The impact of Teaching Assistants/Aides on pupils: evidence and lessons from the UK

International Conference on Educational Monitoring and Evaluation
Conférence internationale sur le pilotage et l'évaluation de l'éducation

Professor Peter Blatchford
Institute of Education, University of London

Beijing, China
22 Oct. – 23 Oct. 2014

Coverage of this talk

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a. Background to rise in para-professionals in UK schools – especially Teaching Assistants/Aides (TAs)

b. Examine the impact of TAs on teachers and pupils

c. Investigate explanations for the troubling findings and ask some important questions about the role and purpose of TAs

d. Explore things we can do differently. *Maximising the Impact of TAs*

Background to DISS research on TAs

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- Huge increase in para-professionals/support staff since 2000 in the UK (i.e., non-teaching staff in schools)
- Support staff now make up 50% of total school workforce
- TAs (i.e., classroom based support staff who help pupils and teachers) comprise 25% of school workforce
- More TAs working in English state-funded primary schools than teachers: 257,300 vs. 242,300
- Annual cost £4.3 billion

Other countries have increasing numbers of para-professionals/ TAs

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- Including: USA, Australia, Italy, Sweden, Canada, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Iceland, Ireland, Malta and South Africa

- (Giangreco and Doyle, 2007).

A similar picture world-wide



Finland	**From 95-2010 increase from 2,000 to 9,700. Small numbers trained.**
Germany	**Increasing numbers used to support inclusion, without training.**
Canada	**Large numbers but variation in use. Limited planning time with teacher.**
Singapore	**Increasing numbers: social & academic support. Do one year Diploma.**
Iceland	**Support for children with SEN & behaviour problems.**
USA	**Large numbers, mostly untrained. Can be a barrier to inclusion.** (Giangreco et al., 2013)

Reason for increase in TAs in UK

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- Assumption that TAs help tackle teacher workloads
- …and raise attainments of pupils, particularly low attainers and those with learning difficulties
- Help teacher because they can spend more time with pupils with difficulties
- **Ofsted survey:** 43% Pupil Premium money (a grant to schools in proportion of number of pupils eligible for Free School Meals) used to fund TAs

Who are they?

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- Predominantly female
- Have less qualifications than teachers
- Flexible part time contracts
- ‘mums’ army’

Background to DISS research on TAs

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- Despite huge increase in TA numbers little systematic research on impact over long term and **under everyday classroom conditions**

- Previous research often small scale and focused on interventions (e.g. for literacy)

- **DISS project filled this gap** (2003-09). Largest study of its kind worldwide

- Aim was to describe characteristics, deployment and impact of Support Staff

Coverage: the story of a research programme

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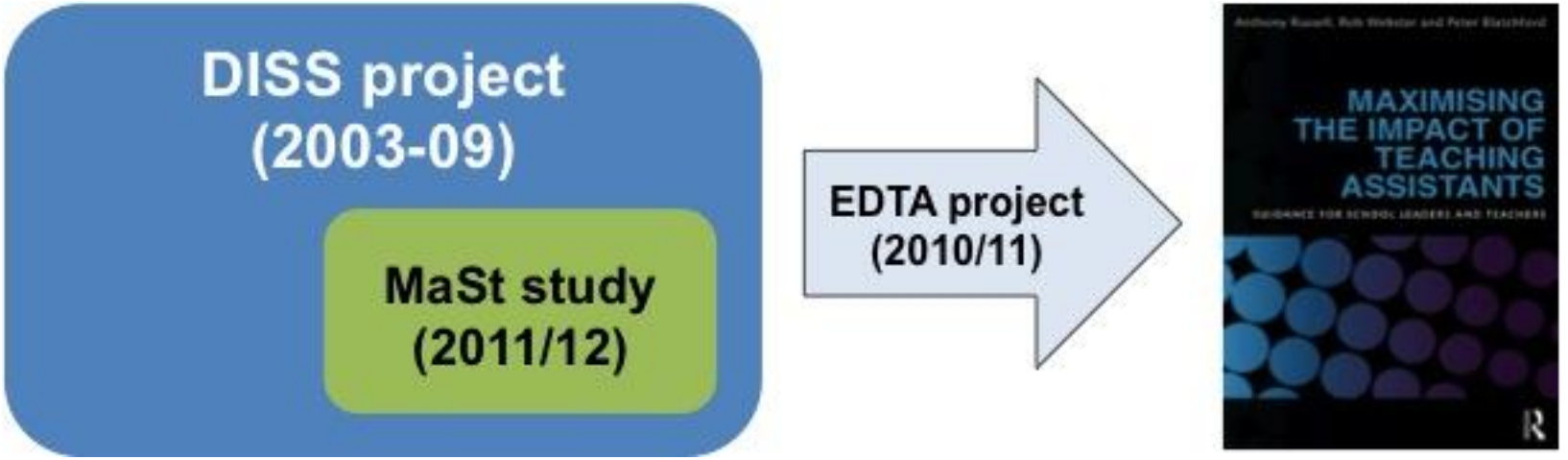
1. The case for change: key results from the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff project and the Making a Statement study

2. How to maximise the impact of TAs: guidance based on work undertaken in the Effective Deployment of TAs (EDTA) project



Project teams

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DISS (Deployment and Impact of Support Staff project - funded by the DCSF and Welsh Government) Peter Blatchford, Paul Bassett, Penelope Brown, Clare Martin, Anthony Russell and Rob Webster, with Selma Babayigit, Naomi Haywood, Maria Koutsoubou, Julie Radford and Christine Rubie-Davies

EDTA (Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants project – funded by Esmee Fairbairn Foundation). Peter Blatchford, Anthony Russell and Rob Webster

MaSt (Making a Statement Project project - funded by the Nuffield Foundation). Peter Blatchford, Rob Webster, Ayshea Craig and Alison McWhirter

Classroom Talk Julie Radford, Paula Bosanquet, Rob Webster and Peter Blatchford

Scale of the DISS project

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- 17,800+ biennial national questionnaire surveys
- Analysis of impact of TA support on 8,200 pupils in 153 schools
- Observations of 680+ pupils and 100+ TAs, in 114 schools
- Detailed case studies in 65 schools
- Interviews with 280+ heads, SENCos, teachers and TAs
- Analysis of adult-to-pupil talk in 16 lessons

TA impact: Teachers' views

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The views of teachers (Teacher Questionnaire)

- Positive effects of TAs on:
  - ✓ On teachers' workloads, job satisfaction and stress
  - ✓ On individual adult attention and classroom control ('another pair of eyes')
- Also ***impressionistically***, teachers believed that TAs had a positive impact on pupils' academic progress…
- …but what is the reality?

Teacher ratings of TA support

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Key predictor: teacher estimate of amount of TA support received by pupils

Amount of support	% time TA support provided in English	
	Wave 1	Wave 2
Low	0-10%	0%
		1-10%
Medium	11-50%	11-25%
		26-50%
High	51%+	51%+

Measures of pupil attainment

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Wave 1 (2005/06)

- Start of year: - Foundation Stage profiles
  - Key Stage assessments

- End of year: - Nat Curric levels from optional tests; or
  - Teacher assessments
  - Predicted GCSE grades (Year 10)

Wave 2 (2007/08)

- Start of year: - Nat Curric levels from optional tests; or
  - Teacher assessments

- End of year: - Key Stage assessments

TA impact on pupil academic progress: sample

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	Year groups	Schools	Pupils
Wave 1	1, 3, 7 & 10	76	2,528
Wave 2	2, 6 & 9	77	5,672
Total		***153***	***8,200***

Longitudinal multiple regression analysis

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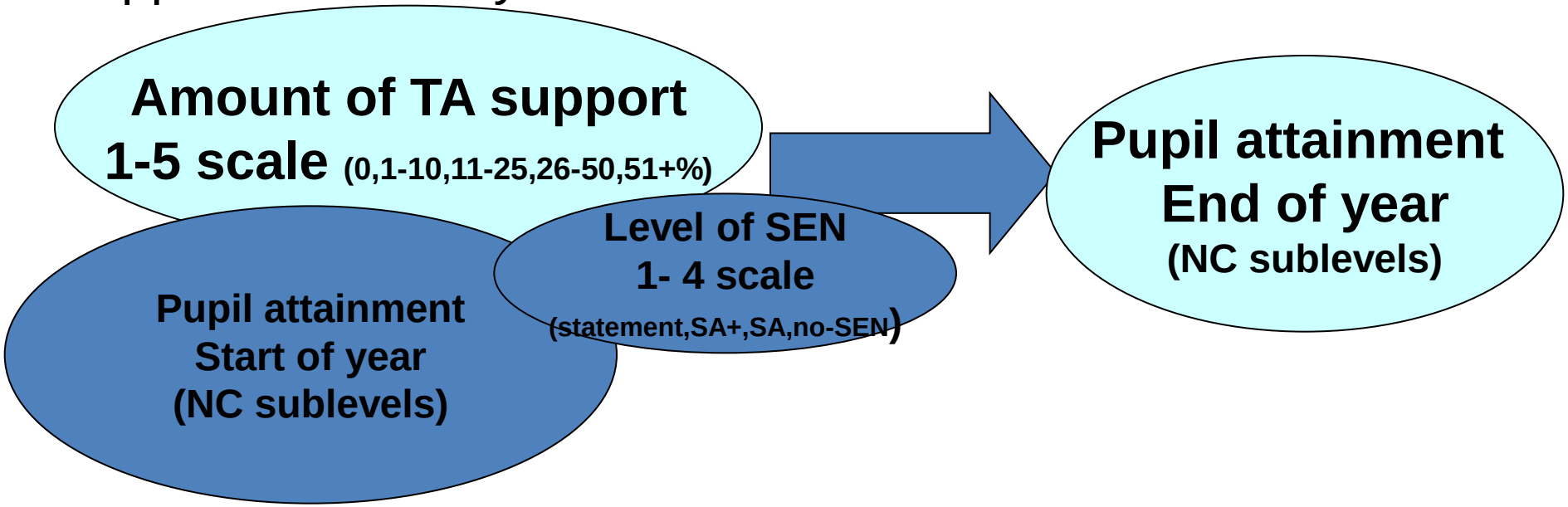
Rather than compare groups, e.g., high SEN/ no TA support vs high SEN/ high support, uses all data on scale of SEN and amount of support – and controls for other variables as well, e.g., prior attainment. We then see the INDEPENDENT effect of amount of TA support on end of year attainment.



Statistical analysis

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- Multi-level regression

- Potentially confounding variables controlled for in analysis:
  - Baseline attainment at start of year (NC sublevels)
  - SEN status (4 point scale: statements, SA+, SA, no-SEN)
  - Plus:
    - Gender
    - Ethnicity
    - Eligibility for free school meals
    - Income deprivation
    - English as additional language

DISS: TA impact on pupil progress

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Statistically significant results using teacher ratings

Wave	Year	English	Mathematics	Science
1	1	✓n	✓n	✗
	3	✓n	✓n	✗
	7	✓n	✓n	✗
	10	✓n	✗	✗
2	2	✓n	✓n	✓n
	6	✓n	✓n	✓n
	9	✓n	✓n	✓n

✗ = No significant effect of TA support

✓n = Significant negative effect of TA support

Explaining the findings

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Something to do with pupil characteristics?

- "TAs tend to support pupils who make the least progress anyway….?"
- But regression controls for variables known to affect attainment and support from TAs (e.g. SEN and prior attainment)

- **So if not pupil characteristics, what else explains the findings?**

- **NOT** the fault of TAs!!

- Organisational and structural factors over which TAs have little or no control

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

230,000 classroom assistants face axe

"Studies have found that those pupils who receive help from teaching assistants make less progress than classmates of similar ability"



Mail Online

Army of teaching assistants faces the axe as Education department attempts to save some of the £4billion they cost each year

Media reports from June 2013

Impact vs. cost: Where we are

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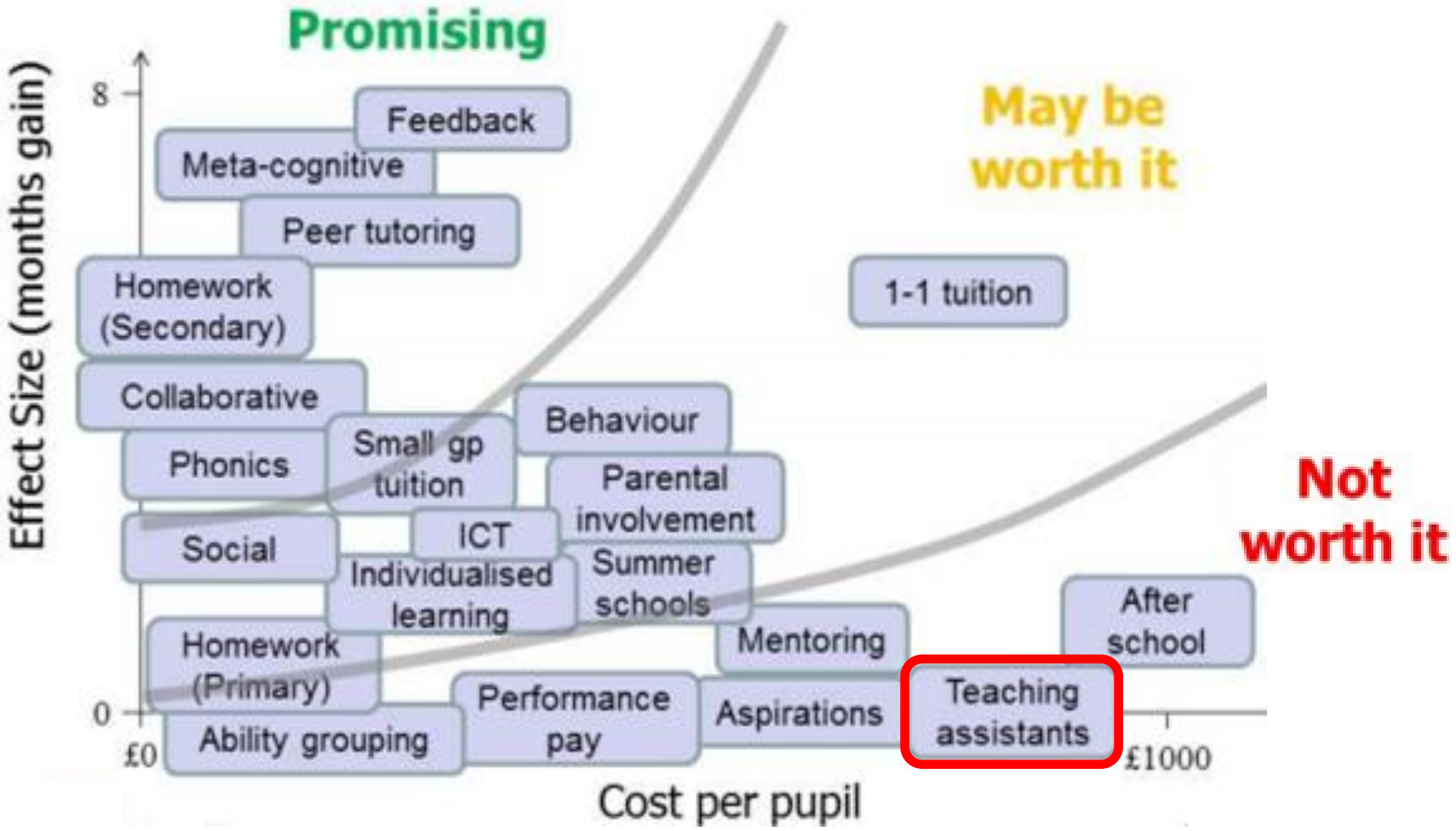

Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit

The MAST study

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- Additional study – the Making a Statement (MAST) Project
- Focus on pupils most likely to receive support from TAs and others – pupils with difficulties in learning
- Making a Statement study extends DISS project

Background to the 'Making a Statement (MaSt)' Study

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- Pupils with highest levels of SEN get most TA support, but make least progress
- DISS focused on TAs. Surprisingly little systematic information on moment-by-moment everyday experiences of pupils in mainstream settings with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- SAGE Handbook of SEN (Ed by Florian) – no studies that provide this information
- About 1 in 5 pupils in mainstream schools have SEN and about 3% have most severe needs that require a statement of SEN

Broader concerns about progress of pupils with SEN

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- Recent statistics show growing interconnection between SEN and income levels/ deprivation

- Cambridge Primary Review: ‘urgency about providing educational and social support for particular children in difficulty which cannot wait for primary education – or society as a whole – to become more equitable and inclusive’

- School failure known to have long-term damaging effects on society, as well as for the individuals concerned

Aim of MaSt Study

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- To provide detailed description of everyday educational experiences of primary-aged pupils with a statement of SEN in mainstream primary schools. In terms of:
  - ***Locations and contexts*** within which they are supported (e.g., in and out of the classroom; individual, group and class contexts)
  - ***Who provides support*** (e.g., TAs, teachers, specialists etc)
  - ***Nature of interactions and tasks*** (e.g., the frequency and duration of different interactions relating to teaching/support)
- Funding from the Nuffield Foundation (2011/12)

MaSt study: sample and methods

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Sample

SEN

•48 pupils in Year 5 across 45 schools

•Moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties

Comparison Group

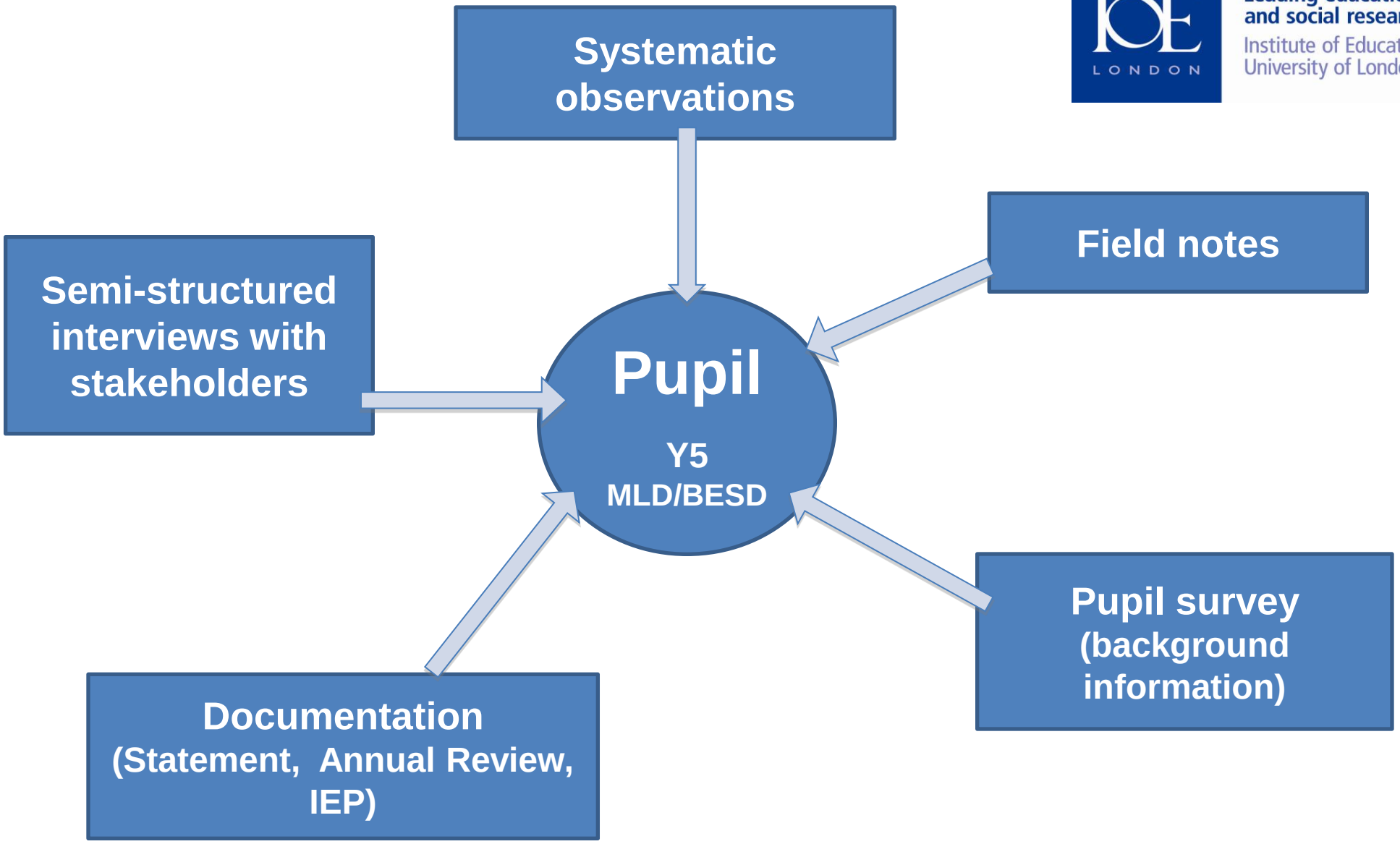
•Compared with experiences of 151 average attainment pupils in the same classes

Data

Pupil shadowed for one week: all day, Monday to Friday

•Activities/contexts recorded every minute = 648 hours

•886 lessons - total of 38,865 data points / minutes



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So….

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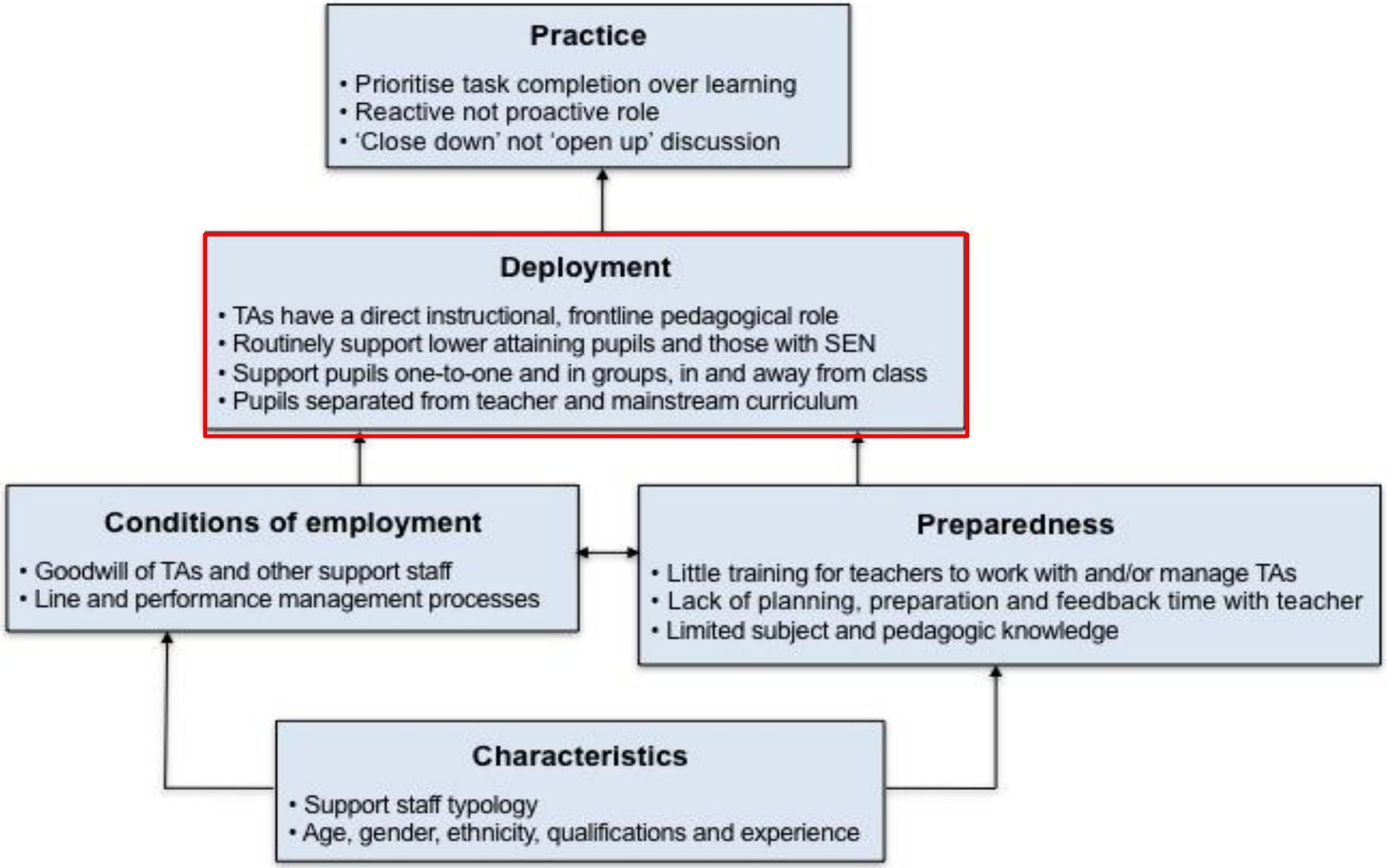
- How to explain the findings on the negative impact of TAs on pupil progress?


Practice
• Prioritise task completion over learning
• Reactive not proactive role
• 'Close down' not 'open up' discussion
Deployment
• TAs have a direct instructional, frontline pedagogical role
• Routinely support lower attaining pupils and those with SEN
• Support pupils one-to-one and in groups, in and away from class
• Pupils separated from teacher and mainstream curriculum
Conditions of employment
• Goodwill of TAs and other support staff
• Line and performance management processes
Preparedness
• Little training for teachers to work with and/or manage TAs
• Lack of planning, preparation and feedback time with teacher
• Limited subject and pedagogic knowledge
Characteristics
• Support staff typology
• Age, gender, ethnicity, qualifications and experience

What do they do? DISS results

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Timelog results for TAs (time spent on tasks)	
Direct learning support for pupils	3.8 hours
Support teachers/curriculum	1.4 hours
Direct pastoral support for pupils	0.3 hours
Indirect support for pupils	0.3 hours
Support for the school site	0.3 hours
Admin support for the school	0 hours
Total	*6.1 hours*

DISS: Key findings on Deployment

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- Teachers work mostly at whole class level (leading and roving)
- TA work mostly with groups and individuals; and rarely with middle and higher attaining pupils
- TAs work more with pupils in need; teachers those without SEN
- The more interactions a pupil has with a TA, the less with the teacher

Interaction by pupil level of SEN	Teacher	TA
Non-SEN	**55%**	27%
School Action	24%	32%
School Action Plus or SEN statement	21%	**41%**

MaSt - Pupils' interactions in primary school

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Pupil activity		Control	Pupils with statement of SEN		
		In class	*In class*	*Out of class/ARP**	*Total*
Teacher/pupil	Part of class	35%	22%	1%	23%
	Part of group	2%	1%	2%	4%
	One-to-one	3%	3%	1%	4%
	(Total)	40%	26%	5%	31%
TA/pupil	Part of class	1%	2%	<1%	2%
	Part of group	1%	3%	3%	6%
	One-to-one	1%	9%	10%	19%
	(Total)	2%	15%	13%	27%
Peer interaction		32%	13%	5%	18%
No interaction		26%	19%	5%	24%
Total		100%	73%	27%	100%

*2% of all observations in Addition Resource Provisions (ARP)

DISS - Pupil role in adult interaction Systematic Observations

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Pupil role in interaction with adult	Teacher	TA
Pupil focus of adult – short (≤10 seconds)	6%	**19%**
Pupil focus of adult – long (>10 seconds)	5%	**44%**
Pupil part of group audience	2%	17%
Pupil part of class audience	**85%**	19%

- Pupils nine times more likely to have sustained interaction with TA (>10 seconds)
- Also pupils six times more likely to be actively involved with TAs (begun, responded to, sustained)

MaSt - Degree of teacher responsibility for pupils with SEN (MaSt Case Studies)

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‘

1. ***Teachers have a high degree of responsibility for pupils with a statement for SEN***

2. ***Teachers have a mid level of responsibility for pupils with a statement for SEN***

3. ***Teachers have a low level of responsibility for pupils with a statement for SEN***

- Most common approach at mid-point of scale, e.g., teachers plan TAs deliver
- High amount of teacher involvement rare
- TAs have high level of responsibility for **planning** but also **delivery** i.e., moment-by-moment pedagogical decision-making
- Teachers as ‘hosts’ (Giangreco et al, 2001)

Deployment of TAs: key findings from DISS and MaSt

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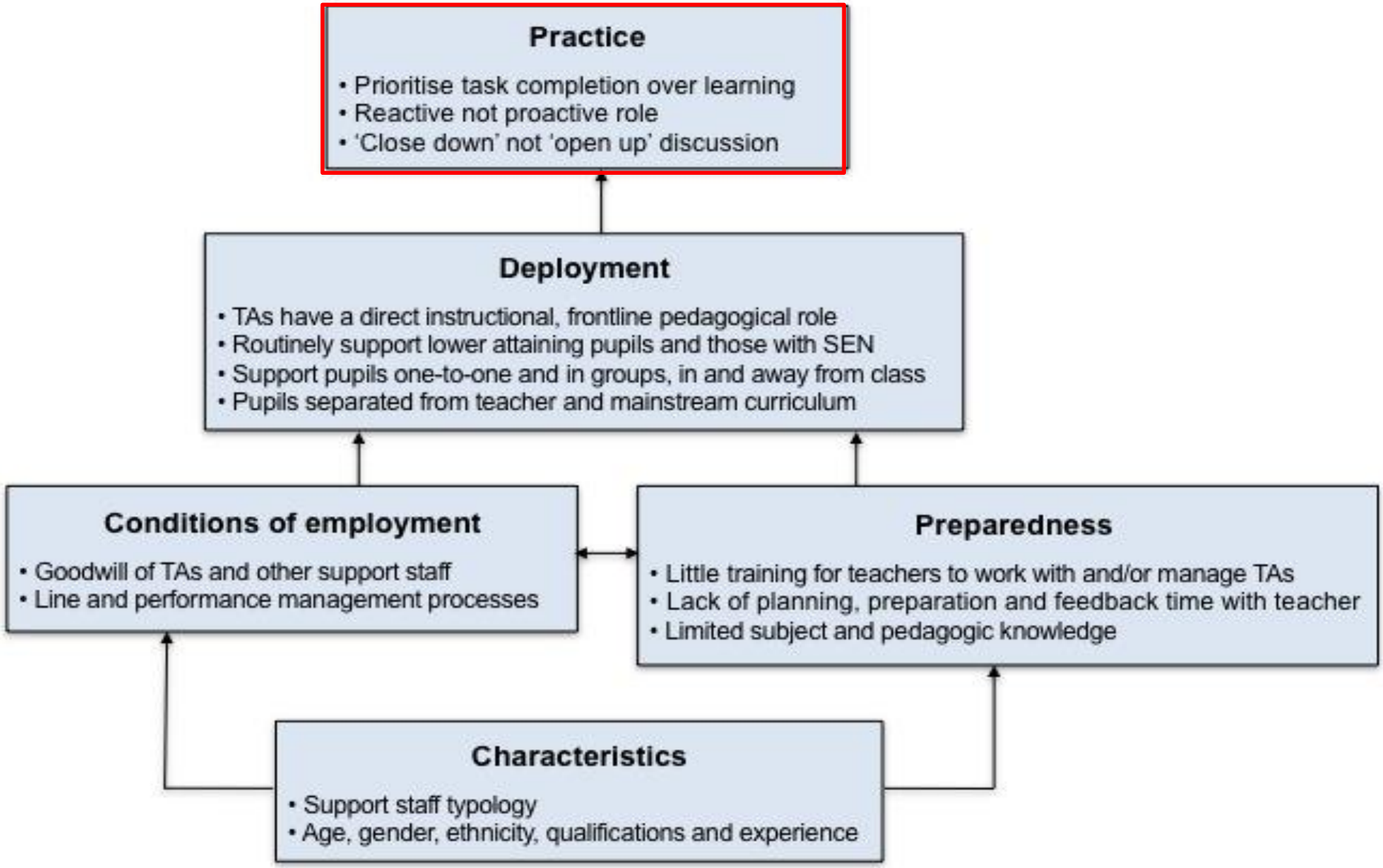
- TAs have high level of responsibility for low attaining pupils and pupils with SEN, differentiating work and interventions (often out of class)
- Pupils with SEN far more interaction with TA (than 'control' pupils, especially 1 to 1 and in small groups
- TA support is 'alternative', not 'additional', to teacher
- TA support leads to pupil separation from the teacher, the curriculum and peers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DISS: Practice - method

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- 'Practice' = interactions of TAs and teachers with pupils
- Unique component of the DISS study
- Simultaneous digital voice recordings
- 16 pairs of transcripts
- Teacher-to-pupil talk and TA-to-pupil talk
- English and mathematics

DISS Key findings on Practice

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- Pupils have longer, more interactive interactions with TAs

But:

- Teachers spent more time explaining concepts
- TA explanations were sometimes inaccurate or confusing

- Teachers provided more feedback
- TAs more likely to prompt pupils and supply answers

- Teachers linked current lesson to pupils' prior knowledge, promoted pupils' thinking and cognitive engagement in a task
- TAs more concerned with task completion

- **Teachers 'open up' talk. TAs close talk down**

MaSt - Appropriateness and quality of pedagogy: summary

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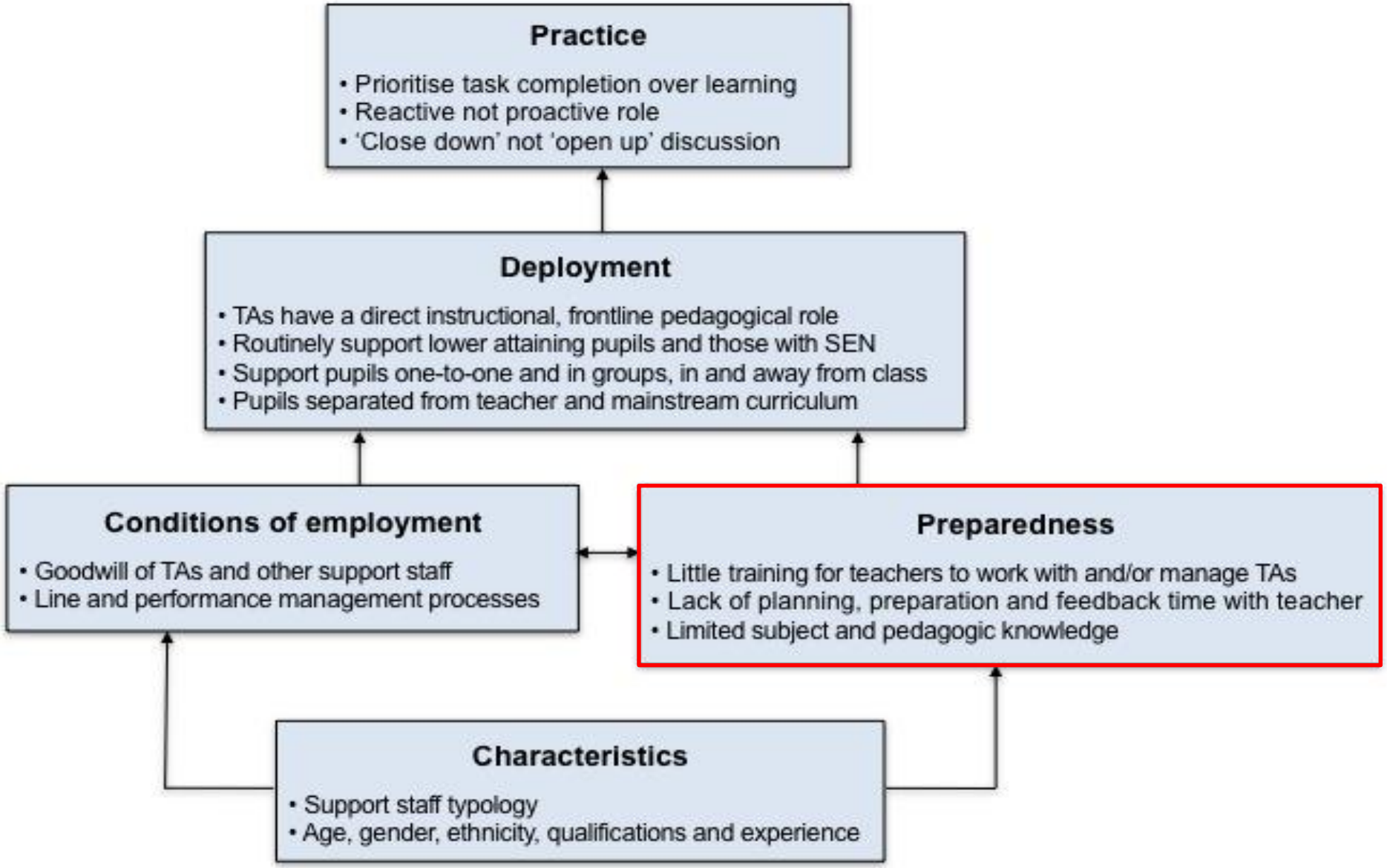
- TAs 'fill in the gap' left by teachers.
- TAs often have main responsibility for planning, delivering and differentiating work for pupils with SEN
- TAs' pedagogical input – well intentioned – but choice and quality of tasks and verbal interactions questionable
- (as Rutherford, 2012)

Quality of pedagogy often unlikely to be sufficient to narrow attainment gap between pupils with SEN and peers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DISS - Key findings on Preparedness

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- 75% teachers no training to work with/manage TAs
- 75% teachers no allocated planning or feedback time
- Teacher-TA meetings depended on TAs' goodwill
- TAs underprepared: 'tuned in' to teacher talk for content/instructions
- TAs and teachers have different levels of subject and instructional knowledge

MaSt - Extent of knowledge and preparedness re pupils with SEN : summary

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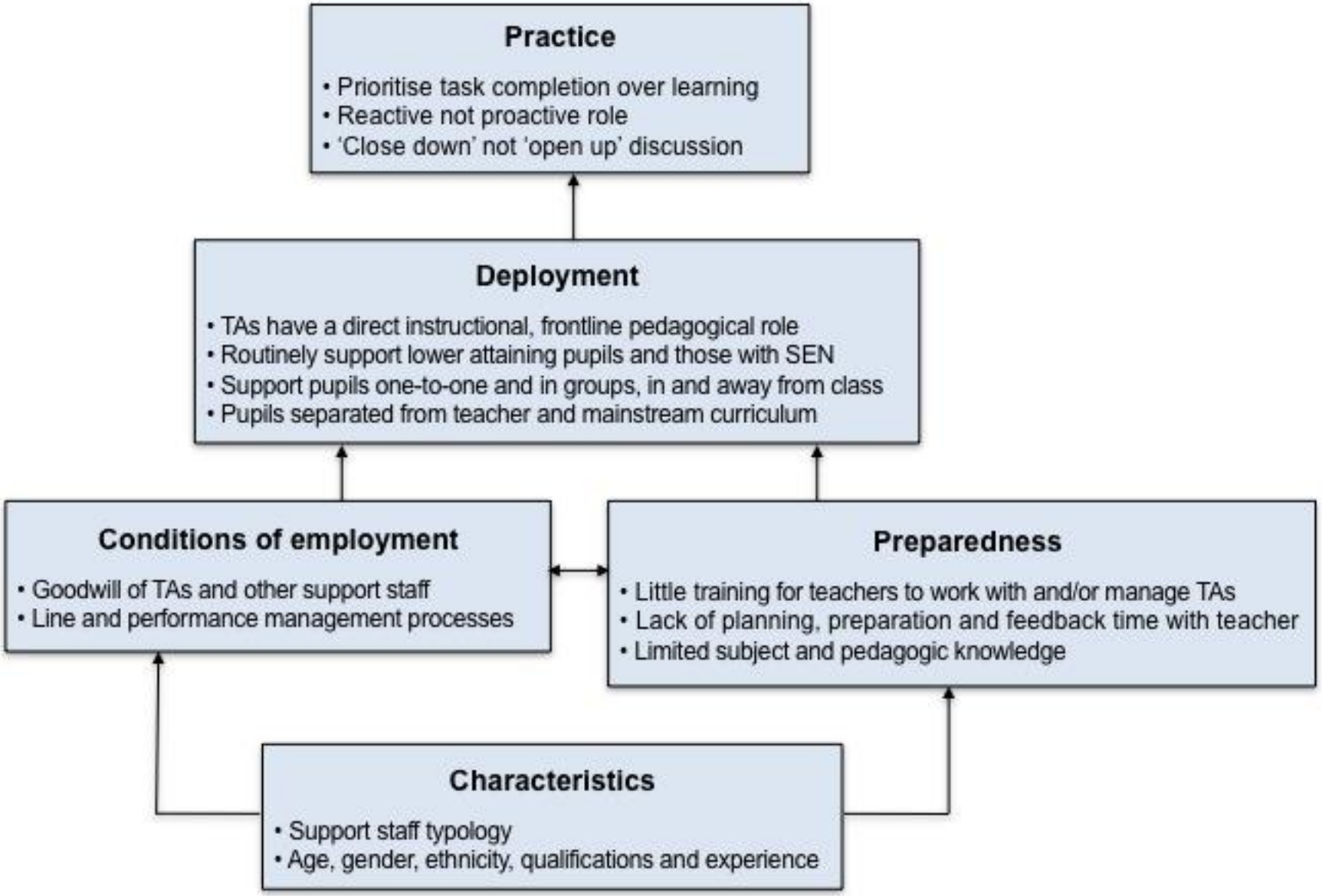
- There are considerable gaps in teachers' and TAs' knowledge concerning meeting needs of pupils with SEN
- Little time to plan and discuss TA role and pupil with SEN
- TAs often take on role of 'expert' in case of pupil with SEN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Key conclusions: DISS & MaSt studies

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- Low attaining pupils and those with SEN receive more support from TAs than teachers
- TA support is ***alternative*** to teacher support – not 'additional'
- Pupils supported by TAs become separated from classroom, teacher and peers
- TAs often have main responsibility for pedagogical planning, delivering and differentiating work (teaching!) for pupils they support
- TAs' pedagogical input is well intentioned, but choice and quality of tasks and verbal interactions are questionable

Main message from the research

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A clear and consistent message to school leaders:

A fundamental rethink is required if schools are going to get the best use from their TAs – and help pupils

Organisational and structural factors need attention:

- **Deployment** of TAs (and teachers)
- **Practice**: TAs' interactions with pupils
- **Preparedness** of teachers and TAs

Rethinking the TA role

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Schools need to examine the deployment of TAs:

- TAs should not routinely support lower attaining pupils and those with SEN
- Address separation of pupil from the teacher and curriculum
- Problem when TAs are given an ill-defined remedial role
- Inefficient use of TA time in classroom

How can TAs 'add value' to the teacher's role?

Rethinking the teacher's role

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- Teachers will have to work through a more inclusive pedagogical strategy in which they deal with the learning of all pupils
- Teachers should take responsibility for:
  - Lesson-by-lesson curriculum planning
  - Pedagogical planning for *all* pupils in the class, including those supported by TAs
- Reduce separation between teacher and pupils with SEN
- **As NASEN's *Every Teacher*…. campaign 2013**

Rethinking the school's use of TAs – school leadership

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- Changing TA deployment can be seen as an 'add-on', with reform not handled by senior staff

- But a fundamental rethink is required if schools are going to get the best use from their TAs – and help pupils

- Schools need to explicitly set out support (inc. TAs) in relation to anticipated academic outcomes for pupils with SEN

How to use TAs more effectively - Effective Deployment of TAs (EDTA) Project

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- **Fundamental rethink needed in use of extra adults!**
- Collaboration with 40 teachers and TAs in 10 schools over one school year
- Aim: to develop and evaluate alternative strategies to TA **preparedness, deployment and practice** (WPR model)

- Led to guidance for schools: *'Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants'* (2012) book

Impact vs. cost: Where we want to be

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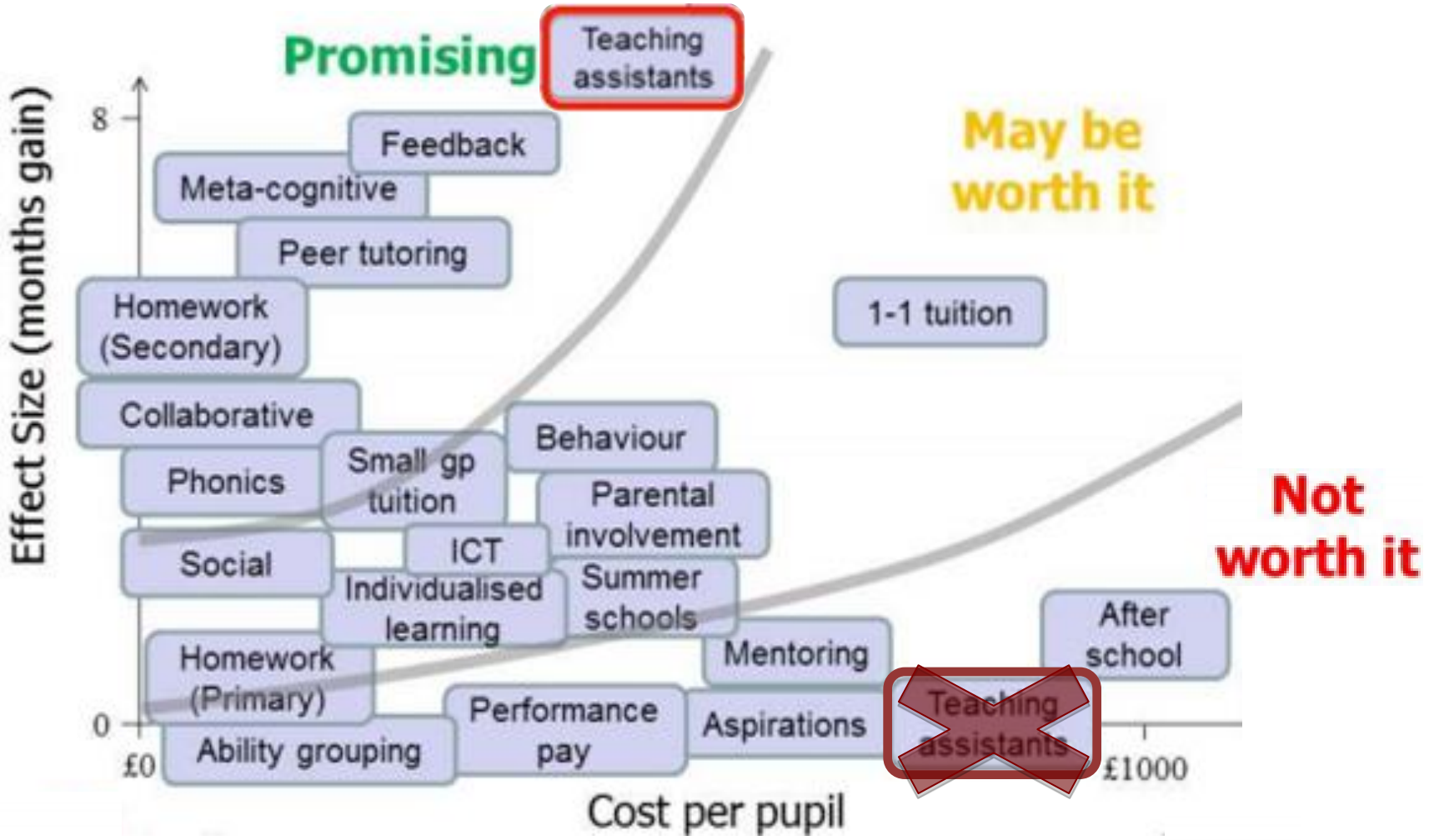

Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit

Lessons for policies of extra teachers in schools

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- **Deployment of extra teachers? -** teachers not TAs - so more qualified
- **But:** still need to consider 'preparedness' and 'deployment' of extra teachers
- Don't just add teachers to classes! – consider how best to use them
- Consider how best to ADD VALUE to the existing teacher
- Develop guidance for roles when more than one teacher

Making best use of extra teacher's time

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Beware passive role, e.g., one adult listening to the other presenting to pupils

(TAs listen to the teacher teach for ⅓ of their time – MaSt study, 2013)

Beware separating pupils who need more help from rest of class and main teacher

Beware 'stereo-teaching' (where second adult restates teacher's presentation to individual pupil)

Beware excessive out of class interventions – need to connect with classroom experience

Preparedness of teachers

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- Decisions about deployment and practice inform preparation
- Minimise problems with TA/extra teacher preparedness: ‘going in blind’
- **Improving TA/extra teacher pre-lesson preparation is a critical part of making better use of TAs/extra teacher**

Thank you for listening!

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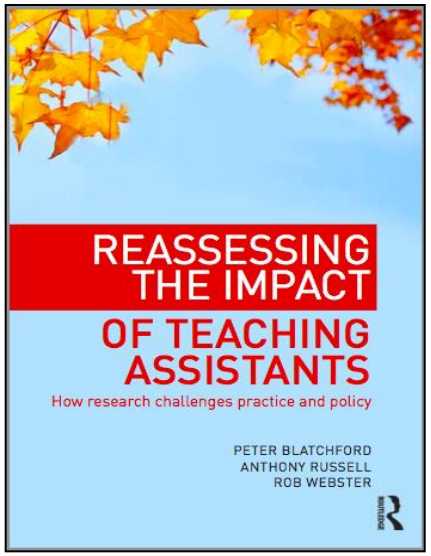

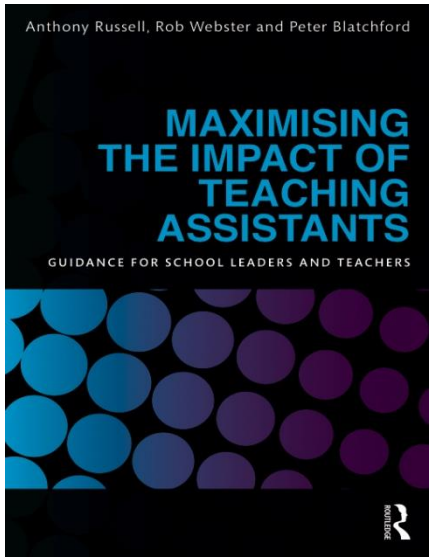

www.MaximisingTAs.co.uk

DISS project /diss.html

EDTA project /edta.html

MaSt project /mast.html

p.blatchford@ioe.ac.uk

r.webster@ioe.ac.uk

No support	State-Ment of SEN
1-10%	School Action +
11-25%	School Action
26-50%	
50%+	No SEN

