and work audits – but recognises problems in the management of teacher supply, which may result in the future deregulation of the teaching profession through the use of TAs as surrogate teachers. The implications that teachers either cannot now adequately perform their roles unaided, or that anyone can teach if they simply get enough practice, are both unedifying and challenging to teachers’ professional integrity (Bedford, Jackson, and Wilson 2008). Interestingly, in a subsequent analysis of the processes and impacts of remodelling, Gunter compares the centralised modernisation of English schools and their teaching workforce to ‘acts of tyranny’ (Gunter 2007). Ozga (2002) similarly reminds us that New Labour’s modernisation agenda is built squarely upon the previous drive by Thatcherite administrations to ensure that public services became more efficient, economic and effective. Within the remodelling framework there are clearly issues not only about what TAs do, but about how they are trained, managed and motivated – exemplifying differences in how schools have chosen to implement the National Agreement (Pugh 2007).

The paucity of research into the role and function of TAs – a real issue given their increasing influence on teaching in schools and the burgeoning policy agenda linking them to remodelling and modernisation – creates a gap in the analysis of education reform. The research that does exist largely focuses on what TAs do in the classroom (see Thomas 1992; Moyles and Suschitzky 1997), or on aspects of management, career development and training (see Watkinson 1998; Pugh 2007), rather than on policy and practice (Milner 2008). However, central funding of the five-year-long Deployment and Impact of Support Staff in Schools project from January 2004, in response to the dramatic increase in support staff in English and Welsh schools, is enabling larger scale research on the deployment of all categories of support staff, on their impact on teaching and learning and on the effects of the National Agreement on pupils, teachers and support staff.

### **Methodology**

In spring 2002 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) launched an initiative designed to pilot measures to reduce the workload of teachers, called the Transforming the School Workforce: Pathfinder Project. The project, and its associated training in change management, was overseen by a team from the London Leadership Centre led by Dame Pat Collarbone. The evaluation was conducted by a team of 12 from the University of Birmingham, led by Professor Hywel Thomas and Dr Helen Gunter. Over two years 32 English state schools and 9 comparator schools, selected by the DfES from across the primary, secondary and special education sectors, were involved. Comparator schools acted as a control, being schools that had expressed an interest in project membership but which had not been chosen by the DfES to take part in the full research. These schools received information on the project, with implicit guidance on modernisation and remodelling practices, but no funding. The data used in this paper are drawn from findings gathered from the 16 primary schools involved in the project, including a case study of a small cluster of four primary schools in Shropshire. This sample of Shropshire schools was chosen because of its innovative use of TAs.

Six ‘strands’ were identified by the DfES as the foundations for teacher workload reduction. We note three of the strands which were pertinent to the development and deployment of support staff, including TAs, within primary schools, namely:

- providing schools with consultancy support (School Workforce Advisers);
- training headteachers in change management;
- allocating funds for employing additional support staff.

(Other strands focused on: providing ICT hardware and software to schools; bursarial training of school managers; and providing schools with capital build resources.)

Discussion of the impact of the first two strands is beyond the scope of this paper; however, detailed analysis of schools’ use of consultancy support and of change management training is available elsewhere (see, for example, Butt and Gunter 2007); here we specifically address the impact of the third strand concerning the employment of additional support staff with particular reference to the use of TAs in teaching roles.

All teachers and support staff working in the pilot schools were asked to complete a substantial questionnaire on two occasions (at the beginning of the summer term of 2002 and again in 2003). This questionnaire covered:

- information about the respondent: role, qualifications, personal details;
- amount of time spent on their work in the school day, evenings, weekends and vacation time;
- attitudes to job satisfaction and quality of life;
- attitudes to ICT and level of competence;
- attitudes to leadership of the school and the change process;
- views on the causes of and solutions to workload issues.

Data from respondents who completed *both* questionnaires are referred to here. In primary schools 440 questionnaires were completed from the 498 distributed (a response rate of 88%) in 2003, higher than the overall response rate for all schools of 76%. The majority of questions sought quantitative responses (such as, about number of hours worked) or attitudinal responses to statements or questions marked against a Likert scale (from ‘very strong disagreement’ to ‘very strong agreement’). Qualitative data were collected from the questionnaire in the form of written responses to open questions, and from one-to-one interviews with teachers, headteachers, governors and support staff (122 in primary schools). We were able to link individual questionnaires and interview data, as respondents put their names on the former which were then coded. Data were analysed throughout the life of the project, being used as the basis for writing individual school reports, as well as for the production of an interim and a final report for the entire project. A total of 99 reports were produced, the final evaluation report on the project being published by the DfES (see Thomas et al. 2004).

### Findings

The evaluation of the project provided us with ‘a unique opportunity to witness intensive change in a sample of schools, and to begin to understand what it means to embrace and experience what became known as remodelling’ (Gunter 2004, 2). One of the key findings of the evaluation was that the project ‘made an impact in reducing the working hours of teachers, led to change in role boundaries between teachers and other members of the school workforce, and made support staff more prominent and effective in schools’ (Thomas et al. 2004, 47). There was a reduction in the amount of time teachers spent on tasks that could be done by others – tasks which were largely taken up by TAs and other support staff – not least through the deployment of TAs in some schools in para-professional and teaching roles. Unfortunately such workload reduction was not reflected nationally in schools at this time, with many struggling to implement the new workforce agreement in the period immediately after its introduction in 2003. Indeed, the School Teacher Review Body Report (2004) published one year after the implementation of the agreement revealed that the workload of primary teachers had actually *increased*, on average, from 51.8 hours to 52.5 hours per week between 2003 and 2004. The reasons for this are believed to relate to the newness of the reforms, the increased workload involved in implementing the changes, and the small numbers of staff working in many primary schools, which limit their ability to be flexible in remodelling workforce arrangements.

### **Primary teachers' perspectives on the remodelling of TAs**

Some of the resources made available to Pathfinder schools were used by them to employ additional TAs, clerical and support staff. This enabled schools to rethink work patterns and to shift some aspects of their teachers' work onto others. Our first analysis focused largely on the views of teachers concerning the changing roles and responsibilities of their TAs, highlighting teachers' responses to alterations in their own working practices. There is evidence both of a reduction in the amount of routine, non-teaching work undertaken by teachers and an increase in the use of TAs in teaching roles. In response to a questionnaire statement that teachers should 'spend less time on clerical work and more on teaching', 98% of primary teachers found themselves in agreement. Eighty per cent also felt that better use of clerical, administrative and teaching support staff would reduce their workload. Comments made by teachers in face-to-face interviews regularly highlighted the positive effects on their working lives of using TAs in enhanced roles.

With respect to their attitudes towards TAs primary teachers showed only relatively small changes from the first to the second year of the project. In response to the statement 'I feel that classroom/teaching assistants need more training', 85% of primary teachers agreed in 2002, and 77% in 2003. This slight reduction may have been as a result of their schools receiving additional resources for funding the training of TAs during the life of the project. The greater visibility of training opportunities for assistants, related to their changing roles, may have altered perceptions amongst teachers about the professional needs of remodelled TAs. When asked whether they felt that working with classroom/teaching assistants reduced their workload, 73% of teachers agreed in 2002, and 79% in 2003. This increase in agreement was mirrored in the teachers' response to the statement 'working with classroom/teaching assistants allows me to spend more time teaching', with 77% agreement in 2002 and 87% in 2003. Again the deployment of greater numbers of TAs, often in para-professional roles, obviously had a beneficial impact on practice. When asked whether they felt TAs were underused, 51% agreed in 2002 and 43% in 2003 – a clear reflection of their increasingly effective use in project schools. The total number of teachers who responded to the questionnaires in both years was 181. The broad trends within these figures reveal that the benefits which accrued from the project's deployment and training of TAs had been recognised by the majority of primary teachers they worked with.

The high percentages of teachers who agreed with the statements is significant. Many primary teachers clearly saw the remodelled use of TAs as key to helping them carry out their professional duties in an appropriate way. Moreover their attitudes towards these staff became more positive over the course of the project, in direct contrast to their colleagues in secondary schools (see Slater 2003; Thomas et al. 2004; Butt and Lance 2005a, b). This questionnaire data demonstrated a supportive response from primary teachers towards remodelling, but we argue here that it is much less instructive than qualitative evidence, which we now go on to discuss. In examining the qualitative data it is possible to illuminate some of the more complex issues about the impact of modernisation and remodelling in primary schools, particularly with respect to the training and management of TAs.

### **A case study of changing practice in primary schools**

A cluster of four rural primary schools in Shropshire was used as one case study for the project. Although a range of strategies was introduced to reduce teacher workload in these schools, here we pay particular attention to the deployment of TAs in teaching situations. Importantly we shift the focus of our analysis at this point, from solely considering the views of teachers on the deployment of TAs, to giving greater recognition to the views of the teaching assistants themselves. It should be noted that in all four schools a cross-section of members of the school personnel, including governors and pupils, were also interviewed – although here only the views of TAs, teachers and senior managers are recorded. Respondents' comments ranged widely across a variety of issues during their interviews, including the changing nature and focus of their work, the perceived limits to their role, their management and leadership, and the availability of training. We have chosen to focus specifically on one aspect of remodelling – the increased use of TAs in pedagogical roles in primary schools – to illustrate some of the consequences for management and professional development.

### **Greater involvement of TAs in teaching**

Many of the TAs' comments captured a sense of the diversity of their new roles, particularly with respect to teaching responsibilities, whilst aspects of their traditional work obviously remained. The TA who made the statement below starts by claiming that her work has altered little during the life of the project, although her later comments show evidence of rather greater change than she initially describes:

My workload hasn't changed, except that there's now a great deal of help with photocopying. The balance of my work is now in the classroom . . . [and] I now prefer working in a more concentrated situation where I get a routine of working with a member of staff. There was previously a lot of dashing between lessons where explanation from the teacher was on the hoof. (Teaching Assistant 1)

Here the TA has a strong link with one teacher with whom she now works more frequently in a teaching role. Implicit within her statement is the recognition that planning time has been found for the teacher and TA to organise their teaching effectively, rather than relying on planning 'on the hoof'. Another TA's comments similarly reveal her involvement in broader pedagogical work, alongside a more traditional plethora of other tasks:

I have marked some SATs papers, spelling tests, and homework. I have tried to relieve the new Head. I take groups of children out for further literacy support . . . I photocopy the homework and stick it in their books, I take the register, dish out the paint, help with the painting and take photos of their work. I flit between different things. (Teaching Assistant 2)

Despite changes in roles, some teachers expressed that their TAs worked within clearly defined parameters. In such circumstances the teacher still has the ultimate responsibility for planning lessons, but both teacher and TA have found time to discuss these plans, to take account of the TAs' views and then to deliver the lesson together:

I decide what the class does and then I go through it with her. It's not her role to decide, she doesn't get paid for it. She will suggest things and is becoming more confident. It is

my responsibility to structure learning. I wouldn't ask her to sort out learning on her own. (Teacher 1)

After the completion of the project and the launch of the National Agreement many primary schools prompted TAs to take on enhanced responsibilities. The greater involvement of TAs in teaching roles is arguably also a consequence of the publication of *Excellence and enjoyment* (Department for Education and Skills 2003b), which encouraged TAs to teach whole classes so as to increase the quality of pupils' learning and enhance standards; the Office for Standards in Education (2002) also suggested that a key factor in the successful development of primary schools lay in the fuller involvement of TAs and other adults in teaching. Even before the National Agreement was signed, Lee (2002) had noted the growing diversification of the TAs' roles in many primary schools – ranging from supporting teachers and working with small groups of pupils, to producing teaching materials, counselling pupils, and producing and using Individual Education Plans. Subsequent work by Durant and Kramer (2005) amongst TAs in Worcestershire has similarly revealed a multiplicity of TA roles, job descriptions and responsibilities – again highlighting a shift towards the adoption of fuller teaching responsibilities.

### Professional development of TAs

A significant outcome of the project in the Shropshire schools was the realisation amongst TAs, teachers and managers that adopting more pedagogical roles could not be successfully achieved without the benefits of further professional development:

The teacher plans and delivers and I help the teacher to teach it. He knows what he wants to do and we discuss it and I comment on it, but I am *not* the teacher ... I can assist with the planning but I can't do it as I don't have enough experience to understand it fully, I haven't done the training. (Teaching Assistant 3)

Many TAs echoed this need for more training and professional development, especially if they were expected to take on para-professional responsibilities in schools. It was apparent that TAs were being required to engage in whole-class work rather than working with individual pupils, as well as taking on a wider range of tasks that traditionally fell to teachers – including purchasing, strategic planning, attending team meetings, and involvement with parents/carers. The demarcation of role boundaries between the work of teachers and TAs became very blurred in some of the case study schools, leading to the growth of different types of TAs.

### Management of TAs

Nationally we have seen that often this miscellany of roles is supported neither by appropriate training, nor by the provision of unambiguous job descriptions, clear line management or any means of reviewing the tasks that TAs are expected to undertake in schools. Furthermore, Pugh (2007) notes the confusing range of management models brought to bear on actualising the work of TAs: just as he has discovered elsewhere, some TAs in the project reported that they were unaware of who their line manager was, whether they had more than one manager, or indeed

who had the ultimate responsibility for their work (the class teacher, Special Educational Needs coordinator, deputy head, head or other).

For those TAs who had benefited from clear management structures and increased professional development during the life of the project, performance was often enhanced:

I'm more confident and also more knowledgeable about the national curriculum. My views about children are more secure and I have more impact on the team. Teachers plan the lesson and have responsibility over most things. For quite a large part of the time in class, teachers and teaching assistants seem to be doing very similar things and the differences may be subtle at times, but they are there. (Teaching Assistant 4)

Here we see a fuller acknowledgement of the professional roles that TAs have taken on, within defined boundaries, resulting in similar roles often being adopted in the classroom by both teachers and TAs.

### Discussion

With respect to this case study of four primary schools that took part in the Pathfinder Project there is evidence of early remodelling through the deployment of TAs in non-traditional roles. This has been mirrored nationally in schools, to a greater or lesser degree, since 2003. We have witnessed a shifting of the working patterns of TAs towards their adoption of more pedagogical roles, reflecting the developing agenda for workforce change. Combined with problems of teacher recruitment and retention, and with the launch of qualifications and training promising higher status for TAs, the role of assistants is rapidly shifting in many primary schools. Nonetheless, there appears to be huge variation between schools concerning how TAs are described, deployed, trained, managed and rewarded. What is clear is a trend for TAs' roles to be morphing from those of helper to associate teacher, leading to a blurring of boundaries between those who teach and those who support teaching. What is not clear, despite what teachers may have told us, is whether this is having a measurable impact on decreasing teacher workload. Barker (2007), for example, believes that reductions in teachers' work are still largely illusory. Saved time is being swallowed up by the need for teachers to train TAs for their new roles on the job, as well as the teachers themselves needing to receive training in how to manage their support staff. This latter point is helpfully pursued by Bedford, Jackson, and Wilson (2008), who report on a training and research project which has recently focused on furthering the development of professional relationships between teachers and TAs. They conclude:

It may be that an assumption has been drawn that teachers can naturally transfer their skills of working with children or how they work collaboratively with other teachers; however it cannot be necessarily concluded that the transferable skills are evident and that new skills sets need to be explored. (Bedford, Jackson, and Wilson 2008, 14)

Overall the experience of TAs in project schools appeared to have been positive – although subsequent research has revealed that the wholesale transfer of such gains from a well-funded one-year project to the national scale has not been straightforward (Gunter and Butt 2007). Our aim in interrogating the original project data in the light of subsequent nationwide shifts in working practices over the past five years was to see if we could tease out issues which might help to understand the complexity of the TAs' current situation, rather than making the simplistic

assumption that merely providing more TAs has resulted in improvements in teacher workload and student learning. TAs now have different aspirations for their roles, as well as possessing widely differing skills sets and interests; they cannot be treated as a standardised group, for not all TAs want to become teachers or associate teachers. It was clear from the project data that primary teachers in 2003 saw their TAs as central to helping them carry out their professional duties. However, teachers were unsure of how to maximise the potential of their support both inside and beyond the classroom. This situation appears largely unchanged (Pugh 2007; Milner 2008).

As a result of our reflection on Pathfinder data we should like to make four additional points. Firstly, professional communication is very important: listening to what TAs themselves say, particularly in relation to their role, training and management, has already proved beneficial (Clark 2002; Quicke 2003; Tilley 2003). Giving TAs the opportunity to discuss their practice with colleagues (both teachers and other support staff) inside and outside of their own immediate working environment is crucial. During the project TAs were able to converse with their counterparts across the Shropshire case study schools – this enabled them to reflect upon their changing practice and to consider how remodelling affected them both individually and as a group. Secondly, TAs and teachers need regular non-contact time together to plan their work and clarify their responsibilities. In Bedford, Jackson, and Wilson's (2008) survey the key recommendation made, by 45% of teachers, to enhance the way they worked with their TAs was for the provision of paid time in school for assistants to plan and liaise. A third issue relates to confidence: the confidence of TAs to undertake their new roles, and the confidence of teachers to sensibly delegate elements of their work to them. Building confidence is not a short-term enterprise. It requires openness, trust and the sharing of responsibilities. Careful thought has to be applied before employment structures are altered and new ways of working implemented. Finally, the issue of TA workload needs further consideration. There is little point in merely shifting overload from teachers in another direction, simply to encounter parallel problems with the recruitment and retention of TAs a few years down the line (Dixon 2003). Our interviews highlighted a variety of emerging practice with respect to all these issues. On the one hand, there were assistants whose new roles were still encouraging them to be 'Jills of all trades' (Moyles and Suschitzky 1997), while on the other there were examples of TAs working in a much more focused manner teaching within a single classroom context. While the four issues stated arise from the examination of data from a small number of primary schools in a single cluster, they nevertheless pose important questions for the broader national context. As Milner (2008) recently concluded:

the strong sense of demarcation between primary teachers and teaching assistants has begun to blur. Previous boundaries set by degrees of responsibility and reference to rates of pay and hours worked, rather than specific tasks and functions, are disappearing. At the same time staff working in schools can see not only the blurring of boundaries between teachers and teaching assistants, but also the widening of difference between different types of teaching assistants and between groups of paraprofessionals and in a wider range of school support staff. (284)

## Conclusions

Our analysis has focused primarily on the increasing deployment of TAs in teaching roles, with reference to their need for professional development and skilful

management. Many schools still appear to be facing significant questions on these matters (Pugh 2007). Distributed leadership models have resulted in TAs being managed by a number of different individuals in schools, causing both confusion and duplication of effort – as such there is a need for more clearly defined job descriptions and line management systems for all support staff (Wilson et al. 2005). Pay and conditions of service for TAs are predominantly determined at local level – a practice which continues to be favoured by central government – across a workforce which is still largely part time, female, white, lowly paid and geographically immobile (UNISON 2002). The lack of nationally agreed pay scales for TAs, given the growing expectations for their status and function, is a worry. Issues of career progression, appraisal and review are also significant, particularly given the recent extension of the pedagogical responsibilities of many TAs. In 2005 one third of TAs were reportedly working up to four hours of unpaid overtime each week, primarily to support their teachers' entitlement to 10% planning, preparation and assessment time. Stewart (2003, 2004) sees remodelling as potentially offering a means of reducing education costs whilst solving teacher recruitment problems by employing TAs and unqualified learning support workers to teach, whilst the function of a smaller qualified teacher workforce would be focused on expert teaching, planning and pupil assessment. The evaluation of the Pathfinder Project and subsequent research (Pugh 2007; Milner 2008) has shown that TAs may be valued by teachers, senior management teams and other support staff in primary schools, but often lack clear and unambiguous management, leadership and career pathways.

The DfES and the Department for Children, Families and Schools have devised national occupational standards and qualifications frameworks for TAs and HLTAs, but these do not fully recognise the changing professional development needs of all TAs. The near commonality of a number of the standards for HLTA and Qualified Teacher Status is significant, for what do these suggest about the roles of the modern primary teacher and their TA? Gunter (2004) questions the further enhancement of the para-professionals' role, believing that the employment of this larger, more varied workforce in schools is flawed. She argues for the allocation of suitable resources to schools such that they might themselves appoint, train and develop these staff as they see appropriate. Unfortunately, TAs still remain an under-researched group whose work motivations are largely unexplored (Milner 2008). The remodelling programme has been hastily embarked upon, seeing only the positive prospects of a shift in workload away from teachers across to TAs. Whilst recent research has indicated that such change is occurring, evidence of a concomitant improvement in pupil learning is less obvious (Gunter and Butt 2007). Future research might usefully pursue three questions:

- What are the drivers and consequences for particular TAs assuming greater teaching responsibilities in primary schools?
- What is the evidence that modernising and remodelling the work of teachers and TAs has had a measurable impact on their workload, and on pupils' learning?
- What are the priorities for the management and training of a modernised workforce of TAs?

Policy makers have decided that workforce remodelling, including changing the role of TAs, will decrease teacher workload and increase job satisfaction. They have adopted this as a major plank of education policy for the first decade of the

twenty-first century, but have not necessarily given sufficient attention to the complexities of expanding the TAs' responsibilities. We should not be driven by a desire to find instant solutions to complex issues, whilst much greater attention needs to be given to the views of TAs themselves as an appropriate starting point for research. The TA who firmly stated 'I am *not* the teacher!' may still be correct, but the shift in role boundaries is such that more TAs are assuming the responsibilities of the primary school teacher in this modernised workforce.

### Note

1. 'Teaching Assistant' (TA) is the generic title preferred by the government for those in paid employment in support of teachers, including those with general roles, or those with specific responsibilities for a child, subject area or age group. In essence TAs can provide support for the pupil, the teacher, the curriculum and the school. In England other terms exist of the TA's role, including Classroom Assistant, Classroom Support Assistant, Classroom Learning Assistant, and Non Teaching Adult (see Kerry [2005] for further definition of the TA's role). As Pugh (2007) indicates this variation in how the jobs of TAs are described can lead to uncertainty about their role, identity, and career progression.

### References

- Barker, I. 2007. Mixed verdict on help from support staff. *Times Educational Supplement*, Aug 3.
- Bedford, D., G. Goddard, F. Obadan, and P. Mowat. 2006. How gaining Higher Level Teaching Assistant status impacts on the teacher assistant's role in English schools. *Management in Education* 20, no. 1: 6–10.
- Bedford, D., C. Jackson, and E. Wilson. 2008. New partnerships for learning: Teachers' perspectives on their developing professional relationships with teaching assistants in England. *Journal of In-service Education* 34, no. 1: 7–25.
- Butt, G., and H. Gunter. 2007. *Modernizing schools: People, learning and organizations*. London: Continuum.
- Butt, G., and A. Lance. 2005a. Modernising the role of support staff in primary schools: Changing focus, changing function. *Educational Review, Special Issue: The Challenges of Modernisation in Education* 57, no. 2: 139–49.
- Butt, G., and A. Lance. 2005b. Teacher job satisfaction: Lessons from the TSW Pathfinder Project. *School Leadership and Management* 25, no. 5: 455–71.
- Clark, M. 2002. Teaching Assistants: Their role in primary schools of the future. *Primary Practice* 31 (Summer): 18–20.
- Department for Education and Employment. 1990. *Self government for schools*. London: HMSO.
- Department for Education and Skills. 2000. *Working with Teaching Assistants: A good practice guide*. London: HMSO.
- Department for Education and Skills. 2002. *Time for standards: Reforming the school workforce*. London: HMSO.
- Department for Education and Skills. 2003a. *Raising standards and tackling workload: A National Agreement*. London: HMSO.
- Department for Education and Skills. 2003b. *Excellence and enjoyment*. London: HMSO.
- Dixon, A. 2003. Teaching Assistants: Whose definition? *Forum* 45, no. 1: 26–9.
- Durant, D., and J. Kramer. 2005. What do teaching assistants do? Paper presented to British Educational Research Association conference, September 14–17, University of Glamorgan, Treforest, Pontypridd.
- Gunter, H. 2004. Remodelling the school workforce. Paper presented at the School Leadership and Social Justice Seminar Society for Educational Studies, November 4, in London.
- Gunter, H. 2007. Remodelling the school workforce: A study in tyranny. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 5, no. 1. Institute for Education Policy Studies. <http://www.ieps.org.uk>.

- Gunter, H., and G. Butt. 2007. Remodelling the school workforce – Debates and trends. Paper presented to British Educational Research Association conference, September 5–8, Institute of Education, University of London, London.
- Kerry, T. 2005. Towards a typology for conceptualising the roles of teaching assistants. *Educational Review* 57, no. 3: 373–84.
- Lee, B. 2002. Teaching assistants in schools: The current state of play. Local Government Association Research Series Report Number 34, August 2002. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research, UK.
- Loxley, A., and W. Swann. 1998. The impact of school based training on classroom assistants in primary schools. *Research Papers in Education* 13, no. 2: 141–60.
- Milner, A. 2008. The effective deployment of Classroom Assistants in support of the National Numeracy Framework. Unpublished EdD thesis, Open University, Milton Keynes, UK.
- Moyles, J., and W. Suschitzky. 1997. *Jills of all trades ...? Classroom assistants in KS1 classes*. London: Association of Teachers and Lecturers.
- National Remodelling Team. 2003. *Touching tomorrow*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
- Office for Standards in Education. 2002. *Curriculum in successful primary schools*. London: HMSO.
- Ozga, J. 2002. Education governance in the United Kingdom: The modernisation project. *European Educational Research Journal* 1, no. 2: 331–41.
- Pugh, J. 2007. How are primary school TAs managed, motivated and led since the NWA in 2003? Paper presented to British Educational Research Association conference, September 5–8, Institute of Education, University of London, London.
- Quicke, J. 2003. Teaching Assistants: Students or servants? *Forum* 45, no. 2: 71–4.
- School Teacher Review Body. 2004. *School Teacher Review Body – Teachers' workload survey*. London: Author.
- Slater, J. 2003. Staff dispute assistants' value. *Times Educational Supplement*, September 12.
- Stewart, W. 2003. Storm out of blue skies. *Times Educational Supplement*, December 5.
- Stewart, W. 2004. Support staff revolt. *Times Educational Supplement*, June 18.
- Teacher Development Agency. 2006. *Professional standards for Higher Level Teaching Assistants*. London: TDA.
- Teacher Development Agency. 2007. *Professional standards for qualified teacher status and requirements for initial teacher training*. London: TDA.
- Teacher Training Agency. 2002. *Draft Higher Level Teaching Assistant standards*. London: HMSO.
- Thomas, G. 1992. *Effective classroom teamwork: Support or intrusion?* London: Routledge.
- Thomas, H., G. Butt, A. Fielding, A. Lance, R. Pilkington, S. Rayner, and I. Selwood. 2004. *The evaluation of the Transforming the School Workforce Pathfinder Project: Research report 541*. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Tilley, D. 2003. Doing it my way. *Primary Practice* 33, (Spring): 36–8.
- UNISON. 2002. *Teaching assistants. A report on the role, pay and conditions of teaching assistants*. Labour Research Department, London: UNISON.
- Watkinson, A. 1998. Supporting learning and assisting teaching: The teacher – The assistant – The learner. TOPIC 19 paper, Spring. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research, UK.
- Wilkinson, G. 2005. Workforce remodelling and formal knowledge: The erosion of teachers' professional jurisdiction in English schools. *School Leadership and Management* 25, no. 5: 421–39.
- Wilson, R., C. Easton, P. Smith, and C. Sharp. 2005. *National Remodelling Team and Evaluation and Impact Survey (year 1)*. London: Department for Education and Skills.