The Wider Pedagogical Role model: summing up the DISS project

DISS project briefing note 6

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This briefing note sums up the key messages from the **Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project** and introduces the Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR) model developed through study. The DISS project has produced results on all categories of support staff in terms of their characteristics and conditions of employment, and in particular, the preparedness, deployment, practice and impact of teaching assistants (TAs) (see briefing notes 2 to 5). Taken together, these components provide the basis for the WPR model – a new model for conceptualising the role and impact of TAs.

Aims of the DISS project

1. To provide an accurate, systematic and representative description of the types of support staff and their characteristics and deployment in schools, and how these changed over time
2. To analyse the impact of TAs and other support staff on teachers, teaching and pupils' learning, behaviour and progress

## Summary of the DISS project findings on TA impact

- Positive effects on teachers' job satisfaction, stress and workload, and their teaching and classroom control (e.g. less disruption)
- Positive effects on pupils' Positive Approaches to Learning, but only for Year 9. No effect for pupils in other year groups
- Systemic negative effect on pupils' academic progress in English, mathematics and science across all years groups
- Negative effect in terms of reduced teacher-to-pupil interaction

Explaining the findings on pupils' academic progress

The statistical analysis of the pupil attainment data was such that any factor influencing the negative relationship between TA support and progress would have to be related to both attainment **and** the awarding of TA support. As the analysis controlled for pupil factors that typically affect progress (e.g. SEN status, prior attainment, deprivation, gender and ethnicity), these factors can all be ruled out. What, however, *could* explain the findings on pupils' progress?

Introducing the Wider Pedagogical Role model

The WPR model (below) shows the key facets and effects of TAs and the support they provide, and how these components relate to one another.
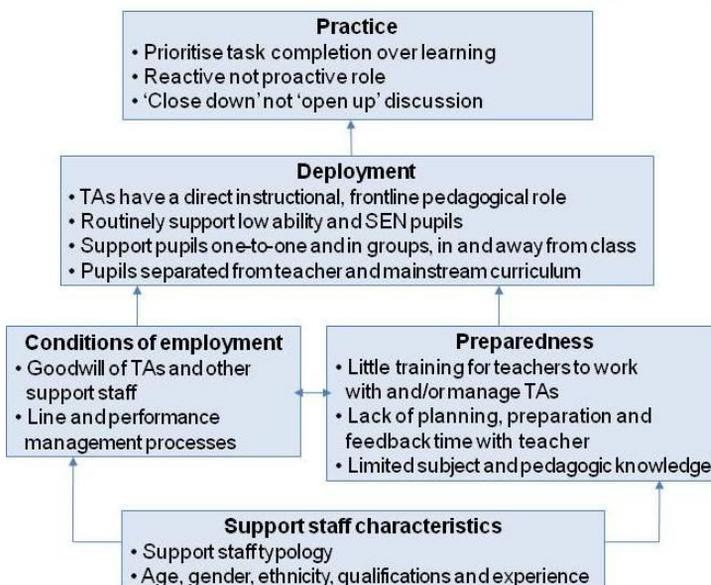
The WPR model and TA impact

The WPR model seeks to show that the effects of TA support on pupils' academic progress is not simply about the individual characteristics of TAs or pupils. To assume that it is seriously underplays the situational and structural factors within which TAs work and which affects their capacity for positive impact.

Instead, as the DISS study concludes, the findings on TAs' impact on pupils are more appropriately explained in terms of the decisions made regarding TAs' deployment, preparedness and conditions of employment, which are outside of their control.

There is a complex interplay of relationships between the components of WPR model which informs how impact can be explained and understood. For example, the lack of time for teachers and TAs to plan and feedback is determined to a large extent by TAs' contracted hours of work. The fact that teachers and TAs have any time at all to communicate is frequently down to TAs' goodwill (working extra unpaid hours).

It was not possible to test these explanations in the DISS study, and so more research is needed on the relationships between the components of the WPR model and the effects on pupils.

Modifying models of educational effectiveness

The increase of TAs in English and Welsh schools, the widening of their roles and responsibilities, and most significantly, their impact on pupil outcomes as revealed through the DISS project, demands that models of school and teacher effectiveness be modified to include TAs.

In particular, the extent to which teachers interact with, manage and organise the work of TAs demonstrates a clear need to account for this changed reality and how these factors affect pupil outcomes, in terms of attitudes to learning, behaviour and academic progress.

Ideas about effective teaching also need to be applied to TAs, as they clearly have an instructional/pedagogical role. First, however, fundamental questions about the appropriateness of such a role need to be explicitly raised and explored.

Implications for pupils with SEN

The issue of the appropriateness of a pedagogical role for TAs is particularly important given the implications the DISS project findings have for pupils with SEN. The DISS project has called for schools to evaluate their current deployment of TAs and ensure that they do not routinely support low ability/SEN pupils and risk pupils' separation from the teacher and the curriculum.

Plus, teachers should take responsibility for the pedagogical planning of pupils supported by TAs, and not hand the planning, delivery and assessment of interventions to under-prepared and inadequately-supported TAs.

At the school-level, TA support must be explicitly set out in relation to anticipated academic outcomes for pupils with SEN.