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The context

This opening chapter describes what the book does and also underlines the importance of skills, values and beliefs to the work of teaching assistants (TAs) and other support staff in schools and other educational settings in dealing with difficult behaviour from pupils. It is followed by an overview of current developments for TAs and their changing role plus a consideration of the value of the book to staff working towards Teacher Development Agency (TDA) standards. There is a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of being a Teaching Assistant when pupils are being disruptive which is illustrated by quotations from those who know best – the TAs themselves.

What this book is about

This book will help teaching assistants (TAs) and other support staff working in schools and colleges to increase their understanding and skills in preventing and dealing with disruptive or difficult behaviour. Occasionally books of this type aim to tell the reader what to do, as if a special technique will always work. This is not a book that tells the TA how to behave in situations but rather it presents a model of the TA who is able to operate successfully in various ways and in numerous contexts. In addition to discussing ways of preventing behaviour difficulties it develops all three major approaches to behaviour management by focusing on the school system, the importance of negotiating or contracting with pupils and the key skills that support and enhance relationships in schools. The book offers many ideas built around a simple principle – the more skills

and ideas the TA possesses the more likely they are to be successful in preventing and dealing with difficult situations. However, I hope these ideas are not presented in what can often feel like a patronising 'do this because it will work' style: they are underpinned by case studies, lists and exercises that help individual and groups of support staff to consider what works for them and what might not. There is also an ongoing consideration of the role and status of TAs and support staff in their schools as any book which presents ideas that do not resonate with the values, roles and skills of the TA and the school in which they work will be of limited value. Based upon ideas initially expressed in one of my chapters in *A Toolkit for the Effective Teaching Assistant* (Lee, 2009), it is book that invites more than a cursory glance but rather welcomes working through as part of any personal reflection or professional development scheme.

Who it is designed for

The initial idea for this book originated while I was working with teaching assistants and other support staff who were studying on Foundation Degree programmes. 'Behaviour Management' was a module that was studied on their course and it became apparent that it was also a major area in which TAs wished to develop their skills. Since starting my career as a freelance consultant this demand from TAs for enhancing their knowledge and skills has become even more evident. Throughout this book the main term employed for those for whom it is designed is teaching assistant, referred to throughout as TA, but use is also made of the term support staff which includes those working under the title 'care staff'.

The book is designed to enhance knowledge and understanding of:

- TAs;

- care and support staff in an educational setting;

- TAs seeking to meet the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for supporting teaching and learning in schools;

- TAs seeking to meet the Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) standards;

- those who have the challenging task of teaching classes in the absence of teachers, i.e. cover supervisors;

- students studying on Foundation Degrees in education or related areas;

- students studying to be teachers;

- teachers, especially those who have a responsibility for professional development in their schools and provide programmes for any of the above.

However, the principal target audience remains those who work with children and young people in any form of supportive role and are not teachers.

Overview

One of the major areas of change in schools over the last ten years is the rise in the numbers of TAs and other forms of support staff in school. Accompanying that increase has been a greater diversity of role, increasing status through the HLTA programme and more direct involvement in teaching classes and groups through cover supervisors. In addition, there are increased opportunities for professional development and study. With these developments there have been accompanying changes in role and function for teaching assistants. Job descriptions for TAs usually start with a list of tasks that follow the word 'support', e.g. 'support the plans of the teacher', 'support the assessment policy'. Until recent times, teachers have been clear that they are in charge of the learning in the classroom and the behaviour of the pupils that secured the climate in which that learning took place. TAs supported the practices of the teacher as well as the learning of the pupils and enforcement of the policies of the school. However, the modern classroom is experiencing turbulence which has been influenced if not directed by government initiatives such as 'Workforce Reform', 'Extended Schools' and 'Every Child Matters'. The concept of the school day, the relationship between educationalists and other caring professions and even what it means to be a teacher or a member of the support staff is being redefined. This reform agenda has also changed the landscape for TAs as they have found new pedagogic responsibilities through the HLTA and with that comes increased expectations of the HLTA status as a classroom manager. The notion of the TA as a general assistant to the teacher contributing wherever possible to the lesson still exists but increasingly skilful and targeted provision has resulted in TAs undertaking a

complex set of tasks and assuming greater responsibility than has hitherto been the case. This is reflected in the TDA National Occupational Standards accompanying these developments, and in the increasing involvement of TAs with all aspects of school life including the behaviour of pupils with the attendant stresses that accompany the task. It has always been the case that inappropriate or disruptive behaviour has been picked up by TAs but in the modern school they are more than ever involved in dealing with these forms of behaviour directly. This book is designed to support them in that task.

The demand for TAs to increase their skills in both preventing and dealing with behaviour problems is becoming the same as teachers. Both roles demand a range of skills, few of which can be taught and most of which are acquired through experience. However, the TA has a major disadvantage over their teaching counterpart. They often lack the status and, therefore, probably the power that comes with the status that teachers possess. There is natural authority built into the role of the teacher, although it could be argued that this is not as prevalent in modern schools as it used to be. Certainly teachers can rarely rely solely upon their status to deal with difficult situations. In not having the natural authority of the teacher, TAs may be disadvantaged but they also may have two advantages. First, some pupils may deliberately rebel against the authority of the teacher and, second, in not possessing such imposing authority, TAs are compelled to look for other ways of dealing with difficulties. They have to be creative and flexible using every technique and idea in their armoury. Some of them have a third advantage in that their knowledge of certain pupils means that they will be able to draw upon that closeness of relationship to deal with a situation. Much here will depend upon their role being related to specific pupils or groups rather than general classroom tasks, their knowledge of a variety of techniques as well as maybe more time to observe and listen to pupils. Whatever their status and role all support staff benefit from possessing a range of skills for coping with disruption and maybe more challenging forms of behaviour.

The structure of the book

This chapter focuses on the role of the TA and reflects upon the advantages and disadvantages that go with that role. Chapter 2 considers what can be done to prevent classroom disruption or problems

with individual pupils with whom the TA works closely. The remaining chapters introduce and elaborate on the three broad approaches to dealing with behaviour problems. The three approaches are described as:

- the system approach;

- the negotiation approach;

- the relationship approach.

These approaches are the full spectrum of professional skills available to the TA and in this sense it is the 'complete' range. They are **not** centred on the problems that the pupils may present, although there is some consideration of these, but the focus is on **the skills, values and beliefs** that are held by the person who deals with the problem – the TA. Beliefs are crucial to how you perceive what is happening with your pupils and the book places emphasis on how events are interpreted and understood and, therefore, how you respond to those events.

All the chapters contain objectives for the chapter in a brief opening section and there are many exercises for TAs to undertake. While the exercises can be undertaken on your own – indeed they are designed for individual reflection – there are benefits to undertaking them in groups and discussing the outcomes and implications for your practice. Additionally, each chapter contains references and points to additional reading that will support further study and investigation.

Terminology

The language used to describe behaviour that can cause problems in schools is in itself a problem and mention should be made of the terms employed in the book. Terms such as 'difficult behaviour' and 'disruptive behaviour' have been included but no matter what phrases are used there are problems that are attached to them. For example, with 'inappropriate behaviour' who defines behaviour as 'inappropriate'? Is it the case that teaching assistants and teachers are always the judges of what is inappropriate? Much the same could be said of 'disruptive'. Throughout the book the terms used have been chosen because they are often used by TAs and ones which they

appear to be comfortable with. Every attempt has been made to avoid labelling the pupil; it is their behaviour that presents us with difficulties, not the pupil.

The behaviour that causes problems is that which interferes with the learning of others and staff rights to teach their lessons. It may be low-level disruption aiming to unsettle the equilibrium of a settled learning group or it may be disturbing for classmates and threaten their feelings of security or, more challengingly, it may be that which threatens the social order of the class or the school.

Meeting Standards

This book has been written as a stand-alone text that enhances professional understanding and development in a variety of areas of behaviour management in the various settings where learning takes place, but especially schools. However, it has a number of uses for those who are seeking formal qualifications and undertaking study and practice based upon centrally developed ideas and the following are just illustrations of its potential.

The Teacher Development Agency (TDA) has brought together a number of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) (www.tda.gov. uk/support/nos) that inform or determine the effectiveness of the many aspects of assistance, care and support in all key educational settings. They also include settings such as Management of Volunteers, Health and Social Care and Information and Library Services. The Standards are divided into Units which are based upon the roles and responsibilities of support staff in schools and are structured in the same way as the former National Occupational Standards for Teaching Assistants in that there are Core and Optional Units at Level 2 and Level 3. This book will help support staff to achieve a variety of standards and the specific core unit at Level 3 which addresses behaviour matters, STL19 *Promote positive behaviour*, more an this - on the next page. It may be that it helps in addressing a number of standards not mentioned below but those included are the more obvious cases.

I hope this book helps TAs to reflect on their practice and to consider their own values that may be challenging and, therefore, is likely to step beyond meeting the Standards. However, it does make a useful

contribution to achieving many of them and will prove a key source of ideas for those seeking to address any Standards broadly related to behaviour management and pupil well-being.

The Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA) Standards (www.tda.gov. uk/support/hlta) have one direct reference to behaviour management:

26.   *Use effective strategies to promote positive behaviour*

but have a number of other relevant standards such as:

2.   *Establish fair, respectful, trusting, supportive and constructive rela-tionships with children and young people*

As mentioned before, for a more intensive and detailed consideration of how this book can help in meeting standards Table 1.1 illustrates the link to the specific National Occupational Standard Level 3 Core Unit STL19: *Promote positive behaviour* which includes such requirements as:

19.1 *Implement agreed behaviour management strategies*

and:

19.2 *Support pupils in taking responsibility for their learning and behaviour*

However, there are many chapters in this book which will support achieving particular performance criteria and it would be wrong to suggest that the above is the only unit that the book will help in achieving. It is important to emphasise that such is the link between learning and behaviour that there are very few units that the key ideas in this book would *not* address. Those selected below are the more obvious cases and include:

Level 2   Core STL4: *Contribute to positive relationships*
Level 3   Core ST20: *Develop and promote positive relationships*
Level 3   Optional STL37: *Contribute to the prevention and management of challenging behaviour in children and young people*
Level 3   Optional STL41: *Support pupils with behaviour, emotional and social needs*
Level 3   Optional STL45: *Promote children's well-being and resilience*
Level 3   Optional STL48: *Support young people in tackling problems and taking action.*
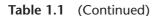
Table 1.1 Promote positive behaviour

Performance criteria	Chapter
19.1 P1 apply agreed behaviour management strategies fairly and consistently at all times	2–7
19.1 P2 provide an effective role model for the standards of behaviour expected of pupils and adults within the school	1–7
19.1 P3 provide praise and encouragement to pupils to recognise and promote positive pupil behaviour in line with school policies	4
19.1 P4 use appropriate strategies to minimise disruption through inappropriate behaviour	2–7
19.1 P5 regularly remind pupils of the school's code of conduct	3
19.1 P6 take immediate action to deal with any bullying, harassment or oppressive behaviour in accordance with your role and responsibilities	2–6
19.1 P7 recognise and respond appropriately to risks to yourself and/or others during episodes of challenging behaviour	2–6
19.1 P8 refer incidents of inappropriate behaviour outside your area of responsibility to the relevant staff member for action	2–3
19.1 P9 contribute to reviews of behaviour, including bullying, attendance and the effectiveness of rewards and sanctions, as relevant to your role	4
19.1 P10 provide clear and considered feedback on the effectiveness of behaviour management strategies	1–7
19.2 P1 encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and behaviour when working on their own, in pairs, in groups and in whole-class situations	5–6
19.2 P2 use peer and self-assessment techniques to increase pupils' involvement in their learning and promote good behaviour	5-6
19.2 P3 highlight and praise positive aspects of pupils' behaviour	4
19.2 P4 recognise patterns and triggers which may lead to inappropriate behavioural responses and take appropriate action to pre-empt problems	5
19.2 P5 encourage and support pupils to consider the impact of their behaviour on others, themselves and their environment	5–6
19.2 P6 support pupils with behaviour difficulties to identify and agree on ways in which they might change or manage their behaviour to achieve desired outcomes	5–6

Table 1.1 (Continued)

Performance criteria	Chapter
19.2 P7 support pupils in a manner which is likely to make them feel valued and respected and recognises progress made	5–6
19.2 P8 encourage and support pupils to regularly review their own behaviour, attitude and achievements	5–6
19.2 P9 contribute to collecting data on pupils' attendance and behaviour, including the use of rewards and sanctions, to inform policy review and planning	3–4
19.2 P10 provide feedback to relevant people on progress made by any pupils with a behaviour support plan	2–3

The advantages of being a teaching assistant/member of support staff

At the heart of the book is the central argument that TAs benefit from a breadth of ideas, skills and techniques in dealing with difficult pupil behaviour. This view is supported by TAs themselves when asked what the advantages are of being a TA when it comes to dealing with difficult classroom behaviour. Analysis of their statements reveals a belief in their closeness to the pupils and the opportunity that a more flexible role presents in dealing with situations usually before they begin to disrupt others, including the time to intervene. Many comments also reflect a perceived personal role that support staff can play between teachers and their pupils, and in doing so, there were occasional implied criticisms about the quality of relationships between pupils and their teachers. Similar to comments about relationships there are often comments about TAs being on the same level as the pupils which may suggest that the social distance between teachers and pupils remains an issue in the eyes of some TAs.

Exercise 1.1   The advantages of being a TA

Look at the quotations below from TAs and other support staff about the pluses that they possess in dealing with behaviour difficulties and disruption. Tick the box of the three quotations that you identify with the most. There is a blank row at the end of the list for you to add any other advantage not included here.

Quotation	Tick
I am closer to the children and I think I am enabled to be more human in response and less authoritative.	
Having the time to communicate on a more personal level.	
You are able to spot potential problems before they get out of hand because you do not have to concentrate on delivering the lesson … and you are often sat with the students. You are then able to 'nip it in the bud' or distract or persuade.	
I can usually spot it and deal with it before it gets out of hand and becomes more disruptive.	
Being able to work with students on a 1:1 before the behaviour disrupts others.	
We are closer to the pupils and are not seen as an official, therefore we can get a greater understanding of the behaviour.	
Stronger relationships with students generally than teachers … working at ground level … more personal knowledge of students' lives.	
Relationship with student, know strategies that work and build up trust. In among the children, have a better perspective of what is going on.	
You get to work with students more to get to the root of the behaviour problem. I think then you can have a closer relationship with the student and know how to deal with behaviour better.	
A unique opportunity to interact with pupils and operate more on their level.	
I am free to deal with this behaviour while the teacher carries on with the lesson. I can deal individually with the pupils at a friendship level.	

The disadvantages of being a teaching assistant/ member of support staff

One of the major developments in schools in the last decade has been the changing role of the TA and the increasing employment of non-teaching staff of various descriptions undertaking key supportive roles in learning and teaching in schools (Townsend and Parker, 2009). The teacher is now much more defined as a manager of learning. In the best of practices it is difficult to distinguish which adult is performing which role and the classroom becomes a vibrant centre of learning where all are agreed on objectives, rules and ways of working. Every adult makes a contribution, knows what they are doing and feels valued.

When asked to consider the disadvantages of being support staff and TAs four broad groups emerge:

• low status;

• inconsistency in application of classroom and school rules;

• relationship tension;

• clashes of practices, beliefs and values.

Low status

The first disadvantage is based upon the status that TAs possess and the frustrations that accompany that status. Much of this can be countered by the manner in which TAs are supported by the school and also by the way that teachers and support staff work together as a team with uniform and shared objectives. Despite the advances in recruitment, training and role definition of TAs, in some schools they are still employed to undertake tasks that perpetuate a low-status role from which they find it hard to develop any authority in dealing with difficult pupil behaviour.

Inconsistency in application of classroom and school rules

A second disadvantage is inconsistency in the way that behaviour matters are dealt with between classes in which TAs are working or

breaks in continuity which do not allow support staff to fulfil their full potential. Teamwork in classrooms (Pittman, 2009) is not automatic but has to be worked on and time needs to be given to agreeing what is important about a lesson, programme of study and ways of working to help to secure consistency and create a seamless classroom operation. This helps TAs to absorb some of the authority of their teacher colleagues in the context of a collaborative partnership.

Relationship tension

This disadvantage is linked to a role that many support staff are asked to fulfil which is based on working alongside and supporting individual pupils. Sometimes the demands they make can lead to stress and there are also tensions when an authority stance is required to deal negatively with a pupil who is well known to them and with whom a good, even close, relationship has developed. The disruption that they are coping with is not of their making – indeed may have nothing to do with them – and it could be the case the TA empathises with the pupil.

Clashes of practices, beliefs and values

The fourth disadvantage is one which resonates strongly with the underlying theme of this book. TAs sometimes report tension between their practices, beliefs and values and those of teachers. Such tensions do not just exist between TAs and teachers but between TAs and TAs and between teachers and their fellow teachers. However, when combined with the other perceived disadvantages, the satisfaction that TAs experience in the workplace can be severely limited.

Although the four disadvantages have been separated it is clear from discussions with TAs that there is considerable overlap between them. For example, tension between staff may be a consequence of low status or a clash of values.

Exercise 1.2   The disadvantages of being a TA

Look at the quotations below from TAs and other support staff about the negatives that they possess in dealing with behaviour difficulties and disruption. Tick the box of the three quotations that you identify with the

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most. There is a blank row at the end of the list for you to add any other disadvantage not included here.

Quotation	Tick
Sometimes depending on your relationship with the students they may not take you seriously as a figure of authority when trying to deal with behaviour issues. This can often stem from how they see the teacher relating to you and whether they treat you as an equal.	
Sometimes you see other adults dealing with a situation badly and you don't have the authority to deal with it yourself.	
I am sometimes expected to pass the incident on to the teacher as the 'higher person in authority' and the information I have is diluted. I am also undervalued as a member of staff in some circumstances.	
Lack of respect from some children. Lack of respect from some teachers.	
As a TA you're not always taken as seriously as a teacher and students will ignore instructions from you and you can feel disrespected.	
Pupils regard TAs as having less status and not able to enforce rules and sanctions.	
Teachers have different ways of working. Inconsistency.	
Being split between several different classes therefore no continuity.	
You can miss out on 'the bigger picture' while dealing with behaviour. I have a child who can't cope with the full lesson. I remove him for the last 15 minutes each time to 'cool off'. I feel isolated from my class and teacher when this happens. I don't feel that I am supporting the other children or the teacher.	
Not always seen to be of use. Not always being there – continuity – moving between four classes.	
Sometimes a hard balance with discipline when you have strong relational skills with students.	
Can be tiring as so many students tell you stuff and want to talk.	
Having different beliefs in behaviour compared to the teacher.	
Stepping on the teacher's toes.	

(Continued)

Feeling uncomfortable about how some people deal with difficult behaviour.	
Conflict of interest.	
Having to follow through with sanctions you don't always agree with.	

Whatever the pluses and minuses of the role of support staff in schools there is one constant and that is change (Lee, 2009)! Gone are the days of the 'Mum's Army': the new roles that TAs now occupy reflect increased status, demands and professionalism all of which come from external forces such as legislation, school requirements and a growing belief that TAs represent good value, not only in terms of finance but also skills. It is easy to imagine that they will continue to increase in number and influence in schools and that schools that seek to give TAs responsibility matched with appropriate training, status and remuneration will reap enormous rewards.

Further reading

Derrington, C. and Groom, B. (2004) *A Team Approach to Behaviour Management: A Training Guide for SENCOs Working with Teaching Assistants*. London: Paul Chapman.
Kamen, T. (2003) *Teaching Assistant's Handbook*. Oxford: Hodder Arnold.

Websites

www.tda.gov.uk/support/hlta
www.tda.gov.uk/support/nos

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Lee, C. (2009) 'Positive approaches to behaviour management', in M. Parker, C. Lee, S. Gunn et al, *A Toolkit for the Effective Teachning Assistant*, 2nd edn. London Sage.
Lee, C. (2009) 'Understanding change and being part of it', in M. Parker, C. Lee, S. Gunn et al., *A Toolkit for the Effective Teaching Assistant*, 2nd edn. London: Sage.
Pittman, M. (2009) 'Working together: collaborative and supportive partnerships', in M. Parker, C. Lee, S. Gunn et al., *A Toolkit for the Effective Teaching Assistant*, 2nd edn. London: Sage.
Townsend, M. and Parker, M. (2009) 'Changing schools, changing roles for teaching assistants', in M. Parker, C. Lee, S. Gunn et al., *A Toolkit for the Effective Teaching Assistant*, 2nd edn. London: Sage.