This paper reports early findings from research undertaken as part of a PhD and considers the development of the role of the TA in the light of recent educational developments. Data is presented which has been gathered from questionnaire responses and thirty semi-structured interviews with Teaching Assistants, Teachers and School Professional Development Coordinators. Respondents represent eleven Local Authorities from the West and East Midlands, the North West and Welsh Borders. Questionnaires and interviews established TA's, Teachers and Professional Development Coordinators views in relation to professionalism, professional boundaries and opportunities for Continuing Professional Development. A Teaching Assistant (TA) is employed to work in schools to provide support in four key areas; support for the teacher, the pupil, the curriculum and the school (DfES 2002). The majority of Teaching Assistants are employed to work in the primary sector. Currently, there are 268,600 support staff in primary schools of which 146,500 are TA's (DfES 2006). There is also a gender bias contained within these statistics. A DfES survey in relation to gender of TA's indicated that 97.7% of all TA's were female and 2.3% male (DfES 2002). As a consequence this research focuses on the experiences of female TA’s in the primary sector. In this paper the terms TA and Teaching Assistant have been used interchangeably.

This research is being conducted at a time of intense change in education. We are seeing the role of the teacher being redefined. In 2001 the government recognised that recruitment to teaching was problematic and retention very poor (20% of all NQTs did not make 5 years in teaching (DfES 2001). They commissioned PWC to investigate teacher workload. Their report argued that the introduction of various initiatives, had led to a range of problems within the education workforce (PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2003). Specifically the report noted teacher shortages in a number of subjects and a significant number of teachers leaving the profession. They argued that this was due to increasing demands on the role of teachers with non teaching activities accounting for as much as 30% of the working week. This meant that teachers were experiencing a poor work/life balance. The resulting National Agreement created between Government, employers and school workforce unions (2003) known as ‘Workforce Remodelling’ was designed to enhance the status and work/life balance of all employees in schools in order to enable teachers to focus more effectively on their teaching and provide every pupil with a chance to achieve greater success. It introduced changes to teachers’ conditions of service which have impacted on the roles and responsibilities of support staff and in particular Teaching Assistants. Workforce remodelling led to contractual changes in teachers pay and conditions, the introduction of 10% of the contracted teaching hours of a teacher being designated as planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time, shifting some of the administrative duties of teachers onto TAs and other support staff and as a consequence a raised profile and increase in number of TAs. Ozga (2002) has noted that New Labours modernisation agenda is built upon the drive by previous administrations towards public services becoming more efficient, economic and effective and we have seen that the ‘new labour’ modernisation agenda was not only linked to education. Other occupational groups have been modernised, most notably the health service. In 1999, the Prime Minister gave the first speech of a PM to a union conference. Blair told the NAHT that “Teachers are the change-makers of modern society. No other profession wields that power”. He wanted to “restore teaching to its rightful place as one of Britain’s foremost professions...recognising the need for a step change in the reputation, rewards and image of teaching, raising it to the status of other professions such as medicine and law”. Perhaps more tellingly the government had been elected on a pledge of ‘education, education, education’ and teachers were central to the government’s political agenda. What is clear is that the government is working with a definition of professionalism that regards it as definable, something that can be created with their assistance and something that is desired by the workforce. Some argue that we can trace the origin of the problem with teacher professionalism back much further. Lawn (1988) has noted that the issue as to whether teaching is a profession are longstanding. McCulloch (2000) has noted that loss of control over content and pedagogy undermined teachers’ professionalism. But not all agree that Modernisation has had such a devastating impact upon teacher professionalism. Helsby and McCullough note that new conceptualisations of what it means to be an education professional are developing which are “taking into account the question of agency and the spaces in which some teachers are able to create to exert their professionalism in curricular matters…(and the)…differences in personal experience and career histories…which affect professional confidence, a key factor in teacher professionalism” (Helsby and McCullough 1996:69). Nixon et al. (1997) have identified an ‘emergent professionalism’ that places the emphasis on the need for the creation of alliances between parents, pupils and teachers and continuing reflection and learning throughout a teachers career to react to context. Similarly, Hargreaves (2000) has argued for professionalism based upon democratic collaboration and Adnett (2006) has noted how collegiality can be a significant factor in professional identity.

What is a profession?
The term ‘profession’ has many meanings and is used in a variety of contexts. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) states that a profession is;

‘The occupation which one professes to be skilled in and to follow. A vocation, in which a professed knowledge of some department of learning or science is used in its application to the affairs of others or in an art upon it. Applied specifically to the three learned professions of divinity, law and medicine, also to the military professions.’

(OED; 1997 Vol. XII, 572)
This definition links profession with occupation. It also raises the issue of knowledge and its application. It uses the example of only three professions to assist in defining the concept. These are the church, the law and the medical professions. O'Day (2000) has identified that the oldest identified professions were the church, the law and the medical profession. She argues that the common defining feature was a calling or vocation to serve God and their fellows. They differed from other Christians only in providing a service that required literate education and training. The three occupations shared a common background in the reformed Christianity and social humanism of the Reformation and the Renaissance. This was acquired in the grammar schools and universities. Members of these professions took their places in a hierarchical society according to their family connections, access to patronage, education and innate ability, as individuals rather than members of occupational elites. O'Day uses evidence gained from primary sources such as the journals of those in the three professions in the period from 1400 – 1700AD. She argues that the people who became members of the law, the church and medicine did not do so in order to make a living, they were already wealthy. For them the professions were more about occupying their time. O'Day does not believe that the three professions were self-conscious groupings. They were simply a way for people who shared similar interests and passions to meet together in an ad hoc way. They did not establish themselves with regulations. O'Day argues that exclusive clubs and societies gradually emerged but professionalism as an institutional process with privileged associations and legal enforcement did not appear until the nineteenth century when there was a rise in technology and occupational specialization and other bodies beginning to claim "professional" status.

Defining Professionalism 1 – A Profession as a series of traits

Initial theorists in this area tended to adopt a 'trait' approach to defining professionalism. They identified the key traits that a member of a given profession should have. If an individual possessed these traits they were a professional. One such approach was that put forward by Flexner (1915) in a report on medical education in the United States and Canada. This set out the procedural practice in medical school education for many decades. It identified that a member of the medical profession would exhibit the following characteristics;

- a professional possesses and draws on a store of knowledge that is more than ordinary
- a professional possesses a theoretical and intellectual grasp that is different from a technician's practice
- a professional applies theoretical and intellectual knowledge to solving human and social problems
- a profession strives to add to and improve its body of knowledge through research
- a profession passes on the body of knowledge to novice generations, for the most part in a university setting
- a profession is imbued with altruism

Similarly, Larson (1977), examining the historical development of professions in the UK and USA, conceptualised the 'professional project' and identified the following as characteristics of a profession, "Professional association, cognitive base, institutionalized training, licensing, work autonomy, colleague "control" code of ethics" (Larson, 1977: 208). This approach is still in evidence amongst contemporary theorists. Rich (1984: 8-11) lists seven characteristics of a profession. A profession:

- requires a high degree of general and systematized knowledge
- requires a long period of specialized intellectual training
- is characterized by work that is essentially intellectual
- provides a unique social service
- controls its standards of entrance and exclusion
- develops and enforces a professional code of ethics
- grants practitioners a broad range of autonomy.

Similarly, Pavalko (1988) describes certain qualities that are attributed to professions:

- A unique knowledge base justifying the claim to special expertise
- A long training period requiring specialized knowledge and indoctrination into the occupational subculture
- Relevance of work to social values
- A service versus a profit motivation
- Occupational autonomy. The profession is self-regulating and self-controlling. Only members of the profession judge and certify who is competent to practice
- A strong sense of commitment and loyalty to the profession
- A strong sense of common identity resulting in a significant subculture
- A code of ethics and system of norms that are parts of the subculture, reinforcing motivation, autonomy and commitment

Pavalko argues that because of these attributes, professions are perceived to exhibit high quality work which justifies public respect and trust. Boone (2001) argues that professions are based on scientific and philosophical facts acquired through scholarly endeavour. Individuals who enter a profession do so for reasons that distinguish them from other work or vocations. They understand that their work renders a unique public service with a scientific or philosophical basis and/or body of knowledge that requires an extended period of academic and hands-on preparation. Professions are also based on specialized skills necessary for the professional to perform the public service. This matches the earlier views of Burbules and Densmore (1991) who identified the characteristics of a profession as:

- professional autonomy
Teaching Assistants – The Development of a Profession?

- a clearly defined, highly developed, specialized, and theoretical knowledge base
- control of training, certification, and licensing of new entrants
- self-governing and self-policing authority, especially with regard to professional ethics
- a commitment to public service.

Pratte and Rury (1991), in a succinct definition, identify the importance of status and remuneration in their list of the characteristics of a profession:

- remuneration
- social status
- autonomous or authoritative power
- service.

Turner (1993) would argue that this last aspect is a key element of professionalism, “the professional is motivated by service to the community rather than by the anticipation of an immediate material reward; altruistic values predominate over egoistic inclinations” (Turner 1993: 14). The problem with trait theories is that, whilst allowing us to identify a group and say that they are professional because the members of the group exhibit certain characteristics may be too simple in enabling us to understand the subtleties of professionalism in contemporary society. Pratte and Rury's (1991) list of attributes for a profession could arguably be applied to any number of occupational groups. It all depends upon our definition of their notions of ‘service’.

Defining Professionalism 2 – An economic understanding of professions

An alternative way to understand professions, professionals and professionalism is to utilise an economic conceptualisation. Whereas a trait theory would simply see a professions as a group of people sharing the same skills, abilities, qualifications etc; and a sociological definition would see professions as resulting from the way society is structured and organised, an economic definition sees them as a function of the market. The economic conceptualisation suggests that professions are associated with a shift away from the 'free market' and are there to act as a collective regulator of economic activity (Adnett 2006). In a "free market" there is an exchange of property rights based on private contracting that is subject to legal sanction. This suggests that individual decision-making autonomy exists, while the possibility of legal sanctions suggests the importance of individual accountability. To move away from the free market implies non-autonomous, complex contracting and non individual policing. Examples include unions, cartels and professional bodies. They all involve collective contracting and/or non-autonomous decision making. If we explore this argument in relation to education we can see that teachers do not contract with the state as individuals but form professional associations which contract with the state on their behalf. This can be seen in the involvement of the Teacher Unions in the School Teacher Review Body which determines pay and working conditions. Teachers do not have autonomy; they are bound by national policy which is shaped by collective groups rather than individuals. So why would each party want this to be the case. Clearly for governments there is a need for control over the education market to ensure that consistency exists across sites of delivery. It would be difficult to individually contract with over ½ million teachers and identify what education they should offer and for how much remuneration they should receive. There are also advantages for teachers. They can gain better working conditions, remuneration and protection through their professional associations.

Whilst some have argued that professionalism is simply a mechanism of the market place others have argued that it attempts to correct market failures. In education, the existence of so many individual teachers creates a problem for government, because they have access to a form of power. This power consists of information – which is held by one party and not the other. It is an asymmetrical relationship. Asymmetric information prevents the specification of complete employment contracts. In education teachers and their stakeholders are in an asymmetrical information relationship because of the complexity of their role. Adnett and Davies (2003) building upon the analyses of Dixit (2002) and Burgess and Ratto (2003) have identified that the complexity of education results in agency problems. First there are multiple outputs, many of which cannot be measured precisely which makes it difficult to identify an individual teacher's effort or effectiveness. Secondly, there are multiple stakeholders (parents, pupils, governors, employers, taxpayers and government) who have diverse preferences concerning the weights to be attached to these outputs. This makes it difficult to identify criteria for evaluation because each stakeholder will have a different perspective. These perspectives may be complementary or in opposition. Thirdly, the agents are in part motivated by professional and public service considerations (Francois, 2000). Fourthly, schooling utilises a 'customer-input technology' in that students educate themselves and each other and the quality of provision therefore depends partly upon the ability of the intake as a whole. Schools can therefore substitute more able students for less teacher effort or effectiveness and still maintain a given level of average student attainment. This complexity also means that teachers' contracts are incomplete because of the level of discretion in this work that this complexity inevitably supports. This means monitoring and regulation may be difficult to achieve. Within such a system it would be relatively easy for those holding the superior information to exploit their stakeholders. The presence of asymmetric information means that the market has to create another way of protecting participants from exploitation. This is done through a process whereby professionals are assisted in acquiring and keeping the trust of their stakeholders through the adoption and enforcement of a code of ethics. Matthews (1991) sought to examine the economic rationale for traditional professional labour market behaviour. He noted that a characteristic of professional labour markets is an explicit or implicit code of ethical behaviour based upon shared values. He believed that this was linked to the presence of asymmetric information and externalities.
Externalities are defined as third party (or spill-over) effects arising from the production and/or consumption of goods and services for which no appropriate compensation is paid. In education teachers produce goods, such as references for both pupils and colleagues. These are used in the market as screens for decision-makers in relation to employment or access to further education opportunities. This may lead the teacher into conflict with the consumers of their service – parents and pupils. For example; a teacher may indicate that a place on a course at another institution should be denied to a pupil because of the pupil’s history of attendance. This would be appropriate and is what the other institution would expect from the teacher. However, this may cause conflict with the consumer (the parent and pupil) who want to gain access to another institution to study. A code of conduct can cover acceptable behaviour in the face of this conflict.

Adnett (2003) has identified a third element which needs to be considered in relation to this argument. Drawing on the work of British and North American research (Sammons et. al, 1995, and Reynolds et. al, 1996) which indicates that effective schools tend to have teachers who share a unity of purpose and collectively exhibit consistency of practice and a high degree of collegiality and collaboration, he notes that the “overall effectiveness of schools depends in part on the ability of teachers to work together to produce local public goods” and that this type of school culture “appears to be particularly important in achieving targets” (Adnett 2003:149). Teamwork plays a fundamental role in enabling the effective sharing of information, resources and expertise and in reinforcing key messages and enforcing agreed policies. Teamwork also plays a key role in the process whereby professionals are assisted in acquiring and keeping the trust of their stakeholders through the adoption and enforcement of a code of ethics ensures that the market can protecting participants from exploitation.

Asymmetric information and externalities lead to moral hazard problems for professionals. A moral hazard can be defined as the risk that one of the parties in a transaction may not have entered into it in good faith i.e.; a teacher may be open to bribes in return for better references or grades. Professional self-regulation has a policing effect and prohibits practices which can create this moral hazard, applying sanctions when these rules are broken. Traditional professionalism relies upon shared objectives and intrinsic motivation. Professionalism is a form of ‘maximand-morality’ (Matthews 1991) – the optimum moral purpose of the profession prevents inertia and lack of effort. A desire for public service may also motivate behaviour (Francois (2000), along with the desire for peer-esteem. Maximand-moralities can produce a stable code of conduct. Processes are generated which reinforce the norms.

The model of the survival of altruistic behaviour developed by Eshel et al. (1998) can be used to explain the dynamic stability of this model of professional labour markets. The model proposes three groups of agents – altruists who are willing to contribute to the public good, ‘egotists’ who are unwilling to contribute to the public good and ‘hooligans’ who will try to gain something by imposing costs on their colleagues. Following a code of conduct or ethical guidelines can be viewed as a cost to professionals which is an investment in the provision of a local public good for their colleagues. New professionals learn what modes of behaviour to follow, and then imitate successful dominant altruistic behaviour. This preserves the survival of such behaviour over time. Where such behaviour dominates other altruists will primarily enjoy the benefits of such altruistic behaviour.

However, an economic analysis which depends upon the need for a code of conduct and ethics may not be appropriate. Teaching does not yet possess the extensive credible regulatory mechanisms found in law and medicine (Adnett 2003). The regulatory body for teachers took a significant period of time to be created and was only launched in 2000. As the ‘Teaching and Higher Education Bill (1998) identified; “It is over 130 years since the first moves were made towards a General Teaching Council. Bills were drafted for Parliament in the late nineteenth century”.

The General Teaching Council for England was launched in September 2000 and acts as the independent professional body for teaching in England. It is required to regulate the conduct and competence of teachers in the public interest. Registration with the GTC is mandatory. Teachers’ employers (including supply agencies) must refer to the Council when they have ceased to use the services of a registered teacher because of misconduct or incompetence. Cases of unacceptable professional conduct, which includes criminal conviction, are referred to the GTC by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). They may decide to take their own action to bar or restrict a teacher where the safety and welfare of children is at risk, or public confidence in the profession would be compromised. Members of the public can also make referrals about teachers’ conduct. Each GTC panel can take a series of actions which include;

- the issuing of a reprimand;
- to make a teachers’ continued registration subject to meeting specified conditions (a Conditional Registration order);
- to suspend from the Register, with conditions if appropriate, for a period of up to two years (a Suspension Order)
- To prohibit eligibility for registration (a Prohibition Order).

But does a profession need to be regulated in order to be called a profession? There may be shared professional standards and a common collegiate ethos which could stand in place of a regulatory framework. A very strong commitment to schools (Marsden 2000), which is stronger than the commitment found elsewhere in the public (Marsden and French, 1998) and private sector (BERR 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey) has been noted, which may eradicate the need for a regulatory framework.

**Defining Professionalism 3 – A sociological understanding of professions**

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Sociologists have also worked to provide a definition of a ‘profession’. Early sociological definitions of professions defined them as a special category of occupations possessing unique attributes that are seen as functional to the wider society (Carr-Saunders 1928; Goode 1960). Indeed Carr-Saunders and Wilson argued that professionalism was a good thing for society, “...the growth of professionalism is one of the hopeful features of the time. The approach to problems of social conduct and social policy under the guidance of a professional tradition raises the ethical standard and widens the social outlook” (Carr-Saunders, 1928, in Vollmer and Mills 1966: 9). The first major sociological study of the professions was carried out by Carr-Saunders and Wilson (Carr-Saunders & Wilson1933), “We have found that the application of an intellectual technique to the ordinary business of life, acquired as the result of prolonged and specialised training, is the chief distinguishing characteristic of the professions” (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933: 491). Carr-Saunders and Wilson had identified two key components that were to be used by later writers namely the links between professional status and prolonged training and intellectual ability. This definition remained unchallenged until the early 1960’s. Millerson (1964) identified that a profession involved, “a skill based on theoretical knowledge - The skill requires training and knowledge - The professional must demonstrate competence by passing a test - Integrity is maintained by adherence to a code of conduct - The service is for the public good - The profession is organised” (Millerson, 1964: 4). Millenson’s analysis goes further than that provided by Carr-Saunders and Wilson by asking questions concerning the types of professional organisation, how they are formed and what structure they take. He also examined educational requirements and codes of conduct. However both the Carr-Saunders and Wilson and Millerson studies were based upon a methodology that asked the professions to define themselves. There was no evaluation of self interest, motivation or power.

In response to this we can identify two further broad sociological explanations of professions. A Marxist analysis focuses on the social relations of production. Professions are viewed as either a means of articulating the state and fulfilling the functions of capitalism (Johnson 1977; Poulantzas 1975), or as being subject to proletarianization and de-skilling, gradually losing status and power (Braverman 1974). A neo-Weberian approach focuses on market conditions, viewing society as an arena where competing groups struggle with the state and each other to gain power and status. Occupations are segmented with a diversity of wants and needs. These form an occupation’s experience of professionalization. The struggle for control is facilitated through social closure1, employed by professional groups to defend their privileged position (Parkin 1979; Friedson 1970). Both approaches emphasize the role of conflict and struggle and the need to achieve and consolidate professional status.

In Johnson’s (1972) conceptualisation of power the main focus is on the relationship between the producer and consumer of professional services. In a study which looked at both UK and US professions, Johnson argues that the division of labour (occupational specialisation) creates varying degrees of social distance between the producer and consumer. He argues that professionalism is one form of occupational control that is used to impose a relationship. It assumes that one person will be dominant because of their professional status. A profession is not an occupation, but a means of controlling an occupation (Johnson, 1972: 45). He also goes on to redefine professionalisation as an inevitable historical process, common to all professions, rather than a process that particular occupations undertake of their own volition. Hanlon (1998) has also identified the role of conflict and argued that “professionalism is a shifting rather than a concrete phenomenon”. Professionals are “those groups commonly thought of as professional by the lay public, academics, the professionals themselves and so on” (ibid p45). These groups, rather than homogeneous are in conflict with each other. He argues that one of the key schisms between the groups rests upon whether the view is of “social service” professionalism whereby the profession exists for the good of society or of “commercialised professionalism” with an emphasis on management. The latter has arisen as a need for greater accountability in an era when trust between society and the professions has broken down (Hanlon, 1998). It could be argued that teachers and Teaching Assistants are two such groups in conflict with one another in an era of commercialised professionalism in education. The Government, has lost trust in the teaching profession. It has created a centralised managerialist education system and imposed a new group of workers (Teaching Assistants) who are in conflict with the existing workers (teachers). Johnson (1972) exemplifies a ‘power approach’ to the professions. He recognised the explanatory weaknesses of previous definitions and his neo-Marxist perspective resulted in a paradigmatic shift in the field of research. (MacDonald, 1995). However some were beginning to ask whether research was looking at the right question given this focus on power relationships. Hughes, a key sociological theorist, is quoted as identifying that he had, “passed from the false question "Is this occupation a profession" to the more fundamental one “what are the circumstances in which people in an occupation attempt to turn it into a profession and themselves into professional people” (E.C. Hughes1963, cited by MacDonald, 1995: 6).

Abbott (1988) argues that ‘professionalization was at best a misleading concept, for it involved more the forms than the contents of professional life’ (Abbott, 1988: 1). Abbott’s work is focussed on the contents of professional work. It is this specialist knowledge, and claims to this knowledge by various competing occupational groups, that form the basis of the professional work. Abbott argues for a ‘systematic view of professions’ (Abbott, 1988: 2). Abbott argues that to understand the professions they must not be considered

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1 Identified by Weber as the action of social groups, who restrict entry and exclude benefit to those outside the group in order to maximise their own advantage (Bilton et al. 1996:669)
separately but together as they co-exist in a systematic relationship. This approach would seem to be helpful when considering whether or not Teachers and Teaching Assistants are professions as they do exist together within the workplace and are dependent upon one another in their work. However, such an analysis of professions in relation to education ignores what Adnett (2006) has termed ‘asymmetry’. Teachers have a position of asymmetry in relation to Teaching Assistants. Teachers’ work is not dependent upon the Teaching Assistant, schools can and do manage without Teaching Assistants. The converse is not true. Teaching Assistants are dependent upon teachers for their work.

Sociological criticisms of a purely economic conceptualization of the market (White 1981) argue that context must be taken into account. This perspective argues that economic behaviour cannot be understood without an account of the cultural context in which economic transactions occur. For example within a market, gender may have an impact on the ownership and control of property. In Saudi Arabia, the cultural context denies women the ownership of property which distorts the market. The effects of context can be more subtle. It can be argued that this is the case in education in relation to the context of gender. The alignment between working hours and childcare within the education market will skew the staffing profile in favour of those with childcare responsibilities. If, culturally these are women, then women will dominate the market. The need to have employment that is of limited duration will also keep the salary costs down.

Recognizing that context is important for an analysis of markets for professional services where professional reputation and trust play an important role, Dietrich and Roberts (1999) have used both sociological and economic approaches to analyse professionalism. They argue that power is a key defining factor but note that it is conceived of differently in each discipline. In economics power is defined in relation to market structures. The power perspective in sociology is concerned with a profession's ability to access and maintain power in order to lay claim to professional status. They argue that, to explain the function of professions, power must be understood in both structural (economic) and processual (sociological) senses. As a structural construct power can be held by individuals, groups or organisations (Pfeffer 1992). Power can be an embedded property of structures, it can be a property of individuals or it can be the property of relationships. Pfeffer (1992) has argued that power should be seen as a property of an individual's role within an organisation. Lowe and Pugh (2007) argue that this perspective is helpful for understanding power in schools. The power of a headteacher is a function of the role that headteachers are generally expected to play within the organisation of a school. Variation in the power of headteachers in different schools reflects variation in the roles undertaken by headteachers within the organisational structure of their schools. According to this perspective power is distributed when a headteacher devolves aspects of any of the control points. For example, the appointment of a Bursar changes the headteacher’s power by devolving access to information about the budget. Power is also distributed when a headteacher becomes less central to the organisational community. Power operates both relationally and reciprocally. To control others, one must have control over things that they desire or need. However, there is also a measure of reverse control. For example, The Headteacher and Governors have considerable power over Teaching Assistants because they control the number of hours worked, salary etc; However, the Teaching Assistant holds some reciprocal power: they may resign, alter their productivity, have time off, join a union etc; As such there is a shifting balance of power between parties in a given relationship. To examine the nature of power in a relationship we need to analyse and identify the relative strengths of each party. There may be an equal or unequal balance of power and the balance itself may be stable or subject to change.

Dietrich and Roberts (1999) also note that the environment within which professions operate is not static and that professionals, through their individual behaviour, shape the social context. This means that it is important to analyse why some occupations have professional status within an historical context. To do this Dietrich and Roberts (1999) explore Nursing. On the surface, Nursing would seem to meet the requirements of being a profession. If we use Pavalko’s (1988) criteria we can see that there is a unique knowledge base used which justifies the claim to special expertise – Nursing is a graduate entry occupation because of the level of this knowledge. It has a long training period requiring specialised knowledge and there is a significant element of work based training which may enhance indoctrination into the occupational subculture. Few would argue that the provision of effective healthcare is a core social value and nursing has had an image of dedicated workers who do it for the love of the job rather than the remuneration; clearly a service versus a profit motivation. Nurses are viewed as having a strong sense of commitment and loyalty to the profession. Nursing has a regulatory body, and code of ethics and hence occupational autonomy. It is self-controlling in that only qualified nurses can judge and certify who is competent to practice. We can also see that there is considerable information asymmetry (Matthews 1991) between nurse and patients. However, the professional status of nursing is often questioned (Parkin 1995; Salvage 1988) and nurses do not have the same professional status as doctors. The emergence of professions requires an economic rationale. Once a profession has emerged the ability to maintain and develop professional status involves social recognition. Nursing was unable to achieve this shift to core professional status due to the inability of the occupation to gain social recognition as a profession, despite its existing economic rationale. Parkin (ibid) has argued that this was linked to the existence of several occupational groups in nursing (geriatric, paediatric etc) which all laid claim to the same professional territory. This resulted in tension and power struggles which undermined nurses’ claims to a unified professionalism. Teaching Assistants may also have many different sub groupings (Special Needs Teaching Assistants, Learning mentors etc;) which may affect their ability to be recognised as a distinct profession. Indeed the problem may be compounded for Teaching Assistants given the historical development which led to a multiplicity of job titles and job roles. A dynamic approach to understanding the development of professional organizations was also recognized by Wilensky (1964). He described a "process of professionalization". This involved the following stages:

1. the establishment of the activity as a full-time occupation
2. the establishment of training schools and university links
3. the formation of a professional organization
4. the struggle to gain legal support for exclusion
5. the formation of a formal code of ethics.

Nursing would appear to have gone through this process. However, as we have noted above, the power struggles identified by Parkin (1995) mean that this process was interrupted. Wilensky identified that minor deviations from this common process were caused by power struggles and has argued that professions can try to shortcut this approach by adopting elaborate codes of ethics or setting up paper organizations, prior to the formation of an institutional or technical basis for the profession. Using Dietrich and Robert’s (1999) analysis, this is an attempt to gain a sociological rationale before the economic rationale has been established. Wilensky suggests that these attempts are doomed to failure, being characterized by "opportunist struggle for the rewards of monopoly rather than a natural history of professionalism" (Wilensky 1964, 157).

We have seen so far that there are several competing ways in which to conceptualise professions. There is no precise and unique definition available. The adjective ‘profession’ is merely a title claimed by certain occupations at certain points in time. A strong attack has been launched on professionalism. The link between agency, asymmetrical information and externalism that is played out in the power relationship between professionals and stakeholders, has led some to argue that professionals can be exploitative (Friedman 1962). Samuel (2000) in his lecture to the World Bank claims that “professional self-regulation, has robbed consumers of sovereignty”. He asserts that “Self-regulatory practices that have developed essentially to serve the interests of service providers”. Samuels is arguing that professional processes have come to "serve the interests of service providers". Professional bodies have a dual responsibility, firstly, to the market. In education this is a duty to schools and their stakeholders. Secondly, they have a duty to their members. Ethically they cannot attend to the needs of their members if it means a cost to the market because of the desire for public service which motivate behaviour (Francois 2000). However, this can place tension on the professional body. Self interest and social responsibility are congruent. It can be argued that there has been a backlash against professionalism. Part of the backlash against professionalism is linked to the economic realities of the market. Those with power secure better working conditions and salaries. The rise of unionism in response to exploitation of workers by the marketplace brought with it a strong Marxist conflict model for resolving disputes which is difficult to resolve in market vs. member disputes. Professional bodies may need to act as de facto trade unions to secure maximum benefit for members. This is a role which sits uncomfortably with professionalism.

The current government would seem to follow trait theories in its approach to managing teachers as a professional group. But as Ozga and Lawn note there is a fundamental problem here. The way teachers talk about professionalism may be very different from the way that the government conceptualises professionalism. Codd (1995) has provided two alternative conceptions of teaching which mirror the professionalism debate.

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<td>Administrative Context</td>
<td>Efficient management (hierarchical)</td>
<td>Professional Leadership and collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Motivation</td>
<td>Extrinsic</td>
<td>Intrinsic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form of Accountability</td>
<td>Contractual Compliance</td>
<td>Professional Commitment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 Codd (1995:27)

On the one hand there are those who see teaching in the professional-contextualist framework where teachers take other reflexive practitioners as their role models and work in a spirit of collaboration with professional leadership. They are committed to their role, possess integrity and are intrinsically motivated to play their part in the development of humanity. This is contrasted with the technocratic-reductionist framework whereby teacher professionalism is defined in terms of competence and the attainment of outcomes in compliance with contractual obligations. Competent, skilled technicians (teachers) are seen as extrinsically motivated and thrive within structures that are hierarchical and efficient. Within education it may be that we have two distinct discourses of professionalism in operation.

Methodological Approach
This research used both qualitative and quantitative methods. By using two research strategies the range of information was increased without compromising the depth of study (Robson 1993:169). Patton (1990) notes that while qualitative data can have a quantitative (enumerative) structure imposed on it, quantitative data cannot be made to yield qualitative explanations. This also allowed for triangulation of data whereby the various aspects of different sources of data are brought together to maximise understanding of the...
research topic (Patton 1990). Gorman and Clayton (1997) argue that the use of more than one technique increases the scope, depth, and ‘accuracy’ of a study. The research employed two distinct data collection phases. During phase 1 questionnaires were used to gather a variety of demographic data about Teaching Assistants. In a small scale study sampling is almost invariable as it is not possible to survey or interview every individual or organisation with particular characteristics. The theoretical population i.e.; all Teaching Assistants in Primary Schools is large. The accessible population comprised 297 respondents. These were drawn from a University Foundation Degree for Teaching Assistants. This sample was also opportunistic. The sample was highly accessible to the researcher. This ‘opportunist’ sampling is recognised in the literature as being both practical and efficient (Robson, 1993; Bell, 1987). The sample represented Teaching Assistants from 11 Local Authorities from the West and East Midlands, the North West and Welsh Borders. The questionnaire was used to collect background information and inform the questions that were later pursued through semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was very helpful in the initial stages of the research as the process of designing a ‘formal’ research instrument meant that the research problem had to be clearly articulated at an early stage (Patton 1990, Busher and Harter 1980). The questionnaire was also the preferred method as it would yield quantitative data related to the research area that was unavailable elsewhere. The questionnaire had both structured and semi-structured elements. This ensured that lots of data could be gathered through using categories which were easy to complete. Semi-structured questions allowed more rich detail to be added.

This research falls within the naturalistic, qualitative paradigm. Its approach is to understand and interpret the world in terms of the subjects. It is interpretive and subjective (Lowe 2006). The case study approach was adopted for phase 2 of the data collection. Case studies typically comprise an in-depth investigation of one or more organisations, or groups of users. Smith (1991 375) suggests that case study “is the logically weakest method of knowing”. Indeed Nisbett & Watt’s (1984) analysis identifies that they might not be generalisable and that they are not easy to cross check—they may be biased, selective, personal and subjective. But there are many benefits to using a case study approach. Observations from a single case can illustrate a general principle; Readers can relate ideas to theory more clearly; Case studies can lead to a more insightful analysis than numerical analysis alone; case studies can establish cause and effect. Case studies investigate and report the complex, dynamic and unfolding interactions of events and human relationships. They are strong in reality and recognise the embedded nature of subjects and researchers. Moreover the material gathered may be sufficiently rich to offer subsequent re-interpretation. Case studies capture unique features that may be lost in a large scale study. Most importantly in the context of this research they can be undertaken by a single researcher (Adelman et al 1980). The challenge when adopting case studies is to draw from findings some more general inferences which could have wider significance and use (Bell, 1987; Blaxter et al., 1996; Gorman and Clayton, 1997). Ten schools were identified from the qualitative data. The schools selected were representative of the range of schools involved in the quantitative study. In each school semi-structured focused interviews were used to gather information. Interviews were conducted with the schools professional development coordinator (PDC)3, a Teaching Assistants and a Teacher. Transcripts were subjected to what is termed by Scholfield (1995:214) as ‘interjudge reliability’ that is using a second body to ensure agreement. The transcripts were then subjected to post-coding in order to present the raw data in a form, headlining the main themes, ready for analysis and comparison.

Teaching Assistants in each of the schools were also asked to complete a workplace diary listing activities carried out in one working week. This was to triangulate information provided in phase 1 about the job role with case study examples from practice. The study also used informal observations of the Teaching Assistants in their workplace to compare the way in which they conduct their roles with the espoused information obtained through interviews. Employers and/or TAs were asked to provide key policy documents. These comprised the Continuing Professional Development Policy, Details on Performance Management and Appraisal systems and job descriptions for teachers and Teaching Assistants.

Each school was also asked to complete a questionnaire relating to their official professional classification. This was drawn from the Standard Occupation Classification (HMSO 2000). This was to identify whether or not Teaching Assistants and Teachers were able to place themselves on the professional scale used by government to determine socio-economic status. Participants were also asked to indicate the classification of their parents. This was to determine social mobility in terms of professionalism. The hypothesis here was that Teaching Assistants may have experienced greater social mobility than teachers as a result of the recent drives to professionalise them.

Findings

Teachers and TAs understanding of professionalism and each other

Figure 2 provides a summary of the elements of professionalism identified in interviews with TAs and teachers. Whilst we can identify many similarities in their understanding there were also some key differences. Teaching Assistants described professionals in two key ways. There were those who saw professionals as people with certain characteristics, “the job that they do shows the best of their ability but it is done in such a way that it makes all the people around them feel comfortable …they are friendly …they are very approachable…they wouldn’t pile a lot of work on somebody else...likeable, easy person, very approachable” (TA1), whereas others related professionalism to job role, training or status, “there is a lot of training involved…Keeping in touch with the new thinking and the new way of doing things. You need lots of dedication; it can be lots of hard work so it’s trying and exhausting…I think you need to have a feeling for the job because it is not always the most paid. There has got to be something else there that attracts you to it” (TA1)

3 Whilst this was the term identified in the initial stages of research design it transpired that no school referred to this role. All schools used the term Continuing Professional Development Coordinator. This is the term that will be used in the remainder of this paper.
What makes a professional? | TA | Teacher | CPD Leader
---|---|---|---
Character traits / personality | X | X | X
Wider societal recognition | X | X | X
Qualifications | X | X |
Autonomy | X | X |
Training | X | X |
Public Service | | |
Is a TA a professional? | | | X
Is a Teacher a professional | X | X | X

Figure 2: Teachers and TAs understanding about professionalism

Teachers identified teachers, lawyers, doctors,Quantity surveyors, bankers and the police as examples of professional people often drawing a clear distinction between job roles that were professions and job roles that weren’t, “I just tend to think of jobs where it is a career I don’t know why that is the case. So I think within my circle of friends, one is an area manager, one is a banker and there is myself and I think of the three of us as having a career and a profession” (T5). The defining attribute of a profession was seen as education level or level of training, “The level of education that they have had to achieve to get to do their job” (T7).

Teaching Assistants identified a broader range of professional roles. They all agreed that Teachers were professional and often went on to explain why, “yes because…it is something you probably choose to go into…you know what you want to be when you grow up. There is a certain amount of training and preparation and getting there. And then you have got to be able to put into practice all that you have learnt and take on board all of the different new thinkings that are coming in. All the new fashions that are out at the moment” (TA1).

An ethnic minority teacher clearly articulated how professionals were viewed by her culture, “I know in my culture professionals were seen as you doctors and teachers and the air pilots. That’s a profession, you know, anything else is seen as ‘oh well’” (T2). This recognition by wider society was a constant theme in teacher’s articulations of professionalism, “Because it is just one of those jobs where you can sign people’s passport photos… people see teaching as a respectable job don’t they. It gains you a certain level of respect from some people” (T5).

Some definitions of professionalism, most notably those of the CPD Leaders were more directed to skills, commitment and experience rather than qualification level, “Definitely transferable skills…flexible, a certain amount of knowledge and a conviction and a confidence. Somebody who is able to relate well to other people. A people person who is trustworthy, who is confidential” (CPD9).

Teaching Assistants did not see themselves as professionals in the same way that they thought teachers were, “No, I wouldn’t have said so because a lot of people don’t realise that you have done training. They just think that you are a mum helping” (TA11). Many told personal stories about how their own role had changed and how this had enhanced their professionalism;

“I would have said when I started it was your little helper coming in…well we have to do the training now and you have to know and understand what you are doing and like teachers you are having to learn the new thinkings and take them on board because to work alongside teachers you have got to understand some of the things they have been taught. You have to know how children develop, what to expect of them. And then to be able to discuss it as well. You have got to be able to hold a conversation and be able to put into words; to express yourself in a way that you can make people understand what you are trying to say” (TA1)

Only two Teaching Assistants identified themselves as professional. This was because they perceived that they had a vocation towards the role and saw a real value in the role;

“I don’t look upon my job as something um where I am just earning money to put food on the table I know that it does do that. Um but I think there is a certain amount of dedication involved. You like what you do. You want to be with the children and help them. It’s not just about you it is about helping those around you. Um it is your attitude towards your work. Wanting to always do your best” (TA1)
“People do rely on me. I come in here and even if it is as simple as a child falling over and needing reassurance and a plaster. That child has needed something that I have been able to supply so therefore I believe that makes me a professional person. I am professional in the way that I deal with them and the fact that I deal with them. If I was the sort of person that would say ‘no I am not doing that I’m going now, deal with it yourself’ then that would make me a very unprofessional person” (TA10)

Some teachers did not think that TAs had professional status. Largely this was because the TAs did not have the training, “No - On the basis that they haven’t had the training, they haven’t got the degree” (T17). Many acknowledged that this was changing within their schools, “I think they are moving that way because they are taking more on with the planning side and getting the resources and the materials ready and I think it is moving that way. I wouldn’t say it is a profession at the moment. They haven’t had of course, all the training that teachers have had as well and done all the lesson plans and monitoring. None of the TAs has been monitored with a lesson like a teacher” (T4). Only one teacher noted the erosion of professionalism of teachers in wider society, “it has almost been regarded by some aspects in society as a lesser profession. It is not quite as important. It is not quite as hierarchical as being say a lawyer or a doctor. And very often comments will be made that well you don’t have an education degree you have a degree in something. Why did you go into teaching? Why didn’t you do this? As if it was a secondary option. And I do think that, and sometimes the press conceptions and the reporting does lead them to think that. But I think it is a profession. I think it’s a very caring profession” (T9)

Those who did not see TAs as a profession often qualified their viewpoint by referring to the views they believed that parents and children held about the TA role, “Parents and wider community view them as ....exactly as an assistant...a support to the teacher but as overall, very separate roles. So I don’t think there is a lot of understanding about their roles and I certainly don’t think they are overall seen as a profession” (T9).

There were some teachers, mainly the CPD Leaders who did identify TAs as a professional group, “TAs haven’t got higher level academic qualifications but I don’t think that should be any bar to them being thought of as a profession. Because the skills and knowledge they have are not necessarily written down on paper” (T9)

**Continuing Professional Development**

One aspect of being identified as a professional within education is access to professional development. Gunter (2004) has noted that the main issue is not the employment of support staff but the allocation of resources that will enable schools to appoint, train and develop these staff appropriately. Teachers gain and have control over their CPD whereas TAs have limited CPD. Most CPD for TAs is in school. Teaching Assistants found it difficult to recall CPD they had undertaken in the previous 6 months, “training …um let me think now… oh it’s hard to recall sometimes isn’t it?” (TA1). Only 11% of respondents listed attendance at more than three courses in 12 months. And few could recall the reasons for undertaking it. Only 50.5% of TAs had received training in the previous 12 months. Figure 3 illustrates that this training was largely (41%) subject specific or related to school needs.

![Graph showing training undertaken by Teaching Assistants](image)

Figure 3 Types of Training

Only 4% of respondents indicated that they regarded the training as personal development. It also transpired that teachers know little about TA training and qualifications. When asked how CPD was organised Teaching Assistants indicated that they were heavily directed by school managers. In 50% of cases it is the head who suggested attendance, “The head teacher obviously finds out about the training courses and then she will say ‘there is a course on this going I can send x amount of people are you interested? It would help you in this way’ or ‘do you think it would help?’” (TA10). 54% of respondents said their school did have a specific CPD policy for Teaching Assistants. 38% didn’t know and 8% identified that the school didn’t have a policy. Many recognised that there were financial limitations which may affect their access to CPD, “Obviously money comes into it as well because we are working to a budget” (TA1). Teaching Assistants saw that CPD had a significant impact upon them professionally. It had enhanced their confidence and enabled them to share a dialogue with teaching colleagues in the school;
“When I think to where I was and to where I am now then it’s a tremendous amount gone on because I have a greater understanding, more confidence. I sometimes pride myself on what I do know. I feel like all this training means I can have a conversation with a teacher. I know I never understand everything that they know because they have done their training as a teacher and I haven’t done that. I think that if I wanted to do that I could have done teacher training anyway” (TA1)

For some the value of the CPD they had undertaken was linked to the fact that it enabled them to empathise with the learners they supported;

“It just reminds you of the fact that, well it was about learning, so it reminds you that if a child is really negative it doesn’t necessarily mean that they can’t do it, it just means the way you are delivery it to them isn’t the way that they understand. It was just a reminder although I know it I have done courses on it before, it is just nice. Yes, I think it helped me because it does just reiterate the fact that, if you try with a child, or are trying to translate what the teacher is saying and it is not going in there is always another way of trying and it is nice to be reminded of that occasionally” (TA10)

TAs found it difficult to articulate what training CPD they would like. Many identified that they would like similar training to their teachers, “if teachers are sent on courses to be taught new ways of dealing with things then to be kept up with that, and maybe the opportunity to go on some of those courses would be nice” (TA10). They felt a need to keep up to date with the curriculum “Keeping abreast of the literacy and numeracy and the new primary strategy...because if you have got to help plan you have got to know what they are talking about” (TA1), and behaviour management “classroom management would be quite nice” (TA1). Some saw CPD as developmental in terms of their career, “More about the resources that you can use on the computers and I would absolutely love to do something about children and families” (TA12). However some indicated that they didn’t think they needed specific training – knowing how to do the job was linked to experience, “A lot of things you just pick up on the way. I think with TAs once you have got your basic ground rules and know where you are going a lot of it is common sense” (TA10).

TAs perceived that teachers had more access to CPD and that the CPD undertaken was different to their own. However they also noted that this was probably prescriptive in nature and directed by the Headteacher;

“I think the teachers, well I’m sure they get the choice but I think it might be slightly different in that I would be asked. The head would say this course was on and would be interested but maybe the teachers, because of their position, the head might feel that because you are doing this you should go on this course. So it might maybe be slightly different in that way. I would imagine that with teachers there is more of a ‘you have to go on this course because...’ whereas as a TA you are given a choice, it’s a personal ‘how far do you want to go with this?’ Whereas with teachers, once you are into teaching it is a case of well the government have changed the guidelines and you have got to go on a course and do that.” (TA10)

CPD leaders identified that their spending priorities in relation to CPD were linked to school development priorities;

“CPD begins with whole school needs, performance management needs - I’m ashamed to say. It’s not my vision of how I would like it to be but it is just about juggling the balls in the air. It is actually easier for me to still hold the CPD budget because you have the big picture of everybody from the caretaker and the janitor through to the lunch time supervisors through to the office staff” (CPD19)

Despite the spending priorities teachers were able to instigate their own professional development, “I instigated it because I wanted to have some more training” (T8, but it became clear that the CPD Leader (who was always a senior manager in the school) would also play a major part in directing a teachers CPD activity “A lot we get are linked to school development, more so than personal ones” (T8). CPD Leaders were also aware that there were both professional and personal development needs to be met, “We try and have a balance between school needs and personal needs because it is important that it is not just about the school but it is where they are at. It might be to increase understanding, it might be a confidence factor, it might be that they have read something and want to explore more about it” (CPD9)

Teachers were very aware of the differences between their CPD access and that of the TAs they worked with, “There are more courses available for teachers. TA’s do get to go on courses but not as often as we do because there is a lot more offered to us. Their training is basically in school” (T2). However, teachers were less aware of the content of TA training than might be expected, “I don’t know anything about the TA course; I would love to know what sort of things they do. So dedicated course to a TA so long as it is relevant to what a TA actually does in school. That to me seems like a good thing to do. What level it goes to I don’t know, I don’t know what it offers them, I don’t know what they come out of it with or what level of, is it a degree or...”(T7)

CPD Leaders had a much clearer understanding of the training undertaken by many of their TAs, “Some of our TA’s have started foundation degrees. It’s absolutely brilliant” (CPD 3. This training was more ad-hoc than that of the teachers and was closely linked to informal professional discussions as opposed to the framework of performance management, “[TAs]have sessions with my deputy ….I think it has been a bit more hit and miss than I would want it to be” (CPD9). Many CPD Leaders expressed the view that it was difficult to get TAs to engage in CPD in the same way as teachers;

“[CPD] would be good for them and they would be able to have more input on what courses they went on. They could decide which areas they either thought they needed developing in or wanted to further. A lot of TAs see it is a nine to three job and they
don't want it to be any more than that. But there are some TAs who do. So I think it should be up to them to decide whether they wanted to further their career, if they saw it as a career as supposed to a job" (CPD17)

Teachers had very clear views about what training they thought TAs should receive, “Training in all basic skills, behaviour management…first aid training … classroom management training … how we actually teach literacy and phonics and how we say letters. You would be amazed at how many TAs I have worked with have pronounced letter sounds incorrectly um so they need training in the basics” (T8). Interestingly, questions about TA training prompted some comments about TAs and teacher training. Some teachers felt that TA training should not be too in depth, “If they want to be a teacher they should go and do a teaching course or degree” (T7)

Qualifications
The majority (80.5%) of Teaching Assistants in this study hold a vocational qualification. The National Qualifications Framework (see Figure 4) sets out the levels against which a qualification can be recognised in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Figure 4 The National Qualifications Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NQF level</th>
<th>Examples of qualifications</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>- Entry level certificates</td>
<td>- basic knowledge and skills / - ability to apply learning in everyday situations / - not geared towards specific occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>- GCSEs grades D-G</td>
<td>- basic knowledge and skills / - ability to apply learning with guidance or supervision - may be linked to job competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>- GCSEs grades A*-C / - BTEC First Diplomas / Certificates / Key Skills level 2 / - NVQs</td>
<td>- good knowledge and understanding of a subject - ability to perform variety of tasks with some guidance or supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>- A levels / - International Baccalaureate / NVQs / - BTEC Nationals</td>
<td>- ability to gain or apply a range of knowledge, skills and understanding, at a detailed level - appropriate for university, working independently / supervise and train others in their field of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Certificate - Key Skills level 4 - NVQs - BTEC Professional Diplomas, Certificate and Awards</td>
<td>- specialist learning, involving detailed analysis of a high level of information and knowledge in an area of work or study - appropriate for university, working independently / supervise and train others in their field of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Intermediate - HNCs and HNDs - NVQs - BTEC Professional Diplomas, Certificate and Awards</td>
<td>- ability to increase the depth of knowledge and understanding of an area of work or study / ability to respond to complex problems and situations - involves high level of work expertise and competence in managing and training others - appropriate for people working as higher grade technicians, professionals or managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Honours - BTEC Advanced Professional Diploma Certificates and Awards</td>
<td>- a specialist, high-level knowledge of an area of work or study / able to use own ideas and research in response to complex problems and situations - appropriate for people working as knowledge-based professionals or in professional management positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Masters - BTEC Advanced Professional Diploma Certificates / Awards</td>
<td>- highly developed and complex levels of knowledge, enabling you to develop original responses to complicated and unpredictable problems and situations / - appropriate for senior professionals and managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Doctoral - Specialist awards</td>
<td>- opportunity to develop new and creative approaches that extend or redefine existing knowledge or professional practice / - appropriate for leading experts or practitioners in a particular field</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 indicates that a Level 3 qualification is held by 39% of the respondents. The NNEB is held by 15% and 14.5% hold a Level 2 qualification. HLTA Status is held by 9% of Teaching Assistants in this study. Higher level (Specialist Teaching Assistant and Foundation Degree) qualifications are held by 3% of the respondents. However 19.5% reported having no vocational qualification.
Figure 5 Teaching Assistants Vocational Qualifications

Figure 6 illustrates that all of the respondents have a general qualification level of 2 or above. The general level of qualification for the study group is high – 70.5% have a qualification above Level 3 compared to 50.6% of people in the general population.

Figure 6 Highest General Qualification

Social Class
Given the high level of general qualification the research looked at whether this was linked to the social class background of the TAs. Figure 7 identifies the current classifications used by the Office for National Statistics in relation to occupational grouping. Generally those with a higher numerical rating are regarded as the more beneficial occupational groups to belong to. This classification is used to identify social class groupings and to measure social mobility.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office for National Statistics – Occupational Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Manager and Senior Officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Professional Occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Associate Professional and Technical Occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Administrative and Secretarial Occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Skilled Trade Occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Personal Service Occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Sales and Customer Service Occupations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Process, Plant and Machine Operatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Elementary Occupations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7 ONS Classifications

Data from the Case Study schools in Figure 8 reveals that Teaching Assistants come from families from a range of occupational groups. 79% of TAs reported that they had experienced a rise in occupational grouping from that of their parents with only 14% remaining in the same occupational grouping. Only 1 TA reported being in a lower occupational grouping than their parents. However, these figures represent what TAs perceive about their own occupational grouping. When we compare the TAs perception with actual ONS occupational grouping data we see a slightly different picture. Only 36% of TAs had actually seen a rise in their ONS occupational grouping compared to their parents. 50% of TAs are actually employed in a lower occupational grouping than their parents. If we look at social mobility from Teachers perceived ONS occupational grouping we see that 70% report that they have experienced a rise in occupational grouping from that of their parents. This is 9% lower than the figure given by TAs. 17% of teachers report being in the same occupational group as their parents and 13% report being employed in a lower occupational grouping than their parents. If we look at mobility from actual ONS
occupational grouping we see that 65% of teachers have experienced a rise in occupational grouping from that of their parents, 31% are in the same occupational grouping as their parents. Only 1 teacher is employed in a lower occupational grouping than their parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Same social Class</th>
<th>Higher social class</th>
<th>Lower social class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived</strong></td>
<td><strong>Actual</strong></td>
<td><strong>Perceived</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAs</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8 Social Mobility for TAs and Teachers

What this data illustrates is that teachers perceive that they have experienced a drop in social class and TAs perceive that they have experienced a rise in social class from that of their parents. Both of these perceptions are erroneous. TAs as a group experience lower rates of social mobility than teachers.

**Terms and Conditions of Employment**

Figure 9 shows the national link between pay and qualifications (DIUS 2007). In 2007 there was a clear relationship between higher gross hourly earnings (full-time employees) and higher qualifications; each additional qualification level is associated with higher gross hourly earnings than its preceding level. The earning differential is greatest between level 3 and level 4, with full-time workers whose highest qualification was level 4 or above earning 46 per cent more than those at level 3. The relationship between higher qualifications and earnings is more discontinuous for part-time workers. Part-time workers qualified to level 4 earn at significantly more per hour than those at level 3. Those who have no qualifications consistently earn less than workers at all other levels. On average full-time males earn more than equivalently qualified females at all qualification levels. However, the relationship is less clear for part-time workers where earnings for both sexes are variable.

Figure 9 National Pay and Qualifications Inter-relationship

**Pay**

The demographic data showed that the TA group were poorly paid despite their qualifications. The majority of Teaching Assistants (72%) report being paid less than £1000 per month. Only 5% earn above £1400 per month. Of the respondents 6% work in a voluntary capacity for all of the time. The pay range is £2.24 – £23.35 per hour. The £23.35 per hour represents those who are called TAs within the scope of this study who work for few hours for high pay. There were five such TAs within this study, all of whom worked for only 7.5 hours per week but who received salaries in excess of £700 per month. These were mainly exam invigilators (2 respondents) or those with specialist roles such as dyslexia support (1 respondent) or behaviour support (2 respondents). The median pay figure per month is £5.23. The average TA gross pay per hour is £7.09. It could be argued that TAs are earning above the national minimum wage however these figures disguise a significant proportion of TAs who earn significantly less. 29 respondents (20.86% of the study) reported earning less than £5.00 per hour. The average pay for this group was £2.82. 68 respondents (48.92% of the study) reported being paid less than the current national minimum wage rate. The average pay rate per hour for this group was £4.20. With a few exceptions, all workers in the UK aged 16 or
over are legally entitled to be paid a minimum amount per hour. This is regardless of the kind of work they do or the size and type of company. The rate is reviewed every year, and any increases take place in October 4.

Policy
None of the schools visited as part of Phase 2 of the study had a policy specifically related to the employment or deployment of TAs. Two schools identified themselves as working on policies.

Job Descriptions
76% of Teaching Assistants have a job description. 2% report not knowing whether they have a job description and 22% report no job description. This is in contrast to the information reported by the schools. CPD Leaders claimed that all of their staff had job descriptions, but many acknowledged that some of these were in the process of being ‘updated’ as a result of Local Authority role restructuring.

Appraisal
59.5% of TAs report having access to appraisal. In 50% of cases this was undertaken by the Head Teacher. A further 36% were appraised by the Deputy Head Teacher, a Key Stage Manager or the schools SENCO. In only 2% of case was appraisal carried out by a Professional Development Coordinator (PDC). 23 TAs indicated that their appraisal was carried out by a HLTA. A further 10% reported appraisal by an undisclosed person. Just under ¼ of all appraisers were female. These findings were confirmed in phase 2 of the study. All of the CPD Leaders were senior managers in the schools and all were responsible for conducting professional development activity for TAs. None of the CPD Leaders interviewed were known as PDC’s.

Affiliation
Union membership is high with over 66% reporting membership. 70% of these belong to UNISON

Discussion
Figure 10 demonstrates why a trait analysis can help to explain why TAs might not be regarded as professionals. It clearly demonstrates that whereas teachers in the study exhibit all of the traits associated with a ‘profession’, TAs do not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>TAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensing</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of Ethics</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public service</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Body</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10 Trait Analysis - Teachers and Teaching Assistants

Trait theories whilst allowing us to identify a group and say that they are professional because the members of the group exhibit certain characteristics do not allow us to understand the subtleties of professionalism in contemporary society. For example it ignores the differences between TAs in relation to three elements – qualifications, training and membership of a professional body. National Occupational Standards’ for TAs now lead to recognised qualifications. Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) status is conferred upon TAs who can demonstrate competence against a core set of work related standards. Theoretically TAs with HLTA status can receive higher pay. The work carried out by TAs contributes to the public good of education and it could be argued that all those who work in schools have high social recognition. In addition TAs can have access to professional bodies. However it is worth remembering that even if a TA possesses all of these traits they are not generally recognised by those they work with. It was clear in the small sample here that there were differences between schools, TAs, CPD leaders, teachers, communities etc; that all affected the extent to which the TA could engage with the traits required for professionalism. This would support sociological theories which as we have seen allow us to account for variations in professional identity, professional practice and professional strength.

The economic conceptualisation of professionalism suggests that professions are associated with a shift away from the ‘free market’ and are there to act as a collective regulator of economic activity (Adnett 2006). This would certainly seem to be evidenced in relation to the teaching profession. Teachers form professional associations which contract with the state on their behalf. As a result they can gain better working conditions, remuneration and protection through their professional associations. However, workforce remodelling has not yielded the same benefits for TAs. Findings from this research suggest that many still have poor pay and working conditions despite the involvement of the unions in the National Workload Agreement (DFES 2003). If professionalism attempts to correct market failures, specifically the problem of incomplete contracts as a result of asymmetrical power relationships (Adnett and Davies 2003), through the process whereby professionals are assisted in acquiring and keeping the trust of their stakeholders through the adoption and enforcement of a code of ethics we should see this in relation to Teachers and TAs. Whilst teachers are bound by a professional code of conduct, albeit not as extensive and credible as those in medicine and law (Adnett 2003) TAs are not. Nor are there the shared professional standards and a common collegiate ethos which could stand in place of a regulatory framework. Adnett (2006) has noted how collegiately can be a significant factor in professional identity however the findings from this research indicate very little collegiality. So are we seeing an ‘emergent professionalism’ (Nixon et al. 1997) that places the emphasis on the need for the creation of alliances between parents, pupils and teachers? Not if definitions of professionalism rely on wider societal acceptance because this appears to be limited for TAs. It should also be remembered that teachers have a position of asymmetry in relation to Teaching Assistants. Teachers’ work is not dependent upon the Teaching Assistant, schools can and do manage without Teaching Assistants. The converse is not true. Teaching Assistants are dependent upon teachers for their work.

Walby (1986) has identified key reasons for women’s acceptance of poor pay and working conditions. It may be that we have subordination through patriarchy where gender inequality is a direct result of male dominance. Capitalism is not responsible for gender inequality because patriarchal control was evident in non-capitalist societies. Firestone (1970) argues that women’s subordinate position is directly related to their biological differences from men. Women will only be liberated if they are liberated from reproduction. Alternatively it could be a result of subordination through a combination of patriarchy and capitalism. Eisenstein (1978, 1984) argues that capitalism and patriarchy are mutually dependent and self-reinforcing. Capitalism exploits some women economically and patriarchy exploits them politically and socially. The combination of this exploitation accounts for the gender inequalities in the workplace. In 2002 amongst full time 33% of all women and 21% of all men were in a union. Amongst those working part time these figures equate to 23% of all women and 12% of all men (Grint, 2005). Different occupations have varying levels of union density. Teaching unions recruit about 70% of women members. This is broadly equivalent to the number of TAs with a union affiliation which leads us to question why the unions haven’t looked at the issue of terms and conditions of employment for TAS. It may be as Campbell has suggested that “for most women, trade unions meet at the wrong time in the wrong place about the wrong things. For most trade unions, women are the wrong people in the wrong place at the wrong time going on about the wrong things” (Campbell 1992b)

Sociological definitions of professions define them as a special category of occupations possessing unique attributes that are seen as functional to the wider society (Carr-Saunders 1928; Goode 1960). However, many respondents in this survey indicated that they thought society did not understand the role of the TA and would reject TAs in favour of more teachers. In a Marxist analysis professions are viewed as either a means of articulating the state and fulfilling the functions of capitalism (Johnson 1977; Poulantzas 1975), or as being subject to proletarianization and de-skilling, gradually losing status and power (Braverman 1974). A neo-Weberian approach focuses on market conditions, viewing society as an arena where competing groups struggle with the state and each other to gain power and status. Both approaches emphasize the role of conflict and struggle and the need to achieve and consolidate professional status. However, if conflict and struggle define professionalism as Hanlon (1998) suggests might we also not see a point where TAs gain the upper hand over teachers? It could be argued that teachers and Teaching Assistants are two such groups in conflict with one another in an era of commercialised professionalism in education. The Government, has lost trust in the teaching profession. It has created a centralised managerialist education system and imposed a new group of workers (Teaching Assistants) who are in conflict with the existing workers (teachers).

Johnson (1972) argued that professionalism is one form of occupational control used to impose a relationship. By defining the nature of professionalism for teachers the government is effectively imposing a form of control over that group of workers. A profession is not an occupation, but a means of controlling an occupation (Johnson, 1972: 45). It could be in a similar way that teachers are defining the nature of professionalism for TAs, using their own dominant status in the relationship in an attempt to gain occupational control. As Stevenson (2007) suggests we may have one group of workers exploiting another group in order to protect their professional role “the new structured individualism of teaching has created a new culture that embraces the exploitation of others…teachers, forced to enter relations against their own will, will have little choice but to engage in relations of exploitation in the form of line management and discipline of assistants” (ibid). This was evident from the way in which teachers spoke about their relationships with TAs. Teachers talk about collective endeavour but then talk about themselves as individuals and their own position and role. More fundamentally teachers protect their space by controlling the classroom environment. They also identified a strong sense that this was exploitative;

“I know that what we do is wrong, well at a personal level I think it’s wrong – we’re taking advantage of these people… I know that [TA name] will come in before I can start to pay her and she’ll stay until [child’s name] leaves Nursery… In effect she’s here for 3 hours and I only pay her for 2…...I don’t force her to… I don’t really [laughs] but I guess I do expect her to be there and I give her jobs… responsibilities… and because of the kind of person she is she does them… but it’s not right is it… but what do I
do… I've only got a limited budget and (TA name) adds so much to the school…. I'd be silly not to make use of her when she’s here wouldn’t I….. [laughs] I'm going to hell in a handcart that's for sure….."

Headteacher – large urban primary

Conclusion

It would appear that irrespective of which analysis we use the status of TAs as professionals is limited. However it may be as Hughes (1963) has argued we are asking a false question when we ask if TAs are a profession. The fundamental question is to identify ‘the circumstances in which people in an occupation attempt to turn it into a profession and themselves into professional people’ (Hughes 1963, cited by MacDonald, 1995:6). TAs might clearly want to turn their occupation into a profession to correct the asymmetry in their relationship with their employers in relation to terms and conditions of employment. But the question needs to be expanded further to ask under what circumstances might others want to turn an occupation into a profession and for what purpose? The government may have a desire to turn TAs into a profession in order to correct the asymmetry in their relationship with teachers who hold all of the power. Teachers may have a desire to turn TAs into a profession in order to protect their own status by defining the new profession in subordination to their own. Assuming that TAs themselves wish to become a profession, and it must be stated that no TA in this research explicitly expressed a desire for professional recognition or status what would we expect to see? Wilensky’s (1964) process of professionalisation identified the need for the establishment of the activity as a full-time occupation with training schools and university links. It also required a professional organization that helped individuals gain legal support and was bounded by a formal code of ethics. Wilensky’s process needs to be expanded further. The activity must become a full-time occupation but there must also be remuneration for the work done, clearly delineated roles from that of the teacher and robust employment contracts. Whilst there are training opportunities and university links remuneration also needs to match qualifications. The formation of a professional organization / legal support / code of ethics is also imperative but of little value unless they are recognized by others in education. This research would indicate that TAs still have a long way to go should they wish to become a profession. They must begin with teachers and school leaders and build a credible identity within their organisations and local communities. Further research needs to explore the dynamics of the professional relationship between TAs, teachers and other stakeholders to identify how the current barriers to the development of the profession can be overcome and whether they should be overcome.

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