**'If we are not great, then we can't be great with the kids': A grounded theory of successful teaching assistant-teacher partnerships for inclusive education**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology (M4)

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Dedicated to my family, friends, supervisors, colleagues, peers, school staff and children and young people who have supported me in coming to the know that:

"When we are talking we are aware that we are marking out the boundaries of belief"

Patrick Kavanagh

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1. **ABSTRACT**

Using constructivist grounded theory methodology, a theory of 'relational interdependence' was constructed by the author and six teaching assistant-teacher working pairs from six mainstream primary schools in one London borough. Each pair self-identified as having a successful partnership for inclusion and took part in an intensive dyadic interview about their partnership. The emerged theoretical model centred on 'relational interdependence' within the pair and between the pair and the children they teach. This construct is further explained by 12 theoretical categories. The theoretical process of these categories was explained by four pathways: the pairs' interpersonal success influencing the quality of their work and interactions (1) and their capacity for this work (2), the positive impact of their partnership on the children (3) and the influence of the partnership on its context and the context on their partnership (4). Findings are discussed considering the extant literature and development of the theory, the limitations and contributions of this research and areas for future research.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Many Educational Psychologists (EPs) are actively involved in work related to inclusive education (Kant-Schaps, 2014). Their work often extends beyond child-based consultation to support schools' systemic needs (Cline et al., 2015). This may include organisational change work in supporting collaborative solutions between schools, families and professionals, and staff development opportunities related to organisational practice or culture around difference and diversity in the school community (BPS, 2022). EPs are uniquely positioned to promote inclusive education with educators and address staff needs to facilitate inclusion (Squires, 2007).

Teachers are legally responsible for the progress and development of all students in their classrooms, highlighting the importance of successful inclusive pedagogical practice (SEND Code of Practice, 2015). However, as many classroom teachers rely on teaching assistants (TAs) to help them facilitate the inclusion of children with additional needs (Sharma & Salend, 2016), the question of how inclusive education is successfully navigated in classrooms continues to grow. This increased interest is reflected in the growing body of research about effective TA deployment. Despite this, there is limited research about the views of teacher-TA working pairs and how they promote inclusion successfully in their classrooms.

This introductory chapter will define inclusive education before describing the local and national priorities and contexts. The EP role and literature base known to the researcher will be described.

### 2.1 Defining Terminology

#### 2.1.1 'Teachers' and 'Teaching Assistants'

The term "Teacher" represents staff who educate children in school settings who hold a teaching qualification and typically hold responsibility for a group/class of students. The term "teaching

assistant" represents staff members in educational settings whose role differs from teachers. They are typically deployed at a 'whole class' level or to support the inclusion of a specific pupil with SEN. In the UK, TA deployment depends on the school's discretion (Vogt et al., 2022). TAs are also commonly known as Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) or Special Needs Assistants.

### 2.1.2 'Success'

This study explores joint teacher-TA understandings of successful partnerships for inclusion, encompassing their associated successes, strengths, skills and facilitators. Pairs will co-identify what they regard as successful. Therefore, the researcher will offer no definition, as the research intends to explore the culture and shared understanding of success relative to pairs' constructs.

### 2.1.3 Partnerships

This research views partnerships as involving a "social system" of individuals "based on an agreement...to collaborate on a common goal", in the case of this study, inclusive education (Eilbert & Lafronza, 2005, p.187). However, due to limited research on partnerships and their close relationships to teamwork, cooperation and collaboration, research relating to all the above is explored.

### 2.1.4 'Inclusive Education'

Inclusive Education was positioned as a global priority by the United Nations (UN; 2015) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where access to 'inclusive and equitable quality education' is promoted for all regardless of gender, disability, and ethnicity. Theoretically and philosophically, inclusive education is almost universally agreed to be 'good practice' (Boyle et al., 2011; UNESCO, 2003), which has led to its incorporation into a range of global policies (Slee, 2018). However, challenges in defining inclusive education and thus evaluating its outcomes, impact and practical application have led to widespread debate on the complex topic. Some criticise

Special Educational Needs and Disability inclusion in mainstream settings, stating it impacts the education of other students and impedes parental right to choose (Gordon, 2014). Contrasting practices, policies, systems and interpretations within and between international and United Kingdom (UK) arenas further complicate the evaluation and application of inclusive education (Kershner, 2016).

Contrasting pedagogies have emerged from social and medical models of disability, where society's barriers are viewed as barriers to learning in the former compared to an individual's needs alone in the latter (Hodkinson, 2019). In line with the social model of disability, fully inclusive education situates responsibility on mainstream settings to remove barriers to learning, while the medical model favours specialist provision either as units attached to mainstream schools or as special schools based on the CYP's level or type of need. There is a large variation in the practice of inclusive versus exclusionary education globally where international guidance is interpreted and applied within the national, local, cultural, and historical context of each country. However, the European Agency (2018a) cautioned that relying on separate classes and settings can limit expectations, opportunities, access to staff expertise, resources and social interaction with peers (European, Agency, 2018b).

## 2.2 Context of the Research: The Historical and Legislative Landscape of Inclusive Education

### 2.2.1 International Context

Internationally, there was increasing momentum for inclusive education after the Second World War when the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948) formally recognised 'human rights' with article 26 stating that *"Everyone has the right to an education…it shall promote understanding,*

*tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups"*. The declaration was followed by a chain of global policy change which underpins the current context.

### 2.2.2 National Context

In the UK, the Warnock report (1979) reflected a shift away from the medical model where children were categorised by their deficits. It laid the foundation for the 1981 Education Act which placed onus on the education system, specifically, local authorities (LAs) to outline educational provision for children through a written statement of need, to be applied by educational settings. It promoted integrated education and propagated the term 'special educational needs' (SEN). Despite this ideological shift, little changed in terms of funding and practice until the 1993 Education Act. This act resulted in a legally binding code of practice, an independent SEN Appeals process and a formal code for assessment and educational placement. The term 'integration' was replaced by 'inclusive education' (Lambert & Frederickson, 2015).

In 1994, The Salamanca Statement committed to education for all 'within the regular education system' and deemed schools that adopted inclusive orientations as the most effective in countering discriminatory attitudes and creating supportive communities and society within an efficient and cost-effective education system. The statement recommended that schools 'accommodate all children regardless of their material, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions' (UNESCO, 1994, p.6). The subsequent SEND Act (2001) reinforced the government's commitment to 'inclusive education' in mainstream schools, outlawing educational discrimination based on disability and granting parents the right to choose between mainstream and special schools.

The Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006) made inclusive education a legal human right, and the Equality Act (2010) made it unlawful to discriminate against an individual based on any protected characteristic: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil

partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. This was relevant to schools and education authorities, particularly their admissions and exclusion policies and educational provision, where children with disabilities or any protected characteristic cannot be treated less favourably[1].

The Children and Families Act (2014) defines SEND as a learning difficulty or disability that calls for special educational provision. The subsequent Code of Practice (CoP; 2015) outlined the entitlement of all children to an appropriate education and inclusion regardless of SEND. The COP described special educational provision as "*educational or training provision that is additional to or different from that made generally for other children or young people of the same age by mainstream schools, maintained nursery schools, mainstream post-16 institutions or by relevant early years providers*" (DfE, 2015, p.16).

More recently, Cochrane (2016, p.23) described inclusive education as 'the practice of supporting a diversity of student needs in a general education setting', allowing each child to connect and belong with same-age peers while accessing learning through a shared educational experience.

The SEND and alternative provision plan: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time (2023) reaffirms the need for a skilled workforce in supporting pupils with SEND, particularly referencing the need for a longer-term approach to using TAs. The plan highlights TAs' key role in inclusion and the need for information on good practice in naturalistic settings. Such an agenda aims to explore the skills, expertise, and facilitators that support educators 'to make the best use of provision and to identify needs early, accurately, and consistently.' (p.53).

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[1] Exceptions were made for sex and belief-based discrimination under certain circumstances for school admissions.

In the UK, LAs must educate pupils with SEND in mainstream schools where possible (Children & Families Act; DfE, 2014). Despite this, while the proportion of children with SEND in England is increasing, so too is attendance in specialist settings (DfE, 2019; Norwich, 2019). Persistent concerns about the quality of inclusive education, particularly appropriate infrastructure and varying understanding of inclusion may sustain the uptake of specialist approaches to education by families (Warnes et al., 2021).

Nationally, a broadening educational agenda is occurring amidst 'workforce and resourcing challenges' and COVID-19 recovery (OFSTED, 2022, p.12; National Audit Office, 2023); which likely impact access to quality education, mental health interventions and SEN support. The Department for Education estimates that, in 2020-21, the cost of supporting pupils with SEND in mainstream schools was around £650 million higher than 2015-16 as the number of Education Health and Care Plans issued for children with SEN has increased by almost 50% between 2016 and 2022 yet the population increased by only 5% (National Audit Office, 2022).

### 2.2.3 The Local Context

The most recent education strategy within the LA where the research was conducted outlines inclusion as a strategic goal ensuring the provision of 'high-quality local specialist and mainstream placements' [2] for children and young people with SEND. The strategy includes aims to conduct an inclusion audit of mainstream schools to create clear expectations and consistent review and monitoring as well as opportunities for schools to work towards an inclusion kitemark and promote inclusive cultures.

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[2] Not cited to maintain anonymity of the local authority.

## 2.3 A Broader Definition of Inclusive Education

This historical and legislative context has led to the term 'inclusive education' most often being used to describe the inclusion of children with SEND. However, broader definitions of 'inclusive education' aim to reduce potential disadvantage in accessing education according to a range of social factors including gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, culture and disability as well as the intersectionality between these aspects of identity (Bešić, 2020).

To date, applied research in the field of inclusive education has used a single-axis definition of 'inclusion' where inclusive education is intended to describe children with and without disabilities being educated together (Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Saloviita, 2020), focusing on optimising access and removing barriers to general education (Boyle & Anderson, 2020). However, this single-axis framework is argued to be simplistic, not accounting for additional aspects of identity or experience which may marginalise a child (Slee, 2001). Therefore, the current study will aim to explore educators' definitions of inclusive education to accommodate single-axis and/or multi-axis definitions as they emerge.

## 2.4 Implication of Broad Inclusive Education Agendas on the Education System and Workforce

### 2.4.1 Implications of Inclusive Education on Teachers

Where teachers create daily learning opportunities for students (Hattie & Yates, 2013), the implementation and success of inclusive education in mainstream settings relies on and impacts teachers and staff in ways that may be challenging and dynamic. Therefore, the views and experiences of those faced with implementing and promoting inclusive practices could provide important insights to Educational Psychology.

*2.4.2 TAs as a Response to the Inclusive Education Agenda*

TAs are described as education staff who 'work with teachers to facilitate the learning and attainment of pupils while promoting their independence, self-esteem and social inclusion' which 'includes staff based in the classroom for learning and pupil support' (UNISON et al., 2016, p.5; Skipp & Hopwood, 2019). Similar relevant roles in the literature include LSAs, learning mentors, support staff, teacher's aides, and higher-level TAs. Sharma & Salend (2016) found that TAs are primarily employed to facilitate the inclusion of those with SEND in mainstream settings.

The number of TAs and support staff in English primary schools has multiplied over the past three decades where in 2021 over 275,000 TAs made up a third of the English primary school workforce (DfE, 2022). This increase may, in part, be a response to inclusion, where teachers view non-teaching staff (paraprofessionals and external professionals) as solutions for large workloads in the context of inclusive education (Warnes et al., 2022).

Owing to the marked increase in TAs, Blatchford and colleagues (2009[3]) evaluated the impact of TAs and support staff in UK schools. They aimed to create an understanding of the impact of TAs on teachers, learning and social inclusion. This study provoked significant debate about the effectiveness of TAs. It called for better TA-teacher collaboration and TA training, which resulted in further research projects and professional development programmes. More recently, the Institute for Fiscal Studies described that one such development programme improved English outcomes at Key Stage 2 and TAs were commended as 'unsung heroes' of the pandemic where they were deemed pivotal in supporting the functioning of schools during this time (Moss et al., 2021, p.3).

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[3] Given that the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project was a largescale piece of mixed methods research, it has likely been reported in many forms. The project started in 2008.

A large portion of the existent literature focuses on TA preparedness and deployment related to educational and social outcomes. However, newly qualified teacher surveys showed they feel least prepared to work with and deploy support staff (Pye et al., 2016; Ginnis et al., 2018) while TAs reported teachers lack an understanding of their role (DfE, 2019). Despite these concerns, a smaller number of papers focus on facilitators, relational factors and the perspectives of two of the key actors in inclusive education: teachers and TAs.

### *2.4.3 Teacher and TA Views about Inclusive Education*

Saloviita (2020) found teachers who were confident in their support networks and had sufficient access to educational resources, such as an in-classroom TA, had more positive attitudes towards inclusion than those without those resources. Additionally, teachers' attitudes towards inclusion influenced how they deployed TAs. Those who held more negative attitudes opted for more pupil withdrawal during instruction, often placing responsibility for the student's instruction with the TA.

Paju et al.'s (2018) Finnish study analysed teacher, TA and special education teacher questionnaires for themes on how to improve SEN inclusion. Three themes emerged: teaching activity in the mainstream classroom, the child's relationship with the school community and the staff's ability to teach children with SEN in mainstream classes. Conflicts emerged across themes revealing the complexity of teacher views about inclusive education. Many respondents expressed a need for more training. Time limitations and difficulties balancing resources between whole-class teaching and individualised tasks were recognised barriers. Further, some expressed insecurity about their competence, emotional exhaustion and feeling conflicted: "caught between a rock and a hard place" in terms of inclusive education (p.45).

In Paju and colleague's earlier study (2016), mainstream teacher, TA and principals' views on teaching children with SEN were collected. They found that confidence in pedagogical and

practical knowledge, and collaborative skills were concentrated in special educators. This suggests a need for additional and in-service training and more effective cooperation between special and general education staff to share the knowledge of teaching SEN pupils in practice.

Shevlin et al. (2013) interviewed teachers, principals and support staff about their perceptions of teachers' attitudes towards creating inclusive learning environments. While teacher attitudes towards inclusion were generally positive, they had clear concerns about their capacity to apply it. A positive school ethos was a key facilitator.

Some evidence suggests that teachers hold more positive views about children with learning as opposed to social emotional mental health needs (SEMH; Ashton, 2020). However, teacher self-efficacy moderately predicted positive attitudes towards inclusion and training was associated with positive views related to SEMH needs specifically (Vaz et al., 2015) Additionally, teacher understanding of children's family life was found to promote positive attitudes towards inclusion (Stanforth & Rose, 2020).

According to Pearson's Diversity and Inclusion in Schools report (2021) based on the views of over 2,000 educators (leaders, middle leaders, teachers, TAs), concerns were raised about the inclusion and representation of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups, SEND and those from disadvantaged backgrounds in their curricula. Two-thirds of staff reported the Black Lives Matter movement prompted them to think about diversity in what they teach. 47% expressed concern for the mental health of disadvantaged children (looked after children, those receiving free school meals), and 47% were also concerned about the well-being of students with SEND. When presented with the statement: "I'm confident the current education system provides the best outcomes for all students", 39% disagreed. 80% believed 'more can be done' to celebrate diverse people, cultures and experiences. These views reflect educators' dissatisfaction with the current system and may suggest a desire for change related to diversity and inclusion.

**2.5 Working Together for Inclusion: Successful TA-Teacher Partnerships**

*2.5.1 Why Working Together is Important*

According to the SEND Code of Practice (2015), teachers should work closely with TAs to plan and assess the impact of support/interventions and link them to classroom teaching. The Education Endowment Foundation (Sharples et al., 2015) report on 'Making the Best Use of Teaching Assistants' advises against the use of TAs as informal teaching resources. Where most TAs are deployed to work with pupils with SEND or low-attainment, potential unintended and exclusionary consequences are argued to have emerged (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020; Blatchford et al., 2015). Several studies found general TA classroom support did not show positive effects on student attainment (Farrell et al., 2010; Blatchford et al., 2012a). However, a positive impact was found in specific deployment for structured group interventions (Slavin, 2018). TA support was linked to reduced access to their teacher and peers, quality first teaching, as well as the development of dependence, stigma, and loss of personal control (Symes & Humphrey, 2012; Webster & Blatchford, 2015).

However, the presence of TAs in classrooms was associated with positive impacts on teacher workload and stress (Blatchford et al., 2012b). While TAs can have a positive impact when deployed according to guidance (Webster et al., 2013), overreliance on TAs is viewed as problematic for the inclusion agenda (Giangrecco, 2021) where the responsibility for educating SEND pupils legally remains with the class teacher, yet potentially not in practice.

*2.5.2 Co-operation, Collaboration and Teamwork*

Henry and Noah (2022) researched teacher views about effective partnerships with TAs finding relationship and communication skills were facilitators of effective teamwork. Barriers to their relationship were funding issues, limited time for planning and communication, lack of a socially

inclusive and team-based school culture and tension between leadership and the TA-teacher pair. None of the teachers had received training about working with another adult in their classroom. However, in many cases, TA-teacher non-contact time is limited in part by differences in contracted hours and multiple roles (Butt & Lance 2005).

Paju et al (2022) found that classroom teachers, special education teachers, and TAs viewed coordination, cooperation and reflective communication as methods of collaboration. They highlighted how educators would like more collaborative practice to support inclusion. Class teachers highlighted the importance of staff resources, whereas TAs described their acceptance by teachers as important.

Losberg & Zwozdiak-Myers (2021) explored inclusive pedagogy through the lens of teachers and TAs working with children across Year 4 within one London primary school. Thematic analysis revealed key themes: whole-class approaches; emphasis on learners' capabilities; flexibility; commitment to ongoing professional development; diversity of needs; TA interventions; and ability-based tasks. While practitioners described examples of inclusive pedagogy frequently, the complexity of designing accessible and individualised provision without marginalising the CYP was emphasised. Practitioners shared positive experiences and placed value on working flexibly with one another to create welcoming environments for all students.

Some studies on collaboration, partnership and cooperation framed its practical implementation as 'aspirational' (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016). Jurkowski and Mueller (2018) studied the cooperation of general education and special education teachers using data from 13 teaching dyads and 184 students. Their findings revealed no change in cooperation over time while students perceived it as deteriorating over time. This may represent some of the practical challenges and complexities that exist in implementing mainstream inclusion and highlights how attitudes towards including children with SEMH needs were more negative than other areas of need.

Igric et al. (2021) investigated teachers and TA views about the TA role using group interviews, questionnaire data and school documentation in Croatia in seven primary schools. Teacher and TA views about the TA role only partly aligned, mostly around personal characteristics. Significant differences in teacher training and education systems between Croatia and the UK exist. For example, the TA role was introduced in 2012 in Croatia compared to the 1960s in the UK. Therefore findings should be interpreted with caution, however, this study is one of few that offers a shared dialogue about their roles, albeit not specifically focusing on working dyads or SEN inclusion.

Several studies suggest collaboration is based on relational and knowledge factors. Devecchi and Rouse (2010) explored effective collaboration with teachers and TAs in secondary schools. They found teachers and TAs supported each other in a 'complex and varied way' (p.97). Sharing of knowledge was presented as central to collaboration and in supporting colleagues and students. Collective knowledge building was linked to mutual authority and autonomy. When schools were able to include TAs in knowledge acquisition and distribution, students, teachers and TAs benefited.

Capizzi and DaFonte's (2012) tool for collaborative settings (teacher-TAs) found orientation to the setting, professional responsibilities, communication and professional development were important for effective collaboration. Models in the literature suggest that negotiation and reflection on professional practice is important for effective working. Notably, relational factors such as co-respect, co-responsibility and cooperative dialogue may depend on deployment and organisational factors.

In Canada, Lyons et al. (2016) conducted interviews with students, teachers, parents, educational assistants and principals in four inclusive schools to investigate successful practices. A shared

commitment for inclusion, class teacher responsibility, and collaborative teamwork were characterised by collective self-efficacy. Joint planning, teaching, problem-solving and reflection on current practice as well as knowledge sharing and attending to relationships were part of successful inclusive practice. Participants described working together in 'teams' to support individual students. While this study does not specifically investigate TA-teacher relationships, it highlights many collaborative and relational strategies used in 'inclusive schools'.

### 2.5.3 Successful TA-Teacher Partnerships for Inclusion: A Summary

Jardi et al (2022) explored successful TA-teacher partnerships in Catalonia. They found that positive relationships developed in unfavourable contexts when the following interpersonal factors were present: feeling at ease, trust, respect, valuing one another, personal affinity, professional compatibility, open communication, sense of belonging to a class group, autonomy and teamwork. This paper positions successful teacher-TA partnerships as something that develops and is improved collectively.

As inclusive education remains a matter of concern to educators and policymakers, the researcher highlights the usefulness of joint TA-teacher perspectives on how they create and maintain their successful partnership relative to their own practice and that of their schools and external professionals. Exploration of 'what works' and facilitates their success in inclusive education will address a gap in the literature.

# 3. METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter describes the theoretical position and methodological approach which underpin this study.

## 3.2 Research Purpose and Aims

The present study aims to generate a theoretical model of successful teacher-TA partnerships which support inclusive education in mainstream primary schools. The guiding research questions are as follows. According to teachers and TAs:

1. *What does a successful partnership for inclusion of all children look like?*
2. *What factors and mechanisms facilitate successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion?*
3. *How could/do EPs support successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion?*

The study aims to create an exploratory and explanatory theoretical model of successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion through their jointly constructed dialogue. It aims to explore the experience of TA-teacher pairs who self-identify as 'successful' partners in promoting inclusion and analyse what facilitated or hindered such. A further intention of the study is to provide an explanation of the pairs' experience of successful partnership for inclusion in the form of a theory relevant to TA-teacher working pairs in similar situations or professionals working with them, e.g. EPs or Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

A range of research focuses on inclusion and successful working relationships separately, as seen in the introductory chapter. However, there is limited literature on these components, particularly their co-constructed meaning. Where teachers' and TAs' day-to-day actions and

interactions enact inclusive education, joint interviews provided a space to consider the 'what and the how' of their successful partnership for inclusion, potentially promoting further success in their joint practice.

## 3.3 Researcher's Position: Ontology and Epistemology

This research assumes a relativist ontological position and a social constructionist epistemological position.

### 3.3.1 Relativism

This research assumed a relativist ontological position. Such orientation posits that reality and knowledge are constructed and exist based on multiple perspectives in their cultural, social, historical and political climate (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Bernstein, 1983). This position rejects a positivist view of the world and knowledge based on one 'real truth' (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1994, p. 107). Where some relativists believe that there is no 'one truth' and only multiple realties exist relative to an individual's context and interpretation (Robson, 2011), others like Burr (2003), argued that there may be broader 'truths' that may only be known or understood via our own interpretations.

This research accepts the latter argument where 'the possibility of specific, local, personal and community forms of truth' relative to 'successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion' is acknowledged (Kvale, 1995, p. 21). Thus, specific shared interpretations and patterns of meaning-making may exist with actors in similar roles and contexts. While teacher-TA dyads co-construct understandings of their 'successful partnership' and the 'complex [social] phenomenon' of inclusion to their interpretation in their local context, they may involve shared "larger social structures" with teachers and TAs who work together in similar contexts (Schuelka & Engsig, 2022, p.449; Charmaz, 2006).

### 3.3.2 Social Constructionism

Epistemologically, this research aligns with social constructionism, where participants' knowledge and understanding of the world is created through the lens of relationships in context (Al-Saadi, 2014; Galbin, 2014). While this research focuses on the reality and knowledge co-constructed by TA-teacher pairs, this epistemological position acknowledges the researcher's worldview and "humanness" in the emergent theory (Hayes & Oppenheim, 1997; Charmaz, 2014).

Recent legislation relevant to Educational Psychology underpins the social model of disability[4], reflecting a shift towards interactionist perspectives (Fox, 2015). Further, teachers and TAs are increasingly tasked with various classroom roles and responsibilities, with a recent priority given to inclusion (Schuelka, 2018). Therefore, understanding the meaning-making of successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion in mainstream primary schools is particularly pertinent. This study recognises the problem-focused nature of the recent educational context and the need to maximise and extend resources within school communities.

### 3.3.3 Symbolic Interactionism

This research uses symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework which posits that the social world is open-ended and emergent, whereby it is constructed through subjective meaning being applied to daily social interactions, which in turn change as experience changes (Mead, 1934; Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003; Blumer, 1969). Their shared meaning of this process is a point of interest.

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[4] The Social Model of Disability says that individual limitations are not the cause of disability. Rather, it is society's failure to provide appropriate services and adequately ensure that the needs of disabled people are taken into account in societal organisation (Goering, 2015).

Symbolic interactionism posits a bottom-up approach to examining larger social structures and institutions by first viewing daily repeated micro-level processes, including repeated interactions and language, which can construct and reproduce macro-processes based on symbols, leading to macro-analyses (Musolf, 1992). By focusing on the interactions and social processes that underpin successful TA-teacher partnerships, this research aims to build a wider social construction of how they emerge to facilitate inclusion.

## 3.4 Research Methodology: Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT)

### 3.4.1 Evolution of Grounded Theory

Glaser and Struass (1967) coined 'grounded theory' as they developed a systematic methodological strategy to analyse 'long conversations' to produce theoretical analyses in an explicit way (Charmaz, 2014, p.5). They advocated for researchers to develop theories grounded in qualitative data rather than testing hypotheses based on existing theories. At that time, positivist paradigms and quantitative methodologies were dominant, where there was a widening gap between inductive qualitative and deductive[5] quantitative research. Key criticisms of qualitative research were that it was 'impressionistic, anecdotal, unsystematic and biased' (Charmaz, 2014, p.6). However, grounded theory elicited interest in qualitative research, which offered a systematic method of generating abstract theoretical explanations for complex social processes (Charmaz, 2008; 2014).

Since Glaser and Strauss' pioneered grounded theory in *Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), they took divergent GT trajectories, where Glaser remained consistent with the 1978 tenets of grounded theory – emphasising emergent theoretical categories, while Strauss joined Corbin

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[5] Inductive reasoning begins with specific data which are used to develop a general explanation whereas deductive reasoning proceeds from existing and general theoretical ideas to produce specific expectations which are then tested against the data collected (Schutt, 2018)

(1990) to promote the addition of technical procedures with a focus on verification and the theory's explanatory power.

In the 1990s, some researchers moved grounded theory away from the positivist paradigm associated with Glaser, Strauss and Corbin. Instead it was presented as a set of strategies such as coding, memo-writing and theoretical sampling that is 'transportable' across researchers' ontological and epistemological stances (Charmaz, 2014, p. 12). One such scholar was Charmaz, who presented 'Constructivist Grounded Theory' in line with the inductive, emergent and open-ended approach of classic grounded theory. Yet, Charmaz (2014) took a different view on truth and knowledge, recognising the researcher's role in constructing the data collection, analysis and resultant theory.

Some key differences between classical grounded theory and CGT are that CGT is marked by:

- CGT acknowledges that the researcher cannot be completely objective where they collaborate with participants to create knowledge (Mills et al., 2006).
- CGT emphasises multiple realities and methodological self-consciousness (Charmaz, 2017).

### 3.4.2 Rationale for Grounded Theory

In accordance with the selected ontological and epistemological position, a Constructivist Grounded Theory research methodology was chosen.

Despite debate in the literature about the deployment and impact of TAs in inclusive education, they comprise almost 30% of England's school workforce (School Workforce in England, 2023). Many countries, including the UK, have deployed TAs in mainstream classrooms in response to inclusion agendas (UN, 2015[6]; Blatchford et al., 2012; Department for Education

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[6] As per the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development

& Employment, 1997). The role of TAs in education is often described as intertwined with inclusion reinforcing the view that TAs are 'the mortar in the brickwork . . . hold[ing] schools together in numerous and sometimes unnoticed ways' (Webster & DeBoer, 2021, p. 2).

Per the introduction, much of the existing literature assumes a deductive stance to reasoning where those that are inductively positioned were mostly conducted abroad, limiting transferability and relevance to unique contexts in the UK. Where I noticed that the daily responsibility for inclusion lies with teachers legislatively and Teachers and TAs in pedagogical practice (SEND Code of Practice, 2015; Webster & Blatchford, 2015a), I became interested in the shared perspectives of the phenomenon 'successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion' to gain a richer understanding of 'what' social processes are occurring in them (exploratory) as well as 'how and why' this supports inclusion (explanatory).

I briefly considered alterative methodological approaches: Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Both would have afforded the flexibility and richness to explore participants' perspectives. However, as I am interested in a relational phenomenon, I felt that Constructivist Grounded Theory with dyadic interviews more closely adhered to constructionism and symbolic interactionism. This would afford a framework for their constructed meanings and explanations to emerge from their naturalistic working relationships building a theory about 'successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion' across the interviews. A key aim of grounded theory is to construct a theory from data to ultimately influence practice (Charmaz, 2014). Such a theory could be relevant to partnerships and professionals who work with them in similar contexts.

An initial entry from my research diary (March 2023) outlined how I drew on my experiences as a TA in a mainstream primary school and from placement experiences as a Trainee EP in commencing this research: "*In practicum, I observed that teachers and TAs are tasked with*

*broad educational agendas and that the way they work together differs greatly. From previous dialogue, I have heard a range of perspectives from my TA and teacher colleagues and consultees about working towards inclusion, where some felt successful and…others not. I wondered 'what worked' for those who identified as successful".*

I aimed for an open-ended exploration of the research phenomenon to allow a rich understanding to develop. No specific psychological theories frame this research beyond relativism, constructionism and symbolic interactionism as it was decided that the literature review would be delayed until after data collection to maximise the insights that emerged from the data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Delaying the literature review is recommended by Charmaz (2014) to avoid preconceived theories or ideas informing emergent categories. I aimed to account for such pre-conceived ideas by acknowledging them under 'reflexivity'.

However, I recognise that I held known and unknown preconceptions about this topic due to my professional experiences and my prior knowledge of the literature. Notably, I scoped existing research and submitted a research protocol to identify and justify a gap in the literature that warranted grounded theory research at the outset. Therefore I acknowledge this study cannot assume a purely *tabula rasa*[7] conception of inquiry (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

CGT was used in this research to explore the joint construction of teacher-TA partnerships and how inclusion successfully unfolds. Arguably, this methodological approach fits well with the theoretical substructures of relativism, constructionism, and symbolic interactionism. CGT also preserves the complexity of social life (Charmaz, 2008; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). This research takes the view that such successful partnerships play a key role in shaping what

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[7] In Freud's view 'the child's mind, when born, is, in the words of Locke, a tabula rasa, a blank slate' (Brill, 1922)

inclusion looks like in their classrooms, schools and wider context through their day-to-day interactions and meaning-making.

### 3.5 Ethical considerations

#### 3.5.1 Ethical Approval

An ethics application was reviewed by my research supervisor and submitted to the Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC) in February 2023. Approval was granted after minor amendments to the information sheet and consent form (See Appendix F). The research complied with the Health Care Professions Council's (HCPC) *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics for Practitioner Psychologists* (HCPC, 2016) and the British Psychological Society (BPS) *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (2021) and the BPS Code of *Human Research Ethics* (2021). I sought and was granted permission from the Principal EP (See Appendix B) of the Educational Psychology Team within my placement LA to use contact lists and Educational Psychology Team members for recruitment purposes and to send emails to teacher-TA pairs who had consented to being contacted for research purposes (See Appendices C&G).

#### 3.5.2 Informed Consent

Detailed information sheets and consent forms were attached to the email inviting participate in the research (BPS, 2021). Participants were given the opportunity to re-read the information sheet and consent form and ask questions before commencing the interview (BPS, 2021, p.5). Participants were reminded that they could withdraw at any time until data transcription without penalty. I obtained written, voluntary and informed consent from both TA and teacher participants prior to conducting each interview (BPS, 2021; See Appendices D&E).

SENCos and/or headteachers were also asked to review the information sheet and sign consent forms so that they understood the terms of the research. This acknowledged their agreement to maintain confidentiality of participating staff, their understanding that participation would not impact EP services received through traded or statutory[8] channels and to ensure they were aware of the post-interview support on offer.

Some participants were recruited through existing relationships where I was the school's link to the Educational Psychology Team for four of six pairs recruited. While I acknowledged the possibility that existing relationships could create researcher bias or impact the recruitment process, the relationships were not deemed intimate enough to make researcher bias a concern (Asselin, 2003). For example, no participants knew about my previous TA work. The information sheet outlined that EP services would not depend on participation by the pair or school and existing relationships were declared and acknowledged at the beginning of the interview where relevant. These decisions were intended to account for a potential power differential and set clear boundaries  about my role as researcher (compared to practitioner) between the researcher and participants as well as between the Educational Psychology Team and schools. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) propose that the key element is not a matter of insider or outsider but that the researcher is open, honest, and insightful and my role in shaping interpretations is acknowledged (See Research Diary in Appendix K).

### 3.5.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality was protected by anonymising participants, schools and borough names and using unique identifiers, e.g. School 1, pseudonyms for participants, 'London borough'.

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[8] Educational Psychologists (EPs) have a statutory role to play in providing expert information and advice which is used to inform Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). In a traded model, schools paid for local authority EP support. Examples included being given a time-allocation, pay-per-activity, or tiered packages of support. (Atfield et al., 2023).

Participants were asked to use initials or pseudonyms should they reference specific children to protect their anonymity, as consent was not sought from families for their inclusion in this research. Despite being reminded of this, participants occasionally discussed first names of CYP during interviews due to being accustomed to using CYP names in their day-to-day interactions. To account for this, all references to CYP names were recorded as initials during transcription.

Participants were reminded about the limits of confidentiality due to the presence of a research partner and work colleague. While they were asked to maintain the confidentiality of their partner unless concerns arose, this could not be guaranteed.

Further, the information sheet outlined limits to confidentiality, whereby concerns related to staff or child safety would be raised using standard safeguarding procedures via the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (Children's Act, 2004). All data was stored confidentially on a password-protected laptop device in line with the Data Protection Act (2018), and it was anonymised upon transcription.

### 3.5.4 Signposting Related to Potential Distress

The potential for dyadic interviews to raise issues within working relationships was acknowledged. Participants were informed of this risk in advance via the information sheet. However, by focusing on 'successful' partnerships, it was hoped that difficulties that arose could be framed as opportunities for the working relationship to be strengthened. Throughout each interview, I monitored the interaction between participants, aiming to provide a safe and reflective space to facilitate shared and differing opinions by attuning to body language, tone, participation and dialogue. Participants were reminded that it was acceptable to disagree or decline to answer questions.

The information sheet acknowledged the potential for uncomfortable thoughts, feelings or unexpected content to emerge from discussions around workplace dynamics, relationships or experiences during or after the interviews. To account for potential distress, participants were signposted to their SENCo/headteacher individually or as a pair should concerns arise. The researcher's email address was provided so that participants or their school could make contact for additional post-interview support should they require further debriefing or support. I allowed participants to reflect or ask questions at the end of each interview after the recording was completed. No schools or participants made contact for further debriefing , and no known issues or safeguarding concerns arose in response to the interviews.

### 3.5.5. Power and Cultural Responsiveness

Due to my experience as a TA and in facilitating consultations in schools as a Trainee EP, I became aware of how social and organisational structures, roles and identities may impact the extent of power imbalances between participants and myself as the researcher (Schein & Schein, 2018). I considered Burnham's (2013) model of the Social GGRRAAACCEEESSS to guide reflective diary entries and consider how the interaction during the interviews were situated.

I also considered how such structures may impact the extent of the power imbalance between teachers and TAs due to differing statuses (Docherty, 2014). However, the emergence of such structures in dyadic interviews was viewed as a reflection or representation of the pairs' naturalistic interactions and power dynamics, and therefore, I aimed not to exert influence on this unless it was deemed to cause distress or concern.

In terms of researcher-participant power, I aimed to account for known power dynamics, by addressing participant queries, attuning to their verbal and non-verbal cues (Kennedy et al., 2011) and reassuring participants that while there were no right or wrong answers as the aim of

the interview was to gain their perspective. They were reminded that they could withdraw or decline to answer at any time. Consideration of power influenced my decision to disclose my TA experience, where I recognised this knowledge could impact interview dynamics related to relatability and alignment.

## 3.6 Validity and Trustworthiness

### 3.6.1 Bias, Rigour and Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced the concept of trustworthiness as an alternative to positivist principles of reliability, validity and generalisability. They viewed trustworthiness as a more applicable measure of quality and relevance in qualitative research through four components: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of findings.

Credibility relates to confidence in the truth of the findings. This corresponds to the notion of internal validity in quantitative research. Credibility was assured through triangulating interpretations of shared initial and later coding sessions with my research supervisor, triangulating theoretical ideas and codes across interviews through keeping a research diary (Appendix K), memo-writing (Appendix L) and later conducting a literature review. MAXQDA, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, allowed the researcher to record and report each stage of coding and analysis systematically. Credibility can also be achieved by spending sufficient time in the field (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A period of seven months elapsed between the first and final interview. Persistent observation of the data by listening to and re-reading it helped build credibility, where it took 12 months to collect, immerse, analyse and return to the data to form the emergent theory (Birks & Mills, 2023). Focused codes and theoretical categories were repeatedly compared and refined related to the transcripts to ensure accurate representations of the data.

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings apply to other situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This parallels external validity used in positivist and post-positivist approaches. I recognise that findings may be applicable to TA-teacher pairs in similar contexts. Transferability was enhanced by using a semi-structured interview schedules which could be used in different contexts to elicit similar or different conceptualisations in the future. By facilitating rich accounts and 'thick descriptions' about interactions, experience and context from participants, the possibility of others drawing relevance from the findings is enhanced for similar contexts. Detailed descriptions of the schools involved allows the reader to decide whether results are transferable to their setting or situation (Kvalsvik & Ogaard, 2021; See Table 3).

Dependability refers to the stability of findings. This was supported by using detailed memos to outline a consistent, acceptable and replicable procedure to analyse the data. Reaching theoretical saturation also increases the dependability of the findings.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings of the research can be defined by other researchers. While the role of the researcher is acknowledged, a joint coding session and triangulation across interviews were used to ensure findings were anchored in the data. Use of an audit trail using MAXqda throughout enhanced transparency.

### 3.6.2 Reflexivity

In the interests of transparency, a process of critical self-reflection on my inner and outer reactions to the research process was supported by discussions in supervision, memo writing and keeping a research diary for the duration of the research . Some entries uncovered bias, preferences, and preconceptions as well as relational factors that may have impacted how and what data emerged. The 'Johari Window' (Luft & Ingham, 1955; See Appendix M) was used as a framework so that the potential for 'blindspots' and 'hidden' areas to be uncovered was

welcomed yet acknowledging there is an 'unknown element' as much as possible to recognise the relationality at play in the grounding of the theory (Hall & Calery, 2001).

For example, I recognised that I was unintentionally prioritising one participant's perspective through a diary entry in June 2023: *"During interview three, I found myself wanting to ask for the TA's perspective rather than accepting the course of the interview, where the teacher offered more dialogue. I wondered whether the role of experience, power and gender was at play and why I tried to correct it. I have experience as a teaching assistant. Did I engage in countertransference [9]of my own experience related to power in the role here? Why did I want to hear more from the teaching assistant?"* I also chose to keep my previous TA experience hidden

By mapping my thought processes through memos and diary entries, I compared ideas to identified codes and triangulate interpretations of the data across interviews. This approach transparently documented how the emergent theory was reached to evidence trustworthiness and rigour (Manson, 1996).

Using Yardley's evaluative principles (2000; 2008), the following features were identified: Prolonged engagement and immersion in the data and efforts to balance power illustrate 'sensitivity to context'. Further, the data collection, analysis and interpretation were deemed to be 'complete' by demonstrating adequacy via saturated categories, offering transparency of the analytical and interpretive methods and having coherence across the research question, philosophical perspectives, method and analysis. The researcher shows 'reflexivity' by reflecting on their own perspectives and motivations and how these may have shaped the

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[9] Countertransference: the redirection of a therapist's feelings toward a patient and the emotional entanglement that can occur with a patient (Fink, 2011)

research process. The importance of the research is anchored in theoretical and practical utility through the literature review and discussion.

Analysis of this piece of research using Yardley's principles (2008) and Lincoln and Guba's description of trustworthiness (1985) allows the researcher to conclude that it is a rigorous piece of research because it is grounded in the data, illustrates numerous examples from the data (Chapter 3) and uses a systematic literature review to adapt/development of the theory and for alternative theoretical explanations to emerge. This adds criticality to the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

## 3.7 Research Strategy

### 3.7.1 Sample Decisions

Due to clear evidence of structural differences in TA deployment between primary and secondary schools (Skipp & Hopwood, 2019) and because over two-thirds of TAs in England working in mainstream primary settings (DfE, 2023), this research solely focuses on mainstream primary settings.

I hoped to obtain an adequate sample size yet recognised that dyadic interviews are resource-intensive for schools based on their ability to release a teacher-TA pair at the same time. Blatchford et al. (2009c) noted that schools may have difficulty releasing staff. This difficulty could extend to topics of interest or joint activities, e.g. participating in this research. Therefore, I aimed to conduct at least five TA-teacher dyadic interviews of roughly 45-60 minutes to capture a range of experiences across primary settings and year groups.

The interviews were scheduled during school hours so as not to disadvantage TAs, many of whom are not paid after school hours. Teachers who held other roles, early career teachers, and

higher-level TAs were included as this was deemed to restrict the pool of participants where duality of role is commonplace in practice.

While some argue that a self-selecting sample lacks validity and representativeness (Lieu, 2010), this sampling approach may attract those who have an interest in the topic of inclusion or those 'who have a story they wish to tell' (Newby, 2010, p. 254).

*Table 1* Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

| Inclusion Criteria | Exclusion Criteria | Rationale |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Both participants in the pair must self-identify as having a successful partnership in promoting inclusive education. | Identified as successful by others but not identifying as successful themselves or where only one participant recognises their partnership as successful. | To support co-construction of meaning around their success based on their collective insight. |
| Have an existing working relationship of at least 6 months' duration in a mainstream primary classroom teaching one or more students with additional needs. | Working relationship of less than six months or where they work together in another capacity but not with the same class group. | Ensuring the pairs have an established relationship over time so that they have a range of experiences and insights to build upon. |
| Agree to take part in a dyadic interview of approximately one hour within school hours. | Pairs wishing to be interviewed separately or outside of school hours. | To support co-construction of knowledge and prevent TA being disadvantaged e.g. partaking in the interview during paid teacher but unpaid TA hours. |
| Commit to maintain the confidentiality of their colleague and students yet recognise the limits to confidentiality as a working pair or related to safeguarding concerns. | n/a | To minimise distress from breaches to confidentiality and create a sense of safety for the pair to discuss their thoughts freely. Assert awareness of standard safeguarding procedures. |

### 3.7.2 Alternative Considerations

While I could have interviewed parents, I was keen for examples of successful practices to emerge related to the staff's own conceptualisation of inclusion, whether related to SEND, social factors or aspects of identity related to individuals, groups or the organisation more broadly. I felt inclusion of a parent privileged an individualistic view of inclusion over other potential conceptualisations, e.g. whole-class processes.

Interviews with durations below 45 minutes were not excluded as this could potentially represent pairs' realistic working conditions, and the researcher aimed not to bias the data collection against such participants. I was aware that a small number of interviews could impact the study's chances of reaching theoretical saturation.

I decided against a pilot interview as it may have influenced my conceptualisations. If interviewees were a TA-teacher pair it would have felt unethical to exclude from the analysis. I felt joint intensive interviews aligned closely with social constructionism and the relational focus of the research.

### 3.7.3 Recruitment

A staged convenience sampling method was used in the researcher's placement LA. Morse (2007) advised researchers to find people who are having the experience they are broadly interested in learning about. Therefore, purposive sampling was used to identify practitioners with knowledge and experience of inclusive pedagogy who also had an established working relationship, the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2009).

In February 2023, the information sheet and consent form were emailed to each primary school headteacher in the borough via the approved LA mailing list. This amounted to over 100 settings being contacted. This led to no participants being recruited.

In March 2023, the research was advertised in the LA's newsletter to headteachers and SENCos, again attaching the information sheet and consent form. No participants were recruited from this stage of the recruitment strategy.

In April 2023, I extended recruitment to all EPs on the Educational Psychology Team via email, asking them to share the project with their link primary mainstream schools via email or face-to-face (See Appendices C&G).

A week later, four pairs from different schools had volunteered. Two weeks later, five further schools who had expressed interest were followed up with. Of these, two more interviews were scheduled. Two pairs did not respond to the follow-up email, another stated they did not have the capacity to cover the pair's lesson, and another asked whether they could participate in the next academic term, citing 'the summer term is very busy'.

In the Summer Term of 2023, I conducted five dyadic interviews with TA-teacher working pairs. A sixth interview was scheduled. However, during informal conversation, the researcher learned they had been working together for less than six months. The pair was thanked for their interest and time, and the visit was discontinued.

In October 2023, two follow-up emails were sent to schools that expressed interest in the summer term. One SENCo responded, stating they had no pair that met the inclusion criteria "working together for longer than six months" due to staff changes at the beginning of the new academic year. A different pair expressed interest, and an interview was scheduled for December 2023 to support theoretical sampling and exploration of theoretical saturation.

### 3.7.4. Participants and Achieved Sample

The study included 12 participants: six TAs and six teachers from six different schools in one London borough. The settings included two infant primary schools, two junior primary schools (Year 3 to Year 6) and two all-through primary schools (Reception to Year 6). All were mainstream primary settings and not specialist or alternative provision settings. All schools' Free School Meals eligibility rates were below the national average of 23.8% (DfE, 2023). Four had religious affiliation, and two did not. Four schools had pre-existing relationships with the researcher. Free school meal[10] statistics are provided as they often used as a proxy for economic deprivation (UK Parliament, 2006). Participant characteristics and their school context are outlined in Tables 2 and 3 respectively[11].

**Table 2** *Participant Characteristics*

| Interview | Role and pseudonym | Presenting Gender[12] | Positions | Year Group | Experience in role | Time working together | Duration of the interview |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | TA - Yvonne | F | One-to-one TA[13], ELSA Lead, First Aider | Year 6 | 12 years | 3 years | 45 minutes |
| | Teacher - Sarah | F | Class Teacher; Senior Leadership Team | | 8 years | | |
| 2 | TA - Stephanie | F | Classroom TA, First Aider | Reception/ Year 1 combined | 30 years | 4 years | 51 minutes |
| | Teacher - Linda | F | Class Teacher | classroom | 35 Years | | |

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[10] In England a Free School Meal (FSM) is a statutory benefit available to school-aged children from families who receive other qualifying benefits and who have been through the relevant registration process (Department of Work and Pensions, 2013).

[11] There was a range of cultural ethnicities amongst the participants, however, details are not recorded due to the social constructionist nature of the study and the fact that participants were not directly asked to provide this information as part of the interview process.

[12] Gender presentation is described as the participants were not explicitly asked to record their gender expression; however, this was implicit in the interviewees' dialogue e.g. use of pronouns and language about their partners

[13] TAs self-described how they were deployed either on a one-to-one or general classroom or whole class basis.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | TA - Natasha | F | Classroom TA | Year 1 | 10 years | 7 months | 38 minutes |
| | Teacher - Hari | M | Class Teacher (Early Career Teacher; ECT) | | 9 months | | |
| 4 | TA - Caroline | F | One-to-one TA, First Aider. | Year 2 | 10 years + | 10 months | 41 minutes |
| | Teacher - Naomi | F | Class Teacher and Literacy Lead | | 8 years + | | |
| 5 | TA – Anna | F | Classroom TA, First Aider, Phonics Intervention Across Year Groups | Year 2 | 3 years | 12 months | 31 minutes |
| | Teacher - Heather | F | Class Teacher and School English Lead. | | 5 years + | | |
| 6 | TA - Shelley | F | One-to-one TA, First Aider. | Year 4 | 4 years | 2 years+ | 48 minutes |
| | Teacher- Samantha | F | Part-time Class Teacher; ECT Lead | | 8 years | | |

**Table 3** *Contextual Details of Pairs' School*

| School Descriptor | Type of School | Gender of entry | Religious Affiliation | Size (number of pupils on roll) | OFSTED Rating | % eligible for free school meals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School 1 | Junior School (voluntary aided school; Year 3 – Year 6) | Mixed | Roman Catholic | 180 (Two-Form Entry) | Good | 21.7% |
| School 2 | Primary School (voluntary aided school; Nursery to Year 6) | Mixed | Church of England | 148 (Single-Form Entry) | Outstanding | 9.5% |

| School 3 | Primary School (voluntary aided school) | Mixed | Church of England | 229 | Good | 10.6% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School 4 | Infant School (voluntary aided school; Nursery to Year 2) | Mixed | Roman Catholic | 190 (Two-Form Entry | Good | 17.1% |
| School 5 | Infant School (community school) | Mixed | None | 356 (Three-Form Entry) | Outstanding | 16.6% |
| School 6 | Junior School (community school) | Mixed | None | 441 (Three/Four-Form Entry) | Good | 20.6% |

## 3.8. Data Collection and Analysis

### 3.8.1. Semi-structured Dyadic Intensive Interviews

This research uses intensive interviews in line with Charmaz's (2014, p. 85) recommendation for constructivist grounded theory as they allow the researcher to gather 'rich data'. Intensive interviews are "gently-guided, one-sided conversation[s] that explore[s] research participants' perspective[s] on their personal experience with the research topic' by using open-ended questions to obtain detailed responses and to allow for follow-up on unanticipated areas of inquiry (p. 56). Intensive interviews mirror the focused yet open-ended nature of grounded theory, providing an 'interactive space and time to enable the research participants' insights to emerge' (p.85).

Potential benefits of dyadic interviews [14] include:

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[14] Dyadic interviews are also termed "joint" interviews in the literature and refer to interviewing two participants together at the same time to collect data (Morgan et al., 2013; 2016).

- Allowing participants to stimulate and co-create knowledge that may not be generated in individual interviews (Morgan et al., 2013). Considering the strengths-based focus of the study on 'successful partnerships for inclusion', the act of joint reflection and mean-making on 'what works' could hypothetically inform their subsequent interactions and practice.

- Facilitating opportunities to explore social and collaborative concepts in everyday life (Klevan et al., 2020).

- Allowing data collection based on the interaction between the participants, particularly where they share a pre-existing relationship (Stockwell-Smith et al., 2019; Eisikovitz & Koren, 2010).

- In established relationships, the participants may feel more at ease to explore the research topic as a discussion.

Drawbacks of dyadic interviews can include an unequal distribution of power that leads to one participant dominating the interview (Arksey, 1996) and the resource/time-intensive nature for schools.

A hybrid of intensive and dyadic interview methods was chosen as the 'best fit' for data collection in the present study. Dyadic intensive interviews align with the philosophical stance of the research, facilitating the emergence of relational and social interactions and the co-construction of meaning about existing pairs' work towards inclusion. To facilitate this flexible approach yet maintain transparency, a semi-structured interview guide was created in line with the study's research questions and pairs were interviewed in their naturalistic working relationships. As the research took an emergent and iterative stance, I aimed to allow participants to explore and direct the course of the discourse and experiences. Therefore, I

adapted the interview schedule over time based on emergent ideas from earlier interviews (See Appendices H&I).

### 3.8.2. Interview Procedure

Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participants' workplace in a private room. This was to ensure the researcher could build rapport, use non-verbal information and encourage longer durations (Irvine, 2011). They were audio-recorded using an application on a secure laptop. At the beginning of each interview, the information sheet and consent form were re-introduced to participants and time was allowed for questions. Participants were encouraged to discuss their thinking as a conversation to encourage the emergence of joint perspectives.

To promote the iterative process, I used summarisation and follow-up questions. Interviews were arranged so that I had at least a week between them to allow for transcription and to note the emergence of initial ideas from the data. The interview schedules were revised and adapted between interviews to guide lines of questioning and analysis by considering the recent data. Therefore, the interviews followed a schedule that was viewed as a flexible guide that allowed participants to lead the interviews. I aimed to incorporate the following characteristics recommended by Charmaz (2014; intensive interviewing) and by Szulc & King (2022; dyadic interviewing):

- Selection of participants with first-hand experience that fits the research topic.

- Open-ended questions.

- Gathering detailed responses from participants.

- Emphasis on understanding the participants' perspectives, meanings and experiences.

- Follow-up unanticipated areas of inquiry, hints or implicit views or accounts of actions.

- Interviewing is viewed as an active and relational process between two or more parties that inevitably shapes data and co-constructs knowledge.

- The researcher asks, "How can I understand what is going on in the context of recognising myself as both the prompter of accounts and the audience for them?"

- Interpersonal reflexivity: focusing on how each participant is reacting to the interview and what is happening between them.

Some challenges emerged in conducting dyadic intensive interviews. Some interviews required minimal prompting, whereas in others, it became difficult to ask follow-up questions. Where at times, participants looked for guidance, and I hoped the pair could clarify their thinking together. Further, some interviews seemed more one-sided, where one participant spoke far more than the other. In initial interviews, I noted that I had attempted to prompt conversation from the second TA participant. Upon reflecting in my research diary, I reminded myself to avoid doing this in future interviews as I may be imposing on the pair's naturalistic dynamics. I ensured that I asked a final open-ended question about the research topic to ensure participants had the opportunity to share any thinking not pre-conceived by myself.

### 3.8.3. Qualities of the Interviewer

I aimed to approach interviews in a warm, friendly and non-judgemental manner to build rapport, trust and to help participants feel at ease. I allowed time to build informal conversation and rapport before starting the interviews and reminded pairs there were no right or wrong answers. I noted that my researcher role may differ from their previous experiences of working with the Educational Psychology Team.

I incorporated pauses, reflected my observations back to them "I can see you both smiling" and asked probing questions "what does that success look like to you?" to encourage the pair to lead conversation and provide more detail.

I aimed to remain conscious of any bias or defences I or the participants may experience during the interviews. I aimed to probe to elicit further detail at times to limit the level of interpretation required. However, at times, topics or lines of questioning seemed to be defended against, e.g. discussions around emotion or SLT.

I acknowledge the systemic and psychodynamic focus of the teaching in my training course and the potential for such to influence the positioning of this research and my interpretations. Further, some of my motivation for pursuing this research was based on observations from previous professional experience which could also be influential.

### 3.8.4. Transcribing the Data

I chose to transcribe the interviews to familiarise myself with the data and to support the initial analysis. Cibils (2019) referred to transcription as 'one of the most underappreciated of processes in qualitative research' (p. 1133). I listened to each recording before starting transcription to familiarise myself with the data. Manually transcribing the data using Microsoft Word meant I could readily recall the nature of interactions between participants from the interviews when making initial interpretations. This ensured greater accuracy in transcription, where my memory supported unclear audio and recording of relevant non-verbal cues, e.g. snapping fingers.

I transcribed the audio recordings verbatim, meaning all utterances were typed as spoken (Braun & Clarke, 2013; See Appendix J) with the addition of non-verbal gestures and vocalisations e.g. smiling, laughter, pointing, silence. This provided a nuanced analysis of relational and interactive aspects e.g. agreement, uncertainty, which seemed appropriate given the focus of the study. Transcribing the data within two weeks of the interview supported the inclusion of such information.

To aid the interactive process, I transcribed interview one before conducting interview two and so on. However, due to time constraints, I did not transcribe interview four before conducting interview five. To reduce the impact of this difference, I listened to the audio recording of interview four before conducting interview five to inform amendments to the interview guide. Once each interview was transcribed, they were checked for accuracy by listening to the recording while reading the transcripts. The transcripts were then uploaded to MaxQDA software.

### 3.8.5. MaxQDA: Computer-assisted Data Analysis

MaxQDA, a computer-assisted data analysis software (CAQDAS), was used to organise data, apply codes, create memos and record the approach transparently. MaxQDA is used widely by qualitative researchers conducting grounded theory studies, and it was also recommended by my research supervisor, who had experience in GT methodologies. The software allowed me to organise, compare, track and revise coded and theoretical categories across interviews while evidencing a systematic approach in constructing a theoretical model. Its colour-coding feature was a valuable tool in this research.

### 3.8.6. Data Coding

In line with Charmaz's recommendations (2014), three coding phases were used: initial, focused and theoretical. These phases were applied across two cycles to enhance comparative analysis and assess theoretical saturation within a rigorous and transparent framework (Yu & Smith, 2021). The first cycle followed initial coding and subsequent focused and theoretical coding to data from interviews one to four using constant comparison to construct emergent categories. In the second cycle, these emergent categories were checked and tested for concordance or discordance with categories and patterns of association which emerged from interviews 5 and 6.

### *3.8.6.1 Initial Coding.*

Analysis was initiated using an open-line coding approach where interview transcripts were reviewed line-by-line (Charmaz, 2014). A flexible or pragmatic approach to initial coding was taken whereby descriptive codes were assigned to text segments depending on its content that formed a meaningful expression. This meant that some codes were assigned to segments of text that were 1-2 words and others part sentences, phrases or longer sections of text. This process allowed the researcher to tentatively look for relationships between concepts as they became familiar with the data. Constructing initial open codes allowed the researcher to start to construct participants' experiences through beginning to "make relationships between implicit processes and structures visible" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 133). Some shorthand words were used in the descriptive codes due to a 63-character limit on the MAXQDA software e.g. about as ab., environment as env. and automatically as autom.

During the first weeks of initial coding, I took examples to supervision. In response to feedback, I revised my approach where I had not assigned sufficient text to descriptive codes to provide context and rich meaning. I was also reminded to limit my interpretation in applying descriptive codes yet to record primitive conceptual observations using the software's memo function. Therefore, I reviewed the initial codes from interview one, aiming to code for action and use 'in vivo' coding. 'In vivo coding' occurs when the descriptive code applied uses participants' language, ensuring the meaning of participants' views and actions is preserved (Charmaz, 2014; ChunTie, 2019). Examples of 'in vivo' codes were: (1) "lots of services have been cut to the bone". Further, due to the focus of the research on working partnerships, I aimed to code for actions related to relational dynamics within the interview in addition to those they described. During a later supervision session, my research supervisor and I reviewed excerpts of the revised initial coding approach and agreed with the codes applied. I proceeded with this approach throughout the initial coding stages in subsequent interviews. A screenshot of the

initial coding process after this was complete for interviews one and two is presented in Figure

1, and examples of initial codes applied in Table 4.

**Figure 1** *Initial Coding Example, MAXqda*
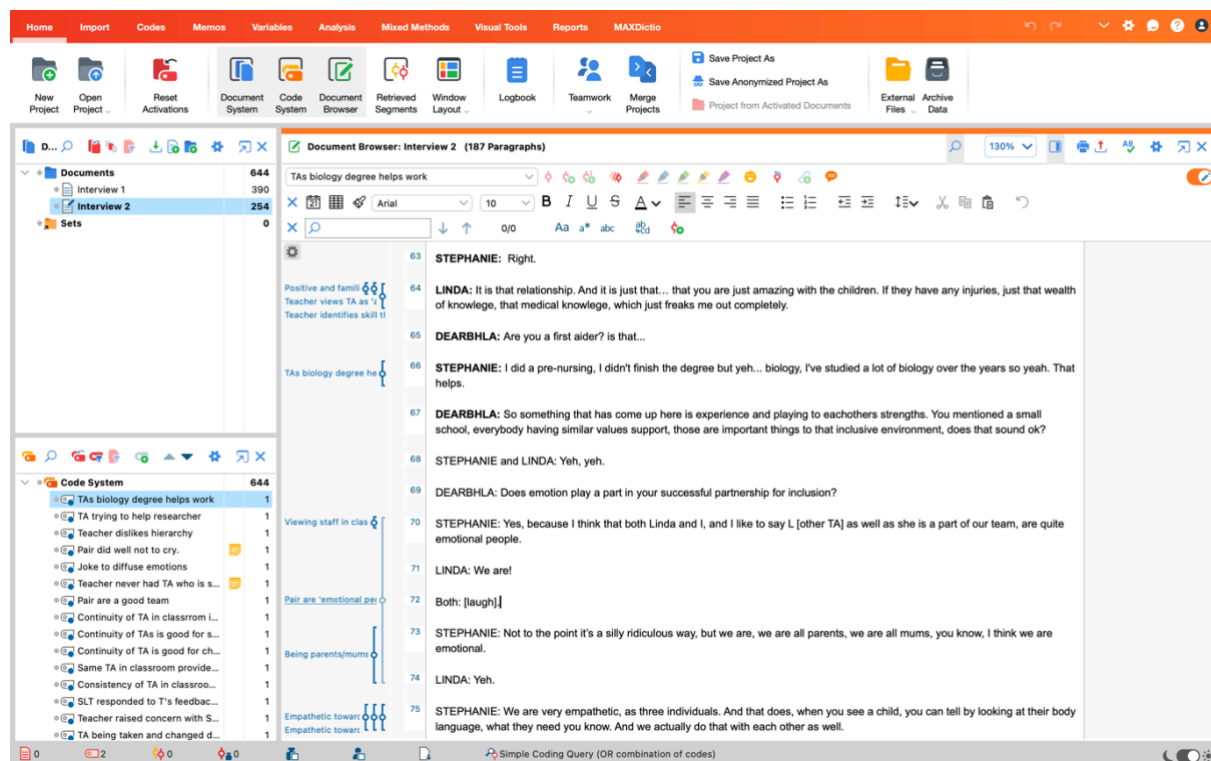


**Table 4** *Example of Initial Coding Applied to Excerpts of Interview Transcripts*

| Transcript section | Ascribed Open Codes |
|---|---|
| "DEARBHLA [Interviewer]: Is there anything else in that field that you feel would be relevant to the success?<br><br>SARAH [teacher]: Timetabling...having ... we know what each other are doing at the same time... it's not like we are up in the air saying, 'what are we doing'"(1, 88-89) | Timetabling so pair knows what they need to do<br><br>Embedded pre-emptive routines/timetables |
| "LINDA [teacher]: 'yeah because you have got it'.<br><br><br>STEPHANIE [TA]: Yeh, I know but I know from hearing about other situations and other | Teacher validates/recognises TA skill |

| schools that it's not always like that... Yeh I think we are… [pause]. | We are just a team |
| --- | --- |
| LINDA : We are just a team. | |
| STEPHANIE: Exactly" (2, 108-111) | |

### *3.8.6.2 Focused Coding.*

A high number of codes emerged due to the detailed initial coding approach. Once initial codes were applied to interviews one and two, I began to compare these codes against each other to make links between them. Similar initial codes were grouped under tentative subheadings termed 'focused codes' to represent emergent ideas, patterns or concepts (Evans, 2013). They were reviewed to consider whether some could be merged or split or re-categorised to ensure best fit to represent its meaning. At this point, I began to map the process by hand and on Microsoft PowerPoint. See Appendix N for list of focused codes under each category.

**Table 5** *Worked Example of Focused Coding from MAXqda*

| Open Codes | Focused Codes |
| --- | --- |
| Timetabling so pair knows what they need to do | Similar approach, style, intentions, values, hopes: Alignment of aims and priorities |
| Embedded pre-emptive routines/timetables | Ethos of Care, Nurture and Safety through Consistency and Connection: Consistent routines boundaries and expectations |
| Teacher validates/recognises TA skill | Respect, Appreciation, Consideration for others' strengths, role and contributions |
| 'We are just a team' | Pair: Working as a Team rather than against each other |

### 3.8.6.3.Theoretical Coding.

For the next level of analysis, I considered hypotheses regarding the similarities and relatedness between codes and concepts which led to the generation of categories. I continually returned to the transcripts to check and adapt how open codes were assigned.

Once focussed codes were established for interviews one to four (Cycle 1), I considered hypotheses regarding the similarities and relatedness between codes and concepts which led to the generation of core categories by grouping and making links between categories were considered by reviewing memos to add richness to the emergent theory.

Transcripts one to four were checked for any additional codes at this stage. I chose to code interviews five and six after these categories were identified to enable these codes to illuminate similarity and/or difference in participant experience. This allowed also allowed the researcher to assess whether theoretical saturation had been met.

**Table 6** *Sample Illustrations of Theoretical Categories*

| Focussed Codes | Theoretical Categories |
| --- | --- |
| Similar approach, style, intentions, values, hopes: Alignment of aims and priorities | 'On the same page': Shared understanding, values, hopes, aims |
| Ethos of Care, Nurture and Safety through Consistency and Connection: Consistent routines boundaries and expectations | 'In it together': Nurturing Family-Like Environment |
| Respect, Appreciation, Consideration for others' strengths, role and contributions | Non-hierarchical relationships centred on respect and equality |
| Pair: Working as a Team rather than against each other | Working as a team rather than against each other: Collaboration |

Throughout the analysis process, the researcher compared, refined and checked the analysis decisions which led to some small changes in focused codes where one was merged with another and where names of some categories were adjusted.

**Figure 2** *Representation of the Coding Process*



| Cycle One |
|---|
| Initial Coding Interview One |
| Initial Coding Interview Two |
| Revisit interview one and two initial codes - amend. Consider emergent focused codes. |
| Initial Coding Interview Three |
| Revisit interview three intial codes - amend. Consider emergent focused codes. |
| Initial Coding Interview Four |
| Revisit interview four initial codes - amend. Consider emergent focused codes |
| Theoretical coding – examining links and grouping focused codes to form tentative categories. Conceptual diagramming was intiated to map connections between categories. Intial links and explanatory pathways identified. |

| Cycle Two |
|---|
| Initial Coding Interview Five |
| Revisit coding system and check whether open codes from interview five apply to new or existing focused codes and categories. |
| Open Coding Interview Six |
| Revisit coding system and check whether open codes from interview six apply to new or existing focused codes and categories. |
| Comparison of focused codes, theoretical categories and pathways between Cycles 1 and 2. Final graphical representations of the theory was agreed. |

After the initial coding process for cycle one, 1,360 open codes and 58 focused codes and 13 theoretical categories were generated. Through the process of constant comparison and mapping, this was refined to 12 categories, and 45 focused codes. At the end of Cycle 1, the number of open codes increased to 1,425 where I duplicated some where they applied to two or more focused codes or categories or where revising the data brought new interpretation.

### 3.8.7. Theoretical Sampling

While many grounded theorists seek further sampling to represent populations, Charmaz presents theoretical sampling as the "conceptual and theoretical development of your analysis" (Charmaz, 2014, p.198). As such, the researcher used further empirical enquiry throughout the research process by adapting interview schedules based on tentative ideas e.g. the role of emotions and the concept of separation between teachers and TAs. Theoretical sampling allowed these ideas which emerged in early interviews to be explored in greater depth, with more direct questioning in interviews 5 and 6. While I considered sampling specific participants (e.g. Key Stage 2 pairs), this was not possible due to difficulties with recruitment. Theoretical sampling meant that participants were actively involved in theory generation.

## 3.9. Theoretical Integration: Sorting Categories and Building a Theory

### 3.9.1. Memos and Research Diary

Throughout the data collection and coding process, the researcher kept memos on MAXQDA and a research diary in Microsoft Word Format. Keeping memos is argued to be crucial to the process of analysis in grounded theory studies (Glaser, 2012). It supports and documents the researcher's decision-making throughout the iterative data collection and analysis process and identifies gaps in the analysis (Charmaz, 2003). These allowed the researcher to highlight ideas

and links between categories, and to acknowledge any links to prior knowledge, experience and potential biases or assumptions.

Charmaz (2014) suggests that you work with hard copies of your memos and sort them manually as you commence integration of your theory. These supported the mapping and diagramming process. Comparing categories and memos supported the production of a logical scheme that reflects the studied experience.

**Table 7** *Example of Early Memo Writing Recorded on MAXqda related to Links between Categories*

| Interview excerpt | Memo |
| --- | --- |
| "NATASHA [TA]: Yeh and as LSA I don't feel lower than Hari. He makes us feel like we are all on the same level. He listens to my ideas. And I listen to his ideas. It's not like we are totally different members of staff." (3, 37) | Reciprocal listening between the teacher and TA impacted their sense of equality in the relationship linking the two factors and suggesting a mechanism of reciprocal listening and communication to support a non-hierarchical relationship. |

**Table 8** *Example of Later Memo Writing Recorded on MAXqda related to Comparison of Memos and the Emergence of Pathways*

| Interview excerpt | Analytical Memo |
| --- | --- |
| DEARBHLA [interviewer]: How do you think having that ability to communicate about emotions and how you are doing, maybe not so explicitly but having that ability, how does that impact your work with the children? | I wonder whether the pair's view of the social world and their associated actions and interactions, influence the social worlds of the children with which they work. Through the lens of symbolic interactionism, their |

SAMANTHA [teacher]: Umm… it probably makes us better in the work that we are doing with the children if we've been able to say what's going on…

SHELLEY [TA]: Yeh….

SAMANTHA: I mean they don't hear our conversations, but they see us speaking properly. They know that we speak properly….They do.

SHELLEY: They do.

DEARBHLA: So they…

SAMANTHA [teacher]: It makes them feel that they can speak about how they are feeling.

SHELLEY: Yeh" (6, 236-243)

non-hierarchical pattern of relating and working towards inclusion could influence the children's meanings and interactions. There seems to be a pattern where the pair acknowledge that their communication improves the quality of their work with the children (Pathway 1) and another pattern where the children witness the quality of the pairs interactions which in turn influences their interactions and response, in this case - their comfortability to express their own emotions (Pathway 3).

### 3.9.2. Sorting, Diagramming and Integration

Initial links between categories were recorded and compared through analytical memos and modified over time to develop the logic and links between categories (See Figure 3). This led to the creation of tentative pathways which were present across all interviews. Due to the high number of emergent categories, the researcher relied on diagramming to visually represent the connections and relationships between categories. This process allowed the researcher to create conceptual maps to show the patterns between actors (TA, teacher, children, others in the system) and categories. These diagrams and maps (shown in chapter three) were used to form extend, and record the theory.

**Figure 3** *Memo Excerpt Illustrating how the Initial Analysis of the Connections and Conceptualisations between Categories were Described*

**'In it together': Nurturing family-like environment**

Created: 13/01/2024 19:29 by dearbhladowd
Modified: 29/03/2024 12:05 by dearbhladowd

'Supporting each other' is described as providing support for the other in challenging moments. This means they can provide better quality interactions with the children. When pairs have agreed strategies that they can use interchangably with the child dependent on the situation the child receives a more consistent or better quality approach (Blue pathway). This illustrated links between consistency, supporting each other (In it together) at the level of the pair and compensating for eachother or playing to their strengths/needs during moments of challenge ('Making it work'/'Emotional Interdependence'). Additionally, wiith the support of their partner, several pairs' work towards inclusion could carry on or move forward when working in this manner (Green Pathway). More specifically, according to several pairs CYP were supported to engage in learning successfully through this manner of working (Orange Pathway).

Further, backing each other up extends to consistency of approach with children and also in communicating with the senior leadership team (Ongoing Communication; Red Pathway). In a practical and systemic sense, teachers one and two also referenced backing up their TA with the senior leadership team in order to influence their decisions about staffing and provision. In pair one, this communication with SLT about the TA also supported their timetabling out of the classroom  to provide targeted interventions such as Lego Group and ELSA [Emotional Literacy Support Assistant].

Through initial diagramming, 'messy' maps (Figures 4 & 5) facilitated tentative analysis and synthesis. They also captured "the messy complexities of the situation[s] in their dense relations and permutations" (Clarke, 2021, p.211). I was reminded in supervision that I was not the only person needing to hold different pieces of theory in mind. Continuous mapping allowed me to build more orderly maps (See Findings Chapter; Appendix O) as the analysis progressed through colour-coding and refining the categories by comparison with the data (See Figure 6).

**Figure 4** *Early Mapping of Key Concepts and Emergent Categories by Hand*
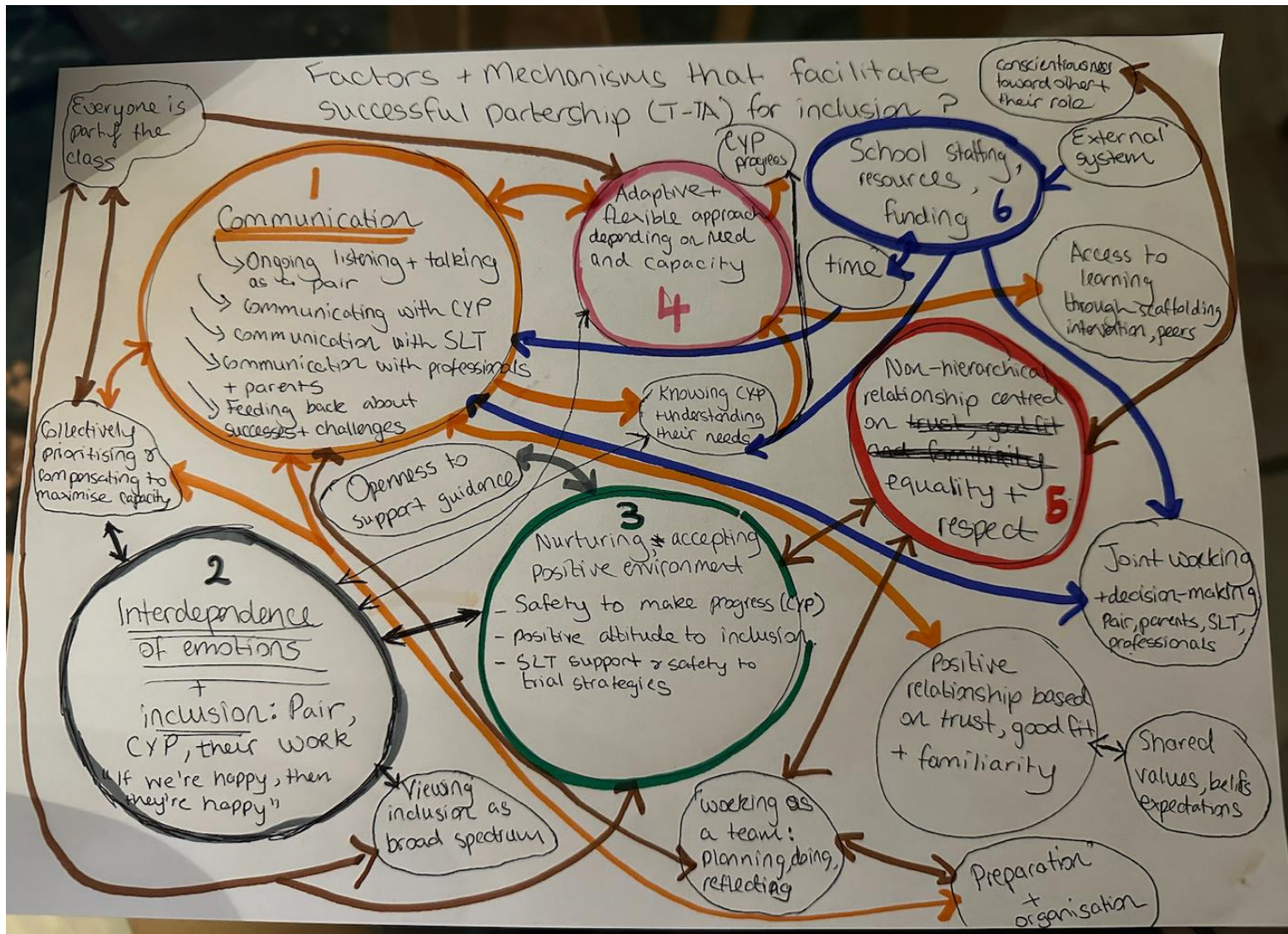
**Figure 5** *Initial Graphical Representation of Emergent Links between Categories*
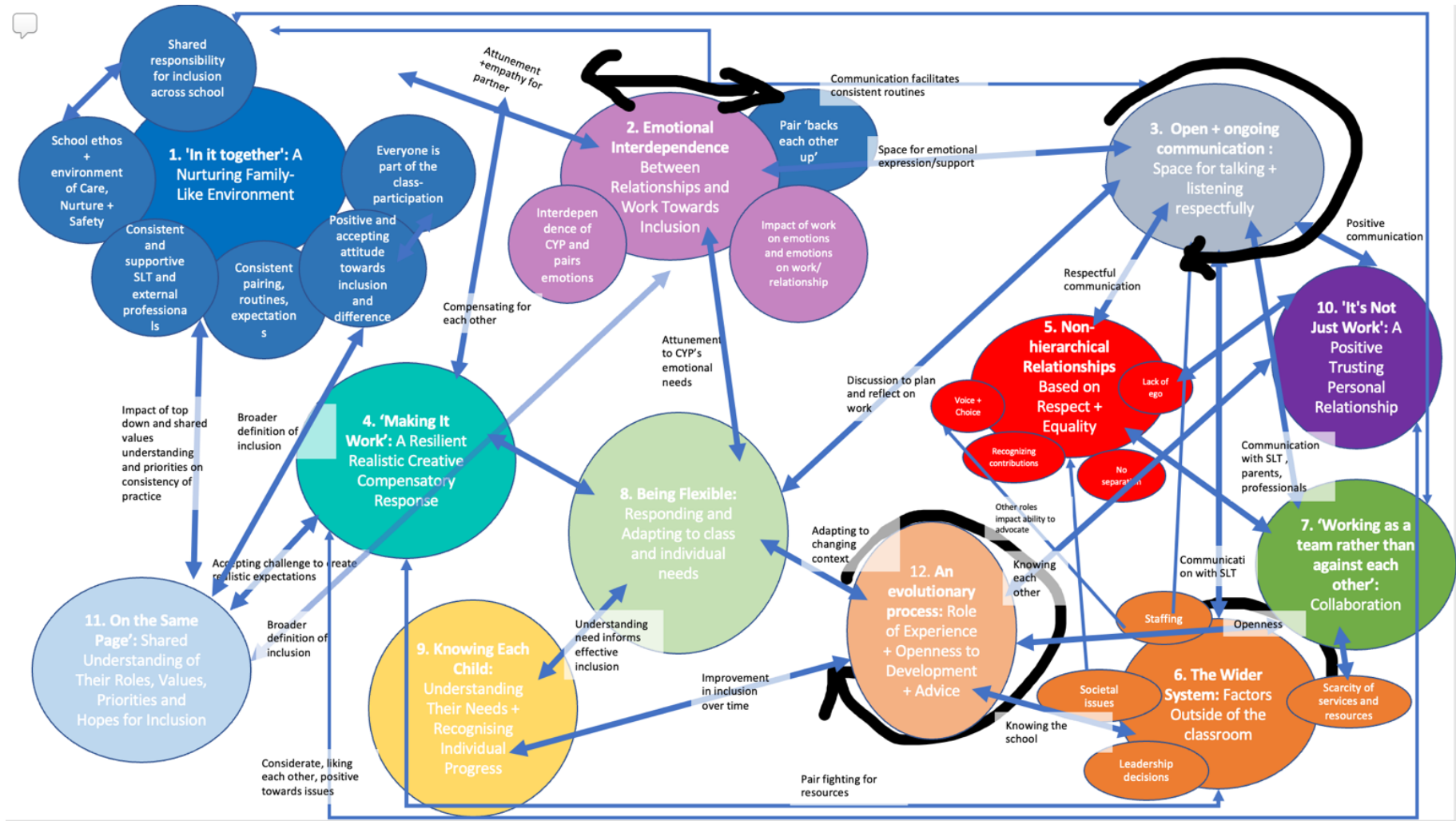
Later the patterns between categories were overlaid onto the actors: TAs, teachers, children and the wider school to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relational processes of the emergent theory. These processes supported the emergence of four theoretical pathways.

**Figure 6** *A Later Diagram Created as a Graphical Representation of Emergent Links between Categories where Colours were assigned to each of the Four Emergent Theoretical Pathways.*
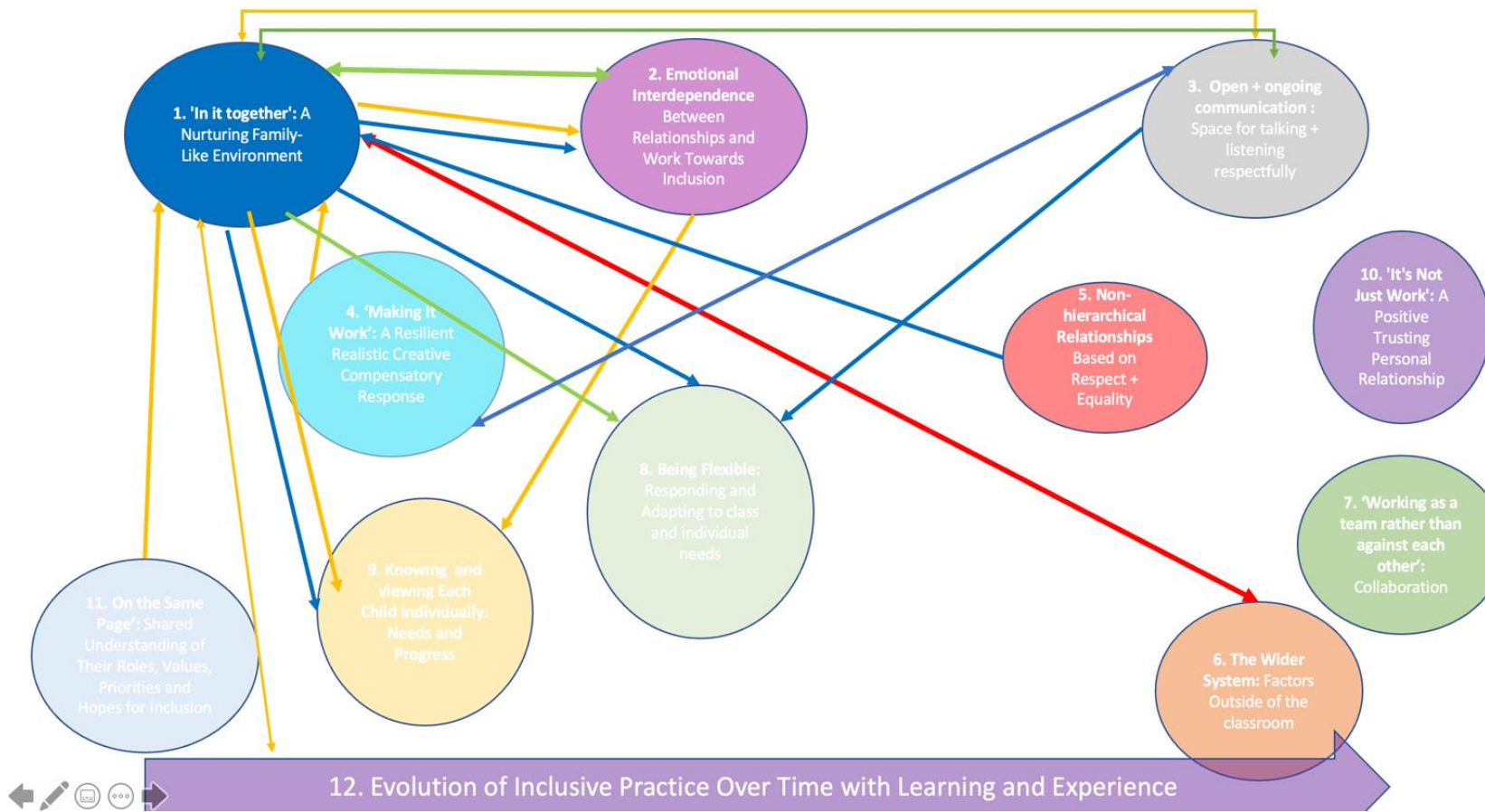
### *3.9.3. Theoretical Saturation*

An integral part of grounded theory is the objective of theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014) as it is argued support the rigor and credibility of grounded theory studies (Yonge & Stewin, 1988; Aldabat & LeNavenec, 2018). Glaser (2001) described theoretical saturation beyond 'seeing the same patterns over and over again' but where conceptualisations of comparisons of these incidents … yield different properties of the pattern until no new properties emerge (p.191).

The researcher considered the following questions outlined by Charmaz (2014, p. 214) when considering whether theoretical saturation of the categories:

- Which comparisons do you make between data within and between categories?
- What sense do you make of these comparisons?
- Where do they lead you?
- How do your comparisons illuminate your theoretical categories?
- In what other directions, if any, do they take you?
- What new conceptual relationships, if any, might you see?

Cycle 2 of the coding process mainly followed the same process as Cycle 1, however, codes for interviews 5 and 6 were checked against the emergent theory, categories and focused codes. The following table outlines the application of open codes in Cycle 2:

**Table 9** *New Initial Codes in Cycle 2 of the Coding Process*

| Interview | Existing initial codes | New initial codes |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Interview 5 | 264 | 27 |
| Interview 6 | 326 | 2 |
| Total | 590 | 29 |

All initial codes from Cycle 2 were assigned to the existing focused codes and theoretical categories from Cycle 1 illustrating that few conceptual variations emerged. Most new codes could be attributed to difference in context and/or participants' role e.g. job-sharing teacher or larger settings. No additional information about the categories emerged throughout diagramming and mapping processes in cycle two of analysis. All final categories were seen in all interviews.

**Figure 7** *Summary Grid of Distribution of Categories*

| | | Interview 1 | Interview 2 | Interview 3 | Interview 4 | Interview 5 | Interview 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 'In it together': Nurturing family-like environment | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Emotional interdependence in r/ships+work towards incl.CYP,pair | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Open + ongoing communication : Space for talking + listening | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Making It Work: Realistic creative compensatory response | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Non-hierarchical relationships based on respect+equality | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| The Wider System: Factors outside of the classroom | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| An evolutionary process: Role of Experience+Opennes to Dvt + A | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Knowing + recognising each child individually: str needs+progr | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Being flexible and adaptive: Reponding to class+ind needs | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Working as a team rather than against eachother: Collaboration | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| 'It's not just work': A positive trusting personal relationship | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| On the Same Page: Shared understanding priorities values+hopes | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |

Based on the information from theoretical coding, memo sorting, diagramming, and comparison cycles one and two for similarity and difference, the researcher decided that they had reached a sufficient level saturation related to the emergent theory and that the data from six interviews was adequate, meaning no further theoretical sampling was needed to refine the theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2006).

### 3.9.4. Generating a Theory

Thornberg & Charmaz (2012, p. 41) define a theory as the presentation of "relationships between abstract concepts and may aim for explanation or understanding". As a result of sorting and revising identified theoretical categories and reviewing the links between them, a theoretical model was generated. This theoretical model explained how key categories operate for the participants in

working successfully together towards inclusion via four key theoretical pathways. The researcher continued to amend the visual representations in collaboration with their supervisor over several weeks to best represent the theory in an accessible yet comprehensive way.

A summary of the data collection and analysis process is presented in Figure 8 and the emergent theory in Figure 9. The impact of the literature review on the emergent theory is explored in Chapter 5: Discussion.

**Figure 8** *Summary of Steps to the Data Analysis Process*
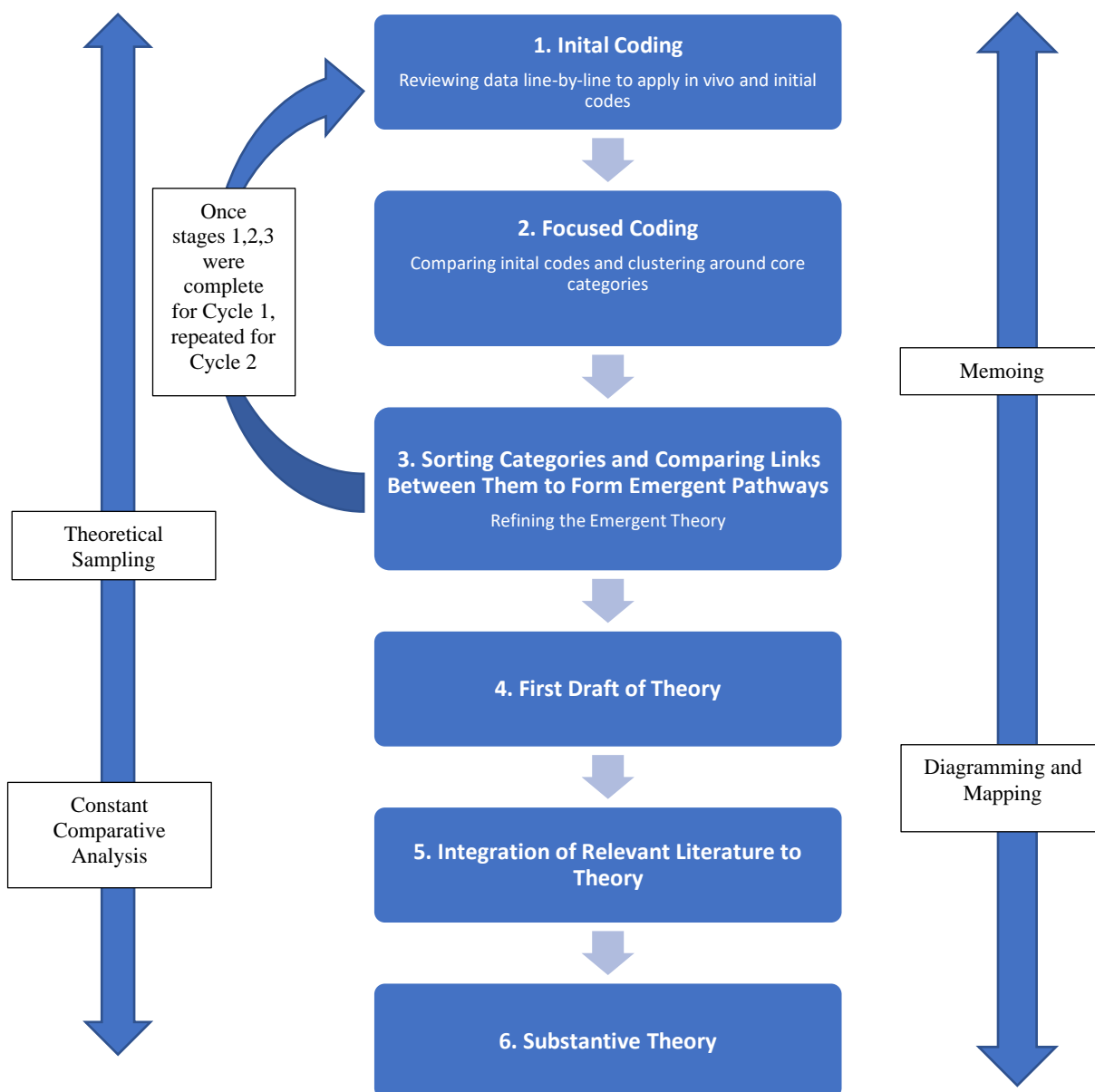
## 4. **FINDINGS**

**4.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter will introduce the overarching theory, followed by a brief description of each category. The remainder of the chapter will focus on an in-depth exploration of the relationships between the primary categories according to four explanatory pathways. The pathways can be understood in the context of Figure 9, which represents the substantive emergent theory and Figure 10 which represents key categories identified in successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion.

**Figure 9** *Presentation of the Emergent Theory after Step 6 of the Data Collection and Analysis Process Presented in Figure 10*
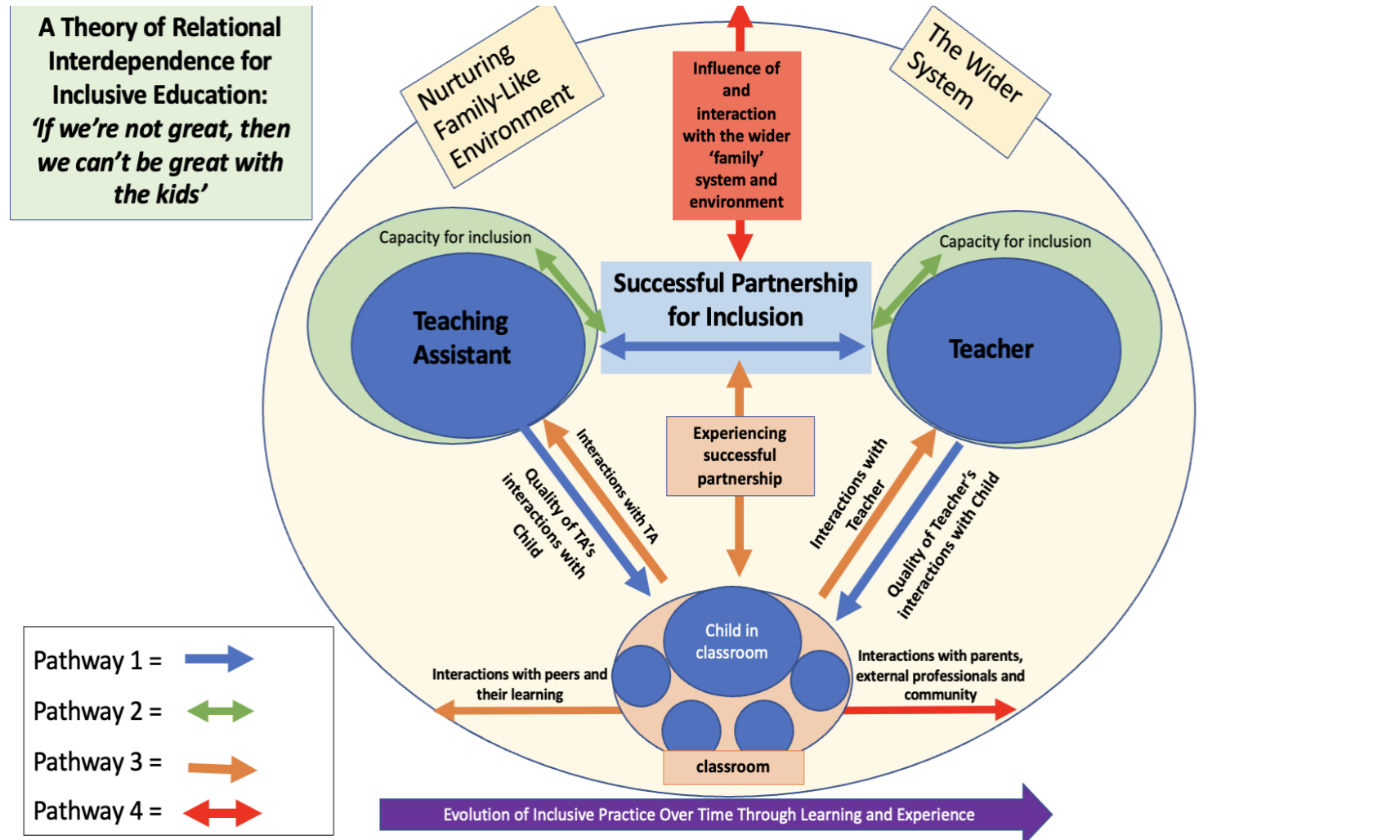
## 4.2 Model of Relational Interdependence in Successful TA-Teacher Partnerships for Inclusion: An Overview

Twelve categories emerged from analysis occurring across all interviews. They are described in Table 10 and presented in Figure 10 to represent findings to research question one (RQ1): '*What does a successful TA-teacher partnership for inclusion of all children look like?*'.

**Table 10** *Twelve Categories, their Prevalence and Brief Descriptions.*

| Category | Prevalence | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 1. *'In it together': Nurturing family-like environment (C1[15])* | 303 | Care, nurture and support are important at several levels including within their partnership. Connection and consistency of the adult interactions with children is central to inclusive safe classrooms. Classroom and wider school ethos of positive attitudes and shared responsibility for inclusion supported pairs' success. |
| 2. *Emotional interdependence within the partnership and between the pair, their work and the children (C2)* | 228 | Creating space for emotion in the partnership by having empathy and the ability to express concerns is important. Prioritising and attuning to the emotions of children where the emotional state of pairs can impact that of the children. Further, pairs recognised the reciprocal influence of their work on their emotions and vice versa. |
| 3. *Open and ongoing communication: Space for talking and listening (C3)* | 214 | Clear ongoing communication is centred on listening, discussion and reflection. The style of communication between pairs is open, honest, respectful and positive where pairs create space for communication. This style of communication is reflected in their interactions with the children to promote understanding, encourage progress and inclusive attitudes. The importance of communication with adults around the child was noted (parents, SLT, external professionals). |
| 4. *Making It Work: Realistic, creative, compensatory, response (C4)* | 200 | Pairs focused on compensating for each other by playing to their strengths. They 'do their best' by being creative, organised and proactive. They accept limitations to form realistic expectations about how to balance individual, class and school needs. |

---

[15] C1 refers to category one, C2 refers to category two and so on.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5. *Non-hierarchical relationships based on respect and equality (C5)* | 186 | Pairs describe the centrality of respect and appreciation for their partner's contributions where their roles are viewed as different but equally important. Limited separation was described across the system between TA and teacher, pair and SLT and children with additional needs and the class. Voice and choice for TAs and children with additional needs is promoted. |
| 6. *The Wider System: Factors outside of the classroom (C6)* | 181 | Key factors in the wider system that impact inclusive practice include staffing, leadership decisions, scarcity of resources, and broader societal/systemic issues. |
| 7. *An evolutionary process: Role of Experience and Openness to Development and Advice (C7)* | 139 | Learning over time was centred on experience in role, setting, working together and with the children. Reflecting on mistakes and holding positive and open attitudes towards their development, advice and support from others emerged. Changes in context over time were recognised. |
| 8. *Knowing and recognising each child individually: understanding needs and recognising individual progress (C8)* | 137 | Knowing each child in their class means recognising individual progress across learning and other skills. This progress is underpinned by understanding the strengths and needs of individual children and so that effective practices can be used to promote progress for each child. |
| 9. *Being flexible and adaptive: Responding to Class and Individual Needs (C9)* | 126 | Pairs consider the needs of the class on an ongoing basis and adapt as needed through individualised, targeted and environmental approaches to teaching, support and resources. Being flexible with each other and being flexible when things are 'not working' are central. |
| 10. *'Working as a team rather than against each other': Collaboration (C10)* | 126 | Collaboration between the pair and whole team around the child was highlighted. Pairs want to be included by parents, SLT and external professionals in joint decision making. Professional involvement over time is important. Pairs are a 'team' by collaborating and making decisions together to support learning and inclusion. Teamwork with pairs was reflected or desired in the wider system of school, parents and professionals. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *11. 'It's not just work': A positive trusting personal relationship (C11)* | 103 | Pairs enjoy positive personal relationships where they get along well and know and trust each other. There is an automatic or natural element to their relationship where they are a good 'fit'. |
| *12. On the Same Page: Shared understanding priorities values and hopes (C12)* | 101 | Pairs describe that they hold similar views, values, priorities and aims for their work towards inclusion in their classroom. The alignment in their values was also reflected by school values in some cases. All pairs view inclusion as a broad spectrum beyond special educational needs/academics and children with identified needs where the importance of individual progress across a range of areas was highlighted e.g. social, participation, emotional development, enjoyment, learning. |
| Total number of open codes | 2042 | |

**Figure 10** *Representation of What Successful TA-Teacher Partnerships Look Like (RQ1)*
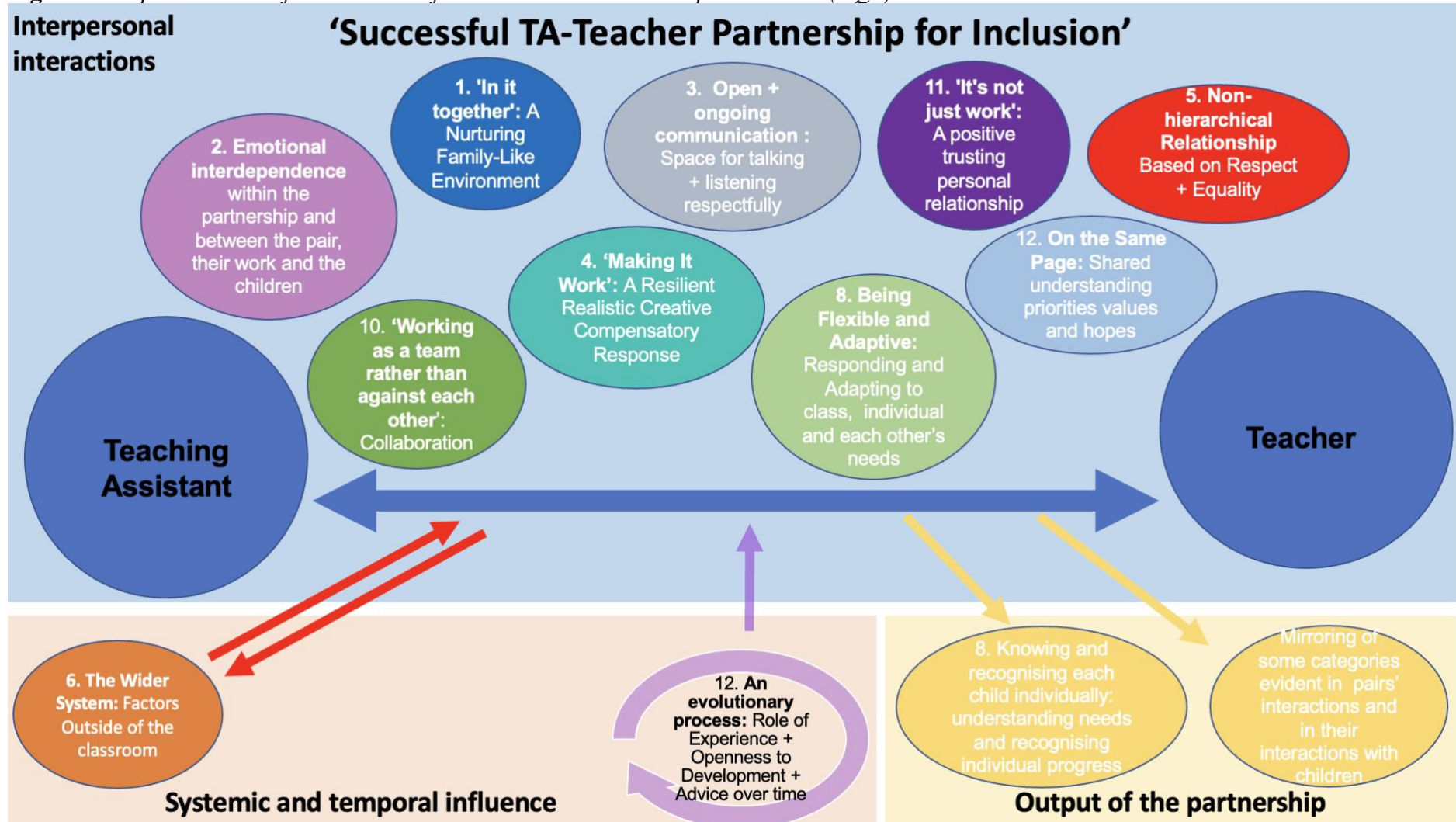
To gain an understanding of how these categories facilitate inclusion, the connections between them were analysed through mapping and diagramming patterns identified in analytic memos leading to the emergence of theoretical pathways. Such pathways are pertinent to the second research question (RQ2): '*What factors and mechanisms facilitate successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion?*'. The pathways represent repeated and interconnected relational and psychological processes in successful TA-teacher partnerships that foster inclusion (See Figures 11, 12, 13, 14). Each pathway was colour-coded, and each category (except C7) was represented by a circle where the connections between them are illustrated by interconnecting arrows. 'Evolution of Inclusive Practice Over Time' is represented by a large arrow or cyclical arrow to represent progression from past to present and future. By refining key patterns and overlaying the four pathways across actors (teacher, TA, children and wider system), Figure 9 was created to present an integrated illustration of the overarching theory.

### *4.2.1 Core Theoretical Concept*

The core theoretical concept identified was 'relational interdependence' within TA-teacher partnerships and between the partnership, children and the wider system in successfully supporting inclusive education. Such interpersonal and interactional processes underpin inclusion by influencing and supporting the quality of their pair's work/interactions with their students. The proposed model is formed by four pathways, representing the complex, relational and intertwined nature of successful inclusion in their classrooms. The remainder of this chapter is structured by describing and illustrating each of these pathways relative to the data and theory.

### *4.2.2 Interaction of Key Theoretical Categories through Four Identified Pathways*

Pathway one is most substantive and is therefore described first. Subsequent pathways are described in turn. Additional evidence for each of the identified categories is contained in appendices P-T. The remainder of this chapter will outline examples of each pathway according to seven of the categories which were connected to all other categories in the theory (C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C10). The remaining five categories (C7: *Evolution of Inclusive Practice Over Time*; C8: *Being Adaptative and Flexible*; C9: *Knowing and Recognising Each Child Individually*; C11: *On the Same Page*; C12: "*It's Not Just Work'*) will be described relative to how they influence the primary seven categories e.g. whether they facilitate or are a barrier to the role of that category in the theoretical model. Further discussion related to categories seven, eight, nine, 11 and 12 and how they link to the theory and wider literature will be outlined in Chapter 6 and Appendix A, B, C, D, and E. Category 6 '*The Wider System'* become a pathway due to its permeating nature in all other categories and there is described in pathway 4.

**Figure 11** *Pathway One: Key Interpersonal Processes between the TA and Teacher which Supports the Quality of their Interactions with the Children.*
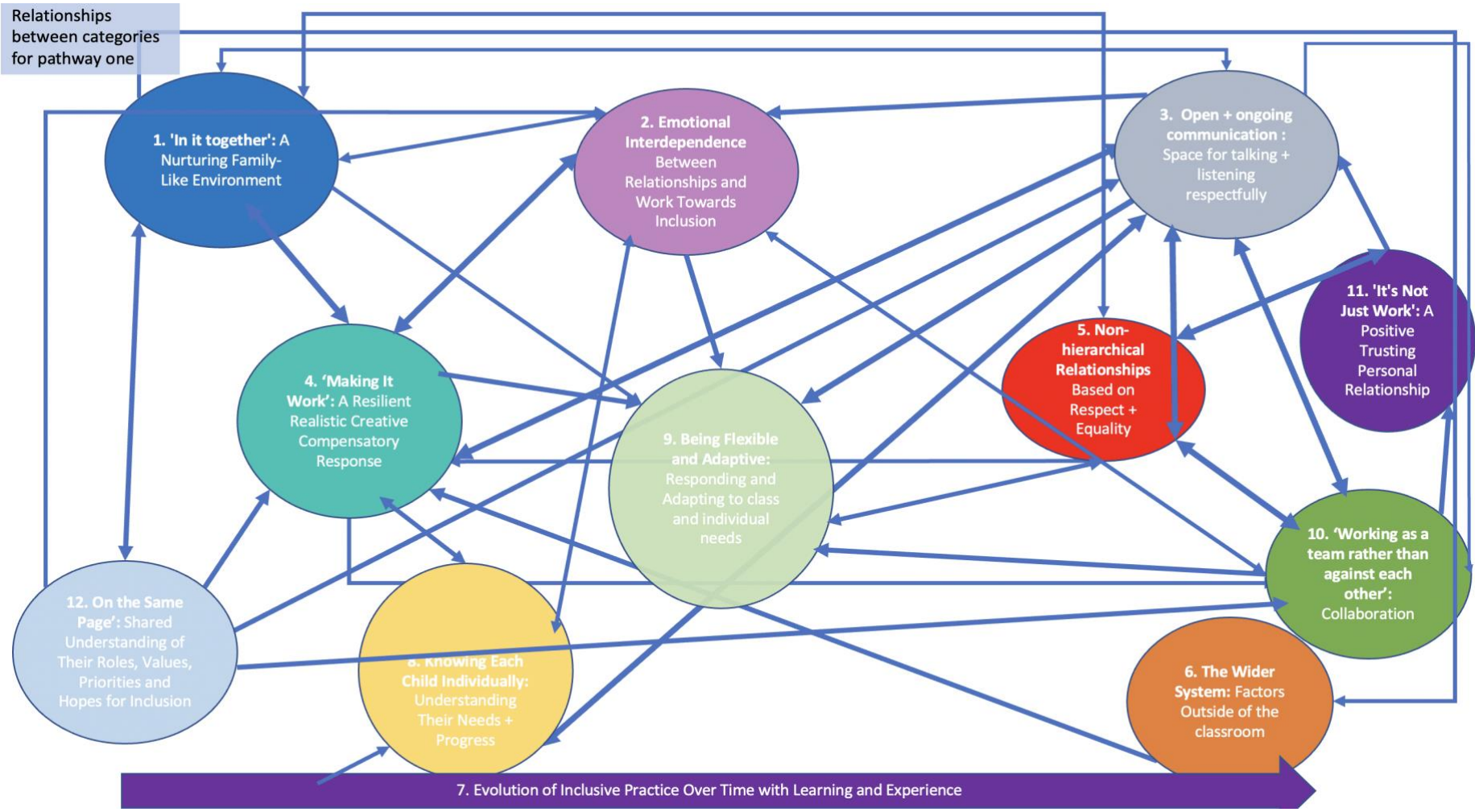
[16]**Figure 12** *Pathway Two: Pairs' Individual and Collective Response to these Interpersonal Processes in terms of their Capacity for Inclusion*



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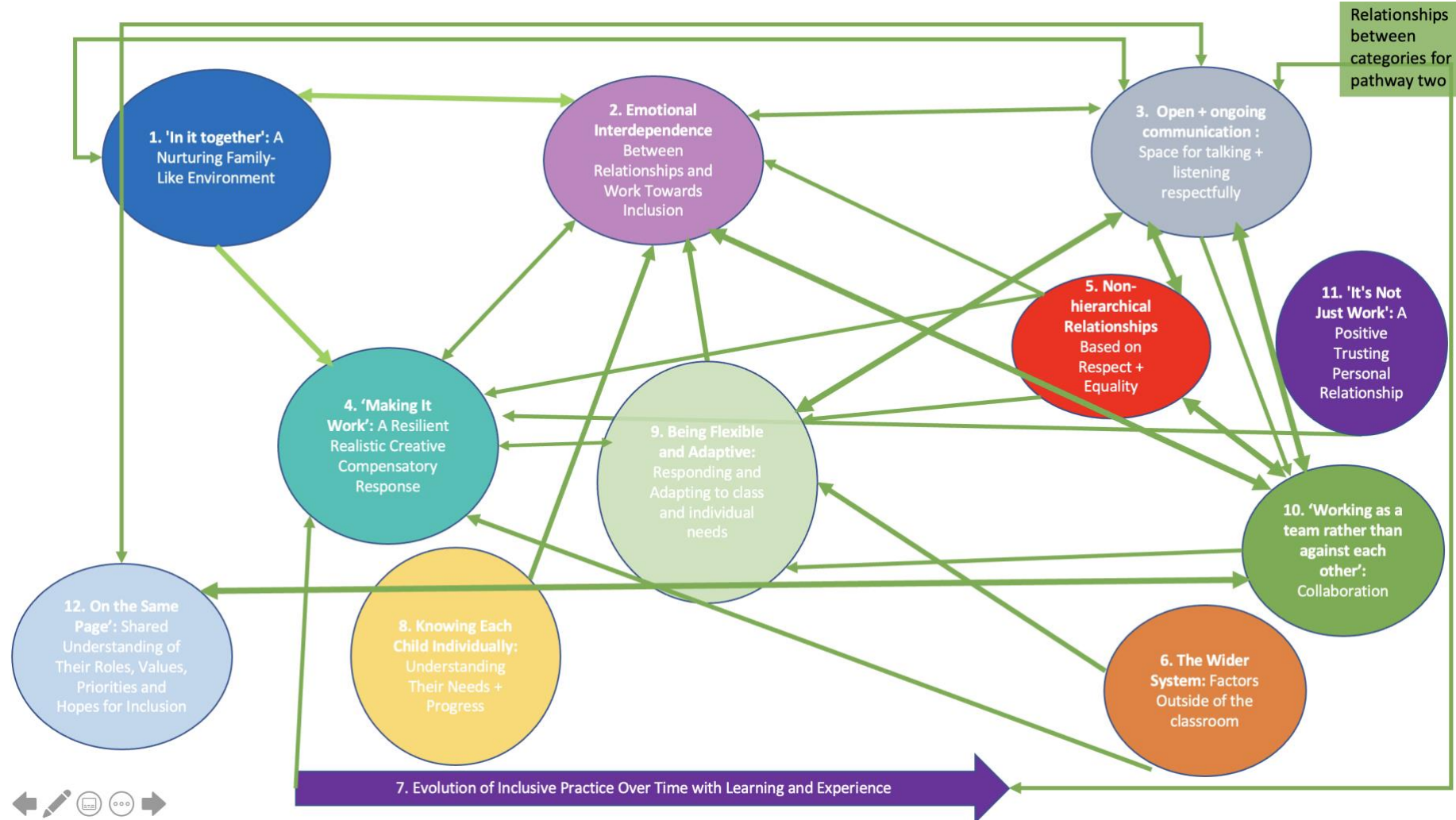
[16] The categories are represented as circles and links between them according to four identified pathways (represented as colour-coded arrows between categories where repeated links were identified in memos)

**Figure 13** *Pathway Three: Children's Response to Experiencing the Successful TA-teacher Partnership*



Relationships between categories for pathway three

1. 'In it together': A Nurturing Family-Like Environment

2. Emotional Interdependence Between Relationships and Work Towards Inclusion

3. Open + ongoing communication : Space for talking + listening respectfully

4. 'Making It Work': A Resilient Realistic Creative Compensatory Response

5. Non-hierarchical Relationships Based on Respect + Equality

11. 'It's Not Just Work': A Positive Trusting Personal Relationship

9. Being Flexible and Adaptive: Responding and Adapting to class and individual needs

10. 'Working as a team rather than against each other': Collaboration

12. On the Same Page': Shared Understanding of Their Roles, Values, Priorities and Hopes for Inclusion

6. The Wider System: Factors Outside of the classroom

8. Knowing Each Child Individually: Understanding Their Needs + Progress

7. Evolution of Inclusive Practice Over Time with Learning and Experience

**Figure 14** *Pathway Four: Responding to and Interacting with their Wider Context and System over Time*



Relationships between categories for pathway four

1. 'In it together': A Nurturing Family-Like Environment

2. Emotional Interdependence Between Relationships and Work Towards Inclusion

3. Open + ongoing communication : Space for talking + listening respectfully

11. 'It's Not Just Work': A Positive Trusting Personal Relationship

5. Non-hierarchical Relationships Based on Respect + Equality

4. 'Making It Work': A Resilient Realistic Creative Compensatory Response

9. Being Flexible and Adaptive: Responding and Adapting to class and individual needs

7. 'Working as a team rather than against each other': Collaboration

12. On the Same Page': Shared Understanding of Their Roles, Values, Priorities and Hopes for Inclusion

8. Knowing and Recognising Each Child Individually: Understanding Their Strengths Needs + Progress

6. The Wider System: Factors Outside of the classroom

7. Evolution of Inclusive Practice Over Time with Learning and Experience

## 4.3 Pathway One: Interpersonal Processes between Teacher and TA which Support the Quality of their Interactions with the Children

Pathway one is the primary pathway and describes the influence of interpersonal factors and interactions within successful TA-teacher partnerships on the subsequent quality of their interactions with children in their class. The pathway will be explored by considering each of the primary categories in order of prevalence, first focusing on the pair's interpersonal interactions and second, where this success facilitates the quality of interactions with children. Each category will be explored relative to how it facilitates or hinders the pathways and how it may interact with other categories.

**Figure 15** *Interpersonal Factors and Interactions between TA and Teacher Pairs and the Influence of these on the Success and Quality of their Interactions with the Children in their Class*
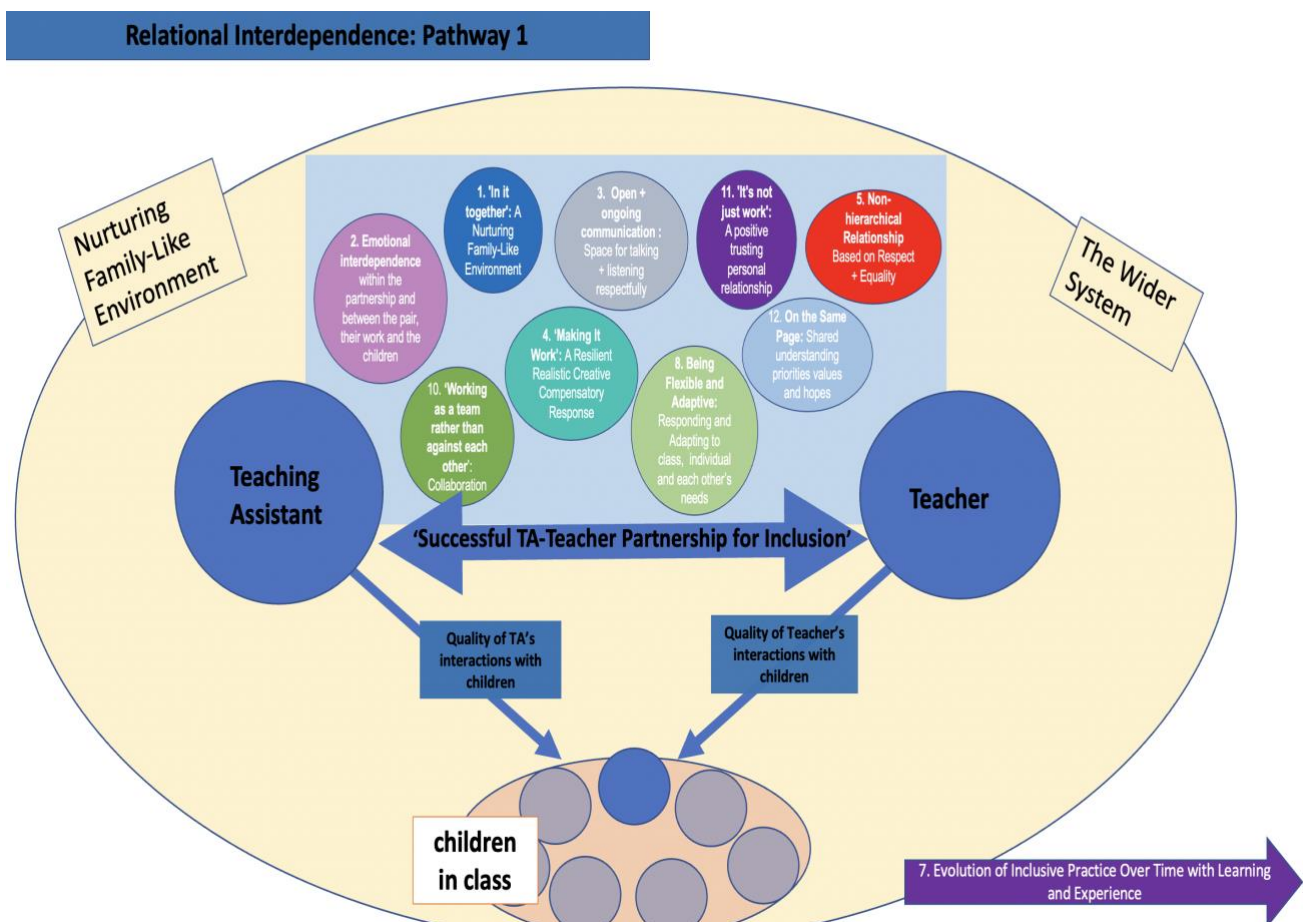
*4.3.1Theoretical Category One: 'In it together': A Nurturing Family-Like Environment*

Category one positions the TA-teacher pair as facilitators and actors of 'Care, Nurture, Support and Safety' in their own partnership. Pairs from all six interviews recognised the role of supporting each other as well as creating a safe classroom through relationships and consistent boundaries in working inclusively.

*Shared Responsibility for All Students in the Class including those with Additional Needs.*

All pairs referenced sharing the responsibility for inclusion in their partnerships. Pairs one, three, four and six described that the teacher maintains a role and responsibility in supporting and working with children with additional needs to receive a more consistent and continuous learning experience:

> *"Yvonne [TA]: I know that she's not just going to be left there staring at the walls, even if her playdough comes out, or it's her English that we know she can do on her own, something is going down there, so she's not just left in the corner" (1, 148[17]).*

In the example above, where a TA was not available, the teacher could compensate and help, and therefore, the CYP got a more continuous learning experience (C4: 'Making it Work').

In interview three, where the pair operate a part-time resourced provision, the teacher continues to play an active role in their students' learning assuring quality of the work children with additional needs receive from the TA:

> *"Hari [teacher]: they are all my class… I will be scheduled to be in here at specific points…and I will have a chance to interact with the children and work with them for their learning…Natasha is doing a really great job in setting it all up…and then I can come and see*

---

[17] Refers to interview number, paragraph number (from the interview transcript). For example, (1, 148) refers to interview one, paragraph 148.

*how it's working and then we can have a talk about any little tweaks that need to take place"*
*(3, 23; 40).*

### Supporting each other: We 'back each other up' .

Supporting each other was raised as an essential factor in the success of partnerships across all pairs in managing challenging moments:

> *"STEPHANIE [TA]: You know that you are going to get that support, and you know that if you need to vent, not like 'aghhh' but if you need to discuss something, or even just having a bad time, you know that we will support each other" (2,81-82).*

### Positive and Accepting Attitude to Inclusion, Needs and Difference.

Many of the pairs used positive language and celebrated the strengths and progress of children with SEN. Pair four described a child with an EHCP as '*queen B'* (100) and teacher six stated that when it comes to maths: "*He could probably run rings around all of us* [laughs]" (107).

Pairs seemed to accept and celebrate child progress 'at their own level' showing the link between positive and accepting attitudes to inclusion and recognition of each child's needs, progress and participation (Category 8):

> *"NAOMI: She just put her fingers in her ears and said, 'good afternoon'…And then her fingers came out of her ears and that was it. CAROLINE: That's an achievement, I think." (4, 173-175).*

> and

> *"SHELLEY [TA]: He likes to be in the classroom. Often at break time he wants to stay…SAMANTHA [teacher]: I don't mind that. I know that some people don't like that" (6, 274-275).*

Many pairs described their ideal for inclusion as learning together in one classroom. Teacher 3 explained: "*My idea of inclusion…to cater to all needs within the classroom and adapt my*

*teaching practices and use my members of staff…to have them in the classroom, so we are able to all be learning in the same environment" (19).*

Pair six extended upon this, highlighting the importance of celebrating the whole class as a team:

*"Samantha [Teacher]:I think…just talking about the class positively…'we are great' or 'you've done a great job at this'. I think we all do, when they work hard…we really celebrate it and are kind of like 'wow, you really impressed us" (6, 278-80).*

Further across pairs holding the value of 'being together' was linked to acceptance in offering adaptations to tasks and their practice:

*"YVONNE [TA]:We have to change certain things to adapt for children that need the extra help or anything into the lesson, but yeh, we try to keep everyone together. SARAH [teacher]: with us" (1, 24-25).*

This implies concepts of belonging to the class unit, regardless of need, culture or difference.

Developing on this, several pairs' (2, 4, 5, 6) positive attitude and nurturing responses towards inclusion were linked to encouraging whole-class understanding of inclusion or tolerance for difference. This promoted peer scaffolding and support. Teacher four recalled facilitating peer discussion around inclusion:

*"NAOMI [teacher]: they said, 'oh that's like that's like H', 'yes right, okay, so what kind of…yes you're right, and what kind of things do we do to help her feel included and what kind of things can we do?'" (1, 76)*

and

*"HEATHER [teacher]: We do a lot of work around tolerance, inclusivity, differences, celebrating differences.. ANNA [TA]: Cultures…" (5, 102)*

### Creating a Calm Safe Classroom.

All pairs referred to the success of their partnership in creating a '*positive, more inclusive…safer environment"* (1,68). Pairs facilitate this by creating a sense of calm and

prioritising both physical and emotional safety and being able to: *"HEATHER (Teacher): swap between…and read each other"* (5, 60).

### *Consistency of Interactions.*

Consistent embedded routines and structures were identified as important in inclusive and safe classrooms by pairs (2,3,4,5,6) where the children *"soon learn their routine. That gives them security"* (2, 93). This role of consistency extends to the language and interactions used by the pair:

*"ANNA [TA]: when the teacher talks to all the TAs to make sure we know the language that the parents are using at home as well so we can all use it with the child…HEATHER [Teacher]:…making sure that the language is consistent"* (5,73-74).

Most pairs (1,3,4,5,6) cited consistency in their approach and expectations as central to inclusion: *"Hari [Teacher]: I think that consistency is so important… just generally the consistency of my expectations…the children seeing that consistency is important with us"* (3,66) and *"HEATHER [Teacher]: just making sure we are using the same strategies with the children…is vitally important"* (5,76-78). Shared values, communication and approaches to inclusion supported the consistency of interactions that the children received (C12-C3[18]).

The ability of pairs to remain on track with their timetable and remain in the classroom consistently was reported to support inclusion positively. Pair one describes a successful day as *"we are in on time, no one is pulled, we are on the timetable"* (1,152)

**Connection and Relationships**

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[18] In this chapter reference to categories in parentheses denotes their link to the pathway or theory being discussed. Where several categories interact, they are presented as follows: (C1-C2). This describes Categories one and two interact with the category being discussed. The purpose of this is to provide richness, rigour and transparency to the study.

Pairs viewed the consistency of adults in the classroom as positively impacting the development of relationships with children: "*LINDA [teacher]: we…know that year-on-year…in Foxglove class the learning support assistants will be the same, there won't be lots people as it's really important that we have that relationship and…continuity*" (2,179) and "*ANNA [TA]: It's just about the connection you get with the children…once you get to know them it all works…better*" (5,42).

In addition to consistency, these relationships were centred on care, nurture and safety. Pairs describe themselves as "caring people towards the children" (3,100) where pair six link constant relationships to the quality of support: "they've got these constant people in their lives and you do think…'you're going to get lost in a big secondary school and not get the support that [you] need'" (6, 416) Pair two describe how they collaborate to create a sense of safety: "*between the both of us, making him feel, actually it's not the end of the world, you are safe*" (2,94). They likened their care and nurture to a parental approach "*we are…all parents, we are all mums, you know, I think we are emotional*" (2,73). Pairs two, five and six described that their relationships with the children developed over time (C7):

> "*HEATHER (Teacher): We've built those relationships, didn't we? ANNA (TA): Yes, exactly. That is what I was going to say. HEATHER: Look at the beginning of the year, compared to now…*" (5,39)

### 4.3.2 Theoretical Category Two: Emotional Interdependence between relationships and work towards inclusion

#### Prioritising and Creating Space for Emotion.

Most pairs (1,2,3,5,6) valued creating space for emotional expression and support in their partnership. Pairs one and two discuss their own emotions in a normalising way: "*we have all had our moments*" (2, 78) and "*Everyone has good days and bad days*" "*you know, everyone is stressed in all jobs*" (1,63, 82) This was reflected in pairs accepting children's emotion: "*SAMANTHA*

*[teacher]: I don't think we insist on them responding a certain way to situations. We let them be upset. We let them…" (6,249).*

The importance of prioritising and making space for emotion in TA-teacher partnerships was mirrored in all pairs approach towards inclusion. All pairs referred to prioritising noticing or attuning to children's emotions where making "*sure that they [the children] are happy and safe at school, that's the number one priority" (5, 26)*. Pair two described that they '*pick up on it quite quickly as us, we are almost like emotional sponges in a way… We knew, by even looking at her body language, how she presented every day we knew...'is this going to be a good one?'" (2,87)*. Pair two applied similar approaches to each other and the children where they *"can tell by looking at their body language, what they need you know. And we actually do that with each other as well" (2,75)*. This illustrates a mirroring of approaches used as a pair and with the children suggesting language and approaches the pair use may permeate their individual practice.

Further, several pairs shared the view that prioritising emotion supported inclusion and learning over all: *"it is really important to just figure out what needs to come first and just ELSA definitely does and then everything else will fall into place" (1,114)*. This informs to how the pair might adapt their work (C9). Teacher three described the impact of unmet emotional needs on the quality of teaching*: "my time was being taken having to deal with situations that arose because their needs weren't being met and in line with that then, the other children weren't getting the input" (3,21)*.

### *Empathy, Understanding and Respect for Children's Emotion.*

Where empathy and support were key aspects of success partnerships, they also permeated interactions with the children: Pair 5 showed empathy by saying '*I understand how you are feeling right now' and trying to unpick exactly what the actual issue is" (72)*.

***Interdependence of Child and Adult Emotion.***

The interdependence between pairs' emotions and their support for the children was noted by several pairs (1,2,4,6) where they adult's response to children and their partner was important:

*"NAOMI: And when she's like that, she's quite prone to an outburst…CAROLINE: You have to be calm" (4,114)*

and

*"if you can't get on it needs to be spoken about. Kind of at the side, so you can kind of leave it at the door, cause the kids aren't silly." (1,196)… if we are not great, then we can't be great with the kids and it's a vicious circle, isn't it?" (1, 87)*

This directly highlights the link between pairs' emotional well-being and the quality of the interactions in their classroom.

### 4.3.3 Theoretical Category Three:  Open and Ongoing Communication: Space for Talking and Listening Respectfully

***Clear Ongoing Conversations.***

All pairs highlighted the importance of clear ongoing communication in the success of their partnerships. Their shared communication was mainly centred on talking, listening, discussion and reflection:

*"it's just this constant dialogue between us about…. STEPHANIE: The children. (2,29)."*

and

*"SAMANTHA [teacher]:  We're constantly speaking… we catch up on what's happened in the days before" (6, 69)*

Communication was used by many pairs to inform changes in their approach (C9) and to develop their practice as a team over time and to create a sense of stability (C10-C7-C1): *"we feedback and*

*have a discussion 'maybe we should try this different approach for this child because they are not*

*getting this'" (3,40)*

### *Creating Space for Communication.*

While all pairs value communication throughout the day, most pairs (1,3,4,5,6) noted the

importance of agreed times or spaces to communicate with each other whether this is protected

time in the morning (1,4,5,6), on WhatsApp (3) or via a shared document (6). Pair five find value

in being: "able to communicate… every single morning… what happened yesterday…what went

well or wrong yesterday" (5, 46-47). This space facilitated reflection on their work and improved

practice over time (C7-C9): "*We normally have meetings in the morning… where we talk about*

*how we can deal with it better*" (5,92)

### *How Pairs Communicate: Clear, Open, Honest, Respectful, Positive.*

In addition to the quantity of communication, their manner of reciprocal communication emerged

was important in their success. Several pairs (2,3,4) noted how the teacher's  clear communication

of hopes and expectations supported the TA's ability 'to get on and do it' (4,201; C4-C9). Pair

three provided a further example: "*It's just that communication where I know what Natasha is*

*doing and I know what Natasha wants from me and vice versa*" (3,36). Here communication

facilitates '*being on the same page'* (C12).

 Some pairs described being open and honest about 'what is going on' and about their thoughts,

feelings or any issues that arise (C2-C3) to allow them to work better:

*"If there's an issue we will say it to each other, do you know? Which kind of knocks down loads of*

*barriers in itself... (1,32).*

Mutually respectful and reciprocal communication underpinned several partnerships (1,2,3). TA three reflected: *"as LSA I don't feel lower than Hari. He makes us feel like we are all on the same level. He listens to my ideas. And I listen to his ideas"* (3,37). TA two added: *"Linda would never speak to like "I'm the teacher" you know, there's no hierarchy"* (2,104) Further pair one referenced directive or possessive approaches from the teacher as ineffective where the teacher 'will be hunting for" (1,230) the TA when they are not on-task. This suggests the manner of communication can construct or deconstruct power or hierarchy in the wider system (C3-C5-C6).

TA respect for the teacher also supported their work: "*It's about discussion, open conversation and then Linda, you will direct, because Linda has so much experience, you've been teaching for a long time"* (2,28). In this example, the TA's respect for the teacher's experience supported her openness to direction and feedback (C3-C5-C10-C12). Similarly, the teachers' reciprocated this openness to TA feedback: "*I'll just say to you afterwards [looks to teacher], 'that was too much, she didn't get that'. So we just have to re-evaluate. NAOMI: I wouldn't keep saying 'plow on, plow on, plow on'"* (4,103). This illustrates how respectful open communication through listening and feedback supports the pairs teamwork in adapting and improving their work over time (C3-C5-C7-C9-C10).

Communication was reciprocal and embedded in the practice of all pairs: "*it's all down to how we communicate…we understand each other's wants and vision for the children. We are all on the same page…So Linda will openly discuss with myself …what she wants…if there's any issues. We all communicate…and it's that openness* " (2,28). This quote implicitly illustrates how the link between communication, being on the same page, and working as a team facilitate them in making consistent and effective adaptations (C1-C3-C9-C10-C12). Communication was also facilitated by the quality of their relationship in some pairs:

> *"conversations being open and having that relationship where we know each other really well"*
> *(2, 103)*

***Explicit and Facilitative Communication with Children.***

Most pairs (1,3,4,5,6) referred to clear explicit communication also permeating their interactions with the children which was described to promote children's understanding, sense of success and promote a sense of predictability. While pairs describe being '*flexible and adaptive*' (C9) in their communication with children according to individual need (*knowing each child;* C8), this includes providing scripts and choice boards to promote children's understanding and communication of their voice/choice (C5). Several pairs recognised communication beyond language where pair five describe a child who '*finds it really hard to express why she's feeling anxious…we know that that's not necessarily the issue, that she doesn't have the language around it*" (66).

Explicit communication allowed pairs to have consistent and clear communication to support children's understanding thus a sense of predictability (C1): "NAOMI [Teacher]: we've got timetable…Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday…CAROLINE [TA]: With pictures…NAOMI: With pictures of who she's got that day so she can cross it off at the end of the day, so she knows then 'ok tomorrow I have…'" (4, 46-48).

Communicating clear expectations to the class supports teaching where staff and children are 'on the same page' (C12). Pair six:*"prepare the whole class for the lesson and go through everything together and then we actually get on to task" (6,25).* Pair six also talked positively about the class as a collective to promote learning and a sense of belonging/identity: "*'we are great' or 'you've done a great job at this'…when they are all focused, we really celebrate it and are kind of like 'wow'*" (6,279; C1-C8).

Several pairs (1,3,4,5) described that they modelled or facilitated open and honest conversations about difference and inclusion in their classrooms. Pair one model difference of opinion to their class: "If she [TA] doesn't agree with me, she will tell me. In front of the kids…she would be like 'actually this is my opinion on' and 'in my experience' "(1,248). This demonstrates an accepting attitude to difference in though of difference through communication (C1). Other pairs use conversation about inclusion to promote acceptance and shared responsibility for inclusion amongst peers:

> *"I will explain to other children, that he is a little bit different, and we have to accept him as he is" (5,106).*

### 4.3.4 Theoretical Category Four: Making It Work - A resilient realistic creative and compensatory response

All pairs referenced '*making it work*' for inclusion in their classrooms. The main way pairs did this was through compensating for their partner by 'tak[ing] over' when one is not available or to play to their strengths to inform who supports different tasks:

> *"ANNA [TA]: if one of us has to like to leave the classroom…or there's a situation that we need to respond to…the other one is going to be there" (5,49).*

> and

> *" LINDA [teacher]: we are very aware of each other's strengths…I know that if the children aren't feeling so well you have this wealth of knowledge about all sorts of things" (2,29).*

Pair five linked this directly to TA knowledge of SEN: *"SAMANTHA [teacher]: I sometimes feel like my SEN training is obviously limited…whereas, I think TAs end up with lots of that knowledge because they work 1:1, like Shelley would find out more about it" (6,389).* This links to experience and development over time through role and training (C7-C6) and may implicitly relate to teacher responsibility for inclusion (C1). Pair two recognise the benefit of their collective experience:

*"between us, we've probably got about 70 years of experience and it is just using each other's experience"* (2,56).

Pairs' compensation can also extended to their emotional capacity (C2): *"That child 'I'm really not able to cope with them today or not able to cope with them in this situation' and then we will actually intervene for one another so that that inclusion carries on"* (2,88).

Pairs also 'make it work' by working creatively and proactively with initiative and resourcefulness: "*We do what we do with what we've got*" (2,122) and "*Natasha really second guesses situations and comes up with solutions before I've even realised there is a problem*" (3, 73). Other teachers described how the TAs are "super proactive" (5,156) and do things "*without [teacher] having to ask*" (2, 60). Pair three echoed this proactivity and resourcefulness where they reference '"grabbing scraps [of time] here and there" to communicate (3,171; C3). '*Making it work*' was facilitated by knowing and trusting each other and recognising each's strengths and contributions. TA two describes that the teacher '*trusts our instincts and trusts us to do it*" (107). Knowing and trusting each other and recognising each other's contributions facilitated pairs in 'making it work' (C4-C5-C7-C11).

Additionally most pairs (1,2,3,5,6) accepted barriers/limitations to form realistic expectations: "as long as we try our best, we can't do everything" (1, 155). Accepting that completion and perfection was not possible was acknowledged by pairs one, two, three and five. Success was defined as *"in the main…you've achieved most of what you wanted to"* (3,144).

Teacher one describes how they used communication to problem-solve unrealistic expectations from SLT of the TA role:

*"SARAH [teacher]: SLT were mad into reading, and 'it had to be done', but we physically couldn't do it, so we had to open our communication and say can we try and check it even three times per week" (154; C3-C5).*

and

*"YVONNE [TA]:I love display boards, and this year I have struggled because…I'm with my 1-1 so I can't just...SARAH: And I can't expect her to, it's not her fault" (1,153).* This was facilitated by empathy/support for each other *(C1-C2).*

Other elements of 'making it work' included preparation, planning and organisation and their ability to balance the needs of the class and individual children by prioritising: *"Shelley goes above and beyond in having extra things together for the children so that they are able to be successful" (6,157)* and *"Natasha being my superhero is still available to do stuff...getting stuff prepped like resources for the classroom" (3,42).* Pair one described how the class needed had to be prioritised after a critical incident: *"we had circle time and Sarah wanted me in there with her and J just listened, she didn't really understand what was going on, but we worked back and forth on that because we are a team"* (245) yet at other times *"displays fall behind'* as the TA's 1:1 child is their priority (157).

By 'making it work' for inclusion, the most skilled or available partner supported the children/child so that the best quality teaching could be provided.

### *4.3.5 Theoretical Category Five: Non-hierarchical Relationships Based on Respect and Equality*

All pairs described their partnerships as non-hierarchical. Pair three described respect in the way they communicate about difficulties: "*having that mutual respect and communication and being able to come to some type of mutual compromise on how to deal with things....comes from communication and that lack of ego…each person's point of view is valid*" (3,203). Links between non-hierarchical approaches, teamwork and shared understanding/agreement were made (C10-C12).

Teachers view of TAs was important across partnerships: "NATASHA [TA]: you can get some people who look down on you 'you're just a TA, just do what I tell you to do', but it's not like that with us" (3,190). Teacher two does not see herself "as having more to offer" (112) than the TA. Some pairs described poor TA-teacher partnerships they had witnessed where the teacher treated the 'TA like a PA [personal assistant]" (1,201), highlighting the importance of valuing each other's contributions and respect in successful partnerships.

Teacher five acknowledges TA contribution in successful inclusion: "*a lot of it is you. I don't want to take the credit away from you*" (156). Teachers affirmed TA input with the children as *"just amazing*" (2,64), '*invaluable'* (3,36) and that she "*goes above and beyond*" (6,156).

Some pairs (1,3,6) demonstrated the teacher's role in promoting TA voice within the interview: "*I can only speak for myself*" .(3,100) and "no, no, no…you go…[to TA]" (6,23). Pair one described that 'it's not just what [teacher] says goes, we are a team and that's it" (1,100). Therefore, equality and respect for the views and contributions of each partner regardless of role supported effective teamwork and thus their work towards inclusion (C10).

This non-hierarchical approach centred on respect, value and equality was mirrored in pairs' view of children with additional needs "*as part of the class*" (4,70) and by ensuring '*each child has the same right to be equal*" *(5,11).* These intentions were linked to practice where they aimed to create '*a fair learning environment…but obviously their needs are also identified and met*" (2,13). This links to being '*flexible and adaptable*' (C9) in line with 'knowing and valuing each child individually (C8). This also linked to everyone "*being in it together*" and teamwork (C1-C10) where "*every single child and adult is working together and feels like they belong*" (6,13).

Most pairs (2,3,4,5,6) highlighted the importance of promoting child 'voice and choice' in working inclusively. Pair five view themselves as "*quite good at giving children choices for things like 'do you need a minute?', 'do you need this?' " (5, 247).* Pairs identified their role in supporting CYP voice by creating opportunities to choose and be heard:

> "*SHELLEY [TA]:we ask them if they want to speak to us, but…they don't have to speak to us*" *(6,252).*

Pair five created "*choice boards because that's just what works for some of our children so they can see the end of the process*" (5,22). Pair two spoke of the importance of supporting a child's participation "*we need to keep her using that big voice in the classroom*" (2, 53). Pairs' ability to respect CYP voice and choice was facilitated by their ability to flexible and adaptable (C8-C9).

### 4.3.6 Theoretical Category Ten: Working as a team rather than against each other' – Collaboration

All pairs referred to working collaboratively where most viewed themselves as a team: "*SARAH [teacher]: It's our third year...YVONNE [TA]: as a team together*" (13) and where later they described working "*back and forth on [a task] because we are a team*" (245).

Being able to collaborate to reach a desired outcome may involve compromise or agreement. Through discussion (C3), pairs agreed to adapt their approach where they worked together to find the right approach over time: *"let's try this for a few weeks and then we are not going to leave it, we are going to revisit and see if it is working, 'do we need to change the next thing?'"* *(3,142)*. Thus their quality of practice improves over time, through communication, collaboration, flexibility and knowing each child (C3-C4-C7-C8-C9-C10).

## 4.4 Pathway Two: Pair's Intrapersonal Response to their Successful Partnership which Supports their Collective and Individual Capacities to Work Inclusively

**Figure 16** *Intrapersonal factors and interactions in response to their successful partnership which supports their collective and individual capacities to work inclusively*
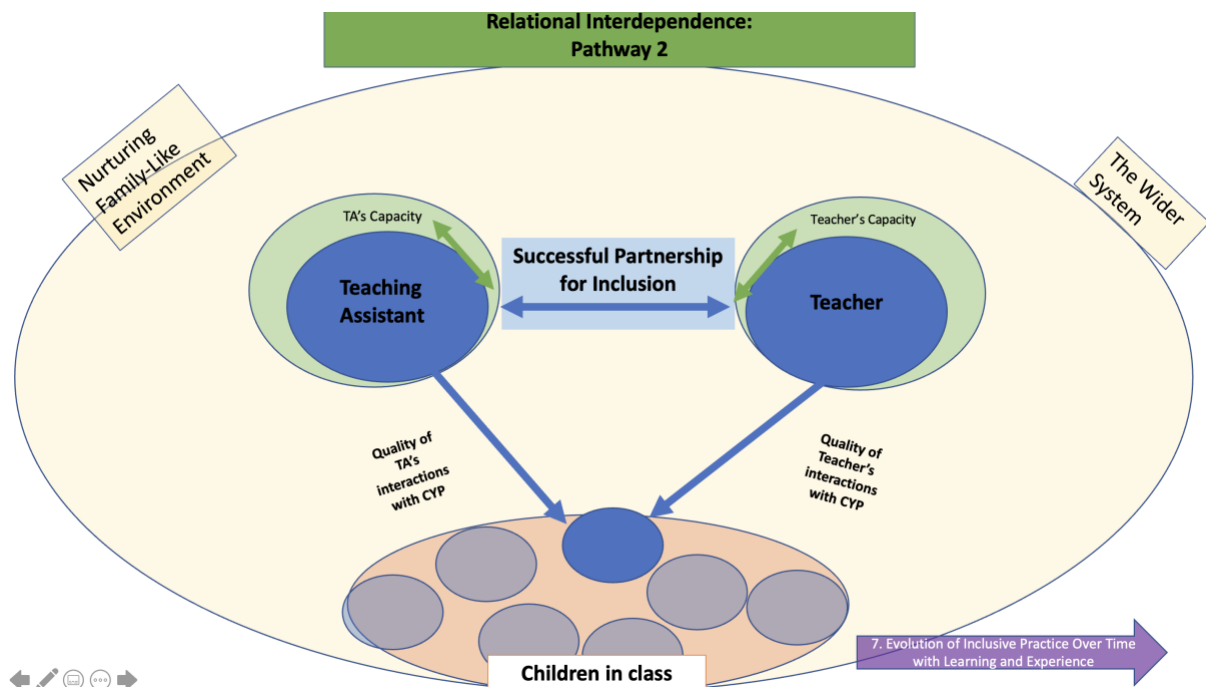
Pathway two serves a supportive and facilitative function for the pathway one. It describes their intrapersonal response to their successful partnership which supports their collective and individual capacity to work inclusively.

### 4.4.1 Theoretical Category One: 'In it together': A Nurturing Family-Like Environment

#### Embedded and Consistent Routines and Timetables.

Embedded and consistent routines and timetables can support the pairs as they "*know what each other are doing at the same time. it's not like we are up in the air saying, 'what are we doing?'*" (1, 89) and where "*there is no timetable that is followed correctly...people are getting stressed*" (1, 95). This suggests lack of consistent timetabling can impact the pairs wellbeing (C2) and ability to work to their agreed plan (C10). Pair two recognise that continuity of TA is 'good for us' (179). Consistently having the TA within the classroom supported teacher six's confidence that they can manage the needs of the class in the contexts of organisational changes e.g. teacher having to cover other duties (C2-C10):

> "*SAMANTHA [teacher]: I know that Shelley is there all of the time and that P [other teacher] is great, so that helps.*" (6, 349)

#### Supporting Each Other: We 'Back Each Other Up'.

Pairs four, five and six offer "*support [to] each other...trying to make sure the other is having an easier day*" (5,124) which helps them to manage challenging moments (C2-C10). This allowed pairs to carry on thus increasing their collective capacity: "*SHELLEY [TA]: with any of the children, if they've had an issue at break time or friendship issues, I will tend to take them out and speak to them outside the class...and then they [teachers] can carry on with the teaching*" (6,220; C4).

***Shared Responsibility for Inclusion*** meant an increased collective capacity for several pairs

(1, 3, 4, 6) where peers and teacher support inclusion in addition to the TA:

*"everyone [class] is praising her and she's really happy" (4,139)*

<div align="center">and</div>

Teachers also demonstrated responsibility for inclusion by taking over (1,2,3,4,6):

*"YVONNE [TA]:I know that she's not just going to be left there staring at the walls, even if her playdough comes out, or its her English that we know she can do on her own…so she's not just left in the corner kind of thing"* (1, 148)

Discussion and involvement of the TA and teacher in inclusion supported better problem-solving, sharing of ideas and an ability to compensate for one another (C1-C3-C4-C10).

### *4.4.2 Theoretical Category Two: Emotional Interdependence Between Relationships and Work Towards Inclusion*

#### *Not Letting Emotional Barriers Last: Persistence and Resilience.*

Most pairs (1,2,3 4,6) described their ability to persist and recover from emotional barriers which linked to their ability to continue/return to work with the children: "*emotion can be a barrier at times, but we don't ever let it become anything more than five minutes" (1,138)*, and *"we just get on with it…You understand and then help when we're not being stressed" (1,66).* This shows emotional resilience is importance and that compensating for one another can support persistence in their work (C1-C4).

Pair three and six respectively showed an ability to persist and cope through challenge or new situations with a positive response: *"I feel like I was thrown in at the deep end with our lovely class"* (8) and "*in a way I will like it [changed role], because I like being in control and in charge*

*of things"* (6, 348). Pair two attributed the '*key thing to getting through when maybe the day is not going as you planned, there's a little bit of laughing about it*" (4; C11).

### *Creating Space for Emotion through Attunement, Empathy and Expression.*

A sense of empathy and understanding for their partner supported their ability to compensate or know what other needed: *"When I came back in, Sarah was folding the stuff and I was like 'Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry... I didn't get...'. She was like 'you've had a busy morning' like it's not 'you should have done that, that's your job' it's 'you've had a busy morning'"* (1, 90).

Most pairs (1, 2, 3, 5, 6) described space to share emotion with each other as helpful: "*SARAH [teacher]: I feel like once you have got that off your chest. YVONNE [TA]: You already feel so much better. SARAH: so much better. And that has helped"* (1,181). Expression of emotion (C3) supported their ability to *'give more when [they] get a slight break" (6,130).* Like identified for children, speaking about emotion first allowed pairs to proceed with their work:

> *"Giv[ing] each other the chance to speak out how we are feeling, even if it's in an angry way...we get over it, and we will say, 'how can we move forward?'. And then we do it together."*
> *(1, 185; C3-C10).*

Attuning to each other's needed and emotions facilitated appropriate support (C1-C4-C11):

> *"We just read between the lines actually – That child 'I'm really not able to cope with them today or not able to cope with them in this situation' and then we...intervene for one another so that that inclusion carries on" (2, 88).*

### *Recognising the Reciprocal Impact of Emotions on Relationships and Work.*

All pairs noted either positive (joy, satisfaction) and negative emotional experiences related to their work which can impact the quality, quantity or continuity of their practice. When TA three supported the morning transition, teacher stress was reduced: "NATASHA [TA]: *then you're calmer on that side, aren't you?* " (165; C1-C2).

However, negative emotion (guilt, pressure, stress) can impact the quality of work and communication: *"I know emotion can get the better of me at times and I can be very difficult to speak to if I have something in my head"* (1, 136).

<div align="center">and</div>

"*SAMANTHA [teacher]: Because, I think that in schools…when you speak to people you realise that everyone has so much going on and that you have to account for all of those things."* (6,229). This suggests that without support and communication, practitioner wellbeing can be impacted (C3-C9).

<div align="center">and</div>

Difficulties balancing need can also elicit feelings of *"guilt[y] because I can't focus on that child…if I sit with her and give her that 1-1, then the rest of them, I can guarantee you they won't be doing what they are meant to"* (1,144).

The work and wider system can "*affect you emotionally"* (5, 132) where "*the pressure of the funding is constant and those children in school who so clearly need help…aren't getting it"* (6,339; C6-C2) and "*I think that we all find it really difficult if…a child…doesn't succeed"* (6,141; C2-C8).

This represents a form of emotional interdependence between pair and children where it "*makes [the teacher's] day in general when they are just smiling and happy because that's what it's all about"* (3, 147).

### *4.4.3 Theoretical Category Three: Open and ongoing communication - Space for talking and Listening Respectfully*

#### *Space for Communication.*

Pairs one, three and five found having space for communication contributed to their capacity for inclusion. Pair one linked this to improved wellbeing (C2) and quality of their relationship (C11): *"There has to be somewhere for people to talk it out, to make sure people are getting on"* (191).

Such communicative spaces valued by pairs one, three, five, and six were linked to their ability to problem-solve and agree improved practice as a team over time (C10-C7-C12): *"ANNA [TA]: We normally have meetings in the morning…where we talk about how we can deal with it better…HEATHER (Teacher): And changing strategies"* (5,91).

Time to communicate can impact pair's ability to support each other's wellbeing and thus the quality of their work: *"you might pass each other in the corridor, and you know that person is stressed but you don't really get a chance to let it out... talk it out…an actual fight will happen and then there's no work done that day because they are not speaking"* (1,184-185; C-6-C2-C8-C9-C11).

#### *How Pairs Communicate.*

Communicating about success and progress can support their capacity to work inclusively:

> *"HARI [teacher]: you get that feedback that they are progressing in their learning…NATASHA [TA]: It's quite often a lunchtime when we meet...and I'll say…'oh wow, we had a really good morning' HARI: Yeh. TA: and you'll say the same…you feel really positive about how it's gone and it's just, we can kind of bounce of each other"* (3, 107-110).

Clear communication supported one TA to provide appropriately adapted teaching and meet teacher's expectation: *"NAOMI: being clear…if [TA] is clear with what I want H [child] to do, then she's able to...CAROLINE: To get on and do it" (4,201; C3-C9).*

### 4.4.4 Theoretical Category Four: 'Making It Work': A Resilient Realistic Creative Compensatory Response

#### Compensating for Each Other: Prioritising and Playing to Strengths.

A pair's ability to play to strengths and compensate was consistently linked to continued and improved interactions with the children on individual and wholeclass levels in pathway one. Swapping allows the most skilled or available practitioner to provide the input:

> *"HEATHER [teacher]: that's not my forte so I completely depend on her for that…ANNA (TA): We all know different things so… we can help each other" (5,82/182; C4-C1-C9)*

This compensation extends to supporting their partner's emotional wellbeing: *"YVONNE [TA]: you know when someone is...not in a bad mood but is just a bit ughhh...SARAH: and nothing solves it....YVONNE: so 'you just give me that' while you sort yourself out" (1,61; C4-C2).*

Pairs noted that their collective capacity for inclusion is greater when they compensated for and collaborated with each other:

> *"it's quite nice to have three heads all on one group of children rather than one. I think that that makes a difference" (6,134).*

Compensating for one another was facilitated by knowing each other (C11) and experience working with one another (C7).

### *Using their own Time and Money.*

Some pairs (2,3,4,6) used their own time and money to support inclusion which likely increased their capacity, through additional resources. Teacher four: "bought a headset, microphone…that plugged into [her] laptop and then [child] would speak into it and it would type…for her which worked" (322). Pairs two and three used their own time to communicate:

> "Early in the morning on WhatsApp [laughs]. NATASHA: [laughs] To start off the day!" (50; C4-C3).

### *We Do the Best We Can: Creativity Initiative Proactivity and Resourcefulness.*

Creativity for resources and solutions was implied to support their practice by *'think[ing] out of the box… Linda [teacher] is very imaginative, very creative, which helps massively' "* (2,122) and "Natasha really second guesses situations and comes up with solutions before I've even realised there is a problem" (3,73).

Pair five showed initiative and proactivity by '*snatch[ing] time*' (149) and not "*view[ing] busyness as an excuse*" (3,52).

Preparation planning and organisation were described to reduce stress/ease of work (C4-C2) where the TA *"takes away the stress of any of the organisation side of things [sighs] so that everything just runs really smoothly…"* (5,80) and "Natasha being my superhero is still available to do stuff…things I need for the classroom…getting stuff prepped like resources" (3,42).

### *4.4.5 Theoretical Category Five: Non-hierarchical Relationships Based on Respect and Equality*

Respect supported effective working (C9-C10): *"I don't see myself as having more to offer than you do…actually we are bouncing off of one and other continuously we actually get so much more out of each other because we have that respect from one another"* (2,112-114).

Valuing and recognising the TA's contributions supported positive emotion in relationships and facilitated their partnerships: *"a lot of it is you... I don't want to take the credit away from you…"* (5,156)

Respect for the teacher also facilitated or hindered teamwork: *"NATASHA: support staff trying to go over the teacher's head. It's not always teamwork in the classroom and actually sometimes it's the support staff that are trying to take over"* (3, 199; C10).

TA one, through describing unsuccessful partnerships described an inability to make her own decisions, or a highly directive partner would impact her wellbeing. Inequality and perhaps a lack of trust were not viewed favourably: *"You've got to be ready to do the photocopying that I need. I wouldn't be able to do that. That would drive me insane. There's no flexibility"* (225-230; C11-C3). Teacher one shared an example of listening to TA voice and engaging in shared decision-making (C5-C3-C10): *"It's not just what I say goes, we are a team". (100).*

Some inequality was described in terms of TA work conditions which does provide additional capacity in terms of time: *"you guys [TAs] come in earlier than you are supposed to and stay on later than you are supposed to, just giving all the time"* (2,78).

### *4.4.6 Theoretical Category Ten: 'Working as a team rather than against each other':*
*Collaboration*

#### ***Teamwork supported Better Intervention.***

TA one described previous experiences without teamwork where she hadn't "*enjoyed it and then that impact[ed] on how I feel, how I come into work*" (1,100; C2).

Working as a team can support their ability to '*help the children*' (1,43) by working towards their '*best interests*' (4,106; C10-C8). Pair one described this: "*you are not having as much of an impact as you would have as if you had that communication open, had a timetable, say during English this is who you are working with*" *(1, 226; C3-C1)*. This teamwork was also supported by being on the same page in having a similar approach (C12-C1): "*where it works, where in other partnerships it doesn't work, we are both very professional in our approach, we work together, it feels like a partnership*" *(3,36)*.

#### ***Inclusion and Collaboration with the Whole Team around the Child.***

Shared CPD was described to support creativity, problem-solving/planning and their ability to work on same page in pairs two and five. This was positioned as helpful where "*you can hear other people's questions and you can hear the answers. We can share…LINDA: then like as a pair having that discussion together, like 'oh this would be good for this child.. we could do this, we could do that*" *(2, 167-170; C4-C12-C3-C8-C9)*.

**4.5 Pathway Three: Children's Responses and Outcomes related to Pairs' Successful Partnerships**

**Figure 17** *The Impact of Pairs' Successful Partnership/Interactions on Children in their Class*
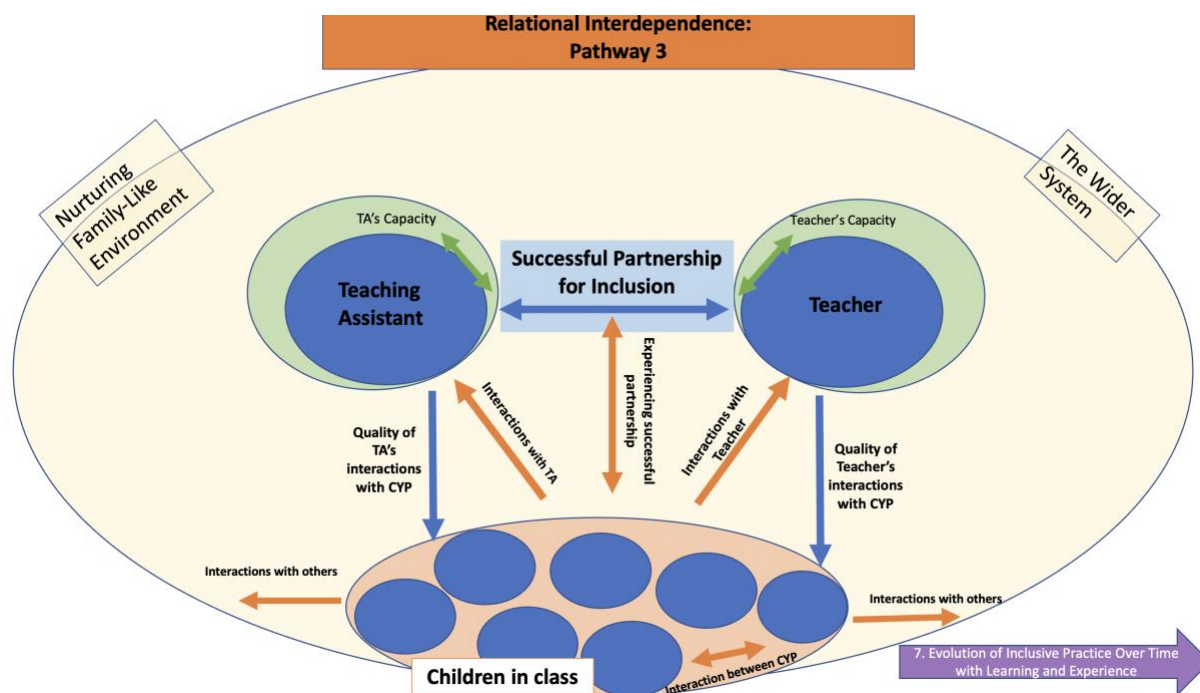


*4.5.1 Theoretical Category One: 'In it together': A Nurturing Family-Like Environment*

> ***Consistent Routines, Boundaries and Relationships supports Children's Behaviour, Motivation, and Feelings of Belonging and Security.***

Experiencing pairs' clear communication, teamwork and 'being on the same page' facilitated consistent routines and relationships alongside firm boundaries. This had a mainly positive impact on learning and engagement which was facilitated for the children by creating a clear understanding of the pairs expectations and a sense of safety, stability and belonging.

> *"NATASHA [TA]: with the child earlier, you brought them out and I overtook and they could see that we were working together and they…did what they were meant to do. HARI: Yeh,*

*we are on the same page, there's no mixed messages, there's no one contradicting each other…there's that consistency" (3, 61-62).*

For several pairs, consistent routines in terms of staffing were described as "*good for the children"* (2, 179) where change can impact their emotion and/or behaviour: "*it really helps that Shelley's in there-that she's the consistent adult –and…that makes a big difference to the children and gives them a sense of stability" (6,69)*

Pairs' (2, 3, 4, 5, 6) focus on developing relationships and connection with the children over time as supportive of the children's ability to communicate and express their emotions (C1-C7-C8-C4):

> *"SHELLEY [TA]:He would have just sat there for ten minutes and not spoke to me at all, and I wouldn't have had any idea what was wrong with him before, but now he is able to tell me." (6,208; C1-C3-C8-C2)*

### Being 'In It Together' in a Family-like Environment.

Pairs' sense of care and nurture was also reflected in the children: *"we've got children with specific needs…that everybody cares for them" (2,26)*. Where pairs model and promote a shared responsibility for inclusion and promote accepting attitudes, a sense of class identity and responsibility this meant children offered peer scaffolding/support: *"If there's teams, they will always pick 'H'… They will say, I want to be with H  or say 'come here' " (4,81)*. This could suggest the pairs' approach shapes or informs how children construct the concept of difference influencing their interactions with peers. Peer support and acceptance developed over time: *"some of the girls, they will go out of their way to help her. They've been together  two years now…so they are well used to her" (4, 81; C7)*.

'Being together' and peer scaffolding were linked to increased feelings of belonging: *"By having the class together no matter what difficulties children might have …they feel like they are" (6,13)*.

Pair four describe how a child's being part of a class activity supported individual learning and progress: "*It was very loud. But she worked through it because… CAROLINE: She didn't want to miss out.*" (4,151).

Open discussion about inclusion with the class, supported curiosity and potentially openness to difference: *"Like last year, we had a family, they actually came in to do circle time and they were talking about autism and what it is and allowing the children to ask those questions without any fear…(5,104; C3).*Pair one noted barriers to participation and inclusion where that a child is '*included in but she is on her own curriculum, so obviously there might be issues with that"* (1,23; C8-C9-C1). This highlights the tension between balancing academic and social aspects of inclusion.

Several pairs (2, 3, 6) noted the benefits of children seeing the pair 'in it together'. Pair six describe how modelling interaction influences the children: *"I think that they can see the interactions between the three of us [two class teachers and TA] are positive and professional but also friendly and I think that that makes them feels that they can speak to any of us and that we are all there for them" (6,119; C1-C3)* and *"the children seeing that consistency is important with us" (3,66).*

### 4.5.2 Theoretical Category Two: Emotional Interdependence Between Relationships and Work Towards Inclusion

All pairs found prioritising, accepting and tolerating emotion had positive effects on children. "*Giving them the space*" for emotion was important for emotional recognition and regulation (6, 260). Teacher four described how she implemented strategies from TA's Zones of Regulation intervention (consistency and shared responsibility) which supported the child's ability to apply and use these skills successfully: *"She sat there screaming saying she's sad. I said 'right what can*

*we do?' and she said 'go and have a drink of water'…We went in. She…a drink of water and calmed down…sat there for a few minutes by herself and…said ' I'm ready to go outside'. And that for me was a massive…CAROLINE: She'd worked out her strategy" (4, 144-145).*

Prioritising emotion was part of holding a broader definition for inclusion (C12-C7). Pair three outlined how managing emotion and behaviour first supports learning and progress over time: "*originally, I was brought into your class for behaviour management and now it's pretty much completely switched around…where I'm not really controlling the behaviour anymore…now it's about teaching the children and helping them to progress in their learning"* (3, 78; C8-C7).

Further, some of the pairs' adaptations can impact CYP enjoyment of school: "*she's been singing and her mum has said that she never sings. It's just lovely seeing a change in some of these children that this room has made a big difference"* (3,147; C9-C2).

Some pairs describe that the pair need to maintain a sense of calm in the environment and in themselves to support wellbeing and learning: *"it definitely helps them focus, it probably helps them to feel safe because it's not a chaotic situation and some of them have got enough chaos going on outside of school that that environment is very calming"* (6,269).

Pair four outlined how they need to remain calm to adapt their communication appropriately so that the child can recover: "*NAOMI: she's quite prone to an outburst…DEARBHLA: And you have to adapt to that?...CAROLINE: You have to be calm. NAOMI: It's not over quickly*." (4, 111-117; C2-C9-C3-C8)

This suggests an interdependence between pairs and children's emotions which was corroborated by pair one: "*YVONNE: If we're happy, then they're happy, aren't they?"* (1,60).

The pair describe the need to resolve their own issues so impact on children is minimised: *"if you…have an issue it needs to be spoken about. Kind of at the side…cause the kids aren't silly" (1,196)*. Pair 6 describes how they manage emotional interdependence between peers by: *"SHELLEY [TA]: the majority of them being calm rubs off on the others…where if they start being a bit hyped up, the rest of them join in" (6,229)*.

### 4.5.3 Theoretical Category Three: Open  and Ongoing Communication: Space for Talking and Listening Respectfully

***Explicit Communication*** with children supports understanding, the formation of consistent expectations and emotional regulation: "she didn't know who she was going to be with so we've got a timetable now that's Monday Tuesday Wednesday…"(4, 46; C3-C8-C1-C2). Showing the children through *"talking constantly"* helps them *"to see that we are on the same side"* (3,56; C12-C2).

***Communication and Teamwork.***

All pairs engaged in communication about adaptations in line with knowing each child and taking a consistent and agreed approach to support successful inclusion and learning (C9-C8-C12-C1-C10). Pair two supported the success of a child with selective mutism through adapting their approach over time by relying on communication (C9, C7): *"we'd discuss maybe her having one friend in, where they've got their own space for ten minutes. Even just ten minutes. We build it up gradually didn't we?" (52)*.

***Whole-class Conversations.***

As previously outlined, whole-class conversation about inclusion supported shared responsibility and positive attitudes for inclusion between pairs and peers and a sense of belonging for children with additional needs (C3-C1). Pair five outlined how honest yet positive and protected communication supported class understanding where some found individualised adaptations "a

little bit confusing…It's trying to be honest but make sure that the rest of the class feel really appreciated and valued…'why is X doing that and not me?' " (5,109-112).

***Targeted Intervention for Communication*** was described to benefit children emotionally, academically and socially: *"their listening and communication will just get better, so in the playground they are happy and they are coming in from break and lunchtime so then we are not having problems that are then erupting in the classroom"* (1,123; C9-C2).

### 4.5.4 Theoretical Category Four: 'Making It Work' - A Resilient Realistic Creative Compensatory Response

Pairs' ability to swap tasks according to strength or to compensate in terms of their availability or capacity was linked to CYP receiving better input and therefore engagement:

> *"CAROLINE: If I'm saying it, she [child] won't listen to me, but then [NAOMI] will come in and [snaps fingers] and ...she got up and sat down"* (4, 125; C4-C1-C8)

> and *"there are one or two children that have not wanted to do their work with me, I will just tell the teacher...'Shall we just swap?'...And then they will do it with her"* (5,52; C4-C10-C1-C8).

Some pairs' ability to acknowledge challenge or the limits of their capacity for inclusion supported change so that better progress and inclusion could be achieved: *"trying to be flexible in that classroom with 30 children…the work was suffering and the learning was suffering"* (3,87). This pair then created a partially resourced additional room.

Some pairs described their preparation and organisation as having positive impact: *"HEATHER [Teacher]: I think it's worked well with a child our class who currently has an EHCP and knowing if…when she's feeling dysregulated…that we have kind of a pathway"* (5,58; C4-C9-C2).

Pair three linked successful inclusion to order, enjoyment and progress in learning and their enjoyment: *"there has been a little bit of order, a little bit of success in terms of their learning, you can kind of can see in their faces first that they are enjoying their learning and secondly, you get that feedback that they are progressing (107; C4-C3-C8)."*

### 4.5.5 Theoretical Category Five: Non-hierarchical Relationships Based on Respect and Equality

Equity and equality within pairs was mirrored in their joint approach in ensuring children *"can access a fair... learning environment"* (2,13) and *"every single child and adult is working together and feels like they belong and no matter what difficulties children might have…we put everything in place to give them that sense of they can do it and they are part of it"* (6, 13; C5-C9-C8-C1).

Several pairs noted how children seeing how they interact impacted how the children listen, engage with and speak with the TA: *"Say if children noticed…and they saw TAs as lessor, they won't listen to them or struggle with behaviour management"* (1, 221-122) or *"struggle[d] with behaviour management"* (1,222; C5-C3-C2). This was extended to CYP witnessing parent disrespect for TA on the CYP's respect again reinforcing the transfer of meaning between child and adult interactions. Pair six highlighted how their language facilitated/hindered respect: *"SHELLEY [TA]: they…treat us all the same. It's not 'I'm a teacher, that's a teaching assistant', it's 'go and find a grown-up'"* (6,328).

The teacher's attitude to hierarchy may influence this process: "*I don't like it if in your classroom, children view every adult differently or if they think there's a hierarchy*" (6,336). Examples of modelling respect for TAs this extended to including TA voice in the classroom:

"*Yvonne feels like she has a voice in the classroom. If she doesn't agree with me, she will tell me…in front of the kids*" (1,248).

Promoting the voice and choice of children with additional needs also had positive impact. Pair four describe how they provided choice and participation at an individualised level to an autistic child which impacted her enjoyment: "*NAOMI: She had the ear defenders on for a while and then took them off and she was head banging [laughs]*" (4,160). (C5-C1-C9-C8). Pair six provide emotional support to children but allow them the choice to express concerns while respecting their boundaries*: "we ask them if they want to speak to us, but that they don't have to speak to us…*" (6,252).

## 4.6 Pathway Four: Pairs Interaction with and response to the Wider System

**Figure 18** *Pairs' Interaction with and Response to the Wider System*
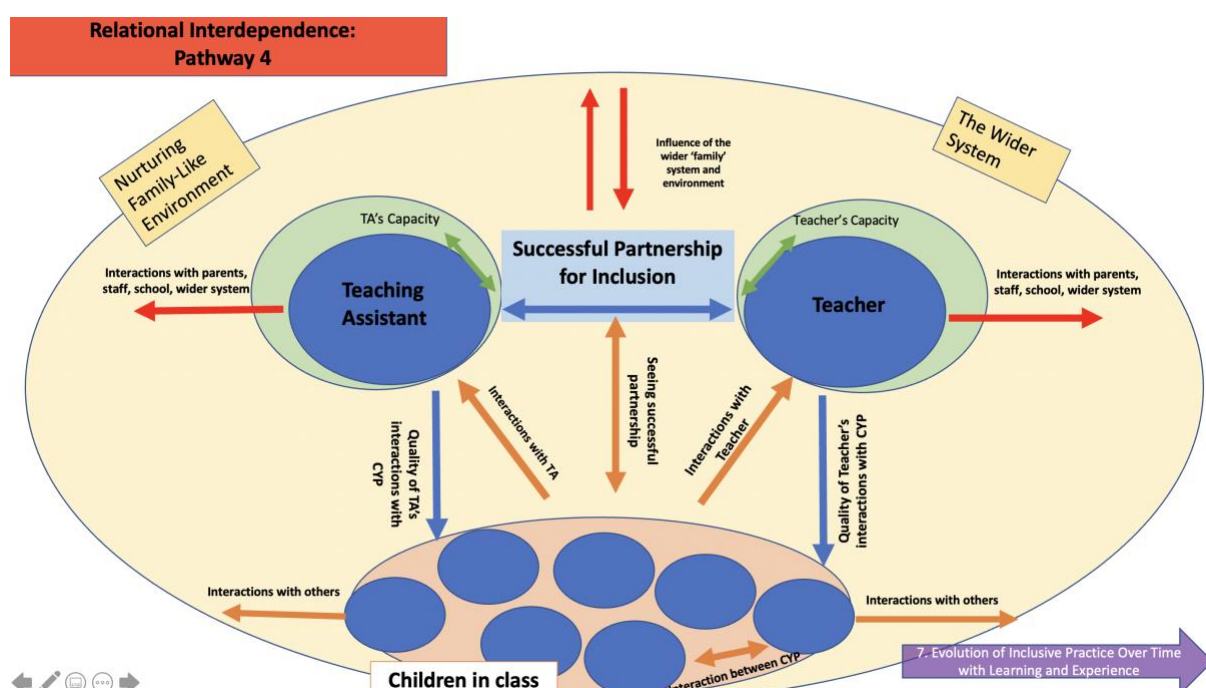
Category six emerged to represent factors outside of the classroom. However, as analysis progressed, systemic factors and pairs' interactions with them were found to embed all categories to some extent and therefore it was established as a fourth pathway.

### 4.6.1 Theoretical Category One: 'In it together': A Nurturing Family-Like Environment

Wider staffing and resources were found to impact pairs' successful inclusion in their classrooms:

> "*SAMANTHA [teacher]: I am going to be out of class more and…that's going to have an impact and that's not a choice…I would be making but I don't know how else things are going to work –for the sake of the school and the children in…the other classrooms…It's to do with people going on maternity leave*" (6, 344-348; C6-C1-C4).

Decisions from SLT and needs of the wider system can impact inclusion:

> "*a couple of years ago, a decision was made for you [looks to Stephanie]…to only be in Foxglove class in the mornings, and to be one-to-one with somebody else in the afternoons, and I went and said, actually this is not working, that's not good for inclusion*"(2, 179; C6-C1).

Notably, this pair amongst others were able to express their needs to SLT, influencing changes in the wider system:

> "*SARAH [teacher] I find at times, there are lots of different TAs, and some TAs do more than others, so some TAs are pulled and stuff, so having that communication with SLT as well and making sure that there's fairness, do you know?*" (1,93)

Pairs ability to communicate and exert influence on SLT decisions seemed to be linked with experience and power held in role (C7-C5), where Linda had over 30 years of experience and Sarah held a position on SLT.

Several pairs acknowledged system stressors, yet the need for fairness in SLT decisions: *"there's a massive issue with teachers and TAs in terms of staffing…and things have to be done, I get it, but*

*I just don't feel like it can be the same TA over and over"* (1,129; C6-C5-C1-C8). The resultant lack of consistency was described to impact their work: "*It's really difficult when people are just being pulled and kind of just expecting you to get on with it and you're just like...ok...that's a bit hard"* (1,127; C6-C4-C10-C9-C8).

Pairings and timetabling can be disrupted due to unexpected situations or other roles which challenged some pairs: "*ANNA (TA): It can be tricker for me [laughs]. HEATHER (Teacher): And it's hard for me when you go out at eleven thirty for break, because then the system is not there"* (5,141; C6-C10-C1).

### Kind and Caring School Ethos.

All pairs described support from the wider school ethos and SLT as facilitative of their success: *"I feel that our head teacher has been very supportive, our deputy head has, our SENCo" (3,124; C6-C1).* A kind and approachable SLT were described to facilitate communication and feelings of cohesion rather than power differences. Pair four *"can go to the office, the door is always open where [they] are not separate from SLT" (279; C1-C5-C3).* The impact of an inclusive school ethos was described*: "it's a small school…we have to support each other. It's a family.... family-like environment" (2, 57).* This ethos impacted the children: *"that is instilled in the children…look at our values…look out for each other, be kind to each other and we don't really have issues such as bullying at this school" (2,22; C6-C1-C2).*

### Shared Responsibility for Inclusion in Wider School.

Consistent and supportive ethos in the wider system (C6) may also represent a shared responsibility for inclusion where it has '*been driven from the top down and…on the front of everyone's mind,*

*it's not just being forgotten and left…it's been sort of a baptism of fire this year, but I feel…we've had support throughout the school"* (3, 127; C1-C10-C4).

### 4.6.2 Theoretical Category Two: 'In it together': Emotional Interdependence Between Relationships and Work Towards Inclusion

Several pairs described the impact of external factors on their emotions: *"We'd be angry because of something completely outside of the classroom, that Yvonne might be pulled, or I might have to do X, Y and Z" (1,179).* An increasing scarcity of resources added stress: *"when I started teaching…I had three 1:1 TAs in my classroom and now…that class has one TA to those three children and that puts pressure on everyone, and no-one is paid enough. TAs aren't paid enough and that really is frustrating"* (6,339; C7-C6-C2). Other systemic factors such as the education system and the Covid-19 pandemic were named as having "*a massive effect on everyone*" (2,78; C6-C2).

Further, children's emotions were described to impact actors in the wider system. This highlights the role of emotional interdependence within and between relationships: "*as a collective, if the children are happy, the parents are happy"* (6,386; C2-C6).

### 4.6.3 Theoretical Category Three: Open Ongoing Communication - Space for talking and Listening Respectfully

#### *Time Limits Communication.*

Resources in the system e.g. limited time impacted space to communicate and resolve issues:

*"I would love if there were a couple of points throughout the week where we have a little bit of time…without having to worry about anything else where we can have a catch-up and we can decide what's going well…But the reality is that we don't have that time and it's very difficult when we are…stretched to the limit"* (3, 171).

### Communication with the Team of Adults Around the Child: Staff, Parents, External Professionals.

Pairs one, two, four, five and six described that they have *"conversations with the parents to make sure everybody is...included"* (2, 33). Communication across the school system was also important: *"HEATHER [teacher]: I know that the communication is going back and forth between what's said in SLT and what's said in TA meetings"* (5,164) and *"it all joins up like a chain. Us saying this...parents doing it at home, really monitoring it at home via a diary and the professionals"* (2,153; C3-C12-C10-C1-C9-C8).

Some pairs noted the importance of being able to advocate for their class: *"I ended up being in the classroom and having an outside area and I just went to the head and said ' I can't do that'...So now it doesn't happen"* (2,99; C3-C6-C4-C1).

Some pairs described the need from space and time facilitated by the wider school system or professionals during challenging times: *"I think there has to be a mediator role. There has to be somewhere for people to talk it out, to make sure people are getting on. That there's a relationship with the kids. That there's no issues there"* (1,191; C6-C10-C1).

*4.6.4 Theoretical Category Four: 'Making It Work': A Resilient Realistic Creative Compensatory Response*

Several pairs (1, 2, 3, 6) named having to 'fight' for inclusion services and protect resources. Teacher three described that in their school: "'*We all fight for Natasha' where most people in the school would say that Natasha is an ideal partner'* "(3, 34; C4-C6). Pair one describe an unsuccessful partnership, where two teachers share a TA: *"How's that working? One teacher is more authoritative, and they feel like they should have the TA all the time whereas the partner [teacher] is very quiet and never has her. So that will have a massive impact on the learning of students in both classrooms"* (1,227).

Pair six's fight for resources extended to taking initiative to access external resources: *"SAMANTHA [teacher]: you can ask for it [training] …There's a lot of the [local offer[19]] stuff that people can on to if needed. You need to go and ask for i …but it's there. DEARBHLA: A bit of initiative maybe? SAMANTHA [teacher]: Mmmm, yeah."* (6,395)

Pair two described their persistence related to barriers to accessing to external resources: *"we just having to keep flag up, flag up, flag up and that's difficult"* (2,127; C4-C6-C1). The fight for resources was facilitated by the teacher's position in the school (1, 2,6), approachability of SLT (3,4) and a persistent and assertive approach (1, 2, 6).

Pairs one, two, and three laughed and made jokes about limited hope for additional resources which may link to resilience and persistence through challenge and it being 'more than just work': *"HARI: Oh I could ask for the world really [laughs]"* (3,245).

### *Compensation from the Wider School.*

Some pairs (2, 3, 4) found that the wider school would compensate for the pair through challenge: *"Our head is really good with that. She will come in very very occasionally…and say 'go and have five minutes"* (2,89; C6-C1-C4).

### *Acknowledging the Limitations on Inclusion due to External Factors Leading to Realistic Expectations.*

The wider system limits access to resources for development and teamwork: *"I feel like sometimes...it [shared CPD] would be useful for you guys, but obviously I know this is not possible"* (5, 171; C6-C7-C10). However, this leads to a sense of redundancy about external support in several pairs (2, 3, 4) and reliance on current resources: *"LINDA [teacher]:it would be lovely to have more input from other professionals, but it feels like there is no point in saying that, so it's just get on with it" (2, 137).* Pair three describe how their ideal for inclusion has not been possible this year due to: *"a lot of needs in the year one classroom"* (3,20).

### *Creativity and Resourcefulness* was limited by funding in pair one in obtaining resources: "*DEARBHLA: You might collectively recognise a resource that could support inclusion, but then... YVONNE: you have to see if you can financially get it* "(1,131; C6-C9).

Clear school structures and teamwork supported pair six: "*I think in terms of the whole system working better, that in turn does help us, because everybody has got it." (6,293).* This highlights the importance of structure across layers of the system (C1-C6).

### 4.6.5 Theoretical Category Five: Non-hierarchical Relationships based on Respect and Equality

All pairs believe that hierarchical relationships are a barrier to inclusion. Some unconscious, yet structural and practical separation was acknowledged yet disliked (1,5,6): "*ANNA (TA): on INSET days, we do TA stuff, and you do teacher stuff…which is normal*" (5, 176) and "*you know the Christmas dinner where you have it separate to us, I hate that*" (1, 208).

Pair six reflected how school structures may impact this separation: "I don't think it's a conscious thing, but they are just kind of separated…SAMANTHA [teacher]:…I think that you are right that the TAs operate in a team training-wise…you do deal with different things–you guys are doing lunch duties every day, we are not" (6, 366; C6-C1-C5).

Other pairs demonstrated and spoke of the teacher's role in advocating for the TA's voice within the wider school: "*YVONNE: Obviously Sarah is on SLT, and she does the timetables and she supported my inclusion with the ELSA role*" (1, 118). Decreasing separation between TAs and teachers and the wider system over time (C7) has been linked to increased flexibility, teamwork and communication: "*there used to be more [separation] however now…it's a lot more flexible*" (4, 282; C7-C9-C5) and "*I've always found the Senior Leadership, you can go and talk to them, and they are one of us*" (4, 276).

Implicit references to power related to experience and role were made. Teacher one felt able to advocate for their class' needs and challenge SLT decisions: "*I'm lucky enough to be on SLT and try to do something to fix it if I can. I make sure her voice is listened to and I do my best to fix whatever is wrong*" (1, 189). This suggests the power held by the pair based on role and experience may influence SLT decisions about development and resources (C5-C6-C7-C9).

### *Impact of Structure on Respect for TAs.*

The way TAs were respected and viewed may be perpetuated by the wider system: *"Well structure is going to have an impact on everything as in society. As much as you don't want it to it can unfortunately"* (1, 225; C6-C5). This impacts children and parents' respect and so on: *"the children don't respect them [TAs] the same way they do the teacher and that can be a massive barrier and even parents as well, I've seen it where, they feel like they can talk down to TAs"* (1, 221).

### *4.6.6 Theoretical Category Six: The Wider System: Factors Outside of the classroom Staffing Impacts Inclusive Practice*

Staffing can impact pairs work towards inclusion where limits on time or the demands of other roles mean they are not together in the classroom limiting their ability to communicate, plan, reflect or execute on their work: *"There aren't periods where the two of us can just be released"* (3, 173) and *"YVONNE [TA]: sometimes J [child with Down Syndrome] will come with me, but then it doesn't work because the phones are ringing and she has to stay in the classroom and if we are not prepared for that, we haven't got stuff in place for that, it impacts on her"* (1, 130).

Teacher five described how the TA not being in the classroom due to other roles can limit the quality of their work and their ability to follow systems (teamwork, consistency): *"HEATHER (Teacher): it's hard for me when you go out at eleven thirty for break, because then the system is not there"* (5, 140). An exception emerged where teacher four felt her role as Key Stage 1 phase leader did not negatively impact their work in the classroom, however the TA described her first aid role: *"I would look after someone with a cut knee and H was…disappeared…Then I was running around looking for her"* (4, 225).

### *Scarcity of Money, Time, Resources and Services: 'Cut to the Bone'*

More broadly, scarcity of resources, funding and services is a "*major problem*" (6, 339) which can impact pairs directly: "*the reality is that we don't have that time and it's very difficult when we are so stretched to the limit*" (3, 171; C6-C3). More time would support their communication, wellbeing and teamwork (C3-C2-C10).

### *Leadership: Decisions and impact*

Decisions from SLT can impact pairs' work in many ways including CPD, staffing, timetabling, support, creating clear structures and choosing compatible TA-teacher pairs. Many pairs shared "*positive things*" (4,269) about their SLTs suggesting they can facilitate pairs' success: "*I think they think about that when they put people together*" (6, 141; C11).

Pair six describe clear systems being created by SLT related to additional needs: *"clear structures with ISP meetings with targets and monitoring. I think those structures help because it's a way of everyone knowing where they are at…I think in terms of the whole system working better"* (6, 293).

SLT's investment in CPD has supported TA development: "*YVONNE [TA]: the more I learn about that the more children pop up and you think that…person needs this…"(*1, 259) and "*I think CPD is a big thing. Training at this school is really good and there's a lot of it. So everyone gets a lot of education, don't they?"* (5, 158).

### *Access to Timely and Sufficient Professional Involvement.*

Several pairs (2,3,4,5,6) felt that ongoing and "*earlier intervention with everything*" from external professionals (6, 407) is needed where "*lots of services have been cut to the bone*" (2, 145; C7-C6-C1). Pair six described that *"more and more…it's really really difficult to get help for the children who desperately need help"* (2, 123; C7-C6-C1-C9-C8). Pairs would prefer "*face-to-face time over*

*lists of strategies"* (5, 206). No pairs had experiences working with external professionals related to their relationship or wellbeing, where most focused on supporting children.

All pairs were open to developing their skills over time and to receiving professional advice (C7). Pair three described support from the Inclusion Advisory Service: "*HARI: We've had support…we've had quite a lot of support externally which has been useful".* When asked about the role of external professionals, several pairs seemed unsure about how EPs could support their partnership (1,3,4) : "*CAROLINE: I don't think…They are here…often enough…then she's not getting the help that she needs to achieve her goals, to be the best"* (4, 291-296; C6-C9-C8).

### Influence of Wider Education System and Society

All pairs recognised the influence of the wider education system on their practice:

*"we understand that there are greater people out there that make us do stuff that doesn't necessarily fit in with what we were planning on doing" (1, 262)*. Further, lack of early and ongoing intervention from external professionals was linked to limited support and child progress: *"STEPHANIE [TA]: it's nearly a year into their education, before it's looked at as yes, this is a potential need"* (2, 138).

Teacher three queried whether the current education system benefits all children: *"I am happy if the children are in the best place for them and they are getting the best thing for them…I am not sure…that is always prioritised"* (3, 180; C7-C9-C8). He described how the current system may create barriers for learning where a high level of need in the class meant wellbeing and learning suffered as their capacity to include was limited by time and resources.

Social issues and the impact of the pandemic were recognised: "*the children who have been affected by the pandemic, like the Year 3s now, there might be gaps in their learning*" (2, 136; C6-C8). Pair four and six questioned teacher training and how equipped she felt to support inclusion: "*when I was training to be a teacher, you get the standard what it [inclusion] should look like in a class*" (4, 85) and "*I sometimes feel like my SEN training is obviously limited…like we've got children who are dyslexic or thinking about it in terms of a need, I don't think that I've got enough knowledge…Whereas, I think TAs end up with lots of that knowledge because they work 1:1*" (6,389).

Pair two described how services from private professionals provided more appropriate input by being more individualised and ongoing: "*private Ed Psych and private OTs and the SALTs they were very good as they would pass on so many tools and resources to me. You know, 'you've got to do this…'* (161; C6-C1-C5). Pair four described how short-term nature of EP work affected its impact and relevance: "*I've seen a report…it said…she speaks in like three words…and I remember thinking, 'No', she's a very good reader, she speaks in sentences…CAROLINE: They didn't know her*" (4, 297).

### 4.6.6 Theoretical Category Ten: 'Working as a team rather than against each other': Collaboration

Inclusion was supported by collaborative approaches to understanding and decision-making which involved the whole team around the child. This included the pair, SLT, parents and external professionals and was centred on opportunities to communicate and agree on the best approach so that a consistent approach could be taken (C10-C6-C1-C3-C9-C8). Such teamwork was underpinned by communication and collaboration "*if everyone is involved , you all know what's going to be best for that child and what steps we need to take*" (4, 328) and "*instead of at home*

*and at school being two different things…we were joining those and actually being much more effective*" (2, 147).

The importance of teacher and TA being included in decisions and communication was highlighted by pairs two and five: "*you often have someone who is doing something day-to-day and actually if you don't know [looks to TA] and things are passed from one person to another…finally to you, you don't necessarily get it*." (2, 162). Collaboration with external professionals was viewed as more favourable than direction by pair three: *"I'm not sure [about] whether someone telling us…NATASHA: how to work together"* (3, 208)

**4.7 Summary of Theoretical Pathways in the Grounded Theory**

The description of the pathways above position the success and quality of the TA-teacher partnership in providing quality interactions (P1). Further, aspects of their interpersonal and systemic context can facilitate or hinder their capacity for inclusion (P2). Pathway three positions successful TA-teacher partnerships as supportive of inclusion and positive impacts on children with additional needs and the whole class (P3). Some interpersonal patterns observed in the partnerships, like expressing emotion was mirrored in children's behaviour. Further, the influence of and pairs interaction with the wider system affected their ability to work inclusively (P4).

# 5. SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

## 5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will outline the systematic search and review of the literature relevant to the proposed theory and central theoretical concept – "relational interdependence" within TA-teacher pairs and with the children in supporting inclusion.

## 5.2 Linking the Emergent Theory with Existing Empirical Literature and Theoretical Frameworks

In line with constructivist grounded theory, the researcher "took advantage of [their] inexperience by delaying a literature review and instead letting [their] insights emerge from [the] data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 24; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The review is intended to facilitate explicit and compelling connections between previous studies and the emergent theory to contextualise, substantiate, challenge and perhaps extend the proposed theory.

## 5.3 Rationale for the Approach to a Grounded Theory Literature Review

In alignment with Creswell and Creswell's (2017) acknowledgement, the literature review is conducted and presented in a way that is congruent with the method's assumptions, meaning it recognises the 'reciprocal relationship between theory and data'. The review, therefore, adopts a more discursive style to offer integration and validation of the emergent theory.

The author used Deering and William's (2023) framework for grounded theory literature reviews, which centres on three functional phases: preliminary, integrative and validation. I deemed the *preliminary* phase of the literary review to have been conducted in October 2022 when choosing a topic to explore and writing the research protocol and ethics application. This search identified the topic as an 'underexplored area of social concern' (p.3) and informed the

introductory chapter. At this point, the papers were reviewed unsystematically, with limited attention to existing theoretical concepts and more focus on key findings.

Some grounded theorists engage in reading to develop theoretical sensitivity as an *integrative* phase of literary review. While I did not engage in reading during the analysis and data collection process, I acknowledged preconceived ideas and knowledge through my Educational Psychology practice and associated reading and study. This was recorded through memo-writing to develop reflexivity and defend how this theory was developed (Charmaz, 2014; Martin, 2006). The discursive style of the literature review intends to offer further integration between theory and literature.

The systematic literature review outlined in this chapter aligns with the *validation* phase of grounded theory, where it aims to contextualise the theory within the research field. The selected articles are reviewed according to four subheadings, which correspond to the four emergent theoretical pathways identified in Chapter 3 (Findings). A critical appraisal of the strengths and limitations of reviewed articles was made using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme checklists (CASP, 2018; See Appendix U for more details). An evaluation of key points of similarity and difference between the emergent theory and reviewed literature extends into the discussion.

In sum, the review aims to position the proposed theory relative to the current empirical base, grounding it within current educational discourse to facilitate discussion in Chapter 5 related to its contributions to Educational Psychology and implications for practice (Dey, 2007; Charmaz, 2000).

**5.4 Scope of the Literature Review**

Due to the multiple and complex findings outlined in chapter three and the dearth of studies on successful collaboration for inclusion from joint TA-teacher perspectives, the researcher chose to base the literature on a broader guiding question: "*what is known about TAs' and teachers' perspectives on their work in supporting inclusive education in mainstream primary schools*?". This decision was intended to find relevant literature that supports and challenges the emergent theory relevant to the literary landscape.

The scope of the search was initially limited to those based in the UK context due to specific or unique cultural and structural factors of educational systems and roles. However, due to the small number of papers returned (n =4) and the fact none focused on joint TA-teacher perspectives, all geography automated filters were removed from database searches to yield a broader range of research. After search two, the researcher conducted hand searches of reference lists of three newly included UK studies and screened reference lists of four international studies which met all inclusion criteria but geographical location. While these international studies were not included in the review, they were an essential part of accessing further UK literature (Appendix V).

**5.5 Search Strategy**

EBSCO (a selection of databases) was used to search educational and psychological academic journals for relevant literature on 25.03.24. Initially, the search terms were informed by the guiding question only (See Appendix Y). However, following pilot searches which yielded a high number of unrelated studies (n=1,770), e.g. student-teacher relationships or children's perspectives only, the search terms were edited to capture the range of terminology used in educator practice and to be more specific to the emergent theory. For example:

- *'interdependence',' reciprocal', and 'mutual'; related to the central theoretical concept*

- *'collaboration', 'team' 'interpersonal' 'partnership'; related to pathway one.*

- *'Capacity' and 'system', related to pathways two and four, were not deemed supportive of relevant literature during pilot searches and, therefore, were not added to the final search terms.*

The final search terms are presented in Table 11.

**Table 11** *Search Terms*

| Search Terms | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Inclusion**[20] | Teaching Assistant* | Teacher* | Interdepend* |
| | Learning support* | | Reciprocal |
| | Support staff | | 'Joint work*'[21] |
| | Aide* | | Mutual |
| | Paraprofessional* | | Collaboration |
| | Special needs assistant* | | Partnership |
| | | | Collabor* |
| | | | Relation* |
| | | | Interpersonal |
| | | | Team* |
| | | | 'working together' |

The review aimed to retrieve papers that focused on the following:

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[20] Double asterisks (**) allow searching for all forms of a word. For example, typing in *"inclusion**"* will return all instances of *include*, *inclusive*, *inclusivity*, etc.

[21] Single asterisks (*) serves to search for words with a common pre-/suf-fix. For example, work* will return all instances of worked, working, worker.

- Joint work or the relationship of teachers and TAs in inclusive mainstream education classrooms.

- Focus not exclusively on their joint work, but where it is focused on at least in part their interaction/relatedness in terms of inclusion and the quality of their work from either teacher and/or TA perspective.

All searches were conducted on 25th March 2024 and verified on 5th April 2024. A PRISMA flow diagram (Page et al., 2020; Figure 19) outlines the systematic process of identifying and screening literature according to titles and abstracts according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 12).

**Table 12** *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Literature Review*

| Criterion | Inclusion | Exclusion | Rationale |
|---|---|---|---|
| Type of publication | Peer-reviewed journals. | Grey literature or papers not included in a peer-reviewed journal. | Research from peer reviewed journals as they have been evaluated by expert reviewers to ensure they have met quality standards. |
| Language of study | English. | Studies not conducted or translated into English. | Translation services were not available to the researcher to allow them to evaluate studies available in languages other than English. |
| Geography | Studies conducted in the United Kingdom. | International studies. | To ensure cultural and professional relevance of the literature to teacher and teaching assistant practice in the UK and support comparability of findings to the UK education system. |
| Date of publication | Literature published between 2008 and 2024. | Research published prior to 2008. | The author recognises the impact of the DISS study (2008) on the TA role, their deployment and educational context. Research before this may not be applicable to current TA-teacher partnerships due to differences in roles and systems. |
| Types of study | Primary qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods studies. | Secondary literature reviews including systematic reviews and meta-analyses. | To gain an understanding of the literature as it applies to practice from first-hand perspectives of relevant professionals. |
| Scope | Studies which focus on or include a focus on TA and/or teacher perspectives on their relationship and/or work towards on inclusion | Studies focused solely on Senior leaders, parents, or child views without teacher or TA views. | To ensure the literature reviewed is relevant to the research question. |
| Setting | Literature relevant to mainstream primary educational settings. | Articles exploring ideas of working relationships more broadly in alternative/specialist education settings with no reference to primary settings. | To ensure the review remains focused and relevant to TA-teacher partnerships rather than caring professions more broadly. TA roles differ greatly across primary, secondary, specialist and alternative settings and therefore if participants from primary settings are not part of the study, the paper was excluded. |

**Figure 19** *PRISMA Flow Diagram (Page et al., 2020) - Identification and Screening Process*
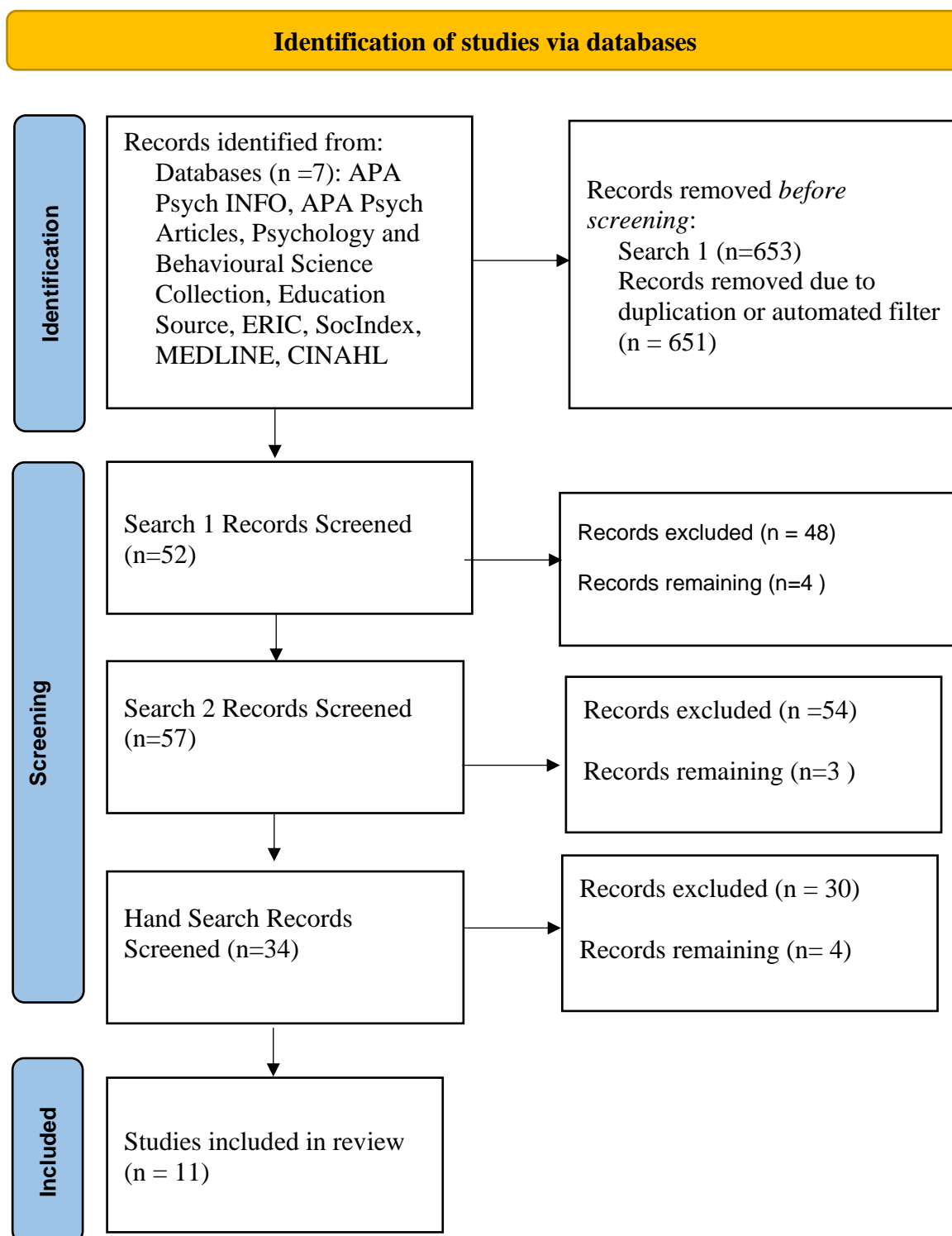


## Results of the Literature Search

The literature search yielded 11 papers for review, listed in Table 13.

**Table 13** *Overview of Selected Studies*

| Title | Author | Year | Participants and Context | Research Design | Data Analysis | CASP Checklist Quality |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Search 1* | | | | | | |
| Is a good Teaching Assistant one who 'knows their place'? | Clarke & Visser | 2019 | Two groups of TAs working in one English primary school. | Qualitative (interviews (n=4), a focus group (n=11), questionnaires (n=4) | Pragmatic Pluralist | High quality |
| The development of inclusive learning relationships in mainstream settings: A multimodal perspective | Efthymiou & Kington | 2017 | Primary school pupils, primary school teachers and primary school TAs | Case study design (classroom observation, semi-structured interviews with teacher and TA, focus group with students) | Discourse analysis | High quality |
| Tensions experienced by teachers and their views of support for pupils with autism spectrum disorders in mainstream schools | Emam & Farrell | 2009 | 17 children with autism and their teachers, TAs and SENCo | Multiple case study design (classroom observation and interviews with teachers, TAs and SENCos) | Case study analytic strategies and grounded theory approach. | High quality |
| Supporting all children to reach their potential: practitioner perspectives on creating an inclusive school environment | Kendall | 2018 | 14 staff including 7 teachers and 4 support staff | Qualitative interviews with thematic analysis | | High quality |
| *Search 2* | | | | | | |
| Perceptions of the barriers to effective inclusion in one | Glazzard | 2011 | Teachers and TAs (North of England) | Qualitative (one focus group of TAs and teachers) | Unclear | Acceptable quality |

| Title | Author | Year | Participants and Context | Research Design | Data Analysis | CASP Checklist Quality |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| primary school: voices of teachers and teaching assistants | | | | | | |
| 'I would say nine times out of 10 they come to the LSA rather than the teacher'. The role of teaching assistants in supporting children's mental health | Conboy | 2021 | 7 TAs from 7 different mainstream primary schools in Elgin, United Kingdom. | Qualitative (semi-structured interviews) | Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) | High quality |
| A complete circuit: the role of communication between class teachers and support staff and the planning of effective learning opportunities | Docherty | 2014 | 6 auxiliaries from 3 primary schools (Moray, UK) | Qualitative (interviews) | IPA | High quality |
| *Hand search 1 (search of references lists of papers included from Search 2)* | | | | | | |
| None included. | | | | | | |
| *Hand search 2 (search of references lists of relevant international papers)* | | | | | | |
| Using the Wider Pedagogical Role model to establish learning support assistants' views about facilitators and barriers to effective practice (North-West England) | Cockroft & Atkinson | 2015 | 8 learning support assistants from one primary school | Qualitative single case study design | Thematic analysis | High quality |
| "New Partnerships for Learning': Teachers and Teaching Assistants Working Together in Schools–the Way Forward." | Wilson & Bedford | 2008 | Teachers from primary (86%), secondary and specialist settings. (England) | Qualitative (questionnaire [56] and interview [18]) | Statistical and qualitative analysis | High quality |

| Title | Author | Year | Participants and Context | Research Design | Data Analysis | CASP Checklist Quality |
|-------|--------|------|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------------|
| | | | | | [no further detail]. | |
| Pond life that 'know their place': exploring teaching and learning support assistants' experiences through positioning theory | Watson et al. | 2013 | 12 members (6 TAs and teachers) of staff drawn from 6 schools (three primaries, two secondaries, and one special school; Southwest England) | Qualitative (workshops and semi-structured interviews) | Interpretative phenomenological analysis | High quality |
| 'Yes, but...': rhetoric, reality and resistance in teaching assistants' experiences of inclusive education. | Mackenzie | 2011 | 13 TAs from East London Schools (primary, secondary and specialist settings) | Qualitative (focus groups, semi-structured life history interviews) | [not detailed] | High quality |

**5.6 Quality of the Reviewed Literature according to CASP Checklist Criteria**

Despite a wealth of research on TA and teacher perspectives about inclusive education and quantitative studies on effective TA deployment, there is a limited number of studies which specifically explore how TA-teacher partnerships can successfully support inclusion from joint perspectives. Just three of the included studies (Glazzard, 2011; Kendall, 2011; Watson et al., 2013) explored joint perspectives on inclusion with two not exclusively conducted in primary schools. Only Glazzard (2011) focuses on joint perspectives of TA-teacher work towards inclusion in a primary school, however, this study was the weakest quality (albeit adequate) according to the CASP checklist (2018). Caution must be applied in interpreting patterns due to findings being from various settings and the nature of qualitative research being highly context-dependent and therefore not directly comparable. However, as the search was limited to the UK, transferability of findings is strengthened. Further, some papers focus on views of TAs or teachers only and therefore do not directly explore the phenomenon of interest, more so offering proximation to contextualise the theory.

The selection of relevant UK papers is deemed limited, emphasising the need for further understanding of such relational processes for inclusion in context. Watson et al. (2013, p.107) argues that "role is open to interpretation by the actor[s] in the construction of their own system of professional practice".

In sum, the review based on 11 robust papers is broadly supportive of the emergent theory in terms of the four identified theoretical pathways revealing some small differences that can offer advancement to the theory.

**5.7 Key Findings in the Literature**

As the introduction outlines, a substantial body of literature focuses on TAs' role in mainstream classrooms in supporting achievement and academic outcomes (Blatchford et al., 2009). However, the present study approaches 'inclusion' from a broader perspective to accommodate a range of constructions. Therefore, views beyond SEN or EHCPs are acknowledged when discussed by participants in relevant papers. Eleven papers will be described in greater detail on the first occasion they are mentioned in this chapter. A more detailed critique of the reviewed papers according to CASP criteria is recorded in Appendix W.

*5.7.1 Importance of TA-teacher Relationship in Inclusive Education*

The need for high-quality TA-teacher working relationships to support inclusion was described across papers.

Emam and Farrell (2009) highlighted the importance of TA-teacher relationships in including autistic pupils in mainstream classrooms. Using case study analysis, thematic analysis and grounded theory, data from semi-structured interviews with the TAs, teachers and SENCos of 17 autistic students were analysed. Participants described the TA role as 'indispensable' to teachers, where teachers tended to focus on instructional roles (p.4-7). The authors conceptualised successful inclusion as participation of all students.

Efthymiou and Kington (2017) highlighted the impact of relationships and interactions in inclusive classrooms, finding that the educational experience of students with SEN differed between the year groups, highlighting the unique micro-environment due to different socio-cultural factors.

In contrast, TAs in Mackenzie's (2011) study described exclusively negative relationships with teachers, where relationships were full of tension and misunderstandings, e.g. holding differing views on inclusion or the TA role. Considering such experiences, only one TA of 13 remained dedicated to working in mainstream education. Only one participant provided positive examples of collaboration with teachers in their work towards inclusion. Notably, this study antithetically promoted the phenomenon being researched: successful TA-teacher partnerships, where poor TA-teacher relationships and conflicts around inclusion co-existed.

In Wilson and Bedford (2008), teachers highlighted the importance of understanding and respecting each other's role, having confidence in each other, and clear mutual expectations of what they required from pupils. The ability to be flexible in response to unexpected events and open and proactive in their communication was described to contribute to effective TA-teacher professional relationships.

### 5.7.2 Interpersonal Processes within Successful TA-teacher Working Partnerships (Pathway 1)

*5.7.2.1 Communication and Collaboration; Shared Responsibility and Understanding.* Investigating how two groups of TAs in primary schools support behaviour management using focus groups, Clarke and Visser (2019) emphasised the importance of TA-teacher relationships and communication within classrooms. Pairs were described to work across year groups, not only with SEN children. However, one TA felt she had 'become responsible for [children's] education' (p.315). Their findings supported the notion that communicative and collaborative TA-teacher relationships around creating shared understanding of role and responsibility facilitated TAs' practice. Inconsistency of teacher expectations was linked to TA tension, and one participant described their ability to intervene to vary between teachers depending on individual differences and relationships. This may

suggest a level of relatedness between the practitioners or where differences in expectations and roles can be a barrier to effective TA behaviour management. Some TAs in Mackenzie (2011) felt that teachers holding unrealistic expectations of TAs was a barrier. A lack of agreed or shared definitions of the TA's 'place' impacted their agency in practice (Clarke & Visser, 2019). While this study provides insight into the TA-teacher professional relationship, the study does not provide teacher perspectives.

Focusing on the views of a range of 14 educators (including TAs, teachers, SENCo and Headteacher) in a North England primary school, Kendall (2018) found that collaborative practice between teachers and TAs was important in inclusive practice where it promoted the sharing of knowledge about individual pupils and facilitated joint planning for delivering the curriculum. Collaborative working was also promoted as a whole-school approach. Participants described that TAs were not deployed to individual pupils but worked across the classroom, where responsibility for SEN was shared between the TA and class teacher. Glazzard (2011) echoed this sentiment where "the need for teachers to accept their responsibility for the education of all children" (p.59) was required for effective inclusion.

In the English Midlands, Efthymiou & Kington (2017) explored the development of teachers' pedagogical practices and learning relationships related to the inclusive education of children with SEN and disabilities in two primary school classes. The study was qualitative in nature, using a range of methods, including semi-structured interviews with two teachers and one TA, a focus group with children with and without identified SEND and observations/recordings of teacher-student classroom interactions. The teachers reported that the educational needs of children with SEND were best addressed by TAs and where seating arrangements, e.g. proximity to the TA, were sometimes barriers to inclusion.

Emam and Farrell (2009) echoed differing understandings of the TA role where TAs viewed their role as to remove barriers to learning, while the teachers viewed their function as to 'provide security' to the student.

Kendall (2018) identified the presence of collaborative working between TAs and teachers in classrooms where they jointly planned weekly delivery of the curriculum and discussed issues that arose at the end of each day. TAs worked across attainment ranges, where the TA and teacher shared work with children with SEN. LSAs in Cockroft and Atkinson's (2015) single case study design also found good communication with class teachers supported effective practice. However, inconsistent time to plan and planning without teacher input was related to low preparedness.

Glazzard (2011) explored the co-constructed perspectives of teachers and TAs on the barriers to effective inclusion in one primary school. All practitioners emphasised that effective inclusion depends on 'teamwork' or the availability of classroom support. One participant described needing a classroom team providing an example of having to manage the emotional/behaviour situation for one child, and needing someone to hand over to 'when you get desperate' and someone to teach the others (p.59). This implicitly suggests that support from another adult may address their emotion, capacity/skill to manage and ability to balance individual over class needs. Further, the ability of another to take over was important to appropriate response to the child/class: "*It is a team thing…there would be times when I would ask other team members to take over because I…had enough. When you get to the point when you know you won't deal with it appropriately you can handover to someone else. If you are all aware of the strategies that work it's easy*" (Bev; Glazzard, 2011, p.59)

Docherty (2014) found the role of communication between class teachers and support staff in planning effective learning opportunities through the perspective of six auxiliaries (similar to TAs) in three mainstream primary schools in Scotland. They found that strong and respectful communication between pairs supported the TA's agency and ability to carry out 'semi-autonomous decisions' where their understanding of role and expectation was supported it 'made life easier' (p.185). However, no participants had dedicated time for communication or planning, although this was deemed desirable: "A *10 min meeting in the day would be excellent, just a pow-wow, to drop ideas. But everything is in the passing*" (p.186). TAs found clear roles and expectations helpful: "*Sometimes teachers have clear guidelines of what they want you to do, so that makes your life easier*" (Docherty, 2014; p 7).

Watson et al. (2013) conducted a series of workshops and semi-structured interviews with six TLSAs and teachers from three primary, two secondary and one special school to explore the experiences of working together. The study highlights that practitioners place value on teacher-TA collaboration and their relationship. One TLSA described being seen as 'more than support staff or as friends' by teachers as signs they are valued.

In conducting mixed methods research, Wilson and Bedford (2008) explored the perspectives of 53 teachers from primary secondary and special schools, on the relationships between teachers and TAs. Effective professional teacher-TA relationships were focused on strong relationships and communication, and teamwork was centred on mutual trust, respect, and openness. The need for collaborative planning and preparation was also emphasised. Participants deemed the following qualities and skills essential to effective TA-teacher working relationships: listening, communication, organisational skills, understanding, flexibility, respect, trust and patience. While these were also deemed important for teachers in effective co-working, their weighting differed slightly, where communication, listening and

organisational skills were more heavily weighted for teachers and patience, trust, respect, flexibility and understanding more heavily weighted for TAs.

In exploring the realities of 13 TAs' experiences of inclusive education in London schools through interviews and focus groups, Mackenzie (2011) found lack of communication and collaboration was a concern where participants did not share examples of positive collaboration.

### 5.7.2.2 *Hierarchy, Respect and Valuing Others.*

In Clarke & Visser (2019, p.315), a key theme that emerged was the TAs' self-described requirement to know their 'place' relative to the teacher they worked with. This highlighted the boundary they felt existed between them which was linked to reduced agency to manage 'incidents as they occur' with the children.

Teachers in Emam and Farrell (2009) valued TAs support in completion of academic tasks, participation and behavioural regulation, acknowledging their 'expertise' on the child. They tended to 'consult' with the TA about the child's classroom life, suggested an element of decreased responsibility.

TAs from a London primary school (Conboy, 2021) referenced a hierarchy between teachers and TAs which was reflected in wider school relationships: "*They [children] can come out if I take the permission of the teacher*" (p.389). Their lower hierarchical position seemed to result in not 'knowing' information about children or being involved in decision-making: "*It kind of went through SENCo and went on to other stages, and they kind of dealt with it from there. I think there was a lot going on*" (p.389). Where TAs are not informed of a child's background or able to provide information about them, this may lead to helpful information being missed. Additionally, TAs in Docherty's (2014) study described the potential for emotional barriers in communication related to a sense of hierarchy with the class teacher. This was noted to impact their ability to provide feedback on the learning process and thus impacting quality of the

learning opportunities available to children: "After a while he got bored of it. He has things that he gets bored of too, but I don't feel it is always my place to say, because I've not any experience or qualification to judge on any child" (p.187).

In Cockroft & Atkinson (2015), LSAs felt that it was important to have certain personal qualities such as listening, patience, understanding and flexibility helped them to be more effective. Additionally, communication and collaborative planning with teachers were facilitators. Contrastingly, inconsistent and independent LSA planning and limited information of planning from the teacher were barriers to effective practice.

Through the lens of positioning theory, Watson et al.'s (2013) workshops and focus groups revealed that teaching and learning assistants (TLSAs) often felt subordinate to teachers, being careful not to overstep their position. At times, TAs interpreted their position in the school system as 'the lowest of the low', a position termed 'pond life'. While all TLSAs believed they had experienced 'pondlife', teachers did not believe this represented all TLSA experience. At times, TLSAs engaged in reflexive positioning exerting agency over their position. For example, Julia recounted 'standing up to [the] teacher' and rejecting the idea she contributed less than the teacher. Further, some teachers resisted TLSAs being described as professional and valued TAs knowing their place. Overall, participants acknowledged the subordinate status of TLSAs. While some rejected this, others accepted it providing positive narratives i.e. where most TLSAs came from the communities of the most deprived children, this facilitated greater empathy for underachieving children and supported home-school communication as intermediaries. TAs in Mackenzie (2011) also echoed concerns related to the poor status of their role in schools. While one TA did not initially recognise a hierarchy, her experience of the project challenged her view of being equal to teachers showing how discussion (or speech acts) can impact narratives.

***5.7.2.3 Responsibility for Inclusion.*** Emam and Farrell (2009) found that there was an overemphasis on adult-mediated support at the expense of peer-mediated support. Teachers preferred TA support when teaching autistic children where they tended to espouse 'support' as the presence of a TA. However, a need for peer tolerance and a strong support culture in the school were described. Teachers' preference for TA support for autistic students was associated with their positive attitude towards mainstream inclusion, which the author suggests may be linked to the dispersal of the teacher's responsibility for inclusion.

Additionally, Watson et al (2013) described evolving responsibilities in TA roles beyond academic support such as taking on more teaching responsibilities, record-keeping and providing emotional support to students.

***5.7.2.4    Understanding of Inclusion: Emotional, Social, Academic.*** Differing definitions and understandings of inclusion between teacher and TAs were identified across several studies. Sally, a TA in Glazzard (2011) described: *"We all have our own ideas of what inclusion means. For some teachers it doesn't mean the child being involved in everything in the classroom…for some people it simply means the child being in the building" (p.2).* Clarke and Visser's (2019) paper highlights the importance of children's non-academic development and the scope of TA's role being beyond learning. Glazzard (2011) outlined a need for policy to recognise children's individual strengths beyond literacy and numeracy and recognise individual learning and progress.

Kendall (2018)'s participants identify children's emotional wellbeing as part of inclusive practice. Additionally, TAs in Conboy (2021) noted that knowledge and recognition of mental health difficulties can impact staff understanding of children's needs *"I think it'd be good for us all, not just TAs; teachers, TAs, lunchtime supervisors, anybody that's going to be working*

*with children to be given basic mental health training, just to recognise the signs, recognise…it's not this huge taboo"* (Laura; p.385). This seemed to promote collaborative training. The need to balance one-to-one TA support with children's social development was recognised by staff in Glazzard (2011):"*because if a child has someone next to them all the time you are setting them apart from all of the others'* (Sally; p.58).

In Mackenzie (2011), TAs tended to hold medicalised and individualised approaches to support children with SEN, however the author linked this to their demonstration of ambivalence in working towards inclusion. The literature clearly recognises a broader definition of inclusion.

### 5.7.2.5 Quality of Interactions with the Children.

Several studies outlined how patterns of relating or interacting between teacher and TA impacted their individual practice. Clarke & Visser (2019) provided an example where TAs' ability to manage children's behaviour was constrained by the quality and consistency of their relationships with teachers and children, highlighting how barriers in the relationship can impact their practice. TAs' ability to manage behaviour proactively was challenged by their sense of agency and understanding of their 'place' and teachers' expectations. This supports links to the need for consistency of expectation to be communicated between teacher and TA, as well as acknowledging the influence of power dynamics on TA practice.

In Emam and Farrell (2009), tensions were identified among teachers in mainstream schools when autistic pupils were included in their classes. Explicit tension was defined as their frustration with the perceived effect of including the autistic students. Implicit tension was described as the anxiety teachers experience due to their self-perceived inability to address the needs of the children while maintaining their commitments to the remainder of the class. Tension was described to pertain to the teacher's lack of understanding related to the social and

emotional needs of the autistic pupils, e.g. impact of Theory of Mind,[22] where teachers may rely on children using their emotional cues where they view emotions to compensate for communication e.g. relying on pupils' facial expression to evaluate the pace of their teaching. Such tension was linked to decreased quality of their relationships with the children they teach. However, teachers relied on TAs to reduce such tension and thus improve the quality of teacher-student relationships.

In Efthymiou &Kington (2017), teachers found that students with SEND tended to engage in less interaction with teachers or peers when activities are competitive or teacher-centred. However, this study emphasises the critical role of the teacher in promoting interactional and collaborative educational practices. Teacher-centred activities were linked to higher levels of individual TA support, which may impact children's social outcomes. Therefore, while teachers acknowledged the importance of the TA's role in providing extra support, they recognised they did not always facilitate educational progress or inclusion. Further, ability grouping was described to limit peer learning (scaffolding).

While Efthymiou &Kington (2017) conducted a robust, triangulated study due to its multi-method and informant approach, the combination of pupil and staff views with a primary focus on teacher skills, means there are limitations on drawing comparisons to TA-teacher perspectives only as taken in the present study.

All participants in Kendall (2018) regarded having a positive attitude towards inclusion as important to its implementation. In Cockroft & Atkinson (2015), LSAs felt they had a positive

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[22] Theory of Mind (Baron-Cohen & Frith., 1985): cognitive ability that enables individuals to understand and interpret the mental and emotional states of others, including their beliefs, intentions, desires, and feelings.

impact on the children they worked with, noting the importance of a positive relationship built on knowing the child, which facilitates a deeper understanding of needs and triggers.

Glazzard (2011) described attitudinal barriers to inclusion where some practitioners were unwilling to adapt their teaching styles to accommodate SEN. The author postulated that staff may feel threatened due to their identity as a 'good educator' or their performance data being compromised rather than negative attitudes to disability. Sally described: '*We've got a teacher who sees his job as just to teach and get them through the SATs. He expects every child to conform and that is against inclusion*' (p.57).

Docherty (2014) outlined that TA-teacher communication is central to the creation of effective learning opportunities and thus inclusion, as it supports pairs in planning and adapting their practice so that children receive appropriate input.

Collectively, these studies recognise the importance of TA-teacher collaboration and communication as well as shared understanding and responsibility for inclusion and shared understanding of the TA role. Respect within partnerships was an important factor in successful practice towards inclusion. Studies represent an evolving role of TAs to support children's emotions. This reflects the broadening of the inclusion agenda and associated TA responsibilities. However, the status of TAs remains low, where they are valued for supporting teachers in managing the demands and capacity to work inclusively. TAs tended to hold more responsibility for SEN pupils in most studies.

### 5.7.3 Capacity for Inclusion (Intrapersonal Factors): Pathway Two

*5.7.3.1 Communication and Understanding of Role Supports Effective and Efficient Responses.* Clarke & Visser (2019)'s TA participants highlighted that inconsistency in understanding role and its associated boundaries can lead to 'tension' and thus TAs assuming a more passive approach to behaviour management. This suggests an emotional impact related to incongruence in understanding on TAs which in turn influenced their practice: their ability to actively respond to behaviour and needs of the children, instead remaining 'an observer'. Implicit power relations were perceived by TAs in their relationships with teachers, where teachers perceived differences in status and role. The author interpreted that "without opportunities to understand teacher's 'motives' in managing behaviour, it was challenging for [TA's] to 'align their responses'" (p. 382). This suggests TA's ability to meet the teacher's expectation relies on openness and communication so they can provide an appropriate response.

*5.7.3.2 Proactive, Initiative and Dedication.* Several studies described instances of staff being proactive and showing initiative and persistence in response to challenge. Some studies explicitly or implicitly referred to inclusive practice being emotionally demanding work (Mackenzie, 2011). Several TAs described a dedication to 'care and nurture', to the children and working outside of contracted hours (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015): *"I'm prepared to go out of my way for children who just need a little bit of extra TLC*.' (Watson et al., 2013p.113) or continuing to work in their role despite challenges (Mackenzie, 2011). While waiting lists and funding were barriers to inclusion, staff in Kendall (2018) described that intervention strategies were employed 'in the meantime' showing resourcefulness (p.16).

*5.7.3.3 Balancing Demands and Capacity for Inclusion: Practical and Emotional Support.* Conboy (2021) found that TAs experienced positive emotional experiences in response to their role e.g. enjoyment, reward, yet some expressed fear about supporting mental

health, particularly before attending training. The study clearly recognised the emotional impact of supporting mental health on these TAs where Karen described: "*I do quite often go home and feel like I've been a social worker for that day. Not just an LSA.*" (p.121). Participants expressed desire for reassurance and guidance potentially indicating a need for further support. In Mackenzie (2011) TAs acknowledged the impact of their work: "*You've got that bond with them, and then when they do get ill, it is quite hard*" (p.67).

In Efthymiou and Kington (2017), teachers described that ability grouping was more helpful to staff than children with SEN. Several TAs carried out alternative activities to support the teacher as opposed to solely supporting children with SEN. Teachers from both classes relied on TA support to manage their workload. Where this support reduced teacher tension and promoted positive attitudes towards inclusion. This study frames the student-teacher relationship as a bridge for effective interaction between support arrangements and as supportive agents in supporting teachers to balance whole class and SEN demands.

Emam and Farrell (2009) found that for the level of tension the teachers experienced in supporting inclusion to be perceived as manageable, they 'rely heavily on the TA' (p.3). The author interprets the research as relevant to teacher burnout. They describe the interaction between the characteristics of the student with autism, their peers, TAs and teachers and the quality of such interaction to facilitate functional support.

Conboy (2021) explored TAs views about supporting children's mental health needs in mainstream London primary school. The TA's work was described as an 'emotional experience' highlighting the emotional impact of their work. Further, the ability to access other staff such as the class teacher was viewed was supportive to TAs. One TA noted intentionally seeking out discussions with other staff members which the author indicated may indicate the needs for ongoing support to fulfil her Mental Health First Aid responsibilities.

Interviewing eight LSAs in one UK primary school, Cockroft & Atkinson (2015) found that having a positive attitude towards their work helped LSAs to be more effective and to cope with the stressors of the role.

*5.7.3.4 Experience: In Role, Previous Roles and Personal Life.* When asked what helped TAs to support the mental health of children, participants' most frequent response was their own experience of successfully supporting mental health in their role or parental/familial experience (Conboy, 2021). In Watson et al. (2013), several TAs had personal experience of learning disability or struggling with academics, which they described led to greater empathy and ability to engage with children. All TAs in Mackenzie (2011) had personal experience of SEN or related work experience.

Cockroft & Atkinson (2015), using a single case study design, found that a key characteristic of effective TAs practice was entry qualifications and previous experience e.g. volunteering. Some TAs felt their own parenting experience also facilitated their practice. Docherty (2014) found where strong and respectful communication existed between auxiliary and teacher, shared understandings were reached about the levels of support offered. This was linked to less wasted time and inappropriate task-setting.

### 5.7.4 The Impact of Pairs' Successful Partnership/Interactions on the Children in their Class Appropriate and Balanced Social, Emotional and Learning Support (Pathway Three)

Efthymiou & Kington (2017) found that the greatest influence on children's educational and social outcomes was the practice and behaviour of the classroom teacher, where deployment of TAs for additional interventions could reduce a child's access to social activities. Participants outlined several factors that can hinder the progress/outcomes of children with SEN. One teacher shared: '*Obviously we do take people with special needs out for literacy and numeracy*

*to get that extra support and it takes away from kind of the social side…they are not involved in a large class environment'* (p.13). A teacher noted the difficulty in balancing academic and social inclusion, with a competitive teaching style affecting peer interactions. However, in more dialogue-driven lessons, students with SEN had more engagement with teachers and classmates. It was suggested that physical marginalisation caused by TA support could affect their self-esteem and peer status.

Glazzard (2011) outlined the need to balance individual TA support with opportunities for independence and social development. Sally described a negative impact of such imbalances: "*He also used to chat to the others. However, after he had worked with Hilary outside of the classroom for a year, I didn't recognise him. He became shy and withdrawn and did not know how to mix or have a conversation*" (p.58).

Teachers in Emam and Farrell (2009) described the presence of a TA supported their ability to manage the tension over the perceived impact of including autistic students. Such tension about inclusion was linked to the quality of student-teacher relationships and thus their teaching and support processes and ultimately the developmental trajectories of the students.

Conboy's (2021) TA participants highlighted the importance of holding caring and parenting elements in forming close relationships with children to support their mental health which was linked to children feeling less isolated and more secure. 'Knowing children' was described to take time but to support TA understanding of the best approach to take for individuals. Support for their mental health included talking with the children to normalise their worries, where the author illustrates that attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) may underpin such ideologies of a 'mothering role' and the importance placed on relationships where they form a secure base for the pupils. While little reference was made to these characteristics in teachers, possibly due to the study's focus on TAs, these findings support an understanding of emotional and relational

elements of their interaction that support children's successful inclusion. Links to attachment theory and the TA role were echoed by Watson et al. (2013).

Most TAs experienced a paucity of communication with the class teacher which was linked to negative learning outcomes where it can lead to time being wasted or an inability to feedback to the teacher on the pupil's progress impacting the TA's ability to provide sensitive support appropriate to the child's needs (Docherty, 2014). In Cockroft & Atkinson (2015) LSAs felt they had a positive impact on teachers viewing themselves as 'a needed support' by establishing links with home, rapport with the children and educational input. This highlights the practical and relational capacity offered by these LSAs from their perspective.

The extension of the TA role beyond academic support was also supported by Watson et al., (2013) where the group of teachers and TAs valued the emotional support TAs could provide to the children to help them to 'get back to class' (p.113). While the importance of nurture was recognised in inclusion, the group rejected the idea that TAs were 'mumsy' which highlighted a contrast of gendered and professional stances. Care and nurture were seen as central parts of TA and teacher roles in several of the studies (Mackenzie, 2011; Conboy, 2021; Watson et al., 2013). This was implicitly linked to providing a sense of safety to children. TAs in Watson et al. (2013) discussed the importance of prioritising emotion as part of inclusion where it supported access to and enjoyment of learning.

### 5.7.5 Interaction with and Response to the Wider System (Pathway Four)

*5.7.5.1 School Structure and Culture.* Clarke and Visser (2019) found that structural aspects of school life impact practice. For example, inconsistent TA deployment across a range of classrooms or teachers impacted the quality of their relationship with children and staff.

Therefore, this led to decreased communication time and TA ability to successfully manage behaviour. Further, TAs expressed the need for SLT to support their decisions about behaviour management. The importance of communication and collaboration in the wider system was highlighted including work with parents.

In line with Kendall (2018), Wilson and Bedford (2008) noted the importance of a wider school culture of teamwork and social inclusion. This supported TAs and students with additional needs through mutual respect. Further they argued that TAs need to be treated as full members of the school community which reaffirms the need for all members of the school to be valued.

*5.7.5.2 Collaboration with Senior Leadership and External Agencies.* Collaboration beyond the classroom was valued across studies (Glazzard, 2011; Conboy, 2021). Kendall (2018) described the effectiveness of the SENCo being a collaborative partner in creating an inclusive environment. Collaboration with parents and external agencies were described as 'important' and 'essential' respectively. However, waiting lists presented a barrier to specialist support. Inclusive practice was deemed effective when it was part of a whole-school ethos where all children are "part of the school and the local community' (p.7). However, insufficient preservice training for teachers and TAs about SEN, particularly emotional and behavioural difficulties was noted as a barrier to inclusion. Openness and access to CPD, where collaborative ethos promoted the development of skills in other staff: "So, I went on the course…after school, I showed other people how to use it." (p.12).

*5.7.5.3 The Education System: Testing, the National Curriculum and Settings Types.* The national curriculum and testing were identified as barriers to inclusion where it was described as prescriptive, potentially impacting children's confidence and self-esteem, particularly those with SEN. Glazzard (2011) found the standards agenda was often in tension with the inclusion agenda, where Bev states: *"The current climate, where schools are judged*

*on results, is the problem – not inclusion."* (p.59). This was echoed by a TA in Mackenzie (2011) who believed that pressures on teacher to meet targets led to poor practice within classrooms.

Glazzard's (2011) participants had no shared agreement about whether special schools threaten inclusion, where Sue highlighted the importance of the quality and relevance of provision over the location and where Bev stated "*It boils down to the needs of the child as to whether a special or a mainstream school is most appropriate. However, we should give them a chance in mainstream first*" (p.60).

*5.7.5.4 Funding, Resources and Training.* Funding was a key barrier to inclusive education across the literature where educators described that additional staffing would be beneficial for the implementation of professional advice. Adequate assessment and specialist support and purchasing specific resources were viewed as necessary but difficult to access due to budgeting (Kendall, 2018). Glazzard's (2011) paper highlighted lack of funding, resources and training as key barriers to inclusion. Many participants felt inadequately trained in SEN: ''*It's sink or swim a lot of the time*" (Mark, p.60). Such external factors were linked to more negative teacher attitudes towards inclusion.

In inclusive mainstream classrooms, Emam and Farrell (2009) found teachers struggled to balance whole-class needs with the needs of autistic students, yet held more favourable attitudes where TA support was available. This is potentially related to the level of responsibility for inclusion imparted on teachers. Further, the authors positioned their paper as reflecting the training needs of teachers related to understanding additional needs e.g. autism or emotional literacy and inclusive practices.

LSAs highlighted the benefits of training from colleagues (teachers/LSAs) and external professionals in facilitating effective practice. However, limited training opportunities due to accessibility and cost led to LSAs feeling 'ill equipped' for their role (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015, p.98; Mackenzie, 2011). Conboy (2021) outlined how TAs desired more guidance in how to support mental health needs. Teachers and TAs in some papers expressed the need for more collaboration with external professionals to promote their practice (Kendall, 2018; Conboy, 2021).

*5.7.5.5 Employment Conditions.* In Cockroft & Atkinson (2015), all LSAs agreed that they worked more than their contracted hours, however this led to barriers including negative feelings about their employment conditions e.g. using their own time to plan and low pay. In terms of LSA deployment, they viewed the shift away from an administrative/organisational role positively, however, this led to concern related to their preparedness to work with children with complex needs in a pedagogical role as well as the responsibility, limitations of space and time on their ability to employ effective practice. This was mirrored in Mackenzie (2011) where few breaks, duties and lack of support ('it's your job get on with it'; p.67) impacted TA conditions.

## 5.8 Summary of Literature Review Findings

In conclusion, the literature review reveals the complex and multi-faceted nature of the partnership between teachers and TAs with clear tension between facilitators and barriers within pairs and the wider system in supporting successful inclusion.

## 6. **DISCUSSION**

**6.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter will discuss "the most significant points of convergence and divergence" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 166) between the emergent theory presented in chapter 3 and the literature in chapter 4. This chapter includes the major findings of the study relative to current literature its pre-existing theories and their contributions to the development of the emergent theory. The implications for educators, EPs and local priorities are discussed in addition to the study's limitations and areas for future research.

The present study offers a model of relational interdependence between teacher and TA working pairs and the children in their classrooms across four pathways and 12 categories. From the outset, the study explored three research questions (RQ). Therefore, this chapter discusses and interprets the study's findings as framed by these research questions.

According to teachers and TAs:

1. What does a successful partnership for the inclusion of all children look like?

2. *What factors and mechanisms facilitate successful teacher-TA partnerships for inclusion?*

3. *How could/do EPs support successful teacher-TA partnerships for inclusion?*

**6.2 Contributions of the Literature and Development of the Theory**

*6.2.1 Contributions of the Literature and Development of the Theory to RQ1*

Regarding RQ1, the final categories generally align with the literature in naming key interpersonal factors in TA-teacher partnerships that promote successful inclusion (Figure 20).

**Figure 20** *Interpersonal Processes in 'Successful TA-teacher Partnerships for Inclusion'*
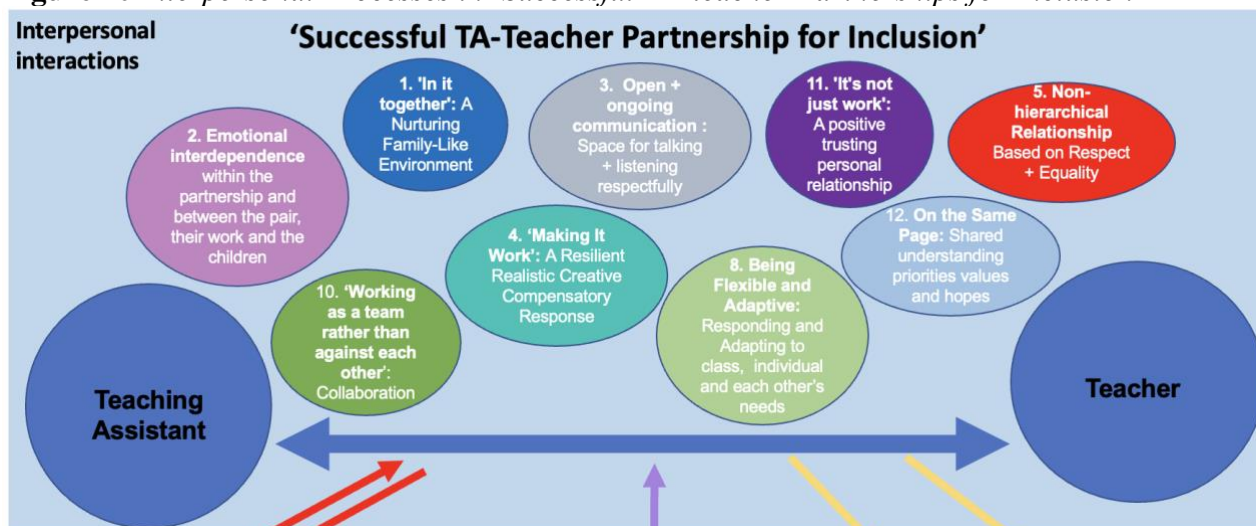


All reviewed studies referred to the importance of how the TA or teacher work either from the perspective of TAs, teachers or joint perspectives regarding what's working or what needs to improve to support inclusive education (Kendall, 2018; Glazzard, 2011). There is strong evidence across the literature for several of the identified interpersonal processes identified in the theory; namely *open ongoing communication*, *emotional recognition and support*, *working collaboratively* and *being on the same page* in terms of expectations and values in creating effective TA-teacher working relationships (Bedford et al., 2008). Further, *being flexible, adaptive, realistic, caring, and consistent* in their approach was also echoed across the reviewed papers (Conboy, 2021; Mackenzie, 2011; Clarke & Visser, 2019).

A subcategory of 'in it together' (C1); *shared responsibility for inclusion* was reflected in the literature where TAs in Glazzard (2011) and Cockroft & Atkinson (2015) identified the need for teachers to hold responsibility for inclusion. TAs in Docherty (2014) echoed several pairs in describing open and ongoing communication as a forum for feedback and subsequent sensitive adaptations to practice, specifically from teachers.

Themes of reciprocal *care and nurture* within pairs emerged in the proposed theory. Pairs described recognising and supporting each other in response to the emotions and demands of their roles while showing empathy and realistic expectations for their partner. While TAs in Conboy (2021; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015) named support from other staff such as class teachers helpful in their work, much of the literature centres on staff care and nurture towards children (Mackenzie, 2011), where some described it as a parent-like at times (Watson et al., 2013; Conboy, 2021). The present theory offers a clear narrative for support and well-being within partnerships as facilitative of their success. In the theory, positive personal relationships (C11) were described to support pairs to manage their emotional responses and mutual expectations. Bedford et al. (2008) echoed the importance of teacher-TA interpersonal relationships centred on a willingness to help each other by "relinquish[ing] part of their role to their partner" (Bedford et al., 2008, p.21). This aligns with two further subcategories of the theory, '*compensating for each other*' and '*working together flexibly*'.

Non-hierarchical TA-teacher relationships centred on respect and valuing each other were described within successful partnerships. This aligns with much of the literature highlighting the role of relative power and position between TA and teacher (Clarke & Visser, 2019; Conboy, 2021; Bedford et al., 2008). For example, TSLAs in Watson et al. (2011) described 'pond life' where they often felt subordinate to teachers, which contrasts with participants in the present study who self-identify as "equals" and "successful partners" (1, 225). However, in this study and present theory alike, personal and positive TA-teacher relationships (C11) were described to mitigate feelings of hierarchy.

A second cornerstone identified in the theory and literature of successful TA-teacher practice for inclusion was collaboration (Kendall, 2018; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Mackenzie, 2011;

Bedford et al., 2008). This included time to plan together and share decision-making, which was underpinned by communication and positive relationships (Watson et al., 2013). However, teamwork was dependent on the availability of classroom support (Glazzard, 2011). Theory and literature converge in acknowledging the impact of power and hierarchy of TA-teacher relationships and collaboration.

### 6.2.2 Contributions of the Literature and Development of the Theory to RQ2 and RQ3

Regarding RQ2 and RQ3, the emergent theory explains how successful TA-teacher partnerships underpin inclusion with reference to interpersonal processes and highlights potential areas of development for EPs. This is explored across the four identified explanatory pathways which compose the theory, followed by a summary and discussion of key points and interpretations from the literature and associated theories.

#### 6.1.2.1 Pathway 1: Interpersonal Processes within Successful TA-teacher Working Partnerships that Facilitate the Quality of Interactions with Children.

This theory's most robust explanatory pathway describes the quality of TA-teachers' interpersonal interactions as influential on the quality of their interactions with the children. This pathway aligns with the reviewed literature, where interpersonal factors like communication, collaboration, and shared understanding of and responsibility for inclusion are linked to their subsequent practice in various ways in all 11 studies by being described as positive and desirable in their work.

In reference to shared responsibility (C1) and subsequent compensation (C4) between partners, the theory proposes that these processes lead to the most skilled or available individual interacting with the child, thus providing higher-quality interactions. Throughout the literature,

teachers were described to rely on TAs to 'make things work' in the classroom and to teach effectively (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017; Emam & Farrell, 2009). The importance of TA skills was raised by teachers in Wilson et al (2009). Individual qualities were not explicitly explored in this study, perhaps due to its social constructionist nature. However, playing to individual strengths was described to support best practice in participants. TAs appreciated collaborative planning information in advance (Wilson et al., 2009; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015) and identified unrealistic expectations as a barrier to inclusion (Mackenzie, 2011).

In line with the present theory, Glazzard (2011) described inclusion as a process that develops over time rather than a state. Such was underpinned by the development of effective relationships (C1) and strategies (C9) over time, where getting to know children individually was important (Conboy, 2021). Knowing each child 'inside and out' enables a deeper understanding of their needs and thus practitioners' subsequent adaptations (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015, p. 98). Being flexible and adaptive to individual and class needs is again a strong category across the theory and literature. Strong links between categories 8 and 9 can be established where flexibility is applied according to individual needs. Efthymiou and Kington (2017) found that student-centred grouping increased teacher and peer interactions. However, barriers to inclusive pedagogies emerged for some practitioners working in diverse mainstream classrooms. This mirrored pairs three and four who used separate workstations and partially resourced provision in response to the level of need in their class requiring a high level of individualised adaptations.

Key across theory and literature was the importance of professional experience regarding roles and relationships in successful inclusion (Mackenzie, 2011; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). In contrast to the theory, several studies recognised personal experience with SEN and parenting

(Mackenzie, 2011; Conboy, 2021; Watson, 2013). Just one pair referenced 'we are all mums' (2, 73). Additionally, openness to professional development in terms of training and advice from professionals was key across the theory, mentioned in passing by one participant in a reviewed paper (Conboy, 2021).

The theory positions *compensating for each other and being resilient, creative and realistic as supportive of pairs' successful inclusion in category four, 'Making it work'*. Throughout the literature, teachers were described to 'rely heavily on' TAs to make things work in the classroom and to teach effectively (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017; Emam & Farrell, 2009, p.416). TA support can help reduce teacher tension, thereby enhancing the quality of student-teacher relationships and, thus, the support they receive (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017). However, external factors and hierarchical dynamics can impede this, and contextual factors may cause variance between settings. Limited coherence in the boundaries of the TA role was deemed problematic across the literature. However, the broadening nature and low status of the TA role were common themes. This provides supportive evidence for the usefulness of TAs and teachers '*being on the same page*" in terms of shared and mutual expectations, facilitated through communication and collaboration. Such also supported clear and consistent communication and expectations with the children.

In the literature, where pairs were not *on the same page* about the TA role, 'frustration' impacted TA performance where they assumed a passive 'observer' role in behaviour management (Clarke & Visser, 2019). Contrastingly, a clear understanding of teacher expectations supported TAs in taking initiative in the present study. An extension of not being *on the same page* could be unrealistic expectations on the part of teachers (Mackenzie, 2011). While all participants held broad definitions of inclusion, the literature identified contrasting definitions of inclusion/support as sources of tension between teachers and TAs (Mackenzie,

2011; Glazzard, 2011) where clear roles and expectations were supportive of their work (Docherty, 2014). The present study identified similar values, approaches and styles as supportive of TA-teacher partnerships. However, this was not identified in the literature, where much of the literature referred to the teacher's pedagogic style and the TA's pastoral side. This may be implicitly linked to '*being on the same page*' in terms of understanding and expectations yet highlights a point of divergence where teachers and TAs in the emergent theory both hold aspects of care, initiative and structure.

### 6.1.2.2 Pathway 2: The Pairs Individual and Collective Response to these Interpersonal Processes which Facilitates their Capacity for Inclusion.

The literature generally supports the second theoretical pathway (Clarke & Visser, 2019; Docherty, 2014; Conboy, 2021; Mackenzie, 2011; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2014; Kendall, 2018; n=7), where TA and teacher responses to their partnership can impact their collective and individual capacity for inclusion. For example, Emam and Farrell (2009) describe how teachers rely heavily on TAs to facilitate their instructional process.

Key systemic barriers to their capacity for inclusion were training, funding and consistent deployment. However, the theory proposes that some pairs' resilient response can protect and promote inclusion, where they 'fight' for resources and quickly recover from problems and emotions. A key theme in the literature and theory was staffing, most often TAs using their own time and resources to ensure their class was included (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). While at face value, this would lead to an increased capacity due to increased resources for the children, this may represent an inequitable expectation on TAs over teachers to 'go above and beyond', which links to status.

The literature and emergent theory align on the importance of positive and accepting attitudes towards inclusion and diversity. Successful inclusion was underpinned by positive attitudes and commitment to inclusion which facilitated TAs ability to cope with stressors of the role (Cockcroft & Atkinson, 2015; Kendall, 2018). In contrast, poor attitudes towards inclusion were linked to reduced teacher responsibility for inclusion and the pressures of the standards agenda on teachers (Glazzard, 2021). All interviewed pairs demonstrated teachers holding some responsibility for all children in the class and positive and caring attitudes towards inclusion.

Communication and collaboration were key in increased capacity for inclusion, which Docherty (2014; p.6) linked to pairs wasting time and ability to plan input and provide feedback to each other to provide 'sensitive support'. Some studies describe staff valuing support from colleagues (Conboy, 2021) or advice from professional agencies (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015) to manage the demands of their role which may suggest pairs would benefit from space to discuss and reflect (communicate) on their practice with external professionals e.g. EPs. Simply, where an additional adult is present in the classroom, TAs are described to 'prop up' inclusion (Mackenzie, 2011). Such communication and collaboration extended to offering care and emotional support to their partners to facilitate their work in the emergent theory. Pairs attuned and acknowledged their partners' emotions to support them and know when/how to compensate to ensure inclusion continued.

Several studies highlight the emotional elements of educators' work, where in the presence of barriers, levels of frustration or lack of confidence impact their work (Mackenzie, 2011). TAs named emotional barriers in their work related to hierarchies with teachers or holding too much responsibility for inclusion (Docherty, 2014; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). Fear in TAs about 'knowing how to' support children or caution about 'knowing their place' relative to the teacher

were described to impact their agency (Watson et al., 2011; Clarke & Visser, 2019; Conboy, 2021, p.386).). Lack of confidence, responsibility and knowledge in teachers related to SEN and inclusion was linked to less collaboration and adaptation (Kendall, 2018). There is an argument for CPD and preservice training to enhance capacity for inclusion and, thus, teacher responsibility. While confidence was not explicitly named in the emergent theory, the strengths-based stance of the study could mean confidence was implicit in the pairs who participated. Additionally, in the theory, the role of positive emotion in response to noticing children's success and progress gave staff 'a little bit of a lift' (3, 114).

In addition to pairs' own emotions, the emergent theory presents pairs as prioritising and attuning to and relying on emotions in their interactions with the children. This approach is argued to facilitate learning, participation, and inclusion. Teachers in Emam & Farrell (2009) described relying on children's emotions and facial expressions to evaluate their teaching performance and inform adaptations. However, they described difficulties interacting with autistic students in this area, highlighting the importance of understanding and attitude on their capacity to include.

Problems with communication extended to TAs not being invited to meetings or not being paid if they attended (Mackenzie, 2011). This aligned with descriptions by pair two, where they were not included in communications by external professionals, particularly TAs. The theme of 'inclusion of TAs' is an area of interest that has emerged from this study. Clarity of roles and consistency of expectations between teachers and TAs '*makes your life easier*' (Docherty, 2014; p.4; Watson et al., 2011; Clarke & Visser, 2019).

Positive relationships within pairs and with children were regarded as supportive of inclusion, highlighting the importance of relational elements of successful practice (Conboy, 2021). The importance of knowing each child 'inside and out' in terms of strengths, needs, and progress enables a deeper understanding of their needs and, thus, subsequent practitioner adaptations (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015, p. 98).

### 6.1.2.3 Pathway 3: Children's Response to Experiencing a Successful TA-Teacher Partnership.

Regarding the third pathway, studies show a clear link between the relationship between TAs and teachers, their practices, and student progress (Efthymiou &Kington, 2017; Watson et al., 2011; Docherty, 2014; Emam & Farrell, 2009; Glazzard, 2011; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Mackenzie, 2011; Conboy, 2021) including social, academic and developmental outcomes. Despite the indispensable role of TAs, some studies indicate TA support does not always lead to positive educational and social outcomes (Efthymiou &Kington, 2017). This underscores the importance of balancing independence with TA support.

Clear points of convergence between theory and literature emerged in the creation of caring and nurturing responses to the children and an ability to provide emotional support. This was linked to children feeling valued, safe and understood (Conboy, 2021). However, the literature positioned TAs in a more caring and nurturing role, while the theory proposes that teachers engaged in such responses, which contributed towards better learning and rapport with staff and enjoyment in their learning (Wilson & Bedford, 2008). The theory proposes that both TA and teacher hold care, nurture, structure and boundaries in successful partnerships for inclusion.

Shared responsibility is most often understood as between teacher and TA, but the theory highlights the role of peers in inclusive education. In Efthymiou and Kington (2017), TA support can impact students' access to teacher and peer support; therefore, potentially, shared responsibility would mean that social aspects of inclusion were more available to students with additional needs. The emergent theory highlights the importance of shared responsibility for inclusion, and the broader definition of inclusion proposed by the theory created opportunities for peer scaffolding and social connection.

Another difference between the literature and theory was concern about TA support leading to physical/social marginalisation of children with SEN, which leads to reduced peer and teacher interactions (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017). This was linked to dependency and low academic self-esteem (Glazzard, 2011). While TAs can positively impact children's learning and interactions with their teacher and peers, this depended on TA preparedness, training and collaboration with teachers (Docherty, 2014; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). The difference between literature and the emergent theory may be explained by the present study's focus on successful partnerships. The emergent theory described the function of class dialogue about difference, which perhaps mitigated some potential marginalisation.

The theory proposes that successful pairs create positive constructions of difference and diversity through whole class dialogue and encouraging peer scaffolding and positive attitudes towards care, nurture and belonging so that 'everyone is part what makes the class' (4, 18). Over half of teacher participants demonstrated or spoke of their efforts to promote TA inclusion as part of the class and wider school. Wilson and Bedford (2008) described environments where TAs are valued as members of the school community have direct impact on instructional practices and engagement in the context of effective systems and organisational culture and

training. The emergent theory proposes that TA-teacher interactions may serve as a symbol that constructs and reconstructs inclusion based on the meaning they make of difference and diversity and ultimately themselves as learners. An example from the present study related to the children's engagement and listening to TAs which can differ depending on the respect exhibited by teachers and the school towards them.

### 6.1.2.4 Pathway 4: Responding to and Interacting with their Wider Context and System Over Time.

In line with pathway four, the literature highlights the influence of systemic factors in facilitating or hindering inclusive practice (Clarke & Visser, 2019; Emam & Farrell, 2009; Kendall, 2018; Glazzard, 2011; Conboy, 2021; Mackenzie, 2011; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Wilson & Bedford, 2008). Key examples include funding, training, whole-school ethos of care and nurture for staff and children, SLT, parents, conditions of employment and the standards agenda.

Inconsistent deployment of TAs was an area of convergence across theory and literature where it added stress to pairs and reduced their ability to teach effectively where unexpected changes occurred by TAs 'being pulled' from the classroom. This limits pairs ability to work consistently with children; illustrating how external factors can hinder pathway one.

Theoretically, knowledge and skill development are described to evolve through experience in role and working with each other but also through CPD and advice from external professionals (Conboy, 2021). Some participants felt they had good access to training. However, this access was presented as a key barrier to inclusion in the wider system in theory and literature (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015), particularly in terms of teacher training about SEN. Implicitly this related

to their responsibility and confidence, an area for further development. Teachers and TAs in Kendall (2018) called for CPD and preservice training. The theory highlights the importance of joint training for TAs and teachers so that they can communicate, collaborate and create shared understandings about their expectations in context. Further, lack of training and support may mean practitioners lack sufficient knowledge, confidence or understanding to practice effectively. Shared CPD could create a forum of shared responsibility and potential for pairs to influence the wider system e.g. colleagues (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017). Lack of teacher understanding was linked to frustration and tension in the literature (Emam & Farrell, 2009).

The theory describes the importance of clear and nurturing support structures in the wider school community and a responsive SLT facilitate inclusion. This mirrors some of the pairs' espoused inclusive processes in their classrooms. Understanding, support and mutual respect from SLT without judgment was important (Bedford et al., 2008), whereas Glazzard (2011) highlighted SLT viewing inclusion as a process that takes time, patience, and energy was key. This may approximate the category of *shared responsibility for inclusion* across the school and an *ethos of care and nurture* extending to that of staff and the wider community. Such whole-school approaches were promoted in some papers (Kendall, 2018; Emam & Farrell, 2009). This may imply alignment across several layers of the system, illustrating that the school community is '*on the same page'* as pairs.

In contrast, hierarchies within schools were associated with reduced TA inclusion in communication and decision-making processes, which in turn impacted their day-to-day facilitation of inclusion (Conboy, 2021). Bedford et al. (2008) echoed the need for a supportive organisational culture, not only for including children but TAs as valued members of the school

community. This aligns with a culture of social inclusion and teamwork promoted by the emergent theory.

The role of experience in SLT was named by Mackenzie (2011). This was not mentioned in the current theory; however, it is possible all participating schools had experienced SENCos and therefore, this warrants further research.

An increased need for communication and collaboration with external professionals and parents emerged in the present theory and literature (Kendall, 2018). All pairs were open to increased involvement and support from external agencies, naming the need for more time, consistency, feedback and their inclusion in such processes. However, many pairs seemed unsure of how EPs could support their work. This was echoed in Conboy (2021): where participants noted a need for support beyond training but were unsure of types of support could be provided. This may be due to limited previously successful experiences with external professionals. However, an openness to advice and support from external professionals was evident across the interviews. Pair one felt that a mediator role or training about successful partnerships could be helpful, however, other pairs felt, their success wouldn't be supported by "someone telling us how to work together" (4, 209). Perhaps this reflects the natural element of successful partnerships (C11), or perceptions of hierarchy related to the wider system.

Time and funding were key barriers to inclusion in the theory. In Cockroft & Atkinson (2015), LSAs felt there was not enough time to be as effective as they wanted. This echoes the sentiment of successful pairs that insufficient time for communication, planning and reflection can limit their ability to facilitate inclusion. More protected time to plan and reflect was called for across the present study and literature so that they can make better and more considered adaptations

to their approaches over time (Mackenzie, 2011). In some papers and interviews, additional TAs were viewed to provide more 'manpower' or capacity for inclusion (2, 97; Kendall, 2018). However, the theory proposes this is only effective in combination with key interpersonal and systemic processes.

In the literature, explicit concerns about the employment conditions of TAs were raised (Mackenzie, 2011; Glazzard, 2011). While only pair six named poor pay/conditions as barriers to TA effectiveness, all TAs described the strain in holding multiple roles on their capacity to facilitate inclusion (Mackenzie, 2011). Further, pairs two, three, and six named TAs 'giving extra time'. Disproportionately TAs found themselves using their own time to facilitate communication, training and contact with external professionals.

The wider educational system is recognised to present challenges for inclusion. For example, pair one and Glazzard (2011) align in describing a conflict between the inclusion and standards agendas. The literature describes such as impacting teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and approaches to teaching (Glazzard, 2011; Kendall, 2018). Mackenzie (2011) noted the pressure experienced by teachers to meet government standards can lead to less favourable practice. Pair four were uncertain whether the current education system was always in the best interests of the children where they found their capacity to meet their definition of inclusion was outweighed by the 'level of need' in their class. This results in them creating a partial resourced provision. This may implicitly echo Glazzard (2011), where there was no shared agreement on whether special schools were a threat to inclusion. Lack of sufficient funding and long waiting lists for professional advice were key barriers to inclusion in the literature and theory (Kendall, 2018).

However, the theory describes some ways that pairs interact with the wider system to facilitate inclusion successfully. Pairs 'grabbed scraps of time' and 'made the best of it' and 'fight for' resources highlighting their resilient yet realistic response to challenge. Several pairs communicated concerns related to SLT decisions, however this related to experience and position of power in the school. Some studies represented productive ways of responding to challenge such as supporting children based on need regardless of the time, they are on a waiting list (Kendall, 2018). Further, an approachable and responsive SLT were key to staff being able to include successfully.

### 6.2.3 Theories from the Literature

Four substantive theories were identified within the reviewed literature: multimodal theory, attachment theory, positioning theory, and symbolic interactionism. These offer potential explanations and extensions of the emergent theory, particularly in terms of applicability to educational psychology practice.

#### 6.2.3.1 Attachment Theory.

Attachment theory initially focused on infant-carer relationships, established the concept of a 'secure base' where the adult through sensitive responsiveness to a child's emotional needs can create a sense of security and safety, from which the child can use to explore their environment (Bowlby, 1988). Conboy (2021) argues that attachment theory is applicable to the school environment whereby TAs act as a secure base to support children to 'make sense' of their learning environment while meeting their emotional and physical needs. In line with attachment theory, the emergent theory champions the role of relationships in facilitating effective adult-child relationships and learning. The emergent theory outlines a clear process of teachers and TAs prioritising, tolerating and attuning to children's emotions and needs so that they can

respond in a way that helps them reach their potential. The emergent theory makes explicit links between pairs being able to create space for and 'contain' the children's emotions through consistent yet connected interactions. This was linked to creating a 'family-like environment' again where some pairs identified as taking up a parenting role.

The emergent theory offers an extended understanding of emotional experiences in schools where direct links between pairs' emotions and the quality of their work were made. Pairs described the need for attunement to the other's needs and responding with care, consistency and support. Bion's psychoanalytic representation of container-contained posits that the caregiver can take the full extent of the child's feelings to hold, digest and return them in a safer and more tolerable form (Bion, 1962a; Gomez, 2017). Projective identification describes a mechanism that facilitates the unconscious communication of meaning and emotion within this container-contained dynamic.

To feel contained, one feels that another is holding on to the intolerable (Bion, 2018). Linda [teacher] described how they offer containment to each other: *"we know at times it might be a little bit more difficult to be that person who includes but we know that if we are having a little time like that, that our partnership will compensate for that. We just read between the lines actually – 'That child I'm really not able to cope with them today or not able to cope with them in this situation' and then we will actually intervene for one another so that that inclusion carries on"* (2, 88). Further, the interdependence of pairs' emotional experiences with children was highlighted: " *To think about wellbeing, obviously for the children and then bringing it in to us as well because if we are not great, then we can't be great with the kids and it's a vicious circle, isn't it?"* (1, 87).

As such, this containment occurs like a chain where one partner offers containment to the other so that, in turn, the children's needs can be met and contained. This explanation clearly links between staff's emotional experiences to the children's. The emergent theory recognises the reciprocal impact of 'the work towards inclusion' on their own emotional experiences. This asserts that the relational process of containment through consistency and connection can facilitate the practice of teachers and TAs who work together. Where such mechanisms are at play in 'the work'  yet in a context of multiple barriers (pathway 4) which can impact pairs' capacity for inclusion (pathway 2), forms of supervision that centre on containment in Educational Psychology Practice could perhaps support educator's capacity for inclusion thus maximising children's outcomes (pathway 3).

*6.2.3.2 Positioning Theory.* Positioning theory is an explanatory mechanism where discursive processes serve to locate people through conversation through jointly produced storylines (Davies & Harré, 1999). Watson et al. (2011) argued that TLSAs can be placed in the positions of 'less competent other' relative to the teacher. By TLSAs expressing an awareness of 'knowing their place', this communicates that they and others have engaged in positioning processes. The emergent theory promotes the importance of equality in their partnerships and between the children in their classrooms, again engaging in the process of positioning. They described how teachers communicate with TAs as important. For example Sarah [teacher] described how TA-teacher hierarchy can impact how the children perceive TAs: "*Say if children noticed it and they saw TAs as lessor, they won't listen to them."* (1, 221). A key relational pattern across the theory was the teacher's rejection of hierarchy between them and the TA and advocating for their voice: *"I don't like it if in your classroom, children view every adult differently or if they think there's a hierarchy. I really hate that*" (6, 366).

And

*"Going back to people's roles, TAs are not here to be a teacher's assistant. That's not what their role is, they are here to support the learning"* (1, 198). This may be an attempt to reposition the TA's role.

The emergent theory extends to explain how children with SEN are positioned within their classrooms with equality, voice and choice. Pairs described that they facilitated whole-class conversations to promote an inclusive ethos amongst peers by recognising and normalising individuals' strengths and needs: " *It was a class conversation, but I didn't bring it up. It was them which made it nicer really that they had said it and they said 'oh that's like that's like H', 'yes right okay so what kind of…yes you're right and what kind of things do we do to help her feel included and what kind of things can we do?' and they were just naming lots of things…she goes on breaks, but it's not only her that would have them*" (4, 76). Further, this was linked to peers willingness to socialise and scaffold/support their peers with additional needs, showing the power of dialogue in shaping behaviour.

Throughout the interviews, the teachers offered extensive dialogue about inclusive practices and apart from interview 3 (newest relationship), the dialogues were deemed to be relatively balanced. Perhaps this symbolised the self-positioning of teacher as responsible for inclusion and equal to the TA.

TAs have come to represent inclusion on a broader basis, yet they are viewed as less competent and less valued in the wider system (e.g. less pay and rights such as agency work). This is mirrored in the way Howie (2010) described individuals with SEN are often positioned as 'other' or as less desirable. The lower status and othering of TAs may be linked to their association with SEN. Further, Watson et al. (2011) explored how power and hierarchy in the

system can impact a TA's agency, akin to the *initiative* subcategory and where Efthymiou & Kington (2017) found children were positioned as 'passive' learners by TA support. This demonstrates how the positioning of TAs and students may be mirrored in classrooms and schools. This may have an impact on pairs' capacity to include where TA's ability to respond autonomously is decreased (pathway 2) or where TAs are positioned as 'passive' practitioners this would impact children's inclusion (pathway 3).

However, positioning theory could be a mechanism for building the status of those who traditionally hold less power and status, TAs and children with SEN alike. This can be described almost akin to teacher and TA being actors on a stage to an audience of children, acting out their roles, relational patterns and dialogue…where the TA-teacher interaction is a symbol for meaning-making for diversity and difference: " *We do a lot of work around tolerance, inclusivity, differences, celebrating differences…ANNA (TA): Cultures… HEATHER (Teacher): Yeh cultures…behaviours… talking about things [as a class]. Like last year, we had a family, they actually came in to do circle time and they were talking about autism and what it is and allowing the children to ask those questions without any fear…and making sure we give them honest answers but making sure everyone is protected at the same time* " (5, 102-104)

Positioning theory highlights part of the emergent theory: 'how' communication occurs within pairs and with the children and presents TA-teacher dialogue as a vehicle to construct and reconstruct inclusion over time in their classroom, school and community over time. This aligns with symbolic interactionism where pairs language and interaction could influence the wider system's constructions of successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion e.g. through joint TA-teacher CPD.

### *6.2.3.3 Symbolic Interactionism.*

While not explicitly part of the reviewed papers, symbolic interactionism explains the patterns of interaction seen within TA-teacher pairs, being mirrored in their interactions with the children and then by the children in their interactions with peers. For example, pair four describe that they support each other, and they provide support to the children and that the children support each other: "*They do go out of their way to help her and include her. If there's teams, they will always pick 'H'* " (4, 81). This mirroring was related to communication about emotion, caring and nurturing attitudes, and respect for all in the theory. Symbolic interactionism serves to extend the theory to acknowledge how the children confer meaning about power and relationships may be based on the actions of pairs towards each other and the children through care, and valuing the contributions of each other yet recognising their differences (Charmaz et al., 2019). This represents the mirroring of their collective meaning of the world, which is perceived and interpreted by the children and so on, creating a wider social structure in their schools (Rock, 2016).

### *6.2.3.4 Other Theories.*

Multimodal theory considers communication and expression to occur through several forms; gesture, language, and visual channels (Kress, 2009). Efthymiou and Kington (2017) use the theory to show the complex relationship between symbolic and non-verbal modes of communication. For example, a teacher who places all children with SEN at a separate table to scaffold teaching by ability group may symbolise separation from peers with negative outcomes for academic identity and social isolation. This could also hold true in how diversity is 'framed within the classrooms' (p.2). This area was not explored by the emergent theory, perhaps due to its focus on success, however, multimodal theory supports consideration of practice in terms of structuring at organisational and relational levels to include all students.

Secondly, systems theory was introduced by Emam and Farrell (2009) to describe teacher-child relationships as a 'living system' through which emotional experiences, information and support is organised and transmitted and where tension impacts the health of living systems and in turn students' developmental trajectories. In this vein, the triadic interactions between TA-teacher and practitioner-child systems in the present study may mirror triadic family interactions espoused in family systems theory (Stroud et al., 2011) and could also be viewed as interdependent 'living system's through which facilitative emotional and practical resources can be exchanged successfully between TA and teacher and thus the children. This may align with This theory explains the interdependence between identified processes and actors in successful inclusion, where the emotional and practical support TAs and teachers offer to each other was linked to the quality of the emotional and practical support available to the children (Pathways 1, 2, 3) in the context of the wider system (Pathway 4).

### 6.2.4 Summary

Regarding RQ2: *What factors and mechanisms facilitate successful teacher-TA partnerships for inclusion?*, the literature is generally supportive of the links between the key interpersonal processes between teacher and TA and the quality of their interactions to include children (pathway 1). There is clear alignment between systemic barriers (pathway 4) and the impact of pairs' capacity to facilitate inclusion (pathway 2), particularly related to resources and emotional capacity relative to balancing the demands of the class, children with SEN and the national curriculum. The literature proposes an extension of the theory related to reduced TA-teacher hierarchy facilitating increased TA agency. Agency may relate to theoretical subcategory '*initiative*'. The literature also identified a link between teacher confidence and holding responsibility for inclusion and, thus, collaboration, ultimately impacting the quality of interactions.

The theory highlighted the link between the emotional experiences of staff and the emotional and learning experiences of the children. Through integrating the theory with the literature, the theory is extended to consider the emotional interdependence between pairs and the children as well as the stage their partnership sets to symbolise and construct meanings of power and difference in relationships through their espoused interpersonal processes in their classrooms (pathway 3) to build inclusive communities.

Areas identified in the literature and not the theory pertained to the personal experiences of staff with SEN or parenting (Conboy, 2021) and SENCo's experience (Mackenzie, 2011). One brief reference was made by pair two, describing that they are 'all mums'; however, this related more so to describing nurturing relationships to create a 'family-like environment' (2, 73), which links to attachment theory. Unlike some of the literature (Glazzard, 2011), the theory did not explore personal values or individual skills beyond *shared values* and *playing to each other's strengths.* This may be due to the relational focus of the study.

Watson et al., (2013) found that TSLAs tended to come from the same communities as the most deprived children in the school, while teachers did not. A theme of economic and social class emerged where TAs acted as 'intermediaries' between home and school. In the present study, limited reference to class was made, yet, TAs were described to hold lower status through less secure jobs and being expected to use their own time more than teachers. This may represent implicit hierarchies within staffing structures which in turn highlights inclusion as a process beyond children, but as a relational philosophy that extends into staff and wider society.

Areas of the theory that were not key findings in the literature which offer new insights:

- Pair's openness to advice and support from SLT and external professionals. This openness extended to learning from their own mistakes together to improve over time.

- TA and teacher both balance and enact connection and consistency/boundary functions for each other where their space and time to communicate allows reflection on patterns of their work which may link to a containing and collective state of mind (Bion, 1962b). They also offer this to the children where both TA and teachers demonstrated the maternal holding function and paternal function of providing a secure (structured) holding environment (Canham, 2004), perhaps illustrating their ability to tolerate anxieties related to the system and children as a pair and preventing a 'split' view of role e.g. TA is all nurture and teacher is all structure (Klein, 1959). Ultimately attunement to partner needs and emotions promotes compensation within the pair meaning children receive continuous and consistent input from an attuned adult due to increased emotional capacity.

- Broad definitions of inclusion beyond SEN and individual support. This considers social and emotional aspects of learning and the importance of peers and community in the relational and structural promotion of inclusion.

Regarding RQ3: *How could/do EPs support successful teacher-TA partnerships for inclusion?,* the theory presents a range of potential facilitating or hindering mechanisms that EPs could permeate into their practice. While the emergent theory does not explicitly name supportive strategies EPs can utilise beyond 'just be here more' (4, 308), it presents an opportunity for EPs to highlight the relational, organisational and strategic elements of their roles (Atfielde et al., 2023) where they can support staff to consider how they *'take up their roles within complex systems' (*Kennedy & Laverick, 2019, p.1).

The capacity-building nature of TA-teacher partnerships is recognised through integrating theory and literature. Namely, their interpersonal processes communicated through multiple modes increase their collective capacity to facilitate secure relationships with the children, which provide a secure base for learning and progress (pathway 3). Various external factors

challenge pairs' work (training, funding, staffing, deployment). However, the theory outlines efforts to 'fight', tolerate and interact with the wider system through mutual attunement and compensation to support successful inclusion.

## 6.3 Critical Appraisal

Despite a wealth of research on TA and teacher views on inclusive education and quantitative studies on effective TA deployment, there is a limited number of studies which specifically explore how TA-teacher partnerships can successfully support inclusion from their perspectives. Therefore, only three reviewed papers (Glazzard, 2011; Kendall, 2018; Watson et al., 2011) explored joint perspectives on inclusion, where two were not exclusively in primary schools. Only Glazzard (2011) focuses on joint perspectives of TA-teacher work towards inclusion in a primary school. However, this study was the weakest quality albeit adequate according to the CASP checklist (2018).

Caution must be applied in interpreting the literature due to findings being from various settings and the nature of small-scale qualitative research being highly context-dependent and, therefore, not directly comparable. However, as the search was limited to the UK, the transferability of findings is added. Further, much of the literature was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning some variance in findings could be due to residual changes in roles.

The limited number of relevant UK papers emphasises the need to further explore such relational processes for inclusion in context. Watson et al. (2011, p.107) argues that "role is open to interpretation by the actor[s] in the construction of their own system of professional practice".

The literature review broadly supports the emergent theory's four identified explanatory pathways revealing some minor differences and theoretical ideas that offer theory advancement.

## 6.4 Dissemination

A key purpose of this research project is to highlight the shared construction of success created by those directly involved in its daily enactment. Therefore it is the intention to disseminate the theoretical findings of this study by:

- Provide all participants and their settings with a leaflet outlining key points of the study.

- Presenting findings to the inclusion and educational psychology teams in the LA the research took place.

- Publish the findings in relevant journals or periodicals.

## 6.5 Conclusions and Contributions

The substantive theory highlights that joint conceptualisations of successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion are complex and interdependent. This study adds to the small pool of qualitative literature about successful TA-teacher partnerships. While many papers focus on attainment and TA deployment (Blatchford et al., 2009b), few concentrate on practitioners' joint conceptualisations of their role in successful inclusion in mainstream classrooms. In 2013, Houssart and Croucher (p.1) advocated for 'a more collaborative approach' to deploying TAs compared to previous government and expert advice. This research provides an alternative view by collaboratively constructing teacher-TA insights. The theoretical model provides coherence to an interconnected and complex relational process across teacher, TA and child, a form of triadic interaction that occurs daily in multiplicity across the UK. While the author recognises the context-specific nature of grounded theory, the study addresses a gap in the literature in a rich and nuanced manner.

According to Bryant (2017), theory is intended to have utility, generating insights that help those encountering the explored situation. Therefore, this research is relevant to practitioners, SLTs, LA and professional services teams such as EPs who work in similar contexts.

As such, the mechanisms outlined in the successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion generally emphasise the impact of social processes between actors in the system, e.g. adults and children and vice versa. There is argument for practitioners and senior leaders to explore relational processes with colleagues as part of inclusive agendas. This could support them to consider the complexity and importance of social and emotional processes in terms of their inclusive practice. It could promote questioning and thus understanding of a range of interpersonal, intrapersonal and systemic factors that may facilitate or hinder inclusion in their specific context. Clarke and Visser (2017; p.74) described an example of such practical application where a "whole-school discussion is required to agree on a workable context-specific definition of the TA role".

Further, where the TA-teacher partnership may serve as a symbol for constructing inclusion and where TAs are often positioned as lower in status than teachers, schools may wish to consider their attitudes towards SEN, difference and inclusion and the value and treatment of TAs and children with SEN in the wider school community e.g. embeddedness of inclusive ethos and staff working condition and wellbeing structures.

This research highlights the need for more or different training and CPD related to inclusion in promoting confidence and teacher responsibility. This could include training for teachers and TAs on working together for inclusion and consideration for SENCos in how pairs can be matched and facilitated to establish positive and effective partnerships for inclusion. A starting point could be assessing the impact of joint TA-teacher training related to topics of inclusion and SEN.

The study will also have implications for local practice in the LA, where the research took place. In the present study, the interviews created space for pairs' positive experiences of inclusion to emerge. In line with the epistemological lens of symbolic interactionism, the author recognises the potential for the interview process to positively impact participants' practice. I wondered what impact explicitly recognising their collective success would have on their subsequent work towards inclusive education. Some evidence of this emerged when Yvonne [TA] described: "E*ven here just now, having this conversation, obviously we know each other, but to hear you say I'm doing good, you know, that's nice."* (1, 174). This research merits consistent deployment of TAs as one potential deployment model, where TA deployment with a specific teacher could, in certain circumstances, facilitate the development of relationships for 'effective collaborative procedures' such as protected time to communicate, plan, collaborate, and debrief related to emotional experiences and the success of their practice. The importance of care towards staff in addition to consistency was raised.

The research LA is creating an inclusion audit to inform an inclusion kitemark for schools. Disseminating this study to the inclusion team could influence their course of action where the study highlights a local evidence-base in support of teacher and TA wellbeing, relationship-building and whole-school approaches/ethos. Such findings promote systemic Educational Psychology work related to supervision, staff well-being and development, and whole-school values. One such model could be the Relational Model of Supervision for Applied Psychology Practice (Kennedy et al., 2018). In this manner, EPs can contribute to a more successful and inclusive educational landscape for children in their communities by facilitating capacity-building by creating space to attend to relational and systemic processes (Fox, 2015). Further, the findings may influence the priorities of schools and EPs in planning their future work.

This study's rigorous and transparent application of Charmaz's CGT framework (2014) to a less-explored phenomenon in a dyadic manner in a UK context is a unique contribution to the literature. It offers new insights into the fields of Educational Psychology and Education. Specifically, it offers an original practitioner-centred viewpoint on the phenomenon of interest. The researcher recognises their influence over the research process through transparent memo-ing and research diary processes to acknowledge pre-conceptions related to their own professional and academic experiences.

## 6.6 Research Limitations

While the theory adhered to grounded theory recommendations for data collection, constant comparison and rigour, its findings emerged within specific situations and contexts. The core theoretical process of relational interdependence asserts the importance of TA-teacher partnerships in successful inclusion. While this process is likely to occur in similar situations, this conclusion can only be drawn once research is conducted in such contexts.

The study was conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic, which is suspected to have had a lasting impact on inclusion (Darmody et al., 2021; Moss et al., 2021). The reviewed studies were conducted both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving the possibility that some differences between theory and literature relate to temporal factors, e.g. structuring of roles.

While the strengths-based focus of the present study could empower individuals and support feelings of success (Freedman & Combs, 1996), it may minimise or implicitly reject difficulties practitioners face. Therefore, some potential barriers experienced by many TAs and teachers may not have emerged in this research. For example, challenges related to TA identity and

balancing independence with individual TA support appeared in the literature but not in the present study.

Using naturalistic dyadic interviews means that existing power dynamics were likely present in the interviews, meaning some voices may have been privileged over others in constructing a 'shared' perspective. For example, I noticed that TA four spoke far less than those in other interviews. However, such differences may be individual and situational in nature, e.g. tiredness and may not reflect a power dynamic. Further, the power I held as linked to the Educational Psychology Team may have applied pressure on pairs to provide specific answers. In interview two the TA stated: *"I suppose that's not helping you, because we are not giving you a specific 'x equals'..."* (61).

In recognising my role in the generation of the theory, I acknowledge that I could not take a purely *tabula rasa* approach to the research where I held existing beliefs from my experience in the Education and Educational Psychology sectors and where I had conducted literature searches as part of my research protocol to justify this course of study. According to Charmaz (2014, p.248): *"Each theory bears the imprint of its author's interests and ideas and reflects its historical context as well as the historical development of ideas – and…grounded theory – in its parent discipline".*

The potential for bias and power due to existing relationships between researcher and participants was acknowledged. However, the duality of roles was addressed in the information sheets and consent form and named at the beginning of interviews to build reflexivity and trust (McDermid et al., 2014). Contrastingly, existing relationships can be viewed as a resource for facilitating rich data (Roiha & Iikkanen, 2022).

While data was collected from a range of pairs from different schools across the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stages One and Two, it was from a small sample limited to one London LA. Therefore, generalisability is limited until further research is conducted across more expansive geographical areas.

Difficulties with recruitment meant that theoretical sampling of Key Stage Two pairs was not possible. However, the research is argued to be credible as it is substantiated by extant literature, and the data was deemed sufficiently saturated.

## 6.7 Future Research

The emergent theory is broad as it represents patterns of interaction across four pathways and 12 categories. Future research on each pathway independently, in different types of settings and geographical areas could provide a more transferable understanding. Increased scope of future sampling and comparison of results with the present study could increase its relevance and applicability e.g. a cross-London exploration.

While this study was compared to literature about TAs and teachers in educational contexts only, subsequent searches have revealed potentially relevant directions in other disciplines and actors. For example, Fruggeri (2005; 2018)  postulates the idea of relational interdependence with links to Bronfenbrenner (1979) where "*one relational context is a positive developmental context for a child as long as the relationship with other relational contexts is also positive*" (Harris et al., 2018; p.167). Such research in social psychology and communication theory moved away from traditional views of relationships as comprising of dyadic interactions only, wherein a triadic context, "*the relationship between two partners influences the relationships that each one of them has with others*". Thus, the reciprocal influence of family relationships is acknowledged in international literature and wider disciplines. This could be an area of future

research related to triadic school relationships which are tentatively supported by the findings of this study. In this vain, future research could include students' thoughts on how teachers and TAs work well together for inclusion.

A salient pattern of the present study was the positioning of TAs as a symbol of SEN and difference more broadly. As such, the status of TAs may represent a culture towards SEN or difference more generally and, therefore, could be an anchor point for broader societal change. This could warrant more specific and focused research to uncover potential invisible processes enacted by the education system. Finally, the theoretical categories and patterns not previously identified in the literature could highlight directions for future research.

While information on gender, experience and role was collected, data on other aspects of identity[23] was not. Other aspects of identity might intersect and affect the TA-teacher partnership. For example, some data emerged related to age, time in relationship versus experience, culture and class yet information about these specific aspects was not collected from all participants. While, these questions are currently unanswered they could inform considerations in future research as a part of the theory of relational interdependence.

## 6.8 Concluding Thoughts

Ultimately, this study cannot claim a universal conceptualisation of 'successful TA-teacher partnerships for inclusion' due to the small-scale nature of the study in a specific geographical context. However, it may serve as a starting point for educators and Educational Psychologists

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[23] Aspects of identity outlined by Burnham (2013) include Gender, Geography, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Attire, Accent, Culture, Colour, Class, Education, Ethnicity, Employment, Economics, Spirituality and Sexuality (orientation and expression).

to better understand 'work on the real ground' and generate future research and discussion about a phenomenon that many children encounter at school each day (Emam & Farrell, 2009, p.16).

This study privileges the links between the collective social and psychological processes of TAs and teachers and those of the children in their class which contribute to their successful inclusion. While, the lens of the researcher and context-specific nature of the theory is recognised, further research could explore whether such relational interdependence forms part of a broader or community form of truth (Burr, 2003).

This research advocates for time and space for teacher-TA pairs to construct their expectations of mutual support and share their emotional experiences to the benefit of themselves and inclusion. Educational Psychologists could advocate for and facilitate these spaces and support leadership teams to consider 'good practice examples' to inform how they set up 'teacher and TAs as teams' for successful inclusion (UNISON, 2013, p.3). Further, this study may be directly relevant to TAs and teachers who work in similar contexts.

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# 8. APPENDICES

**Appendix A: NHS Health Research Authority: Recognition that the Proposed Study is considered Research**

## Appendix B: Approval from the Principal Educational Psychologist of the Educational Psychology Team

[logo redacted]

15th February 2023

**Supporting Letter for Tavistock Research Ethics Committee**

The Research Ethics Committee, Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust,

I, ███████ Principal Educational Psychologist (Joint), am happy for Dearbhla Dowd (Trainee Educational Psychologist) to conduct the proposed research (as part of her professional doctorate in Educational Psychology) in ██████ Schools, titled:

*A grounded theory of successful teacher-TA partnerships for inclusive education: A Social Constructivist Perspective.*

I have read and approve the proposed aims, method and recruitment strategy (including the recruitment email, information sheet and consent forms) for the research.

Yours sincerely,

[signature redacted]

███████

Principal Educational Psychologist (Joint)

███████████

[logo redacted]

# Appendix C: Recruitment Email to Headteachers

*SUBJECT LINE: CALL FOR teacher and teaching assistant pairs to be interviewed about their successful partnerships for inclusion*

*Dear [Headteacher/SENCo]*

*My name is Dearbhla Dowd. I am a doctoral student in Educational Psychology where I am currently on placement in the [redacted] Educational Psychology Team. I am researching teacher and teaching assistant pairs about their experience of successful partnerships for inclusion. I am currently on placement in the [redacted] Educational Psychology Team.*

*If you could please share the details of this project with your staff alongside the information sheet and consent forms so that any who might wish to do so can volunteer to take part in the research. I have attached the information sheet and consent forms to this email so that you can share these with the team.*

**Project Title**: A grounded theory of successful teacher-TA partnerships for inclusive education: A Social Constructivist Perspective

*Participant requirements*
- *Teacher and teaching assistant pairs who have worked together for a period of at least 6 months currently or in the past 6 months.*
- *Agreement from both the teacher and teaching assistant that they have a successful partnership for promoting inclusive education.*
- *A pair who teaches one or more students with additional needs in their classroom.*

Commitment from participants and headteacher
- *One hour in-depth interview on site at your school.*
- *Maintenance of confidentiality.*
- *Availability of the SENCo or headteacher to discuss any concerns that may arise.*
- *Consent from the teacher and teaching assistant to take part*
- *Agreement from the headteacher via the consent form or email.*

Benefits
- *A chance to reflect on the successes of their practice individually and as a pair.*
- *An opportunity to add teacher and teaching assistant voice on their working partnerships and inclusion to the literature.*

Risks
- *Discussions about their working relationships are intended to be strengths-based and developmental, however, there is a small risk that participants could experience discomfort from the interview/research process.*

*Interviews will be allocated on a first come first serve basis.*

*Many thanks,*

*Dearbhla Dowd*
*Trainee Educational Psychologist (M4 Child, Educational and Community Psychology).*

**Appendix D: Information Sheet**

# Information Sheet

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

### Research Project
# A grounded theory of successful teacher-TA partnerships for inclusive education: A Social Constructivist Perspective

*This research has received formal approval from the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee*

### The Researchers
Dearbhla Dowd: ddowd@tavi-port.nhs.uk
Dr Adam Styles: astyles@tavi-port.ac.uk

### Consent to Participate in a Research Study
This letter aims to provide you with information about the research so that you can decide whether to participate in this study.

### Research Description
*Aim:* This research aims to investigate the experiences of teachers and teaching assistant who successfully work together to promote inclusive education across a number of primary schools.

*Contribution from participants:* The teacher-teaching assistant pair is asked to participate in an interview for approximately one hour. The researcher will ask open-ended questions related to the research topic to generate a dialogue between the teacher and teaching assistant.

Participants are expected to agree that their partnership is successful in promoting inclusive education.

*Potential benefits:*
- *Support a reflective conversation which may include identification of strengths, achievements and professional development in yourself, your colleague and your working relationship to promote inclusive education.*
- *Add teacher and teaching assistant voice on 'what works' for inclusive education to the education and psychology literature.*
- *Inform others' approach to inclusive education who are in similar working relationships and education settings.*

*Potential risks:*
- *There is a small chance that taking part in the research could lead to uncomfortable conversations with a colleague with implications on your working relationship.*

*However, it is hoped that these conversations can be constructive and reflective, where the research is intended to be focused on strengths.*

- *Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in this study due to the presence of a research partner, however, both participants will be asked to commit to maintaining confidentiality.*

*Aftercare:* Should any issues arise due to your involvement in this study, the SENCO and/or headteacher have agreed to support developmental conversations individually or as a working pair. The researcher can be contacted to support with this.

## Confidentiality of the Data

The interviews will be audio-recorded. Interview transcripts will be stored for 1-2 years. Data will be held in line with the Trusts' Data protection and handling policy. The researcher will maintain confidentiality related to interview content subject to legal limitations. Where concern or risk is identified, safeguarding or appropriate professionals will be contacted.

The school and names of participants will be anonymised.

## Location

The interviews will take place in an allocated room at the school which you work where the door can be closed so that interview is not overheard.

## Disclaimer

You are not obliged to take part in this study and are free to withdraw at any time until the data has been anonymised, typically within two weeks of the interview. Should you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself or the school and without obligation to give a reason.

## Debriefing for Participants

Should any concerns arise related to this research, you can contact the researcher, Dearbhla Dowd, or Paru Jeram, Trust Quality Assurance Officer pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk

## Debriefing for Headteachers/SENCos

Should the teacher-teaching assistant pair report emotional or relational concerns due to taking part in this study, it is hoped that you or the school's SENCo would support a developmental conversation either individually or as a working pair to resolve any issues. You may contact the researcher for support with such conversations if deemed necessary.

Participation in the research should have no bearing on staff management or employment and their participation will have no bearing on the services the school receives from the Educational Psychology Team.

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

**Appendix E : Consent Form**

**Consent to Participate in a Research Programme Involving the Use of Human Participants**

# A grounded theory of successful teacher-TA partnerships for inclusive education:
# A Social Constructivist Perspective
*The Researchers*
Dearbhla Dowd: ddowd@tavi-port.nhs.uk
Dr Adam Styles: astyles@tavi-port.ac.uk

*This research is being conducted as part of the researcher's Professional Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology.*

| *Please tick below if you agree to the following statement* | Teaching Assistant ✓ | Teacher ✓ | Headteacher /SENCo ✓ |
|---|---|---|---|
| I have the read the information leaflet relating to the above research. | | | |
| I understand the purpose of the research and I have been able to ask questions. | | | |
| I understand I will be interviewed alongside my colleague and engage in a discussion about our practice. | | | |
| My participation is voluntary, and I understand I can withdraw at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. | | | |
| I understand the researcher will keep interview data confidential unless risk of harm is identified. | | | |
| I understand that there are limits to confidentiality due to the presence of a research partner. | | | |
| I commit to maintaining confidentiality related to what my colleague raises in the interview. | | | |
| I understand the findings of the research may be presented at conferences and in academic journals. | | | |
| I understand that participation in this research will have no bearing on services received from [borough redacted] Educational Psychology Team. | | | |
| Should any issues arise I agree to support developmental conversations for participants individually or as a working pair. | | | |

*Please sign below to signify that you hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study:*

Date:
**Participant 1**                                    **Participant 2**
NAME (Block Capitals)                    NAME (Block Capitals)

Signature                                          Signature

………………….                                    …………………….

**Headteacher/SENCo**
NAME/Role/School (Block Capitals)

Signature

………………………..

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

## Appendix F: Ethical Approval from Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699
https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/

Dearbhla Dowd

**By Email**

27 March 2023

Dear Dearbhla,

**Re: Trust Research Ethics Application**

**Title:** 'A grounded theory of successful teacher-TA partnerships for inclusive education: A Social Constructivist Perspective'

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved.  This means you can proceed with your research.

**Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.**
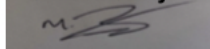
If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

**Michael Franklyn**

Academic Governance and Quality Officer
T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

cc.     Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

**Appendix G: Email to Educational Psychology Team to Support Recruitment**

**From:** Dowd, Dearbhla
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 17, 2023 4:58 PM
**To:** ▇▇Educational Psychologists▇▇ EducationalPsychologists@▇▇ ov.uk>
**Subject:** FW: Support with Doctoral Research Recruitment: Successful teacher-TA partnerships for inclusive education

Hi all,

Following on from my reminder at the team meeting, please find the flyer and documents for my research below.

The aim is to interview TA-teacher pairs about their successful partnerships for inclusion in mainstream primary schools.

I do▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ really appreciate support with this.

Best wishes,

**Dearbhla Dowd**
Trainee Educational Psychologist

**Appendix H: Initial Interview Guide**

**Interview Guide 1**

Research Questions and associated Interview Questions

1. *"According to teachers and TAs, what does their successful partnership for including children with additional needs look like?"*
   a. *Tell me about your working relationship.*
   b. *How does your partnership support inclusive education?*
   c. *What does this success look like?*
   d. *Could you tell me more about this?*
2. *"What factors and mechanisms facilitate/hinder successful teacher-teaching assistant partnerships for inclusion?"*
   a. *What supports the success in your partnership for inclusion?*
   b. *What barriers exist to promoting inclusion in your working relationship?*
   c. *What else impacts the success of your partnership in working towards inclusion?*
3. "How could Educational Psychologists, further support successful teacher-TA partnerships for inclusion"?
   a. How could others support the success of your partnership in promoting inclusive education?
   b. Could educational psychologists play a role here? If so, how?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Appendix I: Final Interview Guide**

**Interview Guide 6**

Research Questions and associated Interview Questions

1. What does inclusion mean to you in your classroom?
   a. What are your main aims for inclusion as a partnership?
   b. How does this inclusive classroom work?
   c. Has your definition or understanding of inclusion changed over time?
2. "What does your successful partnership for including children with additional needs look like (RQ1)?"
   a. How would you describe your working relationship?
   b. How does your partnership support inclusive education?
   c. What do you value about the other person that supports inclusion?
   d. Thinking of a moment you have worked well together towards inclusion, what did that look like? How would that impact the children?
   e. How do you work through challenging moments together?
   f. Do emotions play a role in your partnership in promoting inclusion? If so, what does this look like? Does/How might staff emotion link to CYP?
   g. How do you promote inclusion when working with the whole class?
3. "What factors and mechanisms facilitate/hinder successful teacher-TA partnerships for inclusion (RQ2)?"
   a. What else supports your partnership towards inclusion?
   b. What barriers exist to promoting inclusion in your working relationship?
   c. What does your school do to support your partnership for inclusion?
   d. Does the structure of the school e.g. teams/staffing/scheduling/senior leadership impact on your partnership and inclusion? If so, how?
   e. I'm wondering if you hold additional roles to your classroom roles. If so, do they impact the success of your partnership in working inclusively?
   f. Does time play a role in how you work? If so, how?
   g. As a partnership, how do you work with others to promote inclusion?
   h. Do the values of the school and you as individuals play a role in the success of your partnership for inclusion? If so, how?
   i. Does/how might the wider education system impact the success of your partnership for inclusion?
4. Do you feel there is any separation between TAs and teachers at the school?

5. How could others further support the success of your partnerships for inclusion (RQ3)?
   a. Could external professionals e.g. EPs play a role here? If so, how?
   b. Can you describe if any, involvement from external professionals that has been helpful for your partnerships or working inclusively?
6. Is there anything else that supports or could further support the success of your partnership for inclusion?

# Appendix J: Transcript Excerpt from Interview Two with Initial Codes

**Left column (initial codes):**

..Making him feel betw us that he is safe an
..Pre-empting triggers and reassuring CYP to supp/se
..Supporting CYP to feel safe when routine changes
..We only have so many hours in the day
..Other duties impact partnership for inclusion
..Need for extra time as a pair

..We make sure you are not taken away
..Lucky that theres always two of us in the clas
..Precious that there's always two adults in clas
..Having manpower to do interventions and spend ind ti

..Teacher stopped TA being taken by speaking to
..Acknowleging challenges and limitations to inclu
..If TA is taken they are replaced by another adult
..Another adult would support with some intervention

..Adult supporting certain CYP during wholeclas
..Supporting wholeclass participation
..Limited hope for additional adult in class
..Using humour over what may not be possible
..Laugher to manage limited hope for more support
..Knowing eachother really well
..Having open conversations
..Teacher knows TA capability
..TA knows teacher expectations
..Teacher speaking to TA respectfully
..Shared vision in wanting what's best for the chil
..School+pair share vision for incl. so all going same

**Right column (transcript):**

95  DEARBHLA: What factors facilitate or hinder your partnership for inclusion?

96  STEPHANIE: Possibly time, that's the thing. We only have so many hours in the day and obviously there are other things that come into play as well as far as our duties are concerned. Yeh, I have to cover other areas, not other classes, but other areas and it is just taking that time, I think we need some extra. That is, I would say the biggest hindrance.

97  LINDA: And sometimes, we are really lucky because there's always two of us in the classroom and we make sure that, because that's very precious, that you are not taken away. But sometimes it's just manpower, just having enough people to do things – enough people to do little interventions or to spend ten minutes with that child.

98  DEARBHLA: How to you make sure there are two of you in the classroom?

99  LINDA: At one point, you were being taken out when there was a medical need in the rest of the school and I ended up being in the classroom and having an outside area and I just went to the head and said ' I can't do that. I can't have [TA] suddenly being taken'. So now it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen. And if for some reason you are not here, someone else is drafted into [Foxglove Class]   so we always have two adults. But even still it would be lovely to have another adult every so often just doing some interventions.

100  STEPHANIE: Yes it would.

101  LINDA: Just being with the children when there's whole class teaching, just making sure, maybe there's a couple of children that need an adult next to them.

102  STEPHANIE: It's always possible… [both laugh].

103  DEARBHLA: Is there anything that particularly facilitates your partnership either personally or on a wider basis?

104  STEPHANIE: I think without being repetitive, it's what we said before: conversations being open and having that relationships where we know each other really well. I know Linda's expectations and Linda knows our capabilities and it is just having that conversation and respectfulness… I mean, Linda would never speak to like "I'm the teacher" you know, there's no hierarchy, or anything like that. We all have the same vision, we want what's best for the children and exactly what you said [looks to teacher] we want them to do the best that they can.

105  LINDA: And being in this school helps as well as we are all going in the same direction, we are not pulling in different directions and yeb

**Appendix K: Excerpt from Research Diary**

Entry after interview four: "*I noticed that although the pair were open about the emotions of the children, they did not seem to extend their thinking beyond agreeing that emotion 'probably' did impact them also. Further when speaking about SLT, I sensed a reluctance to discuss this from the pair… I wondered whether my pre-existing relationship with the SENCo and headteacher and their knowledge of this had impacted their comfort to be open or whether differences between the researcher role and my role as Trainee Educational Psychologist had caused confusion for them – where they were used to discussing children with external professionals, however, not themselves?*".

Entry after the final interview: *"When considering depth and richness of the data across interviews, I felt that interviews 3 and 4 were not as rich or participant-led as the other interviews. I wondered whether this was linked to time working together and the time they've had to familiarise themselves with each other and develop successful practices for inclusion".*

**Appendix L: Examples of Memos which Contributed towards the Generation of
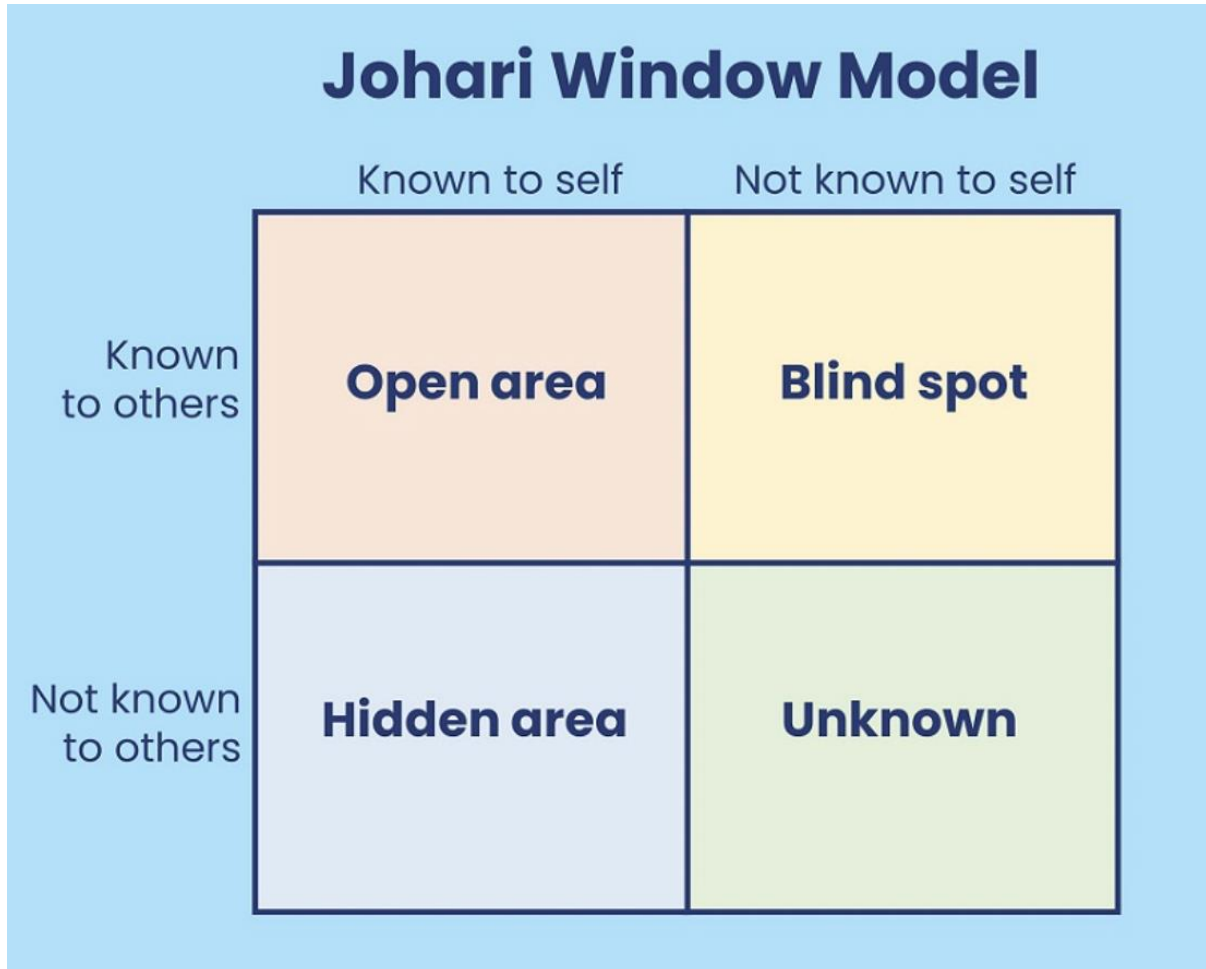Theoretical Categories and Pathways**

*Memo on 25.10.24: There* seems to be an emerging concept of 'give and take' in role while
retaining an awareness and conscientiousness of roles, contributions and expectations of their
partner.  However, flexibility to change or trade off tasks if needed is being highlighted.

*Memo on 30.10.2023:* Links between the authority held by the TA and ability to manage
behaviour. Is this related to TA's social status which could be linked to their positioning in
the social hierarchy of the school? Where the TA may not have done anything wrong, but
their authority and status in the wider school impacts the respect and listening of CYP.

*Memo on 23/11/23:* In reflecting on data collection and analysis so far (interviews 1-3), I am
noticing parallel subcategories within pairs and between pair and the children. For example,
where pairs create space for emotions within their partnership, they also tend to make space
and prioritise emotions of the children. In these pairs, prioritising their own and children's
emotion was linked to positive CYP responses in terms of feeling safe, knowing they can
speak about worries at school and progress in their learning and wellbeing. This caused me to
wonder how patterns of interaction play out within and between the actors (TA-teacher-
child).

*Memo on 26/11/23:* TA three discussed her status relative the teacher she works with. She
linked "feel[ing] like we are all on the same level" to being listened to by the teacher and
listening to the teacher's ideas. This introduces the idea of reciprocal or egalitarian
communication being linked to feelings and status within their partnership. Pairs are noticing
emotions and signs of them in their class. This reminds me to the concept of attunement
whereby being aware of and noticing emotions can support their understanding and
interactions with the CYP in their class. This seems to link strongly to 'knowing each child'
and recognising differences in the individual needs of each child in their class to adapt their
approach.

*Memo on 14.2.24:* Communication with the whole team of adults (SLT, parents, external
professionals) around the child was facilitated by team work i.e. shared decision making
(Pathway 1). However, where pairs were not included by those in wider system, this was
believed to have a negative impact on the quality of their work. This introduced language
around adults, particularly TAs 'being included' in communication processes in the school
and the wider system (Pathway 4). I found the concept of 'TA's being included' of interest,
potentially representing another pattern of 'mirroring' e.g. how children with SEN are treated
mirroring how TAs are treated or vice versa. Pair one and two's ability to communicate
disagreement to SLT about decisions and advocate for TA voice seemed to be important in
protecting staffing but also in terms of viewing inclusion not exclusively in the context of
individual children but as an approach adopted by the wider community e.g. adults, children,
families etc. I wonder whether this links to symbolic interactionism where actions of the pair
and with the children are reconstructed in the wider system.

**Appendix M: Johari's Window Model Used during Memo-writing and Research Diary**



# Johari Window Model

|  | Known to self | Not known to self |
|---|---|---|
| **Known to others** | Open area | Blind spot |
| **Not known to others** | Hidden area | Unknown |

# Appendix N: Prevalence of Categories and Focused Codes across Interviews Recorded on MaxQDA

| | Interview 1 | Interview 2 | Interview 3 | Interview 4 | Interview 5 | Interview 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 'In it together': Nurturing family-like environment | | | | | | |
|   Ethos of Care, Nuture and Safety through Consistency+Connection | | | | | | |
|     Consistent routines boundaries expectations | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|     Promoting Care, Connection, Nurture, Safety in classroom | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Shared responsibility for inclusion acr. school | | | | | | |
|     Shared responsibility for all students in class including SEN | ■ | | ■ | ■ | | ■ |
|     Encouraging and facilitating peer support/scaffolding | | ■ | | ■ | ■ | |
|     Supportive approachable involved responsive SLT + school | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | |
|     Consistent and supportive external professionals | | ■ | ■ | ■ | | |
|   Positive accepting 'whole class atitude to inclusion+difference | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Supporting eachother: We 'back each other up' | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Emotional interdependence in r/ships+work towards incl.CYP,pair | | | | | | |
|   Creating space to support/address emotion: empathy + expression | ■ | ■ | ■ | | ■ | ■ |
|   Prioritising noticing accepting regulating CYPs emotions/behav. | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Interrelation of emotions their r/ship + work with CYP | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Not letting emotional barriers last: Persistent + Resilient | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | ■ |
| Open + ongoing communication : Space for talking + listening | | | | | | |
|   Clear ongoing conversations: Listen discuss reflect | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   How pair communicates: Open/honest, Respectful, Positive | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Explicit and facilitative communication with CYP | ■ | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Creating space for communication | ■ | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Communication with team adults around CYP: parents, SLT, staff | ■ | ■ | | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Making It Work: Realistic creative compensatory response | | | | | | ■ |
|   Compensating for eachother: prioritising+playing to strengths | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   We do the best we can:Creative initiative proactive resourceful | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Accepting challenge+limitations to create realistic expectation | ■ | ■ | ■ | | ■ | ■ |
|   Preparation planning and organisation | ■ | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Balancing priorities CYP'at the centre' vs ind/class/sch need | ■ | | ■ | ■ | ■ | |

| | Interview 1 | Interview 2 | Interview 3 | Interview 4 | Interview 5 | Interview 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-hierarchical relationships based on respect+equality | | | ■ | | | |
|   Respect, Appreciation, Considerat strengths, role, contributions | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   No separation: Pair-SLT, T-TAs, CYP-class | ■ | | | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   'Lack of ego': Different but equally important | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | ■ |
|   Voice + choice: Advocacy and autonomy of TA and child | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| The Wider System: Factors outside of the classroom | | | | ■ | | |
|   Staffing impacts inclusive practice | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Scarcity of money time resources + services:'cut to the bone' | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Leadership: Decisions and impact | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Influence of wider education system and societal issues | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| An evolutionary process: Role of Experience+Opennes to Dvt + A | | | | ■ | | |
|   Learning over time: Setting, Role CYP + from eachother/CPD | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Positive + open attitude towards advice + support to impr pract | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Changing Context Over Time | ■ | ■ | | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Knowing + recognising each child individually: str needs+progr | | | | | | ■ |
|   Recognising individual progress in learning and other skills | ■ | ■ | ■ | | ■ | ■ |
|   Understanding each child+respond needs for effective inclusion | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Being flexible and adaptive: Reponding to class+ind needs | | | | | | |
|   Individualised + Targeted App: Teaching, Support, Resources | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Considering and responding to needs of class on ongoing basis | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Being flexible when things aren't working/situation changes | ■ | ■ | ■ | | ■ | |
|   Working together flexibly | ■ | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Environmental adaptations | | | ■ | ■ | ■ | |

| | | Interview 1 | Interview 2 | Interview 3 | Interview 4 | Interview 5 | Interview 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Working as a team rather than against eachother: Collaboration | | | | | | | |
|   Inclusion and collaboration w/ Whole Team around the Child | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Pair:Working as a Team rather than against eachother | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| 'It's not just work': A positive trusting personal relationship | | | | | ■ | | ■ |
|   Positive and Personal: 'It's not just work' | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | ■ |
|   Knowing + trusting eachother | | ■ | ■ | ■ | | ■ | ■ |
|   'We just click in with eachother': Automatic + Natural | | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | ■ |
|   Shared experiences | | ■ | | | | | ■ |
| On the Same Page: Shared understanding priorities values+hopes | | | ■ | | ■ | ■ | |
|   Viewing inclusion as broad spectrum beyond SEN/acad and ind CYP | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
|   Similar approach/style/intentions/values/hopes | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |

| | | Interview 1 | Interview 2 | Interview 3 | Interview 4 | Interview 5 | Interview 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 'In it together': Nurturing family-like environment | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Emotional interdependence in r/ships+work towards incl.CYP,pair | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Open + ongoing communication : Space for talking + listening | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Making It Work: Realistic creative compensatory response | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Non-hierarchical relationships based on respect+equality | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| The Wider System: Factors outside of the classroom | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| An evolutionary process: Role of Experience+Opennes to Dvt + A | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Knowing + recognising each child individually: str needs+progr | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Being flexible and adaptive: Reponding to class+ind needs | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Working as a team rather than against eachother: Collaboration | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| 'It's not just work': A positive trusting personal relationship | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| On the Same Page: Shared understanding priorities values+hopes | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |

**Appendix O:** Initial Mapping of Links Between Categories (represented as circles) According to Four Identified Pathways (represented as Colour-coded Arrows between Categories)

**Figure A1** *First map of categories, early focussed codes and tentative links between categories*
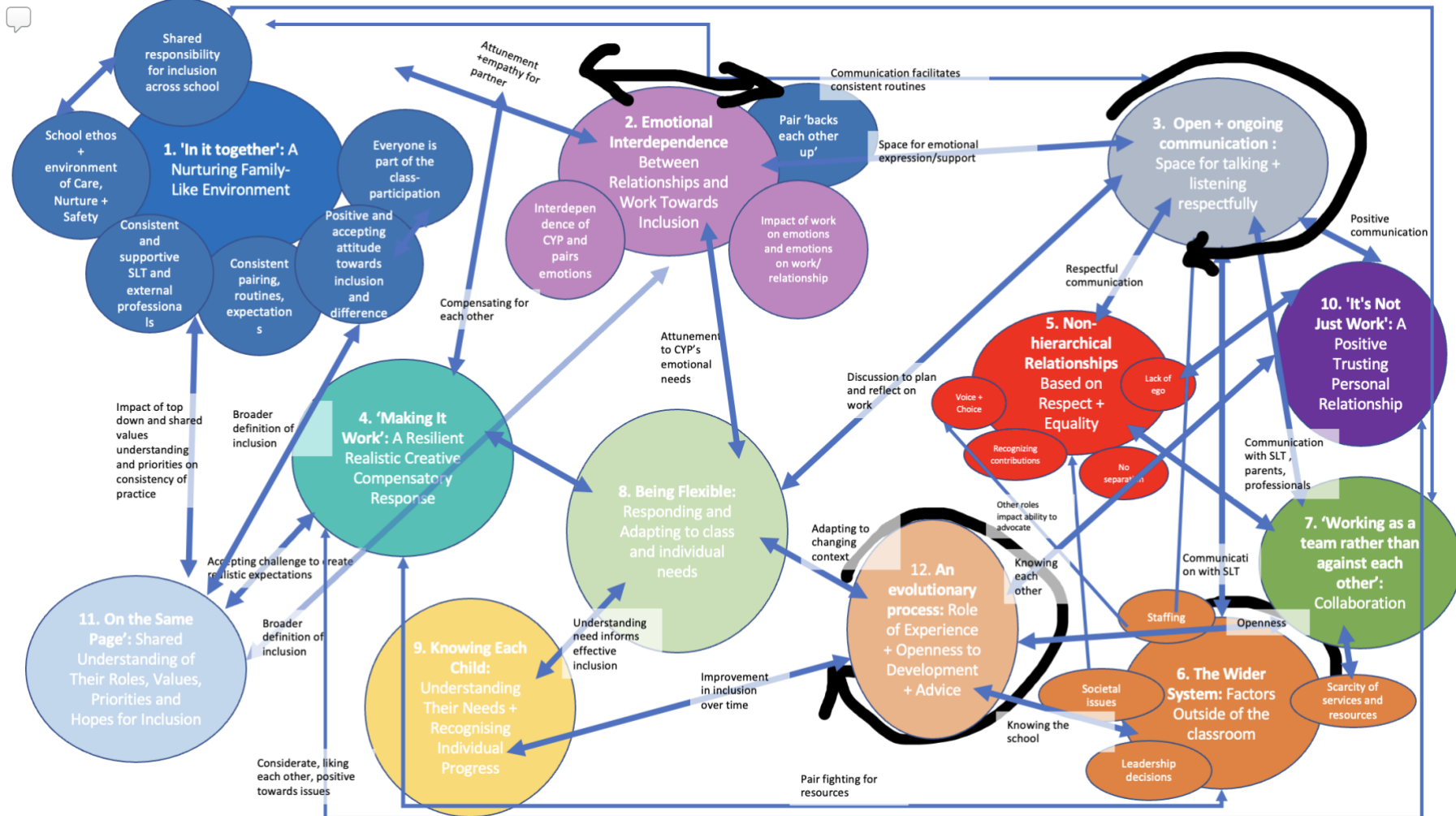
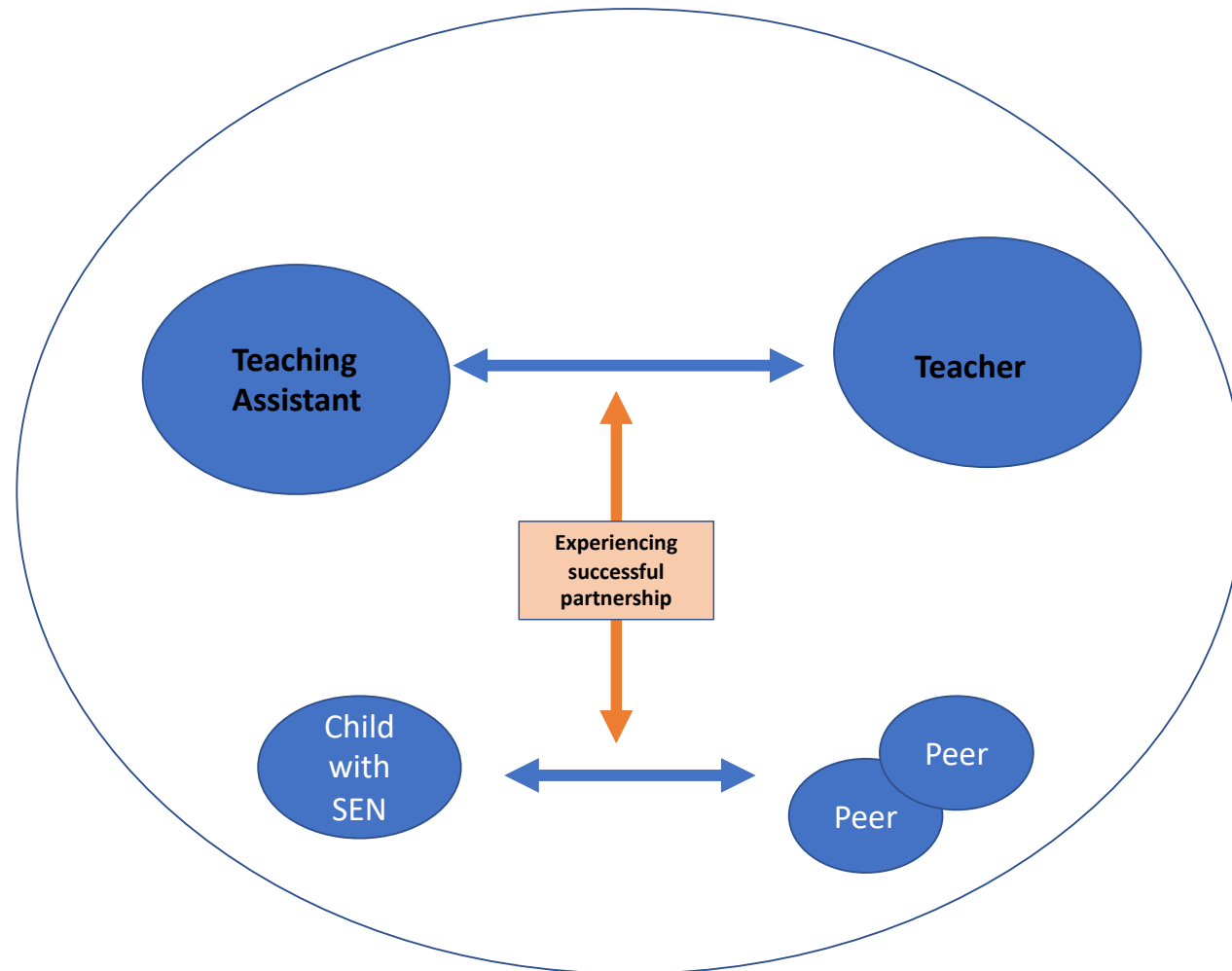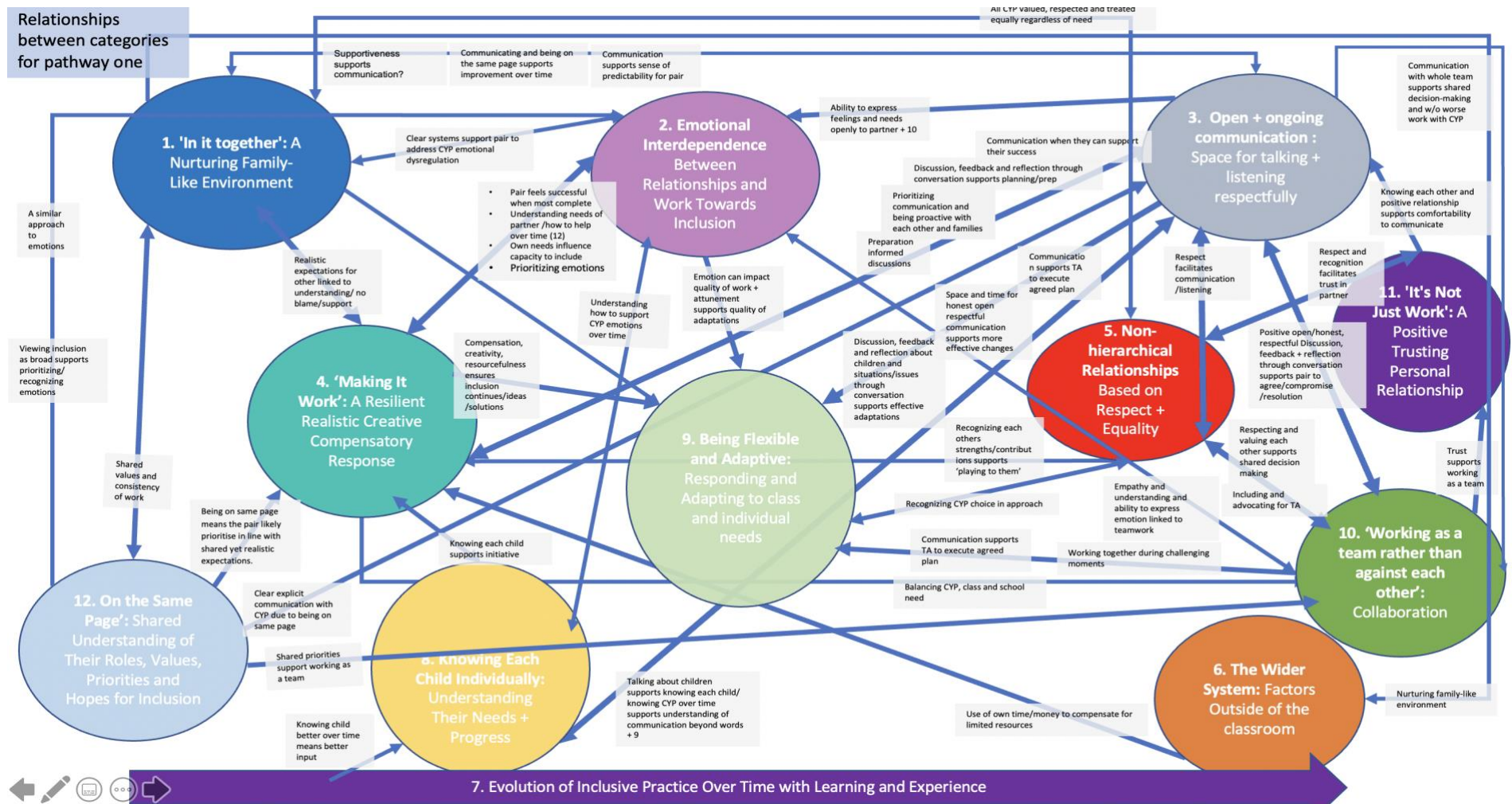**Figure A2** *Initial Conceptualisation of Mapping Across Actors in the System*

**Figure A3** *Pathway One (Blue): Interpersonal Processes between Teacher and TA which Support the Quality of their Interactions with the Children*

**Figure A4** *Pathway Two (Green): Pair's Intrapersonal Response to their Successful Partnership which Supports their Collective and Individual Capacities to Work Inclusively*
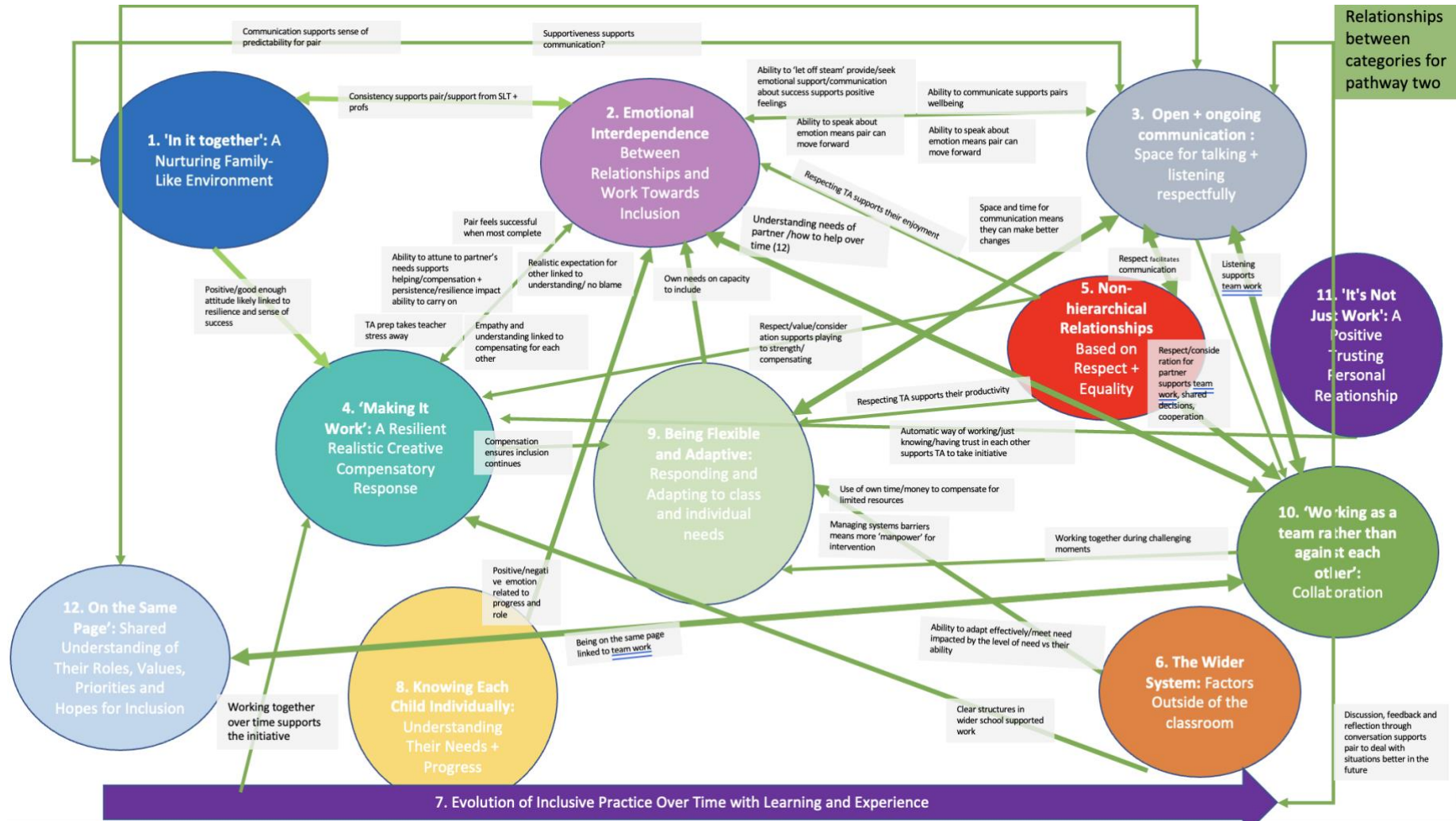
**Figure A5** *Pathway Three (Orange): Children's Responses to Pairs' Successful Partnerships*
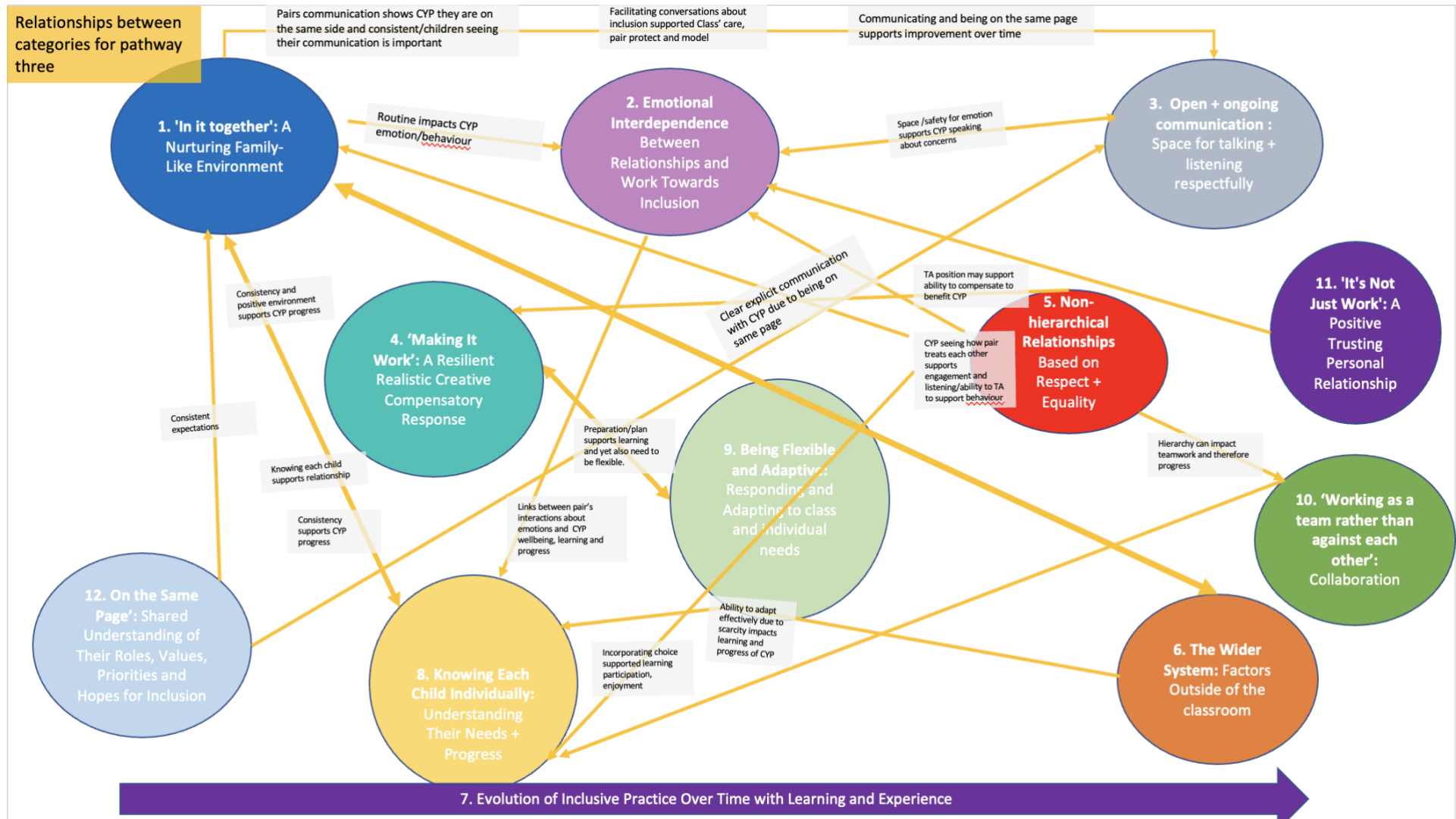
**Figure A6** *Pathway Four (Red): Pairs Interaction with and response to the Wider System*
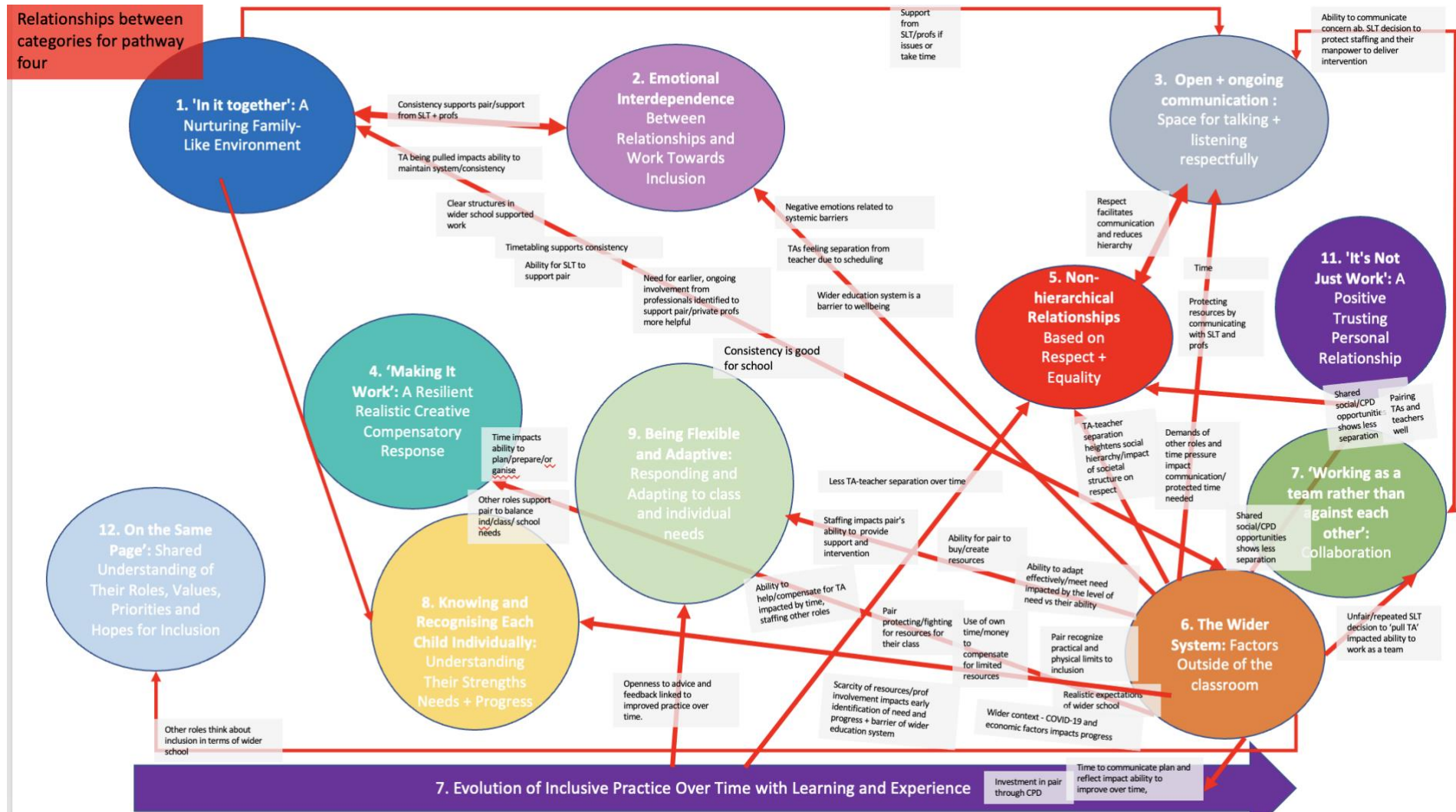
**Appendix P: Category 7 – Evolution of Inclusive Practice Over Time Through Experience and Openness to Advice and Development**

All pairs recognised that their ability to successfully facilitate inclusion improved over time.

<u>Learning over time: Setting , Role, CYP, each other and CPD</u>

Learning over time through time and experience in the setting and in their role. Teacher 6 described how experience in role supported her understanding of inclusion informing her work: *"SAMANTHA [teacher]: I think where I came from a non-education background, so I hadn't been in schools since I had been in school. I think I envisioned it as a particular group of children. Whereas now I see it as everyone and the different ways that children can be included." (6, 103)*

Further, time working together and getting to know each other was described as helpful by some pairs:

*"SAMANTHA [teacher]: Yeh. Structures, it's all tight. Like from the time we first worked together until now it's tighter. SHELLEY [TA]: Yes." (6, 291)*

and

*"SARAH [teacher]:It [their work] just happens automatically but that happens after working with each other for so long as well…YVONNE [TA]: No, if I reacted like that to someone else that is newer, that doesn't really know me, they might think 'oh she's really quite rude' but obviously where we know each other well enough, it's not aimed at you." (1, 138)*

and

*"CAROLINE: I think when I first started with H [child], obviously I didn't I hadn't worked with her before, I wasn't, I didn't know what she was like so I think it's just a matter of getting to know her and know and know what she likes and what works for her so…she would come in herself and say 'what are we doing today, what are we doing today?' so I knew…and [NAOMI] knew." (4, 39)*

This extended to time to get to know each other and the children by pairs two and six (C11-C8):

*"HEATHER (Teacher): We've built those relationships, didn't we? ANNA (TA): Yes, exactly. That is what I was going to say. HEATHER (Teacher): Look at the beginning of the year, compared to now…" (5, 38)*

and

*"STEPHANIE [TA]: she's just done it herself, letting her just gradually take that path and making her feel secure and confident, that she's in a safe place and that she can... LINDA [teacher]: she*

*does now, she will come along and say 'I want to do this, this is my next step, I want to do this'. And it's been an amazing journey. And some of it has been because we know her so well, each of us knows her so well and it is safe. It is safe. She knows that using her voice is ok. It's safe."* (2, 42-43)

Improved inclusion over time was facilitated learning through communicating and reflecting on mistakes and challenges over time, then making adaptations (C9):

*"HARI [teacher]: the fact that we have then looked at different strategies to try and support the children, we've tried an approach initially and when that wasn't working, we tried another approach and that wasn't working, and so…"* (3, 142)

Further some pairs noted that they learned from each other:

*"NASTASHA [TA]: Because Hari is a new teacher this year, it's nice that he's got somebody with a bit of experience because then he can get ideas from me as well. HARI: Yeh, that's it."* (3, 78)

Learning over time also extended to their understanding of inclusion adapting over time:

*"DEARBHLA: Do you think that your definition of inclusion has changed over time?*
*NAOMI: I think it's developed."* (4, 82)

Learning about children over time was also deemed important for external professionals where they get to know the children: *"When people come into assess her, obviously it's just based on what they've been told, and perhaps 3 or 4 sessions, seeing a child in a scenario that she's not normally in and we knew…"* (2, 42)

Positive and open attitude towards advice and support to improve practice over time
A further way they learned over time was through training and involvement from external professionals. While not all pairs have had a positive experience with external professionals to date, all were open to additional support and advice. Pair 4 described their view of the impact of professional involvement on their work : *"NAOMI [teacher]: if anything it's positively as it just gives another point of view."* (4, 211) Despite this, several pairs were uncertain of how external professionals like EPs could support their partnerships beyond focusing on the children.
For pair four, they appreciated SENCo advice and feedback related to inclusion:

*"SAMANTHA [teacher]: When it works you receive feedback that it's working, which is nice. SHELLEY [TA]: Yeh. Dearbhla: From who? Who do you get feedback from? SAMANTHA [teacher]: From Alice [SENCO]." (6,143)*

This openness and improvement also related to CPD:

*"HEATHER [teacher]: I think CPD is a big thing. Training at this school is really good and there's a lot of it. So everyone gets a lot of education, don't they? ANNA (TA): Mmm…"* (5, 158)

and

*"YVONNE: the more I learn about that [ELSA training] the more children pop up and you think that that person needs this that and the other" (1, 259)*

Changing Context Over time

Most pairs (1, 2, 4, 5, 6) commented on the change in context over time, where the demands and level of need was described to have increased and various contextual factors have changed.

Pair five described a higher level of need in their class than "*ever taught before*" (5, 16) and pair 2 described that they are: "*seeing more and more children coming through with needs*" (2, 137).

TA one described feeling more included and less separated now compared to the past:

*"YVONNE: it has got a lot better since that. I also think that's because staff has changed here and people are younger and yeh I don't know…Even though I'm with my 1-1, yeh, I'm included in things and that hasn't always been that case over the years." (1, 216/250)*

and

*"DEARBHLA: In terms of separation between teachers and TAs, do you feel like there is any? CAROLINE: Not really. There used to be. There used to be sort of the teachers and then the TAs, but not any more I don't think . There were a lot of teachers that were here, I think for a long time. You know they'd be here about 30 years, but now there's new teachers coming in, it's a lot more flexible." (4, 282-283)*

**Appendix Q: Additional Evidence – Category 8 - Knowing and recognising each child individually: Strengths, Needs and Progress**

Recognising progress on an individual basis in learning and other areas (emotional regulation, social, pride and confidence, enjoyment of learning, and participation) was recognised as central to inclusion:

*"LINDA [Teacher]: she does now, she will come along and say 'I want to do this, this is my next step, I want to do this'. And it's been an amazing journey. And some of it has been because we know her so well, each of us knows her so well and it is safe. It is safe. She knows that using her voice is ok. It's safe. DEARBHLA: Some good progress there. LINDA: Yes, massive. (2, 43-45)."*

And

*"NAOMI [Teacher]: She just put her fingers in her ears and said 'good afternoon' and that was it. And then her fingers came out of her ears and that was it. CAROLINE [TA]: That's an achievement, I think. NAOMI: Big difference" (4,173)*

The children's enjoyment and participation in learning and sense of success were also deemed forms of progress by pairs:

*"HEATHER (Teacher): We have one particular child this year… it has been more about making sure that they have a positive relationship with school… that's been the number one focus" (5, 30)*

and

*"CAROLINE [TA]: She's very clever and it's just nice when you don't have all of the outbursts and she's able you know, she's happy herself when she's done something good" (4,150)*

and

*"SAMANTHA [teacher]: I think that I mean that they all that they're all kinds of going in the same direction and they all feel successful (6,52)."*

Getting to know the individual needs of each child was an important theme for inclusion:

*"CAROLINE [TA]: I think when I first started with H [child], obviously I didn't I hadn't worked with her before, I wasn't, I didn't know what she was like so I think it's just a matter of getting to know her and know and know what she likes and what works for her so…"* (4,39)

and

*"SAMANTHA [teacher]: I think we're quite good at not... you get the data from the previous year, but I tend not to look at all of it too much because sometimes I think we kind of…
SHELLEY [TA]: it's a fresh start… SAMANTHA [teacher]: We kind of feel our way with it and it's a fresh start with them."* (6,36-39)

Specifically understanding the individual strengths and needs of each child supported pairs to respond effectively:

*"HEATHER [Teacher]: Just in the moment, knowing how to understand what the child needs and kind of being reactive to that… that's really important as well and it's something that I've had to reflect on (5,36)."*

and

*"CAROLINE [TA]:  She's very creative so if there was painting or music, you know she wouldn't need me as much."* (4,69)

Several pairs highlighted the fact that they know the children is a key strength that professionals may lack:

*"STEPHANIE [TA]: this isn't…criticising the professionals that came in, it's just, the three of us, my other colleague included, understood this child so well. We knew, by even looking at her body language…we knew... 'is this going to be a good one?', you know, 'is she going to be open to suggestions?'. When people come into assess her, obviously it's just based on what they've been told, and perhaps 3 or 4 sessions, seeing a child in a scenario that she's not normally in and we knew... we could tell the little nuances 'what's she feeling like today?'. And now... she's just done it herself"* (2, 42)

**Appendix R: Additional Evidence – Category 9 - Being Flexible and Adaptive: Responding to Class and Individual needs**

**Individualised and Targeted Approaches to Teaching,  Support, Resources**

All pairs discussed their work in making accommodations and adaptations to their teaching to best suit each child's needs by creating *"customised learning specifically that would help them to make progress" (3,23)*

This was described to take the form of differentiated instruction or resources in class or the targeted and individual intervention outside of the class environmental supports:

> *"SHELLEY [TA]: Some of them need resources to be able to do for example the maths some of them might need visuals, whereas others might be able to do it in their heads…" (6,29)*

> *and*

> *"LINDA [teacher]: later on we actually had, where individual children or small groups of children would go out to have 1:1 or small group support when they can't manage to access what is actually being taught in the classroom (2,18)."*

Teacher three described how some year ones require access to different environment and curriculum:

> *" I think that the continuous provision and that kind of play learning environment helps them emotionally and help them be able to engage in the learning more as opposed to in the main [class]* (23).

Pair four and five also described the importance of access to breaks from the main classroom and other pairs describe in-classroom environmental supports such as workstations or sensory boxes.

**Adaptations based on whole class need and what is not working**

A key consideration of all pairs was considering and responding to the needs of the whole class and making changes when their approach is not working:

> *"YVONNE [TA]: if something doesn't work, then we will speak about it and obviously change it for the individual or whole class" (1,44).*

and

*"NASTASHA [TA]: Being flexible. HARI [Teacher]: Yeh, adapting to the needs of the children and doing what we needed to." (3, 168-169)*

Such adaptations tended to take the form of scaffolding, flexible grouping and changing their

approach:

*"HEATHER (Teacher): For me it means that every child in the class has the opportunity to participate in the curriculum and we [looks to TA] scaffold lessons and give them what they need and tailor the lessons to make sure they have those opportunities." (5,10).*

and

*"SHELLEY [TA]: one of us will work with the smaller group of children that need the extra help" (6,25)*

and

"CAROLINE [TA]: I'll just use maths for example. I'll just say to you afterwards [looks to Naomi], 'that was too much, she didn't get that'. So we just have to re-evaluate. *NAOMI [Teacher]: Yeh, and I wouldn't keep saying 'plow on, plow on, plow on'. We just break it down again." (4, 103-104)*

Making adaptations also extended to pairs interaction with each other in all interviews:

*"YVONNE [TA]: And just helping each other because in schools things do pop up and you do have to change things. SARAH: Being flexible." (1,36)*

While flexibility and adaptability were key, it was deemed important by pairs hat this was balances

with structure and routine, otherwise it can present as overwhelming for the pair or impact the

learning of the children:

*"HARI [Teacher]: I think there were so many needs in our classroom, that actually, trying to be flexible in that classroom with 30 children was not proving to be... I think the work was suffering and the learning was suffering and now that some of that is taking place outside of the*

*classroom, I think that it means, there's still flexibility in the class, but it's not extreme*

*flexibility all the time so I manage that kind of flexibility in the class" (3, 87)*

**Appendix S: Additional Evidence – Category 11- 'It's not just work': A positive trusting personal relationship**

**Positive and Personal: 'It's not just work'**

Several pairs interacted in a jovial and humorous manner throughout the interviews some described this as a way to support each other during unexpected or challenging moments:

*"HEATHER (Teacher): I mean… I probably… Anna is very steady, aren't you? ANNA [TA]: You think so? [laughs]" (5, 113)*

*and*

*"STEPHANIE [TA]: even just having a bad time, you know that we will support each other. LINDA [teacher]: And we laugh a lot. We laugh a lot. [both laugh]. STEPHANIE: And I think that's a very key thing to getting through when maybe the day is not going as you planned, there's a little bit of laughing about it. LINDA: Yes, we do laugh a lot." (2, 82-85)*

The positivity in pairs' interactions extended to impact their enjoyment at work where most pairs reported *'getting along quite well' (4, 192)*:

*"SAMANTHA [teacher]: I enjoy speaking to you [TA]…SHELLEY [TA]: Ummm… yeh. It's the same really with Samantha" (6,161)*

A pattern emerged where pairs linked the quality of their relationship to the quality of their work which evoked an impact in the children through modelling positive relationships and respect:

*"SARAH [TA]: Because when you have a positive relationship it just works smoother. And therefore you are able to help the children by working as a team rather than working against each other." (1, 43).*

*and*

*"SAMANTHA [teacher]: I think that the children can see that we get on. SHELLEY [TA]: Yeh. SAMANTHA: I think that that's important. I think that they can see the interactions between the three of us [two class teachers and TA] are positive and professional but also friendly and I think that that makes them feels that they can speak to any of us and that we are all there for them. That it is a happy room and happy environment to be in (6, 117-119)."*

**Knowing and trusting each other**

Knowing each other; personally and in terms of each other's skills/strengths and having trust in their partners (particularly teachers in TAs), was associated with work being completed, confiding in each other and being able to compensate for each other:

*"LINDA [teacher]: So I think we both agree that we really play to each other's strengths. I think that because we know each other really well we can sometimes compensate for each other//*
*"STEPHANIE [teacher]: often we don't even need to have a conversation, it's just that closeness and trusting one another. I just know that whatever I'm asking Stephanie to do, she will do it" (2, 29//55-58)*

<div align="center">and</div>

*"HARI [teacher]: I feel really confident then that Natasha is doing an amazing job in here"*
*(3,40)*
<div align="center">and</div>
*"LINDA [teacher]: So i think we both agree that we really play to each other's strengths. I think that because we know each other really well we can sometimes compensate for each other" (2, 29)*

**'We just click in with each other': Automatic and Natural**

This positivity, sense of trust and knowing each other personally and professionally was linked to interacting in an automatic and natural manner:

*"SARAH: We confide in each other. It's not just work. There's a personal element there as well and I do feel like it fits. It does have an impact on work in a positive way." (1,77)*

<div align="center">and</div>

Some pairs also felt their lack of hierarchy was also a natural way of interacting:

*"NATASHA: Nothing prevents it. It just happens." (3,190)*

**Shared Experiences**

Pairs one linked shared experiences to developing an understanding and thus their interactions: *"You understand, you've been there, help each other" (1, 165)* and, pair six acknowledged that shared roles and time together served to strengthen relationships:

> *"we are all friends with each other, don't get me wrong, but I think, the TAs, if we were in a social setting, the TAs would kind of stick together and the teachers do. But I don't think that's because we feel that we have to as such, but I think that the TAs because we are all doing the same kind of role, we have meetings together...we spend more time together if that makes sense, lunchtimes.. And it would be the same with the teachers as well. They do all their training together..." (6, 363)*

The importance of matching appropriate TA-teacher pairs was raised in interviews one and six: "*I wonder where I am going to be next year and what teacher I will get..* I'd like to be with someone flexible*" (1, 257-259)*

**Appendix T: Additional Evidence – Category 12 - On the Same Page: Shared understanding of inclusion, roles, priorities and values**

**Similar approach, style, intentions, values, hopes and priorities**

Alignment of pairs' understandings and expectations for inclusion, roles and their aims was a key theme across the data. Pair described inclusion as successful where they are:

*"NAOMI [teacher]: Working from the same… I was going to say singing from the same \*hymn sheet\*. CAROLINE [TA]: Hymn sheet DEARBHLA: Yeh? NAOMI: Just having the same intentions." (4, 181)*

This extended to pairs *"having the same goal for the children and as a school. We have the same goal and the same vision."* (2, 32). This success was attributed to communication: *"HEATHER [teacher]: making sure we are both updated with everyone, teachers and TAs so we are all on the same page about things."* (5,156).

Shared understanding of role, expectations and responsibility was also a pertinent theme:

*"SARAH [teacher]: One thing that has really helped is that we really understand our roles this year. If Yvonne was with another teacher and she had 1-1 and an ELSA, I don't think that understanding would be there, there's no way" (1,160)*

and

*"SHELLEY [TA]: I just kind of know what she [teacher] expects…" (6, 136)*

The benefits of 'being of the same page' were linked to child response, particularly where it promotes consistency (category one):

*"NATASHA [TA]: Yeh and the kids need to see that we are on the same side as well as they sometimes try and play up… there's no mixed messages, there's no one contradicting each other, there's not…there's that consistency as well" (3, 56/62).*

Most pairs held similar understandings of what inclusion means:

Further several pairs shared similarities in their style, attitude and values, however this was not the case for every pair, where some described opposite strengths and skills where they balanced each other out (explored in category four: Making it work – playing to each other's strengths):

> *"HARI [Teacher]:* I think in the main, our approach is quite similar…*we are both passionate about what we are doing" (3, 98-100).*

<div align="center">and</div>

> *SAMANTHA [teacher]: Yeah. I don't think that I would like sharing a class if you didn't have the other people similar to you. That must be so difficult".*

Shred values and vision between pairs and their school was also beneficial to inclusion:

> *"SHELLEY [TA]: The school values. They are everything, they are all to do with inclusion.*
>
> *SAMANTHA [teacher]: Yeh." (6, 136)*

<div align="center">and</div>

> *"STEPHANIE [TA]: I think the ethos of the school, it's a very nurturing ethos, because of our Christian beliefs as well, which is looking after each other…/We all have the same vision, we want what's best for the children and exactly what you said [looks to teacher] we want them to do the best that they can. LINDA: And being in this school helps as well as we are all going in the same direction, we are not pulling in different directions and yeh" (2, 22/107)*

**Viewing inclusion as broad spectrum beyond SEN/Academics and Individual Children**

A strong theme across interviews was holding a broad definition of inclusion beyond individual children and beyond learning:

> *"NAOMI [TEACHER: so the academic, the emotional. H is a good example of the emotional, she needs a lot of that as well…but again the social side of it and not every child is the same and making sure that everyone gets it all" (4, 85)*

And extending it to identity and life experiences: *"STEPHANIE [TA]: I think that this is over a broad spectrum. We're not just talking about special needs, we are looking at their backgrounds, economic issues, things like that"* (2, 25)

Pairs noted their definitions of inclusion have 'developed' over time: *"HEATHER [teacher]: I think where I came from a non-education background, so I hadn't been in schools since I had been in school. I think I envisioned it as a particular group of children. Whereas now I see it as everyone and the different ways that children can be included"* (6, 103)

**Appendix U:** *Critical Appraisal Skills Programme Checklist: 10 questions to help you make sense of a Qualitative research*

| Question | Response | Hints to consider |
|---|---|---|
| Section A: Are the results valid? | | |
| 1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research? | Yes/Can't tell/No | • what was the goal of the research<br>• why it was thought important<br>• its relevance |
| 2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate? | Yes/Can't tell/No | • If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants<br>• Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal |
| 3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research? | Yes/Can't tell/No | • if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use) |
| 4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research? | Yes/Can't tell/No | • If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected<br>• If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study • If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part) |
| 5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue? | Yes/Can't tell/No | • If the setting for the data collection was justified<br>• If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.) • If the researcher has justified the methods chosen<br>• If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)<br>• If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why<br>• If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)<br>• If the researcher has discussed saturation of data |
| 6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered? | Yes/Can't tell/No | • If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location • How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design |
| Section B: What are the results? | | |
| 8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous? | Yes/Can't tell/No | • If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process<br>• If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the |

| | | categories/themes were derived from the data • Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process<br>• If sufficient data are presented to support the findings<br>• To what extent contradictory data are taken into account<br>• Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation |
|---|---|---|
| 9. Is there a clear statement of findings? | Yes/Can't tell/No | • If the findings are explicit<br>• If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments<br>• If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)<br>• If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question |
| 10. How valuable is the research? | Yes/Can't tell/No | • If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research based literature<br>• If they identify new areas where research is necessary<br>• If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used |

**Appendix V: International Studies that were Hand-searched for Additional Relevant UK literature.**

| Title | Author | Year | Participants and context | Methodology | Analysis |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Comparison of Teachers and Teaching Assistants' Perspective of Necessary Teaching Assistant Competences | Igric | 2021 | 69 participants (40 teachers & 29 TAs) were conducted in primary schools in three Croatian cities. | Qualitative research method was used and focus group interviews in 7 primary schools. Separate focus groups for TAs and teachers. | Statistical analysis of questionnaire data and context analysis. |
| Building successful partnerships between teaching assistants and teachers: Which interpersonal factors matter? | Jardi | 2022 | 22 TAs and 18 teachers from 14 public primary schools (Catalunya) | Qualitative semi-structured interviews) | IPA |
| Teacher aides' views and experiences on the inclusion of students with Autism: Perspectives across two countries | Page & Ferrett | 2022 | 6 TAs from public primary schools (Australia and Cooks Islands) | Qualitative (semi-structured interviews) | Thematic Analysis |
| The Analysis of the Kindergarten Teachers' and Teaching Assistants' Attitudes to Their own Experiences in the Process of Inclusive Education | Rochovska et al. | 2023 | Self-designed questionnaire completed by a total of 284 kindergarten teaching staff - 140 teachers and 144 teaching assistants) (Slovakia) | Quantitative (questionnaire) | Statistical analysis (Mann Whitney U) |

**Appendix W: Summary of Points related to the Quality of Research according to CASP (2018) Criteria**

| References | Key Strengths according to CASP Checklist | Key Limitations according to CASP Checklist | Quality According to CASP Criteria |
|---|---|---|---|
| *1.* Is a good Teaching Assistant one who 'knows their place'? *(Clarke & Visser , 2019)* | -Combination of methodologies and data collection. <br> -Strong theoretical framework of social constructionism and feminism. <br> Peer reviewed. <br> Referenced literature is relevant. <br> Detailed account of the research process is provided. <br> Clear statement of findings. <br> Clear contributions and value of the research. | - Depth of the literature review due to scarcity of extant data. <br> - Limited detail about how purposive sample was recruited and relationship between researcher and participants not described. | - High quality |
| 2. The development of inclusive learning relationships in mainstream settings: A multimodal perspective (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017) | - Clear research aims <br> - Qualitative approach appropriate for exploring personal experiences. <br> - Appropriate research design. <br> - Relationship between researcher and existing relationships with participants and the potential for bias is acknowledged <br> - Clear statement of findings. <br> - Relevance to practicing TAs and staff as day-to-day implementation of inclusion is explored. <br> - Use of NVivo software enhances rigour. | - Small sample size (n=13) in one school may limit generalisability. <br> - Volunteer bias: all participants were previously volunteers – is this a representative sample? <br> - Participants knowing each other may have implications for privacy. | - High Quality |
| 3. Tensions experienced by teachers and their views of support for pupils with autism spectrum disorders in mainstream schools (Emam & Farrell, 2009) | - Clear aims/focus <br> - Multiple case study design is appropriate for complex phenomena in real world contexts. <br> - Appropriate recruitment and data collection strategy <br> - Rigorous and transparent data analysis. <br> - Clear statement of findings <br> - Addresses practice-related issue with potential to inform local policy or practice related to mainstream inclusion. | - Study does not explicitly describe the relationship between research and participants. <br> - Limited detail about ethical considerations. | - High Quality |

| References | Key Strengths according to CASP Checklist | Key Limitations according to CASP Checklist | Quality According to CASP Criteria |
|---|---|---|---|
| | - Peer reviewed journal. | | |
| 4. Supporting all children to reach their potential: practitioner perspectives on creating an inclusive school environment (Kendall, 2018) | - Clear research questions and aims.<br>- Appropriate qualitative design for practitioner perspectives.<br>- Purposive sample allowed recruitment of those with relevant experience.<br>- Data collection and analysis addresses research questions.<br>- Ethical consideration for anonymity and the right to withdraw and adherence to BERA 2011 ethical guidelines.<br>- Analysis was rigorous involving reading, re-reading and manual coding.<br>- Clear findings and original viewpoint.<br>- May be locally relevant in terms of inclusive practice. | - Small sample size in one school.<br>- Lack of participant verification may raise concerns related to reliability. | - High Quality |
| 5. Perceptions of the barriers to effective inclusion in one primary school: voices of teachers and teaching assistants (Glazzard, 2011) | - Compliance with ethical conventions set by the British Educational Research Association.<br>- Clear aims and findings.<br>- Appropriate research design – focus groups to gain TA/teacher perspectives.<br>- Potential local relevance.<br>- Peer reviewed journal | - Lack of clarity regarding the representativeness of the participants and the recruitment/analysis process. | - Acceptable Quality |
| 6. 'I would say nine times out of 10 they come to the LSA rather than the teacher'. The role of teaching assistants in supporting children's mental health (Conboy, 2021) | - Clear research question and aims<br>- Appropriate design and analysis.<br>- Ethical consideration and approval.<br>- Relationship between research and participants acknowledged.<br>- Potential for local implications. | - Small sample in one area. | - High Quality |

| References | Key Strengths according to CASP Checklist | Key Limitations according to CASP Checklist | Quality According to CASP Criteria |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7. A complete circuit: the role of communication between class teachers and support staff and the planning of effective learning opportunities (Docherty, 2014) | - Clear aims/focus<br>- Research design appropriate to explore staff experience.<br>- Appropriate recruitment and data analysis strategies.<br>- Researcher's role in interpretation is acknowledged.<br>- Rigorous and transparent 3-stage analysis process.<br>- Insights into staff experience and potential implications for Educational Psychologists.<br>- Peer reviewed publication.<br>- Findings used for local authority-wide questionnaire which adds credibility. | - Ethical considerations not explicitly described.<br>- Perspectives of class teachers not explored.<br>- Small sample size. | - High Quality |
| 8. Using the Wider Pedagogical Role model to establish learning support assistants' views about facilitators and barriers to effective practice (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015) | - Well-defined research focus.<br>- Appropriate use of focus groups and thematic analysis to the research questions.<br>- Comprehensive overview of participants/recruitment strategy.<br>- Relationship between author and participants considered<br>- Ethical issues considered.<br>- Clear description of data analysis process with clear statement of findings.<br>- Provides insight in LSA views about inclusion.<br>- Use of a deductive framework supports credibility. | - Limited generalisability of single case study design to wider LSA population. | - High Quality |
| 9. "New Partnerships for Learning': Teachers and Teaching Assistants Working Together in Schools–the Way Forward." (Wilson & Bedford, 2008) | - Clear research aims<br>- Appropriate mixed methods design according to research question.<br>- Data collected in manner relevant to research question.<br>- Relationship between researcher and participants was addressed.<br>- Clear statement of findings | - Ethical considerations were not explicitly described.<br>- Limited information about respondents opens possibility for response bias. | - High Quality |

| References | Key Strengths according to CASP Checklist | Key Limitations according to CASP Checklist | Quality According to CASP Criteria |
|---|---|---|---|
| | - Provides insight into working TA-teacher partnerships and potential relevant to the needs and training of these groups locally.<br>- 95% response rate to the questionnaire. | | |
| 10. Pond life that 'know their place': exploring teaching and learning support assistants' experiences through positioning theory (Watson et al., 2013) | - Clear aims and theoretical stance.<br>- Appropriate design, data collection and analysis processes for the research question.<br>- Clear recruitment process.<br>- Ethical considerations made.<br>- Transparent description of analysis and theoretical framework.<br>- Clear presentation of findings.<br>- Provide insight into TA experiences related to positioning theory. | - Small sample size in areas of economic disadvantage, all white participants, potentially limiting generalisability.<br>- Potential for bias and subjectivity related to the author leading workshops.<br>- Focus on positioning theory and individual narratives may exclude important systemic or structural factors relevant to their experience. | - High Quality |
| 11. 'Yes, but...': rhetoric, reality and resistance in teaching assistants' experiences of inclusive education. (Mackenzie, 2011) | - Clear research aims<br>- Qualitative design appropriate for exploring experiences.<br>- Data collection using focus group and interviews appropriately addressed research question.<br>- The relationship between researcher and participants is acknowledged where their lecturer status may introduce power.<br>- Privacy, anonymity, confidentiality considered.<br>- NVivo supported rigorous and transparent analysis process.<br>- Clear presentation of study findings.<br>- Insights into participants' experiences.<br>- Potential to inform local practice and policy. | - Status difference between researcher and respondents may have introduced bias.<br>- Small sample size limits generalisability. | - High Quality |

**Appendix X: Example of How Studies were Excluded from the Literature Review Upon Screening**

| *Reference* | *Reason for exclusion* |
|---|---|
| Pinkard, H. (2021). The perspectives and experiences of children with special educational needs in mainstream primary schools regarding their individual teaching assistant support. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *36*(2), 248-264. | *Focus of the study - Children's perspectives only.* |
| McCluskey, G., Riddell, S., Weedon, E., & Fordyce, M. (2016). Exclusion from school and recognition of difference. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *37*(4), 529-539. | *Focus on exclusion rates and not the roles or experiences of TAs or teachers.* |
| Webster, R. (2015). The classroom experiences of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream primary schools—1976 to 2012. What do data from systematic observation studies reveal about pupils' educational experiences over time?. *British Educational Research Journal*, *41*(6), 992-1009. | *Design of study- Systematic review of observational studies.* |
| Worth, N. (2013). Making friends and fitting in: A social-relational understanding of disability at school. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *14*(1), 103-123. | *Focus of the study - Children's perspectives only.* |
| Colgan, F., & Wright, T. (2011). Lesbian, gay and bisexual equality in a modernizing public sector 1997–2010: opportunities and threats. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *18*(5), 548-570. | *Focus of study – not based in education settings.* |
| Charles, J. M., Bywater, T., & Edwards, R. T. (2011). Parenting interventions: a systematic review of the economic evidence. *Child: care, health and development*, *37*(4), 462-474. | *Focus of study – not based on TA and teacher work towards inclusion, instead on parenting interventions.* |
| Ipgrave, J. (2010). Including the religious viewpoints and experiences of Muslim students in an environment that is both plural and secular. *Journal of International Migration and Integration/Revue de l'integration et de la migration internationale*, *11*, 5-22. | *Focus of study – not based on TA and teacher work towards inclusion and it is also based on child perspectives.* |
| Ipgrave, J., Miller, J., & Hopkins, P. (2010). Responses of three Muslim majority primary schools in England to the Islamic faith of their pupils. *Journal of International Migration and Integration/Revue de l'integration et de la migration internationale*, *11*, 73-89. | *Focus of study – a focus on teachers and school leaders on the structural and pedagogical approaches to faith inclusion rather than teaching assistants and teachers.* |
| Shevchenko, Y. M., Dubiaha, S. M., Melash, V. D., Fefilova, T. V., & Saenko, Y. O. (2020). The Role of Teachers in the Organization of Inclusive Education of Primary School Pupils. *International Journal of Higher Education*, *9*(7), 207-216. | *Design – analysis of secondary data.* |

| Benstead, H. (2019). Exploring the relationship between social inclusion and special educational needs: Mainstream primary perspectives. *Support for learning*, *34*(1), 34-53. | *Focus of the study - children's perspectives only and on the TA role in inclusion exclusively.* |
|---|---|
| Burton, D., & Goodman, R. (2011). Perspectives of SENCos and support staff in England on their roles, relationships and capacity to support inclusive practice for students with behavioural emotional and social difficulties. *Pastoral Care in Education*, *29*(2), 133-149. | *Focus- secondary schools only.* |
| Fernandes, L. (2021). Exploring student teachers' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards working with learning support assistants. Teacher Education Advancement Network Journal, 13(1), 17-25. | *Focus- graduate students in a further education setting.* |
| Haycock, D., & Smith, A. (2011). To assist or not to assist? A study of teachers' views of the roles of learning support assistants in the provision of inclusive physical education in England. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 15(8), 835-849. | *Focus- secondary schools only.* |
| Salter, J. M., Swanwick, R. A., & Pearson, S. E. (2017). Collaborative working practices in inclusive mainstream deaf education settings: teaching assistant perspectives. Deafness & Education International, 19(1), 40-49. | *Focus- secondary schools only.* |
| Clarke, E., & Visser, J. (2019). Teaching assistants managing behaviour–who knows how they do it? Agency is the answer. *Support for Learning*, *34*(4), 372-388. | *Design – analysis of secondary data.* |
| Devecchi, C., Dettori, F., Doveston, M., Sedgwick, P., & Jament, J. (2012). Inclusive classrooms in Italy and England: The role of support teachers and teaching assistants. *European journal of special needs education*, *27*(2), 171-184. | *Design – comparative review of three studies.* |
| Giangreco, M. F. (2010). Utilization of teacher assistants in inclusive schools: Is it the kind of help that helping is all about?. *European journal of special needs education*, *25*(4), 341-345. | *Discursive paper based on existing literature.* |
| Rose, R., & O'Neill, Á. (2009). Classroom support for inclusion in England and Ireland: An evaluation of contrasting models. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, *4*(3), 250-261. | *Review of existing literature.* |
| Vickerman, P., & Blundell, M. (2012). English learning support assistants' experiences of including children with special educational needs in physical education. *European journal of special needs education*, *27*(2), 143-156. | *Scope – not focused on class teachers.* |

| | |
|---|---|
| Warnes, E., Done, E. J., & Knowler, H. (2022). Mainstream teachers' concerns about inclusive education for children with special educational needs and disability in England under pre-pandemic conditions. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, *22*(1), 31-43. | *Scope – limited focus on teachers working with TAs.* |
| International studies | |
| Bourke, P. E. (2009). Professional development and teacher aides in inclusive education contexts: Where to from here?. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *13*(8), 817-827. | *Discursive review article* |
| Handsearch | |
| Rubie-Davies, C. M., Blatchford, P., Webster, R., Koutsoubou, M., & Bassett, P. (2010). Enhancing learning? A comparison of teacher and teaching assistant interactions with pupils. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *21*(4), 429-449. | *Use of secondary data and not sufficient focus on inclusion or TA/teacher relationships* |
| Hopkins, Elizabeth A. "Classroom conditions to secure enjoyment and achievement: the pupils' voice. Listening to the voice of Every child matters." *Education 3–13* 36, no. 4 (2008): 393-401. | *Scope – focused on pupil voice.* |
| Mackenzie, S. (2011). 'Yes, but...': rhetoric, reality and resistance in teaching assistants' experiences of inclusive education. *Support for learning*, *26*(2), 64-71. | *Inclusion of secondary school TAs.* |
| Symes, W., & Humphrey, N. (2012). Including pupils with autistic spectrum disorders in the classroom: The role of teaching assistants. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *27*(4), 517-532. | *Inclusion of secondary school TAs.* |
| Webster, R., Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., & Russell, A. (2010). Double standards and first principles: Framing teaching assistant support for pupils with special educational needs. *European journal of special needs education*, *25*(4), 319-336. | *Not based on TA/teacher perspectives on their joint work.* |
| Wilde, A., & Avramidis, E. (2011). Mixed feelings: towards a continuum of inclusive pedagogies. *Education 3–13*, *39*(1), 83-101. | *Not focused on TAs.* |
| Wren, A. 2017. "Understanding the role of the Teaching Assistant: comparing the views of pupils with SEN and TAs within mainstream primary schools." *Support for Learning* 32 (1): 5-19 | *Pupil views about the role of TAs.* |
| Capizzi, A. M., & Alexandra Da Fonte, M. (2012). Supporting paraeducators through a collaborative classroom support plan. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, *44*(6), 1-16 | *Not a primary study* |
| Jurkowski, S., & Müller, B. (2018). Co-teaching in inclusive classes: The development of multi-professional cooperation in teaching dyads. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *75*, 224-231. | *Focused on teacher-teacher collaboration* |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mulholland, M., & O'Connor, U. (2016). Collaborative classroom practice for inclu- sion: Perspectives of classroom teachers and learning support/resource teach- ers. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 3116(November), 1e14. https:// doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2016.1145266 | *Focused on teacher-teacher collaboration* |
| Pratt, S. (2014). Achieving symbiosis: Working through challenges found in co-teaching to achieve effective co-teaching relationships. *Teaching and teacher education*, *41*, 1-12. | *Focus on secondary school only co-teaching relationships.* |
| Radford, J., Bosanquet, P., Webster, R., & Blatchford, P. (2015). Scaffolding learning for independence: Clarifying teacher and teaching assistant roles for children with special educational needs. *Learning and Instruction*, *36*, 1-10. | *Not focused on TA or teacher views.* |
| Ashbaker, B. Y., & Morgan, J. (2012). Team players and team managers: Special educators working with paraeducators to support inclusive classrooms. *Creative Education*, *3*(03), 322. | *Not a primary study* |
| Horne, P.E. and Timmons, V. 2009. "Making it work: teachers' perspectives on inclusion." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 3-13 13 (3): 273- 286 | *No focus on TA-teacher relationship.* |
| Stunzi, R. (2023). *A Descriptive Case Study of Paraprofessional Perceptions of Preparedness to Support Students with Disabilities and Collaborate with Supervising Teachers* (Doctoral dissertation, Neumann University). | *Not peer reviewed.* |
| Fritzsche, B., & Köpfer, A. (2022). (Para-) professionalism in dealing with structures of uncertainty–a cultural comparative study of teaching assistants in inclusion-oriented classrooms. *Disability & Society*, *37*(6), 972-992. | *Focused on TA-student relationships only.* |
| Symes, W., & Humphrey, N. (2012). Including pupils with autistic spectrum disorders in the classroom: The role of teaching assistants. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *27*(4), 517-532. | *Focused on secondary schools and pupil perspective only.* |

**Appendix W: Initial Search Terms**

| Initial Search Terms | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher* | Teaching Assistant* | Partners* | Inclusi* |
| Educator* | TA* | Collaborat* | |
| | Classroom assistant* | Team* | |
| | Learning support* | Relation* | |
| | LSA* | | |
| | *Support staff* | | |
| | *Key worker** | | |
| | *Teacher aide** | | |
| | *paraprofessional* | | |
| | *Special needs assistant** | | |