The Changing Role of Teacher Assistants—
Where Being a ‘Mum’ is Not Enough

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Faculty of Education, Science, Technology and Mathematics
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Electronic Copy

I, the undersigned, the author of this work, declare that the electronic copy of this thesis provided to the University of Canberra Library is an accurate copy of the print thesis submitted, within the limits of the technology available.

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Rosemary Butt                          February 2014
Declaration on Ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans.

- University of Canberra: Committee for Ethics in Human Research approval: 10-53 (2010)

______________________________
Rosemary Butt                        February 2014
Dedication

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the many people who have encouraged and supported me through this journey.

Thank you to my primary supervisor, Associate Professor Kaye Lowe, for providing encouragement, support and guidance. Thank you for helping with our exploratory research project and for encouraging me to embark on the wider project that would become this thesis. Your patience and timely feedback were greatly appreciated. Thank you to my secondary supervisor, Associate Professor Chris Kilham, for taking chapters to Patagonia and using precious holiday time to provide feedback. Thank you to Dr Anita Collins for willingly joining the team as a supervisor, interpreting ideas into diagrams and providing advice based on recent thesis writing experience.

A special thank you to my colleagues at the University of Canberra, who helped and supported me, kept me focused, answered endless questions and listened to me talk about my research. Thank you also to the Principals, Teacher Assistants and Class Teachers who welcomed me into their schools and classrooms, willingly and openly sharing their daily work experiences with me.

Finally, thank you to my family for providing encouragement and for believing in me. I would particularly like to thank Katie for advice and feedback. To my husband, David, thank you for being so understanding and encouraging and for your unwavering belief in me.
Abstract

This thesis explores the role, qualifications, skills and training needs of Teacher Assistants (TAs) in mainstream primary schools. The increasing employment and deployment of TAs in mainstream schools is a recent phenomenon that is often associated with the movement towards a more inclusive approach to education. While the number of TAs working in mainstream schools has increased, little research has been conducted in Australia on this growing employment sector. In addition, studies have focused on the perspective of school administrators and ignored the perspective of TAs.

This thesis was conducted over three years in four stages across four school sites, and it is informed by the multiple perspectives of TAs, class teachers, school leaders including principals, supervisors of TAs, policy administrators and a vocational education teacher. A case study methodology was adopted, using research methods of focus groups, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes and memos. In response to all stakeholders identifying a pressing need for training, Stages 1 and 3 consisted of the trial and evaluation of two training programs: Preliminary Teacher Assistant Training (PTAT) and Teacher Assistant Training (TAT). A grounded theory approach and a constant comparison method were used for data analysis, and key factors relating to challenges, qualifications, skills, training and benefits were identified.

The findings identify the mismatched perceptions regarding the role, qualifications, skills and training requirements for TAs. Discrepancies in practices pertaining to the funding and employment of TAs are highlighted, specifically in public schools in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The findings are vital to future educational policy-making and school and classroom practice if education agendas are firmly focused on improved educational outcomes, specifically for students with disabilities and learning
difficulties and all students in general. A policy review of the employment conditions of TAs and the processes and practices associated with their deployment is of the utmost importance and is long overdue to ensure the efficient use of resources and quality educational outcomes. The analysis indicates that the issues are not isolated to the ACT; thus, the findings have implications for policy-makers and education systems Australia-wide.

This study provides an alternative model for TA deployment to address the shortcomings in current practices. With the introduction of the proposed alternative model, the challenges facing TAs regarding their role at the school, class and student levels will be addressed, resulting in quality education and improved student learning.
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<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT ETD</td>
<td>ACT Education and Training Directorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQF</td>
<td>Australian Qualifications Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIT</td>
<td>Canberra Institute of Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTP</td>
<td>Career Training Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISS</td>
<td>Deployment and Impact of Support Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAL</td>
<td>English as an Additional Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHA</td>
<td>Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975 (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HLTA</td>
<td>Higher Level Teacher Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1990 (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILP</td>
<td>Individual Learning Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRSED</td>
<td>Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSC</td>
<td>Learning Support Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSUA</td>
<td>Learning Support Units/Autism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>The National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>National Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAL</td>
<td>positive approaches to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIRLS</td>
<td>Progress in International Reading Literacy Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTAT</td>
<td>Preliminary Teacher Assistant Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QTS</td>
<td>Qualified Teacher Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCAN</td>
<td>Student Centred Appraisal of Need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>special education needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>socioeconomic status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAAF</td>
<td>Teacher Assistant As Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAT</td>
<td>Teacher Assistant Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>teacher assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>TIMSS</td>
<td>Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the role, qualifications, skills and training needs of Teacher Assistants (TAs) working with students with disabilities and learning difficulties in four mainstream primary schools in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Multiple perspectives of key stakeholders are sought and analysed. In the ACT, TAs are employed to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties, enabling them to enrol in mainstream schools and participate in learning in what is considered the least restrictive environment.

While there has been little research into the direct effect on learning outcomes for students where TAs are employed, the number of TAs in the workforce is increasing. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) Labour Force Survey reports that 80,400 TAs were employed in 2010—almost double the number employed in 2000 (47,000). Since 2000, nearly 3,500 additional TAs have been employed each year. Labour survey projections claim that the job prospects for TAs are expected to grow strongly over the next five years (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2012a). There is a need to understand and question how and why the growth in the number of TAs being employed has occurred. Why has the number of TAs increased so markedly? What roles do TAs play in schools? What contribution do they make to learning? What is the cost of employing TAs? What evidence exists that their employment is justified?

While TAs have become an ever-increasing presence in contemporary, inclusive classrooms globally, few studies have been conducted in Australia to investigate their role, qualifications required to fulfil the role, conditions of employment, effect on improving student outcomes and ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities or learning
difficulties. It has been noted internationally that TAs have become the ‘primary mechanism’ (Giangreco, Broer & Suter, 2011, p. 25) to enable students with disabilities to enrol in mainstream schools. It appears that in the ACT, TAs are employed as the ‘adjustment’ or ‘accommodation’ to comply with the Education Standards (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006) enabling students with disabilities to access mainstream schools and participate in education, but with little modification to curriculum, pedagogy or environment. Consequently, the practice of employing TAs to enable students with disabilities or learning difficulties to enrol in mainstream schools needs to be investigated in order to assess and maximise the value they bring to classroom outcomes for all students.

For clarity, the terms that are frequently used throughout this thesis are defined below.

1.2 Teacher Assistant (TA)

Due to the multiplicity of terms used both in Australia and around the world to refer to TAs, it is necessary to define the term as it is used in this thesis. The term ‘teacher assistant’ is used to refer to non-teaching staff who ‘assist teachers, give schools a way to comply with Individualised Education Plan (IEP) requirements … and supply remedial help to struggling students and challenging work to advanced ones’ (Darden, 2009, p. 32). In each jurisdiction in Australia, TAs are referred to by a different name, although the role remains fundamentally the same. A new term for TAs in the early childhood context has recently been added to the list in the ACT, where TAs are referred to as Education Assistants (S. Davies, personal communication, 6 June 2013).
Table 1.1:

Terms Used in Australia to Refer to Teacher Assistants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State or Territory</th>
<th>Term Used for Teacher Assistants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>Learning Support Assistants (used in primary and secondary settings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>Education Assistants (used in early childhood settings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Student Learning Support Officers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Integration Aides or Teacher Aides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Teacher Aides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>School Support Officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Teacher Assistants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Education Assistants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>Teacher Support Officers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.3 Students with Disabilities

The lack of an agreed definition for students with disabilities between the state/territory and federal governments in Australia is problematic for this thesis. However, this is currently being addressed with the trial of a Nationally Consistent Data Collection for students with disabilities, which is designed to provide a standard definition. This trial began in 2012 and aims to ‘provide information about the diversity of the population of students with disability, how many students with disability there are, where they are and the level of adjustments provided for them to participate in schooling on the same basis as other students’ (DEEWR, 2012b). Currently, the term ‘students with disability’ is used in the ACT to refer to students who receive additional funding that enables them to receive additional classroom support, usually by TAs. Students with disabilities may experience total or partial loss of their bodily or mental functions; they may have a disorder that results in them learning differently from a person without the disorder; or they may have a disorder, illness or disease that affects their thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment, or that results in disturbed behaviour (DEEWR, 2006).

1 In the ACT students with disabilities are now referred to as ‘students with disability’. As this term is not used throughout Australia yet, the term students with disabilities has been used throughout this thesis.
1.4 Mainstream

A mainstream school is the local, regular school that is accessible to all students. Students with disabilities and those defined as having special educational needs (SEN) may be educated in a class in a mainstream school, but they may also be withdrawn for parts of the school day to receive intensive intervention from specialist support teachers (Forlin, 2006).

1.5 Least Restrictive Environment

According to Hulett (2009), the least restrictive environment allows students with disabilities to be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate.

1.6 Inclusion

Inclusion is ‘active participation and achievement of equity in all aspects of daily life’ (Hyde, Carpenter & Conway, 2010, p. 357). Inclusive education occurs when students learn in the ‘local school of their choice; learning is meaningful and relevant’ (Hyde et al., 2010, p. 357); and policies, curricula, cultures and practices in schools are restructured and rethought so that learning environments can meet the diverse learning needs of all students (Hyde et al., 2010). In essence, inclusion means educating students with disabilities and learning difficulties in mainstream schools—not withdrawing these students for intervention, but adapting and restructuring existing structures, policies and curricula to cater for students’ individual needs.

1.7 Integration

Integration refers to the process of transferring a student from a segregated setting to a less segregated setting. A child who attends a regular mainstream school, but who is in a separate special unit or class, is said to be integrated (Foreman, 2005) but not
mainstreamed. The student may be integrated into mainstream classes for some learning experiences.

1.8 Deployment

Deployment refers to the placement of TAs with students and teachers in classes within schools. Sometimes TAs are placed with one student in the same class every day, and sometimes they are placed with multiple students across multiple classes throughout a day. Deployment varies depending on the availability of funding and beliefs regarding effective practice.

1.9 School Leaders

In this study, ‘school leaders’ refers to school principals and their leadership support teams. They are also known as executive teachers or deputy principals.

1.10 Rationalé

There are three major reasons for this study:

1. There is a lack of research in Australia related to TAs and the most recent international research shows that under some circumstances TA support may be detrimental to students’ education (Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2012; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007).

2. Limited Australian research exists on TA practice and their role in mainstream classes, and even less research includes the voice of TAs (Bourke & Carrington, 2007).

3. In the ACT, many TAs became permanent staff members in 2013 following legislation that gave permanency to TAs who had worked in schools for more than two years. Their new status warrants consistency in role definition, qualifications and skills, which is presently non-existent.

These reasons are now explained in more detail.
1.10.1 Research.

There has been, and continues to be, worldwide escalation in the employment and deployment of TAs in schools (Blatchford et al., 2010a; Butt & Lowe, 2011; Giangreco, Broer et al., 2011; Shaddock, Nielsen, Giorcelli, Kilham & Hoffman-Raap, 2007; Symes & Humphrey, 2011); however, little research has been conducted that shows the benefits, in terms of improved learning outcomes, of employing TAs (Blatchford et al., 2012; Finn, Gerber, Farber & Achilles, 2000; Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2002; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007). The limited research that has been conducted in this area in Australia indicates that the current role of TAs may not result in positive outcomes for students (Shaddock, McDonald, Hook, Giorcelli & Arthur-Kelly, 2009). Indeed, recent research from the United Kingdom (UK) has identified that support provided by TAs can result in negative learning outcomes, and students who receive the most TA support make significantly less progress than similar students who receive less TA support (Blatchford et al., 2012; Farrell, Alborz, Howes & Pearson, 2010).

This thesis will add to the limited body of knowledge concerning TAs in Australia—particularly those working in mainstream primary schools. A search conducted in 2011 of the Education Research Complete (EBSCO) database revealed only six articles written in the past five years that referred to TAs in Australian schools. A search of A+ Education Australia (Informit) revealed one article and one conference paper that were relevant. Sage Journals listed one relevant publication, while other databases found no relevant articles. The deficit of research in this field was confirmed by the editor of the Australasian Journal of Special Education, who stated that investigating the differing perceptions of the role of TAs is important, ‘as there is very little research on teacher assistants in Australian settings’ (J. Stephenson, personal communication, 23 July 2009). Overseas studies have been undertaken by a few key researchers in this field, namely
Professor Michael Giangreco in the United States (US) and Professor Peter Blatchford in the UK, whose work has been cited extensively throughout this study.

This thesis fills a gap in the existing literature because it provides evidence in the form of TAs’ voices on their role, qualifications, skills and training needs, and it provides insight into the conditions of the employment and deployment of TAs in schools. Although TAs have been identified in the literature as the key to enabling students with disabilities and learning difficulties to enrol in mainstream schools, they are rarely acknowledged by researchers as key stakeholders (Cremin, Thomas & Vincent, 2005; Mansaray, 2006).

Research data collected in Australian schools in the past ten years about the role of TAs are from ‘key personnel’ including special education teachers, class teachers, administrators and parents (Bourke, 2009, p. 820). Judgements and decisions about the knowledge and skills needed by TAs and the appropriate professional development and training necessary are made for TAs by those with ‘cultural capital and symbolic power’ (Bourke, 2009, p. 820) rather than by the TAs themselves. To truly understand what it means to provide support to students with disabilities, the perspective of TAs needs to be explored because it can provide reliable and valuable data regarding their daily experiences (Bourke & Carrington, 2007).

1.10.2 Practice of TAs.

Clarification of the role of TAs continues to be ‘elusive and unresolved’ (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010, p. 52). One of the main issues raised both nationally and internationally is the role confusion evident in the ‘blurring of the role and overlap of a TA’s role with class teachers’ (Shaddock et al., 2009, p. 106). Little research exists regarding how the role is perceived by stakeholders, including TAs, class teachers, school leaders, administrators, parents and students. In addition, no consensus exists internationally regarding how TAs should be utilised (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Webster,
Blatchford & Russell, 2010), the duties they should be asked to perform and whether they should have a pedagogical role (Webster, Blatchford & Russell, 2010; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007). Identifying and defining the role of a TA must be a priority for policy-makers and school administrators. This will create clear performance indicators at the state level that are in line with those in place for qualified teachers, and it will establish the scope of actual teaching that can be performed by TAs.

The instructional role of TAs in the classroom has been increasing, which is concerning because research has observed negative outcomes for students where TAs provide support (Giangreco, Suter et al., 2010; Webster, Blatchford & Russell, 2010). Research conducted in England and Wales between 2003 and 2009 (Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project) explored the effect of TA support on students’ positive approaches to learning (PAL). The results showed little evidence that TA support received by students over a school year improved their PAL, except for those in Year 9 (13–14 year olds), where there was a positive effect of TA support across all eight PAL outcomes. In addition, when evaluating the effect of TA support on students’ academic progress, the results showed that students receiving the most TA support made less progress than similar students who received little or no TA support, even after controlling for factors likely to be related to more TA support (e.g. prior attainment and SEN levels) (Webster et al., 2011).

Through analysis, the appropriate roles for TAs working in mainstream schools will be identified, along with the factors that affect the ability of TAs to provide learning support to students. The skills, qualifications and training required by TAs to positively contribute to learning outcomes in the classroom will also be identified, as well as whether the perspectives of the key stakeholders differ on these needs.
The qualifications required by TAs vary internationally. In all jurisdictions in Australia, a person who has no post-school education can be employed as a TA (Shaddock et al., 2009; Snodgrass & Butcher, 2005). When coupled with role confusion, class teachers are uncertain of what TAs can be asked to do and whether they have the qualifications to undertake the role. Research that has been conducted regarding the qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs is from the perspective of class teachers and administrators rather than the TAs (Hammett & Burton, 2005, cited in Bourke & Carrington, 2007). This thesis will complement the existing literature by reviewing the qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs from the perspective of multiple stakeholders, including TAs.

This thesis will contribute to the field by identifying effective models for deploying TAs in schools and developing an alternate model of TA support. The model of support determines the nature and extent of interactions between TAs and students and between TAs and class teachers. However, existing models of TA support are thought to be ‘inadvertently perpetuating low expectations and double standards’ (Giangreco & Broer, 2005, p. 24) and creating inequity issues in classrooms. Depending on the model being deployed, issues of equity arise when students with disabilities and learning difficulties receive most of their instruction from unqualified TAs, while students without disabilities receive most of their instruction from four-year trained, highly qualified class teachers (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Models of TA deployment that enable more effective instruction and learning to take place are not evident in the repertoire of teacher practice (Webster et al., 2011), so alternative models of support, which may not include the use of TAs, will be explored in this study, including better training for class teachers to include all students with and without disabilities in mainstream classes.

1.10.3 Status.
Many TAs in the ACT are employed casually or on a part-time basis because their employment is linked to funding that is allocated to students with disabilities. The majority of these TAs seek permanent employment for income security. In 2013, all TAs who had been employed for more than two years on a casual contract automatically became permanent employees of the ACT Education and Training Directorate (ACT ETD). This change in status warrants a review at the state/territory level, if not at the national level, to achieve consistent role definitions for TAs, including standards for skills and qualifications.

Current research on TAs remains insufficient to inform policy decisions with a high level of confidence (Giangreco, Suter et al., 2010). Scarce resources may be wasted until research confirms the effect of TAs on students’ learning outcomes. The findings in this thesis will add to the body of knowledge about TAs and enable informed policy decisions to be made in the ACT, which may be transferable to education settings in other Australian states/territories and internationally.

1.11 Background to the Study

As the increasing employment and deployment of TAs in mainstream schools is closely linked to policy decisions surrounding special and inclusive education, it is important to consider the factors surrounding the employment of TAs. Therefore, it is important to explain the history of special education and inclusive education in order to develop an understanding of the current status of inclusion and to provide another lens through which to understand the role, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs (Clough, 2000, cited in Boyle, Scriven, Durning & Downes, 2011).

1.11.1 The employment of TAs: An historical global perspective.

Historically, TAs have been employed to assist students with educational needs and disabilities. The Department for Education in the UK defines students with SEN as having ‘learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn than most pupils of
the same age’ (Department for Education, 2011, p. 3). Providing special education services for people with disabilities began in England in the 1790s when the first school for the blind was established by Henry Dannett in Liverpool. It offered training in music and manual crafts for blind children and adults (Warnock, 1978). During the 1800s and 1900s, many different types of institutions and ‘schools’ for students with disabilities were established. These institutions segregated students based on their disability, and students were labelled as being deaf, blind, mentally handicapped, maladjusted and/or delicate (Warnock, 1978). During the early 1900s in both the UK and the US, compulsory education was introduced for all ‘normal’ students. The difference in the treatment of ‘normal’ students compared to students with special needs resulted in a movement to consider the educational needs of all students. Education for students with special needs was provided, but these students were segregated into separate classrooms. In the mid 1960s, a negative reaction to segregated education emerged in the US. As students gained few benefits from education in segregated settings, the reintegration of these students into regular classes was proposed so they could benefit from contact with non-disabled peers (Ashman & Elkins, 2012). This marked the beginning of the movement towards inclusive education in the US, which were enabled by legislative changes.

In 1975 in the US, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act 1975 (EHA) guaranteed the rights of children with disabilities to receive free, appropriate education delivered in the least restrictive environment possible. In 1997, the EHA was revised and became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990). The IDEA (1990) guaranteed students an equal education with viable schooling options and the individualised attention they needed (Lewis & Doorlag, 2011). They were able to participate in regular class activities while receiving appropriate education from qualified
teachers. This marked the beginning of TAs moving from being administrative support staff to being used in classrooms to support students with disabilities and special needs.

In the UK, the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001* and the *Disability Discrimination Act 2002* were introduced to ensure that mainstream schools educated students with disabilities unless their parents requested otherwise or unless doing so made education for other students unworkable (Boyle et al., 2011). Consequently, by 1997 in the US and by 2002 in the UK, students with disabilities were able to attend mainstream schools, and the stage was set for an increase in the employment of TAs.

In Australia, the first special schools were started in the late nineteenth century for students who were deaf or blind (Foreman, 2005). However, students in these schools spent their entire school lives with other deaf or blind students. Students with intellectual or physical disabilities were placed in institutions that catered for their medical needs rather than their educational needs. Some progress towards inclusion was made following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), which asserted the right to an education for every child. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s in Australia, students with physical, sensory or intellectual impairments were educated together in special classes or special schools. However, these schools were segregated from mainstream schools and generally catered for one type of disability (Foreman, 2005).

During the 1970s, the move towards ‘normalisation’ (Wolfensberger, 1972) changed the thinking regarding the model of segregation for people with disabilities. Normalisation meant that ‘all people regardless of disability should be able to live a life that is as normal as possible for their culture’ (Foreman, 2005, p. 504). Adopting the concept of normalisation in Australia led to a change to the mainstream education, integration and inclusion of students with disabilities (Foreman, 2005). It also led to the
employment of TAs during the 1980s in schools to support these students—a policy that continues today.

In 1992, the *Disability Discrimination Act* was introduced in Australia to protect people from both direct and indirect discrimination, making it illegal for an educational authority to discriminate against a child on the basis of his or her disability. In 1994, the World Conference on Special Needs Education, which was held in Salamanca, Spain, proposed that ‘those [students] with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs’ (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1994, p. viii). This proposal was adopted by many countries, including Australia, the UK and the US, resulting in the establishment of inclusive schools. The distinctive feature of inclusive schools is that they make adjustments and accommodations in the curriculum and environment to cater for the needs of all students, regardless of their level of ability or disability (Foreman, 2005), rather than the student fitting into the existing school structure.

As a result of this legislation, the Disability Standards for Education were developed in Australia in 2005. The Disability Standards for Education provide a framework to ensure that students with disabilities are able to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. As a result of the commitment to the Salamanca Statement and the Disability Standards for Education, it is now accepted policy in Australia that ‘learners with special educational needs have the right to be educated alongside their peers who do not have special needs’ (Forbes, 2007, p. 66). The policy decision to move towards a more inclusive education system has been adopted in all states and territories in Australia. However, each jurisdiction has responsibility for its own state education and determines how the policy will be interpreted and which models of education will be provided: segregated, inclusive, integrated or mainstream. In addition, each
jurisdiction has its own *Education Act* and determines the criteria for, and the allocation of, funding for students with disabilities.

### 1.11.2 Australian state perspective on the employment of TAs.

The ACT has a fairly recent history of formalised education. Until the 1970s, ACT schools were part of the New South Wales (NSW) education system and adopted the curriculum and school structures of NSW. The approach to educating students with disabilities in primary schools in NSW was to retain students in mainstream classrooms for most of the school day but to employ a TA or special education teacher to withdraw them to a remedial room for some lessons or part of a school day (Forlin, 2001). This was also the most common strategy used throughout the 1970s and 1980s in schools in the ACT. This withdrawal approach raised concern over the type of intervention provided, including excluding these students from the mainstream curriculum, teachers and peers. In the ACT, a policy to include students with disabilities in mainstream classes was adopted in 2005, when the Disability Standards for Education were introduced throughout Australia.

Not all ACT schools are fully inclusive, and a variety of school placement options are available for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. At the time of this thesis study (2013), two special primary schools were available for students with high support needs and severe disabilities in the ACT. Further, 61 mainstream government primary schools accept students with disabilities and learning difficulties and offer an inclusive education. Twenty government primary schools offer an integrated approach with Learning Support Units (LSUs) that operate within the mainstream school. LSUs enable students to receive special support as required or to be integrated into mainstream classrooms.

This historical background helps to explain current practices regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. The practice that exists internationally, nationally and locally is that students with disabilities and learning
difficulties can be educated in their local mainstream primary schools (the least restrictive environment) with support provided by TAs if required. The practice of employing TAs to provide support to students with disabilities and learning difficulties will be explored in the literature review. However, the key issues are foreshadowed below:

i. Hiring a TA has become a ‘quick fix’ solution (Giangreco, Broer et al., 2011).

ii. TAs are seen as ‘the way rather than a way’ to support students (Giangreco, Suter et al., 2010, p. 49) and there is overreliance and restrictive reliance on TA support (Giangreco, 2010a; Etscheidt, 2005).

iii. Double standards can occur when TAs are assigned to students (Giangreco, Suter et al., 2010), with some students receiving significant levels of support from unqualified TAs (Howard & Ford, 2007; Webster et al., 2011).

iv. TAs are taking on an increasingly pedagogical role (Webster et al., 2010).

v. TAs do not improve student learning outcomes, and students who receive the most support from TAs make less progress than similar students who do not receive support from TAs (Blatchford et al., 2012).

vi. Existing models of support which include TAs in mainstream schools are ineffective or inappropriate (Broer, Doyle & Giangreco, 2005; Giangreco et al., 2002; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006; Webster et al., 2010).

As a result of these issues, there is an urgent need to review and evaluate the way in which TAs are employed and deployed in Australian schools. International researchers have also suggested that policy advisors and administrators need to reconsider models of support for students with disabilities, which may not include TAs (Blatchford et al., 2010a; Giangreco & Boer, 2007). In addition, the roles of all staff in schools should be reviewed and reconceptualised (Giangreco, 2010b) given that international findings regarding ineffective practices may also be occurring in Australia.
As current research on TAs remains insufficient to inform policy decisions with a high level of confidence (Giangreco, Suter et al., 2010), this thesis aims to fill a significant gap in the research and inform decision-making surrounding TA employment and deployment in Australia.

To guide the research, the following questions are investigated from multiple perspectives, including TAs, class teachers, school leaders, supervisors, policy administrators and a vocational education teacher:

1. What is the role of TAs in mainstream schools?
2. What qualifications and skills are required for TAs?
3. What training is required for TAs?
4. What factors contribute to the effective employment/deployment of TAs in mainstream schools?
5. What factors affect the ability of TAs to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities/learning difficulties in mainstream schools?

A theoretical framework is applied using Grounded Theory to enable theory to be generated from data collected and analysed throughout this study (Glasser & Strauss, 2009). Grounded theory is generated inductively through “systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to the phenomenon” (Strauss & Corbin, 1967, p.23) being investigated—the role, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs in mainstream schools.
1.12 Study Sites

To contextualise the thesis, an overview of the study sites is provided in this section and is further detailed in Chapter 3. The study was conducted at four government mainstream primary schools in Canberra, the capital city of Australia. With a population of 358,600 people (ABS, 2010), Canberra is located in the ACT and is surrounded by the state of NSW.

All school sites, their communities and participants have been given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The pseudonyms for the four schools—Scrivener, Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Molonglo—are inspired by waterways in the ACT region. Three of the schools are located in the western Belconnen region and the other is in the southern region of Tuggeranong. All schools are located in the outer suburbs of Canberra, at least 15 kilometres from the city centre. The schools were chosen on the basis that they employ a large number of TAs (41 in total) and fall within the national category of low socio-economic status.²

² Socioeconomic status (SES) is the measure of the influence that the social environment has on individuals, families, communities and schools (Brogan, 2009). The Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSED) is used to identify low SES schools (DEEWR, 2009).
In accordance with the low SES status, the average weekly income of each community is below the Canberra average. In addition, the Scrivener and Molonglo communities have a higher-than-average number of Indigenous people represented in the population, while the Cotter and Murrumbidgee communities have a high percentage of people who were not born in Australia and for whom English is their second language. These factors combine to identify these communities as low SES communities, hence their inclusion in Federal Government National Partnership programs, which attract significant additional school funding. Table 1.2 displays data for the communities in which the schools in this study are located.

Table 1.2:

Demographic Information of Sites Selected for This Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>Average weekly income</th>
<th>% of Indigenous people</th>
<th>% of people not born in Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>$1,363</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>$1,503</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>$1,636</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>$1,632</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra average</td>
<td>$1,947</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012)

1.12.1 Scrivener School.

Scrivener School, which is the oldest school in this study, is located in the north-western suburbs of Canberra. It employs seven TAs and 27 class teachers and was used during Stage 1 as a preliminary investigative site. Scrivener School is a mainstream school with no segregated integration or support units. In 2011, 350 students were enrolled from preschool (for students aged four years) to Year 6 (students aged 12 years). Although 3.2 per cent of the local community is Indigenous, 5 per cent of the school population is Indigenous (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012). The
school has an intensive English language centre that attracts a large number of students from the northern suburbs of Canberra. This results in the school population being rather itinerant, as these students relocate to their local school once their English skills are adequate. The principal at Scrivener School said that when employing TAs, she looks for ‘someone who won’t be too shocked or upset by some of the behaviours that unfortunately they see here’.

1.12.2 Cotter School.

Cotter School is located in the western suburbs and is a mainstream primary school with no integration or support units. Eleven TAs and 30 class teachers are employed at Cotter School. The school consists of a preschool for students from four years of age and a primary school for students aged five to 12 years. In 2011, there were 428 students enrolled, with a high percentage of students (36 per cent) from a Language Background Other than English (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012). The principal at Cotter School said that ‘the requirements when employing TAs have to change and they will need to have a Certificate III or IV but the pay will have to change too’.

1.12.3 Murrumbidgee School.

Murrumbidgee School is the largest and most modern school in this study. It was built in 2009 and is located in the western suburbs. It has an integrated structure with four learning stages: preschool to Year 2 (early childhood); Years 3–5 (primary); Year 6–8 (middle school) and Years 9–10 (high school). Twelve TAs and 31 class teachers are employed in the preschool and primary school stages. In 2011, Murrumbidgee enrolled students from preschool to Year 9, with the aim to achieve capacity in 2012 by enrolling students to Year 10. In 2011, 794 students were enrolled from preschool to Year 9; of these,
504 were enrolled in the primary classes. The principal at Murrumbidgee School said that he usually employs parents of the children at the school to be TAs.

1.12.4 Molonglo School.

Molonglo School is the smallest school in this study. In 2011, 179 students were enrolled at Molonglo School. Eleven TAs and 21 class teachers are employed. It is the only low SES school in the southern region of Canberra. It is an integrated, mainstream primary school that incorporates a Learning Support Centre that caters for 13 students from Year 2 to Year 6. Students from the Learning Support Centre may be integrated, with TA assistance, into mainstream classes. The school enrolls students from preschool to Year 6. The principal said that when she employs TAs, she looks for personal skills and whether they have the right mix of social skills and the ability to serve the needs of the children.

1.13 Participants

As outlined previously, this thesis considers the perspectives of a range of stakeholders, including 34 female TAs. Other participants include class teachers, supervisors of TAs, school leaders, policy staff at the ACT ETD (formerly known as the Department of Education and Training) and a vocational education teacher at the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT). All participants contribute to the multiple perspectives regarding the role, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs. Table 1.3 displays the number of participants from each site, as well as the number of participants in each stakeholder group.
Table 1.3:

**Key Stakeholder Groups: Numbers and Sites**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder groups</th>
<th>Scrivener School</th>
<th>Cotter School</th>
<th>Murrumbidgee School</th>
<th>Molonglo School</th>
<th>TAs from other ACT schools</th>
<th>Total number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Assistants</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class teachers</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leaders</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors of TAs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT ETD staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIT staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An introduction to these key stakeholder groups follows. Further information regarding the participants is provided in Chapter 3.

Thirty-four female TAs from ACT Government primary schools participated in the study. They ranged in age from 22 to 65 and their qualifications varied from Year 10 to university qualifications. Although some TAs were highly qualified, only four (12 per cent) had a qualification that was relevant to providing learning or disability support to students. Their experience as TAs ranged from six months to 22 years. Nearly 32 per cent were employed on a permanent part-time basis, 32 per cent were permanent full-time and the other 36 per cent were either casual full-time or casual part-time employees. The majority of the TAs were employed with funds allocated to students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Seventy class teachers from four schools participated by completing questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The teachers ranged in age from 24 to 56, and five were male. Their teaching experience varied from one year to over 30 years. The majority of the teachers had experience with TAs in their classrooms over an extended period.
Four supervisors of TAs were interviewed. These supervisors included three business managers and one special education coordinator. The supervisors ranged in age from 32 to 60, and all were female. Their years of experience varied from less than one year to over 30 years, and all were permanent full-time employees. Their qualifications varied from Year 12 to a Graduate Certificate in Special Education. The TA supervisor with the Graduate Certificate in Special Education was highly qualified, with over 30 years of teaching experience. The other supervisors were school business managers who had similar qualifications to the TAs they were supervising and little experience.

Eleven school leaders, including principals, participated. Of these, four were male, although only one principal was male. Of the principals, all were permanent full-time and three held a post-graduate qualification. Experience varied from six years to over 30 years. The school leaders had various responsibilities in relation to the recruitment and deployment of TAs in schools.

Three staff from the ACT EDT participated in this study to give a policy perspective on the employment and funding of TAs in ACT schools. In addition, a teacher of TAs at the CIT was interviewed regarding training provided in the Certificate III and IV Learning Support courses and issues surrounding TA deployment in schools.

1.14 Significance of This Study

This study contributes to the sparse local and national research base regarding the role, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs working in mainstream schools. It has the potential for major implications for policy and practice regarding the employment and deployment of TAs in mainstream Australian schools. This study will add to the body of research in order to:
1. define the role of TAs in mainstream schools by eliminating ambiguity and raising awareness of the role of TAs in relation to their effect on student learning and school culture

2. identify the qualifications and skills necessary for TAs to satisfactorily meet teachers’ expectations and address students’ needs

3. identify effective models of TA support and deployment

4. identify research-based effective and efficient policies and procedures regarding the employment of TAs in ACT schools.

1.15 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced and contextualised the study while justifying the timely need for this research. The key reasons for undertaking this study have been presented, including: there is a paucity of research undertaken in Australia regarding TAs; the voice of TAs is omitted from international and national research; increasing numbers of TAs are being employed, but little research has been undertaken to evaluate their contribution to enhancing students’ learning outcomes; the role of TAs continues to be confusing and ambiguous; inconsistency surrounds the qualifications, skills and training required by TAs; and current models used to deploy TAs in mainstream schools may not be ‘best practice’. It is essential that policies and procedures around the employment and deployment of TAs be investigated as a matter of urgency.

The key issues surrounding the employment of TAs have been presented and will be expanded upon in Chapter 2. The context for the study and key participants have been briefly introduced and will be further described in Chapter 3. Chapters 4–6 will present the findings of the study. Chapter 4 focuses on the challenges faced by TAs and challenges for school personnel who work with TAs. The challenges that TAs experience in their daily working lives are examined under the themes of: the role of a TA; conditions of
employment and deployment: system challenges; conditions of employment and deployment: school challenges; and communication. Chapter 5 examines the qualifications, skills and training required by TAs and how these are perceived by the different stakeholders in this study. Chapter 6 examines the benefits accrued from employing TAs and the benefits of being a TA. Chapter 7 discusses the findings and implications of the study, and it draws connections between key findings in the literature and this study. Chapter 8 concludes the study and identifies the contribution this thesis makes to the existing corpus of knowledge regarding policy and practice.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature pertaining to TAs in mainstream primary schools. Issues surrounding the employment and deployment of TAs are identified, as well as gaps in the research. It is apparent from the body of research that the role of a TA is complex. The qualifications and skills required to be a TA are variable, and training for TAs is limited and often inappropriate.

As a result of anti-discrimination and disability education policies introduced in Australia, such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Education in 2005, the majority of classrooms in mainstream schools include students with disabilities and learning difficulties. As a result, the majority of class teachers now work with another adult—often a TA—in their classroom. TAs have become the primary mechanism—sometimes seen as a ‘band aid’ or ‘quick fix’ solution—to support and include these students (Giangreco, 2010a). Forbes (2007) claims that specialist knowledge and expertise is needed within mainstream education to cater for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. However, the solution of employing TAs has not filled this gap, as they do not have the specialist knowledge or skills required, and nor do most classroom teachers, as they have not been trained sufficiently to cater for the diverse needs of all students with all disabilities (Forbes, 2007). However, employing TAs has enabled students with disabilities and learning difficulties to remain in the least restrictive learning environment, where they usually remain with teachers and peers (Kilanowski-Press, Foote & Rinaldo, 2010).

Not all researchers agree that TAs should be employed in inclusive classrooms (Breton, 2010; Giangreco & Broer, 2003, 2005; Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster,
Koutsoubou & Bassett, 2010). Using TAs as ‘a key service delivery model for educating students with disability and learning difficulties’ (Breton, 2010, p. 36) in inclusive classrooms is inequitable, as students with disabilities and learning difficulties, like all other students, have the right to receive their instruction from trained and qualified class teachers (Breton, 2010).

Little research has been conducted regarding TAs in Australia. A search of the Education Research Complete database reveals 15 articles written in the past six years that refer to TAs in Australian schools. Of these, only six (Butt & Lowe, 2012; Bourke, 2009; Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Greer, 2009; Howard & Ford, 2007; Simpson, 2009) are relevant to this thesis study because they refer to primary schools. In A+ Education Australia (Informit), one conference paper (Kilham, 2005) and one article (Elkins, van Kraayenoord & Jobling, 2003) are relevant to this study. Sage Journals lists one publication that is relevant to this study (Anderson, Klassen & Georgiou, 2007). The Australasian Education Directory, ERIC-Proquest and the Australian Education Index— Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Subset reveal no relevant articles. Even less research is available from the perspective of the TAs themselves (Bourke, 2009). Their voice is absent in research studies related to their work (Bourke, 2009; Mansaray, 2006); however, they have become key personnel in mainstream schools by enabling students with disabilities and learning difficulties to enrol (Giangreco & Boer, 2005; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Webster et al., 2010). When searching the literature, it is not always clear which educational context—a special school or a mainstream school—is being studied. Where possible, the researcher has only used references where the context refers to mainstream primary schools.

While little research has been conducted in Australia in the past five years, significant studies have been conducted in the US (Breton, 2010; Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005; Giangreco, 2010a, 2010b; Giangreco, Broer et al., 2011; Wagner,
Newman, Cameto, Levine & Marder, 2003) and the UK (Alborz, Pearson, Farrell & Howes, 2009; Blatchford et al., 2010a; Blatchford et al., 2012; Collins & Simco, 2006; Slavin, Lake, Davis & Madden, 2009; Webster et al., 2010) and have been used to inform this literature review. According to Blatchford et al. (2012), there is still limited international research on the effect of TAs and ‘their use under everyday classroom conditions’ (p. 6).

Figure 2.1 shows the key topics presented in the literature review and the multiple perspectives from which they are presented.

![Diagram](image_url)

*Figure 2.1: Organisation of the literature review.*
2.2 Increased Employment of TAs

In countries where more inclusive education policies have been adopted, there has been a commensurate increase in the employment of TAs—often seen as the mechanism to inclusion (Giangreco, Broer et al., 2011).

2.2.1 International perspective.

According to Collins and Simco (2006), ‘the emergence of TAs in England as a major component of the education profession has been both dynamic and swift’ (p. 197). In the UK, the number of TAs working in schools more than trebled between 1997 and 2010, comprising one-quarter of the school workforce or approximately 170,000 employees (Collins & Simco, 2006; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2011). Similarly, in the US, it was estimated that in 2006, 357,000 TAs were working in special education (US Department of Education, 2007). This number quadrupled to 1,249,380 in 2010 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). In 2003, 84 per cent of students with disabilities attended schools in the US, where TAs were the primary means of support to general education teachers. The National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 conducted by Wagner et al. (2003) identified the use of TAs as the type of support in schools that had increased the most (56 per cent) since the National Longitudinal Transitional Study 1 was conducted between 1987 and 1991.

The increase in the employment of TAs in the UK and US since 1990 indicates that TAs are being used as a driver to enable students with disabilities and learning difficulties to enrol in mainstream schools (Breton, 2010; French, 2003; Giangreco, 2010b; Giangreco & Broer, 2005). In addition, TAs may have unintentionally become the primary educators for students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Webster et al., 2011).

Other factors in addition to the inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties in mainstream schools have led to the increased employment of TAs. In the US,
these include an increased demand for special education services, a lack of qualified special education teachers and accountability factors driven by the IDEA (1990) (Breton, 2010). In the UK, immigration has increased the numbers of students with English as an Additional Language (EAL). The declining supply of teachers, concerns regarding the recruitment and retention of teachers, and workplace reform (Collins & Simco, 2006; Sage & Wilkie, 2003; Webster et al., 2011) have resulted in the recruitment of more TAs in order to make teaching more appealing as a profession, to reduce excessive teacher workloads and to help teachers improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for students. Government policy in the UK has resulted in an increase in TA numbers and funding based on the assumption that TAs help to improve outcomes and standards for all students. Increasing the numbers of TAs is also seen as a cost-saving measure by school administrators (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer & Doyle, 2001; Killoran, Templeman, Peters & Udell, 2001; Mueller & Murphy, 2001), as TAs are cheaper to employ than teachers. Whatever the drivers for the increase, schools and teachers would now struggle to cope without TAs (Webster et al., 2010).

2.2.2 National perspective.

Australia has also experienced an increase in the number of TAs being employed. Data obtained from Job Outlook (DEEWR, 2012a) show that the number of TAs employed in Australia in 2000 was 47,900, increasing by 32,500 to 80,400 by 2011 (an increase of 68 per cent) (see Figure 2.2). These data do not differentiate the role of TAs; some will be employed to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties, while others will be employed to fulfil other roles in schools.
According to survey projections, the job prospects for TAs are expected to grow strongly over the next five years (DEEWR, 2012a). Are they anticipating more students with disabilities and learning difficulties to enrol in mainstream schools? Is the role of a TA going to expand? Will each class and each teacher be assigned a TA? No reasons have been provided for this prediction.

2.2.3 ACT perspective.

The number of TAs employed in ACT schools is difficult to identify from census data, as TAs fall into the category of administrative staff or non-teaching staff, which also includes office staff and business managers. As TAs are employed at each individual school site, no central authority oversees their employment; hence, the numbers employed are not available. A staff member at the ACT ETD estimated that 200–300 TAs are currently...
employed as permanent part-time or permanent full-time staff in the ACT school system (R. Donohoe, personal communication, 12 August 2012). In addition to these TAs, schools employ TAs casually according to need, and no data are available on the number of TAs engaged casually by schools. The number of TAs working in special support units attached to mainstream schools is approximately 80 (R. Donohoe, personal communication, 12 August 2012). Given that increasing numbers of TAs have been employed internationally and nationally, it can be assumed that numbers have also increased in the ACT.

The literature has identified that increasing numbers of TAs have been employed in mainstream schools to provide support to class teachers and students with disabilities and learning difficulties. What does the literature say about these students and the number of students with disabilities and learning difficulties who are currently enrolled in mainstream schools?

2.3 Students with Disabilities

As a result of changes to inclusive practices, an ever-increasing number of students with disabilities are now enrolled in mainstream schools—usually supported by a TA. Employing TAs to enable the enrolment of students with disabilities in mainstream schools has been the solution adopted internationally, nationally and locally in the ACT.

2.3.1 International perspective.

In the UK, nearly 50 per cent of students with SENs (or 224,210 students) are enrolled in mainstream primary schools (Department for Education, 2012), or approximately 2.8 per cent of the total number of enrolled students (Department for Education, 2012). This percentage has remained unchanged in recent years. In mainstream primary schools, the three most frequent types of primary needs for students with SEN are speech, language and communication (29.1 per cent), moderate learning difficulty (21.8 per cent) and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (18.6 per cent). Between 2009 and
2012, the number of students with SEN declined slightly from 1,630,210 to 1,618,340 (0.7 per cent), and the number of these students who attend mainstream primary schools also declined slightly (Department for Education, 2012). No explanation for this change was provided in the report.

In the US, approximately 95 per cent of students aged 6–21 who received additional funding and support in 2009–2010 were enrolled in regular, mainstream schools. In 1980–1981, approximately 4.1 million students aged 3–21 received special education services. By 2009–2010, the number of students receiving additional support had increased to 6.5 million, or 13 per cent of the total public school enrolment. Among all students aged 6–21 who were enrolled in regular, mainstream schools, the percentage of students who spent most of their school day in general classes in 2009–2010 was 80 per cent, compared to 33 per cent in 1990–1991. A greater percentage of students receiving special education services were for specific learning disabilities. A specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write or spell, or do mathematical calculations (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011a). Students are identified by a team of professionals as having a disability that adversely affects academic performance and as being in need of special education and related services (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011a).

2.3.2 National perspective.

In Australia, 89 per cent of students aged 5–14 years who have disabilities and learning difficulties attend mainstream schools (Students with Disabilities Working Group, 2010; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006). The number of students identified with disabilities rose from 114,250 to 157,486 between 2001 and 2008. In 2008, 4.6 per cent of students were reported as having a disability. As the definition of disability as
contained in the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* includes students with learning
difficulties, the percentage of students with disabilities could be increased by 10–15 per
cent, resulting in 14.6–19.6 per cent. The increase in student numbers was the most
dramatic for students with disabilities and learning difficulties enrolling in regular,
mainstream classes. In 2007, approximately 26,154 students received support in regular,
mainstream classes compared with approximately 5,000 in 1997—an increase of 523 per
cent. In mainstream primary schools during 2001–2006, there was around a 50 per cent
increase (from 6,885 to 10,275) in the number of students confirmed with moderate to
severe levels of disability. It is difficult to compare the disabilities of students who enrol in
mainstream schools, as the tools used to identify students with disabilities vary in each
jurisdiction in Australia. However, students with disabilities have ‘a particularly
heterogeneous mix of function requirements, whether it is physical, intellectual, sensory or
learning, varying from low need to high need’ (Students with Disabilities Working Group,
2010, p. 4).

### 2.3.3 ACT perspective.

In the ACT, 81.3 per cent of students with disabilities are enrolled in mainstream
public schools (ACT DET, 2009a). The number of students with disabilities and learning
difficulties rose from 1,711 in 2007 to 1,848 in 2011 (ACT DET, 2011), and the overall
growth of enrolment of students with disabilities and learning difficulties between 2005 and
2009 was 11.7 per cent (Shaddock et al., 2009). In the ACT, students are identified for
additional funding based on the Student Centred Appraisal of Need (SCAN) process. A
SCAN consists of two parts, which reflect the major dimensions of educational needs:
access and participation. Access is divided into five areas: communication, mobility,
personal care (health and well-being), personal care (dietary and medical conditions) and
safety. Participation is divided into five areas: social development, curriculum participation,
communication, behaviours, and literacy and numeracy (ACT DET, 2010). A principal employed in the ACT explained that the number of ‘points’ a student receives in a SCAN determines the level of funding support the student will receive. He went on to explain that 12 points qualifies a student for a full-time TA, while a teacher equates to 24 points (I. Copland, personal communication, 9 June 2012).

The trend internationally, nationally and locally is for increasing numbers of students with disabilities or learning difficulties to enrol in mainstream schools. What effect has this had on mainstream schools and the employment and role of TAs?

**2.4 Changing Role of TAs**

The dramatic increase in the number of students identified with disabilities or learning disabilities who enrol in regular, mainstream schools has resulted in a similarly large increase in the number of TAs being employed to support these students, and the role has changed accordingly (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Harvey, Stacey & Richards, 2008; Liston, Nevin & Malian, 2009; Pickett, Likins & Wallace, 2003; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Trautman, 2004).

Prior to a more inclusive approach to education, globally, the role of a TA was to be a classroom helper and an administrative assistant responsible for preparing materials, supervising non-instructional activities, providing clerical assistance to teachers and administrators, providing personal support for students, supervising the playground, supervising small groups of students, organising and maintaining the teaching and learning environment, and implementing behaviour management plans created by the teacher (Groom, 2006; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Howard & Ford, 2007; Trautman, 2004). Now the role has evolved significantly, with TAs taking on an increasingly instructional, pedagogical role (Collins & Simco, 2006; Howard & Ford, 2007; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Giangreco et al., 2002; Groom, 2006), where they are often required to make
pedagogical decisions that are sometimes ‘beyond their expertise’ (Webster et al., 2010, p. 331).

The role, particularly in the UK and US, is now specifically directed to support the teaching and learning processes of whole classes, groups and individuals. TAs may be asked to conduct individual assessments, implement behavioural plans and individual learning plans, provide personal care, assist students during planned group work, implement a teacher-planned small-group lesson, provide practice opportunities to reinforce previously learned skills, document performance, tutor individual students on a one-on-one basis, adapt curricular materials, share information and provide direct instruction to the students they support (ACT Department of Education & Training, 2009b; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Howard & Ford, 2007; Liston et al., 2009). Howard and Ford (2007) report that in their study, most TAs (64 per cent) were responsible for planning, producing and adapting materials for one-on-one or small-group activities, and many (57 per cent) said they differentiated tasks for students on a daily basis with no direction from teachers.

Results from the DISS project conducted in England and Wales between 2003 and 2009 found that ‘TAs spent over half their day in a direct pedagogical instructional role, supporting and interacting with pupils (nearly 4 hours), 1.4 hours supporting the teacher and curriculum and 0.9 hours performing other tasks’ (Webster et al., 2010, p. 326). TAs who worked with small groups of students frequently did the planning for these groups without teacher supervision, as finding time for planning during their paid working hours was difficult (Collins & Simco, 2006).
2.4.1 Role confusion.

The rapid evolution of the role of TAs has led to confusion and ambiguity (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown & Webster, 2009; Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Broadbent & Burgess, 2003). Role confusion exists in part because ‘TAs and teachers do not have congruence in how they view their roles in the classroom’ (Mackenzie, 2011, p. 65). When roles are not clearly defined or delineated, tension can arise between TAs and class teachers, particularly if the TA is older, more experienced and more empowered than the teacher (McGrath, Johns & Mathur, 2010). The increasingly instructional role of TAs has caused teachers to take on the role of ‘delegator, planner, director, coach and program manager’ (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002, p. 4). Role conflict exists due to a lack of shared understanding of inclusion and the role that TAs should have in order to include students with disabilities and learning difficulties in classes (Lawson et al., 2006, cited in Mackenzie, 2011).

It appears that teachers are unable to cope without TA support due to a lack of effective training in how to meet the needs of all students in a class (Mackenzie, 2011). Some teachers—particularly early career teachers—perceive TAs as being essential to helping them provide instruction, particularly in an inclusive context (Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011; Giangreco et al., 2002), and they believe they cannot teach effectively without TAs.

Schlapp et al. (2003), cited in Blatchford et al. (2009), note that where the boundaries between the role of the TA and the teacher are unclear, some TAs may overstep the boundary into teaching. This research seeks to clarify the role of both teachers and TAs on the basis that their roles must be complementary rather than identical or interchangeable (Australian Association of Special Education, 2007; Blatchford et al., 2009; Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Broadbent & Burgess, 2003; Mackenzie, 2011). However, defining the
appropriate role for TAs ‘persists as an elusive and unresolved issue in the field’ (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010, p. 52), which will remain ‘elusive until schools are eminently clear about the expected roles of teachers and TAs in inclusive classrooms’ (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007, p. 434). Most of the concern surrounding the role of TAs includes the extent and nature of instruction, planning and adapting educational activities, their role in assessment, their role in communication and liaison with parents, and their clerical duties (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010).

### 2.4.2 Appropriateness of the role.

Research is now focusing on identifying the most appropriate role for TAs in this new, more inclusive, school environment by examining the increasingly pedagogical role of TAs (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010; Webster, Blatchford & Russell, 2010). These researchers believe that instruction delivered by TAs should be supplemental rather than primary so that TAs do not need to make any pedagogical decisions. A study conducted in the UK by Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) on the different ways that TAs and class teachers communicated with students concluded that TAs did not have the necessary capacity, training or skills to understand what they were being asked to do and they appeared to actually stifle student independence. Of prompts by TAs, 61 per cent provided the students with the answer while only 11 per cent of teachers provided the students with the answer. In addition to providing answers to students, TAs ‘told them what to write for answers, provided them with ideas, wrote answers for them, read out questions, and spelled words out for pupils without encouraging independence’ (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010, p. 437). Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) conclude that the appropriate role for TAs is to motivate students and help with classroom organisation and behaviour management.

Other researchers argue that the role of TAs focuses primarily on clerical duties, classroom organisation, limiting negative and off-task behaviour, facilitating peer
interactions, materials preparation, personal care and group supervision (Alborz et al., 2009; Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005; Lane, Fletcher, Carter, Dejud & Delorenzo, 2007; Suter & Giangreco, 2009). This would ensure that lessons run smoothly, enabling teachers to instruct students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

When TAs have an instructional role that is secondary or supplemental rather than primary, positive outcomes have been identified for students. These occur when TAs are trained to implement teacher-planned lessons and when they receive ongoing monitoring, supervision and feedback. It has also been argued by Webster, Blatchford and Russell (2010) that supporting the development of students’ ‘soft skills’—confidence and motivation, disposition towards learning and facilitating collaboration between pupils—may be the most important role for TAs. If TAs are to retain a pedagogical role, Webster et al. (2010, p. 332) recommend that it be limited to ‘delivering structured and well-planned interventions’ that they must be properly trained and prepared for.

Giangreco (2010b) argues that the role of all team members in a classroom needs to be reviewed by first considering the roles of the class teacher and special education teachers. If it is then determined that a non-instructional role is the most appropriate for TAs, this role needs to be acknowledged and valued, as it would create time for teachers to work directly with students with disabilities and learning difficulties and enable teachers to teach. If an instructional role is recommended, Giangreco (2010a) proposes that it be:

- supplemental rather than primary; planned by a qualified professional so that it does not require a TA to plan the lesson, determine accommodations, or make other pedagogical decisions; based on explicit and intensive training in research-based practices; and followed by ongoing supervision to ensure implementation fidelity (p. 7).

2.4.3 Stakeholder groups perception of the TA role.
The role of TAs is directly related to the expectations of different stakeholder groups. The few studies that have considered students’ perceptions conclude that students view TAs as mothers/fathers, friends, primary instructors and protectors from bullying (Broer et al., 2005; Hemmingsson, Borell & Gustavsson, 2003). Some students were positive regarding the nurturing qualities of TAs, while others found TA mothering to be intrusive: ‘that’s why I didn’t have any best friends or a girl friend in high school because I always had a mother on my back’ (Broer et al., 2005, p. 421). It can be deduced that students generally perceive TAs in a ‘soft’ role as nurturers and carers, but not always in a positive light.

Studies in the UK and Australia have reported on class teachers’ perceptions of the role of TAs (Blatchford et al., 2010a; Shaddock et al., 2007; Webster et al., 2010). Teachers claim that TAs and other support staff have a positive effect on their job satisfaction, stress levels and workload because they relieve them of many administrative responsibilities (Blatchford et al., 2010a; Shaddock et al., 2007; Webster et al., 2010). Teachers consider that TAs enable them to teach and devote more time to the rest of the class because TAs reduce off-task behaviour and can provide individual attention to students (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell & Webster, 2010a). Having ‘another pair of hands’ in the classroom was seen by teachers as being beneficial because some felt they had neither the training nor the capacity to instruct mixed-ability groups, including students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Giangreco, 2010a; Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010).

From this evidence, it can be concluded that TAs are valued by teachers for the help and support they provide in the classroom.

Research has shown that teachers’ attitudes towards students with disabilities and learning difficulties in their classrooms can be negative; however, teachers encourage the employment of TAs. Assigning TAs will not ‘result in improved teacher attitudes toward
students with disabilities or increased teacher instructional engagement with students with disabilities’ (Giangreco, 2010a, p. 6); rather, it tends to ‘divert attention away from solving the challenges’ (Giangreco, 2010a, p. 6) and placates the teachers and parents of the students to whom TAs are assigned. Teachers have repeatedly stated that their schools would struggle to function without TAs, but it is difficult to demonstrate that TA support has improved students’ outcomes (Webster, Blatchford & Russell, 2010). It can be inferred that teachers appreciate the presence of TAs in their classrooms so they have the opportunity to devolve their responsibility for students with disabilities or other challenges to them.

### 2.4.4 Models for deployment of TAs.

The role that TAs have in schools varies depending on the model of support being implemented in a school. Mansaray (2006) notes that while teachers remain in classrooms, the work of TAs involves a ‘significant amount of boundary crossing in the sense of constant movement between the structured time and space of the school day and, for example, the playground, dinner hall, staffroom, library, photocopying area, etc’ (p. 176). There appear to be three key models of support.

The one-on-one model positions the TA in close proximity to one student. This model is the least inclusive model of support, as teachers tend to disengage from their students. Close TA proximity results in unnecessary dependence and interferes with instruction from teachers. Further, peer relations, gender identity and self-esteem are also effected (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002, 2007; Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010). Giangreco (2012) claims that this model results in micro-exclusion because the student becomes an isolated island in the mainstream. The student may physically be in the same classroom but sitting separately and doing a different activity to the rest of the class.
A TA may be assigned to support a class under the direction of the teacher. This class support model is more effective because teachers are more engaged in directing the TA in support activities or behaviour. The TA has more time to observe the teacher, and during group work, the teacher and the TA can work together to meet the individual needs of the students. The teacher is more likely to provide training to the TA and to work more collaboratively with him or her. In addition, the TA’s skills are utilised for the benefit of the whole class (Cobb, 2007; Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2002; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Groom, 2006).

A third itinerant model involves the TA working across several classes with different teachers and multiple students. In this model, the teacher takes on a role of ‘host’ of the students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007), while the TA, when present, takes on the role of the primary educator of the students. This can result in isolation, stigmatisation or marginalisation for these students (Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2002). Because the TAs move from classroom to classroom hoping they can ‘jump in’ and help as needed, little opportunity exists for planning or consultation in this model (Cobb, 2007). When the TA is not in the classroom, the responsibility for students with disabilities and learning difficulties reverts to the classroom teacher.

None of these models are adequate. Blatchford et al. (2012) concludes that the models of TA support currently being used must change. The consideration of models that do not include the use of TAs (Giangreco, 2010b) is also recommended. If alternate models are to be explored and adopted, the attitudes of school systems, teachers and parents need to change. Many teachers expect TAs to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties in their class, and many parents expect TAs to be assigned to their children with learning difficulties when they enter mainstream schools (Giangreco & Broer, 2007). In addition, ‘over 80% of schools saw TAs as the way rather than a way to support students
with disabilities in mainstream classes’ (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010, p. 49).

Remodelling the role of TAs in the classroom will depend on the relationships formed with teachers, clearly defined roles and expectations, and effective management and support (Groom, 2006).

Many key issues must be faced if TAs continue to be employed to provide support to students with disabilities and learning difficulties. These include recognising the contribution that TAs make and involving them collaboratively in planning and reviewing, ensuring there are good channels of communication, and providing professional development opportunities and sharing of good practice (Groom, 2006). These proposals concur with suggestions by Blatchford et al. (2012) regarding changes to the deployment of TAs, whereby TAs plan with class teachers and specific tasks are allocated to them, including opportunities to provide support to all students. Better service delivery models will require ‘wrestling with difficult decisions about class size, teacher and special educator working conditions and support service provider ratios’ (Giangreco, 2010b, p. 344) and with existing attitudes.
2.4.5 Alternative models of TA deployment.

Existing models of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties rely extensively on TAs. Alternative models are needed (Blatchford et al., 2012; Carter, Cushing, Clark & Kennedy, 2005; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, 2010a), as it seems existing models perpetuate an overreliance on TAs leading to ‘regression in terms of least restrictive access and access to a general education’ (Giangreco, 2010a, p. 9). Current models inadvertently perpetuate low expectations by providing TA support, which can be one of the most restrictive supports offered in a school. Current models used in mainstream schools imply that if students do not have a disability or learning difficulty, they receive instruction primarily from a qualified teacher, but if students have a disability or learning difficulty, they receive instruction from a TA who may have no qualifications (Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2002). Less restrictive options, and more equitable options, need to be considered.

Alternative models being proposed include co-teaching models and collaboration; reallocating resources to pursue a cost-neutral exchange of TA positions for special educator positions; using assistive technologies; strengthening school-wide support; and offering peer-support strategies and cooperative learning groups (Daniels & McBride, 2001; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Giangreco, 2010a; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Mackenzie, 2011). It has also been suggested that capacity building of teachers and special education teachers is required to ensure they can teach mixed-ability groups, differentiate teaching and learning activities, and adopt universal design principles in classrooms (Giangreco, 2010a; Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010).

Alternative models proposed by Blatchford et al. (2012) recommend that TAs no longer take primary responsibility for supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in a class; this role would be shared with the class teacher. Planning time would
be provided for TAs and class teachers to ensure that class teachers itemise specific tasks on their lesson plans for TAs to undertake during lessons. Differentiation of content and product would be undertaken by the class teacher rather than the TA ‘on the fly’. TAs would be encouraged to emphasise understanding rather than task completion (Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2012). This model utilises TAs differently, clarifies their role and ensures that they are better prepared to perform in their role.

Before reviewing and adopting different models of support, concern about the role of TAs and class teachers needs to be clarified and even reconceptualised (Giangreco, 2010b). In addition, the qualifications, skills and training required to be a TA may need to be reviewed and reconceptualised if new models of support are introduced.

2.5 Qualifications Required by TAs

Qualifications required to be a TA vary in the international, national and local context. A TA employed in Australia does not require a qualification beyond Year 10, and evidence of this achievement is often not requested. Data obtained from advertised vacancies for TAs in each state and territory in Australia reveal that a formal qualification is not required, but it is desired in some jurisdictions, as shown in Table 2.1. This is not the case in other countries, where changes to the career structure of TAs have resulted in TAs needing an appropriate qualification to be employed and to advance in their career.
Table 2.1:

Qualifications Required by TAs in Each Jurisdiction in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State or territory of Australia</th>
<th>Formal qualification</th>
<th>Desired qualifications (as listed in job descriptions for TA positions in each state and territory)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>Not Required</td>
<td>First Aid; Certificate III in Disability; Working with Children Check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Not Required</td>
<td>Previous work with children with disabilities; Working with Children Check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Not Required</td>
<td>Drivers Licence; First Aid; aptitude and experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Not Required</td>
<td>Certificate III in Education Support, Certificate IV in Education Support or a Diploma in Education Support; Senior First Aid Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>Not Required</td>
<td>Experience working with children and working in a classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Not Required</td>
<td>Criminal record check and Working with Children Check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>Not Required</td>
<td>Willingness to undertake training and external study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Not Required</td>
<td>College or Technical and Further Education (TAFE) studies in Education Support; pre-employment check</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data obtained from advertised vacancies for TAs in each state and territory in Australia in 2012

2.5.1 International perspective.

In the US, the entry-level qualification for a TA is a high school diploma. Some school districts require TAs to have at least two years of college or an associate degree. TAs in schools that have Title 1 programs (a federal program for schools with a large proportion of students from low-income households) must have at least a two-year degree, or two years of college, or pass a state or local assessment. Most states require that TAs pass a skills-based test to work with special needs students (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Prior to this requirement, some TAs were not suitably qualified for their role, and some teachers believed it resulted in more work for them in the classroom (Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2002). Teachers have also found the literacy skills of TAs to be problematic and less than acceptable (Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2002). In addition, teachers have questioned whether TAs can grasp the concepts being taught in classes in
order to reteach or revise them with students (Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2002). Introducing a test and requiring a formal qualification, such as an associate’s degree, eliminated these concerns.

In the UK, there is no minimum entry-level qualification; for the majority of TAs, their highest qualification is at, or below, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level (Blatchford et al., 2008; Webster et al., 2011). However, since 2004, a National Workforce Agreement has been introduced to give TAs the opportunity to access training, development and career opportunities through the UK Higher Level Teacher Assistant (HLTA) training program (Burgess & Mayes, 2009).

2.5.2 National perspective.

In Australia, a qualification is not a pre-requisite for employment as a TA in any state or territory (see Table 2.1). Table 2.1 was compiled from jobs vacancy descriptions that appeared over a six-month period in 2012 on the Department of Education websites for each jurisdiction in Australia.

The lack of specific qualifications has implications for classroom practice. TAs can be employed with qualifications ranging from a tertiary qualification to a basic Year 10 high school qualification and in some jurisdictions, even this is not required. If a class teacher has had the benefit of working with a TA who has a tertiary qualification—specifically a Bachelor of Education—the teacher may believe that all TAs hold a similar qualification and have similar skills. This is not the case, and it adds to the confusion surrounding the tasks that TAs can be expected to perform in classrooms when duty statements are either unclear or not available.

Figure 2.3 shows the highest educational attainment of TAs in Australia in 2011, when 7.5 per cent of TAs held a Bachelor Degree, 25.5 per cent had no post-school qualification and 36.5 per cent had a Certificate III or IV qualification. It is unclear from
the figure whether the Certificate III and IV qualifications were in learning support and hence relevant to employment as a TA. A report by Snodgrass and Butcher (2005) on School Services Officers (TA equivalents) in South Australia recommended that TAs working with students with disabilities and learning difficulties have a qualification in special education. However, by 2011, only one-third of TAs in Australia held a Certificate III and/or IV, and this Certificate may not necessarily be in Disability or Education Support. All jurisdictions in Australia offer competency-based qualifications for TAs through vocational education and training programs; however, a post-school qualification is still not required for employment as a TA.

Education Aides

All Occupations

Educational Attainment per cent of Employment

Figure 2.3: Highest educational attainment (per cent share of employment) for TAs compared with all occupations.

Source: Job Outlook (DEEWR, 2012a)
While duty statements for TAs were not always available on departmental websites, a search in the job vacancy section of each state and territory’s Department of Education website revealed the qualifications being sought for TAs. Each jurisdiction in Australia requires different qualifications for TAs, but it is possible to gain employment as a TA in all jurisdictions in Australia with no post-school qualifications. Each jurisdiction has different expectations in relation to the desired qualifications for TAs, and job descriptions also vary. The following table displays an example of a position advertised for a mainstream primary school TA, known as an Education Assistant, in Western Australia. Although the role requires the TA to deliver education programs, including to ‘assist active learning’ and use computer technology, no formal qualifications are required for the position. Searching for a job advertised for a TA in an ACT school was fruitless, although a duty statement\(^3\) was obtained from a staff member in ACT ETD during an interview in September 2012. Positions for TAs in the ACT are rarely advertised because principals or business managers usually identify suitable volunteer helpers at the school—often parents of students at the school—and approach them to undertake a TA role. Examples of advertised TA positions from jurisdictions in Australia are available in Appendix 1.

\(^3\) A duty statement for a TA position in the ACT is only available to people applying for an advertised position. The principal then sends an application package which includes the duty statement (H. Phibbs, personal communication, 11 October 2013). While the duty statement is not freely available on the ACT ETD website the officer in ACT ETD willingly made it available for the purposes of this research.
Department of Education
Southwest Education Region
River Valley Primary School
Education Assistant—Mainstream

Advertised Vacancy Number: SS/SS313201

This is a nine (9) month fixed-term, part-time (0.3 FTE) position commencing Term 1, 2013

Do you have the elements required to assist active learning?

River Valley Primary School (PS) is seeking a vibrant and motivated Education Assistant—Mainstream to join their team of friendly staff. To be successful in this role you will be a team orientated person who is highly committed to seeing students achieve outstanding results. This position is for half day shifts on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

As an Education Assistant—Mainstream at River Valley PS, you will assist the teacher in delivering planned education programs including the operation of computers, and under teacher direction, implement individual or small group programs or demonstrations and encouraging a supportive and inclusive learning environment. You will assist with the preparation and maintenance of the learning environment by maintaining equipment, materials and resources for use in classes, displays and demonstration, and, assisting the teacher with clean and safe storage of items after classes and activities.

This selection process will initially be used to fill the above vacancy. Applicants assessed as suitable during this selection process may be appointed to other similar vacancies that occur throughout our school for 6 months.
To advance in status and salary as a TA, training and/or qualifications are expected in most jurisdictions in Australia. The type of training recommended, such as Certificate III and IV in Learning Support, Disability Support or Education Support, is offered by colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) centres in all jurisdictions in Australia. Table 2.2 shows the different courses available for TAs in each state and territory. However, many of these courses are available online and

**To be suitable for this role, you will need to demonstrate the following work related requirements:**

- **Sound oral and written communication skills, including the ability to interact with students, parents and teaching professionals.**
- **Sound interpersonal skills including the ability to work as part of a team.**
- **Sound organisational skills that will assist in the delivery of effective educational programs to students.**
- **Ability to assist with the general health and well-being of students.**

Applications will be assessed against these work-related requirements of the position. *The business needs of the school may also be considered.* It is therefore recommended that you consider all information contained in the advertisement and any other related information before applying for the vacancy.

Further information about River Valley Primary School can be found by visiting [Schools Online](http://www.schools-online.com).

**For further job related information:**
Please contact Marilee Hall, Registrar, by telephoning (08) 9726 3135 or emailing marilee.hall@education.wa.edu.au

No formal qualifications are required for this position, even though the role states that the TA will be required to use computers and implement individual and small group programs as well as assist with learning.

While being advertised as a TA role, the person may also be required to assist in the general office.
can be accessed via the Internet; hence, the location is not significant. The courses on offer indicate the different courses that are valued by employers in each jurisdiction. It is interesting to note that the minimal educational requirements needed to enrol in these courses varies from state to state. The online courses have no pre-requisite qualifications for enrolment. Therefore, it can be concluded that no minimum qualifications are necessary to be a TA in Australia.

Table 2.2:

*Courses for TAs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State or territory of Australia</th>
<th>VET courses available</th>
<th>Entry requirements to courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales</td>
<td>Certificate III in Auslan</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Aide Work—Introduction (Training Program)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate III in Learning Support, Disability Support or Education Support</td>
<td>Literacy skills to the level required to complete an ACT Year 10 certificate (or equivalent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate IV in Learning Support or Education Support</td>
<td>ACT Year 12 or equivalent or a Certificate III in Learning Support or Education Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma of Education Support Education Integration Support</td>
<td>Certificate IV in Learning Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Certificate III in Auslan</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Aide Work—Introduction (Training Program)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate III in Education Support</td>
<td>No minimum education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate IV in Education Support</td>
<td>Certificate III in Education Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma of Education Support</td>
<td>Certificate IV in Education Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education Integration Support</td>
<td>Language, literacy and numeracy skills equivalent to Level 2 of the National Reporting System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>Certificate III in Auslan</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>Certificate III in Auslan</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>Certificate III in Auslan</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate III in Education Support</td>
<td>Minimum Year 10 required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate IV in Education Support</td>
<td>Certificate III in Education Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma of Education Support</td>
<td>Certificate IV in Education Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University Preparation—Education</td>
<td>Diploma of Education Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>Certificate III in Education Support</td>
<td>Pre-requisites—none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate IV in Education Support</td>
<td>Certificate III in Education Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma of Education Support</td>
<td>Certificate IV in Education Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Certificate III in Education—Teacher Aide/Assistant</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate III in Educational Support</td>
<td>To be able to satisfy a Department of Education Good Character Check and to have effective literacy, numeracy and information technology skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Certificate IV in Education—Teacher Aide/Assistant</td>
<td>Certificate III in Education Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Job Outlook (DEEWR, 2012a) and TAFE College courses (2012)

Bourke (2009) queries the appropriateness of these courses in preparing TAs in their role. According to Bourke (2009, p. 822), the Certificates in Education Support offered for TAs in Queensland include content that is ‘based on the assumption that … TAs need the same type of training that teachers do, only in a much compact form, and mostly in their own time’. However, research shows that it is important to offer training that acknowledges
the needs and perspectives of the people receiving the training (Bourke, 2010; Deppeler, Loreman & Sharma, 2005; Forlin, 2006).

A typical course is the Certificate III course in Education Support (Queensland). Core units refer to behaviour support for children and young people; legislative, policy and industrial requirements in the educational environment; student education in all developmental domains; working with diversity in the education environment; communicating with students; working effectively in an educational team; complying with school administrative requirements; and contributing to OH&S processes (Technical and Further Education Queensland, 2012). This course offers a unit in communicating with students, although not all certificate courses do so. Communicating with students is an important part of a TA’s role, and a training course needs to reflect this. The evidence is that teachers and TAs differ in how they communicate with students (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Teachers tend to ask more open questions, while TAs ask more closed questions. Further, teachers spend more time explaining concepts, while TAs’ explanations are sometimes confusing and even inaccurate. Teachers also inform students about the focus of the lesson. Rubie-Davies et al. (2010) found that: 11 per cent of teachers provided students with answers, while 61 per cent of TAs provided students with answers and only 33 per cent encouraged students to think independently; teachers tended to be proactive and in control of lessons, while TAs tended to be reactive; teachers had a more formal style of delivery, while TAs were more informal, inclined to use colloquial language and were sometimes familiar with students. As a result, all training courses for TAs should include a unit on communication and learning.

2.6 Training for TAs

Training can be defined as professional learning that is ongoing and delivered in short periods, and that provides TAs with skills that may be context- and content-specific
and that may enhance their ability to work with both teachers and students in the classroom. The type of training needed, how it is delivered and who delivers the training are issues that are evident in the literature.

Three levels of training have been advised for TAs (AASE, 2007; Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Butt & Lowe, 2011; Liston et al., 2009; Mueller, 2003; Riggs, 2001; Snodgrass & Butcher, 2005; Trautman, 2004; White, 2004). The first level, which is conducted before commencing work, involves training in a sector-specific induction programme and in a context-specific induction programme. The second level is ongoing training that is specifically related to the role the TA is undertaking, and it is embedded in the work they are doing in the classroom (Cobb, 2007). The third level is ongoing professional learning to enhance career prospects in courses such as Certificates III or IV. Although these levels of training should be beneficial for TAs, Giangreco, Broer and Edelman (2002) report that virtually no TAs in their study had received training before being assigned to work with students due to a lack of time on the part of teachers and administrators to conduct the training. This was due to the hasty employment of TAs at the beginning of a school year in response to increased and unanticipated enrolments of students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Howard & Ford, 2007).

Training TAs has been discussed extensively in the literature, with differing views on what is appropriate and, in more recent years, on whether training TAs actually makes a difference (Giangreco, Broer & Suter, 2011; Webster et al., 2011). For the past decade, researchers have claimed that TAs need training (AASE, 2007; Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Cobb, 2007; Davis, Kotecki, Harvey & Oliver, 2007; Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010; Griffin-Shirley & Matlock, 2004; Groom, 2006; Hauge & Babkie, 2006; Mueller, 2003). It has been suggested that training is required in ‘behavioural interventions, the specific needs of students, teaching strategies, adapting curricula and materials, physical care, basic
academic skills, computer skills and interpersonal skills’ (AASE, 2007, p. 5). Other research has identified training in embedding teacher-planned instruction, facilitating social interactions, implementing social stories, meeting the needs of children and their families, and developing an awareness of proximity to the students whom they support (Carroll, 2001, in Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005; McDonnell, Johnson, Polychronis & Risen, 2002). Bourke and Carrington (2007) recommend that training for TAs is necessary to ‘refit’ TAs for new, inclusive education policies and practices in line with their changed role in schools. This approach of ‘training up’ TAs to prepare them for their changed role is based on the view that more training will bridge the gaps in their skills and knowledge (Bourke, 2009; Mansaray, 2006).

A typical response to the need to train TAs is the approach adopted in the system studied in this research in the ACT. A professional learning package is being developed that will offer eight two-hour sessions that cover issues of legality (Disability Discrimination Act, Disability Standards for Education, Duty of Care), differentiated learning and adjustments for access and participation, links from this to Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), inclusive technologies, communication, understanding behaviours and student support plans (R. Donohoe, personal communication, 12 June 2012). No staff at the ACT ETD could say whether completing this package will equate to a Certificate III in Learning Support or whether TAs will be required to complete the training package prior to employment. Further, staff could not say whether TAs already employed in the system would be required to complete the training or, if they are required to complete the training, where they will undertake the training and whether study release will be provided.

Commencing in 2012, one full day of training is now offered to permanent TAs by the ACT ETD in January prior to the commencement of the school year. Permanent TAs and some who are on casual contracts (if contracts have been organised) can attend sessions run
by the Directorate’s Professional Learning section and Therapy ACT (R. Donohoe, personal communication, 12 June 2012). While training is being provided, it is unclear whether it will address the specific needs of TAs in their role as learning support assistants.

### 2.6.1 Cost of training TAs.

Few studies refer to the cost of training or who incurs the costs to train TAs. One study conducted in Colorado, US, by McKenzie (2011) reports that funding is provided to ‘pay TAs for a 1-day training prior to the beginning of each school year … and to pay TAs to attend monthly meetings’ (p. 38). This study notes three significant outcomes as a result of the training: increased retention of TAs; enrolment by several TAs in teacher education training programs; and increased collaboration among TAs and class teachers. In the ACT, a staff member in the ACT ETD explained that the Directorate funds TAs to study the Disability Support Education Certificate IV at the CIT (R. Donohoe, personal communication, 12 June 2012). No other funding is allocated for TA training in the ACT. One principal explained that each school principal determines how and to whom professional learning funds are allocated (R. Powell, personal communication, 15 August 2012).

TAs consistently request training (AASE, 2007; Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008) and believe that the best training and professional learning they can receive is ‘on the job’ with a good teacher who is willing to teach them (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008). One study has found that teachers claim they do not have time to train TAs (Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2002). Crucially, the type of training requested by TAs varies from the training recommended for them by teachers and their supervisors. TAs prioritise training in dealing with challenging emotional and social behaviours; basic instructional strategies; dealing with special education rules and regulations; legal issues;
the effect of different disability types on learning; and the use of technology and adaptive equipment (Breton, 2010; Howard & Ford, 2007).

There is a mismatch of training and the roles that TAs perform. Too frequently, TAs are asked to undertake instructional responsibilities for which they are not trained, qualified or adequately compensated (French, 2001; Suter & Giangreco, 2009; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). When asked if they received the necessary training to work with students, nearly 30 per cent felt they had not received this essential training (Breton, 2010). One reason given for this was that schools did not pay for TAs to attend training programs. The consequence of this lack of training was that the least qualified and least prepared school personnel frequently provided instructional support to the most challenging students with the most complex needs (Breton, 2010).

2.6.2 Effects of training.

Claims by researchers differ on the effect of training TAs. Some researchers claim that training TAs is beneficial and affirming (Cobb, 2007; Howard & Ford, 2007; Leblanc, Ricciardi, & Luiselli, 2005; Snodgrass & Butcher, 2005), but others question whether it will improve or ensure quality inclusive education or increase learning outcomes (Giangreco, Broer & Suter, 2011; Webster et al., 2011). Logan (2006) claims that training offers new ideas, provides skills to respond to students’ individual needs and helps maximise the benefits of employing TAs. Giangreco, Backus, Chichosiki-Kelly, Sherman & Mavropoulos (2003) identify that TAs gain knowledge, perspective and skills as a result of training, thereby affirming its importance. The conclusion drawn from this study is that TAs can be trained to undertake a variety of tasks that may result in positive student learning outcomes. A review of the literature by Farrell et al. (2010) concludes that ‘trained and supported TAs helped children with literacy and language problems to make statistically significant gains in learning when compared to similar children who did not
receive TA support’ (p. 439). O’Shaughnessy and Swanson (2000) support Farrell et al. (2010), claiming that ‘with adequate training and ongoing supervision TAs can successfully implement research-based reading interventions’ (p. 274).

More recent research has questioned the effectiveness of training TAs. Providing training for TAs is seen as an ‘over simplistic, and ultimately insufficient response’ (Giangreco, 2010b, p. 344) that may or may not be beneficial to students. Giangreco (2003) claims that training TAs can inadvertently led to a ‘training trap’, whereby teachers relinquish the instruction of students with disabilities and learning difficulties to TAs because they have received some training, no matter how little they have received. Although training can be beneficial, it is not sufficient to enable TAs to take over the class teacher’s instructional responsibilities. If TAs are to have a pedagogical, instructional role, they need formal training in pedagogy (Webster et al., 2010).

The literature so far has noted that the number of TAs being employed has increased considerably during the past 10 years. In addition, the role of TAs has changed considerably; however, the qualifications required to be a TA in Australia have not varied and TAs can in fact be employed with no qualifications. Debate continues on the effectiveness of training TAs, but it is evident that the roles and qualifications of a TA need to be clarified first and foremost before decisions regarding appropriate training can be made. What career opportunities exist then for TAs? Is career advancement dependent upon gaining a higher qualification or attending training?

2.7 Career Opportunities for TAs

Opportunities for TAs to progress in their chosen career vary. In the ACT, opportunities for advancement are limited and lack transparency. Few positions exist for higher-qualified or more experienced TAs, and schools resist employing them because they
cost more. A list of competencies required for TAs to advance in status exists, but few principals know of it and even fewer TAs are aware of it.

2.7.1 International perspective.

Career opportunities for TAs vary in the international, national and local context. In the US, TAs can enrol in training programs to enable them to advance in salary or gain credit points towards becoming a teacher. A career pathway is clearly defined for these TAs. For example, in New York, TAs can access training through the Department of Education’s Career Training Program (CTP). Full-time TAs are eligible to take up to six credits per semester at nearly all of The City University of New York colleges as well as several private colleges (Paraprofessional Academy, 2012). For every 15 credits that TAs obtain, they receive a salary increase. In the US, TAs’ earnings vary widely according to the state in which they are employed. TAs in New York receive an average annual salary of US$35,258 (Salary Expert, 2013), while a TA in Atlanta receives US$24,808 (Schnotz, 2011). The average salary for a TA in the US in 2013 was US$31,116 (Salary Expert, 2013).

In the UK, a career pathway exists for TAs. TAs can advance from a beginning TA to become a HLTA under the National Workforce Agreement. This higher status is obtained with experience—not necessarily with additional qualifications. With a HLTA status, a foundation degree or equivalent qualifications, TAs can progress to teacher training by undertaking a degree, which leads to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) (Teaching Assistants, 2012). Salaries for a TA in the UK range from £10,000 to £15,000 or $15,000 to $22,000 when converted into Australian dollars. Some TAs would like to undertake a teaching degree but, due to financial constraints and without assistance from the school where they work, they are unable to enrol (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008). However, some TAs are happy being classroom assistants and do not seek advancement. According to
Giangreco, Broer and Edelman (2002), TAs enjoy their position; they like working during school hours because it fits into their daily routines and their children’s schedules, and the TAs’ income is not usually the primary income source.

2.7.2 National perspective.

Career opportunities for TAs vary in each jurisdiction in Australia. Table 2.3 shows the career structure for TAs in each jurisdiction in Australia, as well as the salary scales for TAs. It is evident that there is no consensus regarding a well-structured career pathway nationally or in most jurisdictions. Queensland is an exception, with a well-structured and transparent career path for TAs with clearly defined qualifications and skills required to advance in salary. To obtain the information, job descriptions for vacant positions were searched and emails were sent to Human Resources (HR) personnel in each jurisdiction’s Department of Education. Not all HR personnel responded to email requests. Limited information is available from New South Wales and Western Australia due to a lack of response to email requests.

Table 2.3:

Salaries for TAs in Government Schools in Australia—2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australian state or territory</th>
<th>Career structure</th>
<th>Salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory (unclear what competencies are required to advance)</td>
<td>School Assistant 2</td>
<td>$39,432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Assistant 2/3—competencies to be displayed to move to:</td>
<td>$43,728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Assistant 3</td>
<td>$48,474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Assistant 4</td>
<td>$58,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>School Learning Support Officer</td>
<td>$26,146–$48,183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Education Support Level 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range 1</td>
<td>$35,847–$42,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range 2</td>
<td>$43,683–$51,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education Support Level 2—a tertiary qualification is required to progress to Level 2 Range 3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range 4</td>
<td>$52,601–$63,427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range 5</td>
<td>$69,288–$81,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range 6</td>
<td>$84,437–$96,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>TAOO2 consists of four incremental pay levels. On completion of 12 months’ satisfactory service,</td>
<td>$40,141–$44,894</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
permanent teacher aides move from level 01 to
level 02, then to 03 and 04 on an annual basis.
Classification TAOO3 is achieved for teacher aides
who meet the following criteria: Completed 12
months’ service at TAOO2 level 04; Hold an
Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
Certificate III, an equivalent or a higher
qualification (e.g. Certificate IV, Diploma, Degree);
and hold a current Senior First Aid Certificate.
Progression to TAOO3 is automatic if the above
qualifications have been entered into personnel
records.

TAOO4 positions are allocated to schools where a
need has been established, and they are filled from
the current teacher aide workforce. They typically
involve a specialised teacher aide role. Possession
of a relevant Certificate III or IV qualification is
desirable.
Classification TAOO4 also consists of four
incremental levels.

| South Australia | SSO 1: Level 1–Level 6 | $39,763–$46,559 |
|                | SSO 2: Level 1–Level 3 to progress beyond this level, employees require a post-secondary school qualification | $50,064–$54,184 |
|                | SSO 3: Level 1–Level 3 | $58,300–$62,426 |
|                | SSO 4: Level 1–Level 3 | $66,955–$70,049 |
|                | SSO 5: Level 1–Level 4 | $75,403–$84,468 |
|                | SSO 6: Level 1–Level 3 | $88,856–$93,955 |

| Western Australia | Education Assistant Level 1/2 | $34,654–$40,673 |
|                  | Education Assistant Level 2/3 | $37,638–$43,928 |

| Northern Territory | Level 2 TA is required to have completed a Certificate III in Education Support | $43,972 |
|                   | Level 3 TA is required to have completed a Certificate IV in Education Support | $47,102 |
|                   | Level 4 TA is required to have completed a Diploma of Education Support | $52,086 |

| Tasmania | Year 1 | $34,648 |
|          | Year 2 | $35,933 |
|          | Year 3 | $37,378 |

Source: Online duty statements and data obtained from each jurisdiction

In most jurisdictions, a career structure exists for TAs who gain a qualification. If TAs study to obtain a Diploma in Education Support, they gain credit for entry into a teaching degree at a university. The salaries received by TAs in Australia are generally better than the salaries received by TAs in the UK and US. Despite this, even TAs in
Australia struggle financially, mainly because few have the security of a full-time permanent position. One TA from South Australia noted that:

Almost everything is a battle when you are a TA. Many are struggling financially, even though some have been in the job for thirty or forty years. It’s just crazy. Getting a home loan or planning a holiday or even a night out for tea is near impossible when you have no job security or permanency (EAU SA Branch, 2009).

Giangreco, Broer and Edelman (2002) confirm this, stating that ‘TA positions do not offer a “living wage”’ (p. 57). This is supported by the Queensland Courier Mail (5 October 2011), which claimed that 80 per cent of TAs earn less than the minimum wage.

2.7.3 Retaining TAs.

Retaining qualified TAs is problematic due to poor employment conditions, low salary levels and limited career prospects (Giangreco, Broer, Edelman, 2002; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Tillery, Werts, Roark & Harris, 2003). Higher wages will not help to retain TAs in schools according to Ghere and York-Barr (2007), who recommend ‘better communication and greater understanding of, and support for, the complex and demanding work that TAs do’ (cited in Bourke, 2009, p. 820). Poor retention rates of TAs needs to be resolved because attrition is costly for schools and can affect students’ educational programs due to the constant change of support staff (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010). As TAs who are assigned to work one-on-one with a student experience a higher turnover rate than TAs assigned to one classroom (Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2002), this model of deployment needs to be reviewed in order to address the retention of experienced TAs.

It has been suggested that the retention rates of TAs could be increased through the development and implementation of professional learning programs that provide a venue for collaboration and problem-solving among TAs (McKenzie, 2011). Mentoring for TAs has also been recommended to help with retention (AASE, 2007).
Variations abound regarding the qualifications, skills and training required by, and available to, TAs in Australia. As long as their role in mainstream schools remains unclear, the appropriate qualifications and training needed in their role will also be unclear. While this issue remains unresolved, the TA position will continue to attract unqualified, unskilled and untrained employees who are employed to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties and expected to positively improve learning outcomes for these students. Section 2.8 will identify whether this is a realistic expectation.

2.8 Effect of TAs on Student Learning Outcomes

The effect of TAs on students’ outcomes and learning has only been researched internationally in recent years (Blatchford et al., 2010a; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Webster et al., 2011). In Australia, little research has been undertaken to identify the effect of TA support on students’ learning outcomes (Shaddock et al., 2009). This area needs further research, as it would be naïve to think that increasing the number of TAs in a school would automatically improve learning outcomes (Farrell et al., 2010), particularly when TAs lack qualifications, skills and training.

Research on the effect of TAs on student outcomes is contradictory. Some researchers find no effect of having TAs in mainstream classes (Finn et al., 2000; Muijs & Reynolds, 2003), while others report positive effects of TA support (AASE, 2007; Alborz et al., 2009; Causton-Theoharis, Giangreco, Doyle & Vadasy, 2007; Farrell et al., 2010; Giangreco, Broer & Suter, 2011). An overall negative effect on student learning outcomes has also been identified (Blatchford et al., 2010a; Gerber, Finn, Achilles & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Shaddock et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2011). The DISS project, which was conducted in England and Wales between 2003 and 2009, was the first large-scale study to measure the effect of support staff on students’ learning outcomes and to test observations made previously regarding the effect of support
staff. In order to understand these contradictory outcomes, it is important to analyse the evidence provided in the following sections.

### 2.8.1 Positive effect on students’ learning outcomes.

In many circumstances, the literature has noted that TAs can have a positive effect on student achievement—particularly behaviours and attitudes (Blatchford et al., 2009; Blatchford et al., 2010a; Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010). A positive effect occurs when TAs are trained to implement teacher-devised programs and are well supervised and managed by teachers (AASE, 2007; Alborz et al., 2009; Causton-Theoharis et al., 2007; Farrell et al., 2010; Giangreco, Broer & Suter, 2011). Positive learning outcomes in literacy can be achieved for ‘at risk’ students when TAs have been explicitly trained using professionally planned programs and receive consistent supervision (Miller, 2003; Farrell et al., 2010; Vadasy, Sanders & Peyton, 2002). Farrell et al. (2010) report on findings from three research projects that claimed that ‘TAs were just as capable as teachers in providing effective targeted support to pupils with learning difficulties’ (p. 443). This was supported by another UK study, which confirmed that the quality of teaching improved when TAs were present (Ofsted, 2002) and ‘well trained and managed TAs were effective in increasing standards in schools’ (Ofsted, 2002, cited in Farrell et al., 2010, p. 436).

Another positive effect on students’ learning is TA proximity, as students are more engaged both actively and passively (Werts, Zigmond & Leeper, 2001, cited in Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010). Other positive effects of TA support include: students have more interactions with adults; improved confidence and motivation to work; good study habits and the ability and willingness to complete assigned tasks; talk between TAs and students is more personalised than between teachers and students; increased individualised attention for students; and increased on-task behaviour and decreased off-task behaviour, resulting in easier classroom management and more time for the teacher to teach (Blatchford et al.,
An important finding from the DISS project (2003–2009) was that classroom teachers claimed that the presence of TAs ‘resulted in increased attention by pupils; more effective support for their learning; increased teacher effectiveness; and improved learning outcomes’ (Farrell et al., 2010, p. 445).

2.8.2 Negative effect on students’ learning outcomes.

A disturbing feature of the literature is the finding that support by TAs has negative effects on students’ learning. The DISS project (2003–2009) found that TA support adversely affected attitudes to learning and achievement when researchers observed and measured support staff’s presence and proximity, and interactions and attention (Blatchford et al., 2010). The project’s findings indicate a negative relationship between TA support and academic progress. Most notably, the more support given by the TA, the less progress made by the student (Blatchford et al., 2012). When the effect of TA support on students’ PAL is examined, the results show little evidence that TA support improves students’ PAL (Webster et al., 2011). In the US, although TA proximity has been identified as having a positive effect on students’ learning outcomes, it has also been identified as having a negative social effect—particularly when one-on-one support is provided (Giangreco, 2010a)—as the student becomes separated from teachers and peers.

Other reasons why TAs have a negative effect on students’ learning outcomes are related to the deployment and practice of TAs and the preparedness of teachers and TAs (Webster et al., 2011). Specific reasons provided for this negative effect include:

- the reduction in teacher input for supported students when TAs are present;
  abdication of responsibility by the class teacher
- dependency being encouraged by TAs because they do not encourage students to think for themselves
- feelings of stigmatisation
• insular relationships
• separation from peers and the curriculum
• loss of personal control
• loss of gender identity and risk of being bullied
• interference with the education of other students
• tendency for TAs to focus on task completion rather than understanding and skills (AASE, 2007; Blatchford et al., 2010a; Blatchford et al., 2010b; Broer, Doyle & Giangreco, 2005; Giangreco, 2010a; Malmgren, Causton-Theoharis & Trezek, 2005; Moyles & Sushitzky, 1997 cited in Blatchford et al., 2010; Ofsted, 2004; Webster et al., 2010).

A negative effect on students’ learning outcomes also results from different types of talk that occur between teachers and students and between TAs and students: ‘Teachers explained concepts, provided more feedback, linked current lessons to pupils’ prior knowledge and attempted to promote pupils’ thinking and cognitive engagement in a task’ (Webster et al., 2010, p. 327). However, TAs prompted students, gave explanations that were sometimes inaccurate or confusing, supplied answers, were more concerned about task completion, reacted to the immediate needs of the pupils, did not make good use of the extended interactions they had with students, and used interactions that failed to foster active student participation (Webster et al., 2011). In addition, class teachers tended to ‘open up’ talk with students—both linguistically and cognitively—while TAs tended to ‘close down’ the talk (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010).

From the literature, it is apparent that uncertainty and ambiguity exist regarding the role, qualifications, skills and training required for TAs. In addition, the effect of TAs on students’ learning outcomes varies, necessitating rigorous questioning regarding the escalating employment of TAs. The literature also raises a number of questions regarding
the working experiences of TAs, such as: What is the daily working experience for a TA employed in a mainstream school? Are the daily working conditions for TAs equally uncertain, variable and problematic? Do TAs experience problems in their workplaces associated with their lack of qualifications, skills and training? The employment and working conditions of a TA will now be identified and presented.

2.9 Employment and Working Conditions for TAs

Employment and working conditions for TAs, as well as the demographics of TAs, are similar internationally and in Australia. In the UK in 2011, 93.4 per cent of TAs were female. Of these, 45,000 were employed full time, while 175,000 were employed part time (Teaching-Assistants.co.uk, 2012). However, in the US in 2010, only 37 per cent of TAs were employed part time (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). A gender breakdown was not available on TAs in the US, nor were statistics available on TAs working in the ACT.

Figure 2.4 shows the share of employment (per cent) for males and females who are employed full time and part time in Australia, compared with all occupations. It is evident that part-time work is the most common for females and that more females are employed than males (DEEWR, 2012a). Unfortunately, data are not available on the number of permanent and casual employees in this sector.
Figure 2.4: Share of employment (gender) for TAs.

Source: Job Outlook (DEEWR, 2012a)

Working conditions for TAs can be directly linked to how they are employed as well as to who they are—that is, their status. Most TAs are married women re-entering the workforce after having children and who live near the school (Pickett et al., 2003). TAs frequently have their children enrolled in the school and may also be volunteers in the school (Howard & Ford, 2007). TAs may choose to be part-time employees to fit in with their family life. Whether they are permanent or casual is more significant, as this affects their job security.

2.9.1 Lack of job security.

Most TAs in Australia are hired informally by the school principal, without the position being advertised, and often in response to an unexpected increase in enrolments of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Most TAs in Australia are employed on casual contracts, with renewal dependent on the enrolment of new students with disabilities and learning difficulties or the ongoing enrolment of these students (Howard & Ford, 2007). Job insecurity is a key issue for TAs in all jurisdictions in Australia, as confirmed in
a newspaper report of a rally outside Parliament House in Queensland, where one TA protested over the ‘unliveable wage’, stating that ‘We’ve got no security of our job, the hours change from year to year and the banks won’t even lend us money’ (McIlroy, 2011).

Being on casual, temporary contracts means that TAs are employed term by term and usually do not receive pay over holiday periods or sickness benefits. The terms and conditions of employment for TAs vary in each jurisdiction. In 2009, the Public Service Association (NSW) sought to gain permanency of employment for ‘long term temporary TAs many of whom have been working in the one school for more than 20 years’ (Simpson, 2009). In Tasmania in 2006, a proposal was put to the union to pay TAs over 52 weeks rather than the current 40–42 weeks. The offer would involve TAs working additional hours during term time, with pay for those hours ‘annualised over a 52 week period’ (The Mercury, 2006).

TAs have a good reason to be concerned about the lack of security surrounding their employment, as they are usually the first to lose their jobs when cuts occur to funding. In July 2012, the NSW Government announced that 6,000 jobs would be cut across education and health, with 2,400 support staff—including TAs—set to lose their jobs (The Australian, 4 July 2012). Lack of job security was commented on by a long-term TA working in South Australia, who described her experience when a new principal was appointed to the school where she was working:

I was asked to return to school in the first week of the holidays to discuss my next contract with the new principal. I was told my contract was not going to be renewed and she rambled excuses. I had worked at the school for 7 years! (Hall & Greer, 2008).

In addition, principals in the ACT, NSW and Western Australia are now empowered to recruit staff and make funding allocation decisions, which have resulted in money that
had previously been allocated to TAs being allocated to ‘technology or other teaching
equipment better suited to the needs of students’ (Perpitch, 2010).

2.9.2 Lack of planning time.

Schools frequently benefit from the goodwill of TAs, as they arrive early at school
or leave late in order to plan with teachers. In the UK, 82 per cent of TAs claimed to work
extra hours voluntarily (Webster et al., 2011), mainly due to a lack of planning time.
Planning time that TAs have with class teachers is linked to employment conditions for
TAs. Most are employed only during school hours, with no planning time allocated during
the school day (Collins & Simco, 2006; Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron & Fialka,
2005; Webster et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2011). Time to plan is limited to break times,
before and after school, during lesson changeovers, and lunch time (Collins & Simco, 2006;
Webster et al., 2010). When planning time is not provided, TAs feel that they are
underprepared for the tasks they are given; they go into lessons ‘blind’ and have to ‘tune in’
to the teacher’s instructions to grasp the content, skills and instructions being given to the
students (Webster et al., 2010). As a result, TAs respond to students in a reactive way—
operating in the moment—due to their lack of preparation and gaps in their own knowledge
(Webster et al., 2010). Given that questions are being raised about TAs’ ability to improve
students’ learning outcomes (Webster et al., 2010), it is essential that planning time be
provided. In addition, thorough pre-lesson preparation is essential if TAs have an
instructional role (Webster et al., 2010).

A research project conducted to explore the ‘preparedness’ of TAs (Blatchford et
al., 2012) has found that providing time for TAs and class teachers to plan and discuss
lessons has a positive effect on TA preparedness. Class teachers prepare lessons of a higher
quality, including the explicit role and tasks to be undertaken by the TA (Blatchford et al.,
2012).
2.9.3 Lack of induction programs.

TAs rarely participate in orientation or induction programs in schools (Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2002; Groom, 2006; Howard & Ford, 2007; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Trautman, 2004). This occurs because school administrators frequently fill TA positions in haste immediately prior to the commencement of the school year (Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2002) in response to increased enrolments of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. There is then no time before classes commence for TAs to attend school- or system-wide induction programs, if they are available. As a result, TAs experience feelings of ‘isolation and had to navigate their own course through the physical, social and administrative structures of the school’ (Howard & Ford, 2007, p. 30).

The literature recommends orientation programs for TAs that are context-specific and that cover topics such as school policies and procedures, behaviour management, health and safety procedures, and child protection (AASE, 2007; Groom, 2006; Howard & Ford, 2007). Orientation at the classroom level is also recommended so that TAs understand how the classroom is set up and are able to follow the daily timetable and routine of the room (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008). Orienting new employees into a school should be a basic right for all staff; however, Giangreco and Doyle (2002) state that TAs consider it a sign of respect when administrators orient them into the school.

2.9.4 Lack of respect.

TAs often experience a lack of respect in schools. As noted above, TAs feel appreciated when they are oriented into schools. Earlier, it was noted that TAs feel valued when they are trained and supervised. However, orientations and inductions rarely occur, and class teachers are reluctant to train or supervise TAs. TAs also feel respected when they are viewed as important members of a classroom team and are able to provide input into decisions regarding teaching and learning plans for students (Chopra & French, 2004;
Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008). TAs feel respected when class teachers acknowledge the important and varied roles they undertake in the classroom (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). One TA working in South Australia said that:

I would like to see a shift in attitude by teachers and leaders towards TAs. This can be achieved by [TAs] becoming more assertive about what we are willing to do, by asking to be recognised for a job well done and through more support from colleagues (Hall & Greer, 2008).

Although class teachers and principals claim that they value TAs, many TAs feel ‘neither respected nor valued and experience frustration related to being under, over, or improperly utilised as well as having their pay not reflect their effort and performance’ (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010, p. 46). In addition, Bourke and Carrington (2007) note that the work attributed to TAs is minimally acknowledged in official documentation, indicating that their position is not given enough credibility or value by educational administrators. This invisibility might relate to their ‘poverty of position’ and lack of a voice in the educational context (Van Zanten, 2005, p. 682, cited in Bourke & Carrington, 2007, p. 19). Giangreco, Suter and Doyle (2010) also argue that increasing numbers of TAs are an ‘indicator of their perceived importance as a group but they may be the most marginalised employees in schools as indicated in the studies on respect and appreciation’ (p. 50).

2.9.5 Lack of a voice.

The lack of a voice experienced by TAs is related to how they are employed and how they are valued in schools. Although TAs have been identified in the literature as the main support mechanism that enables students with disabilities and learning difficulties to enrol in mainstream classes, they are not always acknowledged as key stakeholders.
According to Bourke and Carrington (2007), TAs lack ‘social and cultural capital within the field of education policy’ (p. 18) and hence have no identity or power. As TAs are employed only during school hours, they cannot attend staff meetings, planning sessions with teachers, or ILP meetings with the parents of the students they support unless they do so voluntarily in their own time. TAs also have no say in how they are deployed in a school and, due to the lack of security surrounding their employment, they often feel reluctant to express their opinions. This lack of a voice and lack of an outlet to express their opinions could be interpreted to mean that their opinions are not valued. In addition, TAs feel ‘marginalised and disempowered’ in the hierarchies of schools when decisions about them are made for them by educational bureaucrats (Sorsby, 2004, p. 57).

2.9.6 Lack of supervision.

TAs feel valued and respected when they are supervised and their role is acknowledged by their supervisors (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). However, the literature suggests that school personnel do not want to supervise TAs. Supervision of TAs was identified as being challenging for teachers (Pickett et al., 2003, cited in Hughes & Valles-Riestra, 2008; Mistry, Burton & Brundrett, 2004, cited in Collins & Simco, 2006). French (2001) finds that teachers are reluctant to supervise TAs because they are not trained in adult supervision and are not able to help them progress in their career. Webster et al. (2011) reports that more than half of the teachers in the DISS project managed one or more TAs, with 66 per cent of these teachers claiming to have not had any training for this role. Problems arise when untrained supervisors provide supervision that does not align with effective practices (French, 2001; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay & Stahl, 2001). Poor supervision of TAs has been reported in the literature since the 1990s and continues to be an issue (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010). Consensus has not been reached on whether
class teachers, special education teachers, principals or other school administrators should supervise TAs.

2.9.7 Lack of feedback.

Groom (2006) recommends that TAs should receive performance reviews and appraisals, as this would provide an opportunity for TAs to receive feedback and engage in discussion about their professional development. Breton (2010) reports that nearly 40 per cent of TAs have never had a performance review. In addition, 40 per cent of the respondents in this study had direct interactions with their supervisors on a less-than-weekly basis and 15 per cent never received direct instructions from their supervisors. Giangreco, Suter and Doyle (2010) express concern that when special education teachers manage and supervise TAs, they devote only 2 per cent of their time to each TA they supervise. It can thus be concluded that TAs receive minimal supervision, direction and feedback. Breton (2010) observed that as TAs receive the least amount of training, they should receive the most feedback regarding their job performance from their supervisors or class teachers. As TAs are the least qualified staff in schools, they should be supervised and receive feedback on their performance.

From the literature, it is evident that the employment and working conditions for TAs are not attractive, and TAs are poorly remcompensed for the work they do. TAs feel marginalised due to their poor pay, the uncertainty of their casual employment contracts and their lack of a voice (O’Brien & Garner, 2001, cited in Mackenzie, 2011; Sorsby, 2004). A TA from South Australia summarised these findings regarding employment and working conditions:

The lack of job security, the difficulty in gaining permanency and the low rate of pay, does detract from what is otherwise an enjoyable and rewarding job. I go on school camps. I don’t get paid overtime. I am considered a ‘volunteer’ after my
official working day has ended. It just seems wrong that there is no provision for TAs to be paid after hours. Perhaps I’m one of the luckier ones, I’ve heard that TAs in some sites don’t get as much as a recess break. Everyone needs a cup of a tea (AEU SA, 2009).

2.10 Training for Pre-Service Teachers

Another issue identified in the literature that affects TAs but is not directly linked to their employment conditions and processes is the lack of training that class teachers receive during their Bachelor of Education courses in utilising, supervising and working with TAs. Teachers consider that they do not have the training or skills necessary to supervise TAs (Pickett et al., 2003, cited in Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008) and were poorly prepared during their university course to teach students with disabilities and learning difficulties in mainstream classes (Australian Education Union, 2010; Lancaster & Bain, 2007; Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011; Winter, 2006). Lambe and Bones (2006) surveyed pre-service teachers who believed that the successful inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties depended on the support of TAs in the classroom. It is evident that pre-service teachers need training in working and collaborating with TAs (Farrell et al., 2010; Lambe & Bones, 2006; Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011; Wallace, 2003) and in supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Australian Education Union, 2010). Universities need to consider how to include this important information into existing courses.

2.11 Conclusion

TA presence in mainstream classrooms is a recent phenomenon. Their increased rate of employment, which is linked to the increased number of students with disabilities and learning difficulties who are enrolling in mainstream schools, has created tensions for class teachers and school administrators. In addition, their role and deployment in schools
is being questioned in light of international research (Webster, Blatchford and Russell, 2010; Giangreco, 2010a). Growing evidence suggests that TAs have a negative effect on students’ learning outcomes, and scant evidence exists to suggest that employing TAs is the best use of resources (Parkins, 2002, cited in Boyle, Scriven, Durning & Downes, 2011). The practice of employing unqualified, unskilled and untrained staff to enable students with disabilities and learning difficulties to enrol in mainstream schools requires a thorough review, as it has been allowed to proceed without evaluation for too long. It is not surprising that researchers are now questioning how the use of TA support has happened in such a ‘consistently unfettered manner given the lack of supportive evidence’ (Suter & Giangreco, 2009, p. 82).

In Australia, data on funding for TAs is only available for NSW, where over 90 per cent of funding for support goes towards TAs. In the ACT, the money spent to employ TAs is not known because the ACT EDT does not manage the TA recruitment budget. Research is needed to assess the cost and effect of TA support. This has been raised recently by Boyle et al. (2011), who have questioned how student success is being measured against expenditure on TA support, noting that it is unusual for a large percentage of public sector money to be allocated but not scrutinised in relation to outcomes. Comparative costs for employing TAs were only available for the UK. Blatchford et al. (2012) claim that 16.4 per cent of primary school budgets in the UK is spent on TAs and other education support staff such as bilingual support assistants. More detailed costings were not available.

Another significant gap in the literature is the voice of TAs, thus highlighting their ‘position of poverty’ (Van Zanten, 2005, p. 682, cited in Bourke & Carrington, 2007, p. 19) in schools as well as their lack of ‘social and cultural capital’ (Bourke & Carrington, 2007, p. 18), resulting in their exclusion from the inclusion debate. Other significant voices lacking in the literature are those of the parents of students with disabilities and learning
difficulties and the students themselves. While this thesis will address the lack of a voice for TAs, future research will be required to address the lack of a voice for parents and students.

There are calls for an urgent review in Australia of all educational policies and practices (Donnelly, 2012) due to the steady decline over the past 15 years of the performance of Australian students internationally in assessments such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Donnelly, 2012). The focus is on the quality of teachers and teaching, and it should also be on policy that has resulted in the employment—without evaluation—of increasing numbers of unqualified TAs to provide learning support to students with disabilities and learning difficulties. This is reinforced by recent findings from research in the UK by Blatchford, Russell and Webster (2012), which identified that ‘children who received the most support from TAs made significantly less progress than similar pupils who received less support’ (p. 2). In light of this evidence, schools and school systems in Australia should be concerned about accountability, as they could be subject to legal risk (Etscheidt, 2005). In the US state of Iowa, a judge ruled that a school district failed to provide adequate education services for a student with a disability, even though a TA had been provided, and ordered that compensatory education be provided. The judge considered that TA services should be supplemental rather than primary and should not replace a trained, qualified teacher (Suter & Giangreco, 2009). Research in the ACT specifically, but also throughout Australia, into the lack of standardisation and accountability within the TA sector is urgently needed.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This qualitative case study is an in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon—namely, the employment of TAs and their requirements in defining their role, qualifications, skills and training needs. It examines multiple perspectives of a range of stakeholder groups in four stages over a three-year period. Focus groups, questionnaires, observations, field notes, memos and semi-structured interviews are undertaken with principals, class teachers, school leaders and supervisors of TAs in four school sites, as well as policy administrators and a vocational teacher. The four school sites, with the pseudonyms of Scrivener, Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Molonglo, employ a total of 41 TAs. The added perspectives of 19 TAs who attended TA training were also sought. Combined, the information gathered from the qualitative work provides a rich or ‘thick’ description of the daily working lives of TAs and contributes to a holistic understanding of what it is like to be a TA (Geertz, 1973). All data are collected and analysed using a grounded theory approach, allowing themes pertaining to policy, practices and procedures to emerge in relation to the employment and deployment of TAs in mainstream schools.

The primary research question of this study is: What are the roles, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs, and how are these perceived by TAs, class teachers, supervisors of TAs and school leaders?

Specific research questions that guide this study are:

1. What is the role of TAs in mainstream schools?

2. What qualifications and skills are required for TAs?

3. What training is required for TAs?
4. What factors contribute to the effective employment/deployment of TAs in mainstream schools?

5. What factors affect the ability of TAs to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities/learning difficulties in mainstream schools?

3.2 Description of the Methodological Approach

The value of using of a multiple case study method for primary research is well documented and is defined by Creswell (2013) as ‘a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information’ (p. 97). This case study was undertaken in four stages over three years across four school sites. The multiple perspectives of TAs, class teachers, supervisors of TAs and school leaders, including principals, were sought.

The majority of research surrounding TAs excludes their voice, so this case study draws on ethnographic methods ‘to enable the voice of those who would otherwise be silent to be heard’ (James, 2001, p. 255). The study is ethnographic in nature, as it occurs over an extended period of three years in the natural, real-life working environment of the TAs (O’Toole & Beckett, 2010).

The author’s role in this study during the observation period was as an ethnographic fieldworker. Although the author sat unobtrusively in classrooms or other locations taking field notes of TA interactions with students and teachers, the author was not a detached observer but an engaged, interested co-participant in the classroom (Geertz, 1973, cited in Gomm, 2004). As an ethnographic researcher, the author was attempting to construct meaning from the perspectives of the TAs, class teachers, supervisors and school leaders within their working environment and to develop meaning through their experiences and practices.
A case study approach allows the exploration of the interrelationships and multiple perspectives of key school stakeholders pertaining to the role, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs. Accordingly, a case study approach is the most appropriate for this study because it:

- facilitates the conveying of experience of actors and stakeholders as well as the experience of studying the case. It can enhance the readers’ experience with the case. It does this largely with narratives, and situational descriptions of case activity, personal relationships and group interpretation (Stake, 2000, p. 454).

The case study approach enables the researcher to ‘catch the complexity and situatedness of behaviour’ and ‘to present and represent reality’, giving readers a sense of ‘being there’ (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 129). In addition, the case study methodology enables the researcher to focus on a particular phenomenon (Yin, 2003b), which in this case includes TAs and their roles, qualifications, skills and training needs, as well as the relationships between participants within settings (Denscombe, 2007).

Five characteristics of case study inquiry have been applied to this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 2000). First, the research takes place in a natural setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denscombe, 2007) at four school sites where TAs are employed to provide support to students with disabilities and learning difficulties. TAs were observed in a variety of different settings at each school site, such as classrooms, staff rooms, the general office, the library and playgrounds. Observing TAs in different settings within schools helped the researcher gain a deep understanding of the multi-faceted role of a TA, as well as the complexity of their roles.

Second, the research relied on the professional knowledge of the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to the human-as-instrument as a characteristic of case study methodology, whereby the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering data and
considering the voice and perspective of the participants, as well as the interactions between them. Observations were conducted over 39 hours at the school sites, including informal discussions with TAs and teachers in classrooms, and in staffrooms before and after the observations, to clarify and confirm the data collected.

Third, *multiple perspectives* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 2000) were sought in Stage 1 from TAs, class teachers and school leaders to gain balance and variety and learn more about TAs through the narratives of the participants (Stake, 2000). Additional participants—for example, business managers—were included in the study in subsequent stages as their involvement in the recruitment and supervision of TAs became apparent during Stage 2. To further develop understanding, the perspective of administrators in ACT ETD, who contribute to policies concerning the employment and deployment of TAs, was sought during Stage 4. On hearing about the training being conducted for TAs during Stage 3, a VET at the CIT contacted the researcher. She was also interviewed during Stage 4 to provide the perspective of a vocational educator of TAs.

Together with multiple perspectives, the strength of case study research lies in the use of multiple sources of data collection. In this study, data were collected via focus groups, observations, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, field notes and memos, which provided rich and varied data that enabled a detailed understanding, resulting in a ‘thick description’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Examining multiple cases enabled a thorough understanding of the role of TAs at each school, and the ‘thick description’ of their daily working lives led to an understanding of what it would be like to be a TA and to experience the world from their point of view (Geertz, 1973). As multiple cases were examined, multiple perspectives were obtained and multiple data collection tools were used (Merriam, 1998). The findings are robust, as the multiple cases corroborate each other in cross-case
synthesis. The following chapters describe the multiple perspectives of the participants, demonstrating the thick description through the accounts of participants in the findings.

*Building tacit knowledge* of a context or situation is the fourth characteristic of this case study methodology. Tacit knowledge is knowledge that is felt or intuitive—not necessarily articulated (Charmaz, 2006b)—and that captures the nuances of multiple perspectives and interactions between participants in different settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 2005). The author’s own experiences as a school administrator employing and working with TAs enabled her to capture and make sense of what was happening at each site. Multiple perspectives were captured during 39 hours of observations at the different school sites by observing TAs working with students and class teachers. Excerpts of interviews presented in future chapters also capture these perspectives.

*Establishing trustworthiness* is the fifth characteristic of this case study methodology. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is established through *prolonged engagement, persistent observation* and *triangulation*. Trustworthiness is the belief that the findings of a study are ‘worth paying attention to’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). In this study, trustworthiness is achieved through prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation.

Prolonged engagement is demonstrated by spending sufficient time undertaking an investigation. Prolonged engagement occurred because the study was conducted over three years, with 39 hours of observations conducted across three sites: approximately 22 hours of interviews were conducted at four sites; 10 hours of Preliminary TA Training (PTAT) were designed by the researcher and delivered to seven TAs; and 10 hours of TA Training (TAT) were prepared and delivered to 27 TAs. Confidence in the research findings is established when extensive and prolonged engagement has occurred.
Persistent observation occurred, allowing the researcher to establish trustworthiness through the identification of the core characteristics of the issue being researched. Persistent observation occurred in three sites over two years. As the qualifications, skills and training required to perform in the role became apparent over time, the context of the observation changed, resulting in a deeper understanding of the overall issues.

Triangulation is used to establish trustworthiness in order to ‘validate the findings in terms of their accuracy and authenticity’ (Denscombe, 2007, p. 138). Triangulation uses multiple perceptions to clarify and corroborate meaning and to verify the repeatability of an observation or interpretation (Stake, 2005; Zuber-Skerritt, 1996). Meaning is clarified by identifying different ways in which the case is seen, and triangulation helps to identify different realities for different participants (Stake, 2005). Triangulation occurred when data from the four sites gathered over three years converged, providing evidence to support the findings. These converging lines of evidence helped make the findings robust (Yin, 2012) and trustworthy. In addition, multiple participants and research methods were employed to collect the data. The multiple participants contributed their different perspectives, enabling different realities to be identified, examined and questioned (Stake, 2000). Figure 3.1 demonstrates how trustworthiness was established.
To further develop trustworthiness, credibility is achieved when evidence from different sources about the same events is triangulated (Gomm, 2004). For example, credibility was achieved through the use of multiple sources and types of evidence to address research questions, as well as through data triangulation and multiple perspectives. Prolonged engagement at each site also helped build credibility, as intimate familiarity with the sites was developed due to the range, number and depth of observations conducted (Charmaz, 2005). Credibility was also achieved through coding and pattern-matching data to ensure that the findings and interpretations derived from the data were transparent (Cohen et al., 2011).

The research relied on member checking for data validation to ensure the accuracy of reporting the voices of the participants. Transcripts from interviews were returned to participants to ensure that what was said was being accurately reported. Transcripts of
Interviews were member checked for accuracy by 15 out of 24 participants. Two people queried transcripts and requested changes. After these amendments, the records were accepted as accurate. Informal member checking occurred during conversations with participants through questioning responses for clarification to ensure that emerging theories were accurate.

This section has demonstrated that widely accepted characteristics of case study methodology are evident throughout this study. Different meanings and perspectives of the multiple participants regarding the role of TAs were examined with ‘as little disruption to the natural setting as possible’ (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). The experiences, stories and interpretations of all participants were emphasised to give a voice to TAs (which is omitted in most research studies), and participants were observed and interviewed in their natural settings to make sense of, and interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings that the different participants brought to the settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Trustworthiness has been achieved through prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation, and credibility has been demonstrated through trustworthiness and member checking.

3.3 Research Design

The design of a case study is the logical sequence that emerges and connects the research questions and collected data to the analysis and conclusions drawn from the findings, which results in a chain of evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research design connects the researcher to the chosen sites, participants and the existing body of knowledge in the field (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

This study presents the multiple and divergent perspectives of the key stakeholders at each site. A further perspective was gained during Stage 3 from TAs employed at various ACT schools who participated in a series of training sessions designed specifically for TAs by the researcher. Their perspective validated and added to the data being collected to
develop themes. Initially, the supervisors of TAs were not included as key participants. It had been assumed that school leaders (i.e. deputy principals or principals) would be TAs’ supervisors. In Stage 2, this assumption was proven to be incorrect when it was found that the school business manager was usually the supervisor of TAs given that TAs are classified as non-teaching, administrative staff. Once this was revealed, TA supervisors were also included to ensure their perspective was heard. (In large schools, if a school leader, such as a learning support teacher, is employed, this school leader is the supervisor of TAs. This was the case in one of the schools in this study.)

An emergent design was adopted based on grounded theory to uncover the multiple perspectives and realities of the participants, to develop understandings and to generate a thick description (Stake, 2006). The emergent design was refined as the study proceeded, influencing the final research questions and methods of data collection while maintaining the focus of the research on the roles, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs. Figure 3.2 displays the research design and is followed by an explanation of the four stages.

Figure 3.2 shows the four stages of this study, including the sites, participants, contexts for data collection, methods of data collection and analysis, and the six emergent themes.
3.3.1 Stage 1: Mapping the terrain.

In this stage, a preliminary case study of one mainstream school in the ACT—Scrivener School—was conducted. The purpose of this stage was to understand the roles, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs and to determine and justify the need for a wider study. The key participants in this stage were seven TAs, 22 class teachers and two...
school leaders, including one principal. Data were collected using focus group interviews, memos and semi-structured interviews. PTAT, consisting of ten hours of training, was designed and delivered by the researcher to determine whether specific training made a difference to TAs’ skills and knowledge, as well as their ability to provide learning support. Topics for PTAT were suggested by TAs, class teachers and school leaders during focus group interviews. The findings from Stage 1 helped to determine the research questions and research design for Stage 2.

3.3.2 Stage 2: Digging deeper.

In Stage 2, three further case studies were completed at Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Molonglo schools. Multiple cases were studied in this stage to provide a broader array of evidence and to allow the issues identified in Stage 1 to be explored more intensely (Yin, 2012). This stage investigated the perspective of all stakeholder groups across the three sites in order to understand the various duties of TAs and how the context affected that role. The participants included eight TAs, 48 class teachers, three supervisors of the TAs and nine school leaders. From these participants, a smaller group of key participants emerged. This group comprised six TAs, six class teachers, three principals and three supervisors of TAs. These 18 key participants were involved in Stages 2, 3 and 4. The data collection methods in Stage 2 included questionnaires, observations, memos and field notes.

3.3.3 Stage 3: Shifting sands.

Stage 3 aimed to provide targeted training for TAs in a series of five two-hour TAT sessions. TAs, class teachers and school leaders suggested topics for TAT in questionnaires completed during Stage 2. It aimed to determine whether training TAs made a difference to their skills and knowledge, as well as their ability to provide learning support. The participants in this stage were the eight TAs from the multiple sites examined in Stage 2 and 19 TAs from other ACT ETD schools. Throughout Stage 3, observations of TAs
working with students and teachers continued to be conducted in classrooms. Data were collected using questionnaires, observations, field notes and memos.

3.3.4 Stage 4: Planting seeds for sustainability.

Stage 4 aimed to develop a greater understanding of the roles, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs from the multiple perspectives of the key stakeholders; evaluate the effect of TAT sessions on TA practice; identify factors that may affect the ability of TAs to perform in their role; and evaluate the study. The key participants were six TAs, six class teachers, four supervisors of TAs and four principals from the four sites selected for the study. In addition, interviews were conducted with three staff from the ACT ETD and one VET from the CIT in order to gain policy perspectives in relation to funding for TAs, the recruitment and deployment of TAs, and information about the Certificate III Learning Support course taught at the CIT. Data were collected using observations, semi-structured interviews, memos and field notes.

3.3.5 Methodological assumptions.

A framework, or a set of propositions or statements, was developed to help guide the research (Yin, 2003a; Stake, 1995). Having been a class teacher and a school leader in a variety of schools, the author has brought personal knowledge and an understanding of the roles, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs to this research. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the author’s teaching career commenced, TAs did not work in classrooms. They were unqualified staff employed in schools to provide administrative support to teachers, such as ordering teaching supplies, copying learning materials, passing on messages for teachers and students, typing notes for parents and putting up displays of children’s work. However, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, TAs began to move into classrooms as their function changed to a support role, initially to assist teachers in the classroom and then to assist students—particularly students with disabilities—as a more
inclusive approach to education was adopted. Although their role changed, there was no expectation that they acquire a qualification to perform in this new role. When planning this study, a training component was included because it was assumed that TAs wanted training and that training would make a difference to their performance in their role. This assumption proved partially correct.

From 1995 to 2005, the author was a school leader—deputy principal—with the responsibility to apply for grants to fund the employment of TAs, recruit TAs, arrange the TA timetable, and monitor and supervise the performance of TAs. As a result of this experience, when commencing this study, the author assumed that TAs in all schools would be supervised by a school leader such as the deputy principal or principal. This assumption was incorrect but not realised until Stage 2; consequently, additional stakeholders—primarily business managers who supervise TAs—were included in the study.

3.3.6 Time frame.

This study took place in four stages over a three-year period. Figure 3.3 provides a visual representation of the timeframe in which this study was conducted. Stage 1 was conducted during the 2009 school year (February to November), allowing analysis of the data and the finalisation of research questions and appropriate research methods for further investigations. Stages 2, 3 and 4 were conducted over the following two years.
### Stage 1: Mapping the Terrain, 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Research method and duration</th>
<th>February–April</th>
<th>May–July</th>
<th>August–November</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>4 Focus Groups—7 TAs; 22 class teachers and 2 school leaders, 1 hour each group&lt;br&gt;TA training—7 TAs, 10 hours&lt;br&gt;7 semi-structured interviews with TAs, 1/2 hour each</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Stage 2: Digging Deeper, 2011–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Research method and duration</th>
<th>February–April</th>
<th>May–July</th>
<th>August–October</th>
<th>November–January</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Molonglo</td>
<td>64 questionnaires, 30 minutes&lt;br&gt;8 TAs; 48 class teachers; 9 school leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotter and Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>6 TAs&lt;br&gt;6 class teachers; observations, 20 hours total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Stage 3: Shifting Sand, 2011–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Research method and duration</th>
<th>February–April</th>
<th>May–July</th>
<th>August–October</th>
<th>November–January</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TA Training Sessions held at the University of Canberra; Cotter, Molonglo and Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>21 TAs, 10 hours total training&lt;br&gt;8 questionnaires&lt;br&gt;Observations, 8 hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Stage 4: Planting Seeds for Sustainability, 2011–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Research method and duration</th>
<th>February–April</th>
<th>May–July</th>
<th>August–October</th>
<th>November–January</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotter, Molonglo, Murrumbidgee and Scrivener, ACT ETD and CIT</td>
<td>22 interviews, 1 hour each; 6 TAs, 6 class teachers, 4 school leaders; 4 supervisors of TAs; 3 administrators; 1 vocational teacher.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotter, Molonglo and Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Observations, 19 hours; 6 TAs and 6 class teachers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotter, Molonglo, Murrumbidgee and Scrivener</td>
<td>Field notes and memos—continuous&lt;br&gt;Data analysis—continuous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.3: Gantt chart—timeframe for this study.
3.4 Data Collection

Charmaz’ (2006) Grounded Theory was used as a framework to collect and analyse data. Accordingly, data were collected and analysed in a recursive and iterative manner during all 4 stages to “construct theories grounded in the data themselves” (Charmaz, 2006, p2). To strengthen the validity of findings and to build the theory, a multiple method approach to data collection was employed. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) when utilising a grounded theory approach “different kinds of data give the analyst different views or vantage points from which to understand” (p. 65) the phenomenon under investigation. Data were collected from the participants, incorporating three key principles of case study data collection: using multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database and maintaining a chain of evidence (Yin, 2003). Collecting multiple sources of evidence from multiple participants at multiple sites and creating a case study database created a ‘chain of evidence’ (Yin, 2009, pp. 122–123, as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 295), so another researcher could track each step of the case study from its inception to its conclusion, enabling the study to be replicated.

Data were collected from the participants during different stages of the study using six distinct case study tools or research methods: focus groups, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes and memos. When developing grounded theory, using a variety of research methods is recommended by Glaser & Strauss (1967) as “there are no limits to the techniques of data collection, the way they are used, or the types of data acquired” (p.65). The variety of research methods enabled a ‘thick description’ of the multiple cases (Geertz, 1973) to be developed, as well as to triangulate the data to strengthen trustworthiness, validity and credibility of the research project. The research methods helped the researcher to “arrive at a theory suited to its supposed uses” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). Different data collection methods were more appropriate for different
stages of the study in order to interpret the phenomenon under investigation. Observations provided the richest source of data as what was seen could be queried and explained during informal discussions held with TAs immediately following observations. Data collected from observations was coded immediately following observations and memos were written of positive, negative or intriguing events. Questions arising from observations were also noted. Semi-structured interviews were the final research tool used to verify theories and to ensure data saturation had occurred as no new ideas surfaced. Table 3.1 displays the research method used at each site, as well as the number of participants.

Table 3.1:

Research Methods, Participants and Total Number of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Research methods</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>TAs</td>
<td>Focus group interviews</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes and memos</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group interviews</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes and memos</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leaders, including principals</td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus group interviews</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes and memos</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA supervisors</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes and memos</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning for TAs at University of Canberra</td>
<td>TAs</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes and memos</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAT at the University of Canberra</td>
<td>Class teachers</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT EDT</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six data collection methods were used during different stages of the study. These methods are now explained and justified as appropriate tools for this study.
3.4.1 Focus group interviews.

Focus group interviews were selected as a research method during Stage 1 because they are ‘inexpensive to conduct and often produce rich data that are cumulative and elaborative; they can be stimulating for respondents and so aid in recall; and their format is flexible’ (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 705). In addition, focus groups allow participants to discuss topics among themselves, which helps to develop an understanding of the views and opinions being expressed (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996). Focus groups were also appropriate because time was limited to one staff meeting and the researcher was trying to develop a broad understanding of the issues perceived by the participants. Two focus group interviews were conducted with TAs and two were conducted with class teachers and school leaders. One TA focus group comprised four TAs and the other group comprised three TAs. The class teachers and school leaders were interviewed in two focus groups comprising 11 teachers and one school leader in each group. Focus group interviews were conducted during the preliminary case study at Scrivener only.

The questions used to guide the focus group interviews were:

1. What is the role of a TA in your school?
2. What qualifications and skills do TAs need to do their job well?
3. What training do you think TAs should receive that would add to their skills and help them to undertake their responsibilities?

Responses to the questions were transcribed and returned for clarification. If responses were unclear, the interviewer asked additional, unstructured questions for clarification. The data were transcribed, categorised and then returned to the school for ‘member checking’ (Kuzel & Like, 1991, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) to ensure that their opinions were accurately represented.
Table 3.2:

*Focus Group Interviews: Site and Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study site</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>TAs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class teachers</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School leaders, including principal</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.2 *Questionnaires.*

Questionnaires were selected as a research method for Stages 2 and 3 to enable participants to respond to a written set of questions in order to provide a level of ‘consistency and precision’ (Denscombe, 2007, p. 153). Questionnaires were also selected as a research method as they are an efficient way to collect data enabling many more respondents to contribute than would be possible to interview (Oppenheim, 1992). To collect demographic data pertaining to the participants, closed questions were used. Open-ended questions linked directly to the research questions. Participants were asked to identify the roles, qualifications, skills and training needs required by TAs in their workplaces. Open-ended questions were used to allow participants to freely write their responses (Cohen et al., 2011) which were then used to guide observations in Stages 2, 3 and 4 and to prepare TAT sessions in Stage 3.

Questionnaires were distributed during Stages 2 and 3 to collect data from TAs, class teachers and school leaders at the three school sites and at the TAT sessions (see Appendix 2). Three questionnaires were prepared for three different groups of participants: TAs, class teachers and school leaders, including principals. A total of 72 questionnaires were completed. During Stage 2, questionnaires were completed by key participants at Cotter, Molonglo and Murrumbidgee. In total, 24 per cent of TAs employed at these sites completed a questionnaire and 70 per cent of class teachers and school leaders completed a
questionnaire. During Stage 3, TAs who attended TAT sessions were also asked to complete a questionnaire. About half (56 per cent) of the TAs who attended the TAT sessions completed a questionnaire.

Table 3.3:

**Questionnaires: Sites and Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study sites</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>TAs</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Class teachers</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>School leaders, including principals</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAT sessions at the University of Canberra</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During a meeting with each principal, the researcher obtained permission to attend a staff meeting and inform all teachers and TAs about the research project. At Cotter and Molonglo, the research project was explained during a staff meeting held after school, and questionnaires were then distributed and completed. As TAs do not usually attend staff meetings, TAs at these two schools were given the questionnaires by their supervisors (the business managers) and returned the completed questionnaires to them. At Murrumbidgee, the principal misinterpreted the request to speak to all staff about the research project and instead arranged for the researcher to only speak to TAs. Questionnaires for the class teachers and school leaders were left with the principal at Murrumbidgee to distribute, complete and return to the principal. The researcher met with all TAs at Murrumbidgee on a pupil-free day at the beginning of the school year to explain the research project. TAs completed the questionnaires in their own time and returned them to the principal.

Questionnaires were completed by a higher percentage of participants when the researcher had the opportunity to meet the participants and explain the research project, as evidenced by the higher response rate from class teachers and school leaders at Cotter and Molonglo.
Molonglo, and from TAs at Murrumbidgee. Seven TAs who attended the TAT sessions also completed questionnaires. Table 3.4 presents the numbers and percentages of participants who completed questionnaires at each site.

Table 3.4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number and Percentages of Participants at Each Site</th>
<th>Who Completed Questionnaires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAs who completed questionnaire</td>
<td>% TAs who completed questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>4/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>2/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>2/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAT sessions at University of Canberra</td>
<td>7/19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.3 Semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as a research method because ‘richness’ of understanding can be achieved when the first-hand experiences of the interviewees are sought (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Semi-structured interviews were used to gain important insights and encourage open conversation, as interviews reveal ‘how case study participants construct reality and think about situations’ (Yin, 2012, p. 12). The semi-structured interviews, as ‘the main road to multiple realities’ (Stake, 1995, p. 64), were designed to elicit deeper understanding and meaning from the multiple perspectives of the case study participants. This method provided the depth, detail and richness to achieve ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973), as the information obtained was based on the first-hand experiences of the interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Stake, 1995). A set of guiding questions was prepared for each interview based on developing hypotheses and theories from observations and discussions with TAs, but the researcher elicited greater depth and
detail with follow-up questions based on participants’ initial responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Gaining insight into the actual meaning of situations witnessed during observations was an important outcome of the interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used to unlock and reveal the multiple views and realities of the experiences of TAs as perceived by the different participants. Observations and interviews complement each other as effective research methods because what has been observed can be confirmed or queried in an interview.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted during Stage 1 at Scrivener with seven TAs who attended the training sessions. The TAs met with the researcher during the school day in a small room arranged by the principal. The following questions guided the interviews:

- Can you identify any benefits that you, personally, have experienced from the training undertaken?
- Can you identify any ways in which you are now better able to help the teachers you support?
- Can you identify any ways in which you are now better able to help the students you support?
- What changes have you noticed since you have completed the training course?
- How do you feel about yourself now that you have completed the training course?

The questions served as a guide and TAs were encouraged to expand on their responses or elaborate on the effect of the training.

During Stage 4, all 24 key participants from Stages 2 and 3 were interviewed using a semi-structured format. Participants interviewed included six TAs, six class teachers, four supervisors of TAs, four principals, three staff from ACT ETD and one staff member from
the CIT. As these interviews were conducted two years into the study, the participants were well known to the interviewer and a rapport had been developed. The interviews ranged in duration from 35 to 90 minutes. Interview times were negotiated either via email or during a site visit to suit each participant. The two TAs at Cotter and the two TAs at Murrumbidgee asked to be interviewed together during their lunch break. All class teachers asked to be interviewed after school, but all TAs were interviewed during school hours. Supervisors and principals were also all interviewed during school hours. Interviews were audio-recorded with written permission from the participants, and they were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. After transcription, participants were sent a copy of their interview for veracity.

An interview guide with question suggestions was used as the basis for all interviews, and it varied slightly according to the participant being interviewed (see the guiding questions prepared for each participant group in Appendix 3). Topics for interviews were identified from the literature, responses to questionnaires and observations. Examples of topics covered included the role of a TA, duty statements for TAs, qualifications required by TAs, supervision of TAs, funding TA employment, TAT sessions and other training for TAs, challenges for TAs, challenges working with TAs and benefits of TAs.

Interviews were probing and helped to develop a deep understanding of the multiple and diverse experiences and perceptions of the participants. The researcher listened for, and explored, key words, ideas and themes using follow-up questions to encourage interviewees to expand on what was said that was significant to this research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Consequently, not all question topics prepared by the researcher were explored with all participants.

Table 3.5 shows the total number of participants who participated in semi-structured interviews throughout the study and the sites where these interviews were conducted.
Table 3.5:

_Semi-structured Interviews: Sites and Participants_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview sites</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>TAs</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Class teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>School leaders, including principals</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAT sessions at the University of Canberra</td>
<td>Supervisors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT ETD</td>
<td>ACT ETD staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIT</td>
<td>CIT teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.4 Observations.

Observations were selected as a case study method because they enabled a deep understanding of the different sites to develop (Stake, 1995). The researcher could witness events as they occurred, be present while the action was unfolding and thereby obtain important non-verbal evidence (Cohen et al., 2011). Following true qualitative research protocols, observations were held in the field in the participants’ natural settings. The research settings were observed in an unobtrusive manner. Observations were a useful method of data collection to corroborate data from questionnaires and enable comparisons between written questionnaires and observed practice.

Observations were conducted during Stages 2, 3 and 4. An observation guide, compiled from responses to questionnaires regarding the role undertaken by TAs in classrooms, was developed to record data systematically, to produce data that was consistent and to be alert to specific activities (see Appendix 4). Observations focused on the various roles undertaken by TAs and the different strategies employed by TAs when working to support students. During observations the researcher focused on the everyday experiences of the TAs seeking to confirm that what TAs, class teachers and school leaders
said was happening was really happening. Furthermore, observations focused on interactions and communications between TAs and class teachers, between TAs and other staff in the school, including school leaders, and between TAs and students. Time sampling was undertaken to identify how much time class teachers spent speaking to TAs about the tasks they would perform with students during each lesson (see Appendix 6). Observing these students in classrooms when TAs were not present would have strengthened emerging hypotheses however permission had not been sought for this. This would be an interesting study for future research.

Event sampling was undertaken to identify the different tasks TAs performed in their role at the different sites. In Stage 1, TAs at Scrivener kept a diary for four weeks of the tasks they were asked to perform. During observations conducted in Stages 2 and 3, the researcher noted when and if TAs performed the same tasks. Similarities and differences are presented in Appendix 5.

TAs were observed performing their daily duties in a variety of contexts in each school, including classrooms, staff rooms, school halls, a library, front offices, a science laboratory, during a walk around the school, on the oval and on the play equipment. Activities were observed such as whole-class lessons, small-group lessons, individual lessons and transitions between lessons.
Table 3.6:

*Settings Where TAs Were Observed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cotter</th>
<th>Murrumbidgee</th>
<th>Molonglo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms</td>
<td>Classrooms</td>
<td>Classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>School hall</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff room</td>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>Playground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front office</td>
<td>Gymnasium</td>
<td>Front office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal room adjacent to classroom</td>
<td>Science laboratory</td>
<td>Staff room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outside school grounds</td>
<td>Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School oval</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Front office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TA staff room</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During Stage 2, six TAs were observed at Cotter and Murrumbidgee. Due to leadership changes at Molonglo and despite many attempts, permission was not gained to conduct observations during Stage 2 at this site. At Cotter and Murrumbidgee, a total of 12 hours of observations were conducted during Stage 2. At this stage, the key TA participants had not been selected, so all TAs who provided permission were observed. At Cotter, the two key TAs observed prior to the TAT sessions became the key TA participants in this study. At Murrumbidgee, four TAs were observed, two of whom became the key TA participants in the study. The two TAs from Molonglo who attended the TAT sessions in Stage 3 became the key TA participants and were observed during Stage 3.

Table 3.7:

*Hours of Observations Conducted During Each Stage at Each Site*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Scrivener</th>
<th>Cotter</th>
<th>Murrumbidgee</th>
<th>Molonglo</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total hours</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During Stage 3, the six key TAs from all three sites attended the TAT training sessions and were observed during and between TAT sessions at their schools. A total of nine hours of observations were conducted at the school sites during this stage. The researcher observed strategies being used by TAs, including new strategies taught during TAT sessions, and whether they were being used effectively.

During Stage 4, while evaluating the effectiveness of training conducted in Stage 3, observations totalling 18 hours were conducted, or approximately six hours at each site. While shadowing the TAs, an attempt was made to observe as many situations as possible where TAs were used to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties in order to note the strategies they used and the range of tasks they performed. The observations focused on the TAs and their interactions and communications with students and school staff. Further data regarding the role of TAs and deployment models used was obtained through observations. The observation guide continued to be used to focus observations. A total of 39 hours of observations were conducted over two years. To confirm reliability of ideas and theories developing from observations, the researcher held informal discussions with TAs following each observation session.

### 3.4.5 Field notes.

Field notes were made during observations and analysed afterwards to determine what was seen, heard or sensed (Yin, 2012). Field notes were made of events as they happened and of occurrences of events, such as the amount of time teachers spent talking to TAs, where these discussions occurred and what they were about. Given that field notes of observations represent one interpretation of what is observed and are influenced by previous personal experiences and values, being objective was always a consideration.
At all stages, field notes were made during school visits to run focus groups, distribute questionnaires, meet principals and conduct observations. During all school visits, the researcher conducted informal interviews with TAs and class teachers to further develop an understanding of the role of TAs, to build and refine theories and explanations, and to develop a rapport and trust with the TAs and class teachers. These informal discussions were recorded in field notes.

Field notes were also made regarding discussions with TA supervisors when seeking permission to conduct observations. Field notes were written up soon after site visits, which enabled hypotheses to develop and questions for future visits and interviews to form.

3.4.6 Memos.

Memo-writing is essential when utilising a grounded theory approach to collect and analyse data. Memos were used to compare data as they were collected to ‘elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps’ (Charmaz, 2006a, p. 96). Memos were also made by the researcher to ‘log new thoughts as they arose and new possibilities in relation to the analysis of the data’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 295). Memos were made as reminders for future questions, to crystallise these questions and to make notes about the participants. Memos also noted suggestions for future training, directions to pursue, the researcher’s thoughts, questions to ask during observations and informal discussions, hunches, evolving theories and ideas. While PTAT was being conducted during Stage 1 and TAT sessions were being implemented during Stage 3, the researcher made notes based on observations of TAs during the training, comments made by TAs to the presenters and to other TAs, questions asked and knowledge displayed. For example, during one TAT workshop, TAs were discussing ideas to help with the behaviour management of students. One TA said that she is never asked her opinion by
the class teacher. The TA then said, ‘What would I know? I’m only a TA’. How this TA perceived herself in the hierarchy of a school raised questions about the status of TAs, which was further explored during interviews with TAs, class teachers, school leaders and supervisors.

3.4.7 Additional sources of data.

During Stage 1, PTAT was provided for the seven TA participants. Training provided an opportunity for the researcher to develop rapport and trust with the TAs. These sessions provided a rich source of data, as TAs were observed interacting with each other while participating in informal discussions. Five modules were prepared based on topics suggested by TAs, class teachers and school leaders during focus group interviews, and they were delivered during term two, 2009, on consecutive Friday afternoons from 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm. All TAs attended all sessions, as the PTAT was held during their normal working hours. The focus of each session is outlined below.

When analysing the data collected in this study during Stage 2, responses from questionnaires by TAs, class teachers and school leaders suggested that TAs needed, and would benefit from, training. Based on recommendations provided by participants, five training modules—called TAT—were delivered during Stage 3 for the TAs from the three key sites and for 19 TAs from other ACT Government primary schools. These training modules differed slightly from the PTAT conducted in 2009, as they were based on the needs of the TAs at Cotter, Molonglo and Murrumbidgee. Variations are noted below. The training sessions provided another rich source of data collection in the form of observations, field notes and memos. Informal discussions were held with TAs on topics such as their roles, qualifications, experiences, challenges and employment conditions and processes. The first four training modules were conducted at the University of Canberra from 3.30 pm to 5.30 pm over eight weeks during term two, 2011. The final module was
conducted during the June/July school holidays from 9.00 am to 11.00 am. At the end of every second training session, anonymous feedback was sought from the TAs (see Appendix 7). The content of the two different training programs is shown below.
# Module 1: How Learning Occurs and Reading Strategies
- The role of a TA
- How learning occurs
- Conditions necessary for learning
- Practical strategies to use when supporting students

# Module 2: Specific Disabilities
- Symptoms and behaviours associated with different disabilities
- Strategies to use when working with students with specific disabilities
- Behaviours associated with different disabilities
- Practical strategies linked to behaviours and specific disabilities

# Module 3: Behaviour Management
- Strategies to use when managing difficult behaviours
- ‘Speed Bumps’ as effective behaviour management strategies
- ‘LEARN’ as a framework for effective behaviour management

# Module 4: Literacy Skills and Strategies
- Literacy skill development—writing and spelling
- Strategies to use with writing and spelling

# Module 5: Numeracy Skills
- ‘Count Me In Too’ maths programme
- Key components of a balanced numeracy programme
- Strategies for mental computations

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4 In the ACT, ‘Count Me In Too’ is used to teach numeracy because it is ‘designed to assist teachers broaden their knowledge of how children learn mathematics by focusing on the strategies students use to solve arithmetic tasks’ (NSW Government Curriculum Support, 2010, p. 1).
TAT Sessions, June–July 2011
University of Canberra

**Module 1: Learning to Learn**
- Learning styles and how students learn
- Having a learning disability
- Sharing experiences with other TAs

**Module 2: Literacy Skill Development**
- Effective strategies for literacy skill development
- Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary as key components of an effective reading programme

**Module 3: ‘Can you Say that Again?’**
- Communication disorders
- Types of speech impairment and causes of speech difficulties
- Difficulties with speech and oral communication
- Strategies used with speech and language difficulties

**Module 4: Autism Spectrum Disorders**
- Autism Spectrum Disorders and needs of students with autism
- Effective strategies to use with autism spectrum disorders
- Social stories

**Module 5: Numeracy Strategies**
- Strands of a maths programme
- Commonly occurring maths errors—identification and correction
- Mental maths computations
- Effective strategies for maths

The two TA training programs differed as the needs of the TA groups varied. The TAs from Scrivener requested training on different disabilities—specifically, Autism Spectrum Disorders. Strategies for managing behaviours were requested by both groups of
TAs, but because only five modules could be provided, this module was omitted from the TAT sessions. Strategies to develop literacy and numeracy skills became the focus of the TAT sessions.

In addition, due to requests from TAs and class teachers, a module on helping with communication disorders was included for TAs participating in the TAT sessions. The focus also varied slightly depending on the presenter.

Data collection also occurred during informal discussions at school sites at recess and lunch time and while walking with TAs on playground duty.

3.5 Data Analysis

The grounded theory approach to data collection was the most appropriate for this study because it focused on human interactions where the researcher was investigating practical daily activities and routine situations from the participants’ point of view in their natural setting (Denscombe, 2007). In addition, methods used for data collection aimed to generate a theory from the perspective and context of the key participants (Birks & Mills, 2011). In this study, interactions between TAs and class teachers, students and other school staff were observed, queried and analysed while TAs performed in their role in their normal working environment. According to Charmaz (2006a), ‘grounded theory involves taking comparisons from data and reaching up to construct abstractions and simultaneously reaching down to tie these abstractions to data’ (p. 181). This involved thoroughly investigating the circumstances and experiences of the participants being studied to allow interpretations and theories to emerge. Theories then emerged and re-emerged in an iterative manner as the grounded theory developed.

The core tenets of a grounded theory approach were adopted in this study to collect and analyse the data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1994, p. 273), ‘Grounded Theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically
gathered and analysed’, while the role of the researcher is to ‘seek meaning in the data, probing beyond their superficial meanings’ (Denscombe, 2007, p. 102). Once the data are gathered and analysed, a set of relationships emerges among the data and categories, which offers ‘a plausible and reasonable explanation of the phenomenon under study’ (Moghaddan, 2006, cited in Cohen et al., 2011, p. 598). Grounded theory is also ‘dedicated to generating theories rather than testing theories’ (Denscombe, 2007, p. 89). Fieldwork is important when a grounded theory approach is adopted, as there is a need to link explanations to what occurs in the real world (Denscombe, 2007).

Four key features of a grounded theory approach are identified in this study (Cohen et al., 2011):

i) The theory is emergent rather than predefined.

Denscombe (2007) considers a grounded theory approach a ‘voyage of discovery’ (p. 90). In this study, while the researcher did embark on such a voyage, emerging theories were constructed based on ‘past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices’ (Charmaz, 2006a, p. 10). During data collection, emerging theories and hypotheses were tested and questioned against new and different emerging themes to allow theory construction to occur. During Stage 1, theories and hypotheses emerged that were further tested at multiple sites during Stages 2 and 3 of the study. Research focused on the interactions between key participants, TAs, class teachers, supervisors and school leaders at four specific sites (Denscombe, 2007). When key participants were interviewed during Stage 4, hypotheses were tested again using open-ended questions to ensure that the emerging theories and themes were grounded in the data.

ii) Theory emerges from the data.

Entering the field—the sites for this study—with an open mind and awareness of the researcher’s assumptions based on the researcher’s own previous experience (outlined
earlier in this chapter) allowed the data to present the theory. During all stages, data were collected in the field using different methods to ensure that all possible explanations for the phenomenon being investigated were exposed. In addition, data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously, allowing codes and categories to emerge and then be tested as more data were collected and analysed (Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987).

iii) Theory generation is a result of systematic data collection and analysis to seek patterns and theories waiting to be discovered.

Data collection was undertaken systematically in the field during all four stages at the four sites and during PTAT and TAT sessions. Data were analysed and coded throughout all stages as patterns, similarities, differences, variants and the unexpected were sought and questioned. While Stake (1995) claims that searching for patterns in the data is the key to developing an understanding of the data, which enables the grounded theory to emerge, Charmaz (2006a) believes that ‘coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data’ (p. 46). The sites for Stage 2 were deliberately selected after the data from Stage 1 were analysed. The sites were selected to enable another feature of a grounded theory approach—theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)—to occur because of their ‘relevance to emerging categories and concepts allowing comparisons and contrasts’ (Denscombe, 2007, p. 95). These comparisons and contrasts were against the site from Stage 1. Theoretical sampling continued until ‘theoretical saturation’ (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 177) occurred, ensuring credibility of the categories and concepts that were emerging into theories.

iv) Grounded theory is both inductive and deductive; it is iterative and close to the data that give rise to it.

Data were coded, categorised and compared from Stage 1. These codes and categories were revisited and revised when more data were collected from additional sites.
during Stages 2 and 3. The iterative process of questioning, reviewing, revisiting and revising data was continuous. It was a persistent process of comparing ideas on existing data to improve the emerging concepts and theories (Denscombe, 2007).

Data analysis revealed the complexities of the case studies, and cross-case syntheses and analyses enabled the findings from each individual case study to be highlighted (Yin, 2012). A constant comparison method was used to analyse the data collected (Merriam, 1998). The aim of a constant comparison method is to reach saturation of the data, which occurs when no new insights, relations, codes or categories are produced, even when new data are added (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Creswell, 2013). According to Birks and Mills (2011), a constant comparison process continues until a ‘grounded theory is fully integrated’ (p. 11). This process of constantly comparing data aids triangulation and trustworthiness of the data, as data are compared across a variety of sites and participants using a range of methods (Cohen et al., 2011).

Four stages of constant comparison (Cohen et al., 2011) were employed in this study:

i) **Comparing incidents and data that are applicable to each category.**

Data were coded, broken into segments, disassembled and then rearranged or reassembled to produce new ideas that explored similarities and differences across the four sites (Cohen et al., 2011). Coding provided an ‘analytic scaffold on which to build’ (Charmaz, 2005, p. 517, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) the grounded theory. Open coding occurred during the initial phase of coding (Charmaz, 2006a), with prescriptive labels assigned to chunks of data (Denscombe, 2007). These open codes were subject to change and revision as research progressed, more data were analysed and new codes emerged. Open coding revealed gaps in the data, so new sources of data were sought. One example of this occurred when participants kept referring to funding linked to TA
recruitment. An employee of ACT ETD was interviewed to gain an understanding of how TA recruitment is funded. As simultaneous data collection and analysis occurred, gaps in the data and knowledge could be filled.

ii) Integrating these categories and their properties.

As relationships emerged between codes, axial coding occurred to merge certain open codes that appeared to be more interesting and relevant to the study. Axial coding allowed fractured data from open coding to be brought back to a coherent whole (Charmaz, 2006a) and grouped into categories and subcategories. Emerging categories and subcategories resulted in more questions about situations observed, how they differed at the different sites, and how and why the experiences of the TAs at each site differed. Informal discussions with TAs helped clarify some issues, and understanding was further clarified during observations and interviews.

iii) Bounding the theory through delimitation when saturation takes place.

Once open codes had merged into axial codes and no further codes or categories emerged, theoretical sampling—an iterative process designed to ‘elaborate and refine categories’ (Charmaz, 2006a, p. 96), leading towards theory development—occurred until data saturation (Charmaz, 2006a) occurred in all categories. A point of saturation, or ‘theoretical sufficiency’ (Dey, 1999, p. 257), was reached, as nothing new could be added to the categories, ensuring that the categories were robust and credible. Data were then considered to be ‘grounded’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, cited in Creswell, 2013), as a solid foundation for the findings was established, adding to the validity of the research (Denscombe, 2007). The most crucial themes that help to explain the phenomenon concerning the roles, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs in mainstream schools then emerged.

iv) Setting out the theory.
The themes that emerged were:

1. *challenges for TAs*: anything that the TAs thought constrained them in carrying out their duties

2. *challenges for other stakeholders*: challenges that confront class teachers, school leaders and supervisors as a result of employing TAs

3. *qualifications*: formal qualifications such as a Certificate or a Diploma that a TA may gain

4. *skills*: knowledge and personal qualities that TAs require in their role

5. *training*: instruction that TAs receive while attending workshops or courses, which may be site-specific

6. *benefits*: advantages of employing TAs and benefits of being a TA.

An example of the process of constant comparison follows, as it was applied in this study. Examples of open codes are behaviour management, planning lessons, collecting resources, preparing a teaching space, playground supervision and helping in the general office. These open codes were later subsumed under the axial code ‘The Role of a TA’, which became a core category that merged with other core categories to form the theme ‘Challenges for TAs’. Other open and axial codes and categories that emerged during the data analysis are presented in Table 3.8.

The process of identifying themes involved managing, organising, categorising, storing and retrieving data. The data management tool Nvivo9 was used to produce a database or ‘chain of evidence’ (Yin, 2009, p. 122–123, cited in Cohen et al., 2011, p. 295). When using Nvivo9, nodes (another name for codes) are created into which data are coded. An advantage of using a data storage tool such as Nvivo9 is that nodes can be assigned to each site and each participant, allowing data to be linked to specific sites and specific participants. Patterns, similarities and differences that emerge can then be analysed by site
or by participant and between sites and between participants. Data collected from multiple research methods were initially collated into nodes, or open codes, that emerged during the data analysis. As data were collected, they were analysed, coded and assigned to a node. These early nodes grew as additional data were collected and new codes emerged. As more open codes were revealed, axial codes, or higher order nodes, were created, which then merged into categories or themes. Hypotheses or theories then developed to describe the complex interrelationships of the different codes and emerging themes (Creswell, 2013), thus advancing the understanding of the participants and their experiences. These will be examined in detail in the following chapters. Six clear themes arose when the data were analysed and coded:

1. challenges for TAs
2. challenges for other stakeholders
3. qualifications
4. skills
5. training
6. benefits.

These six themes emerged from open codes that were categorised into axial codes.

The original nodes or open codes, the axial codes and the emerging themes are displayed in Table 3.8.
Table 3.8:

**Codes and Themes That Emerged During Data Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPEN CODES</th>
<th>AXIAL CODES</th>
<th>THEMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour management; Preparation of teaching resources; Integration of students into mainstream; Photocopying; Planning lessons; Preparing the teaching environment; Writing a program for a student; Mandatory reporting; Assisting with literacy and numeracy; Helping groups of students; Helping individual students; Supporting students on I.L.P; Toiling; Helping with social skills and coping skills.</td>
<td>The Role of a Teacher Assistant</td>
<td>CHALLENGES FOR TEACHER ASSISTANTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duty statements; Induction program; Salary; Career pathways; Job security; Orientation program; Recruitment of TAs; Supervision; Feedback; Lack of a voice; Hours of employment; Models of deployment; Undervalued and underutilised.</td>
<td>Conditions of Employment and Development - System Challenges and School Challenges</td>
<td>CHALLENGES FOR OTHER STAKEHOLDERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With supervisors; With ACT E.T.As; With teachers; School meetings; Email access; I.L.P meetings.</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism; Different expectations; Relationships; Power struggles and confidence issues; Timetabling and planning time; Lack of initiative; Relief TAs and relief teachers; Duty of care; Entrenched TAs; Lack of training for teachers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificates III and IV in learning support or disability support; First Aid; Lack of qualifications.</td>
<td></td>
<td>QUALIFICATIONS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different stakeholder groups at different sites perceived the importance of the above codes and themes differently. These six key themes are analysed in-depth in the following chapters.

3.6 Sites

The four sites selected for this study use the pseudonyms Scrivener, Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Molonglo. They were chosen because of their involvement in the National Partnership (NP) initiative, which is a Commonwealth Government scheme that provides additional funds to schools with a low SES, including a higher-than-average number of Indigenous students or a higher-than-average number of students enrolled from a language background other than English.

The NP ‘aims to improve student engagement and educational attainment and to overcome some of the barriers to high educational achievement in these communities’ (ACT DET, 2009c, p. 3). The Australian Commonwealth Government is providing $1.5 billion over seven years (2008–2015) to support education reform in NP schools, with the funding matched by co-investments from state and territory governments (DEEWR, 2008). This equates to an additional $6 million in funding over a seven-year period for the four schools used in this study. These funds have been used to employ a literacy and numeracy field officer in each school who supports teachers in aligning pedagogy with national literacy and numeracy strategy initiatives. Funds have also been used to employ TAs to support students with disabilities or learning difficulties.

The four sites employ a total of 41 TAs, but each site deploys them using different models of support. At Scrivener and Cotter, TAs are deployed in units of up to four classes to provide individual support to students who qualify for funding under the ACT Student Disability Criteria (ACT Department of Education and Training, 2010). Some TAs at Scrivener also provide one-on-one support to individual students. At Murrumbidgee, TAs
are deployed using a withdrawal model of support. In addition, an itinerant model of deployment is utilised as TAs move from class to class, student to student and teacher to teacher. At Molonglo, one TA is deployed to a preschool class and one TA is deployed to one class and one teacher. An itinerant model of TA deployment is also utilised at Molonglo.

Despite pedagogical initiatives, increased funding to NP schools and employing large numbers of TAs to support students, students’ results in national literacy and numeracy tests from the four schools continue to be lower than the Australian average in most strands tested. One indicator used to determine the success of NP initiatives is school performance and rankings in national literacy and numeracy tests (NAPLAN). The following tables were compiled from NAPLAN results in 2011 and 2012 to demonstrate the comparative rankings of the schools in this study. In the ACT, 92 schools participate in NAPLAN tests, and while the overall rankings of the four schools in this study continue to be low, some improvements have been made since the introduction of the additional funding. At Molonglo, all Year 3 students’ NAPLAN rankings improved between 2011 and 2012, while at Cotter, all rankings other than reading declined. At Scrivener, all rankings other than grammar declined. At the time of writing, no analysis has been conducted by the schools to identify why these results have occurred.
Table 3.9:

**Comparative Rankings in the ACT of Schools at the Year 3 Level, 2011–2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Scrivener</th>
<th>Cotter</th>
<th>Molonglo</th>
<th>Murrumbidgee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>70 ↓</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>88 ↓</td>
<td>63 ↓</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>89 ↓</td>
<td>61 ↓</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>74 ↓</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>82 ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>82 ↓</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the Year 5 level, when compared with 92 schools in the ACT, the four schools in this study perform poorly. Comparative rankings indicate that the school rankings declined across nearly all strands tested between 2011 and 2012. At the time of writing, no analysis has been conducted by the schools to identify why these results have occurred.

Table 3.10:

**Comparative Rankings in the ACT of Schools at the Year 5 Level, 2011–2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Scrivener</th>
<th>Cotter</th>
<th>Molonglo</th>
<th>Murrumbidgee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>87 ↓</td>
<td>79 ↓</td>
<td>90 ↓</td>
<td>86 ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>85 ↓</td>
<td>79 ↓</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>74 ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>89 ↓</td>
<td>79 ↓</td>
<td>91 ↓</td>
<td>74 ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>80 ↓</td>
<td>91 ↓</td>
<td>86 ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>88 ↓</td>
<td>69 ↓</td>
<td>93 ↓</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be concluded from these tables that despite the additional funding and support from TAs to improve students’ learning outcomes, the four schools continue to perform poorly when compared with other mainstream primary schools in the ACT. This leads to
the question of whether the provision of TA support makes a difference or whether there is a connection between TA employment, their level of qualifications and skills, and their ability to provide learning support. Indeed, the results also raise questions regarding the quality and appropriateness of the programs on which the additional funding is being spent.

3.6.1 Scrivener School.

Scrivener was the site for the Stage 1 preliminary case study, which was conducted in 2009. Scrivener opened in 1975 and by 2011, 350 students were enrolled from preschool to Year 6 (see Table 3.11). The majority of students live locally, within a seven kilometre radius of the school. There are seven TAs employed at Scrivener to provide learning support to students with disabilities. Two TAs are employed in the preschool, while the other five are employed in the primary school. The number of TAs employed varies depending on the number of students enrolled who qualify for TA funding. Approximately 25 per cent of students receive additional funding based on a disability or learning difficulty. These students are included in mainstream classes because there are no learning support units attached to the school. These students access the mainstream curriculum with support from TAs.

More than 20 per cent of the school population comes from a language background other than English. Families with students enrolled at the school speak a total of 22 different languages as their first language, including Arabic, Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese. Since 2012, the school has incorporated an Intensive English Centre into the structure, which enables students from a background other than English to improve their English skills before entering mainstream classes. The interaction of these children and families from diverse cultures has enriched the school community and provides the school with a strong multicultural ethos. Indigenous students enrolled at the school account for 5 per cent of the school population, which is higher than the average Indigenous representation in the
mainstream ACT population (1.5 per cent). Due to its low SES status combined with a high proportion of Indigenous students, the high number of students from a background other than English and the high percentage of students with disabilities, Scrivener receives additional funding in the NP scheme to participate in reforms that focus on making a difference to students’ educational outcomes.

The school is an open-plan design with combined teaching units at each year level, and team teaching is encouraged. Support is also provided for students who have English as a Second Language (ESL).

Table 3.11:

Demographics: Scrivener School, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class teachers</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language background other than English</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2012)

The school’s principles are based upon the Fish Philosophy: ‘Be there; choose your attitude; make their day; and play’. These principles are explicitly taught through social skills programs and are embedded in the school culture. The school is also recognised as a strong advocate for the use of restorative practices to reconnect and nurture relationships. The school curriculum is informed by the Australian Curriculum, with a strong focus on numeracy and literacy. Dedicated blocks of time are set aside each day for the explicit teaching of literacy and numeracy skills, with TA assistance provided during these sessions.

As a result of the research findings in the preliminary case study, changes occurred regarding TA deployment within the school. In 2009, TAs at Scrivener were assigned to
individual students. Using a timetable based on funding allocated for support, TAs moved from class to class to assist students. When the principal and business manager were interviewed during Stage 4 in 2012, TAs were deployed differently; they were deployed to units comprising four classes and only moved between these four classes to support funded students. The principal believed that this model was more effective, although more expensive.

TAs at Scrivener related well to the class teachers. They spent their breaks in the staff room with the teachers and were assigned to duties on the playground with class teachers. TAs did not have their own computers and were unable to access emails unless they used computers in the business office. Arrangements for PTAT conducted in Stage 1 were made via the principal, who allowed TAs to be absent from the school on Friday afternoons from 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm for five weeks. This indicates the value that the principal placed on improving TAs’ knowledge and skills.

TAs at Scrivener are recruited by the principal and business manager, and they are supervised by the business manager, who conducts interviews, prepares contracts and undertakes performance reviews. Students at Scrivener refer to TAs by their Christian name, although the class teachers are referred to by their title and surname. Half of the TAs live in the local area and either have or have had children at Scrivener.

When the researcher returned to Scrivener during Stage 4 of the study in 2012, six of the seven TAs involved in the preliminary case study in 2009 were still employed at the school. The principal commented that their employment was more stable than that of the class teachers.

3.6.2 Cotter School.

Cotter is a mainstream primary school that is located in north-west Canberra. It consists of a preschool for students from four years of age and a primary school for students
aged five to 12 years. It opened in 1989 and currently employs 11 TAs (see Table 3.12). The number employed varies depending on the enrolment of students with disabilities and the funding that accrues for these students. In 2011, 3 per cent of the 428 students enrolled at Cotter had a learning difficulty or disability. Most of the students live locally.

The school community comprises a range of nationalities and backgrounds, including students from Vietnam, Sudan, China and the Philippines, and a high percentage (36 per cent) of students have English as their second language. Students from more than 28 different countries attend the school. An Indonesian language program is offered in Years 3–6. Cultural diversity is valued, and the school promotes the values of respect, tolerance and excellence. Due not only to its low SES status, but also its high linguistic diversity, Cotter receives additional funding via the NP scheme to participate in reforms that focus on making a difference to the educational outcomes of students. TAs provide learning support to students from language backgrounds other than English, as well as to students with disabilities.

The school has a unique design, with separate buildings containing teaching spaces, administration offices, library and general purpose facilities. It has been designed to cater for 460 children in four open-plan learning units. TAs are deployed to support students in all learning units, as all classes are inclusive mainstream classes. Each unit has four open teaching spaces, a practical room for art and craft, a withdrawal room for small-group work, a storeroom and a staff office, as well as a small common area. Students in Years 5 and 6 can participate in an instrumental music program, and the two school choirs regularly perform at local events in the ACT.
Table 3.12:

Demographics: Cotter School, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAs</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Teachers</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language background other than English</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2012)

TAs at Cotter are recruited and supervised by the business manager, who conducts interviews, prepares contracts and undertakes performance reviews. There are nine TAs employed at Cotter to provide classroom support for students with disabilities or learning difficulties, and two TAs are assigned to work in the preschool. Their weekly timetable is prepared by the principal or deputy principal. TAs are deployed into classes based on the number of hours of funded support allocated to students per the ACT Student Disability Criteria. TAs may be assigned to one unit and class teacher for a morning session and then to another unit and class teacher for an afternoon session. They do not remain with the same class or same teacher for the entire day. TAs know which students they are assigned to support and work individually with these students. Sometimes non-funded students ask for help and TAs willingly provide assistance. When the class teacher gives instructions to the entire class, TAs sit strategically between or beside students whom they know might be disruptive. They provide relief at lunch time for TAs who work in the preschool. At recess time, they spend their break in the staff room with the teachers unless they are on playground duty.

Two of the six TAs volunteered to be key participants in this study. One of these TAs has school-aged children, but her children do not attend Cotter. Neither of the key TAs live in the local area. TAs and class teachers at Cotter are referred to by their title and
surname. TAs at Cotter do not have ready access to computers or emails. They can use computers in the business office during their break times to access emails if they are not being used by office staff.

The principal at Cotter considers that the TAs’ role is to focus on:

first and foremost, the student, then the teacher then the broader family, the family dynamic. That is the key. Student management links to the relationships established.

Having an ability to work without really close supervision, having initiative and an ability to extend the ILP are key skills needed by a TA.

She also noted that in recent years, ‘TAs have had to do preschool supervision as well which just complicates things for us all’.

3.6.3 Murrumbidgee School.

Murrumbidgee opened in 2009 and is an integrated super-school that is located in western Canberra. It aims to:

engage all students in academically challenging learning, nurture a safe and caring environment, foster collaborative relationships within the community, develop learning pathways so all students can reach their potential, empower students as learners and leaders and promote a passion for the Arts (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012).

TAs work across all sectors of the school. In 2011, there were 12 TAs employed in the preschool and primary school sectors to provide support for students with disabilities or learning difficulties (see Table 3.13). Murrumbidgee comprises multiple school years (preschool to Year 10) on one site. The school is structured into four learning stages: preschool to Year 2 (early childhood), Years 3–5 (primary), Years 6–8 (middle school) and Years 9–10 (high school). Students in the preschool to Year 5 sectors live in four suburbs surrounding the school. The middle school and high school sectors enrol students from an
additional three suburbs. In 2010, there were 815 students enrolled from preschool to Year 8; however, by 2011, enrolments from preschool to Year 9 had declined to 794, even though an additional year level had been added to the school (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012). This decline may be attributed to the size of the school, with many different age groups on one campus; poor performance in NAPLAN tests; and unhappiness within the community.

In 2011, there were four kindergarten classes, seven composite Year 1/Year 2 classes, five composite Year 3/Year 4 classes and three Year 5 classes. TAs support students in all classes. At Murrumbidgee, 4 per cent of the student population is Indigenous and 22 per cent are from a language background other than English. Languages spoken in the community include German, Chinese and Vietnamese. Approximately 30 per cent of students at Murrumbidgee have a learning difficulty or disability. Due to its low SES status combined with a high proportion of Indigenous students, the high number of students from a background other than English and the high percentage of students with disabilities, Murrumbidgee receives additional funding via the NP scheme to participate in reforms that focus on making a difference to students’ educational outcomes.

Table 3.13:

Demographics: Murrumbidgee School, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Teachers</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>504$^5$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language background other than English</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2012)

---

$^5$ This number represents students in the preschool and primary school.
Classrooms are traditional in structure rather than an open-plan design. The school has three Learning Support Centres (LSCs), which cater for students who have a borderline to mild intellectual disability and/or a significant learning difficulty. Murrumbidgee also has two Learning Support Units/Autism (LSUA), which can cater for up to six students in each unit. Students who meet the ACT Student Disability Criteria for Autism Spectrum Disorder are eligible for a place in these units. One TA is assigned to work in each of the five centres to support students with disabilities and help integrate students from the centres into mainstream classes as and when it is appropriate.

TAs are recruited by the business manager and principal but are supervised by the special education teacher, who organises their timetables. Two TAs are employed to work in the preschool. The other TAs are timetabled to work in different classes with different teachers and different students throughout the day. These TAs need to be in the classroom when lessons commence so they can listen to the class teachers’ instructions and then work with the students they are assigned to assist. In some classes, the TA might support three or four students; however, these students are not grouped together, so the TA moves from one student to another to offer assistance. These TAs also provide relief for TAs in the preschool at lunch time.

TAs who participated in this study reside in the local area, and their children attend Murrumbidgee. TAs at Murrumbidgee have their own staff area where they have access to computers and emails. They do not join the teaching staff at break times but remain in their staff area. At Murrumbidgee, TAs are referred to by their Christian name by both students and teachers, while teachers are referred to by their title and surname.

The principal at Murrumbidgee noted that the new policy that gives permanency to TAs who have been in the position for more than two years was trialled in the 1990s and was not successful. He said that:
If a TA had acted in the same position for more than 12 months they were entitled to permanency. The schools had to find positions for all these people. It took a number of years for these TAs to work their way through the system. This was also when central office controlled the employment of TAs. Now with school autonomy principals have the power to recruit TAs.

He also remarked that ‘TAs have to fit in as part of the team. It is not about the individuals but about the team and how we can do it much better’.

3.6.4 Molonglo School.

Molonglo opened in 1984 and is an integrated, mainstream primary school that is located in southern Canberra. The school motto of ‘Caring and Sharing’ aligns with the school vision to ensure that there is a strong focus on community involvement and building relationships and partnerships at the school with all stakeholders. Eleven TAs were employed at Molonglo in 2011. Two TAs were employed to support teachers and students in the LCS, two TAs were employed in the preschool and seven were employed in mainstream classes to provide support to different students in different classes throughout the day. The school enrols students from preschool to Year 6, and the majority of students live locally.

In 2010, there were 198 students enrolled at Molonglo, but numbers declined to 179 by 2011 (see Table 3.14). Declining enrolments could be attributed to declining numbers of primary school aged students in the local area. Census data reveal that in 2006, there were 261 children aged 5–9 years in the feeder suburb, but this number declined to 215 by 2011. In the 10–14 year age bracket, there were 266 students in 2006 but only 222 in 2011 (ABS, 2012).

There are three preschool classes, one class at each year level from kindergarten to Year 6 and one composite kindergarten/Year 1 class. Classrooms are traditional in design
rather than open plan. There is also a LSC, which caters for 13 students from Years 2 to 6. TAs work in all classes to support students with disabilities, and two TAs are employed in the LSC. Programs on offer at Molonglo promote and encourage the integration of students with special needs into mainstream classes with the support of TAs.

Table 3.14:

Demographics: Molonglo School, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TAs</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Teachers</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language background other than English</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2012)

Molonglo has a higher-than-average Indigenous population for schools in the ACT, with 13 per cent Indigenous students. As a result, Molonglo operates a Koori preschool program for Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander children aged 3–5 years. In addition, 19 per cent of the students come from a language background other than English. In the local area, families come from Germany, New Zealand, Samoa, India, Vietnam and Croatia. Approximately 10 per cent of students at Molonglo have a learning difficulty or disability. Due to its low SES status, the high proportion of indigenous students, the high number of students from a background other than English and a high percentage of students with disabilities, Molonglo receives additional funding via the NP scheme to participate in reforms that focus on making a difference to the educational outcomes of students.

The business manager at Molonglo recruits TAs with the principal and then supervises them, prepares their contracts and undertakes their performance reviews. The timetable for TAs who work in different classrooms with different students is prepared by
the deputy principal and principal. Although the TAs who participated in this study have school-aged children, their children do not attend Molonglo. TAs do not have ready access to computers and emails, but they can use the class teachers’ computers. The TAs spend their break time with the class teachers in the school staff room. TAs at Molonglo are referred to by their Christian name, while class teachers are referred to by their title and surname.

The principal at Molonglo said that the role of TAs at her school was ‘not to take over from the teacher but to support the teacher in the delivery of a quality service for that child or children’. She likened TAs to:

really expensive chocolate: you apply for those precious TA days so you want them to be used well. You make them last and don’t quaff them down without thinking about it. I expect the TAs to be used effectively and to savour every one.

She believes that one of the greatest challenges for TAs is having a career pathway: ‘If you are stuck and can’t get anywhere that is pretty awful. You can’t go anywhere with what you want to do. Doing the same job all the time is very boring. Everyone needs variety’.
3.7 Participants

The aim of this study is to identify the different perceptions held by key stakeholders of the roles, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs working in mainstream primary schools. As the voice of TAs is not prominent in other studies (Bourke, 2009; Mansaray, 2006), they are the key participants in this study. In addition to 34 TAs, participants include 70 class teachers, 11 school leaders (including principals), four supervisors of TAs, three staff from the ACT EDT and one VET from the CIT. In total, 123 participants have contributed to this study. Codes are assigned to participants.

3.7.1 TAs.

In total, 34 TAs participated in this study: seven TAs from Scrivener participated in Stage 1; eight TAs from Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Molonglo participated in Stage 2; and 19 TAs from a variety of ACT government primary schools joined the eight TAs from Stage 2 to participate in Stage 3. Table 3.15 displays the number of TAs who participated in each stage of this study, as well as the research method used to gather data from the TAs during each stage. Of the eight TAs who participated in Stage 2, six volunteered to become key TA participants in this study. These TAs were TA8, TA9, TA10, TA11, TA12 and TA13. They completed a questionnaire during Stage 2, were observed in classrooms during Stages 2–4, attended TAT sessions in Stage 3 and participated in semi-structured interviews in Stage 4. While these TAs were employed specifically to provide support to students with disabilities or learning difficulties, they could not explain why they worked with these students except to say that additional funding was provided for these students.
Table 3.15:  

**TA Participants in Each Research Stage and Research Method**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TAs</th>
<th>Number of TA participants</th>
<th>Research method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>27, including 8 TAs from Stage 2</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Memos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.16 profiles the TA participants from all stages of the study. These data were obtained from TAs who participated in preliminary training during Stage 1 or who completed a questionnaire in Stages 2 or 3. The average age of the TAs was 43 years, and all were female. However, while the average experience as a TA was six years, the range was from six months to 22 years. One-third (32 per cent) were permanent full-time employees, one-third (32 per cent) were permanent part-time employees, 18 per cent were casual part-time employees and 18 per cent were casual full-time employees. While only three out of 21 (14 per cent) TAs held a Year 10 Certificate, which is the minimum qualification required to be a TA, 10 (47 per cent) held a post-school qualification. No TAs indicated that they held a Certificate III or IV qualification in learning support or disability support, although three held a Diploma in Child Care or Children’s Services and one was a three-year trained teacher. Three of the TAs had ESL.
Table 3.16:

**TA Participants: Attributes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TAs</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Highest qualification</th>
<th>Years of experience as a TA</th>
<th>Employment status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TA1</td>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA2</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Casual full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA3</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Casual full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA4</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Casual full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA5</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 12 + TAFE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Casual part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA6</td>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Certificates III &amp; IV</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Casual part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA7</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Diploma in Child Care</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Casual part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA8</td>
<td>60–65</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Permanent part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA9</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Casual part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA10</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Diploma in Children’s Services</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Permanent part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA11</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Permanent part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA12</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Casual full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA13</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Diploma in Child Care</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA14</td>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 12 (nurse)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Permanent part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA15</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B. App. Sc. (Mathematics)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA16</td>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Permanent part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA17</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B. Sc. (Physiotherapy)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Permanent part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA18</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Nurse/Midwifery</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA19</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B Ed (Primary)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA20</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Permanent part-time</td>
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<td>TA21</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>CIT certificate (unspecified)</td>
<td>21</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA22</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: TA participants in bold are the six key TA participants
3.7.1.1 Seven TA participants from Scrivener School (Stage 1).

TA1 has been a TA for nine years and is the only permanent full-time TA employed at Scrivener. Anne’s highest level of education is the Year 12 Certificate. She is 55 years old and previously had children at Scrivener, but they have since left. TA1 is assigned to work in the Year 5 and 6 units of the school. She likes to attend training and had recently attended a behaviour management course called ‘Speed Bumps’, where she learnt new strategies to help manage challenging behaviours. She conducted a short session for the other TAs to tell them about the course and the strategies she had learnt.

TA2 has been a TA for four years and is employed in a casual full-time capacity. Her highest level of education is the Year 12 Certificate, and she works as a TA in the preschool. During the PTAT in 2009, she left Scrivener to move to the coast.

TA3 comes from Thailand and English is her second language. She has been a TA for only six months and is assigned to a kindergarten student with Asperger’s syndrome. She is employed on a casual full-time basis but hopes to become permanent full-time. When communicating with the researcher both verbally and in writing, TA3 was difficult to understand because her English language skills were not well developed. She attended all TAT but did not interact with other TAs or the presenters.

TA4 has been a TA for three years and is assigned to the preschool in a casual full-time capacity. Her highest level of education is the Year 12 Certificate, but she is keen to undertake more training. She logs onto the ACT ETD website regularly to see what courses are available for TAs but frequently misses out as places fill quickly—often by class teachers. Few courses are offered only to TAs.

TA5 has been a TA for two years and has a Year 12 Certificate. She was working in another school, which lost its funding for a TA, and she was approached by the principal to move to Scrivener. She loves her job but hopes to become a school counsellor or a youth
worker in the future. She provides individual one-on-one support to a student with extreme emotional/behavioural issues.

TA6 has been a TA for three years. Although she has Certificates III and IV, they are not in learning support or disability support. She works in the Year 3 and 4 units, providing support to a number of students with special needs.

TA7 has a Diploma in Child Care and hopes to become a primary school teacher when her children are older. She speaks both Japanese and English and has been a casual TA for five years. She has already enrolled at university to start her primary degree but realises it will take a long time because she only has time to do one unit per semester.

3.7.1.2 Six key TA participants from Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Molonglo schools (Stage 2).

TA8 began working in the childcare sector and then worked in respite care for families with children with disabilities. She has worked as a TA in a number of schools—both mainstream and special education schools—and is a permanent employee. She was ‘made permanent all of a sudden. I didn’t even apply. I didn’t even know my name was put forward to gain permanency’. TA8 has been at her current school for six years but said that ‘the last couple of years have been different. It depends on who is in charge’. She quietly takes on additional responsibilities in the school, such as washing the tea towels in the staff room and supplying and washing the hand towels in the bathrooms each week. TA8 enjoys sharing her skills, such as knitting, with the students and has made French knitting appliances to teach the students how to do French knitting because she said many had never seen it done before. She has a quiet disposition and uses her initiative. According to one class teacher, TA8 is very good at predicting when students are becoming unsettled or are likely to erupt, and she takes steps to prevent these episodes. TA8 has not received any training in her position but would like some training to help students with communication
difficulties—especially the students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. She has a first aid qualification but has never had to use it except to apply Band-Aids. TA8 is employed on a permanent part-time basis and is planning to retire at the end of the year.

TA9 has previously been a dietician and has studied at university but has not completed a degree. She is very bubbly and vivacious. She approached the school seeking employment when her marriage broke up, as she required work during school hours so that she could take her children to and from school. She arranged to leave the school at 2.30 pm to enable her to do this. TA9 has been a TA for one and a half years and currently works four days a week, which allows her to help at her children’s school for one day a week. TA9 is employed on a casual contract and does not know from term to term if her contract will be renewed, which is a major concern for her. In 2011 TA9 did not find out until the last day of Term Two whether her contract would be extended for the remainder of the year. TA9 has had no training but would like to participate in any training being offered. She talks to more experienced TAs at her school to obtain ideas and strategies. She loves her work and finds it very rewarding, despite feeling insecure. In the next five years, TA9 would like to obtain permanency: ‘the stability that would come with that would just be awesome. Not knowing is a negative and not knowing what your wage will be. My priority is to work around the kids and their school hours’. TA9’s mother is a teacher and TA9 would ultimately like to study to become a teacher.

TA10 completed a diploma at CIT in Children’s Services and then enrolled in a teaching degree but found that it was too hard to study, work and be with her family, as her husband travelled a great deal. She now thinks she will stay in schools because ‘I love it’. TA10 has worked at her current school for three years and previously worked at another school nearby. Her children attend the school where she currently works. TA10 was initially a casual employee but is now a permanent part-time employee after applying for,
and being offered, the position. Her own education was not in Australia and she sometimes struggles with the differences between education in Australia and Fiji, where she says children show more respect to their teachers. TA10 struggles with behaviour management, especially when she sees students being rude to teachers. She believes that:

School is respect and learning. We only used to speak when the teacher asked us a question. You sat and did your work. It took me a while to adjust myself and say to the kids, ‘suit yourself. If you don’t want to learn that is your problem’.

TA10 said that some of the ways to teach were different to the ways she was taught in her country of birth. English is not her first language, and her speech and grammar reflect this. Although TA10 loves her job, she would like a full-time position, as it would provide more security for her and her family.

TA11 is also a permanent part-time TA. She has been at her current school for three years and previously worked as a TA at a nearby school for five years. She commenced working as a volunteer at her previous school and was asked by a teacher to apply for a TA position. She has had no training and has learnt ‘on the job’ from teachers. Her children attend the school where she works. TA11 has a friendly disposition and likes to be greeted by name by the students. She believes it helps to know the students and be liked by them. She would like to be a permanent full-time TA. Both of her parents are teachers, and TA11 thinks that she will ultimately train to become a teacher. When talking about her job, TA11 said that the best thing is not having any responsibility to take home at the end of the day:

Emotionally, though, it is draining. It isn’t for everyone. People say it is the easiest job, but it isn’t. It is quite a rewarding job though. If I can make a difference in this child’s life then I’ll do it whenever I have to do it.

TA12 has been at her current school for one term on a temporary, casual contract to replace the permanent TA, who is on extended leave. She had previously worked in an
office and then applied to be a relief TA at the school. In relation to the role of a TA, she said:

I think it is so much more than I ever imagined that it would be—being so involved. I think I came in a bit blind to it. That is not a bad thing. Don’t get me wrong. I’d do it all again in a heartbeat. It depends on who you are working with as well, from the teachers to the students. I’m sure every classroom is not the same. Being assigned to the one teacher and one class means you can get to know them well. I know when the teacher is talking to the kids, I know when she is coming up for something, I know what she will need next. I start to predict what she needs and respond. That would be invaluable for her.

TA12 applied for a TA position because it suited her family life with two young children. She had hoped to continue as a TA at the school, but when the position was advertised she was not shortlisted for an interview because she did not have a first aid qualification or a Certificate III in Disability Education, which the school was seeking. Seventeen people applied for the TA position when it was advertised, including permanent TAs already working in the ACT system who were on a priority list for employment. In addition, she had not responded to one of the selection criteria, which minimised her chance for an interview. She was extremely disappointed, as she had developed a good relationship with the students and the teacher. She commented that ‘I’d love to still be at the school and if not this one then another. I’ll stay on the register for temporary work and see what other positions come up on the website’.

TA13 has been a TA for two years and loves it. She had previously been a child care worker and has a diploma in child care from an overseas facility. TA13 has a permanent position as an assistant in the preschool. She considers that it is not a real job as she loves it so much. She has teenage children and claims that school hours suit her at the
moment. TA13 has duties in the preschool but is also required to relieve staff in the front office and is frequently called away by the business manager (her supervisor) from afternoon planning sessions with the preschool teacher. She hopes to study to become a teacher when her children are a little older. TA13 said:

When I took on the job my goal was to be a teacher, but now I am in this situation I am so happy and settled here. That is because of my relationship with the school leaders and my teacher. I am seriously thinking of a teaching degree but not until next year when both my children are in high school. They are my priority at the moment. I do know the teachers have a lot more work and responsibility. My family comes first at the moment.

When the university had an open day, she attended to find out about the process of enrolling and whether she would gain any credit for the diploma that she has. Although TA13 is considering her future career options, she is in no hurry. She commented that ‘Some teachers have said come over to the other side but I don’t want to. It is challenging but so rewarding. I don’t see it as a job’.

3.7.1.3 Two secondary informants: TAs (Stage 2—limited participation, Stage 3).

The following two TAs were observed in classrooms during Stage 2 and then participated in the TAT offered in Stage 3.

TA15 has a bachelor’s degree in Applied Science (Mathematics) but has chosen to be a TA. She was employed in a full-time permanent capacity after approaching the school for a position. She works in the autism unit and helps to integrate students into mainstream classes. TA15 believes that:

the most important attributes of a TA are an aptitude for and love of the job. Those who are suited make sure that they equip themselves with the information they need to do the job well. The best way to learn is by experience. Those who aren’t suited
won’t be any good even if they are trained. Unfortunately some people take on the job because it suits their family to work school hours. Others do it because they have a child with special needs and think this makes them suitable—it doesn’t necessarily.

TA14 has been a TA for 12 years and is 50 years old. She had previously been a nurse. Initially, TA14 became a TA after being encouraged by a TA friend to apply for a position. She had been working as a TA in another school, which closed down. The principal at her current school recognised her name as a parent from her previous school and offered her a position as a TA. TA14 observed that being a TA is not so much about assisting the students, but about the expectations of teachers, which vary considerably. She thinks that the loudest, pushiest teachers receive the most TA help. She also observed that TAs are not always placed where their strengths lie, and that it is ‘a wise school that puts the TAs where their strengths are and that might not be the position that they originally came into the school for’.

3.7.1.4 Seven TAs from other ACT government primary schools who attended the TAT sessions—Stage 3

The following TAs joined TAs from Cotter, Molonglo and Murrumbidgee for the TAT sessions in Stage 3.

TA16 has been working as a TA for one year in a part-time capacity. She is over 60 years old and was approached by the school to become a TA. She had previously been working in the business office of the school and was thus known to the principal and business manager. She enjoys her job but would like class teachers to be more explicit when giving instructions.
TA17 is 50 years old and has been working as a TA for eight years in a part-time capacity. Previously, she worked as a physiotherapist. She approached the school to gain the position as a TA. TA17 currently works in a LSU with two class teachers.

TA18 is 53 years old and has been employed in a full-time permanent capacity as a TA for four years. She has previously been a nurse and a midwife. TA18 was approached by the school to become a TA after applying online for an advertised position. She believes it is important for TAs to be ethical and confidential, and to be aware of school policies regarding OH&S, duty of care, movement of students around the school, toileting policies, and inclusion and integration policies.

TA19 is 55 years old and has been a TA for 10 years. She has previously been a class teacher with three years training, but she chose not to upgrade to gain a Bachelor of Education. TA19 is a permanent full-time employee and works in the autism unit at the school. She was approached by the school to become a TA. She believes it is important for TAs to have knowledge and understanding of children’s different needs and learning styles, as well as the ability to build relationships with students and class teachers.

TA20 has been a TA for three years and is employed in a part-time capacity. She approached the school to gain employment. Although TA20 has a Year 12 Certificate, there were numerous spelling errors on her questionnaire. TA20 performs a variety of roles, including helping in the business office while staff have their break.

TA21 has been a TA for 21 and a half years. She is 55 years old and was recommended by a friend to become a TA. She is a permanent employee in the LSU and mainly works with individual students. TA21 performs a range of duties from classroom literacy support to administrative work in the front office and ‘duties as directed’ by the teachers.
TA22 has been a TA for 22 years. She is 52 years old and is a permanent employee with a Year 10 Certificate. She was appointed as a TA after responding to an advertisement for the role. During her 22 years as a TA, she has not undertaken any training but ‘learns as she goes along from the class teachers—training on the job’.

3.7.2 Class teachers.

The author’s involvement with class teachers commenced during Stage 1, with the preliminary case study conducted at Scrivener, when 22 class teachers and school leaders participated in focus group interviews. The group comprised one male and 21 female teachers who ranged in age from 35 to 55 years. They were all full-time permanent staff members who resided in suburbs throughout the ACT, but not in the feeder suburbs for Scrivener.

The author’s extended involvement with class teachers started in Stage 2. During this stage, 48 class teachers from three of the key sites—Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Molonglo—completed a questionnaire. Of these 48 class teachers, six volunteered to be key participants because they had the six key TA participants working in their classrooms either in a full-time capacity or regularly each week to provide support to students. These key class teachers completed a questionnaire, were observed in their classroom working with the TAs before, during and after the TAT sessions, and participated in a semi-structured interview after the TAT sessions were completed. These class teachers ranged in age from 30 to 60 years. All were permanent full-time staff members with extensive years of experience ranging from nine years to over 30 years. Their combined experience averaged 13 years. Table 3.17 shows the key attributes of the class teachers.
Table 3.17:

*Key Class Teacher Participants: Attributes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Highest qualification</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Employment status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Graduate Certificate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT1</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bachelor Education</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor Education</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT3</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor Education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor Education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT4</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor Education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor Education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7.3 Supervisors of the TAs.

Four supervisors of the key TA participants were participants in the study. They participated in Stages 2, 3 and 4 by arranging observations and interviews for the researcher with the TAs and class teachers. They were also interviewed during Stage 4. An initial questionnaire had not been prepared for business managers; it was not until the TAs were being observed that the researcher became aware that business managers were the supervisors of most TAs. At Murrumbidgee, the special education teacher coordinates the special education team and is the TAs’ supervisor. Apart from this supervisor, the other supervisors lacked experience and most were only as qualified as the TAs. Table 3.18 shows that the supervisors assigned to the TAs generally had less than two years’ experience and were marginally better qualified than the TAs they were employed to supervise.
### Table 3.18:

**Supervisors of the TAs: Attributes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Highest qualification</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Employment status</th>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Associate Diploma Childcare</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Graduate Certificate: Special Education</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.7.4 School leaders.

Eleven school leaders, including four principals, participated in this study. School leaders from Scrivener participated in Stages 1 and 4 of the study, while the other school leaders participated in Stages 2 and 4. In Stage 1, school leaders participated in a focus group interview. In Stage 2, school leaders completed a questionnaire. In Stage 4, principals participated in an interview.

Table 3.19 displays the attributes of the school leaders. All are permanent full-time employees with considerable years of experience. All have been involved in the recruitment of TAs and worked with TAs when they were class teachers. Three of the 11 school leaders are male and four school leaders have a post-graduate qualification. The average age of the school leaders is 45 years.
Table 3.19:

School Leaders: Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Highest qualification</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Employment status</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL1 (Principal)</td>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Master of Educational Leadership</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL2</td>
<td>20–30</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL3 (Principal)</td>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Master of Education</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL4</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Masters of Education</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL5</td>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL6 (Principal)</td>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Graduate Certificate: Leadership</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL7</td>
<td>20–30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL8</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>14</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL9</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL10 (Principal)</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL11</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7.5 ACT ETD staff.

To gain a policy perspective, staff from the ACT ETD who have teaching qualifications participated in this study. Staff in this branch are seconded from schools for a period of time before returning to a school when the secondment concludes. An email was sent to the Inclusion and Support Branch in the ACT ETD, which works closely with schools where TAs are employed. Two staff accepted the invitation to be interviewed. A principal from an ACT ETD special education school was interviewed specifically on the funding policy for TAs and the SCAN process that students undertake to determine the level of funding they are entitled to receive. During the data analysis, the issue of funding TA support was raised. To seek information about the link between funding and TA
recruitment, the researcher contacted this principal. These three participants were interviewed during Stage 4 of the study.

Table 3.20:

**ACT ETD Staff: Attributes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Highest qualification</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Employment status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ETD1</td>
<td>30–40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETD2</td>
<td>40–50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETD3</td>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ACT ETD staff varied in age and gender. All hold a Bachelor of Education qualification and are employed in a permanent full-time capacity.

3.7.6 **Teacher at the CIT.**

A teacher at the CIT was also interviewed to provide another perspective for the study. CIT1 teaches in the Certificate III Learning Support course and has around 25 students enrolled in the course. CIT1 contacted the researcher when she heard that TAT was being conducted at the University of Canberra. She sought information regarding the training to see why it was being held and what the training focus was. CIT1 was interviewed during Stage 4 of the study. Demographic information about the CIT teacher is provided in Table 3.21.

Table 3.21:

**CIT Teacher: Attributes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Highest qualification</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Employment status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIT1</td>
<td>50–60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>Permanent part-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.8 Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted in only one jurisdiction in Australia—the ACT—and it was confined to government-funded, low SES schools. The data collected from focus groups, questionnaires, direct observations and semi-structured interviews may only reflect practices in low SES schools in the ACT and may not be representative of practices in all schools. Conducting similar research in all schools in the ACT that employ TAs would be beneficial. Interviews were conducted with the class teachers who have TAs working in their classrooms. Pivotal to this study is an understanding of the relationship between the TA and the class teacher. Conducting further interviews with a larger number of class teachers across a range of jurisdictions about their experiences with TAs would further enhance the findings. It was not feasible to gain the perspectives of parents and students because of time restrictions and the specific scope of this study.

3.9 Ethics

Before commencing this study ethics approval was gained from the University of Canberra: Committee for Ethics in Human Research and from the ACT Department of Education and Training, now known as the ACT Education and Training Directorate. Prior to commencing data collection, written permission was gained from all participants and signed consent forms are kept in a locked filing cabinet. To ensure anonymity of participants codes have been used when quoting participants and pseudonyms used for research sites.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methods used for gathering data for the study and the merits of using a case study approach. A grounded theory framework has been adopted, which enables codes and themes to emerge that are related to the research questions and data collected. The four distinct stages—Mapping the Terrain, Digging Deeper, Shifting
Sands and Planting the Seeds for Sustainability—and different theories drawn upon to inform the methods used in each stage of the study have been explained. Descriptions of the participants and the selection methods used to identify relevant participants from the range of stakeholder groups have been provided to contextualise the data. Details have been provided about the key sites selected for the study, as well as an explanation of the selection process used. The data collected from the multiple participants and sites have been analysed, and six key themes have emerged, which will be discussed in the following chapters.
Chapter 4: Findings and Challenges

4.1 Introduction

This study investigates the role, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs working with students with disabilities and learning difficulties in four mainstream primary schools in the ACT. Research questions used to guide the study are:

1. What is the role of TAs in mainstream schools?
2. What qualifications and skills are required for TAs?
3. What training is required for TAs?
4. What factors contribute to the effective employment/deployment of TAs in mainstream schools?
5. What factors affect the ability of TAs to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities/learning difficulties in mainstream schools?

Using a Grounded Theory approach to collect and analyse data, six key themes emerged. The following three chapters are organised according to these six themes emerging from the data collected in four stages over a three-year period. This chapter particularly focuses on issues relating to the challenges faced by TAs from their perspective and from the perspective of those they work with. TAs are powerless to change most of the issues identified as challenges; however, the effect on their ability to perform in their role is significant. This chapter also presents the challenges that other school personnel experience related to working with TAs. These include TAs’ lack of professionalism and confidentiality; different expectations of TAs and class teachers; power conflicts, relationships and power struggles between TAs and class teachers; timetabling and planning issues; TAs’ lack of initiative; and confusion regarding duty of care.
4.2 Challenges for TAs

This study has revealed a series of challenges that TAs face on a daily basis in their workplace as they attempt to perform in their role to meet the expectations of class teachers, school leaders, their supervisors and their employers. It was apparent during data collection that the challenges of being a TA fell into four broad categories: the role of a TA, conditions of employment and deployment (system-level challenges), conditions of employment and deployment (school-level challenges) and communication. Due to their marginalised status and casual employment status, TAs are reluctant to question existing processes and practices; instead, they accept the challenges presented in their role.

![Figure 4.1: Challenges for TAs.](image)

1. The role of a TA refers to the range and diversity of tasks that TAs perform.
2. Conditions of employment and deployment for TAs (system-level challenges) refers to the challenges that TAs face as a result of ACT ETD employment processes and deployment conditions that apply to TAs.
3. Conditions of employment and deployment for TAs (school-level challenges) refers to challenges that TAs face as a result of employment processes and deployment conditions that operate at each school site.
4. Communication refers to the challenges that TAs face because communication channels in their workplace are ineffective or inefficient.

The findings regarding these challenges will now be presented.

4.2.1 Role of TAs.

Table 4.1 presents the key themes that emerged during data collection regarding the roles of a TA. At different sites, the roles of a TA were perceived differently by different stakeholders, which led to role confusion, ambiguity and overlap. There was little consensus regarding the role of a TA.
Table 4.1:

Different Perceptions on Roles of TAs According to Key Stakeholders at Key Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of a TA</th>
<th>TAs</th>
<th>Class teachers</th>
<th>School leaders</th>
<th>TAs’ supervisors</th>
<th>ACT ETD</th>
<th>TAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour management</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Murrumbidgee Scrivener</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Scrivener</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare teaching resources</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Murrumbidgee Scrivener</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Murrumbidgee Scrivener</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with parents/families</td>
<td>Molonglo Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Cotter (no)</td>
<td>Cotter (no) Molonglo (no) Murrumbidgee (no)</td>
<td>No communication</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photocopying</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help teacher plan lessons</td>
<td>Molonglo (preschool)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare the teaching environment</td>
<td>Molonglo (preschool)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a program for a student</td>
<td>Cotter Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist students with literacy and numeracy</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Murrumbidgee Scrivener</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Murrumbidgee Scrivener</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help groups of students</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee Scrivener</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Scrivener</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee Molonglo</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare a program for a student</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support students on ILPs; contribute to ILPs</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Cotter Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee Cotter</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of a TA</td>
<td>TAs</td>
<td>Class teachers</td>
<td>School leaders</td>
<td>TAs’ supervisors</td>
<td>ACT ETD</td>
<td>TAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate students into mainstream</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee, Molonglo</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with educational tasks / strategies</td>
<td>Cotter, Molonglo</td>
<td>Cotter, Molonglo</td>
<td>Cotter, Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliver a program planned by a teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support individual students</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee, Scrivener</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Cotter, Molonglo, Murrumbidgee, Scrivener</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Toileting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with social skills and coping skills</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee, Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help in general office</td>
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<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Cotter, Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First aid</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cotter, Molonglo, Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground supervision</td>
<td>Cotter, Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Cotter, Molonglo, Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool release</td>
<td>Cotter, Murrumbidgee, Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of school policies</td>
<td>Cotter, Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Molonglo, Murrumbidgee, Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervise Before School Care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The primary roles that TAs perform at the different schools in this study are presented in Table 4.1. These are now analysed in greater detail.

4.2.1.1 Behaviour management.

Behaviour management refers to the role that TAs play in correcting the off-task, disruptive behaviour of students. Behaviour management was a contentious role for TAs, as they did not consider it was their role; however, class teachers and school leaders did. The generic duty statement for TAs refers to TAs assisting students and staff as part of a team with behaviour management and social skills programs.

During interviews, half of the TAs claimed that although they have a role in behaviour management, they did not believe they should have a role. TA11 from Murrumbidgee saw behaviour management as being her ‘greatest challenge’. When asked whether behaviour management was her role, she said:

No, I don’t think so. It is a fine line. Some teachers feel they are the teacher; it just depends on the teacher. I don’t want to step on any toes. It is a fine line. You have to try to work out when to step in. (TA11)

TA8 at Cotter, who was also unsure whether behaviour management was her role, believes that:

My role is to try to settle the class so the teacher can teach. No-one has specifically said ‘please settle those children’. I know it helps them if I can and the lesson just flows without interruptions. (TA8)

Another TA from Cotter who was equally unsure about her role said:

You have to know what you are expected to do. You want to be useful and if you see the kids not paying attention, you feel your role is to get them involved. You want them to get the best learning outcome. Perhaps that is the mother side or parent side of people working in our role. You want the best for the kids and you can’t help
yourself by telling them to listen and learn. They need behaviour management to help settle them. They need the behaviour management to happen. Sitting on the floor helps settle them. You need to know though what your role is and the expectation of the teacher. (TA9)

Lack of clarity regarding the role of TAs in behaviour management is a challenge for TAs. Class teachers from all sites consider that TAs have a role in behaviour management, although more of a placating, calming role rather than an intervention role. A class teacher from Cotter School said that ‘The TA assists to help students try to do the right thing before it escalates to a bigger problem. It should be the class teacher’s duty though if there is an issue to sort out’ (CT1). A class teacher at Murrumbidgee agreed with this:

I don’t expect mine to deal with general classroom behaviour. That is my job. Recognising the signs is important. With the behaviour kids, if they flair up, knowing how to calm them down or call for help is important. (CT3)

A class teacher at Cotter who believes that behaviour management is the role of TAs commented that ‘Some TAs don’t know if the teacher wants them to step in and diffuse a situation. Some see behaviour management as being only the teacher’s role’ (CT2). Another class teacher at Molonglo who agrees that behaviour management is a role for her TA said that ‘If one of the kids is having a tantrum she [TA] will take that child away and deal with it until they are calm and they will sit back down’ (CT5). A class teacher from Scrivener disagreed, saying that the ‘TA’s role is not to discipline students. The TA should approach the teacher regarding behaviour management’. Another teacher at Scrivener said that TAs have a behaviour role: ‘If a child “loses it”, they may go for a walk around the

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6 Class teachers at Scrivener were interviewed in focus groups and hence have not been assigned codes.
school with a TA’. Among class teachers, there are differing perceptions on the role of a TA in behaviour management.

During observations, it was evident that TAs played a significant role in behaviour management. They were observed sitting strategically between students on the floor while class teachers gave instructions and explanations, removing students who were disruptive from classrooms, locating students who had not returned to class, chasing after students who left the classroom, removing sharp or distracting objects from students’ hands, speaking directly to students about their inappropriate behaviour, standing strategically beside or behind students, shadowing specific students during recess and lunch breaks, stepping in when a relief teacher was teaching to stop disruptive behaviour and accompanying disruptive students to the administration office. The TA role in most instances was supportive behaviour management. When the relief teacher was teaching however, the role was more corrective behaviour management.

The role of TAs in behaviour management needs to be clearly identified and clarified in duty statements. TAs and class teachers are ‘left guessing’ what each other’s role is in behaviour management because the role of TAs in behaviour management is ambiguous and confusing. This confusion and ambiguity could be prevented with a clearly defined duty statement or role description with shared understanding between TAs and class teachers.

4.2.1.2 Preparation of materials or resources.

Preparing teaching materials and resources for class teachers has historically been a role for TAs and continues to be an important role. TAs and class teachers from all schools and TAs who attended the TAT sessions indicated that a TA’s role is to prepare teaching materials or resources for the class teacher. Few TAs and class teachers were specific about the teaching resources prepared, with TAs stating that their role was to ‘provide assistance
to the teacher in preparing resources’ (TA12) and ‘to support classroom teachers by
preparing teaching materials/resources’ (TA9). Although the preparation of resources for a
teacher was considered the role of the TA by TAs and class teachers from all sites, neither
supervisors nor school leaders referred to this as being a role for a TA.

It was accepted by stakeholders that preparing materials or resources for a class
teacher was a role for a TA. This role was not a contentious or ambiguous role given that all
TAs and class teachers referred to this responsibility. However, during observations, only
one TA was seen preparing teaching resources for a student—sight word cards—while
another TA was asked to make additional photocopies of a worksheet for a teacher.

4.2.1.3 Communicate with families.

The role of TAs in communicating with families was a contentious one due to issues
surrounding confidentiality, privacy and professionalism. TAs from Murrumbidgee and
Molonglo, as well as one TA who attended the TAT sessions, said that they had a role in
communicating with families. This role was questioned by principals and class teachers,
who stated that communicating with parents is not a role for a TA. However, the generic
duty statement for TAs states that TAs ‘act as a resource to teachers and families of
students providing information about the child to both teaching staff and family members’
(ACT ETD, TA Duty Statement, see Appendix 1). The TA from the preschool at Molonglo
(TA13) communicates with families daily when parents drop off or collect their children. In
a preschool, this is an appropriate role because the TA frequently answers questions that
parents have about organisational procedures and general questions concerning their
children. More specific educational questions are referred to the class teacher. One TA
(TA19) who attended the TAT sessions said that she communicates with parents by making
phone calls to chase up notes. Again, this would be an appropriate role for a TA because it
is an administrative task only.
According to all school leaders and class teachers interviewed, it is not appropriate for TAs to communicate with parents about their children. This should be the responsibility of class teachers. This expectation was known and understood by a TA at Scrivener, who said that she ‘sometimes gets cornered by parents. I cannot comment, and tell them to take it up with the teacher’ (TA1). However, this places the TA in a difficult situation, especially if the TA is known to the parent. The principal at Murrumbidgee noted that TAs can be put in difficult positions, saying that ‘if the mums [our TAs] are in the community and someone asks them a question, it is hard not to answer it’ (SL6).

A TA from Murrumbidgee mentioned that she communicates with parents by commenting that ‘when you talk to parents about their child, and I’ll say “you know when he makes that face…”’. The parents love that you know their child’ (TA11). However, class teachers and school leaders at Murrumbidgee did not believe that TAs should communicate with families.

The principal from Cotter was also concerned about TAs communicating with families, relating one situation where:

She [the TA] had the relationship with the family and the family were ringing her direct at night. The relationship had developed so strongly with the TA that the family didn’t have confidence in the school. If the TA didn’t come, the child didn’t come. The family knew he could not manage without her. We needed to re-establish the boundaries around that. (SL3)

The principal at Cotter said it was inappropriate for the family to be contacting the TA and for the TA to allow it, even if the TA and the family were neighbours or friends (SL3). A staff member from the ACT ETD also expressed concern about TAs having a role in communication with families, saying, ‘Well they do, but they shouldn’t. Often TAs are
friendly with families because they are in the community. This makes it quite stressful for them’ (ETD1).

The supervisors of TAs did not comment on this role for TAs.

Confusion and contention surrounds the role of TAs in communicating with families. According to principals, class teachers and staff from the ACT ETD, this needs to be clarified. Principals are aware that TAs communicate with families—often inappropriately and unprofessionally. In doing so, TAs can overstep the boundaries of privacy and confidentiality—particularly when they are known to families in the community.

4.2.1.4 Help groups of students.

Providing help to small groups of students rather than individual students only has become a more common role in recent years for TAs.

TAs at Murrumbidgee and Scrivener and TAs who attended the TAT sessions referred to this as being their role. At Molonglo, the TA from the preschool was observed working with small groups of students.

The TAs at Murrumbidgee mentioned that their role is to help with groups of students, and they were observed working on a maths program with small groups of students who had been withdrawn from their classrooms. However, the TAs at Murrumbidgee were only observed working in classrooms with individual students on a one-on-one basis. Even though there were usually three or four students in the same class to whom funding was attached, these students were not grouped together, so the TAs moved from one student to another to provide assistance.

One TA at Scrivener said that she takes ‘small groups for reading. I watch the teacher for two days then take the groups by myself for another session’ (TA5). Another TA at Scrivener said that her role is ‘to take small groups for maths mentals’ (TA6).
All class teachers at all four sites referred to this as a role for TAs. A teacher at Cotter said that her TA ‘works with small groups or she floats around if I am working with the group that has the students that she is assigned to’ (CT1). However, the same class teacher said that she needs to see what the TA is capable of before asking her to work with a group. At Molonglo, the class teacher said that a key role for the TAs was to work with groups. The class teacher said that she ‘trained her up to do that’ (CT5), although she had never seen a duty statement stating that it was the TA’s role. The same class teacher said:

When I have one group, I know I have another adult who can deal with the others or she has a group then I can work with the rest of the class. It takes the load off. When there are such a variety of needs, I can put a high or low group together with another adult. I don’t always put the TA with the weakest group. (CT5)

Although the class teacher claimed that the TA did not always work with the weakest group during observations, she was only observed working with the weaker students while the class teacher worked with the more capable students.

School leaders at Murrumbidgee, Cotter and Scrivener referred to TAs having a role in supporting groups of students. The principal at Cotter commented that ‘it is great for the TA to have flexibility to move and to look after a group, not being assigned to one student’ (SL3). The same principal said that having a TA ‘assigned to a group of students rather than to an individual would be an efficient use of a resource’ (SL3); however, during observations, TAs at Cotter only helped individual students. School leaders at Murrumbidgee also referred to TAs helping with groups; however, the class teachers did not mention this as being a role of the TAs. The principal at Scrivener said that ‘TAs take a group sometimes out of the class. Usually the TAs seem to work with the weaker students’ (SL1).
Staff from the ACT ETD mentioned that the TAs’ role is to help teachers with group work, but they did not elaborate on how they could help.

No supervisors commented on this as a role for TAs.

During observations, it was noted that TAs rarely worked with groups of students, even in schools where class teachers claimed they helped groups. The responsibility of TAs appeared to be to support individual students, as the TAs moved from student to student in a classroom or sat with one student—usually the student to whom funding was attached. It was interesting to note that at Molonglo, where TAs were assigned to one teacher and one class, group work did occur. The model of TA deployment being used and the teacher–TA relationship that develops depending on the model appears to be a significant factor in determining whether group work occurs.

It could be concluded that confusion surrounds the role of TAs in helping groups of students. Although most stakeholders claimed that TAs assist with groups of students, this rarely occurred during observations. However, TAs could be utilised to assist groups of students, thus freeing up the class teacher to provide support to individual students.

4.2.1.5 Help individual students.

Providing support for individual students—particularly students for whom TA funding is provided—is a commonly accepted role for a TA; however, this role is a restrictive and exclusive role that can distance students from the class teacher and peers. The role is also dependent on the skills and qualities of each TA.

TAs at Murrumbidgee, Cotter and Scrivener said that their role is to provide support to individual students. TAs were not specific about how they provide support to individual students. A typical comment made by a TA from Cotter regarding this role was ‘to assist students that have been identified as needing extra assistance to facilitate their learning
within the classroom environment’ (TA8). Similarly, a TA at Scrivener said that her role is to ‘support the learning needs of individual students as directed by the teacher’ (TA3).

At Murrumbidgee, one TA was observed integrating a student from the LSU into a science lesson. The TA sat beside the student and read instructions to him, and then negotiated with a group of students for the student to join their group for the experiment. While the experiment was being conducted, the student sat with the group but only interacted with the TA.

Two TAs at Scrivener are responsible for individual students. According to the principal:

The TA puts together his program in consultation with the class teacher. Her involvement is very significant—just one-to-one with him. This involves so much time above what we receive funding for, so another TA is also assigned to this unit to support the other students. (SL1)

Another TA at Scrivener is permanently in a kindergarten class. Some students have funding, but the TA helps everyone. Another TA is assigned to one student for whom no funding is received, but if ‘he is settled and working then everyone can work’ (SL1).

Class teachers at all key schools said that the TAs’ role is to help individual students. However, how the TAs helped in this role was dependent on the perceived initiative of the TA. One class teacher at Molonglo School commented on a TA who displayed initiative and knew when to step in to help and when to withdraw:

She was there for one child in particular, but she was not always with that child. That funded child is her first priority, but if that child is coping, she would step back because otherwise the child would become too dependent on the adult and wouldn’t mix with her peers. The TA knew that she didn’t always have to be with her—she could be with others too. (CT5)
Another class teacher from Molonglo commented that when supporting individual students, the TAs’ role was to ‘help the students complete set tasks by repeating instructions step by step but not to do tasks for them’ (CT6). A class teacher from Cotter said that the role of TAs when providing individual support to students was to ‘support students with learning needs ranging from fine motor skills, keeping a child on task, breaking down information/tasks into small steps, and to provide additional scaffolding to allow students to complete tasks’ (CT2). One class teacher at Scrivener said that the TAs’ role in supporting individual students was to ‘help with extra differentiation for the student—to alter and modify activities for the student’s needs’. This would be a challenge for an untrained and unqualified TA, and it is a task that trained class teachers should perform.

School leaders at all schools and staff from the ACT ETD agreed that TAs have a role in supporting individual students. Responses on how TAs supported individual students were general. For example, ‘TAs have individual responsibility for students with special needs and/or disabilities’.

The supervisor of TAs at Murrumbidgee explained how the role of a TA should work in assisting students individually:

Often a TA is working in a room because of a funded, identified student. If the student is ok, then they can go and work with someone else or ask the teacher if there is anything else they can do. Other kids who have no funding points need just as much help. For the overall good of the class, the TA helps whoever needs help. Never say, sit with that person or sit with this person. Sometimes the kids don’t want someone sitting with them. (S3)

However, during observations, this was not the situation that was occurring in classrooms. TAs always sat beside individual students—usually funded students—at the request of the class teacher.
From the perspective of key stakeholders, it is evident that TAs have a role in supporting individual students. However, the perceived role varies based on the needs of students for whom funding is provided, as well as the personal qualities and skills of the TAs. The class teachers’ ability to utilise and plan appropriate tasks for TAs to perform is important. Class teachers should not expect TAs to differentiate or modify activities for a student, as this is a complex and challenging task that should be performed by a trained teacher rather than an untrained TA.

4.2.1.6 Help with literacy and numeracy.

Providing literacy and numeracy support is seen as a role for TAs because additional funding that is often used to employ TAs is provided to NP schools to improve students’ literacy and numeracy standards.

TAs and class teachers from all sites, as well as TAs who attended the TAT sessions, consider that a TA’s role is to assist students with literacy and numeracy skill development. The TAs were not specific about the type of support or strategies they use in literacy and numeracy support, but class teachers said that the role included TAs assisting with:

- reading groups; helping students to learn the alphabet; mini-guided reading sessions; playing literacy games; book orientations; reading through a book with a student;
- asking questions to gauge comprehension; listening for correct responses to questions; counting words in a sentence; assisting with journal writing; assisting students to improve their spelling and reading; and listening to students read.

Staff at ACT ETD also agreed that this was a role for a TA. One staff member said that the TAs’ role is ‘not to teach them how to read but to support a child when they are reading’ (ETD2).
One principal referred to the role that TAs play in literacy support, saying that they help ‘by taking a group for cooperative reading’ (SL1).

Supervisors did not comment on this role for TAs.

Throughout the observations at the different schools, it was evident that TAs had a role in literacy and numeracy skill development. TAs were observed reading instructions on worksheets to students, conducting book orientations (only in Stage 3 after TA training), helping with spelling, reading and editing written drafts of stories, helping students complete maths worksheets, and explaining maths concepts to students. In addition, TAs at Murrumbidgee withdrew small groups of students to deliver an intensive prescriptive maths program.

All TAs and class teachers agreed that TAs have a role in helping students with literacy and numeracy skill development. However, while class teachers elaborated on different strategies that TAs use to support literacy, TAs could not explain what they did. Neither TAs nor class teachers elaborated on numeracy strategies used by TAs to support students. During the TAT numeracy session, it was evident that TAs knew limited strategies or mental computation skills to teach students. If a TA’s role is to help improve literacy and numeracy skills, they should know effective strategies to use and should have training in literacy and numeracy support.

4.2.1.7 Support students on an ILP.

An ILP is a learning program with a set of goals that is prepared by a team that may include the class teacher, special education teacher, school counsellor, principal, TAs and parents. All students in the ACT who receive additional funding for disabilities or learning difficulties are required to have an ILP, and TAs are frequently employed to support these students to achieve their goals.
TAs at Murrumbidgee and Cotter referred to their role in ILPs. One TA at Murrumbidgee said that her role was ‘to implement programmes and ILP targets for many different students with special needs’ (TA11). The same TA had been invited to an ILP meeting. She was asked by the class teacher to contribute to the goals of the ILP. She relayed the conversation with the class teacher:

‘What do you think I should write? You have been working with X. What do you think of this?’ I gave her verbally what to do. She invited me to the meeting and asked if there was anything I wanted to talk about. (TA11)

Another TA at Murrumbidgee said that she can see ILPs via Maze, the school and ACT’s information and communication technology (ICT) online administration system. She said:

It is a lot better now we have access to Maze. We can go on there and see ILPs. We have only had access this year [2011]. I’ve been along to my students’ ILP meetings to hear what parents say. I even had input, quite a lot. A school leader invited me because he felt I would know the most about the child—the teacher was away that day. He asked me for a brief outline then asked me to come along because I knew the child. I went to three that day. I knew the parents of one of them really well. (TA10)

When asked if she would have been invited to the ILP meeting if the teacher had been present that day, the TA responded ‘Probably not. I would have liked to have gone along though’ (TA10). The TA went on to say more about accessing ILPs:

They [ILPs] are interesting to look at. When I first looked at them I thought ahahah what is this? They mention the TA on them. When it mentions us it is important that we are involved in it. (TA10)
It appeared that the TA had been given access to Maze but was given no background information about ILPs. It is possible that this TA stumbled across the ILP by chance and then saw a reference to TAs on the ILP and became curious enough to continue reading.

A TA at Cotter said that she had once been involved in a meeting with a child she worked with. The TA said:

I’ve been involved in these meetings with a child I worked with at lunch times. I was rostered to be with her subtly. I was asked to come to meetings with various people—the social worker, parents and teachers—the ILP meeting. That really helped me to know what to look out for. It also showed me differences between what I observed at school and what the child was passing on at home. They were quite different! (TA8)

Another TA at Cotter had been shown an ILP but had not been invited to the ILP meeting. She said:

I have seen one this year. It was awesome. The class teacher showed me and talked me through it. We talked about it. He was keen for me to read it and talk about it. That was great. That is the only ILP I have seen. (TA9)

TAs who attended the TAT sessions commented that their role is to ‘understand students’ ILPs while a staff member from the ACT ETD said that TAs ‘feed into planning for ILPs’ (ETD2).

Class teachers at Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Molonglo and school leaders at Cotter and Murrumbidgee consider that TAs have a role in ILPs. They claim that the TAs’ role is to ‘assist the classroom teacher to establish learning goals for individual learning plans’ (CT3) and to ‘provide input into the ILP’ (CT1).

Supervisors did not comment on this as being a role for TAs.
Neither TAs nor class teachers at Scrivener commented on the role of TAs in the ILP process; however, the principal said that TAs are involved in the ILP process:

If the child they are assigned to is having an ILP meeting with parents, the TA goes to it. The ILP meetings are always held during the school day. TAs help make the ILPs and all go to the ILP meetings.

Different perceptions and practices exist surrounding the role of TAs in ILPs. During observations, there was no evidence that TAs helped students work towards achieving goals on an ILP because no ILPs were sighted. During interviews, TAs commented that they usually did not know which students were on ILPs, were not privy to ILPs, were rarely asked to set goals for ILPs and were rarely included in meetings with parents about ILPs. In addition, TAs at one school had access to the school administrative system, Maze, to look up ILPs but were rarely included in ILP meetings. At another school, TAs were routinely included in, and expected to attend, ILP meetings. A lack of consistency surrounds the role of TAs in the ILP process, and clarification is necessary for all stakeholders.
4.2.1.8 Preparation of work for students.

Preparing a teaching and learning program for a student has historically been the sole responsibility of a class teacher; however, TAs are frequently taking on this role or assisting with the task.

One TA from Cotter indicated that she ‘planned for the couple of children who I work with’ (TA8), and the principal from Cotter commented that one TA was ‘writing the program’ (SL3) for a student she worked with.

TAs from Molonglo indicated that they are ‘available to assist the teacher to plan lessons’ (TA12) and ‘sit and have input into programming and planning’ (TA13). This happens because the TA from the preschool at Molonglo has preparation time with the class teacher because the students finish at lunch time. Preparation and planning time is only afforded to preschool TAs but does not always occur because they can be called to assist in the general office during this allocated time. TAs from Murrumbidgee did not refer to planning lessons or work for students; however, those who implement the intensive maths program plan the daily program for their students without teacher supervision.

Supervisors did not refer to this as a role for TAs.

The principal at Scrivener said that one of her TAs helps plan a program for a student ‘in consultation with the teacher’ (SL1).

Different practices occur at different schools, with some TAs involved in planning lessons and writing programs, while others are not. It would be unusual to expect a TA to plan and write a program for a student, as the class teacher would normally write the program for all students, perhaps seeking input from TAs. This was supported by a staff member from the ACT ETD, who said that ‘even though TAs don’t do the planning, they feed into it’ (ETD1). The responsibility of planning and writing a program for a student needs to be clarified for all stakeholders, as TAs would not be expected to have the
necessary skills, qualifications or training to write a teaching and learning program and then implement it.

4.2.1.9 Integrate students into mainstream classes.

When students with disabilities or learning difficulties enrol in mainstream schools, they may be placed in a LSU depending on their disability. Students from the LSU may join their peers in a mainstream class for some learning activities. When this occurs, the students are usually accompanied by a TA who assists them to integrate.

This is a role for TAs at schools such as Murrumbidgee and Molonglo, where there are LSUs. At Cotter and Scrivener, this role was not mentioned, as there are no LSUs at either school and hence all students attend mainstream classes.

According to TAs, class teachers and school leaders, TAs at Murrumbidgee integrate students into mainstream classes. A class teacher at Molonglo also referred to this as being a role for TAs; however, the TAs at Molonglo did not refer to this role, although they are involved in integration. Two TAs who attended the TAT training mentioned integrating students into mainstream classes as a role that they undertake at their schools.

Supervisors of TAs did not mention this as a role for TAs.

When conducting observations at Murrumbidgee, one student was being integrated into a science class, and the TA played a key role in supporting the student. The student being integrated only interacted with the TA; no interaction occurred between the student and the class teacher or the student and his peers.

This is only a role for TAs in schools that contain special support units such as autism units or LSUs. However, even in schools where these units exist, some TAs consider that the integration of students is their role, while others do not. Clarity is needed in this role for TAs.
4.2.1.10 Playground supervision.

Supervising students in the playground has been a role solely for class teachers, but it is increasingly becoming a role for TAs. TAs at Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Molonglo indicated that they do playground supervision of students, although those who attended the TAT sessions did not mention playground supervision as their role, and nor did the TAs at Scrivener. TAs conduct playground supervision with class teachers. As a TA at Molonglo said, ‘they are an extra pair of eyes on the playground at recess and lunch time’ (TA13). The TAs at Murrumbidgee said they assist teachers doing duties at lunch and recess. One TA at Cotter ‘shadows students on the playground’ (TA8).

Only class teachers at Molonglo mentioned this as a role of TAs, while school leaders at Cotter and Molonglo referred to it as a role for TAs. The principal at Cotter said that ‘all the TAs do playground duty. They then have their recess break after the class teachers’ (SL3). However, this arrangement distances TAs from the class teachers, thereby preventing an opportunity for sharing ideas and planning lessons. The principal at Scrivener said that ‘TAs are all rostered onto playground supervision but they don’t seem to like it. They tend to congregate around the library area but won’t go outside’ (SL1). This may be why the TAs at Scrivener did not refer to this as a role they perform.

Supervisors of the TAs did not refer to this as a role for TAs.

During observations, only the TA from the preschool at Molonglo was seen undertaking playground supervision alongside the class teacher. Playground supervision is a role for TAs; however, some class teachers are not aware that this is the TAs’ role. It is a role for TAs in a preschool and may or may not be a role for TAs in a mainstream school, particularly when TAs do not have a duty of care. If class teachers and supervisors of TAs are not aware that it is a role for TAs, then who is directing the TA to ‘shadow students on the playground’? This role needs to be clarified because TAs have neither a duty of care nor
the qualifications and training that teachers have in supervising students. TAs should not be undertaking playground supervision unless they are accompanied by a teacher who has duty of care.

**4.2.1.11 Being aware of school policies.**

Schools have a range of policies—some of which are site-specific and some of which have been developed by the ACT ETD. Policies exist on topics such as behaviour management, student welfare, excursions, mandatory reporting of child abuse and manual handling of students. It would be expected that school staff, including TAs, be familiar with all school and system policies.

At Cotter and Murrumbidgee, TAs mentioned that they need to be aware of school policies such as mandatory reporting of child abuse; however, although these TAs had been involved in mandatory reporting cases, none had received training in reporting abuse. TAs who attended the TAT sessions commented more generally about being aware of school policies such as ‘toileting policies, inclusion policies, restorative practices and behaviour management’. One TA at Cotter said that she ‘had had to make reports to school leaders. I’ve never done any professional development on mandatory reporting though. I know the expectation on that around me but I’ve never been to a meeting about it or had training’ (TA8).

Class teachers from Molonglo and Murrumbidgee commented that one responsibility for a TA was ‘to report to the teacher any interesting behaviours, marks, etc. for mandatory reporting and assessment’ (CT6) and ‘to understand their role is to recognise mandatory reporting issues’ (CT3). However, as TAs have no training in mandatory reporting, class teachers should not ask TAs to perform this role.

Although the TAs at Murrumbidgee mentioned that they had not received training in mandatory reporting, their supervisor said that they had: ‘Yes, they all have to do
mandatory reporting at the beginning of the year’ (S3). She may have been confused with class teachers, who complete a mandatory reporting training session at the beginning of every school year. The supervisor also said that one of the TAs had been involved in ‘a disclosure, a pretty dreadful one’ (S3).

Principals did not comment on the need for TAs to be aware of school policies in their role. This was surprising because all school staff should be aware of all school policies. Staff from the ACT ETD said that an annual update in mandatory reporting is compulsory at all schools for all staff, and a full training session is held every three years. Although TAs are welcome to attend these sessions, they are not compulsory for TAs because they are usually held outside of TAs’ hours of employment. The ACT ETD staff noted that this was an issue that needed to be resolved.

The role that TAs have in implementing school and system policies needs to be clarified—specifically, the role of TAs in the mandatory reporting of child abuse. When TAs are involved in disclosures and the mandatory reporting of child abuse, it is essential that they receive the same training as teachers. No schools in this study offered such training for TAs.

4.2.1.12 Help with general office duties and first aid.

TAs assist in the general office by answering phone calls, photocopying, filing, responding to inquiries from students and parents, and administering first aid to students. TAs can be rostered to work in the general office for regular daily time slots or on a needs basis if an office staff member is away.

TAs from Cotter, Molonglo and Scrivener provide help in the general office either on a regular timetabled basis to provide relief for permanent office staff at lunch time or on a needs basis. One TA at Molonglo replaces the receptionist in the general office each day at 2.30 pm when she leaves to collect her children from their school.
Most class teachers were not aware that this was a role for TAs; only one class teacher mentioned that her TA assists in the general office. TAs do not assist class teachers with administrative tasks, and one class teacher was adamant that photocopying was not the role of a TA. In contrast, one school leader at Cotter referred to this as a role for TAs.

The model of supervision appeared to influence the role of a TA in providing general office support. TAs worked in the general office when their supervisor was the business manager responsible for running the general office. TAs at Murrumbidgee, where the supervisor was the special education teacher, were not required to assist in the general office. At Scrivener, TAs might be asked to assist during busy periods in the general office, but they were not rostered on regularly.

Although possessing a first aid qualification is considered a desirable qualification for employment, TAs said that they rarely use the qualification and did not mention providing first aid as being part of their role. At Scrivener, school leaders and the TAs’ supervisor mentioned that first aid was part of the role of TAs, but only during an emergency situation. They are not on a regular first aid roster.

Class teachers did not mention first aid as a role for TAs. The principal at Cotter and the TAs’ supervisor at Molonglo mentioned that TAs have a role in first aid; however, none of the TAs at these schools referred to first aid as part of their role.

When TAs are employed using funds provided for student support, they should not provide general office support or lunch time release for permanent office staff. This role for TAs in some schools needs to be reviewed, as the business manager may be using TAs inappropriately. Requiring TAs to possess a first aid qualification to gain employment seems to be an unnecessary expense when TAs rarely use the qualification in their role.
4.2.1.13 Preschool release.

All schools in this study have a preschool co-located within the primary school, which is administered and staffed by the principal of the primary school. This line management arrangement is quite recent, and principals and preschool staff are still adjusting to the change.

TAs at Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Scrivener provide release for TAs in the preschool to enable them to have a lunch break. This may not be known by other school staff, as no class teachers, school leaders or supervisors mentioned this as a role for TAs. One result of this arrangement is that TAs do not have a break with class teachers and are unavailable to meet with them to plan teaching activities.

Providing release in a different context such as a preschool is challenging for anyone. As one staff member from the ACT ETD said, ‘We know with teachers who do the release role how challenging it is. Seeing a TA do different things every hour with a different child with different requirements and in different locations is quite a skill to watch’ (ETD2). This staff member questioned how a TA with no qualifications or training could be expected to adapt and adjust to such different contexts with different demands.

Once again, if TAs are employed using funds provided for student support, this may not be an appropriate role for a TA; consequently, it needs to be reviewed. In addition, TAs would not have the training and qualifications to support students from preschool to Year 6.
4.2.1.14 Supervising of before-school care.

Only at Scrivener were TAs expected to supervise the Before School Care program. This role involved TAs preparing and supervising activities for students from 8.30 am to 9.00 am, when school commenced. During this time, TAs could not be in classrooms to set up activities, plan with teachers or find out the day’s program. The principal mentioned that she was considering employing someone to undertake this duty to free up the TAs.

In summary, while role confusion presented the greatest challenge for key stakeholders in this study, other challenges related to conditions of employment and deployment were also identified. These will now be presented under the headings of System-level Challenges and School-level Challenges.

4.2.2 Conditions of employment and deployment for TAs: System-level challenges.

This section examines the challenges that TAs face due to conditions of employment and processes of deployment that operate in the ACT ETD. These conditions and processes are beyond the control of TAs; however, they affect TAs’ ability to perform in their role. System-level challenges for TAs are now presented.

4.2.2.1 Duty statements.

The only duty statement available for TAs in the ACT reflects the role of a TA in a special school rather than a mainstream school. The duty statement focuses on the physical care duties that a TA would perform in a special school, such as lifting, restraining, toileting, cleaning and changing. According to principals, the role for TAs in mainstream schools is learning support rather than physical support. One principal was adamant that ‘TAs are employed to support the learning’ (SL6); however, this is not consistent with the duty statement.
Due to the lack of a duty statement that clearly defines the role of a TA working in a mainstream school, ambiguity and uncertainty regarding the role has resulted in role confusion and role overlap. In this study, the ambiguous, varied role of a TA presented the greatest challenge for all stakeholders, and the role was perceived differently by different stakeholders at different schools. Staff from the ACT ETD acknowledged that the duty statement available for TAs working in mainstream schools is too generic and does not adequately describe the role undertaken by TAs in these schools; however, no alternative duty statement has been prepared for these TAs (see Appendix 1 for the current duty statement and Appendix 8 for suggested duty statements).

Although an increasing number of TAs are being employed to work in mainstream classes with students and class teachers, none of the class teachers at any of the schools had seen a duty statement for a TA. A class teacher at Cotter said, ‘No I have never seen a duty statement. Not that I can remember. We had some talk earlier this year or last about TAs’ duties’ (CT1). Another teacher said that he ‘might have seen guidelines rather than a duty statement but not a formal document’ (CT2). A class teacher at Molonglo said that she had ‘never seen a duty statement. I have winged it knowing that they don’t have duty of care’ (CT5).

The TAs at Murrumbidgee did not see a duty statement when they were initially employed as casual TAs, but when they applied for permanent positions, they were shown a duty statement. These TAs were still unsure of their role in relation to duty of care, which is not referred to on the duty statement, and they sought clarification from administrators in the ACT ETD. The TA said:

7 Duty statements for TAs in the ACT are only available to applicants for advertised positions hence class teachers are unaware of the duties listed for TAs.
We were wondering where the boundaries are. Sometimes a teacher leaves us in a classroom. That makes me nervous because I am not sure that this is the right thing to do. One teacher said we all have duty of care. I don’t agree. Sometimes they say you can’t do this as you don’t have duty of care but then they leave us while they photocopy! I offer but they say no, it’s ok. I have never been told what the boundary is. (TA11)

Having a clearly defined duty statement would prevent uncertainty such as this, thus ensuring that all school personnel know the boundaries and the role. The lack of a duty statement has resulted in TAs performing tasks for which they are unqualified, unskilled and untrained. It has also resulted in TAs being asked to perform inappropriate tasks such as moving and cleaning furniture prior to carpet being laid.

4.2.2.2 Salary.

The Australian minimum wage is currently $15.96 per hour or $23,028 per annum (Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman, 2012). The salary for a TA—about half of a beginning teacher’s salary—commences at $39,431 and can increase to approximately $43,728 according to years of service and demonstration of competencies. The salary of TAs is therefore above the Australian minimum wage; however, according to one TA, it is not a ‘livable wage’ (TA10) and according to one supervisor of TAs, ‘you could not feed a family on it’ (S3).

Salaries for TAs are consistent across the schools because they are determined by the ACT ETD after union negotiations. For TAs to advance in salary beyond $43,728, they must demonstrate competencies. When staff from the ACT ETD were asked what competencies TAs would need to demonstrate, they were unable to answer because there was no policy or competency list available. One principal was aware of the competencies and said that she could sign off that TAs were competent in skills such as manual handling.
or lifting, which meant that a TA could progress to a higher salary rate. She had done this for a TA who presented her with the form that the TA had received from a TA in another school. This process could be considered *ad hoc* and lacking transparency because, according to the principal at Scrivener, it is based on ‘who you know not what you know’ (SL1).

TAs did not comment on the salary they receive or their salary scales; however, other stakeholders did. A class teacher at Molonglo said that ‘The pay is ridiculous for what they do. It is not enough’ (CT6). The supervisor at Murrumbidgee concurred with this, saying that ‘You couldn’t feed a family on the money a TA gets. If you choose to marry and have children, they will starve’ (S3).

The principal at Molonglo said there are no salary steps for TAs to progress through because they are either permanent or not permanent staff. In addition, there is no recognition for experience because there is ‘no increase in pay for length of service’. The principal at Molonglo said:

> I feel for them. Life is really tough. We have a stratified society and unfortunately a stratified level of jobs and they are at the bottom level. It is the door. It is the bottom level to get in. (SL10)

Most TAs are employed as a School Assistant 2, which is the ‘bottom level’ of the salary range in schools. If TAs gain a qualification such as a Certificate III or IV in Learning Support or Disability Support, which is desirable and encouraged by schools, new challenges are presented for them. A staff member from ACT ETD said:

> If TAs have a Certificate IV, they can go for positions advertised as School Assistant 3 with a higher salary ($44,913), but to employ them in schools there is a cost, as the school can’t afford to employ them as they only have an allocation of funds to employ a School Assistant 2. It is then hard for them [TAs] to move around
the system, as a principal needs to be aware that it will cost more to employ them. It is not a huge difference, but with tight budgets it is hard. (ETD1)

In addition, although many schools require TAs to have a first aid qualification, they are not paid to have this qualification, which must be obtained outside of school hours and is usually paid for by the TA. There appeared to be few incentives for TAs to improve their qualifications and skills, as the salary variation is minimal and job opportunities may be reduced.

4.2.2.3 Career pathways.

Most TAs are employed as School Assistant 2, which, according to one principal, ‘Is the door. It is the bottom level to get in at’ (SL3). The same principal noted that at this level, TAs are ‘cheap and expendable’ (SL3). According to the principal from Molonglo, there are also more jobs for ‘casual TAs than for TAs on contract. A contract provides a stepping stone to another position. There are no career positions though. TAs have nowhere to go from their current position’ (SL10). This principal also commented that when TAs are employed, even as permanent TAs, if they are initially employed to work in the preschool or a LSU, then they become stuck in that setting. She said that being a ‘TA in the preschool all the time or the TA in the learning centre all the time is very boring’ (SL10). She believes that TAs need variety and a ‘road to go forward’ because ‘to get spice into the career of a TA is difficult’ (SL10).

TAs did not refer to the lack of a career pathway as a challenge, but principals did. Neither class teachers nor the supervisors of TAs commented on the lack of career pathways for TAs. Teachers may not have commented because they are unaware that TAs lack a career pathway. However, supervisors should be aware because they are involved in the recruitment of TAs. TAs may not have commented on their career options and pathways
because they accept their position as it is and are quite happy. They may also be unaware of their options or what a TA position could lead to.

4.2.2.4 Job security.

It appears that there is no job security for TAs, who are often employed on casual contracts and are consequently paid only during school terms. For one TA, this meant that ‘at the end of Term 4, I’ll have six weeks holidays with no work and hoping I’ll get another contract. This is tricky financially’ (TA9).

Lack of job security was referred to as a challenge by TAs from all schools. No class teachers referred to job security as being an issue for TAs. A TA from Cotter said:

I would like to get permanency. The stability that would come with that would just be awesome. Not knowing is a negative and not knowing what your wage will be is hard. I ask myself ‘Can I stay in the job financially?’ To have permanency would be amazing. (TA9)

One TA at Murrumbidgee said that they ‘don’t normally know what hours we’ll have until school resumes in the New Year. We will still have 90 per cent of full-time hours’ (TA11), as these TAs are permanent and guaranteed 90 per cent of a full-time load. However, they would all prefer to have a full-time permanent position. Another TA at Murrumbidgee said:

I still worry as my job is permanent part time, so if it comes to it, they only have to guarantee us 40 per cent of hours. My worry is towards the end of the year worrying about the hours because it is linked to funding it can change. It fluctuates quite a lot. I don’t stress as much as I did as a casual. That was pretty scary. (TA10)

Even though the TAs at Murrumbidgee are permanent part-time employees, the work might not continue each year. The two TAs had different perceptions of the percentage of time they were guaranteed. One TA thought that 90 per cent was guaranteed,
while the other believed only 40 per cent was guaranteed. This was an issue that needed to be clarified for them.

When conducting observations, one TA at Cotter was approached by the business manager—her supervisor—at recess time to sign a new contract. It was the last day of the term and the TA did not know if her contract would be renewed. She was relieved to be signing a new contract because it was ongoing until the end of the school year—not just for the following term. Job security was still not guaranteed because she would have six months of continuing employment until the six-week Christmas holiday break, but no certainty of a position the following year. The business manager had not renewed her contract until the last day of term, which could be interpreted as demonstrating a lack of concern and respect for the TA, who was worried about continuity of employment.

The principal from Cotter was fully aware that ‘lack of security of tenure is a concern for a TA’ (SL3). When their employment is dependent on the enrolment of students with funding for TA support, there is uncertainty of continuing employment.

However, the lack of job security combined with anxiety and uncertainty regarding hours of employment may change. Staff from the ACT ETD mentioned that ‘after being in a school on contract for two years, they [TAs] must be offered a permanent position’ (ETD1). This condition of employment, which was only recently introduced, commenced in 2013 for all TAs—both full time and part time. With a new School Assistant Agreement commencing in 2013, lack of job security may be reduced; however, it will result in another issue for principals and business managers. As the principal of Scrivener said:

I currently have only two permanent TAs but the others will be permanent by the end of the year. In my first year here, there were so many funding points in the Year 6 class, but when they walked out the door, their points walked with them. It makes it difficult for principals to offer permanency. Fine for us now but I don’t know
what I’d do in two years time. If our demographic changes, we may not need that many permanent TAs. If we need less, will they get jobs elsewhere in the department as the school would not be able to afford to keep them? (SL1)

As a result of changing the employment status of many TAs to permanent, fewer may actually be employed in case there is no funding for students with special needs and fewer students with funding are enrolled in each school.

4.2.2.5 Induction programmes.

There is no induction into the ACT ETD system for TAs prior to commencing in a position at a school. This would explain why TAs had not seen a duty statement and were not sure of their duty of care responsibilities. The lack of an induction resulted in one TA being unsure of school expectations generally and training and professional development specifically. She said, ‘When I signed a contract, there was a form to fill out about days of PD that I had to attend, but I am not sure how many’ (TA8).

The ACT ETD staff agree that there is no induction into the ACT ETD system, but there is an expectation that they will be inducted into the school in which they are employed:

The business manager, the TA’s supervisor, would be expected to induct them into their school—leave forms, signing in, hours, very basic stuff. There is an expectation that when they are with the teachers, the teachers would explain to them what to do. (ETD2)

This is an incorrect assumption on the part of staff at the ACT ETD because there are no orientations for TAs into ACT schools, and class teachers say that inducting TAs is not part of their role. Class teachers were vague about an induction program. One teacher at Molonglo said that she had had to inform her TA about transferring to another school, as she had not undertaken an induction and hence was unaware of her rights as a permanent
employee (CT6). No TAs referred to the lack of an induction into the system—perhaps because they did not expect one due to the tenuous nature of their employment or the _ad hoc_ manner in which they were employed.

To summarise, challenges for TAs that arise due to system-level conditions of employment and deployment are challenging, and they are beyond the control of TAs who require policy and practice to change within the ACT ETD. TAs also confront challenges in conditions of employment and deployment at the school level. These are now presented.

4.2.3 **Conditions of employment and deployment for TAs: School-level challenges.**

This section examines school-level challenges faced by TAs when they are employed by a school. These challenges, which are also beyond the control of TAs, vary from site to site and are context-specific. As principals are responsible for practices at their school, the conditions of employment and deployment for TAs reflect the value that principals afford to TAs. School-level challenges that have been identified include recruitment of TAs, school orientation programs, hours of employment, planning time, lack of voice, supervision, feedback, models of deployment, and feeling undervalued and underutilised.
4.2.3.1 Recruitment of TAs.

Employment processes for TAs are both *ad hoc* and inconsistent across sites in this study. The business manager—the supervisor of the TAs—is involved in TA recruitment either with the principal (when a TA is being recruited for a permanent contract) or alone (when a TA is being employed on a casual contract). Factors that affect the selection of TAs varied across each site. Qualities that were valued by principals and business managers, but not by all principals or all business managers, included being a parent in a school, having previous TA experience, appearing to be suitable, being known to another TA or someone at the school, and being recommended by staff from another school.

At Cotter, the principal ‘actively encourages parents to apply for jobs’ (SL3). She said that ‘there have been a couple of TAs whose children have been here. More and more I am looking for that’ (SL3). However, the business manager at Molonglo would only employ parents ‘if the parent were an ok parent’ (S4). The principal at Murrumbidgee was very supportive of parents being TAs. He said:

> We have a stock of really good mothers, parents at the school, who establish themselves as TAs and show their enormous value as mature adults, who want to be here for many years. They provide the most wonderful resource for the kids as they are passionate about what they do. All the TAs at Murrumbidgee School are mums and mums of children at the school. (SL6)

The TAs’ supervisor at Murrumbidgee was also supportive of parents being TAs, saying that ‘They have a real stake in the school because their children are here. They want the best for their own kids and for the other kids here’ (S3).

At Molonglo, the business manager likes TAs to personally hand in their curriculum vitae ‘so I can see what they are like. If I can see that they are generally well mannered,
courteous, happy, I can pick that up with a short conversation. But you can’t always tell’ (S4).

The principal at Cotter likes to employ TAs with school experience: ‘If someone has been doing TA work in schools for quite some time, then I am more likely to employ them than someone who has been in an office and wants to go into a school industry’ (SL3). The principal at Molonglo said that she ‘employs known people—we generally stick to the same TAs for consistency’ (SL10).

The principal at Scrivener had a very stable group of TAs for the past four years but had employed three new TAs recently. All were known to the principal but were not parents of students at the school. According to the ACT ETD, the recruitment of TAs is ad hoc:

It is not as specific as it needs to be. Often a conversation is held with other TAs to get their friends in. All they need is a police check and a card to get registered to legally work in the school. Often, part timers are asked to increase their time in the school until the end of the year. Then they look for the following year to recruit someone if funding is still available. (ETD1)

ACT ETD staff claim that ‘better ways to recruit people’ (ETD2) are needed and ‘until we can provide TAs with training and a better working environment, then we will always struggle’ (ETD2).

The ad hoc manner in which TAs are recruited and the different criteria used to select TAs at each site implies that their role is not valued highly and that the position is not important enough for a rigorous and transparent recruitment process to occur.

4.2.3.2 School orientation programs.

TAs commented that they are not oriented into their school before they commence work. School leaders concurred that TAs do not have an orientation into their schools. One
TA at Murrumbidgee, who commented on the lack of formal orientation offered for TAs, observed that TAs informally induct each other: ‘When a new TA comes to work here, we know the kids who they are working with, so we fill them in, but strictly speaking, no-one gives you any information’ (TA11). The supervisor of the TAs at Murrumbidgee said:

We are very bad at orientations even with the teaching staff. You just arrive at a school and it is just manic. Just crazy. What actually happens is the TAs tend to take each other under their wings and look out for one another. If there is somebody new, they make sure they are ok. We do the basics—make sure they have a key, name badge, introduce them at morning tea, take a quick whizz round the school. The bell goes and you are into it. (S3)

The supervisor at Scrivener also commented that ‘it would be beneficial if there was some form of orientation for them—something consistent’ (S1). She recounted her first day as a TA in another school—a role that she did not remain in. She said:

I was told by another TA at the school to wait in the courtyard for the child to come. Apparently she usually arrived late, was part Asian and would be on the back of a bike ridden by her grandmother. I waited alone but they didn’t come so I went back to the class. She had arrived early that day. I had been told that she had Down syndrome and was in Year 3. The rest of the Year 3 class had gone to camp but she didn’t go and was to spend the time in kindergarten with me. There was no program left. I hadn’t worked with children before. A challenging situation but worse for the child. That was my induction into that school. (S1)

It is not surprising that this person did not continue as a TA after experiencing this orientation into the role and the school.

Class teachers noted that TAs were not oriented into schools but that they should be. One class teacher said:
It should be a requirement, once you are employed, to have an induction and to hear about the do’s and don’ts, what is expected. Some TAs come in and want to take over. I shouldn’t be expected to tell them what to do and what not to do. (CT4)

From these comments, when no orientation is conducted by the principal or business manager, misinformation may be passed from one TA to another regarding students, school policies and practices. With no orientation and with no clear duty statement, TAs commence work in a challenging, complex role with little guidance or direction, and they most likely feel undervalued from day one. When no orientation occurs, TAs’ lowly status in the school becomes clear.

4.2.3.3 Hours of employment.

The hours that TAs are employed are challenging because they do not align with class teachers’ hours of employment, thereby preventing TAs from attending meetings scheduled for after school unless they choose to stay back. Consequently, TAs miss staff meetings, planning meetings with class teachers and ILP meetings with families. Further, TAs only have a break of 15 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes at lunch time, which again prevents them from planning with class teachers or attending meetings. TAs’ working hours—from 9.00 am to 3.00 pm or from 8.30 am to 3.30 pm—are not decided by the TAs; they are decided by their supervisors based on funding and ‘the needs of the children’ (S4). According to supervisors, these hours suit TAs who want child-friendly hours of employment. A staff member from the ACT ETD commented on the hours of employment:

Where do you find the time to sit down and plan because TAs are only employed from 8.30 am to 3.00 pm. They have commitments to pick up children. They are not being paid to stay so why would they? Some schools only pay them from 9.00 am to 3.00 pm, so they walk in on the bell and out on the bell. (ETD2)
Due to TAs’ hours of employment, class teachers commented that they have no time to plan with them. Demonstrating their lack of understanding of the role of a TA, the business managers considered that the time before school started or when school finished should be adequate for planning. Given that TAs at some of the schools assist in the general office before or after school, planning time with class teachers becomes non-existent. The hours that TAs are employed could be more flexible and negotiated with TAs to enable them to attend school meetings and planning sessions with class teachers.

4.2.3.4 Planning time.

A lack of planning time with class teachers is a significant challenge for TAs because they walk into classes unsure about what they will be required to do each day. Class teachers were also concerned about the lack of planning time with TAs. Planning time is linked to the hours that TAs are employed, as well as the model of deployment used in each school. The greatest challenges are presented for TAs who are deployed using the itinerant model of TA support and deployment, where they move from class to class supporting different students. TAs deployed to be with the same class teacher and class each day were less concerned about planning time. A TA employed using this model in the preschool at Molonglo said:

We get planning time together on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. I have been asked to do some of the front office work at that time and have been called on this term. They said to do the planning first then go to the front office. A couple of weeks ago they asked at the drop of a hat to do the front office that afternoon.

(TA13)

Although planning time is allocated for the preschool teacher and TA, it can be withdrawn at short notice, thereby preventing input from the TA into the planning process.
At schools where different models of deployment are implemented, TAs have no planning time. A TA at Cotter said that ‘Usually as the lesson starts she [class teacher] says, “Can you work with Sophie?” Otherwise you walk into a class not knowing what to do’ (TA8). Another TA at Cotter said that ‘As the teachers are starting, I get a rundown. If I don’t get a rundown on things I go with the flow’ (TA9). A class teacher at Cotter commented that her TA would ‘pop in at 8.30 am and that’s the time when she’ll find out about the day. No dedicated planning time makes it tricky’ (CT1).

At Molonglo, the class teacher said that she met with her TA during the school holidays. They found out that they lived close, which helped, but ‘there is no time at school or in school hours’ (CT5). This was despite the fact that the TA was assigned to her and her class as a full-time assistant. Without this arrangement, which was based on the goodwill of the TA to meet during her unpaid break between terms, the class teacher said that the TA ‘would have to pick it up from what I was doing—from my modelling’ (CT5). The TA who works with this class teacher said, ‘We will talk before school and during lessons. We email each other. We also talk at lunch and have exchanged phone numbers as well. If I have an idea, I’ll text her’ (TA12). This arrangement works well for this TA and class teacher, as the TA is assigned only to this class teacher. If the TA had to make arrangements to meet out of school hours with a number of class teachers, this would be a great imposition on the TA, and the school would be taking advantage of her goodwill and availability.

TAs at Murrumbidgee have no planning time. One class teacher commented on how challenging this is for the TA: ‘The TA walks in completely blind and has to pick up the gist’ (CT3). A TA at Murrumbidgee said that she can go to a room earlier than the lesson, but as the teachers move around, they are usually not there to tell her what to do. When they do arrive earlier, ‘it is not always convenient for the teachers because they have stuff
to prepare. It is hard finding the time. A lot comes from us finding time and finding the
teachers between classes’ (TA11). With no allocated planning time, the TAs at
Murrumbidgee either spend time chasing class teachers to find out what they will be
required to do, or they walk into classes unprepared for the lesson.

During observations, TAs and class teachers were rarely seen planning together.
The TA and teacher at Molonglo who work in the preschool were observed planning one
afternoon. The model used to deploy TAs in schools has a significant effect on planning
time and the availability of TAs and class teachers to meet. The model used in preschools
and in special units where TAs are assigned to one teacher and one class should work best;
however, when TAs are withdrawn to help in the general office, their availability to assist
with planning is reduced and they too end up not knowing what their role in lessons will be.

4.2.3.5 Lack of voice.

In interviewing TAs, it was apparent that their voices are mute regarding issues such
as career pathways and salaries. This might be because they are grateful for a job due to
their lack of qualifications and skills, their family circumstances and the school-friendly
hours of employment they seek. TAs do not participate or contribute to decision-making in
schools, and they are unable to share their ideas in meetings such as ILP meetings, strategic
planning meetings or staff meetings due in part to their hours of employment.
Consequently, their voice is not heard in schools.

TAs from three schools in this study do not normally attend ILP meetings, although
one TA from Cotter said that she had been invited to one meeting but had not seen the
actual ILP or the outcome of the ILP meeting. One TA from Murrumbidgee noted that TAs
are named on ILPs as contributors to ILPs. She said that ‘They mention the TA on them.
When it mentions us, it is important that we are involved in it [the ILP]’ (TA11). However,
TAs are not usually invited to meetings or involved in discussions either before or after meetings are held.

This was confirmed by a staff member from the ACT ETD, who said that TAs are ‘not invited or included in ILP meetings or staff meetings. For some TAs, that suits them well, but others would like that opportunity’ (ETD2). Another ACT ETD staff member claimed that it was ‘mind boggling that someone who spends so much time with a student is not involved in that [ILP] consultation process’ (ETD1).

Only TAs at Scrivener regularly attend ILP meetings. At Scrivener, the meetings are held during the school day, which enables TAs to attend. The TAs also provide input into the ILP. Generally, ILP meetings are held outside of school hours and, as TAs are employed only during school hours, this could be why TAs at other schools do not attend these meetings. However, even when meetings are held during school hours, TAs are usually not invited to attend; consequently, they lack a voice in this process.

Another process that TAs do not contribute to is school strategic planning. One staff member from CIT said:

TAs are not involved in issues like the strategic plan. They survey the parents, teachers, students but not the TAs. They are not asked. They don’t have a voice in a school. This is just one example of where the TAs are not included in a process.

(CIT1)

TAs do not usually attend school staff meetings. These meetings are held after school and TAs are only employed during school hours. Consequently, TAs do not hear about decisions made at staff meetings, they do not participate in the decision-making process and they do not contribute to discussions, so they miss out on information that is disseminated in these meetings.
The principal of Molonglo said that she would ‘love it if the TAs came to staff meetings’ (SL10) but usually they would not attend. The supervisor at Murrumbidgee said that ‘if there is something important, they are asked to come, but staff meetings are after school and they are not paid’ (S3) because it is after their hours of employment. The principal at Scrivener said that she expects TAs to attend staff meetings until 3.30 pm, for which they are paid, but most leave at 3.30 pm because they are not paid (SL1).

The decision to attend staff meetings or ILP meetings is taken out of the hands of the TAs when their hours of employment are restricted to school hours. Their lack of a voice in decision-making processes limits opportunities for their perspective to be considered. If principals want TAs to attend and participate in meetings, instead of depending on the goodwill of the TA to attend, they could increase their hours of employment to indicate that they value their presence at, and input to, these meetings.

4.2.3.6 Supervision.

As the primary role for TAs is to support students and teachers, the line management arrangement whereby the business manager, who is responsible for the general office, supervises TAs, is a challenge for TAs. In their support role, TAs require a skill set of strategies to use with students, which differs considerably from an office skill set. The supervision of TAs was also noted as a challenge for class teachers who were unsure who was responsible for supervising TAs.

When asked about the role of a TA in a school, the business managers could not articulate what the TAs did in the classrooms; however, to provide supervision and feedback on performance, business managers are required to observe TAs in a classroom context. The business manager at Molonglo said:

I basically employ them, but I have no control over any of the TAs. It is hard to manage them when you don’t know what is going on. As long as they are being
managed by their teachers, that is fantastic. I don’t have any understanding about how they are being managed. It makes it a little bit difficult. (S3)

The business manager at Scrivener was aware of her supervisory role but had been in the position for less than one year and was still not entirely certain of the varied roles of a TA in the classroom. However, she had undertaken performance reviews on the TAs who were likely to become permanent at the end of the year. She had observed them in classrooms and spoken to class teachers about their performance.

The class teachers claimed they were not responsible for supervising TAs but were equally unsure what the role of the business manager was in supervising TAs. When one class teacher at Molonglo was told that TAs had performance reviews, she said, ‘The TAs have to do this as well? I didn’t know. I haven’t been involved in one’ (CT5). In relation to the supervisor’s role in supervising TAs, another teacher at Molonglo said, ‘They don’t know what goes on in the classroom. They need to get in there and look’ (CT6).

The business manager at Molonglo said she had ‘watched them [TAs] in the classroom already this year’ (S4). However, according to the classroom teachers, the business manager had visited one classroom but had ‘never set foot’ (CT5) in the other classroom. When the TAs from Cotter were asked if the business manager observes them in classrooms or provides feedback, one TA said, ‘I have never had any feedback on my performance. No, nothing on what I do. Do other TAs?’ (TA8).

The lack of supervision was also commented on by class teachers from Cotter: ‘I haven’t seen anyone come in to watch or observe. No-one has ever asked me how they are going’ (CT1). However, the business manager from Cotter said that she ‘talks to the teachers and gets feedback that way’ (S2) rather than observing them in classrooms.

The principal at Cotter said that in practice, the deputy who runs special needs was the supervisor of the TAs and that the business manager was just there to ‘check in with
each morning and have a chat. The teaching and learning side is the class teacher and the
deputy or special needs team’ (SL3). This may be the case, but the business manager is
identified as the supervisor of TAs and hence the person responsible for their performance
review and for renewing their contracts based on their performance.

In Murrumbidgee, where a special education teacher is employed to coordinate the
TAs and students with disabilities, the supervisor of the TAs is the special education
teacher. The principal said that this worked well. He stated that ‘the business manager does
the hiring of the TAs. She does recruitment but the special needs coordinator does what
happens on the ground. It works nicely’ (SL6). However, a class teacher at Murrumbidgee
was surprised to hear that TAs have a performance review, as no-one had ever observed
TAs in her classroom. She also thought that the performance of TAs was judged on whether
teachers complained. She thought it ‘goes on the assumption if you don’t complain they
must be good. That has always been my understanding of how that works’ (CT3). The
principal at Murrumbidgee said that TAs do have ‘a performance review process but not
one that is followed as well as we would like as yet’ (SL6).

The role of the business manager in supervising TAs appears to be both confusing
and contentious. Class teachers are unaware that TAs’ performance is reviewed because
they are not involved in the review process. The model of supervision used in schools
affects the extent of the supervision provided. The supervisory arrangement appears to be
more appropriate for TAs at Murrumbidgee, where the special education coordinator is the
TAs’ supervisor. This also separates the dual and possibly challenging roles of ‘hiring and
firing’ TAs and supervising the TAs by giving responsibility for these two roles to two
different people.
4.2.3.7 Feedback.

TAs receive little feedback on their performance from their supervisors and class teachers. Due to the lack of an appropriate duty statement outlining the role of a TA in a mainstream school, feedback would be problematic and arbitrary because it is not linked to a defined role. However, feedback on performance should be afforded to all staff.

At Cotter, TAs claim that they receive no feedback from the class teachers: ‘I don’t think there is much verbal feedback … not much positive reinforcement’ (TA10) and ‘the only time I’ve been spoken to is if class teachers want your perspective on what a student is doing’ (TA9). Feedback may be defined differently by the TA and the class teacher. The class teacher claims that:

I am always letting [the TA] know how much I appreciate what she does. I do try to make sure she knows she is appreciated. I don’t know if she gets feedback elsewhere or from above. I am not sure. (CT1)

At Murrumbidgee, one class teacher commented that a lack of time or timetabling issues prevent her from providing feedback to her TAs. She said that she ‘makes suggestions on what they are to do, but I cannot give feedback as they come in then they leave as soon as the lesson ends and you are still dealing with the class’ (CT3)

Providing feedback to TAs regarding their performance seems to be rather ad hoc or only incidental, resulting in a challenge for TAs to know whether they are providing the support desired by their supervisors and class teachers. The model of deployment has a significant effect on feedback given to TAs. Where TAs move from class to class, teacher to teacher and student to student, there is little time in a hectic schedule for communication and hence little feedback is provided. Where TAs are with the same class and teacher all day, incidental feedback can be provided. Without a clearly defined duty statement outlining the role of a TA, class teachers and supervisors would be unable to provide
meaningful feedback. TAs are then left floundering, wondering whether they are performing satisfactorily in their role.

4.2.3.8 Models of deployment.

Models of TA deployment varied both within schools and across different sites. A noteworthy finding from this study revealed that models of TA deployment significantly affect the ability of TAs to provide learning support. Models used to deploy TAs in schools are predominantly linked to funding provided for TAs rather than to pedagogical understanding based on ‘best practice’ or how best to improve students’ learning outcomes. The models used included:

1. TAs moving from student to student with disabilities and learning difficulties, and from class to class and teacher to teacher
2. one TA assigned permanently to one unit of three or four classes moving between students with disabilities and learning difficulties
3. one TA to one class and one teacher
4. one TA to one preschool class and one preschool teacher
5. one TA to one student on a permanent basis
6. TAs withdrawing students individually or in groups from classes.

All six models presented challenges to TAs and class teachers. The models are presented in Table 4.2.
Table 4.2:

*Models of TA Deployment Used in ACT Mainstream Schools*

| Model 1: TA moving from student to student with disability and learning difficulties, and from class to class and teacher to teacher. |
| Model 2: One TA to one unit of three or four classes moving between students with disabilities and learning difficulties. |
| Model 3: One TA to one class and one teacher, but TA always works with students with disabilities and learning difficulties. |
| Model 4: One TA to one preschool class with one preschool teacher. Students with disabilities are the shared responsibility of the TA and class teacher. |
When TAs moved throughout a day from class to class and teacher to teacher, (Model 1), TA support was least effective because class teachers and TAs rarely spoke, tasks for TAs to undertake were not planned because class teachers were not always sure that TAs would arrive, no opportunities were presented for either class teachers or TAs to provide feedback, and class teachers did not supervise the work done by the TAs. In this transient, disconnected model, no rapport developed between the TA and the class teacher, although TAs did develop rapport with the individual students with whom they worked.

When TAs were assigned to a unit to support three or four classes and three or four class teachers (Model 2), their situation was similar to that of transient TAs. Planning with three or four class teachers did not occur, and TAs were usually told ‘on the fly’ who they would be supporting and how. Feedback was rarely provided and supervision was non-existent because no class teachers assumed responsibility for TAs.

| Model 5: One-on-one TA support provided to one student with a disability or learning difficulty. TA always assigned to work with this student. | Model 6: TA withdrawal model, where TA withdraws students to a different teaching space away from peers and the class teacher. |
When TAs were assigned to one class and one teacher (Model 3), they were utilised to support only students with disabilities and learning difficulties. This model resulted in students with disabilities and learning difficulties receiving most of their instruction from unqualified TAs, and they were stigmatised, distanced and separated from their peers and the class teacher. However, feedback was possible and *ad hoc* planning occurred between lessons, at recess and lunch time, and before and after school, unless the TAs were required in the general office.

Both TAs and class teachers considered Model 4 the most effective and beneficial for students. This model is traditionally used in preschools in the ACT where TA support is provided permanently to one preschool class and one preschool teacher. This model worked because the TA in this study was qualified with a Diploma in Child Care and the class teacher accepted the TA as an equal. The class teacher supervised the TA closely, provided feedback regularly and planned activities collaboratively, including group tasks for the TA to administer. In fact, the teacher and TA worked as co-teachers. In this model, a supportive, respectful relationship developed between the TA and the class teacher, the TA and the parents, and the TA and the students. The TA was also invaluable when the class teacher was away by providing a constant when a relief teacher was employed. The only downside was that the TA felt she had the same role as the class teacher but was being paid considerably less.

When a TA was assigned to one student on a permanent basis (Model 5), the TA became the primary teacher for the student, and the class teacher was the ‘host’ of the student with a disability or learning difficulty. The student was distanced from the teacher, the curriculum and peers. A relationship developed between the student and the TA, but not between the teacher and the TA. *Ad hoc* opportunities were provided for the TA and the
class teacher to plan, but the class teacher tended to devolve responsibility to the TA, assuming that the TA had skills in learning support, which was not the case.

When TAs withdrew students from their classrooms for intensive instruction (Model 6), the quality of instruction was uncertain because it was not overseen by a qualified teacher; no feedback was possible; students were distanced from their peers, teacher and curriculum; and students were excluded from learning in their classroom. The legality of this model is questionable because TAs do not have a duty of care and hence should not be out of sight of class teachers.

In all models of TA deployment used in schools in this study, the TAs only assisted students with disabilities or learning difficulties. When the TA was present, the class teacher never worked with these students; they were deemed the responsibility of TAs. On one occasion, the class teacher checked what the TA was teaching. Issues of equity and quality of instruction arise as a result of this widely entrenched practice.

4.2.3.9 Undervalued and underutilised.

All TAs want to be seen as valued members of the school staff. TAs commented that varying degrees of respect and value were shown to them by students, class teachers and school leaders. One TA at Cotter said that ‘you pick up on your level of value by how they [teachers] communicate to you’ (TA9). She said that it was a challenge trying to work out her role in the classroom when she was keen to do the job but received no feedback from teachers (TA9). She considered this a lack of respect shown to her by the class teachers.

Another TA at Cotter mentioned that the type of work TAs were asked to do reflected how they were valued and respected (TA8). This comment related to TAs being asked to clean and move furniture by their supervisor. The TA said that it depended ‘on the role and duty statement and how it is interpreted. We are there for learning support but
other people think we are there just to do bits and pieces’ (TA8). Without a duty statement that clearly defines the roles of TAs, the supervisor may have considered this an appropriate task for a TA to perform, even though TAs are employed with funds to support student learning.

TAs at Murrumbidgee experienced different levels of value and respect from students and teachers. One TA has been told by students, ‘You are not our teacher. You are just there to help. You are not a teacher’ (TA10). The TA said that some teachers will ‘step up and say “you apologise right now because she is trying to help in here”’ but other teachers will not do anything’ (TA10). She said doing nothing and allowing students to speak to her like this indicated a lack to respect shown by the class teacher. Another TA said that a look from a student implying ‘I need your help’ can be ‘nice and very reaffirming’ (TA11). When students say, ‘Where were you yesterday? I missed you’, the TA (TA10) said she felt valued.

Some TAs believe they are not respected by students, some are not respected by class teachers and others are not respected by school leaders or their supervisors. They receive little feedback and have limited communication with school leaders. However, the following positive comments about TAs were made during interviews by principals and class teachers but left unspoken to TAs who are desperate for reassurance:

TAs play an integral support role in any school. They are a valuable asset. We need to look after them. (SL3)

TAs are valued members of our school who need more help and support. They are often left feeling undervalued. They make an enormous contribution to our school. (SL10)

The challenge is being seen as [a] real part of the team. This is not an issue here. They are valued here. (SL6)
I always let TA10 know about how much I appreciate what she does. She is always going above and beyond what her job description is. I do try to make sure she knows she is appreciated. (CT1)

I think TAs are wonderful. An undervalued resource that is not always used properly. They should be highly commended. (CT2)

An ACT ETD staff member relayed a story in which a lack of respect was displayed to a TA. After being employed by the principal, the principal never acknowledged her again when passing her in the corridors. The ACT ETD staff member said:

Last year, I worked at a school and the principal didn’t even say hello to the TAs. Yes, she employed them but there was a hierarchy. I couldn’t believe what was going on until one day I saw it. The TAs are not invited to, or included in, any staff meetings or ILP meetings. Some that suits but others would like the opportunity. (ETD2)

The principal at Molonglo also felt that TAs were not valued:

We don’t look after the lowest paid. I have sometimes seen services delivered by TAs that were better and more valuable than the teachers. We don’t value them. We are too busy putting out fires. They are the glue that holds it all together. I think they are undervalued. (SL10)

During observations, it was apparent that TAs at some schools were treated differently to class teachers. In some schools, TAs were referred to by their Christian names, while class teachers were referred to by their surname. Some of the TAs liked this because they liked to have a friendly rapport with the students, while others preferred to be treated in a more professional manner.

TAs are also often underutilised, which leads to them feeling that they are not valued. One ACT ETD staff member said:
I think they feel they are not utilised to the fullest. They have a lot of skills that the school is not tapping into. The schools may not be aware of their skills. I am not sure how that transfer of knowledge will happen. (ETD1)

One class teacher at Molonglo said:

There are times when I have no idea what to do with my TA. If I am doing whole class teaching. I don’t really know what to do with them when I am doing floor work or whole class teaching. They say, ‘Is there anything to display or cut up?’ Then that is what I use them for. (CT5)

A class teacher at Murrumbidgee thought that putting up displays was not utilising the TA appropriately. She said:

Sometimes she comes in when we are going out for PE [Physical Education]. Pointless for her to come in then. I am not a big fan of her doing photocopying or putting up displays and all that unless I am desperate. So I suggest that she go to another class rather than hanging out doing not much. (CT3)

When this occurred during an observation, the TA initially sat in the classroom for 15 minutes before it was suggested that she join another class. The TA returned to the TA staff area to check on emails. Being underutilised was considered by TAs a lack of respect and left one TA ‘feeling quite despondent’ (TA10).

Another sign of respect and value afforded to TAs was noted by a staff member from the ACT ETD. She commented that TAs are frequently ignored when people visit a classroom, as they are not introduced (ETD1). During observations, this was noted on many occasions, especially when TAs moved from classroom to classroom and teacher to teacher. When accompanying TAs into classrooms, the TA’s arrival was acknowledged by the students and class teacher in only one classroom.
However, the principal at Cotter believes that a change in culture is occurring. A one-day conference was organised for all permanent administration staff, including TAs, at the beginning of the 2012 school year: ‘For the first time ever they are saying they were valuing the TA role and the contribution they make’ (SL3). Staff at the ACT ETD planned another conference for administration staff in 2013. Unfortunately, not all TAs attended because it was only for permanent TAs.

Although it was acknowledged by key stakeholders that TAs are valued and make worthwhile contributions to schools, it is also clear that this is not being conveyed to TAs, which leaves TAs feeling undervalued. Not all stakeholders valued TAs, noting that sometimes they are better off without a TA in their classroom, especially when the TA has no initiative or lacks qualifications, skills and training.

To summarise, it is evident that conditions of employment and deployment for TAs at both the system and school levels contribute substantially to the many challenges that TAs face. The model of TA deployment being used had a significant effect on the ability of TAs to provide effective learning support to students. In addition to these challenges, another key theme identified in this study was the communication challenges faced by TAs.

4.2.4 Communication.

A significant finding in this study is the lack of effective communication channels for TAs working in mainstream primary schools in the ACT. TAs require open and effective communication channels between class teachers, their employers, their supervisors, other TAs and the students whom they support. When any of these channels of communication break down or are inefficient, the ability of TAs to support both class teachers and students is compromised. During observations and interviews, it was evident that existing channels of communication in schools fail TAs. Inefficient employment processes have resulted in communication failure when TAs are:
1. not inducted into the ACT school system
2. not oriented into the schools in which they are employed
3. excluded from school meetings
4. poorly supervised
5. excluded from information dissemination networks in schools.

In addition, models of TA deployment used in schools result in TAs and class teachers having limited communication opportunities.

When TAs are not inducted into the ACT ETD system, communication channels between TAs and their employers are not established, which results in TAs having minimal understanding of their role, the expectations of their employers and the career structure for TAs.

When a school orientation is not provided, TAs do not establish a communication channel with their supervisor or principal, and they lack vital information that could help them in their role to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties. When left to orient each other, which happened in one school, TAs may pass on inaccurate or misleading information about students. If TAs are oriented into schools, information about the students they support could be provided by the principal or business manager. An orientation program could provide an opportunity for communication channels to be established between TAs and business managers (TAs’ supervisors), class teachers and principals.

As TAs are only employed during school hours, they are excluded from important communication opportunities within schools because they are unable to attend staff meetings, planning meetings with class teachers, school strategic planning meetings and ILP meetings with class teachers and families. If TAs choose to attend these meetings—most of which are held after school hours—they do so of their own goodwill, as they are
not paid to attend. As most TAs do not attend these meetings, their voice as significant school staff members is unheard.

When planning time is not provided with class teachers, no communication channel is established and feedback cannot be provided, nor information about students or strategies to use with students. Opportunities for TAs and class teachers to plan are denied when supervisors ask TAs to work in the school office at lunch time or after school, or to provide release time for TAs in the preschool. As a result, TAs operate in isolation due to the lack of communication opportunities with class teachers regarding planning.

Information about students who TAs work with is not passed on to TAs. If class teachers know the history or diagnoses of their students, they do not pass this information on. One TA said:

I had a tricky Year 4 student all first term. Nothing I could do was right or worked. There was a meeting at the end of term with the parents. Everything then clicked into place. I could read him after that. I then found out more about his background. In the meeting I found out even more. Once I found out I could help. There were a whole lot of things that I didn’t know but after the meeting I knew and it was much better. (TA8)

Another TA at Cotter said that she asks teachers about the students because ‘it helps to know what I am dealing with’ (TA9). She also said that ‘some of the teachers don’t know what you are there for and can’t guide you. That was a bit hard as I had to find my own feet’ (TA9). She mentioned that she had been provided with an assessment on a child, which gave specific examples of where the child needed help and how to help him. She said that this was ‘the first time this had happened. You only find out by asking’ (TA9).

The TAs at Molonglo were not aware which students were being funded for support. One TA commented, ‘that is something that I don’t know. There may be some but
I haven’t been involved with that. I think there are some but I don’t know’ (TA12). A better result may have been achieved if this information had been communicated to the TA by the supervisor or the class teacher to enable the TA to use effective strategies to support these students. Whose role is it to inform TAs?

At Murrumbidgee, TAs said that it was difficult working with students when they did not know what to expect, as they are not provided with any information about the students. One TA at Murrumbidgee said, ‘We are told, “This is the child you are to work with, he or she is in this class, off you go”’ (TA10). According to another TA, ‘it is hard when you don’t know the triggers and teachers don’t inform you’ (TA11).

As well as not receiving information about the students they are to work with, TAs are rarely given strategies to help students. One TA at Murrumbidgee said that ‘No teacher comes out of the class and shows us what to do with a kid. They expect us to know what to do’ (TA11). A lack of communication between class teachers and TAs is highlighted in this comment, as all class teachers in this study assumed that TAs had a qualification or had been trained in learning support. If they had been involved in TA recruitment or had time to talk to their TAs, they would quickly realise that most TAs lack qualifications, skills and training in learning support. Due to this lack of understanding, class teachers did not believe their role was to assist TAs with strategies; however, it is apparent that TAs need assistance in this area.

Channels of communication between TAs and their supervisors appear to fail. This line management arrangement prevents supervisors from monitoring the performance of TAs in classrooms. As the supervisor, the business manager is required to provide feedback to TAs; however, as TAs spend most of their time in classrooms with teachers and students, communication opportunities between TAs and business managers are limited. The majority of TAs stated that they had not received any feedback—either positive or
negative—from their supervisor. Further, it appeared that supervisors and class teachers did not communicate regarding TAs’ performance.

TAs’ ability to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties is significantly affected by the model of TA deployment used in the school. When the model being implemented is one TA to one class or one teacher, communication between the TA and the class teacher is both efficient and effective. In these circumstances, the TA and the class teacher have opportunities to communicate throughout the school day. When a more transient model of support is adopted, poor communication occurs between class teachers and TAs because TAs are timetabled to work with students in different classrooms and with different teachers throughout the school day. This deployment model challenged TAs in two schools in this study, as explained by TA11:

I know where I am going to be as I have my timetable, but as regard to the content of the lessons, I don’t normally know beforehand. As the teachers are starting, I get a rundown or I go with the flow (TA11).

When using this transient model, class teachers said that because TAs left the room as soon as a lesson finished to move on to the next classroom, the class teachers and TAs had no opportunity to communicate regarding students’ progress or issues that may have occurred during the lesson. This model of deployment of TAs results in poor communication channels being established between TAs and class teachers and limited opportunities for any communication about students.

TAs also struggle to receive day-to-day information disseminated in schools. Information in schools is frequently distributed via email, and not all TAs have access to computers to enable them to access emails. TAs at Murrumbidgee have access to emails because there are two computers in the TA staff area. These TAs also have half an hour per week timetabled for them to use computers to access emails. Class teachers do not use
emails to send lesson plans or messages because they know that access is difficult for TAs. In addition to having access to computers and emails, TAs at Murrumbidgee have access to ILPs via Maze—the ACT ICT administration system. No TAs at the other sites have similar access to computers, emails or Maze information. Email access is difficult in other schools, where TAs can only use computers in the general office during break times to access emails or use the class teachers’ computers. Emails sent by the researcher to TAs employed at these schools were responded to at night, when TAs were at home and had access to their own computers. When TAs have no access to computers, they miss emails, cannot access bulletin boards and cannot access information about professional learning opportunities—they are effectively locked out of another channel of communication that is frequently used in schools. TAs do not have the social or cultural capital in schools to change these processes; consequently, they receive information second- or third-hand, which can be inaccurate or misleading, or it may be received after an event has happened.

Different employment conditions exist in schools regarding access to information for TAs, but TAs are generally excluded from communication channels where information is distributed to other school staff and from discussions or assessments regarding the students they support.

4.2.5 Summary.

The lives of TAs are clearly challenging on many levels. The lack of a duty statement defining their roles in mainstream schools presents the greatest challenge for all stakeholders in this study, and it has resulted in TAs being asked to perform tasks that may be inappropriate and for which they have no training, skills or qualifications. It has also resulted in different perceptions being held by key stakeholders in this study on the roles of TAs. Consequently, TAs at each site perform different tasks and perceive their roles differently.
The conditions of employment and deployment for TAs present further challenges. Due to the tenuous, uncertain and casual nature of their employment and their lack of an induction and orientation, TAs willingly undertake tasks asked of them by class teachers and their supervisors. Many of the challenges confronting TAs on a daily basis are outside the control of TAs, but they significantly affect their ability to provide support to teachers and students. TA deployment models vary considerably within schools and across schools, with each model offering different opportunities for TAs to provide effective learning support.

A lack of effective and efficient communication channels also challenge TAs by marginalising them in the workplace when they are denied access to communication loops in schools, thereby ensuring that their voices are not heard. While many challenges were identified for TAs, challenges for other school personnel who work with TAs were also identified. These challenges will now be presented.

4.3 Challenges of Working with TAs

A number of issues were identified by class teachers, school leaders, supervisors of TAs and staff at the ACT ETD regarding the difficulties and constraints they face when TAs are employed to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties. These challenges include a lack of professionalism and confidentiality, different expectations, power struggles and relationships, timetabling and planning issues, a lack of initiative, replacing TAs when they are absent, misunderstandings regarding duty of care, entrenched TAs who refuse to move, and a lack of training for teachers to work with support staff such as TAs.

4.3.1.1 Professionalism and confidentiality.

Some TAs lack understanding regarding professionalism and confidentiality. Establishing and maintaining professional boundaries between home and work are
important because many TAs live in the local community and are known to families and students. When TAs are not inducted into the ACT ETD system or oriented into a school, they are not aware that ACT Government privacy regulations and policies apply to them.

Supervisors, principals and ACT ETD staff mentioned challenges related to professionalism, privacy and confidentiality when employing TAs. A staff member from the ACT ETD related a situation where the boundaries between home and school contexts and role expectations were not recognised by a TA:

A TA lives next door to one of the students and gives information to the family—misinformation about what is happening. Things happen in a wider context and for a reason. When they are taken out of context it is not healthy. (ETD2)

Another staff member from the ACT ETD related a situation where the family knew the TA and knew ‘a lot about the teacher’s personal life’ (ETD1). Being a friend of the family, the TA felt under pressure to answer questions about the teacher. The TA did not seem to be able to separate her professional role at school from her role at home as a friend.

A staff member from the ACT ETD commented that for some TAs, ‘their sense of powerlessness in their setting may cause them to brag about the ins and outs of what they know is going on in a school even though this is totally inappropriate’ (ETD2). This staff member said that ‘confidentiality is a huge issue’ (ETD2) for schools when TAs are employed. She noted that this was especially the case when TAs live in the local community and/or have their own children at the school where they work. However, many principals deliberately employ ‘mums’ who live in the local community.

The principal from Murrumbidgee, who employs mothers as TAs, said that he has had problems where TAs ‘share information they are privy to’ (SL6). He said that ‘if the mums [TAs in the school] are in the community and someone asks them a question, it is hard not to answer it’ (SL6). The principal at Cotter actively encourages parents to become
TAs but makes it clear to them that ‘you are not a parent when you are here’ (SL3) in order to define the role with expectations and standards.

The supervisor at Cotter commented that when a TA works in the general office, ‘I wouldn’t have her doing any filing of the students’ files for confidentiality reasons’ (S2). However, it would be appropriate for office staff to file records; hence, TAs should maintain confidentiality if they are expected to work in the school office, otherwise this role should be reviewed.

It is evident that better screening of TAs is required and that the employment processes for TAs need to be reviewed to ensure that privacy and confidentiality issues are addressed when TAs are employed. Expectations regarding professionalism, privacy and confidentiality should be clearly articulated to TAs; however, when employment processes for TAs are *ad hoc* or hasty, these requirements may be overlooked, especially when there is no induction or orientation and duty statements do not define the role and competencies or standards required.

**4.3.1.2 Different expectations.**

TAs and class teachers can have different expectations regarding students’ behaviours and needs, effective strategies to use and ways to communicate with students. As a result, their classroom practices differ. If the TA focuses on, and responds to, certain behaviours that the class teacher would prefer the TA ignore, a situation arises that affects students, the TA and the class teacher. A class teacher from Molonglo provided an example:

Sometimes there is a conflict with behaviour management. I just wish they could read my mind. There are some behaviours I want to ignore and want them to ignore but they don’t and sometimes I want them to approach the child and they don’t. That is my biggest challenge—having different expectations. (CT5)
A class teacher from Cotter said that the challenge for him was ‘working with another adult in the room. Children react differently to having two adults in the classroom’ (CT2), especially if they have different expectations of the students and have different teaching styles and personalities. He commented that some TAs can be extremely loud, which is ‘not what students need. I have had some TAs who want all the drama and attention and are loud’ (CT2).

A class teacher from Molonglo commented on different expectations, stating that some TAs ‘let students become dependent upon them’ (CT5) while other TAs ‘won’t do anything for the student’ (CT5). Another class teacher commented on the different expectations that she and a TA had regarding the support that the TA provided:

I worked with a TA who liked a particular child and so just spent time supporting this child. She wouldn’t spread herself around the other students. This could have been related to how the TA was assigned to students by her supervisor and what the supervisor said her role was, but I don’t know. (CT6)

A class teacher from Cotter also noted that ‘not much thought goes into pairing them [TAs] up with kids. There needs to be more understanding of that person and the child. It depends on how it is done’ (CT1). This process is the responsibility of the business manager; however, no matching of skills or needs occurs.

The principal from Molonglo said that the issue of different expectations is: the responsibility of the teacher as well. This is where it would sometimes fall down. The teacher would think ‘thank God I have someone else in the classroom’, but they have to be clear about articulating their expectations required to support a child or children. (SL10)

The different expectations of teachers and TAs can be challenging for all stakeholders. Principals believe that class teachers should convey their expectations to TAs;
however, as mentioned previously, class teachers believe that this should occur during a
school orientation conducted by the business manager or principal. School leaders should
also play a role in placing TAs with class teachers of similar personality types and with
students they can effectively support.

4.3.1.3 Power struggles and relationships.

The power of some TAs was noted as a challenge or threat for some class
teachers—especially early career teachers. The confidence and power of some TAs—
especially older and more experienced TAs—could be quite challenging for early career
teachers. A staff member from the ACT ETD said ‘quite young new teachers come with an
experienced TA and they tell the teachers what to do and what they will and will not do.
This is quite poisonous’ (ETD2).

The power of a TA to influence early career teachers was noted by another ACT
ETD staff member, who said that TAs can ‘demonise’ students in a school. She related a
story where a TA:

Told the teacher that a particular child was a bad child because she [the TA] had
struggled with the child and couldn’t manage the child. Nothing would change the
teacher’s mind. The TA had been there for 20 years. I couldn’t even change the way
the teacher thought about the student. (ETD1)

A teacher from Molonglo related a power struggle she had with a TA:

She had been around for a while. I thought I’d be strong enough but she forgot that I
was the teacher and didn’t take my lead at all. She went behind my back and gave
treats to the kids. I had lots of behavioural issues at the start. Giving them treats and
promises. It was very tricky. (CT5)

As a result of this power struggle, the relationship between the TA and the class teacher
broke down. The class teacher said, ‘I couldn’t trust her anymore or depend on her to take a
small group as I couldn’t trust her to do what I wanted done’ (CT5). The TA was then taken off the class, but the class teacher said that it had been a challenge for both her and the students.

A staff member from ACT ETD commented that ‘some TAs are attracted to this work for inappropriate reasons—for control and power’ (ETD1). She related a story of a TA she had worked with:

A few years ago, the TA waited until I was away sick for a few weeks, and when I got back she had changed my program, the timetable and everyone’s breaks. They had had a string of relief teachers and she had taken control and totally changed things to how she always thought they should be. I snapped. I confronted her. She had been in the school for a long time and thought she knew better than me. (ETD1)

This teacher was an experienced teacher and had the confidence to confront the TA, but this may not be the case with a less experienced teacher.

Some TAs think that once they are employed, they can change their hours to suit themselves and their family circumstances. The principal at Molonglo recalled a TA who ‘knocked off at 3.00 pm’ even though she was employed until 3.30 pm. It suited her to collect her own children so she worked through lunch in order to do this. She had not discussed this with the principal, who said that the TA ‘needed her lunch break to recover. She can’t do that’ (SL10). The principal expressed concern that the TA would start arriving at school late too, as she ‘had managed to manipulate her finishing time’ (SL10).

The principal at Cotter commented on a situation that had arisen:

A TA was doing too much direct conversation with a parent. The teacher was stressed and the parent was demanding. It is hard to make hard and fast rules but it has to be via the teacher. A TA can only pass on organisation information. They can’t pass on opinions. The TA had overstepped the mark. (SL3)
This caused a challenge for the class teacher, who was being judged and criticised by the TA and whose ability was then being questioned by the parent.

When TAs take advantage of less experienced teachers, reinvent their status in a classroom when the class teacher is away, manipulate their conditions of employment to suit their family life and engage in power struggles with teachers, they become a challenge for school leaders.

4.3.1.4 Timetabling and planning time.

Timetabling TAs into classes where they move from class to class, teacher to teacher and student to student can create challenges for class teachers due to frequent interruptions by TAs when they arrive and depart, lack of continuity of support, lack of certainty that the TA will turn up, lack of planning time and lack of feedback opportunities.

One class teacher from Murrumbidgee said that ‘sometimes she [TA] comes in when we’re going out for PE. Pointless for her to come then so I suggest that she goes to another class rather than hang out doing not much’ (CT3). However, this meant that the time that the TA had been allocated to that class and to those students was lost. This situation occurred during observations; rather than finding another class or student to support, the TA returned to the office to read emails.

A lack of planning time with TAs was another challenge that teachers commented on. One teacher from Cotter said that it would be ‘lovely to have time off to talk to them, as the time to get together was a challenge’ (CT1). Another teacher from Cotter said that if the TA ‘could come even just for 20 minutes a week it would be good’ (CT2). A teacher from Cotter thought it would be beneficial to have dedicated planning time:

I think we could get more done or find it easier to talk if there was time dedicated to sit down and even talk about what she [TA] has seen. She is working really closely
with the kids. She will tell me things that she has noticed. It would be good to have time to document it all. (CT1)

A teacher at Molonglo commented on the benefits experienced when she had planning time with a TA, saying that ‘I had a TA that had release time with me and I found this invaluable and I was able to utilise her skills much better to meet the needs of the children’ (CT6). One principal noted that enabling teachers and TAs to plan together would be an added cost: ‘How to pay for the extra time is a challenge. Really we end up using the good will of good people. The reality is we are not adequately resourced to do what they [ACT ETD] want us to do’ (SL6).

A lack of planning time meant that class teachers and TAs rarely communicated. Class teachers were unable to show TAs strategies to use with students, to provide background information about a student or to discuss goals for a student’s ILP. This meant that TAs would arrive in a classroom unaware of what they would be required to do, thus taking up valuable teaching time while the teacher explained the lesson and the TA’s task for the lesson.

During observations, it was apparent that the lack of planning time resulted in TAs being told—generally in less than one minute—what would happen in the forthcoming lesson. They then needed to listen carefully to get the gist of the lesson in order to explain concepts or reteach skills to students. Class teachers commented that with no planning time, there was no opportunity to receive feedback from TAs on students’ progress or needs.

The model of deployment being used determined whether any planning time was possible. TAs who worked in the preschool had allocated planning time with their class teachers unless they were timetabled to assist in the general office. Class teachers who had TAs for short periods and who most needed planning and discussion time with TAs had no time allocated. This presented a challenge for class teachers and TAs alike.
4.3.1.5 Lack of initiative.

While some TAs were recognised for displaying initiative by creating teaching resources for students, others were criticised for lacking initiative and waiting to be directed by the class teacher.

One class teacher said, ‘When there are behaviour issues, it is a challenge if they [TAs] just sit at the table and wait for you to tell them what to do’ (CT4). Although the TA was displaying little initiative, the ambiguity of the role may have resulted in the TA being uncertain whether to help or to leave behaviour management to the class teacher. Another class teacher referred to a TA with no initiative as ‘being like having another student to deal with’ (CT5). When a TA lacks initiative or a willingness to display initiative, it is challenging for an already busy class teacher.

A class teacher from Cotter commented that:

A more thorough screening, a better employment process for TAs would be good.
I’ve had one or two who were not the best and it can have a big effect on the class.
The changes they caused, the extra stress on the class teacher and the effect on the class were amazing. (CT2)

It was not clear whether these TAs lacked initiative, but their presence created additional challenges for the class teacher and the students when they did not meet the expectations of the class teacher to provide the support required.

4.3.1.6 Relief TAs and relief teachers.

A lack of continuity of TA support is another challenge for teachers, which arises when TAs are away and relief TAs are called in. One class teacher commented on relief TAs, saying ‘sometimes I would be better on my own than with them’ (CT4). Having a series of relief TAs while waiting to appoint a permanent TA presented a challenge to another teacher and her class:
The first TA didn’t work out. She had a term contract, then we had someone to fill in and her contract ends soon, then I have another one coming in the last term. It has been challenging for the students and very hectic. (CT5)

Finding relief TAs was a challenge mentioned by all business managers whose role it is to replace TAs if they are sick or on leave. The main challenge is to find suitable relief TAs. One class teacher mentioned that she had engaged her mother to work at the school as a relief TA because it was difficult to recruit suitable relief TAs (CT5). Finding appropriate relief TAs is a challenge for business managers, but when unsuitable relief TAs are employed, their presence in classrooms creates a challenge for permanent staff—both class teachers and TAs.

Finding appropriate relief teachers who do not take advantage of TAs is also a challenge. On two occasions during observations, a relief teacher was working with the class that the TA was assigned to. On both occasions, the TA became the key person in the classroom. In one classroom, the TA managed the behaviour of students, while the relief teacher attempted to teach. Without the presence of the TA, the teacher would have had no control of the class. It was evident that the TA had more authority and respect with the students than the relief teacher. In the other class, the relief teacher deferred to the TA, expecting the TA to take responsibility for the class. The TA very capably did this while the relief teacher ‘floated’ around the classroom, taking advantage of the willingness of the TA to take on her role.

4.3.1.7 Duty of care.

The role that TAs have in the duty of care generated conflicting responses. Staff in the ACT ETD were unable to clarify TAs’ role in the duty of care. They are seeking legal clarification but suggested that until they receive advice, ‘TAs can run things but under the guidance of a class teacher’ (ETD3). Whether this means that TAs need to be within sight
of a teacher is interpreted in different ways. The principal at Scrivener was clear in her understanding of the duty of care of TAs, saying that ‘They are not to have supervision of children out of the sight of teachers’ (SL1), but the business manager was unsure of the duty of care, saying that ‘They have duty of care too but I am not sure the full extent’ (S1).

Other interpretations of the duty of care were expressed at the other schools. A class teacher at Molonglo said that they have the ‘same duty of care of any adult in the school’ (CT6), while another class teacher said that ‘They don’t have duty of care so they cannot supervise students alone’ (CT5). These different interpretations could result in TAs being utilised in different ways by different teachers, leading to confusion regarding the duties that TAs can be asked to perform. It could also place TAs in difficult and perhaps inappropriate legal situations with students. Class teachers commented that it would be easier for them if TAs had a duty of care and could then remove students to quieter work spaces or outside a classroom if they were being disruptive.

The duty of care needs to be clarified for all stakeholders to ensure that TAs are only asked to undertake duties that they are legally required to undertake. If TAs do not have a duty of care, the tasks they can be asked to perform, such as removing students from classrooms when their behaviour is disruptive, may be reduced, and this would present an additional challenge for class teachers and school leaders.

4.3.1.8 Entrenched TAs.

Some TAs are ill-matched with class teachers and some have been employed for too long at the same school, resulting in complacency, power battles and stagnation in the position. A challenge for principals was the difficulty in moving entrenched TAs on to another school and finding the best mix of class teachers and TAs. Some TAs have become comfortably established at a school and do not want to move or do not realise that it is time to move. The principal at Molonglo said:
If the TA is a permanent officer and it is not working out for a variety of reasons and it is time for them to move on, they don’t want to move. They have watched everyone come and go and they don’t want to move. The tears and tantrums that occur! It is so stressful and a real challenge for principals to move them on. (SL10)

The principal at Molonglo also commented on the difficulty in moving TAs. In one school she worked at, the TA had been in the ‘learning support unit for too long. The TA and the teacher had been together for eight years. They had “barnies” in front of the students, which was totally inappropriate’ (SL10).

It is possible that a class teacher and a TA may not get along. A principal at Cotter said that this may arise if:

A class teacher inherits a TA who is assigned to a student in the class. The class teacher may not want to work with them. They may have a personal problem. I have had to have frank conversations with class teachers. Underneath it all, if it is not working, the child is getting nothing or conflicting advice—how awful is that for high support needs children? (SL3)

As well as finding ways to move TAs around in the system, finding the best mix of class teachers and TAs, and TAs and students, presents a challenge for principals. Entrenched TAs could become a greater problem now that all TAs who have been employed for two years in the ACT will become permanent employees. Policies may need to be developed to ensure that TAs move schools in a similar manner to teachers, and principals may need to carefully place TAs with class teachers.

4.3.1.9 Lack of training for class teachers in utilising support staff.

A significant finding in this study is the lack of knowledge that class teachers have in utilising and planning for support staff, especially given that TAs have been a feature of mainstream classrooms for over 20 years. Class teachers and school leaders commented
that teachers need training in using TAs effectively in their classrooms. Class teachers at Cotter commented on the need to ‘use support staff better’ (CT1) and claimed that they did not receive training in their Bachelor of Education course in how to use TAs: ‘We were never told this is how you can use a TA. Never this is what they are legally able to do and given lists of things they could be asked to do’ (CT2). Another teacher from Murrumbidgee commented that ‘teacher training needs to include how to work with TAs, how to get the most out of your TA’ (CT3).

Staff from the ACT ETD said:

We need to target teachers to use their staff more effectively. Sometimes they get up to four staff and don’t know how to use them. Issues blow up because the teacher is not good at managing other staff. It is a skill. When you have in your head what you are going to do today and then working out what others can do is hard. Working out what else to do and delegating is a higher-order skill or they don’t want to let go.

(ETD2)

One TA at Murrumbidgee commented that teachers did not know what to use them for: ‘I think a lot of teachers have not had a TA in the classroom before. They struggle with the fact that they have a TA in there’ (TA11).

School leaders also commented on the need for teachers to receive ‘some general information on how to work effectively with TAs’ (SL6). A lack of ability to utilise support staff effectively results in TAs being underutilised or used inappropriately. Frustration and feeling undervalued occurs when TAs are not utilised appropriately or fully.

In summary, the challenges faced by class teachers, school leaders and supervisors when working with TAs are broadly defined in terms of their personal qualities, including their professionalism. When left unaddressed, these challenges result in frustration and anxiety for class teachers, school leaders and supervisors, and they affect students—
particularly when TAs and class teachers have different expectations regarding students’
behaviours and needs. Confusion and a lack of understanding regarding the duty of care
could result in TAs performing tasks that they should not be undertaking. Many of the
challenges that confront class teachers, supervisors and principals regarding TAs relate to
the processes used to employ them. These could be overcome with better screening of TAs,
clear duty statements, and induction and orientation programs provided by the ACT ETD
and schools.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the challenges that TAs face on a daily basis that affect
their ability to perform in a poorly defined role. Their greatest challenge is role confusion,
ambiguity and role overlap, which directly relates to the lack of a duty statement that
clearly defines the role of a TA in a mainstream school. Although a duty statement exists
for TAs, it is relevant for TAs who work in special schools and whose key role is to support
the physical needs of students with disabilities. TAs who are employed to work in
mainstream schools are employed to support the learning needs of students rather than their
physical needs. Throughout this chapter, the softly spoken voice of the TA has emerged
when explaining the challenges they experience and their desire for better working
conditions.

The ACT ETD system processes and procedures, as well as school processes and
conditions, combine to marginalise TAs. Poor employment processes and poor employment
conditions—all of which are beyond TAs’ control—result in TAs trying to perform in a
role while working in isolation with little guidance or direction. Performing in a role that
lacks a duty statement to define the role—alongside class teachers who are also unsure of
the role—results in TAs being asked to perform tasks that may be inappropriate or even
illegal, and for which they may be neither qualified nor trained to perform. Due to their
casual, often hasty, employment—which depends on the enrolment of students with disabilities or learning difficulties, TAs’ lack of qualifications and skills, and their lack of training—TAs are in a tenuous, insecure position. Due to limited feedback and poor supervision, TAs struggle to know whether their performance is to the satisfaction of teachers or supervisors. When communication channels for TAs are inefficient or non-existent, they cannot voice their opinions or question their employers. Poor communication channels marginalise TAs, leaving them feeling isolated and undervalued as school employees.

The lack of understanding that class teachers have of the role of TAs was also highlighted, as most class teachers have not sighted a TA duty statement. Further, they have misconceptions regarding TAs’ skills and qualifications, and they lack training in using support staff effectively. Poor matches of class teachers and TAs can result in different expectations in the classroom and tensions between TAs and class teachers.

Business managers and principals often recruit TAs in haste when students with disabilities or learning difficulties enrol in a school. Without a clearly defined duty statement or understanding of the role of TAs, inappropriate TAs may be recruited with a mix of skills that are more appropriate for office work than for classroom support work. The supervisory role of the business manager is a concern for TAs and class teachers, as business managers lack an understanding of classroom and student needs.

This chapter has also presented the challenges experienced by teachers, principals and supervisors due to the employment of TAs. These challenges could be reduced or eliminated if different models of TA deployment are used in schools and if better employment processes are implemented. Another key theme that has emerged during the data analysis relates to the qualifications, skills and training required by TAs. These findings will be presented in Chapter 6.
Chapter 5: Findings—Qualifications, Skills and Training Required by TAs

5.1 Introduction

As stated previously, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 address the six themes that are apparent in the data. While Chapter 4 identified the challenges that TAs and other school personnel face due to ineffective employment policies and practices, Chapter 5 examines the specific qualifications, skills and training required by TAs. These are organised in Figure 5.1 according to the formal qualifications and skills such as personal qualities and knowledge required by TAs to perform in their role as perceived by the different stakeholders in this study.

The need for TAs to have formal qualifications and skills emerged as a key theme during coding. Formal qualifications could include a Certificate or a Diploma obtained from a vocational or education provider such as TAFE or an institute of technology or a university. During coding, the skills required by TAs were divided into personal qualities and knowledge. Personal qualities include the ability to form and maintain relationships with people, as well as attributes such as being kind and caring and displaying initiative. Knowledge includes understanding how to assist students using specific strategies, knowledge of disabilities and general knowledge about learning.

![Diagram of Qualifications and Skills of TAs]

- **5.2.1 Formal Qualifications**
- **5.2.2 Skills**
  - Personal Qualities
  - Knowledge
5.2 Qualifications and Skills of TAs

The following section addresses the qualifications and skills required by TAs to perform in their role as identified by the key stakeholders in this study.

5.2.1 Formal qualifications.

No formal qualifications are required by TAs working in ACT schools. If first aid is considered a formal qualification, TAs commented that first aid is often required for employment; however, they rarely use the qualification.

TAs were unsure what formal qualifications they should obtain. Some TAs believe that a Certificate III in Children’s Services will be required from 2013, but they were not certain about this, commenting that ‘I have heard whispers that it is coming in but I haven’t heard directly from the powers that be that a formal qualification will be required by TAs’ (TA11). One TA said that ‘No-one has mentioned having a Certificate III or first aid to me. Some schools are expecting this for permanency. First aid has never been pushed’ (TA9). Changes are occurring in the ACT, but the TAs in this study have not been informed.

Class teachers were unsure what qualifications were required for the position of TA. When a class teacher from Cotter was asked about the qualifications required to be a TA he said ‘I don’t know. I probably should know but I don’t. It could vary. Some have little experience’ (CT2). All class teachers in this study thought that TAs employed in their schools had a qualification in learning support, and all were surprised to learn that they only required a Year 10 qualification to be employed as a TA.

Supervisors of TAs are involved in TA recruitment; however, the supervisors held different perceptions of the qualifications required to be a TA and did not know what courses were available for TAs. One supervisor from Cotter—referring to the desire for
TAs to have a first aid certificate to be employed—stated that ‘holding a certificate in disability or student education would be an advantage’ (S2), while another said that when employing TAs, she ‘asked for a qualification—a Certificate III or IV in Disability’ (S4). She went on to say that a qualification would be an advantage. When recruiting TAs, the supervisor at Murrumbidgee said, ‘We did ask for a qualification—a Certificate III or IV in Disability’ (S3). When asked what qualifications TAs required, the supervisor at Scrivener said, ‘They don’t need to have any qualifications to work as TAs. So, a TA could be anybody off the street really, as long as they pass the police check’ (S1). None of the supervisors said that first aid certificates or certificates in disability or learning support were essential for a position as a TA at their school—only desirable. It was unclear whether supervisors knew what qualifications were actually available for TAs, as none mentioned the most appropriate courses for TAs—Certificate III in Children’s Services and Certificate III in Learning Support.

One principal commented that formal qualifications are not required, but that this is changing in the ACT. This was confirmed by a statement made by an ACT ETD staff member, who said that ‘from 2013, anyone who works with children from birth to five years must have a Certificate III in Children’s Services—a 12-month course conducted over two semesters. This would include preschool TAs’ (ETD3). Given that TAs in primary schools frequently provide release for TAs in preschools, all TAs will presumably need to obtain this qualification. However, in 2012, no TAs in this study had been informed of this requirement.

One principal said that ‘the person’s education has really not been a huge thing. We don’t need evidence. A desirable qualification is a Certificate III’ (SL3). Another principal said that what she looks for ‘is people who have done courses, but training and experience with children are more important’ (SL10). The same principal said that first aid was
considered highly desirable and that Certificate III in disabilities or special needs would always be desirable (SL10).

The principal at Murrumbidgee said:

First aid is the most common requirement. Most areas are moving towards TAs having a qualification. It is an advantage to have a qualification. It is desirable. We hire student teachers as TAs and this works particularly well. We also hire mothers—parents at the school—who establish themselves as TAs and show their enormous value as mature adults, who want to be here for many years. They provide the most wonderful resource for kids as they are passionate about what they do. (SL6)

The principal at Scrivener said:

I would certainly look at qualifications such as a teaching qualification, but only if they don’t tell the teachers what to do. I have two TAs who are three-year trained teachers. I look at experiences and that they wouldn’t be too shocked or upset by some of the behaviours that unfortunately they see here. (SL1)

To conclude, all stakeholders concur that TAs need qualifications, but just what those qualifications should be is unclear. School personnel who recruit TAs, such as principals and business managers, seemed to be unaware that a Certificate III in Learning Support was available in the ACT. TAs need qualifications that align to their roles in mainstream schools. However, until a duty statement that clearly identifies TAs’ roles in mainstream schools is developed, the qualifications needed by TAs will remain unclear.

Mixed messages regarding the formal qualifications required by TAs in the ACT are circulating in schools. Given that many TAs are casual employees who would like permanency, they need to know if a formal qualification will be required for permanency and what that qualification will be. In addition, if TAs are required to have a qualification
such as first aid, they need to see that there is value in obtaining this qualification by using it in their role. TAs who had this qualification had rarely used it, except to apply a Band-Aid to a student.

A lack of knowledge regarding the qualifications and skills of TAs was problematic for stakeholders in this study, resulting in class teachers expecting either too much or too little from their TAs. A significant finding in this study is that all class teachers interviewed thought that TAs held a qualification in learning support and that they are called Learning Support Assistants\(^8\) because they have undertaken this training. One TA commented on this lack of understanding, saying that ‘The teachers think we know more than we do’ (TA11). This misconception has resulted in misunderstandings by class teachers of what TAs can actually do. TA support provided to both students and teachers was extremely variable, which is not surprising when no standard qualification is required by TAs. Until all TAs hold the same qualifications, class teachers will be unsure of TAs’ skills and qualifications.

When a principal states that a TA’s education is not important, this implies that the role of a TA is not important or valued in the eyes of the principal. This attitude will change by employing qualified and skilled staff in schools to provide effective learning support to students.

5.2.2 Skills: Personal qualities.

Specific personal qualities required by TAs were mentioned by stakeholders in this study. Table 5.1 shows the personal qualities required by TAs as perceived by the different stakeholders, who all identified the key personal quality as interpersonal skills, including the ability to relate to children and teaching staff. Stakeholder groups then identified different personal qualities as the key TA qualities needed to perform in the role. TAs identified patience and perseverance as important personal qualities. Class teachers

\(^8\) The term used in the ACT for TAs.
identified good communication skills; the ability to follow directions and display initiative; being kind, caring and compassionate; and being professional as key personal qualities for TAs. TAs did not mention that these qualities were important in their roles. School leaders mentioned patience and perseverance as well as professionalism and good organisational and time management skills. Supervisors at all sites valued different personal qualities for TAs, as shown in Table 5.1.
Table 5.1:

**Personal Qualities Required by TAs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills: personal qualities required by TAs</th>
<th>TAs</th>
<th>Class teachers</th>
<th>School leaders</th>
<th>Supervisors</th>
<th>ACT ETD</th>
<th>TAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills/people skills/ability to relate to children</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
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<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patience and perseverance</td>
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<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication skills/ability to follow directions</td>
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<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good listener</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm and passion</td>
<td></td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Well mannered, courteous</td>
<td></td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative, fun, friendly, sense of humour</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
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<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professionalism—privacy and confidentiality</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kind, caring, approachable, flexible, understanding, compassionate</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
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<tr>
<td>Willing to learn and help others learn</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisational skills/time management skills</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
TAs at all schools—Cotter, Molonglo, Murrumbidgee and Scrivener—as well as TAs who attended the TAT sessions, consider that people skills, interpersonal skills and the ability to build rapport with students and staff are important personal qualities for TAs. A TA from Murrumbidgee explained:

I think having skills is important for doing my job well as a TA, but I also think you need to be a certain type of person to work with children and special needs children. You must be patient, caring, very flexible and want to build a relationship with that student so they can form trust and a positive relationship with you. (TA10)

In addition to having interpersonal skills, TAs at Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Scrivener, as well as the TAs who attended the TAT sessions, mentioned patience and perseverance as key qualities. Having a child with a disability did not qualify a person to be a TA according to one TA, who said that ‘Unfortunately some people take on the job because they have a child with special needs and then think it makes them suitable—it doesn’t necessarily’ (TA19).

The need for good communication skills was mentioned by TAs at Murrumbidgee and by TAs who attended the TAT sessions, but not by TAs at the other key sites. TAs at Scrivener and Molonglo, as well as the TAs who attended the TAT sessions, mentioned the need to be creative, friendly and fun, as well as the need to have good organisational and time management skills.

Class teachers from all schools concurred that people skills, interpersonal skills and the ability to build rapport with students and staff are important personal qualities for TAs. Class teachers at Cotter, Molonglo and Murrumbidgee said that communications skills and being kind, caring, approachable, flexible, understanding and compassionate were all important personal qualities for TAs to possess. They also mentioned the need for TAs to be professional in regards to privacy and confidentiality. This personal quality was not
mentioned by TAs at any of the schools. Patience was mentioned by class teachers at Cotter and Molonglo, while class teachers at Cotter, Murrumbidgee and Scrivener referred to the need for TAs to show initiative. Class teachers at Molonglo, Murrumbidgee and Scrivener said that TAs needed to be flexible.

Each class teacher had a different perception of the personal skills required by TAs:

Be flexible as things change. It is a hard job as you have to pick up on inferred stuff rather than direct. Being observant is a huge skill for them. Willing to cope with change and knowing that the teacher they are assigned to may not want them there.

This happens sometimes because the teachers think they are being watched. (CT4)

TAs would be placed in a difficult situation if they were aware that the class teacher did not want them in the class. They are assigned to the class, the teacher and the funded student and hence have no option but to be there. This would present another challenge for TAs that is directly related to employment processes and conditions.

I have had TAs who won’t sit back and let kids do things for themselves. They need to teach them, then step back and let the kids have a go. There are TAs who just don’t use any common sense or intuition. They are not with it; cannot anticipate.

Sometimes I would be better on my own than with them. (CT5)

This comment indicates a class teacher with strong views on the qualities and skills that a TA should possess, otherwise they would not be welcome in her class.

To be outgoing and confident enough to go around and introduce yourself to kids; to know what kind of person you are—not to sit back; to want to be involved in a child’s education and passionate about a child’s education; to be able to talk to the children appropriately; and an ability to communicate effectively with a child. (CT3)
Being able to communicate with children and have an understanding of how children learn best or ways to help children not just to complete work but about the child and understanding children. TAs that develop a good rapport with the kids are able to get more from them. Really understanding kids is beneficial. If the TA can communicate with them and talk to them, it helps when they sit with students to help them finish their work. They need to be able to talk to them and rephrase things. Some do this well. (CT2)

These two comments from class teachers emphasise the need for TAs to have good communication skills and the ability to communicate with students. A common thread running through the comments made by class teachers is that not all TAs have the personal qualities expected by class teachers.

School leaders at all schools, who recruit TAs, believe that good interpersonal skills and the ability to build a rapport with students and staff are important personal qualities for TAs. School leaders did not refer to the need for communication skills. At Molonglo and Murrumbidgee, patience and perseverance were also acknowledged as important personal qualities for TAs to possess. At Cotter, school leaders mentioned the need for TAs to be professional regarding privacy and confidentiality. At Murrumbidgee, it was important to have a willingness to learn, to be flexible and to have organisational and time management skills. At Cotter, showing initiative and having good organisational and time management skills were important.

Comments made by principals on the personal qualities required by TAs included:
Number one is relationships—the relationships with the student. Then personality, initiative and a willingness to learn. (SL3)
Mature people who are sensible and down to earth and who are passionate about what they do. (SL6)
Principals, who recruit TAs, and class teachers have some common beliefs concerning the personal qualities required to be a TA. Communication skills and the ability to communicate with students and other school personnel were key qualities identified by class teachers, but not by school leaders. It is evident that class teachers consider that TAs require different personal qualities related to students’ needs in their classes and the tasks they require TAs to perform. It is also evident that class teachers have strong views on the personal qualities they seek in TAs; however, class teachers, who work with TAs on a daily basis and know what skills and personal qualities they require, are not included in the TA recruitment process. Omitting class teachers from this process appears to be an oversight.

The TA’s supervisor at Murrumbidgee said that TAs need to be enthusiastic and passionate, while the supervisor at Molonglo said they need to be well mannered and courteous:

I like the TAs to come in personally and hand in a resume so I can see what they are like. Then I can see if they are well mannered, courteous and happy. I can pick that up with a short conversation. (S4)

Comments such as these from supervisors, who are also involved in TA recruitment, indicate that they have no understanding of the qualities that class teachers seek in a TA, nor the role that TAs perform in classrooms.

To conclude, different stakeholders had different perceptions regarding the personal qualities required by TAs to perform in their role. Class teachers, who work with TAs in their classrooms, had firm ideas regarding the personal qualities they seek in TAs; however, class teachers have no input into the recruitment of TAs, nor the placement of TAs with class teachers and students. Principals and business managers are involved in TA recruitment; however, the qualities they consider important vary from those of class
teachers. Employment processes for recruiting TAs and deploying TAs in classrooms need to be reviewed in light of these findings.

5.2.3 Skills: Knowledge required by TAs.

The knowledge required by TAs emerged as another significant theme in this study. The knowledge required by TAs can be divided into three broad categories: knowledge of strategies to use with students, knowledge of disabilities and students’ needs, and general knowledge required for the role. Table 5.2 summarises the responses from stakeholders at different sites regarding the knowledge required by TAs in order to perform well in their role.
Table 5.2: 

**Knowledge Required by TAs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge of strategies to use with students</th>
<th>TAs</th>
<th>Class teachers</th>
<th>School leaders</th>
<th>Supervisors</th>
<th>ACT ETD</th>
<th>TAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour management strategies</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee Scrivener</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Scrivener</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy and numeracy strategies</td>
<td>Cotter Murrumbidgee Scrivener</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Murrumbidgee Scrivener</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies to help students</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Murrumbidgee Scrivener</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Murrumbidgee Scrivener</td>
<td>Cotter Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of disabilities and student needs</td>
<td>Molonglo Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Molonglo Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Molonglo Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand different disabilities</td>
<td>Molonglo Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Molonglo Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Molonglo Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand students’ needs</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Cotter Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Cotter Scrivener</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand how children learn</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Scrivener</td>
<td>Molonglo Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General knowledge required by TAs</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Cotter Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>First aid</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understand role/limits of the role in the classroom</td>
<td>Cotter Molonglo Scrivener</td>
<td>Molonglo Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory reporting/school policies</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration/office skills</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duty of care responsibilities</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT knowledge</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Cotter Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.3.1 Knowledge of strategies to use with students.

There was little consistency among key stakeholders regarding the knowledge of strategies required by TAs to perform in their role. TAs at Murrumbidgee and Scrivener said they needed strategies in behaviour management and literacy and numeracy, while TAs at Cotter said they only needed strategies in literacy and numeracy. TAs who attended the TAT sessions also said they needed knowledge of behaviour management strategies, but they did not say they needed knowledge of strategies to help with literacy and numeracy. Given that all TAs said they needed to help students with literacy and numeracy, they should all require knowledge of strategies to use in order to assist students and improve learning outcomes.

All class teachers commented that TAs needed knowledge of literacy and numeracy strategies and strategies to help students. Class teachers at Cotter, Molonglo and Scrivener also referred to the need for TAs to have knowledge of behaviour management strategies.

No school leaders mentioned that TAs need knowledge of behaviour management strategies, but they did refer to the need for TAs to have knowledge of literacy and numeracy strategies.

Only one supervisor commented on the need for TAs to have knowledge of strategies in behaviour management.

During observations, TAs were seen applying their knowledge of literacy and numeracy strategies. TAs were observed listening to students read. One TA used a few strategies to help a student decode words for herself, and she provided words quickly for the student. The TA could have started the session with a book orientation strategy, but she did not; thus, the student, who was from a background other than English, had little understanding of most of the vocabulary in the story. TAs were observed reading instructions on maths worksheets to students but not using numeracy strategies other than
those modelled by the class teacher. TAs were also observed using behaviour management strategies to negotiate, motivate and encourage students to complete set tasks. One TA was observed removing distracting items from a student, while others were seen sitting strategically between disruptive students.

5.2.3.2 Knowledge of disabilities and students’ needs.

Only TAs at Molonglo and Murrumbidgee referred to the need for knowledge of disabilities and students’ needs—possibly because both of these schools have LSUs and integrate students with disabilities into mainstream classes when appropriate. Scrivener and Cotter are fully inclusive; however, students with disabilities and special needs are enrolled in these schools, so it could be assumed that TAs working at all sites require knowledge of disabilities and students’ needs.

Only class teachers at Molonglo thought that TAs needed knowledge in different disabilities, while class teachers at Cotter, Molonglo and Murrumbidgee thought that TAs needed knowledge in students’ needs. Class teachers at Cotter, Molonglo and Scrivener thought that TAs needed knowledge in understanding how children learn.

School leaders at Murrumbidgee said that TAs needed knowledge in understanding different disabilities, students’ needs and how children learn. School leaders at Molonglo said that TAs needed an understanding of different disabilities and how children learn. At Cotter, school leaders considered that TAs needed knowledge and an understanding of students’ needs. At Scrivener, school leaders did not comment on knowledge that TAs would need in relation to disabilities or students’ needs.

Supervisors at Cotter and Scrivener commented that TAs needed to understand students’ needs. When supervisors are involved in the recruitment of TAs, it is expected that supervisors will seek TAs who understand the needs of the students they are employed to support.
5.2.3.3 General knowledge that TAs require in their role.

TAs at Molonglo noted that they needed first aid knowledge and knowledge in school policies such as the mandatory reporting of child abuse. TAs who attended TAT sessions also said they needed knowledge in the mandatory reporting of child abuse. TAs at Cotter and TAs who attended the TAT sessions said they needed knowledge to perform administration/office tasks. No other TAs commented on the general knowledge they may require in their role.

Class teachers from Cotter, Molonglo and Scrivener noted that TAs needed to understand their role and also the limits of their role in the classroom. This would certainly be desirable, but as the existing duty statement does not define the role of a TA in a mainstream school, it is difficult for TAs to have this knowledge and understanding. No class teachers referred to the need for TAs to have knowledge in first aid or the mandatory reporting of child abuse. Class teachers from Molonglo said that TAs needed knowledge to perform administration/office tasks and knowledge of their duty of care responsibilities.

The need for TAs to have knowledge in ICT was referred to by class teachers at Murrumbidgee, school leaders at Murrumbidgee and Cotter and ACT ETD staff. A class teacher from Murrumbidgee recounted how knowledge of ICT can be used by TAs:

When we go on an excursion, we take photos and use the video camera. Being able to use the camera is important. Then we make up a digital booklet of the excursion. Having this knowledge is good for a TA. (CT4)

The principal at Murrumbidgee also claimed that TAs needed knowledge of ICT in their role:

We gave the TAs a flip camera to film when they saw a child having an ah-ha moment. Capturing that was good for the TAs. They liked the challenge of
capturing those moments and providing evidence of learning to share with teachers and parents. (SL6)

School leaders at Scrivener commented that TAs needed first aid knowledge, and supervisors of TAs at Cotter and Scrivener also said they needed first aid knowledge.

In conclusion, TAs did not elaborate on the knowledge they require to perform in their role, and few TAs commented on the knowledge or strategies they require. This could be because TAs do not have a duty statement that clearly defines their role in mainstream classes. It could also be because they lack qualifications, skills and training and do not realise what knowledge they lack regarding teaching strategies, the needs of students with disabilities, and using different technologies in learning and teaching.

However, class teachers were quite explicit regarding the knowledge needed by TAs. Comments provided by class teachers reflected the role they required TAs to perform in their classrooms and the knowledge they would need in this role:

Knowledge in maths and English skills to at least Year 10 level; understanding individual needs; understanding their role in the classroom; understanding how children learn and the different types of learners; skills in behaviour management; being able to adjust their language so that students understand; understanding normal child development; knowing different strategies to help students complete tasks and background knowledge of the students they support. (CT1)

A basic knowledge of the school curriculum; basic English and maths. The main help TAs provide is with literacy and numeracy—getting those less capable students started on tasks so they are not sitting there waiting for help so they don’t fall behind the others. (CT2)

Behaviour management as well as classroom and student management; how to build good relationships; literacy, reading and sound knowledge; knowledge of students
and their needs; understanding of learning and physical disabilities; knowledge of
strategies to support students; and understanding of the limits of their role; their
duty of care responsibilities; and to be able to do the work the students are doing.
(CT3)
TAs need literacy knowledge to conduct a mini guided reading session with little
games, reading through a book, completing a book orientation, asking questions,
and coaching students to give the correct response. (CT4)
Assessing students’ literacy needs using running records; asking comprehension
questions while students read; providing prompts when listening to children read;
and knowledge of critical literacies. (CT5)
Class teachers hold firm opinions on the knowledge that TAs require and could
identify specific tasks that TAs should be able to perform in their role. A wide gap in the
knowledge of strategies was evident between TAs and class teachers, which should be
expected given the lack of qualifications and training of TAs. The comments from class
teachers indicate the type of qualification or training that TAs require in mainstream
schools in order to perform in the role that teachers need and expect.
During observations, it was evident that TAs need to be extraordinary people with a
variety of qualities and skills to perform the tasks required. During a two-hour observation
session, it was not uncommon for a TA to placate a student, repeat instructions from a class
teacher, read a maths worksheet and explain the task, withdraw a student to a quiet space
for intensive one-on-one support, help students find lost items in their school bag or the
classroom, listen to a student relay a story from home, separate disruptive students and read
with students. Many of these tasks require a TA to have a set of complex skills, including
knowledge in strategies to help with literacy, numeracy and behaviour management, as well
as personal qualities such as being understanding, caring and a good listener. While the
qualifications and skills required by TAs are closely linked to the role they perform in classrooms, so too are the training requirements for TAs.

### 5.3 Training Requirements for TAs

Training refers to the formal instruction that TAs would gain by attending workshops or courses that may be site-specific. These could include school-based training such as skill development training in strategies to help support students with literacy or numeracy, training in the use of assistive technologies or training in behaviour management strategies.

All key stakeholders, except for the supervisors of TAs, commented on the need for TAs to receive training.

Table 5.3 shows the training needs identified for TAs by key stakeholders in this study.
Table 5.3:

*Training Required by TAs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training needs of TAs</th>
<th>TAs</th>
<th>Class teachers</th>
<th>School leaders</th>
<th>Supervisors</th>
<th>ACT ETD</th>
<th>TAT TAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour management—strategies to deal with difficult</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behaviours</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies to help support students</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening to children read</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy and numeracy strategies</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Team building/working with others</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different disabilities/learning needs and how to work with</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>these children</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT training—assistive technologies</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School policies—code of ethics, role of a TA, school</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td></td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>welfare policies</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help a teacher</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to support a student (e.g. writing a social story)</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How children learn/learning styles</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
<td></td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A wide variety of recommendations were made from all stakeholders regarding the training needed by TAs. The suggestions for training reflect the role that different stakeholders believe that TAs have in mainstream schools.

Training in behaviour management, different disabilities and learning needs (including how to work with children with disabilities) were the most frequently mentioned training required by TAs. TAs at Cotter mentioned that they needed training in how to listen to children read, in literacy and numeracy strategies, and in strategies to support students. TAs at Molonglo were less specific, saying that they needed training in how to help a teacher and how to support a student. TAs at Murrumbidgee said that they needed training in strategies to help support students, including literacy and numeracy strategies and ICT training. TAs at Scrivener said that they needed training in listening to children read, ICT and how to support students. TAs who attended the TAT sessions also mentioned their need for training in literacy and numeracy strategies and in ICT.

While some training needs seem to be common among all TAs, it is not surprising that different TAs require different training due to the range of qualifications and experiences they have, with no consistent expectation that they would have completed the same formal qualification such as a Certificate III or Certificate IV in Learning Support. In addition, the range of students they work with would necessitate a different skill set.

Class teachers from all key sites made recommendations regarding the training needed by TAs. The most frequently mentioned training recommended by class teachers for TAs was behaviour management strategies, which reflects their emphasis on this role for TAs. Class teachers considered that TAs also needed training in strategies to help support children, including literacy and numeracy strategies; team building and working with others; different disabilities and learning needs, including how to work with children with
disabilities; ICT; learning styles and how children learn; and training in school policies, including the TA role and code of ethics training.

One class teacher explained that TAs needed training because ‘the way they were taught is not always the right way and not the same as how we teach it now’ (CT1). Another class teacher commented on the lack of training of a TA. She had asked a TA to write a social story for a student, believing that it was reasonable to expect the TA to know how to do this:

I asked a TA to write a social story for a student but she had no idea yet she was an experienced TA. Nearly every teacher has someone on the spectrum who isn’t diagnosed, so TAs need to know what to do to help. (CT4)

As TAs are not required to have a qualification such as a Certificate III in Learning Support, it would be unrealistic to expect a TA to know how to write a social story unless the TA had received training. This is not a skill that a TA could pick up by listening to or observing a class teacher; specific training is required.

Due to the variations in skills and qualifications that TAs possess, as well as the diversity of students’ needs, it is not surprising that class teachers have suggested a wide range of training for TAs. The extensive range of training recommended by class teachers also reflects the lack of qualifications and skills possessed by TAs when they are employed.

School leaders did not all concur that TAs needed training in behaviour management. School leaders at Molonglo and Murrumbidgee recommended this training, but the other school leaders did not refer to it. Overall, school leaders and staff from the ACT ETD recommended the same type of training for TAs that class teachers had recommended.

To conclude, class teachers and TAs at the different schools have different perceptions regarding the training that is required by TAs in order to effectively perform in
their roles. TAs recognise the need for training in behaviour management because of the demand placed on them to assist class teachers in this role. Further, training is required in specific disabilities because of TAs’ role in the classroom, where they always support students with disabilities. Not all TAs referred to training in the strategies that they may need to use to support students in literacy or numeracy, nor in ICT, which were both mentioned by all other stakeholders. Some TAs may already know strategies to help students with literacy, numeracy and ICT and hence do not think they require additional training. However, during the TAT sessions, it was evident that TAs lacked knowledge of the strategies to use to assist students with both literacy and numeracy.

All stakeholders recognise the need for TAs to receive training and can identify the type of training that TAs require. However, class teachers would like, and expect, TAs who are employed to be trained so they do not have to train them and so they know exactly what they are capable of doing to support both them and the students.

Training TAs after they are employed presents issues for business managers, principals and class teachers. These issues will now be presented.

5.3.1 Effect of training on TAs.

During Stage 3: Planting Seeds for Sustainability, 27 TAs from ACT schools, including the key TA participants in this study, participated in five two-hour TAT sessions that were specifically prepared for TAs based on the data received from the questionnaires and observations. The training was designed to improve the skill and knowledge base of TAs and to enable the researcher to evaluate the effect of training on TAs’ ability to provide learning support for students with disabilities.

TAs from all schools commented on the benefits they received from training. Some comments related to training they attended that was arranged by their school, and some comments related to the TAT sessions. One TA said that training ‘helps with confidence
and is good because you learn from the experiences of other TAs, not just the presenter, but the other participants’ (TA10). Another TA commented that training ‘helped me to understand more my role and the work we do within our role. It is encouraging from that point of view’ (TA9).

One TA from Murrumbidgee commented on training held at the school:

We had some people come to the school earlier in the year after school talking about trauma. It was one of the best PDs I have been to. When you talk to a student and try to calm them down with things and they tell you stuff and you think wow, so that is why they are like this. This has probably been the best PD year we have had. (TA11)

The same TA also commented on the TAT sessions:

PD gives you more confidence—backs up what you know. I am doing the right thing. Watching the video of what it looks like for someone with autism. I wish I’d seen that four years ago when I was trying to connect with a child. It gives you a clear picture and more knowledge about the disability. (TA11)

This TA should have received information and training about autism four years earlier, when she had been supporting that student.

A TA from Cotter, who was commenting on the TAT sessions, said that ‘What we had was amazing and you feel thirsty for more. We need more training’ (TA9). Another TA from Molonglo commented that ‘I felt incredibly empowered after the workshops. I found attending training helped to make a difference’ (TA13).

Another comment from a TA related to how she could better help students with disabilities as a result of the training due to her enhanced empathy and understanding:

I gained an understanding even at the basic level of some of the strategies and some of the needs of these kids. I can’t imagine what it must be like when you have all
these things running through your head already. How important it is to give wait
time for these kids. (TA12)

Providing ‘wait time’ is a basic strategy used with students with disabilities and
learning difficulties, and which this TA should already have been using.

A TA from Molonglo said that one student she works with responded well to the
strategies that she tried:

When I was working with X with the alphabet, I was thinking about what the speech
pathologist said about feeling the sound of the words, using your tongue, making
sure they are watching your mouth. He was doing this and responded to the
strategies. (TA12)

The same TA had been worried about students reversing numerals. She is more relaxed
now, as ‘the big issue I had was reversals of numbers, writing numbers backwards. Now
that I know they will generally grow out of it, I don’t stress about it anymore’ (TA12).

Another TA from Molonglo referred to the literacy workshop and her improved
understanding of how to help her students: ‘We have some home readers. I sit with them
and do not hold the book any more but let them hold the book and I don’t point at the words
anymore’ (TA13).

Overall, the feedback from the TAT sessions was positive, but the training
highlighted:

- TAs’ lack of knowledge, skills and strategies to use when supporting students
- that 10 hours of training was insufficient to fill the significant gaps in
  knowledge and skills
- that TAs had developed improved self-confidence and a belief that training
  would enable them to perform more effectively in their role.

5.3.2 Availability and accessibility of training.
No schools offered training opportunities specifically for TAs. The ACT ETD offered limited training for TAs; most training offered was for class teachers, but TAs could also participate. The availability of training was raised by all stakeholders at all schools as a concern; however, all agreed that TAs need training and that all workplaces should provide training or access to training for their staff.

Class teachers acknowledged that TAs were keen to receive training. One teacher at Cotter said that ‘She will do any training offered but there is not a lot offered for TAs’ (CT1). The supervisor at Cotter disagreed:

They [TAs] certainly are offered training. I have given them these pamphlets so they are aware of what is available for TAs. These may be for everyone … I’d prefer to send them to things they are interested in and what works well for them. (S2)

The training being offered on the pamphlet was for all staff at the ACT ETD rather than specific training for TAs, and the TAs said that by the time they heard about training, most courses were booked out by teachers who have more ready access to computers to sign up. The TAs at Cotter also noted that ‘when you are permanent, you need to do four days [PD] per year out of school, but there is not much available for TAs’ (TA10) and ‘we are scratching—there is nothing really available for you’ (TA9). The TAs at Cotter said that when they were due to renew their first aid certificate, it was good because first aid was a three-day course and they only had to find one more day of training in that year.

One of the casual TAs at Cotter was not aware that she had to undertake training:

I thought that because I was casual there were no expectations on me to undertake training. I wasn’t aware that I had to and no-one said that I had to. I’ve just found out that I have to attend and that our PD has to be out of school hours. I didn’t even know that—it is all a bit foggy! (TA9)
The expectation surrounding training and PD had not been explained to the TA because no induction or orientation had been conducted when she was employed.

The principal at Cotter noted that training for TAs was limited, and she was not sure whether her TAs attended training. She said that ‘Training for TAs is ad hoc. We try to send people along to PD (e.g. autism PD), but it was particularly expensive. Don’t know if we sent any TAs. If courses come up we try to send people’ (SL3). The expense of sending a TA to an autism workshop would have been weighed up against the expense of sending a teacher to the workshop.

Funding from the ACT ETD is not available for TAs, and no funding is provided in school budgets for training TAs. However, this may change with school autonomy, as the principal will decide who can attend training. The situation that currently exists was explained by a class teacher at Murrumbidgee:

TAs mainly get offered training at the school. Generally, they won’t pay for TAs to go to other training. My TA is coming to an autism workshop with me in October. They are paying for it and a teacher and a TA to replace us. My TA has been to some computer ones at the Centre for Teaching and Learning [ACT ETD]. Training on using the Smartboard was held here at school in the library. Usually we just teach ourselves. (CT4)

This comment highlights the low status of TAs in schools, as well as the value placed on their role. It is unusual that the TA is attending the autism workshop, that a relief TA is being provided and that the school is paying for it. TAs are usually only offered in-house training that would be held after their hours of employment, thus relying on the goodwill of the TA, and which would cost the school nothing if the TAs attend.

All schools in this study offer in-house training for teaching staff, which is held after school, and TAs are invited to attend. Murrumbidgee offers training in the mandatory
reporting of child abuse each year, which TAs can attend. However, none of the TAs have attended because it is held after their hours of employment. Cotter invited TAs to EpiPen training. Molonglo offered training in Kagan Cooperative Learning and invited TAs to attend. One TA attended and will continue to attend the series of workshops. TAs at Scrivener attended a workshop on diabetes when a student was diagnosed with diabetes, as they ‘could see the relevance in the workshop’ (TA1).

When most TAs are ‘mums’, attending training after school hours is difficult. According to TAs, Certificate III in Learning Support is on at a ‘horrendous’ time for families, as it is run over 18 weeks, two nights per week, from 4.00 pm to 7.00 pm. None of the full-time or part-time TAs in this study had considered attending this course because of the times it is held.

A class teacher at Molonglo commented on training that her TA had attended after school and how it was organised:

My TA has done some speech training this year. I helped her find courses on the internet. It is not necessarily my job to help her. It should come from the business manager who is her supervisor but that doesn’t seem to happen. (CT6)

Specific courses are offered at the Centre for Teaching and Learning, which is run by the ACT ETD for TAs in using technology for students with disabilities. TAs often miss out on registering for these courses because ‘they don’t see them come up on the list’ (TA8) and TAs do not have easy access to computers in schools in order to register online. Some courses were offered in 2012 for TAs employed in LSUs and special schools, but not for TAs in mainstream schools.

Differences between the schools occurred in this study regarding access to training and funds provided for TAs to attend training. A TA at Molonglo who attended a workshop said:
I went to an autism and Asperger’s workshop from 9.00 to 3.00. I had the day off but had to pay for the workshop myself. They couldn’t help me with that. (TA12)

However, a TA at Murrumbidgee attended a ‘write on’ workshop, was given the day off, a relief TA was provided and no costs were incurred by the TA. These differences reflect the different values that principals and business managers place on training TAs. A consistent system-wide policy would prevent such variations from occurring.

The supervisor at Scrivener said that actually knowing about and getting onto the email list for training and professional learning was difficult. She said that ‘There was a workshop for all administration staff, including TAs, at the beginning of the year but we didn’t know about it. I wasn’t the business manager at the time and we weren’t receiving any of the emails as the business manager was on leave’ (S1).

A variety of reasons prevent TAs from accessing training, whether it is held in-house or outside the school. Access to training to improve their qualifications and skills is denied to most TAs. Ideally, if TAs are employed with qualifications and skills to perform in their role, only ongoing site-specific professional development and training would need to be provided by employers. However, providing training during the normal working hours of TAs may be problematic because school leaders are reluctant to provide release time, and class teachers expect TAs to be in their classrooms to support students.

5.3.3 Differing perceptions.

Class teachers have varying perceptions on the training that TAs require and how it should be undertaken. All class teachers agree that training TAs is necessary. However, some class teachers like to train TAs themselves to ensure consistency in the approach and strategies used, while others expect TAs to have the necessary training if employed. If training was more widely available for TAs, class teachers would not need to train them. In
addition, if all TAs employed held a Certificate III or IV in Learning Support, they would require less training.

One class teacher from Molonglo said that ‘I need to train them, spend a lot of time with them, to get that eye contact with them and this takes a lot of time. After a couple of weeks, the TA knows what I expect’ (CT5). However, the same class teacher said that she only trains TAs if they are staying with her class for a while. She had a relief TA but as ‘she is only with the class for two weeks, I haven’t worried about training her’ (CT5).

Another class teacher from Murrumbidgee said that the training needs of TAs vary ‘from one TA to another. Sometimes TAs have natural ability, but not always. Training is therefore essential’ (CT3).

Although class teachers indicated that training TAs is beneficial, a staff member at the ACT ETD commented that teachers do not always encourage TAs to undertake training. Apparently, ‘the teachers enthuse [about training] but then don’t want the TAs to tell them how to run the classroom’ (ETD2).
To summarise, the training needed by TAs is linked to two factors:

1. their role in the classroom

2. the qualifications, experiences and personal skills they have when they are employed.

The role that TAs have in the classroom is a poorly defined role that does not reflect the learning support provided by TAs in mainstream schools. Until a duty statement is prepared that defines the role of TAs in mainstream schools, training needs will vary depending on the qualifications, skills and prior experiences of TAs.

5.4 Conclusion

TAs’ lack of standardised qualifications, skills and training are significant causal factors contributing to many of the challenges faced by both TAs and other school personnel who work with TAs. Although all stakeholders in this study commented that TAs need qualifications, skills and training, little consensus exists on the most appropriate qualifications, skills and training required for TAs. Perceptions varied within and across sites and between stakeholders.

TAs employed in the ACT do not require a formal qualification, and many only have a Year 10 Certificate. Even a Year 10 Certificate is not always required, as principals employ TAs because they are available and known to them, and they have personal qualities that principals value more than educational qualifications. As a result, the qualifications, skills and training of TAs varies considerably, resulting in class teachers being unsure what tasks their TAs are capable of performing. A significant finding of this study is that all class teachers thought that TAs had qualifications or training in learning support and were surprised to learn that the minimum qualification required to be employed as a TA is a Year 10 Certificate. When class teachers are not involved in the TA recruitment process, they assume that TAs have skills, qualifications and prior experiences
that are appropriate for the learning support role they are employed to perform. Employing TAs with no qualifications, skills or training to fulfil a role that is complex and ill-defined presents yet another challenge for all stakeholders in this study, further highlighting the need for improved employment processes for TAs.

Until the role of a TA working in a mainstream school is clarified, it is difficult to determine the exact qualifications or personal qualities that a TA would require. However, class teachers appear to know exactly what qualifications and skills they require in a TA working in their classroom. When determining the role of a TA, policy-makers could defer to class teachers and ask them what they believe the role entails and then identify the qualifications and skills that TA need to perform in that role.

Ensuring that all TAs have a qualification, such as a Certificate III in Learning Support, would minimise the need to train TAs. However, ongoing training or professional learning is necessary to maintain and improve the knowledge and skills of all staff, including TAs. If all TAs had the same base level qualification, greater consistency of support could be provided, class teachers would know what TAs were capable of doing in their classes and less immediate training would be necessary.

To employ unqualified, unskilled and untrained staff in schools to support students with disabilities who may present challenging behaviours and who need assistance with learning is an equity issue that needs to be addressed. How and why this practice has occurred and has been allowed to continue without evaluation warrants further research.
Chapter 6: Findings—Benefits of Teacher Assistants

6.1 Introduction

As stated previously, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 address the six key themes that emerged during the data analysis. This chapter examines the benefits of employing TAs from the multiple perspectives of class teachers, school leaders, administrators and supervisors. The benefits of being a TA from the perspective of a TA are also presented. This chapter is noticeably short, and all comments made by key stakeholders concerning the benefits of TAs are included. Even when probed during interviews for additional information, little was elicited.

From the class teachers’ perspective, TAs are beneficial because they are:

1. a positive influence
2. helpful
3. able to build relationships with students
4. a calming influence on students
5. able to make the class teachers’ life easier
6. an extra pair of eyes and an extra pair of hands
7. able to work with groups of students
8. able to assist with challenging behaviours.

Comments made by class teachers regarding the benefits of TAs were frequently prefaced by ‘if you have a good TA …’ (CT1) or ‘if the TA is the right person …’ (CT5) or ‘I’ve been lucky with the TAs I’ve had’ (CT3). Clearly, not all TAs are perceived in a positive, beneficial way, as was noted in Chapter 4 when examining the challenges of working with TAs.
Principals referred to TAs as being a ‘valuable asset’ (SL3) and as people who ‘make an enormous contribution’ (SL6), but even when probed, they did not identify the specific benefits of employing TAs.

The supervisors of TAs did not comment on the benefits of employing TAs; however, most supervisors utilised TAs as office relief staff who enabled permanent office staff to have a lunch break or to provide office assistance during busy periods in the school day.

The benefits of employing TAs did not generate extensive discussion during the interviews.

6.2 Benefits of TAs

6.2.1 Class teachers’ perspective.

There was overwhelming support for the employment of TAs by class teachers. While many challenges of working with TAs were raised, all class teachers commented on the benefits of having TAs—particularly the right type of TA—in their classroom to support both them and the students. Comments made by class teachers included:

They can be a very positive influence on the class and the unit, if you have a good TA, like I have this year. There are many benefits to be gained not just for the teacher, but for those students below average who need extra help to keep up with the rest of the class. (CT2)

In a classroom, they are such a big help. Having someone who is so closely linked to that child and who has been able to build that relationship with them. My TA sits strategically between children to help calm them down. It makes life so much easier for the teacher and the whole class, not just for that student. (CT1)

TAs have a very positive influence on the class—the right TA. To sit strategically between children and calm them down makes life so much easier for teaching the
whole class. The students have developed such a rapport with her it shows how important it is to have the right person working with these students. Being able to help the less capable kids or students whose English skills are lower is also so important. (CT3)

My TA is an extra pair of eyes and extra set of hands. When I have one group, I know I have one other adult who can deal with the others or she has a group then I can work with the rest of the class. It takes the load off. When there is such a variety of needs, I can put a high or low group with another adult. (CT5)

The greatest benefit is having the TA with you all the time for behaviour support. One of the greatest benefits is you have that one-on-one. If I am dealing with a problem, she will take the group and get the kids together. (CT4)

Having an extra set of hands in the classroom is the greatest benefit—it takes the pressure off the teacher to get around to all the 20 kids. The right TA makes life a little easier—they don’t have duty of care but they often take children out if their behaviour is distracting. They are an invaluable asset that we need to look after. (CT6)

From the class teachers’ perspective, the greatest benefit afforded by TAs is the presence of another adult in a classroom to assist with behaviour management, calm students and work with groups of students. While class teachers commented that TAs were beneficial in helping groups of students during observations, TAs rarely helped groups except in the preschool. TAs’ main role was to sit strategically between students when teachers were explaining tasks to a class, enabling the teacher to teach and students to listen and learn. TAs also took disruptive students out of classrooms to allow teachers to teach and students to learn.
The class teacher at the preschool noted the benefits of having a full-time TA: ‘The parents know that anything they tell me they can tell my TA. We can share it. This is the luxury of having a TA with you all the time’ (CT6). Unfortunately, this luxury is not afforded to all class teachers who often share TAs.

6.2.2 Principals’ perspective.

Principals also appreciated the presence of, and contribution made by, TAs. The principal of Molonglo likened TAs to ‘expensive chocolate that you make last and don’t quaff down without thinking about it’ (SL10). The principal was referring to the difficulty in obtaining funding for TAs. She said that when that funding is acquired, you do not waste it but ‘savour’ it, ensuring that the funding is used effectively. Other principals made the following comments regarding the benefits of employing TAs:

TAs play an integral support role in any school. They are a valuable asset. We need to look after them. (SL1)

TAs are valued members of our school who need more help and support. They are often left feeling undervalued. They make an enormous contribution to our school. (SL3)

The challenge is being seen as real part of the team. This is not an issue here. They are valued here. (SL6)

While principals appeared to value the contribution that TAs make, they were not specific about identifying what TAs actually do that is of benefit to the school, teachers or students. It was clear that principals thought that TAs needed to be valued more highly and included more as members of staff.

6.2.3 ACT ETD perspective.

Staff from the ACT ETD also commented on the benefits of having TAs:
In certain settings, they need more adults there. Just having another adult to bounce off as well. The teacher can’t always see the best way or make the right decisions. It is highly anxious for everyone when someone is kicking, screaming and trashing the room—you need someone else there to make decisions or make the decisions for you. I have had very positive experiences with TAs. TAs can be very calm and collected working as a team. Sometimes teachers’ egos may get in the way of accepting the range of help that TAs can offer. (ETD2)

From the perspective of the ACT ETD administrator, the presence of another adult can be an asset to a class teacher, but not all teachers realise this or accept the help that a TA can provide.

6.2.4 Supervisors’ perspective.

The supervisors of TAs were mute regarding the benefits of employing TAs; however, they are frequently involved in the recruitment process with principals. Perhaps this is because most business managers are not aware of the role that TAs have in supporting class teachers and students and hence could not comment on the benefits. Business managers may also be concerned only with the cost of employing TAs and hence cannot see the benefits. However, most business managers benefit from employing TAs because they timetable them onto the office roster at busy times during the school day and use TAs to relieve permanent office staff at lunch time.

6.3 Benefits of Being a TA

TAs made few references to the benefits of being a TA. Some comments made were:

I love being involved. The job is so much more than I ever thought it would be. I came in a bit blind to it. I would do it all again a heart beat. It depends on who you
are working with as well, from the teachers to the students. I am sure every classroom is not the same. (TA12)

‘The job is challenging but rewarding’. (TA13)

I love being a TA. A great job. There is no responsibility to take home. Emotionally though it is draining. It isn’t for everyone. (TA11)

TA12 was employed on a casual contract for one term and although she had applied for the position, she was not offered the position because a permanent TA requested a transfer and won the position.

At least one TA commented on the difference it makes working with different teachers. Employing TAs who have the right type of personality to work with different class teachers is an important consideration for business managers and principals when assigning them to classes. All TAs commented on how much they love their job and that it is challenging but rewarding.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter on the benefits of TAs is notably short. Although all stakeholders were questioned during interviews about the benefits of employing TAs, minimal discussion was generated on the benefits accrued from TA employment. All class teachers acknowledged the important role that TAs play in their classroom—particularly noting their role in managing students with challenging behaviours. Class teachers noted that the presence of TAs sitting strategically with or between students during teaching explanations allowed other students to listen to the teacher and learn. Class teachers with full-time TA support would struggle to cope without TAs; the extra pair of hands and eyes have become indispensable. Principals also noted the benefits of employing TAs but did not expand on how TAs benefit their schools. When likened, by one principal, to expensive chocolate that needed to be savoured and not wasted, it was evident that TAs were highly regarded in her
school. *Neither class teachers nor principals mentioned that TAs help to improve student learning outcomes; however, TAs in mainstream schools are employed to assist students with learning.*

TAs did not significantly elaborate on the benefits of being a TA. Although it was evident that they all liked their jobs and wanted to continue to be TAs, they were reticent to elaborate on what they perceived as the benefits of being a TA.
Chapter 7: Discussion and Implications

7.1 Introduction

The findings from this study show that each stakeholder group holds significantly different perceptions of the role of TAs and the qualifications, skills and training requirements that are necessary to perform in the role. Further, some stakeholders—specifically, the supervisors of TAs—have limited understanding of what TAs do on a day-to-day basis in the classroom. The role of a TA in mainstream schools is complex, confusing and challenging, which can lead to tension between TAs and class teachers and between TAs and their supervisors when there is a lack of shared understanding of inclusion and the role of TAs (Mackenzie, 2011). The findings revealed that TAs lack qualifications and skills—specifically in learning support—so why do schools employ TAs? How effective are they in improving students’ learning outcomes? Why does the government continue to provide additional funding to schools for TAs when no evidence exists to demonstrate that they improve students’ learning outcomes? What are the benefits and costs of employing TAs, and have alternative programs or options been considered? While these questions may not be fully answered in this study, some of the findings can inform significant improvements in policy, practice and planning in relation to TAs at the state/territory and school levels.

Many of the challenges TAs experience are due to existing employment processes. This includes the lack of a standard duty statement from the ACT ETD that clearly defines TAs’ role in mainstream schools, as well as hasty, ad hoc recruitment practices where no induction or orientation into either the system or school occurs. Without a duty statement,

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9 A duty statement exists for TAs working in special schools in the ACT, but their roles differ significantly from TAs in mainstream schools.
TAs can be utilised inappropriately or can be asked to perform tasks for which they lack qualifications, skills and training. Once employed, TAs are challenged further by employment and deployment conditions that neither enhance their role nor benefit students: they are excluded from information about students with whom they work; they lack access to class teachers to plan lessons and discuss students’ needs and progress; they lack a voice in decision-making processes, including decisions that affect their role; they are usually excluded from online communication channels in schools so do not receive daily updates about staff, students and training that are sent via email, and they cannot access departmental bulletin boards; they are inadequately supervised by business managers who are unsure of the TAs’ role in classrooms; and TAs feel that they are neither respected nor valued by school staff. TAs want training but have limited access to it; when training is provided, it is often designed for teachers and it is hence inappropriate. In addition, the model of deployment used has significantly affected the ability of TAs to provide learning support.

The situation for TAs is further complicated when class teachers lack understanding of the TA role. This is because TA roles vary within and across schools and there is no standard duty statement; class teachers lack knowledge of the qualifications and skills possessed by TAs; they believe, incorrectly, that TAs employed in their schools are qualified in learning support; poor communication channels exist between class teachers and TAs; class teachers have no say in how TAs are deployed in their classrooms; and class teachers lack training in utilising and managing support staff effectively.

Additional challenges arise because TA supervisors lack understanding of the role of a TA in a mainstream classroom as their own remit, and experience focuses on running a business office. They lack knowledge of the skills and qualifications required by TAs to perform in their role in a classroom and lack training in supervising support staff.
Principals and other school leaders acknowledge that the role of a TA is complex and challenging. However, principals are frequently under pressure from teachers and parents to provide support for students with disabilities or learning difficulties when they enrol at a school, which does not always allow time for thorough recruitment. In addition, pressure to secure and spread limited funds to provide TA support across a school can result in hasty decisions being made when recruiting TAs.

Despite these challenges, the number of TAs being employed has increased over the past two decades. However, during the past 10 years, researchers internationally have begun questioning this trend and are specifically examining TAs’ instructional role, their employment to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and the perceived benefits accrued from employing TAs (Giangreco, 2010a; Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Webster et al., 2010). While concerns have been raised, the status quo remains in the ACT and TAs continue to be employed at increasing rates and deployed to provide learning support to students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Change is necessary on many different levels to address these issues and ultimately improve student learning outcomes. Such change needs to occur within education systems and to practice and culture. All stakeholder groups, as well as parents and students, stand to benefit from such changes.

Discussion of the findings follows under the headings:

1. implications for school systems
2. implications for school practices
3. the changing role of a TA
4. attitudinal improvement
5. cultural change.
7.2 Implications for School Systems

Changes are required in ACT ETD system practices to improve the current employment processes for TAs. These include duty statements for TAs working in mainstream schools, induction programs, career structures and training.

7.2.1 Duty statements.

TAs working in mainstream schools in the ACT do not have a duty statement that clearly defines their role in supporting the learning of students with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools. A lack of clearly defined duty statements has been noted as a concern for TAs nationally and internationally (Blatchford et al., 2009; Howard & Ford, 2007; Giangreco, 2010b). Without clear duty statements, neither TAs nor class teachers know what roles TAs can perform. The absence of a duty statement can lead to TAs being reactive rather than proactive due to uncertainty (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010), and it can result in overlaps of roles, causing frustration, anxiety and tension between class teachers and TAs.

On the ACT ETD website, the role of a TA in a mainstream school is summarised as:

Role focuses on supporting the teacher to include a child with a disability in all school activities. Duties may include preparation of class materials, supporting the health care and physical needs of a student and general work in the classroom not directly focusing on the student with a disability. Some support of therapy or specific programs may be included (ACT ETD, 2013).

This description does not reflect what TAs employed in mainstream schools actually do. It does not indicate the variety of tasks that TAs were observed performing in
classrooms throughout this study and it differs from how the key stakeholders in this study perceive the TA role. Staff at the ACT ETD agreed that the TA duty statement is very generic and does not adequately describe the duties that TAs perform in mainstream schools. As a result, role confusion, ambiguity and overlap occur. This is in line with findings from the literature review, which suggest that role confusion has been occurring for many years (Blatchford et al., 2009; Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Mackenzie, 2011; Shaddock et al., 2009). Role confusion occurs for a variety of reasons and can be attributed to the shift from using TAs to support teachers to using TAs to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties in mainstream classes (Harvey et al., 2008; Liston et al., 2009; Pickett et al., 2003; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Confusion also occurred in the ACT when TAs were renamed as learning support assistants, which led teachers to assume that TAs held a qualification in learning support. Developing an appropriate duty statement that defines the TA role as a learning support assistant in mainstream schools will address these issues and is recommended as a priority for the ACT ETD (see Appendix 8 for suggested duties linked to qualifications).

### 7.2.2 Induction programs.

Unlike teachers, TAs are not inducted into the ACT ETD system. As a result, TAs have a poor understanding of the system and requirements within which they are employed. They feel isolated, undervalued and removed from the ACT ETD, which is ultimately their employer. In addition, effective communication channels are never established between the ACT ETD and TAs, although such channels exist for teachers. This lack of communication leads to TAs being unaware of critical policies and practices that affect them in their employment. These include policies related to privacy and confidentiality, the mandatory reporting of child abuse, duty of care, performance reviews and training expectations. A
system change is required to ensure that all TAs are inducted consistently into the ACT ETD system.

7.2.3 Salary structure, qualifications and career pathways.

Salary structures for TA roles are set by the ACT ETD. As TA roles do not require formal qualifications or experience, TAs receive the base salary for staff employed in ACT schools. The level of funding provided by the government for each TA role in mainstream schools is determined by students’ needs based on a SCAN. Unlike other professions, TA salaries are neither performance-based nor aligned to qualification levels. TAs are rarely employed for their skills or qualifications. There is no expectation or incentive for TAs to obtain advanced status or additional qualifications, which is partly why the majority remain unqualified and do not participate in additional training opportunities. Even when TAs do attain qualifications, it is unlikely that their salary will increase.

Development of a career pathway along which TAs could progress based on their qualifications and years of service or evidence of advanced skills and competencies is recommended. A suggested career structure for TAs in the ACT is provided in Appendix 8.

It is reasonable to expect that as TAs attain formal qualifications and new skills, this is recognised with an increase in salary, as more highly qualified and trained TAs would be better equipped to provide quality education to students and better assist teachers, leading to improved student outcomes. Due to budget constraints, principals and business managers in the ACT tend to employ the least qualified and least experienced TAs. This is not only a phenomenon in the ACT, but throughout Australia. After obtaining a police check in the ACT, it is possible to be employed as a TA; as one principal noted, ‘people have been pulled in off the street’ (SL3) to fill a TA position. TAs in the UK and US are expected to have qualifications, and a career structure exists through which they can progress by obtaining further qualifications and skills (Abbate-Vaughn, 2008; Burgess & Mayes, 2009;
Malmgren et al., 2005). A similar approach could be adopted in Australia. In the ACT, progress is being made towards achieving this, but if the current funding model for TAs in schools seeks to genuinely improve students’ learning outcomes, the existing attitude that it is acceptable to employ TAs without qualifications, skills or training must change.

In the ACT, as of 2013, TAs employed in preschools who work with children from birth to five years are expected to have a Certificate III in Children’s Services. However, there is no expectation that TAs employed to work with students aged 6–12 years in primary schools will have a qualification. A Certificate III in Children’s Services includes topics such as child development, health and safety, family and culture, professional skill development, and play and creative experiences (Canberra Institute of Technology, 2012). While these topics are appropriate for TAs working with young children in preschools, they are not necessary for TAs employed in mainstream primary schools to provide learning support to students with disabilities and learning difficulties. However, requiring all TAs who work in primary schools to complete this course would be a step towards ensuring some consistency of knowledge and basic skills. In this study, neither principals nor business managers knew whether TAs already employed to work with children from birth to five years would be required to gain this qualification, nor did they know whether TAs who provide relief in the preschool would need this qualification.

To advance in their career, it is recommended that TAs obtain a qualification in learning support or disability support. A recommended career structure for a TA is provided in Appendix 8.

7.2.4 Training opportunities.

A lack of training opportunities for TAs was noted by all stakeholders in this study, and there was consensus that TAs would benefit from training. Until a minimum qualification is required for TAs and the first wave of TAs who are fully qualified enter the
workforce, new and improved training programs need to be developed for TAs to undertake while in the role if they are to be effective in providing learning support. Observations conducted for this study found that TAs who lack qualifications and training flounder in the classroom and use strategies that may be inappropriate to support students and teachers. As one teacher noted, ‘TAs need training because the way they learnt is different to the way we now teach’ (CT1).

The literature also recognises the need for training TAs, with the type of training suggested varying depending on the context and the perception of the stakeholder (Malmgren et al., 2005; Webster et al., 2011).

While training is highly recommended by all stakeholder groups, there are virtually no programs that are specific to the needs of TAs in mainstream schools in the ACT. Attempts to rectify this are in motion, with an online learning package developed by the ACT ETD to be made available in 2013. During this study, none of the TAs had heard about the training package and they did not know whether or when they would be expected to complete it. It had not been confirmed at the time of writing whether TAs would be required to complete the package prior to employment or within one year of being employed or whether it would be compulsory or optional. Given that the majority of TAs do not have ready access to computers during the school day and limited time outside of class, it is assumed that they will undertake the training outside of school hours or that additional funding will be provided to allow them to complete it during normal working hours. The ACT ETD staff developing the package had assumed that TAs would have access to a computer and the Internet during class time and would have the skills to use an online training package. Unexpected outcomes may be highlighted with the introduction of a training package such as insights into the ICT competencies (or lack of) of TAs. Such information will serve to inform future training options for TAs.
Differing views on what type of training is required for TAs were expressed by key participants, and in recent years, researchers have questioned whether training TAs actually makes a difference (Giangreco, Broer & Suter, 2011; Webster et al., 2011). When training was provided for TAs in this study, they requested and required more, as it was apparent that TAs were ignorant of basic vital strategies to use when helping students with literacy and numeracy.

Until a consistent, recognisable qualification is introduced, the training requirements of individual TAs will vary according to their experience and other qualifications, and the specific needs of the students enrolled in the different schools and assigned to the TA. The three levels of training recommended in the literature (AASE, 2007; Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Butt & Lowe, 2011; Liston et al., 2009) are the most appropriate for the TA participants. The recommended training for TAs in the ACT is summarised in Table 7.1.
**Table 7.1:**

*Training Recommended for TAs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1, Part A: System induction</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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</table>
| Conducted prior to taking up the position of TA to ensure TAs are familiar with system policies, career opportunities and employer expectations | - Induction into the role of a TA as per a duty statement defining their role  
- Familiarisation with ACT ETD policies including working with children workshops—eg Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse  
- Duty of Care; Behaviour management; Student welfare  
- Salary and career structure information e.g. probation; performance reviews; leave entitlements  
- Access and orientation to ACT ETD intranet, email and bulletin board | 2-day ACT ETD induction |

| Level 1, Part B: School orientation | Conducted prior to taking up the position of TA to ensure TAs are familiar with school policies and practices | Familiarisation with school specific policies and practices such a behaviour management; student welfare; communicating with parents; reporting in sick  
- Introduction to all staff  
- Tour of school  
- Information about specific students and strategies that work with these students  
- Rosters and timetables  
- Supervision and performance reviews  
- Use of photocopiers and other school equipment | Half-day school orientation |

| Level 2: Ongoing training related to the work performed in classrooms | Conducted at least once per term and more frequently if necessary to ensure TAs have the skills to assist students and teachers | Training in specific strategies to use with literacy and numeracy  
- Training in programs used by teachers that TAs may be able to implement such as conducting running records; conducting behaviour assessments  
- Training to develop skills e.g. in behaviour management; working with groups; integrating students into mainstream  
- Using ICT including Smartboards, cameras, videos, ipods and ipads to create visual timetables; social stories; checklists; documentaries; portfolios | Minimum of 2 hours per term, preferably during school time |

| Level 3: Ongoing professional development | Conducted by a vocational education provider such as TAFE or CIT to ensure TAs | Certificate III in learning support or disability support  
- Certificate IV in learning support or disability support | As offered by providers. To be completed after school hours. |
One key barrier to up-skilling TAs that was identified is the time required to undertake training. TAs are not paid to do any work—including participating in training—outside of their set work hours. Given that most TAs are parents themselves, and have noted that being a part-time TA fits in around their family commitments, most favour training during school hours. It is paramount that TAs are granted time during their working day to undertake training to ultimately better serve the students and teachers they work with. While online training may provide a suitable option, TAs who attended PTAT and TAT sessions appreciated the benefits of networking with other TAs.

In conclusion, the benefits of suitable training for TAs cannot be overestimated. Research by McKenzie (2011) and the findings from this study suggest that training leads to:

1. increased opportunities to further education (e.g. teacher education courses)
2. increased collaboration between TAs and class teachers.

Ultimately, training leads to improved practices and quality outcomes for TAs, teachers and students.

### 7.3 Implications for School Practices

A review is recommended of the process of employing TAs to maximise their effectiveness in classrooms and improve the quality of learning support provided to students who need it the most. TAs are currently employed by schools as required. Unlike teachers, they are not employed at the system level by staff at the ACT ETD. The recruitment processes for TAs vary from school to school, with little consistency. While it
is not necessary for the ACT ETD to be involved, more transparency with consistently applied criteria for employment could be adopted.

In order to maximise the efforts of TAs, schools would benefit from orienting TAs and then reviewing: (1) TA hours of employment; (2) supervision of TAs; (3) feedback provided to TAs; (4) planning time that TAs have with class teachers; and (5) TA practices in classroom when supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

### 7.3.1 Recruitment processes.

Implementing more stringent employment processes for TAs is recommended. Interviewing TAs prior to employment to ensure they possess the qualities and skills necessary in the role is essential. Asking TAs to find a friend, ‘pulling people in off the streets’ or asking parents at the school are inappropriate recruitment practices that diminish the importance of the role.

It is essential that duty statements are made available prior to recruitment. In this study, TAs were only given a duty statement if they responded to an advertised position. Very few TAs are employed this way. The lack of a duty statement that clearly defines the role of a TA in a mainstream school underlies many of the challenges faced by TAs and other stakeholders.

Many TAs demonstrated poor literacy skills. This became apparent during the PTAT and TAT sessions when TAs provided written feedback. Grammatical errors and spelling errors proliferated feedback forms. This finding is alarming because most TAs are employed to assist students in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Improved recruitment processes would ensure that high levels of literacy are set as an employment criterion. Tests such as those used in the US would screen out TAs who did not meet minimum literacy standards. Since 2006 in the US, TAs already employed in schools must demonstrate
competencies in literacy and numeracy tests to retain their positions, and all TAs employed from 2006 must have a two-year college degree (Abbate-Vaughn, 2008).

Establishing a minimum credential for TAs is crucial. A Certificate III or IV qualification in Learning Support or Disability Support is regarded as necessary. An employee of the ACT ETD claimed that the current system is little more than ‘throw[ing] someone in with no skills and see[ing] what happens’ (ETD2). The lack of a basic minimum qualification for TAs combined with varied skill sets and differing personal qualities results in variable and erratic support provided to students.

When reviewing the recruitment processes for TAs, personal attributes require consideration along with formal qualifications. These include good interpersonal skills and the ability to develop a rapport with students and staff. Nurturing qualities such as being compassionate, kind, caring, friendly, understanding, approachable and patient are important for TAs to possess because they play a role in encouraging students’ ‘soft skill’ development (Webster, Blatchford & Russell, 2010, p. 3).

Effective communication skills are also required by TAs. TAs communicate—usually orally—with students, teachers and school leaders on a daily basis. When TAs have poor oral communication skills, they are ineffective in explaining tasks, rephrasing teacher instructions and reteaching students. They may even misinterpret teachers’ instructions when repeating or rephrasing them for students. Changing current recruitment practices ensures that qualified TAs with effective communication skills and the desired personal attributes are employed.

7.3.2 School orientation programs.

No schools conducted an orientation program for TAs; however, school orientation programs are recommended in the literature for TAs and have been for many years (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Groom, 2006; Howard & Ford, 2007). It was noted by either the
principal or business manager at all schools in this study that they should conduct an orientation for TAs. In some schools, TAs inducted each other by passing on information about students and teachers with whom the TAs would be working, as well as information regarding the training available and the competencies to achieve in order to receive a salary increase. The accuracy of the information passed is questionable.

A lack of orientation results in:

1. compromised policies—for example, TAs are unaware of school policies such as privacy policies, resulting in some TAs sharing inappropriate, confidential information with families in the school community, leading to difficulties for both class teachers and principals. TAs are also unaware of school policies regarding behaviour management and students’ welfare.

2. uncertainty surrounding school practices—for example, TAs lack an understanding of practices surrounding excursions, first aid, performance reviews, reporting in when sick, accessing information and professional development expectations.

3. TAs feeling undervalued, despondent and isolated, without direction, identity and status.

Not being informed of school policies and practices and feeling undervalued and isolated could hinder TAs in their role to improve students’ learning outcomes.

7.3.3 Hours of employment.

The hours that TAs are currently employed by schools in this study affects their ability to meet and plan with class teachers; to attend meetings such as staff meetings, strategic planning meetings and ILP meetings; and to attend professional learning with teachers. When TAs are unable to attend meetings, their voice is unheard, they have no idea what decisions are made, including those that affect them, and they experience further
isolation. This finding concurs with that of Bourke and Carrington (2007) who noted, TAs lack social and cultural capital and hence have no identity or power within schools. Most school-based professional learning is conducted after school hours, and although researchers recommend that TAs receive training and professional learning (Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Cobb, 2007; Ford, 2007; Howard & Ford, 2007; Leighton et al., 1997a; Mueller, 2003), their hours of employment exclude them from attending.

According to staff at the ACT ETD, extending the hours for TAs could affect the availability of TAs, as many parents have chosen this career because it fits into their family life. Alternatively, it could open the door to more career-oriented TAs who see the role as a stepping stone to becoming a teacher. Flexibility around the hours of employment for TAs or allowing TAs to negotiate their hours may be options. Until working hours are reviewed to encourage TAs to attend meetings—and to prevent schools from depending on their goodwill to work longer hours—an agreement could be negotiated to pay TAs who remain beyond their hours of employment to attend meetings or professional learning.

Full-time TAs are employed for 6.5 hours per day, but the start and finish times are determined by principals and supervisors based on the role that TAs perform in the school. The principal at Scrivener was able to arrange ILP meetings with teachers, school leaders, TAs and parents during school hours to enable TAs to attend, indicating the value she placed on TA input at these meetings. It is recommended that all principals consider making similar arrangements or adjust TAs’ hours if they value the contribution of TAs in this process and want their voices to be heard.

The inflexible, non-negotiable hours of TAs excludes them from attending most school meetings, thus negating their school involvement, constraining their input and silencing their contribution.
7.3.4 Supervision.

The supervision of TAs in most schools in the ACT is a contentious line management arrangement. In the ACT, the business manager, who oversees the school general office, is usually the TAs’ supervisor. This is not necessarily the model used throughout Australia and may not be a model used in other states/territories. One supervisor suggested that this arrangement had been made purely to spread supervision across a wider range of school leaders. Nevertheless, when business managers are assigned to supervise TAs and do not observe them working with teachers and students or have a background in education or learning support themselves, performance reviews and judgements made regarding their suitability for permanency or renewing contracts are questionable.

It is recommended that the supervision model used at Murrumbidgee be adopted by other schools. A school leader at Murrumbidgee, who is responsible for learning support, is the TAs’ supervisor. This appeared to be the most appropriate supervisory arrangement, as she prepared the timetable for TAs, observed TAs in classrooms and talked to class teachers about TAs when conducting performance reviews. In the other schools, the business managers had similar qualifications to TAs (Year 12 Certificate), had limited experience as business managers (usually less than two years) and had little understanding of the role of TAs in classrooms. One newly appointed business manager in this study had previously been a TA. A principal (SL1) noted that business managers frequently commence as TAs in schools and then move into the role of business manager. She also noted that this places them in a difficult position as the supervisor of previous co-workers and friends. The business manager’s role as the supervisor of TAs is consequently questionable.

While business managers may not be appropriate supervisors of TAs, this study confirmed the literature reports that no school personnel want to supervise TAs, and supervision continues to be inconsistently implemented (Giangreco, 2010; Giangreco &
Broer, 2005; Webster et al., 2011). Class teachers do not want the responsibility of supervising TAs and are not trained to supervise other adults, which is consistent with Shaddock et al.’s (2007) findings. As the role of the business manager in supervising TAs does not align with the role that TAs undertake in the classroom, class teachers would be more appropriate supervisors of TAs. If class teachers are deemed to be more appropriate supervisors, training is pertinent, as is a change in attitude.

7.3.5 Feedback.

Feedback to TAs regarding their performance and contribution is non-existent. TAs did not receive any feedback—either positive or negative—from supervisors or class teachers. As Breton (2010) noted, TAs have the least amount of training and hence should receive the most feedback on their performance; however, this does not appear to happen. When class teachers were asked whether they provided feedback to TAs on their performance, most said they did and that they hoped the TAs realised how much they were appreciated. They also said that they could and should provide more general feedback and more specific feedback on what TAs do well and what they could do better. According to Webster et al. (2010), class teachers claim that when no planning time is provided, there are no opportunities to provide feedback to TAs. According to the TAs in this study, the only positive feedback they received was when their contract was renewed.

It is recommended that feedback be provided and linked to performance criteria when performance reviews are conducted. Keeping TAs in the dark about their performance or leaving them waiting expectantly to hear whether their contract is to be renewed are inappropriate practices and contribute to TAs feeling undervalued and despondent. A lack of feedback provided to TAs leads to questions regarding the value that teachers, supervisors and school leaders ascribe to TAs’ employment and roles in schools. Given that TAs have no qualifications and receive limited training opportunities, feedback
on performance should be a priority when TAs are expected to improve students’ learning outcomes.

7.3.6 Planning time.

Planning time is not allocated to TAs and class teachers, which concurs with the findings in the literature that ‘communication between most TAs and class teachers is ad hoc, taking place during lesson changeovers, before and after school and during break times’ (Webster et al., 2010, p. 329). In addition, any planning that occurred depended on the goodwill of the TA to be available. This is also consistent with findings in the literature (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010; Webster et al., 2010).

Due to the lack of TA and teacher planning time, TAs often go into lessons ‘blind’ and unaware of what teachers will ask them to do, which negatively affects students’ learning outcomes (Webster et al., 2010). This occurred in all schools using a transient model of TA deployment. It was evident that TAs had no idea what support or assistance they would be asked to provide. As the TA entered the classroom, the teacher told her, usually in less than one minute, who she would support and how.

A study by Blatchford et al. (2012) found that ‘creating time for teachers and TAs to meet had a positive effect’ (p. 2). Lesson plans were shared and discussed with TAs, and the role that TAs would play in each lesson was identified in the lesson plan. When planning time was provided for class teachers and TAs, they reported ‘singing from the same hymn sheet’ (Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2012, p. 50). In addition, when TAs and class teachers had planning time together, TAs were able to provide valuable feedback to class teachers on the performance of students they worked with (Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2012).

It is recommended that a review and adjustment of TAs’ hours of employment and their timetables be undertaken. Until such time, TAs and class teachers are working at odds
rather than ‘singing from the same hymn sheet’. The implications of this change would be significant, as TAs would be better prepared to provide support when they enter classrooms. Meeting time would allow TAs to share valuable information from the perspective of another adult on the progress of students in the class. Given that the benefits of this small change have been proven (Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2012), reconfiguring TAs’ workload and timetables to include planning time with class teachers is worth trialling and evaluating.

7.3.7 Change in TA practices.

Following on from the DISS project, research in the UK explored the practice of TAs, with a focus on providing TAs with strategies to use with students and adopting changes to their communication with students. TAs were encouraged to consider when not to talk, allowing students time to respond, and they were encouraged to focus on ‘understanding, not task completion’ (Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2012, p. 3). The quality of questioning by TAs improved, and students became less dependent on TA support as a result of new and improved TA practices (Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2012). TAs in this study in the ACT focused on task completion rather than understanding, which suggests that existing practices could be improved if similar training was provided to them.

Changing TA practices will take time, and TAs may require many hours of training due to their limited knowledge and understanding of effective strategies to use with students. During the TAT sessions, it was evident that the majority of TAs had a limited repertoire of strategies to use with students. This was particularly evident in the numeracy workshop, when TAs could only name one strand of mathematics and were unaware of appropriate mental computations to use to help students. The lack of knowledge of basic strategies would negatively affect the quality of numeracy support provided by TAs.
During observations held after the TAT sessions, TAs were seen using some newly acquired practical strategies with students including:

- helping a student to articulate sounds using a mirror
- conducting a book orientation and explaining the vocabulary
- pausing, prompting and praising students when listening to them read
- including processing time when asking questions
- after reading instructions on a maths worksheet, allowing ‘wait’ time and processing time
- rather than sitting beside a student, the TA waited towards the back of the classroom to give the student the opportunity to get started without help.

While it was encouraging to see TAs putting these basic strategies into practice, that some TAs had been providing learning support for many years without this fundamental knowledge was concerning. This raised questions of how TAs had been supporting students in classrooms up to this time, and how effective their support has been. Their lack of knowledge of basic strategies could be contributing to the poor performance of students at the schools in this study in literacy and numeracy tests.

To conclude, existing school practices, processes and procedures desperately need to be overhauled if TAs are to fulfil their funded roles of helping to support students’ learning outcomes. Recruitment practices must ensure that only suitably qualified, skilled and trained TAs are employed. School orientation, appropriate supervision, assistance with appropriate strategies to use with students, the provision of performance feedback and the provision of timetabled planning time with class teachers are recommended for TAs.

### 7.4 Changing Role of TAs

Prior to a more inclusive approach to education, the role of a TA was to help a class teacher. This involved preparing materials, supervising non-instructional tasks, providing
clerical assistance, providing personal support for students, playground supervision, supervising small groups of students, organising and maintaining the teaching and learning environment, and implementing behaviour management plans created by the teacher (Groom, 2006; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Howard & Ford, 2007; Tautman, 2004). The role of a TA has evolved to supporting the teaching and learning processes of entire classes as well as groups and individual students. TAs have taken on a more instructional, pedagogical role (Collins & Simco, 2006; Howard & Ford, 2007; Groom, 2006), which in many cases is ‘beyond their expertise’ (Webster et al., 2010, p. 331). While the role of TAs in the ACT has certainly evolved to become a more instructional role, they were never required to teach entire classes, they rarely supported groups of students and they usually instructed individual students.

7.4.1 TAs’ role in instruction.

As more students with disabilities are enrolling in mainstream classes in the ACT, TAs have been thrust into a primary instructional role where they make pedagogical decisions. The increasing practice of TAs instructing students is a major concern given that they do not possess the qualifications or skills of a teacher. This parallels observations in the literature, which state that TAs are increasingly undertaking instructional roles (Collins & Simco, 2006; Howard & Ford, 2007). At Murrumbidgee, TAs were responsible for implementing primary instruction in a maths program for part of each day without direct supervision from a teacher, and for which only one of the TAs had received training. Even the TAs questioned this task, as they were concerned they were undertaking a role that, without direct teacher supervision and without duty of care, was inappropriate. Researchers would also question this role, as many believe that the appropriate instructional role for a TA is secondary or supplemental rather than primary, so that TAs do not make pedagogical decisions for which they are not trained (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010; Webster,
Blatchford & Russell, 2010; Webster et al., 2010). The expectation that TAs can be involved in instruction reflects the lack of understanding that class teachers and supervisors have about the role of a TA, as well as assumptions made about TAs’ qualifications.

TAs at most schools are used only for secondary instruction. While this is considered acceptable, even when providing secondary instruction, some of the tasks performed require higher-order thinking skills and are challenging. TAs were required to restate and rephrase instructions and then modify the worksheets, as differentiated worksheets had not been prepared by the teacher. Modifying or adapting worksheets or instructions ‘on the hop’ is a complex skill, and doing so requires TAs to make pedagogical decisions that may be ‘beyond their expertise’ (Webster et al., 2010, p. 331). It may also lead to TAs consciously or subconsciously prioritising work for the students based on their own understanding rather than on any knowledge about teaching and learning.

The instructional role for TAs—particularly any primary instructional role—must be reviewed to determine exactly what TAs are being asked to do and to ensure that they have the necessary skills to undertake these tasks. As Giangreco (2003, p. 51) notes on the demands placed on TAs:

Imagine a TA asked to observe a large group lesson and then follow up with a student who has a disability by reteaching the lesson to match the student’s needs, adapting the teacher’s assignment, or assisting with homework—all accomplished ‘on the fly’. These would be high-level curricular and instructional tasks for an experienced special educator, much less a TA.

This aptly describes the complex and challenging tasks that the majority of TAs performed on a daily basis with limited teacher supervision. Given that TAs are unqualified and untrained, it is inappropriate and unjustifiable that TAs make high-level curricular and instruction decisions that fully trained and qualified class teachers should make.
7.4.2 TAs’ role in group instruction.

Internationally, TAs are taking on a role in providing support to entire classes and groups of students (Webster et al., 2010). During observations, it was noted that TAs never supported entire classes and rarely supported groups of students, even though class teachers claimed that TAs supported groups of students. Students receiving TA support were never grouped together, so the TA moved from student to student, providing individual assistance and repeating instructions to each student.

Providing support to groups of students would be the most appropriate role for a TA if training is provided, but class teachers’ preparations must improve to include an activity for the TA to supervise or deliver. Training TAs to work with groups is recommended to ensure that TAs have the skills and confidence to do so. A lack of planning time during school hours for TAs and class teachers makes it difficult for teachers to explain group tasks to TAs. In addition, the attitudes of class teachers to TA support have resulted in TAs working with individual students rather than groups. It became apparent that for group instruction to be effectively implemented, the attitude of class teachers must change.

7.4.3 TAs’ role in behaviour management.

TAs’ role in behaviour management warrants clarification for the benefit of all stakeholders. TAs and class teachers are unsure of the boundaries surrounding TAs’ involvement in behaviour management; however, due to their presence in classrooms, TAs are involved. In fact, class teachers expect TAs to be involved in behaviour management, claiming that this is a role for TAs. A lack of clarity and role delineation results in TAs being unsure whether to step in and assist teachers with unruly behaviour or to step back and leave behaviour management to class teachers. All TAs were observed in behaviour management, usually adopting supportive strategies aimed at preventing a behaviour from escalating. Supportive strategies included TAs encouraging students to commence tasks,
negotiating with students to complete tasks, taking distracting or dangerous items away from students, relocating students to quieter spaces to work, sitting or standing strategically beside or between students, holding a student’s hand to encourage him or her to stay with the class, and finding students who had left the classroom. The TA’s role in behaviour management in the above examples is supportive, as they encourage the development of students’ ‘soft skills’ (Webster, Blatchford & Russell, 2010, p. 3) by helping to motivate students to complete tasks, thereby enabling teachers to teach. An appropriate role for TAs employed in the ACT could be to limit negative and off-task behaviour (Giangreco, 2009) to ensure that lessons run smoothly. TAs performed this supportive role in all classrooms quite effectively, and class teachers noted that this was a valued and highly beneficial role of TAs. After conducting observations and interviews, the researcher concurs that the TA role that is most valued by class teachers in the ACT is to minimise disruptive behaviour.

While this role could be the most appropriate one for TAs, it was not mentioned as a task for TAs in mainstream schools in the role summary presented in Section 7.2.1; however, it was mentioned in the Duty Statement for TAs in Appendix 1. If TAs are to be involved in behaviour management, they would benefit from training in implementing supportive behaviour management strategies. Corrective behaviour management could then become the sole responsibility of the class teacher, thus clearly delineating roles and preventing role confusion and ambiguity regarding behaviour management. Clarification and role delineation in behaviour management would be beneficial for all stakeholders.

7.4.4 Communication with parents.

The existing practice of TAs communicating and liaising with parents and families caused the most dissent for stakeholders. The Duty Statement for TAs (see Appendix 1) states that TAs ‘act as a resource to teachers and families of students providing information about the child to both teaching staff and family members’ (ACT ETD, 2012). TAs
believed that communicating with parents is their role, while class teachers, principals and supervisors claimed that TAs do not have a role in communicating with parents.

Possibly due to their familiarity with families in their local community, TAs speak with, and answer questions from, parents. TAs’ lowly status within schools can be improved within their local community when they share information about issues that are not known outside the school. Unfortunately, TAs often overstep the boundaries of confidentiality and privacy when communicating in this manner with parents. Inappropriate communication with families occurs because the roles of TAs and class teachers have not been clearly delineated or articulated. In addition, privacy policies and expectations surrounding confidentiality are not explained to TAs because they do not receive an induction into the ACT system or orientation into the school. The existing practice of TAs communicating with parents and families must be reviewed. It is recommended that the boundaries of communication be clearly outlined during a system induction and school orientation.

7.4.5 Duty of care.

Duty of care has serious legal ramifications for TAs, class teachers, principals and schools, and it requires immediate attention to clarify misinterpretations for the benefit of all stakeholders. When reviewing existing practices to identify the most appropriate role of TAs, it is important to clarify understanding regarding TAs’ duty of care. A lack of consensus surrounding duty of care may result in TAs performing tasks that are inappropriate or that place them in inappropriate supervisory situations. When class teachers leave the classroom to photocopy or answer a phone, TAs are left alone with students and take over the class teacher’s duty of care role. What are the legal ramifications of being placed in this situation? TAs commented that they felt uncomfortable when this happened, but they assumed that class teachers knew they did not have duty of care. If a
situation arose while the teacher was away and the TA dealt with it incorrectly, the class teacher would be at fault for leaving the TA in charge without duty of care for the students.

The TAs at Murrumbidgee, who implemented a maths program to groups of students, were placed in a situation where they had duty of care. The TAs at Scrivener, who supervised before school care for students without class teacher supervision, were also undertaking a role that was not appropriate and for which they had no duty of care. When TAs have little job security and low status in schools, they are under pressure to perform all tasks requested by class teachers, principals and supervisors. TAs also assume that school leaders know the boundaries regarding duty of care and would only ask them to undertake tasks that they are legally allowed to perform. This may not be the case due to the diverse and conflicting interpretations of duty of care that have been revealed.

If TAs have a recognised qualification, such as Certificate III in Learning Support or Disability Support, it may be decided that these TAs have a duty of care. In this case, the issues above would be resolved, and qualified TAs would be able to take groups of students outside a classroom to work on specific skills, or they would be able to take individual students who are being disruptive out of a classroom for the benefit of the other students and the teacher. Clarifying the duty of care is essential for all school personnel to ensure that TAs are not asked to perform tasks that could subject them to a legal complaint.

7.4.6 Mandatory reporting of child abuse.

The involvement of TAs in the mandatory reporting of child abuse requires clarification. TAs would benefit from immediate training in the implications and procedures involved. Some TAs had been involved in disclosures due to the close relationships they form with students. Class teachers said that they expect TAs to report any signs of abuse or any disclosures. Staff in the ACT ETD noted that TAs have been thrust
into this role due to their close relationships with students. No TAs had been trained in mandatory reporting, and if they are to have such a role, training is essential.

In summary, some practices that exist in mainstream schools have resulted in confusion, ambiguity and role overlap for key stakeholders. The primary cause could be linked to poor employment practices, processes and conditions for TAs, as well as the lack of a duty statement that clearly defines TAs’ roles in mainstream schools. In addition to identifying the roles of TAs in mainstream primary schools, the roles they should not undertake also need to be clearly articulated to ensure delimitation between theirs and teachers’ roles. As noted in the literature, the roles of both TAs and class teachers necessitate clarification to ensure that the roles are complementary rather than identical or interchangeable (AASE, 2007; Blatchford et al., 2009; Bourke & Carrington, 2007). Until the expected and appropriate roles for teachers and TAs in inclusive classrooms are identified and defined, this issue will remain ‘elusive and unresolved’ (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010, p. 52).

7.5 Attitudinal Improvement

A concerted effort is required to change teachers’ attitudes towards students with disabilities and learning difficulties, as well as the role of the TA. Class teachers believe that TAs are employed to support the funded students, and hence they ask TAs to sit beside these students and work with them individually. This common practice has evolved not because teachers have been advised to use TAs in this way, but because teachers have not considered other ways of utilising TAs. Class teachers rarely prepared an activity for TAs to deliver to the students they were directly working with. In light of the research showing that poorly prepared TAs have a negative effect on students’ learning outcomes (Blatchford et al., 2012; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007), class teachers could adopt more creative, effective
TA support models. Specific training for class teachers may be required to assist them to learn new methods of utilising TAs given that existing practices are entrenched.

School leaders have adopted the practice of hiring a TA as a ‘quick fix’ or ‘Band-Aid’ solution when students with disabilities or learning difficulties enrol in their schools (Giangreco, 2010a). Consequently, TAs have inadvertently become the primary mechanism (Giangreco, 2010b) for enabling students with disabilities to enrol in mainstream schools. It appears that in the ACT, TAs have also become the ‘adjustment’ or ‘accommodation’ required for schools to comply with legislation in the Disability Standards for Education, which state that reasonable adjustments should be made to curriculum development and delivery, as well as to student participation, in order to accommodate students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Disability Standards for Education, 2005). Employing TAs has become the solution, as school leaders believe that a ‘reasonable adjustment’ has been made. However, employing a TA with no qualifications or training in learning support does not equate to making an adjustment to the environment, curriculum or delivery when a student with disabilities or learning difficulties enrols in a mainstream school. This solution is inappropriate, lacks leadership and warrants consideration of alternatives to TA employment and support.

7.5.1 Attitudes of class teachers.

There is confusion, inconsistency and misunderstanding among teachers regarding the role and value of the TA in the classroom. In this study, class teachers’ attitudes to TAs varied across sites. Most negative attitudes were held by class teachers when TA support was transient and disconnected, as no rapport can be established. Most positive attitudes occurred when TAs were deployed to one class and to one teacher. TAs are very aware of the attitudes held by different class teachers towards them. After attending the TAT sessions, only two TAs mentioned the training and their new skills to the class teachers.
Reasons given for not mentioning the training included the belief that the teachers were not interested in knowing about the training, lack of planning time, lack of meeting time and lack of rapport established between TAs and class teachers.

Some teachers take the support they receive from TAs for granted by not planning activities for them. Class teachers who had itinerant TA support rarely, if ever, planned work specifically for TAs, who then felt undervalued and underutilised, and the support provided was *ad hoc*. The class teachers claimed that they were never sure the TA would turn up and hence did not waste their time planning for them. Sometimes a TA would turn up when timetabled to be with a student or students and the class would be outside for a physical education lesson. During observations, when this occurred, the class teacher suggested that the TA go to another class where she would not be expected and nothing would be planned for her. The TA is timetabled to be with the class because funding has been secured to provide learning support to one or more students in the class; hence, the provision of TA support must not be wasted but instead welcomed, utilised appropriately and planned. A lack of planning could reflect the belief of class teachers that TAs were qualified in learning support and hence could assist with minimal direction. It could also reflect the belief that TA presence was sufficient ‘reasonable adjustment’ for students with disabilities or learning difficulties.

Recent research by Blatchford, Webster and Russell (2012) has demonstrated that when class teachers provide detailed lesson plans to TAs, include TAs’ expectations and tasks in the lesson plans and provide materials ahead of lessons, the quality of the lesson and feedback improved considerably and TAs no longer went into classes feeling ‘blind’ and unprepared. Requiring class teachers to provide this is a reasonable expectation when they receive TA support. In explaining the challenges of obtaining TAs, one principal said that she hoped teachers valued the support and treated TAs like expensive chocolate—not
to be wasted. It is evident that fully utilising TA support is necessary to maximise their benefit for all. To make the most of TA support, teachers must change their attitude from ‘gracious host’ of students with disabilities and learning difficulties to ‘engaged teaching partner’ (Giangreco, 2003, p. 50).

Some class teachers believe that TAs can prepare work for students—specifically, students with disabilities or learning difficulties. Some TAs were required to prepare work for students, but it was unclear whether these TAs were supervised by teachers or whether they modified or adapted work from teacher-prepared worksheets. Regardless, this practice reflects both the lack of awareness of class teachers that TAs are not always qualified and a lack of regard for the students the TAs are working with. It is not satisfactory for an unqualified TA to prepare work for students with disabilities or learning difficulties because they have higher learning support needs than other students (Giangreco, 2010a). If anything, class teachers must prioritise learning programs for these students. Preparing work for students was noted in the literature as a new role for TAs, whereby TAs who work with small groups of students frequently undertake the planning for these groups (Collins & Simco, 2006). In examples cited in other research, this occurred without teacher supervision because finding time for planning during their paid work hours was difficult (Collins & Simco, 2006). Equity issues arise when unqualified and untrained TAs prepare work for any students.

The title for TAs in the ACT, ‘Learning Support Assistant’, may have also contributed to the attitude of class teachers towards TAs. Based on the title, all class teachers incorrectly assumed that TAs had a qualification in learning support. This misunderstanding could be attributed to the fact that class teachers are not involved in the TA recruitment process, do not see the curriculum vitae of TAs, do not have planning time with TAs to talk about their experiences or skills and are unaware of their qualifications or
prior experiences working with students. University courses for pre-service teachers rarely include a unit on support staff, so teachers lack basic knowledge surrounding TAs, their roles, qualifications and skills.

Class teachers in this study rarely provided TAs with strategies to use with students, which reflects their attitude towards TA support and beliefs about students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Some class teachers claimed that they did not have time, while others said they expected the school to employ TAs with a repertoire of strategies, knowledge about learning support and qualifications in learning support. None of the six key TAs in this study had qualifications or training in learning support or disability support, and observations revealed that they knew few strategies to help students with literacy or numeracy. The majority had learnt ‘on the job’, by observing class teachers, not because the teachers had assisted them. If a desired outcome of TA support is to improve students’ learning outcomes, class teachers need to be responsible for ensuring that TAs use effective strategies with students.

7.5.2 Attitudes of school leaders.

In any organisation, leaders set the culture, and the attitudes of school leaders towards TAs is a concern that needs to be addressed. School leaders often do not value the contributions of TAs, which only validates the attitude of class teachers. In this study, only one principal arranged ILP meetings during school hours so that TAs could attend, indicating the value she places on TAs’ contributions. The principals at the other schools did not value TAs’ contributions and arranged meetings during times when TAs could not attend.

The attitude of school leaders to training TAs is also variable. Again, only one principal in this study saw TA training as an important part of the role and arranged it during work hours. Others would not allow TAs to be absent during their normal work
hours and insisted that training be undertaken after school. In addition, some school leaders provide funds for TAs to attend training, while others expect TAs to fund their own training or do not think that TAs require training. This shows the low regard of TAs by school leaders, as well as the lack of importance given to their role.

To conclude, attitudes towards TAs and the support they provide reflect the value attributed to their role and their status in schools. The attitude that unqualified and untrained TAs can be employed to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties warrants review for the benefit of all stakeholders, but particularly for the students who receive TA support. Changing class teachers’ attitudes is essential to maximise the benefit of support. School principals and business managers need to show leadership in changing the perception of TAs among the school community and ensuring that class teachers are aware of their skills and qualifications.

7.6 Cultural Change

Cultural change refers to the changing practices occurring in schools that have become accepted as they have evolved or continued for many years and have become the norm.

7.6.1 A ‘quick-fix’ solution.

The cultural practice of employing a TA in haste as a ‘quick fix’ solution when students with disabilities or learning difficulties enrol in a mainstream school is a cultural mindset that necessitates change (Giangreco, Broer & Suter, 2011). This culture has resulted in TAs being viewed as the ‘primary mechanism’ (Giangreco, Broer & Suter, 2011, p. 25) to support students with disabilities in mainstream schools. This study has identified that TAs in the ACT are employed to be the ‘reasonable adjustment’ or ‘accommodation’ to support students with disabilities or learning difficulties. This ad hoc recruitment process has resulted in poor choices of TAs being made to the detriment of the
students whom they are employed to support. Improved recruitment practices and processes that are necessary for TAs to effectively do their job are again highlighted. While reviewing recruitment practices, school leaders could also evaluate the benefits and costs of TA support and consider alternatives to TA support. Alternatives such as establishing a classroom culture that encourages ‘peer-to-peer support through such strategies as cooperative learning groups and peer tutoring’ (Giangreco, 2003, p. 51) could be considered.

7.6.2 Employing parents as TAs.

Reviewing the practice by some principals in mainstream schools of employing TAs who are parents of students at the school is recommended. Issues of privacy and confidentiality can arise when principals employ TAs who are parents of students in the school and/or TAs who live in the local community. Close scrutiny of this practice is suggested, as it can cause problems for principals, class teachers and students when TAs fail to separate work from home. If a more formal, transparent recruitment process is adopted, this cultural practice may dissipate.

7.6.3 Excluding TAs from ILP processes.

Another cultural change that could occur in schools is the practice of excluding TAs from the ILP process. TAs are mentioned on ILPs as key personnel who provide learning support; however, they are rarely included in ILP meetings or even shown ILPs. TAs at one school attended ILP meetings as the principal arranged cover for the teacher and TA during school hours. TAs at other schools did not attend ILP meetings because they were held after school and they were rarely invited. TAs in one school had access to ILPs via the ICT system, while other TAs had no access to these documents. While it would directly benefit the TAs, students and classroom teachers for TAs to be present and informed at ILP meetings, it would be ill-advised to do so without the necessary policies and training for
TAs in place. Cultural change, including a change in the practice of employing the parents of students enrolled in the school, may be necessary before TAs are included in the ILP process. It is recommended that a policy be written and consistently applied in all schools to outline TAs’ roles in ILP meetings and their access to ILP programs.

### 7.6.4 Working with another adult.

As the use of TAs in mainstream schools has increased, the majority of class teachers are working with another adult (TAs) in classrooms. It is therefore important that this change in culture is understood and the implications are understood by all teachers. Teachers would benefit from training to utilise support staff effectively, as many teachers flounder when organising appropriate activities for TAs. Requiring class teachers to plan an activity for each TA for each lesson they are timetabled to be in the classroom is a reasonable expectation. Acknowledging the presence of another adult in a classroom by utilising their support effectively to improve learning outcomes for all students will be a cultural shift for class teachers.

### 7.6.5 Effective models of TA deployment.

Another cultural shift that is necessary to maximise the benefit of TAs is to ensure that the most effective models are used to deploy TAs. Different models of support are implemented in ACT schools, and some are more effective than others. According to research (Blatchford et al., 2012; Cobb, 2007; Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2002; Groom, 2006; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010), different models of TA deployment reflect different beliefs and attitudes to inclusion (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010) by the key stakeholders. Each model of support being used provides different challenges for both TAs and class teachers, as shown in Table 7.2.
Table 7.2:

Models of TA Deployment and Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TA Deployment Model</th>
<th>TA withdrawal model</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- TA and student/s can work quietly alone on specific needs of student/s</td>
<td>- Class teacher cannot see or supervise instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- If student is disruptive, class is not being effected by the disruptions</td>
<td>- TA is providing instruction not a qualified teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- TA and student/s can develop a rapport</td>
<td>- TA may be placed in a compromising situation as TAs do not have duty of care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- TA only withdraws students with disabilities and learning difficulties—stigma attached to being withdrawn</td>
<td>- Teaching activities may be completely different from that which peers are undertaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Student/s are withdrawn from peers, teacher and curriculum</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                     | Itinerant TA support model |
|                     | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|                     | - TA works with many different students with diverse needs | - Class teachers ‘host’ students with disabilities until the TA arrives and takes over |
|                     | - If TA is sick he/she is not replaced as support provided may not be missed | - No planning time |
|                     | - When TA is not present class teacher assumes responsibility for teaching students with disabilities and learning | - Little communication with class teachers |
|                     | - Support many different students | - Support many different students |
|                     | - Little opportunity to develop a | - Little opportunity to develop a |
CHANGING ROLE OF TEACHER ASSISTANTS

difficulties relationship with students or teachers
- Can miss introduction to lesson while moving from class to class
- May not be timetabled on when needed
- Students do not know TAs and may lack respect for them
- No opportunity to provide feedback to TA by class teacher or vice versa
- None of the class teachers want to be the supervisor of the TA
- There is little connection between the TA and the teacher; the TA and the students; and the TA and the curriculum

One unit with a number of teachers and classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- TA is known to students and teachers</td>
<td>- Ad hoc planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA is a constant in the unit if a class teacher is away</td>
<td>- Often three or four teachers for TA to work with all with differing needs and expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Opportunities for TAs to provide feedback to class teachers and vice versa</td>
<td>- None of the class teachers want to supervise the TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- TA always assigned to work with students with disabilities and learning difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Many students—may be 100 in each unit—to get to know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One-on-one TA to student with disability support model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Some planning occurs</td>
<td>- Ad hoc planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- TA knows student well
- TA can be a constant if teacher is away
- Students know the TA
- Only one teacher’s expectations to meet
- Opportunities for collaboration exist
- Opportunities for feedback are provided—although *ad hoc*

- No allocated planning time
- TA can be taken advantage of by relief teacher if class teacher is absent as they know the routines and students
- Class teacher never works with students with disabilities or learning difficulties
- Stigma for students who always work with TA rather than class teacher.

### TA to one class and one teacher but TA always works with students with disabilities and learning difficulties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- TA and class teacher always work together in same teaching space</td>
<td>- Class teacher never works with students with disabilities or learning difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Class teacher can oversee the work of the TA</td>
<td>- Stigma for students who always work with the TA rather than the class teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA knows the students well and their needs</td>
<td>- Students are distanced from the teacher and other students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students may work on a differentiated program</td>
<td>- TA can take sole responsibility for teaching these students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Planning can occur but is usually <em>ad hoc</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### One teacher and one or more preschool class support model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Collaboration occurs</td>
<td>- TA can be called out during planning time to work elsewhere in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Planning time is provided</td>
<td>- TA undertakes a very similar role to the class teacher but is paid considerably less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA knows students well</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA is a constant if teacher is away</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA highly respected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA works with groups of students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Opportunities for feedback are provided - TA can be included in meetings with parents held during planning time.

Studies have shown that the way in which TAs are deployed affects their ability to provide learning support (Blatchford et al., 2012). In addition, issues of equity arise when unqualified and untrained TAs always support students with disabilities and teachers always support students without disabilities or learning difficulties. Models of deployment currently being used in mainstream ACT schools have not been evaluated or costed, and restrictive, seemingly ineffective, models are being utilised. In this study, the amount of funding allocated to students determined the model of deployment adopted. All models being utilised provide different opportunities for TAs to support students. TAs can provide support to individual students or to groups of students; however, TAs rarely support, or deliver instruction to, groups of students. With the cultural change in schools and the attitudinal change by class teachers and school leaders, TAs in the ACT could be deployed to support groups of students, particularly when more than one funded student is in a class.

Given that many TAs in the ACT have recently secured permanency, an opportunity is presented for school leaders to reconsider how these TAs are deployed and utilised in classrooms. Reconceptualising attitudes to the inclusion and deployment of TAs is necessary, and the benefits to students’ learning outcomes would be worthwhile. It is timely to review the entire TA model and consider alternate options, such as using TAs as facilitators. This new model would allow for greater cost-efficiency, fewer restrictions for students and better support for improved learning outcomes for all students, not just those with disabilities or learning difficulties.
7.6.6 An alternative deployment model of TA support.

Adopting the Teacher Assistant As Facilitator (TAAF) model (see Table 7.3) in mainstream schools, where class teachers support students with disabilities and TAs support the larger class group, is not currently being utilised in the ACT, but it could be a more effective model of TA deployment. This model would require a significant cultural shift and change in mindset for class teachers and TAs, but the benefits for all students may be significant. The final report from the DISS project noted that ‘marked and productive changes to the deployment of TAs at the classroom level’ (Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2012, p. 3) had occurred following a review of TA support, whereby ‘TAs worked more often with middle and high attaining pupils and teachers spent more time with low attaining and students with educational needs [students with disabilities] pupils. This greatly improved and enriched teachers’ understanding of these pupils and their needs’ (Blatchford et al., 2012, p. 3).

Hence, it would be worth trialling the TAAF Model presented in Table 7.3 and evaluating its success by comparing learning outcomes achieved prior to, and following, its implementation.
Table 7.3:

*Teacher Assistant As Facilitator (TAAF) Model of TA Deployment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternative Model of TA Deployment and Support</th>
<th>TAAF Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class teacher as teacher of students with disabilities and learning difficulties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Class teacher works to support learning needs of students with disabilities and learning difficulties or with any students who need additional support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Class teacher plans and prepares all teaching and learning activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA facilitates learning for students without disabilities or learning difficulties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Greater equity and access to the qualified teacher for all students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students with disabilities and learning difficulties benefit from instruction from the fully qualified class teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA knows all students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA is a constant if teacher is away</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA is respected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA and class teacher can cooperate and collaborate if TA is with class teacher at all times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Class teacher works with students on a needs basis not only with students without disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA may not have confidence to facilitate a larger group of students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TAs may not have knowledge and skills to answer questions from all students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Class teacher will need to communicate with TA to ensure that TA knows what is expected in each lesson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Class teacher will need a repertoire of effective strategies to use to support needs of all students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students (and parents) may not perceive the TA as someone who can facilitate learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- TA may believe he or she is being used as a teacher but not paid as a teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Planning time will be required but may not be provided</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If TA is itinerant, class teacher will need to be well prepared</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When alternative models of deployment are considered, models of support that may not include TAs also require consideration. Alternate models recommended in the literature (Giangreco, Suter & Doyle, 2010; Webster et al., 2010) could include students providing...
peer support; teachers co-teaching two classes to enable two adults to work in a teaching space; combining funding for many students with disabilities to employ trained teachers rather than unqualified and untrained TAs; and creating support withdrawal units in schools through which students rotate to gain specific skills and knowledge that are staffed by qualified teachers. A trial of different models of support is recommended to determine their cost, benefits and effectiveness in terms of improved students’ learning outcomes.

Alternative models that do not require TA support are provided in Table 7.4.

Table 7.4:

*Alternative Models of Support That Do Not Require TAs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer support model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Class teacher does not depend on TA support</td>
<td>- Peers may be reluctant to provide support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Peers will always be available in the classroom</td>
<td>- Class teacher will need to change peers providing support to share the responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teacher does not need to plan tasks for an additional adult</td>
<td>- Students will need training in peer support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students with disabilities and learning difficulties will not be distanced from their peers or the teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- All students fully included in class activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two teachers co-teaching classes—one may have qualifications in special education*
Advantages | Disadvantages
--- | ---
- Two fully qualified teachers share planning and teaching responsibilities for two classes | - Large number of students in one teaching space may cause distractions for students with learning difficulties
- All students have opportunities to received instruction from qualified teachers | - Only two adults in the classroom and no TAs to facilitate or keep students on task
- Different students may relate to and respond differently to the different teachers | - Not all teachers are willing to co-teach and share the teaching space
- One teacher with special education qualifications could model effective special education strategies to the other teacher | - Teachers would need to have similar expectations and attitudes to students with disabilities and learning difficulties
- Withdrawing students to target specific needs is possible as both are qualified teachers

7.6.7 Communication channels.

A culture exists of employing TAs and then excluding them from communication channels both in the ACT ETD system and in their schools. Communication channels fail TAs from the time they commence their employment: no induction or orientation programs are provided; hours of employment exclude TAs from attending meetings; access to ICT including email is non-existent or limited; and planning time with class teachers is limited. Due to poor communication between TAs and class teachers, TAs work with limited direction, supervision and feedback. This results in many having a high degree of autonomy, which enables poor practices to manifest. When TAs do have access to ICT, it is limited and they are excluded from emails and bulletin boards, which has become the primary mode of communication in schools. Access to ICT for TAs varies from school to school, with TAs at one school having both time and access, while TAs at the other schools have neither time nor access. When TAs are excluded from vital communication channels
where information is disseminated, they are marginalised and disempowered. Their lowly status is further reinforced when they receive information second- or third-hand. Establishing communication channels that are open and accessible to TAs is necessary.

Due to their exclusion from communication channels, the voice of TAs is unheard in schools. With no voice, other school personnel make decisions about them and for them. When TAs are excluded from conversations and decisions made about them, it affects their self-esteem and motivation, resulting in TAs feeling isolated and undervalued within schools (Hammett & Burton, 2005, cited in Bourke & Carrington, 2007). Their ‘poverty of position’ as TAs is again highlighted (Van Zante, 2005, p. 682, cited in Bourke & Carrington, 2007, p. 19).

Another cultural practice that occurs in mainstream schools in the ACT is to exclude TAs from receiving information about students. TAs are usually not told the reasons why they have been employed to support specific students. They are not informed of specific students’ needs and hence do not know which strategies to use to assist students. Some TAs are not informed who they are employed to support in a class. This is consistent with a finding by Mackenzie (2011), whereby TAs have little say in what happens to them and appear to be often excluded from discussions about the children they work with.

To conclude, until a change in culture occurs, TAs’ support will continue to be the only strategy considered when students with disabilities are enrolled in mainstream schools. Existing ineffective models of TA deployment will continue to be utilised; unqualified and untrained people who may have conflicts of interest by being too connected in the local community will continue to be employed; and TAs’ voices will remain silent. An evaluation and review of current practices, including a consideration of alternate processes, is highly recommended. Trialling the new TAAF model of TA deployment and support is also highly recommended.
7.7 Change in Status of TAs

The status of TAs in the ACT has changed recently. Prior to 2013, most TAs in the ACT were employed on casual contracts, resulting in employment insecurity. For some TAs, this has been addressed in the latest union award agreement, which sees TAs who have been casual employees for two years or longer automatically become permanent employees of the ACT ETD. Although this agreement will benefit some TAs, there are serious implications for other TAs and for schools, which may not have been considered when this change was made:

1. Permanency will be afforded to many unqualified and untrained TAs.
2. TAs will remain key to inclusion policies, with existing models of support continuing even though research internationally has indicated that TA support does not make a difference to students’ learning outcomes.
3. TAs who have been employed for less than two years may have less job security because schools may not extend their employment to avoid being locked into employing them permanently in the school.
4. To ensure that schools are not oversupplied with TAs, in the future, principals may employ casual TAs for shorter periods, resulting in greater job insecurity.

This agreement may also affect schools in the future due to the movement of students who receive additional funding. Principals may be reluctant to employ new TAs in case they become ‘stuck’ with too many when funding ceases as students move to other schools.

While the agreement benefits some TAs, it will have longer-term implications for schools and students. Job security will continue to be a challenge for TAs. According to one principal, a similar situation occurred in the 1990s, and it took many years for the large number of TAs employed as permanent staff to move through and out of the system.
7.8 Conclusion

This study has highlighted that change—particularly in employment processes and conditions for TAs in the ACT—is necessary. It has also revealed the complex, multifaceted role of a TA; outlined the qualifications, skills and training that TAs require to be successful in their roles; the different models used to deploy TAs in classrooms and the effectiveness of these models; and the challenges that TAs present to other key personnel in schools. The issues identified in this study may be applicable to other jurisdictions in Australia; hence, findings and recommendations may be transferable. As many TAs employed in the ACT prior to 2013 have now become permanent employees of the ACT ETD, it is critical that a review be undertaken of the benefits and costs of employing TAs as a support mechanism for students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

As noted in the literature, research has shown that TAs are increasingly being employed throughout Australia, the US and the UK (Blatchford et al., 2010; Collins & Simco, 2006; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010; Webster et al., 2011), despite international research showing that they do not benefit students’ learning outcomes. Prior to this study, minimal research has been conducted in the ACT and little research has been undertaken in Australia to demonstrate or assess the effectiveness of TAs’ support on students’ learning outcomes; therefore, the recommendations are extensive.

Change in mainstream primary schools is recommended, and the specific areas that need to be addressed are outlined below. The current culture of employing unqualified TAs to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties requires immediate review, as it has been demonstrated that this is not an equitable or effective practice. Alternate models to TA support require consideration, analysis and implementation. The existing attitudes of class teachers and school leaders towards TA recruitment and deployment will need to
change, especially if other models similar to the TAAF model are to be implemented successfully. Until such attitudes and practices change, the status quo will be maintained.

No research has been conducted in the ACT, and scant research has been conducted in Australia on the cost-effectiveness of employing TAs. Internationally, the DISS project demonstrated that TAs make little contribution to learning, and the more TA support provided, the greater the decline in students’ learning outcomes (Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2012). Given this, it is timely that a review of learning support provision and cost be undertaken as a priority. In addition, as noted in Chapter 3, the continuing poor performance in literacy and numeracy of students attending the schools in this study necessitate an immediate review of the NP funds utilised to employ TAs to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Specifically, the following recommendations are made for schools and the ACT ETD:

1. **Develop duty statements for TAs and class teachers working with TAs**
   
i) Prepare a duty statement to reflect the legitimate role of TAs in mainstream schools.

   The duty statement should include role delineation—specifically, the role of TAs in behaviour support; instructing students; planning; communication with families; group work; supporting ILPs; ‘duty of care’; and mandatory reporting of child abuse (suggested TA duty statements linked to qualifications and a career structure for TAs is in Appendix 8).

   ii) Develop a duty statement for teachers who have TAs working in their classrooms.

   The duty statement should include expectations of class teachers and role delineation—specifically, the role of the class teacher in behaviour support; preparing and
differentiating activities for TAs; instruction; communication with families; creating ILPs; student welfare; ‘duty of care’; shared planning with TAs; supervising TAs; training TAs; and providing effective strategies for TAs (suggested class teacher duty statement is in Appendix 9).

2. **Recruit qualified TAs through transparent processes**

All TAs working in mainstream primary schools should possess a Certificate III in Learning Support or Disability Support as a minimal requirement to work in classrooms. (TAs may be employed without this qualification, but they cannot work with students; they could be School Assistants who work in the general office or provide assistance to teachers.) All TAs who work with students should undertake a basic literacy/numeracy test prior to employment, and a minimum level of proficiency is required.

All TAs must be interviewed to ensure that they demonstrate well-developed oral communication skills and meet other selection criteria.

All TAs to complete an induction program that covers ACT ETD system policies, practices and protocols, and a school orientation to ensure that TAs are aware of school-specific policies and practices.

3. **Provide a structured training program for TAs linked to a career pathway**

At the system level, develop and implement a three-level training program for TAs linked to a career pathway where recognition for, and acquisition of, additional training and higher-level qualifications leads to advancement, including salary increases. In addition, develop a policy about access to, and funding of, training for TAs, which is applied equitably and consistently.

4. **Review and evaluate current practices**

i) Review the hours that TAs are employed and consider more flexibility in arrangements.
ii) Evaluate management lines that affect TAs, including the role of business managers as TA supervisors. Consider class teachers as alternative supervisors for TAs.

iii) Evaluate models of TA deployment and support used in schools and consider implementing alternate models such as the TAAF Model of TA Deployment and Support, and evaluate learning outcomes for all students when this model is utilised.

iv) Review channels of communication available to TAs to ensure that they receive information provided to all school and ACT ETD staff.

v) Evaluate the effectiveness of using TAs to improve learning outcomes. Conduct a cost-benefit analysis of learning support in all ACT schools to determine whether employing TAs is the most cost-effective way to achieve improved learning outcomes for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Review cost of employing TAs against alternate models of support used to include students with disabilities and learning difficulties in mainstream classes.

vi) Review pre-service teacher education courses to ensure that pre-service teachers learn how to work with another adult, prepare specific tasks and activities in each lesson for TAs, and supervise support staff who work in their classrooms.

vii) Review training for teachers who already work with TAs and who may need to develop their management or adult supervision skills.

Timely action on these recommendations is critical in the ACT due to the changes around the employment of TAs—specifically, recommendations relating to training. Many of the TAs who have been made permanent ACT ETD staff lack the qualifications and skills that would be required if alternate models of TA deployment are introduced in the ACT.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The growing trend of employing TAs to help improve students’ learning outcomes has occurred without supporting evidence of the benefits or effectiveness of this approach (Blatchford et al., 2009; Gerber et al., 2001; Giangreco, Doyle & Suter, 2011; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010; Shaddock et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2011). Alarmingly, recent international research has found that TA involvement in the classroom has a negative effect on learning outcomes (Blatchford, Webster & Russell, 2012; Farrell et al., 2010). Government policies in the ACT see additional funding provided to schools to employ TAs so that students with disabilities and learning difficulties can attend mainstream schools; however, little research has been done to evaluate this program.

This study concurs with international research regarding factors that affect the ability of TAs to fulfil their role of assisting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in the classroom. Systemic barriers are identified at the policy, school and classroom levels that impede TAs’ abilities to achieve in their role.

The current funding policy in the ACT results in ineffective models of TA deployment and support operating in mainstream schools. The policy of providing support for students with disabilities in the ACT is inextricably linked to TA recruitment, and it also dictates the model of TA deployment. Six different models of TA deployment operate in and across the schools in this study. While all models of deployment provide different opportunities for TAs to support students and teachers, TAs only supported students with disabilities or learning difficulties. How equitable is this practice and this policy? Class
teachers’ attitudes were that these were the students who TAs were funded to support, hence they were the ones who TAs were assigned to work with. Where has this attitude come from and how did it become accepted practice in mainstream schools? These questions need to be answered, and more equitable models of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties are required.

Employment practices and conditions also create barriers to TAs’ performance. The absence of a duty statement that clearly defines a TA’s role in mainstream schools affects the TA, the class teacher and the TA’s supervisor. Even once employed, few TAs see a duty statement, and their days comprise ad hoc tasks. There is also no career pathway for TAs. Ineffective channels of communication within schools minimise opportunities for TAs and class teachers to discuss lessons and students’ needs, to plan activities and to give and receive feedback. The voice and perspective of TAs is often unheard by class teachers, school leaders and policy-makers. The supervision of TAs is inappropriate and ineffective, with TAs receiving scant feedback on performance. Working under these conditions, how could TAs be expected to enhance or improve students’ learning outcomes?

Perceptions of the roles, qualifications, skills and training that TAs require vary considerably among the key stakeholders in this study, making it nearly impossible for TAs to meet the expectations of all stakeholders. These varied perceptions and assumptions lead to confusion, despondency and a lack of job satisfaction for TAs and frustration for class teachers. In filling a gap in the research, this study makes recommendations that are designed to improve working conditions for TAs, improve their status in schools and provide opportunities for greater job satisfaction, with the ultimate goal of improved learning outcomes for all students.

A review of the literature, based predominantly on research conducted in the UK and US, found common issues around role confusion, ambiguity and overlap, and the
employment, deployment, supervision and training of TAs. Such issues have emerged since inclusive education policies were introduced and the TA role changed from purely assisting teachers to providing learning support for students. Factors significantly affecting the ability of TAs to perform in this new role have been highlighted in this thesis, including the existing culture and practices within schools, and the attitudes of key personnel.

While this thesis adds to the corpus of knowledge, this field warrants further research both in the ACT and at a national level in Australia. Areas requiring additional research include:

1. funding policy in jurisdictions in Australia and the link to TA recruitment
2. alternate models that do not use TAs to support students with disabilities
3. costs associated with employing and deploying TAs based on different TA models of deployment
4. the effect of TAs’ support on students’ learning outcomes
5. supervision of support staff—whose role is it?
6. pre-service teacher courses—specifically, inclusive education courses—do they provide pre-service teachers with the skills and strategies needed to teach all students and to utilise support staff?
7. the perspective of the parents of students with disabilities regarding TA support—why do they request TA support? Are they aware that TAs do not require qualifications or training in learning support?
8. online training provision for TAs—do they have access to ICT and the skills to gain maximum benefits from online training?

8.2 Reconceptualising the Role of TAs

This study proposes the adoption of the TAAF Deployment Model of TA Support. In this model, class teachers, while responsible for the whole-class curriculum, focus
attention on students with disabilities and learning difficulties (i.e. those in most need of support). Unqualified and untrained TAs facilitate the teachers’ set curriculum to students without disabilities and those not requiring additional learning support. TAs support the work already planned and set up by the class teacher. The TA is a facilitator who ensures that there is a level of support available to students who have the capacity to complete assigned tasks relatively independently. To avoid role confusion and ambiguity, Table 8.1 outlines the recommended roles of TAs and class teachers when implementing the TAAF model.

Table 8.1:

*Role of TAs and Class Teachers in the TAAF Model of Deployment and Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles in the TAAF Model of Deployment and Support</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TAs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Class teachers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervise learning for groups of students who can work relatively independently</td>
<td>Plan content of all lessons for all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support a teacher and a class, not specific students</td>
<td>Differentiate activities to cater for needs of all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer questions from students as necessary</td>
<td>Provide additional instruction, modified instruction or reteach students with disabilities or learning difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep students on task</td>
<td>Duty of care for all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate with the class teacher</td>
<td>Collaborate with the TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan with the class teacher</td>
<td>Plan with the TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist with supportive behaviour management</td>
<td>Responsible for corrective behaviour management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor student progress</td>
<td>Overall responsibility for student progress and achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide feedback to class teacher on student progress</td>
<td>Supervise TA and provide feedback on TAs performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide feedback to class teacher on students to enable class teacher to communicate student issues to families</td>
<td>Communicate with families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist with goal setting for ILPs (if appropriate)</td>
<td>Assist TA with effective teaching strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend ILP meetings (if appropriate)</td>
<td>Prepare ILPs for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend training</td>
<td>Provide training for TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make mandatory reports to the class teacher (if trained in mandatory reporting)</td>
<td>Make mandatory reports to school leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The TAAF model enables class teachers to have an extra pair of hands and eyes in the classroom that they value. Further, roles are clearly delineated and defined, and all students benefit by receiving their primary instruction from a qualified and trained teacher. Reconceptualising the roles of TAs and class teachers in mainstream classrooms would benefit all students, but particularly students with disabilities and learning difficulties. As many schools in the ACT now have TAs as permanent staff members, an opportunity arises for school leaders to deploy TAs differently and to utilise them as a learning resource to improve outcomes for all students.

8.3 Tip of the Iceberg

When the researcher commenced this study to explore the differing perceptions of the roles, qualifications, skills and training needs of TAs—knowing that they do not need qualifications—the researcher assumed that training alone would improve TAs’ abilities to support class teachers and students with disabilities and learning difficulties. This proved to be untrue. While training is beneficial and necessary, this was just the tip of the iceberg; many factors were unearthed that affect the ability of TAs to perform in their role. TAs face challenges on a daily basis that stem from systemic issues and that relate to employment conditions, processes and practices, culture, and communication channels. The expectation that TAs can improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities is unrealistic given their lack of qualifications in learning support and vast gaps in knowledge, skills and understanding.

Throughout Australia, TAs are referred to by different titles; only in the ACT are TAs called Learning Support Assistants, implying that they have knowledge and skills to help students learn. This title has misled class teachers into believing Learning Support Assistants are formally qualified in learning support. Parents of students with disabilities and learning difficulties who request a Learning Support Assistant to enable their child to
attend a mainstream school may also assume that Learning Support Assistants are trained professionals. If parents were aware that TAs are unqualified and untrained in learning support, would they want a TA sitting beside their child and helping with their child’s learning? Conducting research that includes the perspective of parents of students with disabilities is required to answer this question.

8.4 Where the True Benefits Lie

Throughout this thesis, it has been apparent that key stakeholders hold differing perceptions about TAs, their roles, qualifications, skills, training and the benefits they bring to the classroom. When discussing these benefits, it has been apparent that some class teachers were less enamoured with their presence than others. Comments from class teachers regarding the value of TA support were conditional and often prefaced with, ‘as long as the TA …’. What benefit is accrued from employing TAs? All class teachers value TAs for their presence in classrooms in managing challenging behaviours from disruptive students. These students may or may not have a disability or learning difficulty and may or may not qualify for additional funding, as ‘challenging behaviour’ is not a criterion for funding in the SCAN process. TAs deal with students who misbehave, thereby allowing the teacher to teach the other students. If this is the true benefit of TA support and the key role of a TA in a mainstream classroom, this needs to be acknowledged. Training should be provided to TAs in behaviour management, and school leaders and class teachers need to stop pretending that TAs are employed to provide learning support for students with disabilities. Not one class teacher referred to TAs improving learning outcomes; however, all class teachers acknowledged their value in managing challenging behaviour.

When a student with a disability or learning difficulty enrols in a mainstream school, parents know that funding is available for support and they request it, often with short notice. Principals placate teachers and parents by hastily employing a TA, often based
on availability rather than merit. The TA might already be a volunteer at the school and be known to the principal and class teacher. School leaders believe that in making this appointment, a ‘reasonable adjustment’ or an ‘accommodation’ has been made to allow the student with the disability or learning difficulty to be included in the mainstream class.

If only this scenario could change. How different it could be if TAs who were qualified in learning support or disability support were employed to provide appropriate, targeted support using effective research-based teaching strategies; if TAs had sound literacy and numeracy skills, oral communication skills and the confidence to facilitate groups of students; if a career path for TAs linked to the acquisition of skills, qualifications and training was available; if leadership positions were created for more highly qualified, skilled and trained TAs; and if mentoring and supervision were provided for TAs. If recommendations from this thesis are endorsed and implemented, TAs could be more than just an extra pair of hands and eyes and someone to help manage challenging behaviour. TAs could be an asset to class teachers in their efforts to enhance and improve learning outcomes for all students.

Following the recent change in the ACT that saw TAs become permanent ACT ETD staff, it is timely for a review not only of the role of TAs, but also recruitment processes and practices, and employment conditions. The status quo presents too many challenges for all stakeholders and does not result in the intended outcome of improved student learning. With different employment and deployment structures, TAs could be instruments of change and highly valued contributing members of school staff.
8.5 Final Remarks

This thesis has challenged the common and accepted practice of employing ‘mums’ who have the time to help out in schools and classrooms. Significant changes to policy, practice, culture and attitudes are required, along with further research into the areas identified. If schools are truly committed to improving learning outcomes for all students, the prerequisites for TA applicants must include formal qualifications and training, because ‘being a mum’ is just not enough.
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Appendices

Appendix 1A: ACT TA Duty Statement

Advertisements for TAs in different jurisdictions in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directorate</th>
<th>Education and Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Division</td>
<td>Office for Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Branch</td>
<td>Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section/School</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary/Permanent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position Number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification</td>
<td>School Assistant 2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position Title</td>
<td>Learning Support Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate Supervisor</td>
<td>Business Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In accordance with Directorate Policies

Under general direction, assist teachers in school activities and in the implementation of educational programs for students with special needs. Assistants may be required to:

1. assist students and staff (across a variety of settings) as part of a team, with:
   - physical management tasks (e.g. lifting students, loading and unloading special equipment from vehicles)
   - behaviour management and social skills programs
   - specialised medical requirements
   - toileting, cleaning and changing
   - individual learning programs—individuals and small group work
   - supervision of arrival and departure of students
   - playground supervision
   - attend and assist on excursions
   - transporting students
   - swimming lessons and hydrotherapy sessions, including undressing and dressing of students

2. prepare program materials and teaching aids using a variety of technologies, including computer programs, smart boards, intellitools and digital cameras

3. implement programs provided by physiotherapists, speech pathologists and paramedical staff

4. act as a resource to teachers and families of students by providing information about the child to both teaching staff and family members

5. assist in maintaining a clean and safe working environment for students and staff in accordance with OH&S standards and safety procedures

6. perform general administrative duties, including general computing duties

7. perform First Aid duties when in receipt of a First Aid allowance.
SELECTION CRITERIA

Relevant Knowledge
1. Knowledge of the educational and social needs for students with a wide range of disabilities or special needs.
2. Knowledge of issues and policies related to working with students with disabilities.

Relevant Skills and Abilities
3. Ability to work with, and relate to, students with a wide range of disabilities.
4. Proven communication and interpersonal skills. Ability to communicate effectively with staff, students and family members.
5. Proven capacity to work as part of a team.
6. Organisational skills, including the ability to set priorities, meet deadlines and exercise initiative.
7. Ability to apply equity and diversity, occupational health and safety, and participative management principles and practices in the workplace.

Desirable Requirements
8. First Aid qualification or willingness to undertake appropriate training.

SUPERVISION
1. The Learning Support Assistant will work closely with, and receive direction from, teaching staff. The occupant is expected to be proactive, exercise judgement and initiative, and work with limited supervision.

Source: ACT Education and Training Directorate.
Appendix 1B: Western Australia Department of Education

**Department of Education Western Australia**
Southwest Education Region
River Valley Primary School
Education Assistant—Mainstream
00023151
Level 1, $21.26–$21.83 per hour (EA (Gov) GA 2013)
Advertised Vacancy Number: SS/SS313201

This is a nine (9) month fixed-term, part-time (0.3 FTE) position commencing Term 1, 2013

Do you have the elements required to assist active learning?

River Valley Primary School (PS) is seeking a vibrant and motivated Education Assistant—Mainstream to join their team of friendly staff. To be successful in this role, you will be a team-orientated person who is highly committed to seeing students achieve outstanding results. This position is for half-day shifts on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays.

As an Education Assistant—Mainstream at River Valley PS, you will assist the teacher in delivering planned education programs including the operation of computers, implementing individual or small group programs or demonstrations under teacher direction and encouraging a supportive and inclusive learning environment. You will assist with the preparation and maintenance of the learning environment by maintaining equipment, materials and resources for use in classes, displays and demonstration, and you will assist the teacher with the clean and safe storage of items after classes and activities.

River Valley PS is located in the township of Burekup, 10 kilometres north of Bunbury, nestled among vineyards and dairy farms. The school opened in 1999 as a result of the amalgamation of the former Roelands Primary School (est. 1903) and Burekup Primary School (est. 1913).

The school caters for students from Kindergarten to Year 7 with Multi-Age Grouping classes, and it has strong community involvement and support. Staff and students are encouraged to participate in our 'Positive Behaviour Program', where recognition is given to those who display Excellence, Responsibility, Respect and Care.

This selection process will initially be used to fill the above vacancy. Applicants who are assessed as suitable during this selection process may be appointed to other similar vacancies that occur throughout our school for six months following this initial appointment. This includes circumstances where this position becomes subsequently vacant should the successful applicant decline or vacate the advertised position.

To be suitable for this role, you will need to demonstrate the following work-related requirements:

- sound oral and written communication skills, including the ability to interact with students, parents and teaching professionals
- sound interpersonal skills, including the ability to work as part of a team
- sound organisational skills that will assist in the delivery of effective educational programs to students
- ability to assist with the general health and well-being of students.

Applications will be assessed against these position requirements. The business needs of the school may also be considered. It is therefore recommended that you consider all information contained in the advertisement, and any other related information, before applying for the vacancy.

Further information about River Valley PS can be found by visiting [Schools Online](Schools Online).

For further job-related information:
Please contact Marilee Hall, Registrar, by telephoning (08) 9726 3135, or emailing marilee.hall@education.wa.edu.au

Source: Department of Education, Western Australia.
Appendix 1C: Department of Education Tasmania

STATEMENT OF DUTIES—November 2010

TITLE Teacher Aide NUMBER Generic

AWARD/AGREEMENT Department of Education Teacher Aides Industrial Agreement 2008

CLASSIFICATION Teacher Aide

DIVISION Learning Services

BRANCH Specified Learning Services

SECTION Specified School

TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT

Permanent or fixed-term, full- or part-time, up to 73.5 hours per fortnight. The occupant works only for the duration of school terms; consequently, leave and other benefits are paid on a pro rata basis. Teacher aides are covered by prescribed award arrangements, and all provisions, including TOIL, prevail.

FULL TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE)

As specified

CATEGORY/FUNDING/RESTRICTIONS

Permanent or fixed-term. Cost code: Specified School or College.

SUPERVISOR

Principal/Specified Teacher(s)

LOCATION The current location is within a specified school.

THE ROLE Provide assistance to the teacher(s) by assisting with the management and learning of students.

DUTIES

1. Assist teachers both inside and outside the classroom.
2. Assist with the supervision of small groups or individual students during activities.
3. Undertake specific therapy tasks with specified students under the supervision of a teacher or nominated professional.
4. Toilet, wash and prepare and feed nominated students and care for their physical well-being.
5. Prepare teaching aides and other material to support teaching and learning programs.
6. Publish students’ work, cover books and laminate students’ work.
7. Maintain stores and equipment.
8. Drive or assist students in buses or cars or when attending appointments.
9. Participate and assist in whole-of-school activities.
10. Assist during school camps and excursions.
11. Undertake clerical duties associated with the above tasks.

LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY Responsible for the efficient completion of tasks as directed. May be responsible for the physical well-being of a student or group of students.

Source: Department of Education, Tasmania.
Appendix 1D: Queensland Department of Education

Job Description: Teacher Aide

Your opportunity

As the Teacher Aide, you will contribute to the provision of a quality educational service by assisting and supporting teachers with the preparation/enhancement of learning materials and associated activities.

The Teacher Aide reports to the Principal or nominated delegate as appropriate. The reporting relationship to teachers may be changed by the Principal on a regular basis to fulfil specific needs within the school. When supporting students with specific health procedures, a Teacher Aide will be under the direct or indirect supervision of a registered nurse or medical practitioner.

The duties of a Teacher Aide may include a mix of any of the following activities:

However, these activities are not exhaustive, and other relevant activities may be performed by Teacher Aides provided that such duties are appropriate having due regard to the nature, classification level and purpose of the position.

You will be responsible for leading the following activities and delivering the following key tasks:

- assisting teachers and students with sporting activities and school excursions
- assisting with the management and stocktaking of equipment and resources
- communicating effectively and displaying a high level of interpersonal skills to function as an effective team member
- maintaining anecdotal records on students for use in reviewing students’ development
- displaying respect and empathy for students with high-level needs
- displaying confidentiality, tact, reliability and sensitivity to students and their families
- compiling and supervising class rolls
- clerical assistance duties, including typing teachers’ notes and work programs, duplicating/photocopying teaching materials, checking bus lists, collating and duplicating exam papers, recording examination results, compiling students’ results records and assisting in organising off-site activities
- assisting in the supervision of education activities under the direction of a teacher
- assisting in preparing, storing, making available and clearing away teaching equipment and materials
- assisting teaching staff with playground/bus supervision
- collecting money from students for various school activities as required
- contributing to the welfare, health and safety of students, including the delivery of First Aid
- assist students with special needs; in certain circumstances, this may extend to moving disabled pupils, assisting with positioning and assisting with meals, toileting and dressing of pupils who are unable to care for themselves—suitable training is essential
- listening to students’ reading
- reading aloud and storytelling
- assisting with science demonstrations, textile and cooking classes—for example, collating food lists and purchasing, preparing and storing materials
- laundering linens
- care of equipment
- assisting students to find reference materials
• specific literacy and numeracy duties may include:
  - working with small groups as well as individual students
  - support for teachers in providing learning materials for at-risk students
  - using computers when working with students.

Source: Queensland Department of Education
Appendix 1E: Victorian Department of Education

Position Description: Education Support Lvl 1 Rge 1—Quicksmart

Role

Undertake routine tasks that are usually carried out under close supervision and direction. The level of supervision will vary depending on whether there is a high variety of tasks and where priorities may change (e.g. administrative support, assisting teachers in the classroom and other educational activities, such as providing attendant care and assistance to students, general support roles and assisting in out-of-school care programs). Positions that work on a more independent basis will generally perform a limited number of tasks on a regular basis where priorities are clear, procedures are well established and direction is readily available.

Work has little scope for deviation. Tasks may involve a wide range of duties of a routine nature. Problems can usually be solved by referring to well-documented procedures and instructions and clearly established practices. Assistance is readily available when problems arise. An experienced officer at this level will exercise limited judgement within clearly defined guidelines and well-established practices that relate specifically to the tasks performed.

Does not carry responsibility for the work of others. More experienced employees will provide guidance and advice to others relative to the required tasks within the work area.

The Education Support position supports the educational services being provided to students but must not include duties of teaching as defined in clause 2.6.1 of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic) or its successor. Supervision of students cannot be required except where it is an integral part of the employee’s position or involves the supervision of students individually or in small groups, in controlled circumstances, where the responsibility for students remains clearly with a teacher.

Qualification requirements do not operate at this level. Certification requirements may be required to legally perform specific tasks—for example, driver’s licence, First Aid, safe food handling.

Responsibilities

- Assist students on an individual or group basis in specific learning areas.
- Assist with communication between students and teachers, particularly the interpretation of instructions.
- Provide basic physical and emotional care for students.
- Participate in team meetings.
- Assist with toileting, meals, lifting and administering medication to students who require special care.
- Assist with the supervision of pupils in playgrounds, at camps, on excursions, in sporting activities, therapy activities and life skills.
- Assist in the preparation of student resources and equipment.
- Prepare basic curriculum support resources.
- Set up and put away equipment and materials in support of teaching programs.
- Observe students and draw the attention of the teacher to them where necessary.
- Participate in the monitoring and evaluation of programs and the evaluation of individual student involvement and achievement.
- Assist with communication between teachers and non-English-speaking parents/students.
• Assist in the translation of documents.
• Assist students with the preparation and service of meals.
• Ensure work areas and materials, equipment and appliances are maintained in a clean and ready-to-use condition.
• Assist in the preparation of equipment and purchasing of materials and supplies as required.

Who May Apply

Individuals with the aptitude, experience and/or qualifications to fulfil the specific requirements of the position.

Source: Victorian Department of Education
Appendix 1F: New South Wales Department of Education

Under the supervision and direction of a teacher, school learning support officers assist in classroom activities, school routines and the care and management of students with special needs.

Generally, their role includes assisting teachers in school and community centres to:
- implement individual education programs (IEPs)
- provide opportunities for students to develop personal, social, independent, living and pre-vocational skills
- attend to the personal care needs of students
- operate audio-visual aids, duplicate and issue learning materials, and clerical duties.

There are several types of school learning support officer roles, including general, pre-school, Braille transcriber, sign interpreter and ethnic.

Total remuneration package is valued up to $48,183 per annum (range $26,146–$43,663). Remuneration package includes employer’s contribution to superannuation and leave loading.

**Position Criteria**
- Awareness of the needs of young students
- Ability to work with young students
- Effective communication skills

**Position Criteria**
- Awareness of the needs of students with disabilities
- Ability to work with students with emotional, physical or intellectual disabilities
- Effective communication skills

**Qualifications**
- Nil


Source: New South Wales Department of Education
Appendix 1G: Northern Territory

Special Education Support Officer
Taminmin College, Darwin
Administrative Officer 3

Primary Objective
To provide a high level of service to staff and students—especially those children who have learning and/or behavioural problems—and to provide a link between schools, teachers, service agencies and parents to achieve effective education services for students.

Key Responsibilities
1. Assist with the implementation of IEPs that are developed for selected children with learning/emotional disabilities.
2. Contribute to the programming, report preparation, recording and collecting of data that are relevant to student programs.
3. Play an integral role in supervising students in the learning environment and provide one-to-one instruction as appropriate.
4. Oversee and stocktake the resources of the special unit.

Selection Criteria
Essential
1. Experience working with children in an educational and supportive environment.
2. Demonstrated interpersonal, communication and organisational skills, which have resulted in effective team membership and the ability to work independently.
3. Proven ability to work and positively interact with others in a cross-cultural setting and to work with initiative and complete confidentiality.
4. Proven ability to support teachers/special programs for disabled children.
5. Senior First Aid Certificate or the ability to gain suitable qualification as soon as possible.

Desirable
1. A current Northern Territory driver’s licence.

Further Information
For Expressions of Interest (EOI) less than six months, please limit your application to a one-page response to the selection criteria and a single page summary of your curriculum vitae.

This vacancy is based on school conditions, and remuneration will be 92 per cent of an AO3 salary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote Vacancy No:</th>
<th>6761</th>
<th>Vacancy Closes:</th>
<th>04/09/2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact Officer:</td>
<td>Narelle Jones 08 8983 7247 or <a href="mailto:narelle.jones@ntschools.net">narelle.jones@ntschools.net</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Northern Territory Department of Education
Appendix 1H: South Australian Department of Education

School name: Linden Park Schools

SSO1—Student Support & Classroom Support

Position Descriptor: SSO support for five students who have arrived from the New Arrivals Program

Job Reference No.: 2012-1295-SS1-C-2-17

Location: Linden Park Junior Primary School

Region: Eastern Adelaide

Tenure: 28/05/2012 to 09/12/2012

Hours Per Week: 3.5

Classification: SSO01—SSO Level 1

Conditions: $48,511–$56,802 per annum FTE/20 per cent Salary Loading

Major Function(s)/Skill(s): Curriculum

SSO Classroom Support Officer

The classroom support officer is accountable to the school Administrative Officer for the provision of curriculum support for teaching staff and students by:

- contributing to the planning and delivery of curriculum with participating teachers
- delivering curriculum to children in small groups or on a one-on-one basis under the direction of the teacher or director
- performing clerical and administrational duties such as maintaining files and information related to the students at the site
- organising and preparing materials and resources for general and specific activities; this may include organising activities, including learning areas within the safety guidelines and under the direction of the teacher
- contributing to the evaluation of the program by engaging in discussions with the teacher regarding implementing and evaluating program changes
- contributing to the organisation of special events, children’s work displays, researching and collating information, costing equipment and materials, and making recommendations regarding resource purchases to the teacher/director.

Brief Role/Duty Statement of the Position

- Provide classroom support for students in the New Arrivals Program
- Reception to Year 7

Essential Skill Codes Required: CS

Other Essential Requirements of the Position: (e.g. days and hours required to be on duty) to be negotiated.

Application to Include

One-page expression of interest attached to your application in DECS jobs, addressing the following criteria:

1. Experience working with students from a non-English-speaking background
2. Experience working in classroom setting.
Application Due: Thursday 24 May 2012 (11.20pm)

If you believe you meet the essential requirements for this position and wish to express interest in this position, please lodge your application in DECS Jobs.

Source: South Australian Department of Education
**Appendix 2A: Questionnaire for Teacher Assistants (Learning Support Assistants in the ACT)**

**Personal Background Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>male</th>
<th>female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td>20–35</td>
<td>36–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46–55</td>
<td>56–65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highest educational qualification attained?

How long have you been employed as a LSA?

How were you employed?

Did you respond to an advertisement?

Did you approach the school?

Were you approached by the school?

Were you recommended by someone?

Were you transferred from another school?

Other

Are you    Full time Part time Permanent Casual

1. What is your role at the school? What do you do?

2. What skills do you need to do your job well?

3. What training do you need to perform your job well?

Any other comments

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire. Your responses will help to inform a training program that will be developed to assist you to undertake your role as a Learning Support Assistant.
Appendix 2B: Questionnaire for Class Teachers

**Personal Background Information**

**Sex**
- male
- female

**Age range**
- 25–35
- 36–45
- 46–55
- 56–65

**Highest educational qualification attained?**

**How long have you been employed as a teacher?**

**How long have you been at this school?**

**Are you employed**
- Full time
- Part time
- Permanent
- Casual

**Do you have any LSAs working in your classroom this year?**
- Yes
- No

If yes, **how many hours per week is he or she there?**

**Does the LSA support one student or many?**

**What does the LSA do when he or she is working in your classroom?**

Do you have time to meet with the LSA/s to talk about your teaching program or about the students?
- Yes
- No
- Any comments?

Does the LSA have the necessary skills to undertake the duties that you would like the LSA to perform?
If not, please comment on what skills you think the LSA needs.

1. **What is the role of a LSA?**

2. **What skills do LSAs need to do their job well?**

3. **What training do LSAs need to do their job well?**

Any other comments

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire. Your responses will help to inform a training program that will be developed to assist Learning Support Assistants when working with students with special educational needs.
Appendix 2C: Questionnaire for Principals and School Leaders

Personal Background Information

Sex  
- male
- female

Age range  
- 25–35
- 36–45
- 46–55
- 56–65

Highest educational qualification attained? ________________________

How long have you been a school leader? ________________________

How long have you been at this school? ________________________

Are you employed  
- Full time
- Part time
- Permanent
- Casual

How do you engage LSAs to work at your school?

What qualities do you look for when engaging LSAs?

Do you have a school induction program for LSAs?  
- Yes
- No

Do you offer any training programs for LSAs?  
- Yes
- No

1. What is the role of a LSA at your school?

2. What skills do LSAs need to do their job well?

3. What training do LSAs need to do their job well?

Any other comments

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire. Your responses will help to inform a training program that will be developed to assist Learning Support Assistants when working with students with special educational needs.
Appendix 3A: Guiding Questions for Teacher Assistants—Semi-structured Interview

1. What is your main role? Is it to support the teachers or to support the students?
2. Do you have a duty statement or have you seen one? If not, how do you know what your role is? Has anyone ever told you?
3. Do you worry about your future as a LSA? Getting your contract renewed? What is it dependent on?
4. What do you see yourself doing next year? In five years?
5. What is the hardest part of your job? The greatest challenge that you have?
6. Who are you working with and why?
7. What are you trying to achieve when working with each of these students?
8. Who checks or monitors what you do with students?
9. Do you ever receive any feedback about what you do from class teachers, executive staff, students or parents?
10. Does anyone give you strategies to try?
11. Can you talk to anyone about students and what to do to help them?
12. Do you work with students on ILPs? Have you seen their ILPs? Were you involved in setting the goals for the ILPs or meetings regarding the ILPs?
13. How do you know what to do when you enter a classroom?
14. Do you have any time talk to class teachers about what you do or about the students who you work with?
15. Have you undertaken any training this year?
16. Can you identify any benefits that you have experienced from the training?
17. Can you identify ways that you are now better able to help the teachers you support?
18. Can you identify any ways that you are now better able to help the students who you work with?
19. How do you feel about yourself now that you have completed the training?
20. Is there anything else you would like to comment on about your job as a LSA?
Appendix 3B: Guiding Questions for Class Teachers—

Semi-structured Interview

1. What is the main role of a LSA? To support you, the teacher, or to support the students who they are assigned to?
2. Do you know what you can ask the LSAs to do? Have you ever seen a duty statement?
3. What do you think that LSAs should do when they are working in a room with you?
4. Do you believe that LSAs are useful? If so, how? What do they do that is useful?
5. Do you have planning time with the LSAs?
6. Do the LSAs attend ILP meetings or have input into ILPs for the students they work with?
7. What is the greatest challenge you see for a LSA?
8. What is the greatest challenge for you when working with a LSA in your classroom?
9. What is the greatest benefit to you of having a LSA working in your classroom?
10. When the LSA is working with a student, do you ever check to see what he or she is actually doing or teaching the student?
11. What would help you the most as a class teacher with students with diverse needs? More LSAs?
12. Can you identify any changes in the LSAs who work at your school since they completed the training sessions?
13. Can you identify ways that the LSAs are now better able to help you in the classroom?
14. Can you identify ways that the LSAs are now better able to help students in the classroom?
15. Has the training been beneficial? Please explain.
16. Do you have any other comments about LSAs that you would like to make?
Appendix 3C: Guiding Questions for Principals

1. Can you begin by telling me about yourself—how long you have been a teacher and a principal and where have you taught?
2. Are you involved in employing LSAs at your school?
3. Why are they employed? Who decides that you need a LSA?
4. When they are employed at your school, do they undertake a system or school orientation?
5. What qualities do you seek in a LSA when you employ one? Qualifications? Skills? Personal attributes?
6. What is the role of a LSA in your school?
7. Do you have a duty statement for a LSA?
8. Are LSAs employed to support students or class teachers?
9. Are LSAs employed to help improve learning outcomes for students or are they employed for other reasons?
10. What differences do LSAs make in your school?
11. Sometimes LSAs are assigned to one class and sometimes they are assigned to individual students and may move from class to class during the day. What model do you think is the best model for LSA support?
12. Do you think LSAs should have an instructional, pedagogical role or a supportive, administrative role? Can you explain why?
13. Who determines who the LSAs support and who organises their timetables?
14. Who supervises what LSAs do?
15. What challenges do LSAs face?
16. What training do you think LSAs should have?
17. Have you ever had any problems with LSAs—perhaps their professionalism? Attitudes? Communication with teachers or parents? Knowledge and skills?
18. What challenges do teachers have when working with LSAs in their classrooms?
19. Do you have any other comments to make about LSAs?
Appendix 3D: Guiding Questions for Supervisors of TAs

1. Do you have any responsibility for employing LSAs?
2. If so, what qualities do you look for? What skills do you think they need?
3. If not, who employs LSAs, and do you see their CVs with their qualifications and experience?
4. Who then organises a timetable for LSAs? What determines who they work with—both students and teachers?
5. Does your school provide any induction for LSAs? Personal development? Training? If so, what is provided?
6. Do LSAs have access to a computer and have a system email log on?
7. Do LSAs attend staff meetings? Teacher personal development? Is there a requirement that they attend any out-of-school activities? If so, are they paid to do this or is it in their contract or terms of employment?
8. If a class with a supported student was going on an excursion, would the LSA attend? What if it was an overnight camp? Would they be expected to attend and would they be paid more?
9. Do you think the LSA is in a classroom to support the teacher or the students?
10. What is the greatest challenge for you when working with LSAs?
11. Do LSAs get involved in the ILP process? Do they see the ILPs?
12. Do you provide any planning time for LSAs and the class teachers? Do you think planning time is necessary?
13. Do you think LSAs are valued in the school? What evidence do you have of this?
14. Do you think LSAs add value or help to improve student learning outcomes? Do you have any evidence of this?
15. What is the greatest challenge for you when being responsible for the management of LSAs?
16. Name one thing that you think would help LSAs and class teachers to work with students with special needs.
17. Do you have anything else you would like to comment on?
Appendix 3E: Guiding Questions for Staff at ACT Education and Training Directorate

1. Tell me about your role in the office of the ETD.
2. What experience have you had with LSA?
3. How are LSAs employed into the ACT system? Are positions advertised? Do they complete an application by providing a CV and responding to selection criteria? Is the process managed from the central office or is it school-based?
4. What qualifications does a person need to have to be a LSA? What are the desirable qualifications?
5. Once someone is employed, is there an induction process? If so, what happens?
6. Are LSAs employed solely on the needs of students identified on a SCAN?
8. Do you have any copies of duty statements?
9. How are LSAs then deployed into schools? Is there a preferred model that you recommend or do schools decide?
10. What do you think of the role of the office manager as the supervisor of the LSAs?
11. Do office managers oversee the hiring of LSAs?
12. Is there a performance review for LSAs? Who oversees this?
13. Do office managers have any training in supervising LSAs or office staff?
14. What do you see as the greatest challenge in employing LSAs?
15. What is the greatest benefit of employing LSAs?
16. Is any training offered to LSAs?
17. What training do you think LSAs need to perform in their role?
Appendix 3F: Guiding Questions for Interview with CIT Staff

Member

1. Tell me about your role at CIT.
2. What experience have you had with LSAs?
3. What courses do you offer at CIT for LSAs?
4. Tell me about the different certificate courses that students can take. What is the difference between the courses that you offer?
5. How are the courses offered? Full time? Part time? During the day? After school hours?
6. Do you have many people enrolled who are already working in schools as LSAs?
7. Do you give students strategies to use in the classroom? If so, what is the focus?
8. Do you teach students how to use technology and assistive technologies?
9. Do you talk about ILPs and the role of a LSA in the ILP process?
10. Do you mention duty of care and their role in duty of care? How do you define duty of care for your students?
11. What qualifications does a person need to have to be a LSA? What are the desirable qualifications?
12. Is there an entry requirement to get into a LSA course at CIT? A literacy or numeracy test?
13. Do you notice development over the course in their skills and confidence and ability to undertake the role?
14. Given that they all do a school placement, I imagine they would have many different experiences. Can you comment on this?
15. When your students have completed the course, do most get employed? Do you assist them to find jobs?
16. Is ongoing support or training offered to your graduates?
Appendix 3G: Interview Questions for Teacher Assistants at Scrivener School to Evaluate the Exploratory Study

1. Can you identify any benefits that you, personally, have experienced from the training undertaken?
2. Can you identify any ways in which you are now better able to help the teachers you support?
3. Can you identify any ways in which you are now better able to help the students you support?
4. What changes have you noticed since you have completed the training course?
5. How do you feel about yourself now that you have completed the training course?
Appendix 4: Observation Guide

1. Time spent telling TA what to do in the lesson.
2. Whether TA works with only one child or more than one child.
3. What the TA does to support the student.
4. What questions the TA asks.
5. Does the TA modify work for the student?
6. Does the TA provide curriculum, academic support or more social and behavioural support?
7. Does the TA provide instructional support or does the teacher provide instructional support?
8. When the TA is in the classroom, does the teacher ever approach to see how the student is progressing?
9. Who checks students’ work? TA or class teacher?
10. Does the student appear to like working with the TA or are they disengaged?
11. How does the TA motivate the student?
12. Does the TA have to negotiate with the student to complete work?
13. Type of questions TA asks—open or closed?
14. Type of questions students ask and whether TA provides the answers and closes down the conversation or asks another question to keep the conversation flowing.
15. Instructional—teaching or reteaching? Ensuring that learning is happening?
16. Hurry along to complete a task?
17. Keeping student on task—managing disruptive behaviour?
Appendix 5: Event Sampling—Tasks That Teacher Assistants Were Asked to Perform

At Scrivener School, TAs kept a log of the tasks they performed during a four-week period. If the task was performed each week, it scored 4. If it was performed in only one week, it scored 1. At the Molonglo, Murrumbidgee and Cotter schools, TAs were observed performing the following tasks. Frequency of performance was not recorded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Scrivener</th>
<th>Molonglo</th>
<th>Murrumbidgee</th>
<th>Cotter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support children identified with specific learning needs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photocopying</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing teaching resources for teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support whole class—students ask TA for support</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Help with reading—one-on-one—individual</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading individually with students assigned by teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Help with maths—one-on-one—individual</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help students to get back on task</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforce what teachers say</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Take small groups for reading</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Take small groups for maths</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prepare display boards</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assist children individually to reinforce learning concepts presented by teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribute teaching materials such as textbooks, workbooks, papers and pencils to students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribute tests and homework assignments, and collect them when they are completed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Withdraw students for one-to-one work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage students to participate in activities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Behaviour—if a child ‘loses it’, may go for a walk around the school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Read instructions to students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help students to stay on task</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Settle students at the beginning and end of the day</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break tasks into small steps</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily duty—playground</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily duty—office</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Observe students’ performance and record relevant data to assess progress</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Description</td>
<td>Scrivener</td>
<td>Molonglo</td>
<td>Murrumbidgee</td>
<td>Cotter</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
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<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow students with behaviour problems</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laminating</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Present subject matter to students under the direction and guidance of the teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Help with differentiations for students—alter and modify activities to cater for children’s needs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help students from language background other than English with English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharpen pencils, make glue, play dough</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assist with behaviour management</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assist students with technology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stock teaching materials and supplies, and purchase supplies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type, file and photocopy materials</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist relief teachers with timetables, schedules etc.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervise students on excursions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct demonstrations to teach skills such as sports, dancing and handicrafts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Make children’s lunches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discuss assigned duties with classroom teachers in order to coordinate instructional efforts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Preschool Assistants Only</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up outside play equipment</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pack away outside play equipment</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Answer phone</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare morning tea and lunch tables</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>General cleaning duties</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organise and label materials, and display students’ works in a manner that is appropriate for their eye level and perceptual skills</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruct and monitor students in the use and care of equipment and materials in order to prevent injuries and damage</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove furniture</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean toilets</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist young children with toileting</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organise and supervise games and other recreational activities to promote physical, mental and social development</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in teacher—parent conferences regarding students’ progress or problems with the class teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct demonstrations to teach skills such as sports, dancing and handicrafts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend staff meetings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type, file and photocopy materials</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lock up</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 6: Time Sampling During Observations

### Observations prior to TA training sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of conversations held between TA and class teacher</th>
<th>Less than one minute</th>
<th>More than one minute but less than 5 minutes</th>
<th>More than 5 minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotter School—TA8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (in staff room at recess time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotter School—TA9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 (in playground at recess time)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee School—TA10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee School—TA11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee School—TA14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (during school assembly)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee School—TA15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Observations during TA training sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of conversations between TA and class teacher</th>
<th>Less than one minute</th>
<th>More than one minute but less than 5 minutes</th>
<th>More than 5 minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotter School—TA8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotter School—TA9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 (after a lesson discussing a student’s behaviour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee School—TA10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee School—TA11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molonglo School—TA12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 (in staff room during recess time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molonglo School—TA13 (preschool TA)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 (during planning time)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Observations following TA training sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of conversations between TA and class teacher</th>
<th>Less than one minute</th>
<th>More than one minute but less than 5 minutes</th>
<th>More than 5 minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotter School—TA8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotter School—TA9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee School—TA10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrumbidgee School—TA11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molonglo School—TA12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 (in staff room at recess time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molonglo School—TA13 (preschool TA)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2 (before school)</td>
<td>1 (on playground supervising students)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During observations, one class teacher on one occasion checked on what the TA was doing when working with a student; otherwise, class teachers left TAs and students alone.
Appendix 7: Teacher Assistant Training (TAT)

When analysing the data collected in this study during Stage 2, responses from questionnaires by TAs, class teachers and school leaders suggested that TAs needed, and would benefit from, training. Based on recommendations provided by participants, five training modules—called TAT—were delivered during Stage 3 for the TAs from the three key sites and for 19 TAs from other ACT Government primary schools. These training modules were based on the needs of the TAs at Cotter, Molonglo and Murrumbidgee. The first four training modules were conducted at the University of Canberra from 3.30 pm to 5.30 pm over eight weeks during term two, 2011. The final module was conducted during the June/July school holidays from 9.00 am to 11.00 am. At the end of every second training session, anonymous feedback was sought from the TAs. This feedback is provided below.

WORKSHOP 1: 14 June 2011—LEARNING STYLES

What does it mean to have a learning difficulty?

Rate this workshop from 1–5 (1 useless–5 extremely useful)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4 = 3</th>
<th>5 = 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Useless</td>
<td>Moderately useful</td>
<td>Useful</td>
<td>Quite useful</td>
<td>Extremely useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment on what you learnt in this workshop and how you have used this knowledge when working with students. (Responses are anonymous)

The way students process information.

How to deal with the students and be very patient while they process the question.

This workshop has given me a greater understanding of how children with learning difficulties interpret information and the need to simplify content or modify content to ensure that the children receive the best opportunity to learn. Where necessary I have simplified and modified content and ensure the student has some level of comprehension.

I enjoyed learning about learning styles and the four thinking selves. I thought about the students that I work with and whether they were an a, b, c or d and tried to think about the way I could use that to help them with their learning.

It was interesting to see what it is actually like for a student with learning difficulties, and how quick the questions are ‘fired’ at the student. I have learnt things need to slow down and for myself
to write things down, so I can slow the lesson to the student’s pace and not the class. I also learn that learning disabilities has to do more with perception than with motivation.

Helped me to understand how people learn differently and opened my eyes to see the world from the ‘learning disabled’ person’s point of view. I am more aware of what I say, my body language and expectations.

Re-emphasised how children learn differently and how important time is to allow for comprehension of an instruction.

After attending the workshop, I have been more aware of how I pose questions to students and the pace of my speech and try to allow the child more processing time before expecting a response.

The DVD helped with understanding the anxiety group session can be for the individual students. Our group sessions are more based around group discussions and answers rather than asking for individual answers (preschool assistant).

Patience and time is a very important factor. I have since considered that every student I help will need different amounts of time given, with understanding or competing tasks.

WORKSHOP 2: 21 June 2011—LITERACY SKILLS
Strategies to help students who struggle with literacy

Rate this workshop from 1–5 (1 useless–5 extremely useful)
1 = Useless  2 = Moderately useful  3 = Useful  4 = Quite useful  5 = Extremely useful

Comment on what you learnt in this workshop and how you have used this knowledge when working with students. (Responses are anonymous)

I understand what Kaye said; I totally agree with some of her theories; but some of the students are so illiterate that the only way to get through to them is by sounding out /c/ /a/ /t/.

How to read the books to the child. Of course not to interfere while they are read. How to differentiate the good reader and a poor reader; setting the reading up for success—book orientations.

A lot of the strategies such as shared reading and paired reading I was already using. I also use the read-on technique but I found the idea of not giving the student a clue that takes them away from the text when they get stuck on a word a really good rule to remember.

I have learnt that when a child is reading and replacing a word with one of the same meaning to let it be! Good readers do that! Not to give them clues on the text as it leads them away from the story.
Book orientation is very important—it can introduce the story and any working involved. Also about different strategies in reading such as echo, NIM and paired reading.

It was very useful to learn how to successfully help a child/adult to read. I especially took ‘rules of prompting’ away with me and used the strategies. I used them with one student, and it was a more relaxed and enjoyable experience.

Was a great presenter, useful information put across in an engaging way. Had many ideas going on from her strategies and was able to put them into use over this next week.

Strategies used in teaching to read and keeping the process positive, finding the child’s strengths and use it in reading.

This was fantastic and gave me a new outlook for students we work with. Fresh approach with new skills to use. Thank you so much, I would love to do more on the UCan read program.

I have been focusing on using book orientations to give students a greater knowledge of the text before reading and have found this to be very successful.

We have just started home readers and the idea of choosing books for their interest has been our priority to help encourage reading at home and in the classroom. We do group reading and encourage students to be involved in stories.

Some of the different techniques used. For example, the echo technique, I used this on a kindergarten student.

WORKSHOP 3: 28 June 2011—Communication Disorders with Therapy ACT: articulation difficulties and phonemic awareness

Rate this workshop from 1–5 (1 useless–5 extremely useful)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2 = 2</th>
<th>3 = 3</th>
<th>4 = 4</th>
<th>5 = 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Useless</td>
<td>moderately useful</td>
<td>useful</td>
<td>quite useful</td>
<td>extremely useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment on what you learnt in this workshop and how you have used this knowledge when working with students. (Responses are anonymous)

It was very interesting but unfortunately I don’t work with children with speech problems. I thought there would be some talk on behaviour management and not just speech issues.

I learnt the difference between speech and language disorders. Also how we make the different sounds. It helped me understand why my students have difficulty in producing the sounds.
It was interesting. I thought I could have learnt more if we had talked more about behaviour management. I don’t work with small kids with speech problems.

It was good to learn the different sound and the sounds that are related to speech and other that are related to learning difficulties.

The hierarchy of teaching sounds will be useful.

I haven’t had the opportunity to utilise this as yet but enjoyed the pd.

It raised my awareness of issues impacting on children with speech difficulties. It gave me some strategies to use when working with them.

I found this workshop interesting but I am not sure how much I would be able to use it.

The use of the mouth position, of the tongue—you take for granted. Now I’m mindful of how I look at the student and having them watch my mouth. The difference between language and speech.

WORKSHOP 4: 5 July 2011—Autism spectrum disorders and social stories

Rate this workshop from 1–5 (1 useless–5 extremely useful)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3 = 1</th>
<th>4 = 3</th>
<th>5 = 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Useless</td>
<td>Moderately useful</td>
<td>Useful</td>
<td>Quite useful</td>
<td>Extremely useful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment on what you learnt in this workshop and how you have used this knowledge when working with students. (Responses are anonymous)

I put into practice a social story, which was successful in the fact of positivity towards routine in the room.

It helped my understanding of how a person with autism sees the world. How they assume we all see/understand things like they do. It also helped me to realise the value of rules. I have also had an opportunity to assist in writing social stories.

I find it very useful. I work with autistic children. I feel that I can understand them better.

I took back a few ideas and spoke to my peers I work with on the ideas and concepts spoken in the training. I suppose the training also reminds you on how things could, should be done.

Help with working with children with autism and how they relate to different learning situations.

How to write social stories was very useful.

I wish I hadn’t missed this workshop. It would have been really good.
I have done a few workshops on Autism before so this workshop reinforced what I had already learnt.

**WORKSHOP 5: Tuesday 12 July 2011, 9.30–11.30am**

**Helping students who struggle with numeracy**

Rate this workshop from 1–5 (1 useless–5 extremely useful)

1 2 3 4 = 5 5 = 7

Useless Moderately useful Useful Quite useful Extremely useful

Comment on what you learnt in this workshop and how you might use this knowledge when working with students. (Responses are anonymous)

That there is a lot more to maths than just numbers! Have learnt to break down explanations a lot more and to start at basics. I will use the knowledge of understanding maths solutions/steps with my students. It is not only a numbers. It is more than a number.

Explaining to kids more clearly how to solve the problem. Workshop made you look at what we do in class, how we work with students.

Looking at different issues that affect learning.

Totally enjoyed this. Wish we could continue. I could sit here all day.

Great workshop, very helpful with going into more depth with the language we use to explain maths problems. Find the most simplified strategies.

The importance of understanding why a child may be making errors and to value what the child can do (build their confidence).

Fabulous workshop full of awesome information. It was really interesting and thought-provoking material. It gave me valuable insights which can inform my work with students in maths.

I found this extremely interesting and a completely different way of looking at maths applications and procedures. I can see it would be beneficial if a student is not understanding a process to be able to explain it in a different way or show them why they are doing a process.

Representing numbers correctly; showing the patterns in maths; making sure of the language being used.

The practical lesson helped with how the students understand mathematics. Highlighted how to reteach and reinforce correction. The workshop will help me with my own children’s high school maths homework.
Have an open mind, question what you are reading, unlearn old confusing methods.

Lots.

**If you could have other training workshops, what would you like training in?**

Definitely in numeracy. It was awesome. Explain a lot of things in ‘layman’s terms’!

Behavioural management would be great.

More numeracy workshops.

Training in difficult behaviours; how to handle situations that are difficult

Discussion groups with other LSAs in different school, discussing problems, issues, help to problem solve, ideas.

More regarding numeracy.

Strategies and help for: working with behavioural problems; children with emotional problems; children from NESB; more numeracy work. The workshop was great. I’d love to hear more.

Separation anxiety—transitions to new school. Games and resources to help with learning—in literacy and maths for preschoolers. Learning about the smartboard and accessories.
## Appendix 8: Suggested Career Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Salary</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Assistant—assigned to either a primary school or a preschool</td>
<td>$39,432</td>
<td>Year 10 minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Support Assistant Level 1 Assigned to a primary school</td>
<td>$43,728</td>
<td>Certificate III in Learning Support or Disability Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Support Assistant Level 1 Assigned to a preschool</td>
<td>$43,728</td>
<td>Certificate III in Children’s Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Support Assistant Level 2 Assigned to a primary school</td>
<td>$48,474</td>
<td>Certificate IV in Learning Support or Disability Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Support Assistant Level 2 Assigned to a preschool</td>
<td>$48,474</td>
<td>Certificate IV in Children’s Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Support Assistant Level 3 Assigned to a primary school</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>Diploma in Learning Support or Disability Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Support Assistant Level 3 Assigned to a preschool</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>Diploma in Children’s Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Progress to an undergraduate degree in education with credit obtained for recognition of prior learning.

Salary is based on existing salaries for LSAs in the ACT. Level 3 LSA position does not currently exist.

### Suggested Duties for Each Career Level

#### School Assistant
1. Prepare the classroom for daily activities; collect teaching materials
2. Take roll as students arrive at school
3. Collect homework and home readers; mark off names of students who have completed homework
4. Prepare fruit for fruit break
5. Sit strategically with students while teacher gives a lesson or instructions; minimise off-task, disruptive behaviours
6. Keep students on task
7. Photocopy and laminate
8. Put up class displays
9. Attend excursions
10. Assist class teacher in the playground.

#### Learning Support Assistant—Level 1
1. Prepare the classroom for daily activities; collect teaching materials
2. Take roll as students arrive at school; collect and exchange home readers
3. Collect homework; mark off names of students who have completed homework
4. Prepare fruit for fruit break
5. Sit strategically with students while teacher gives a lesson or instructions; minimise off-task, disruptive behaviours
6. Keep students on task while class teacher teaches a small group of students with or without disabilities or learning needs
7. Attend ILP meetings of students in the classes they support
8. Assist class teacher to manage the behaviour of disruptive students by keeping them on-task
9. Photocopy and laminate
10. Put up class displays
11. Conduct reading assessments—running records
12. Attend excursions
13. Assist class teacher in the playground.

**Learning Support Assistant—Level 2**
1. Prepare the classroom for daily activities; collect teaching materials
2. Take roll as students arrive at school; collect and exchange home readers
3. Collect homework; mark off names of students who have completed homework
4. Prepare fruit for fruit break
5. Sit strategically with students while teacher gives a lesson or instructions; minimise off-task, disruptive behaviours
6. Summarise teacher’s instructions step by step on a whiteboard
7. Keep students on task while class teacher teaches a small group of students with or without disabilities or learning needs
8. Attend ILP meetings of students in the classes they support
9. Take a group for literacy activities—not the bottom group but a middle- or high-achieving group; administer an activity prepared by the teacher; monitor student performance and report on progress
10. Take a group for numeracy activities—not the bottom group but a middle- or high-achieving group; administer an activity prepared by the teacher; monitor student performance and report on progress
11. Assist class teacher to manage the behaviour of disruptive students by keeping them on-task
12. Photocopy and laminate
13. Put up class displays
14. Conduct behaviour observations on a checklist
15. Conduct reading assessments—running records
16. Attend excursions
17. Assist class teacher in the playground.

**Learning Support Assistant—Level 3**
(Recommendation: Duty of Care responsibilities assigned to these LSAs)
1. Prepare the classroom for daily activities; collect teaching materials
2. Take roll as students arrive at school; collect and exchange home readers
3. Collect homework; mark off names of students who have completed homework
4. Prepare fruit for fruit break
5. Sit strategically with students while teacher gives a lesson or instructions; minimise off-task, disruptive behaviours
6. Summarise teacher’s instructions step by step on a whiteboard
7. Keep students on task while class teacher teaches a small group of students with or without disabilities or learning needs
8. Attend ILP meetings of students in the classes they support
9. Take a group for literacy activities—not the bottom group but a middle- or high-achieving group; administer an activity prepared by the teacher; monitor student performance and report on progress (group could be withdrawn as LSA has duty of care)
10. Take a group for numeracy activities—not the bottom group but a middle- or high-achieving group; administer an activity prepared by the teacher; monitor student performance and report on progress (group could be withdrawn as LSA has duty of care)
11. Assist class teacher to manage the behaviour of disruptive students by keeping them on-task
12. Photocopy and laminate
13. Put up class displays
14. Conduct behaviour observations on a checklist
15. Conduct reading assessments—running records; graph results of assessments
16. Attend excursions
17. Assist class teacher in the playground
18. Mentor Level 1 and Level 2 LSAs
19. Supervise a team of school assistants—conduct performance reviews in consultation with the school assistant’s supervisor and provide training as needed for school assistants and Level 1 and 2 LSAs.
Appendix 9: Suggested Duties for Class Teachers Who Work with TAs

1. Prepare the teaching program for all students
2. Provide differentiated activities for students with disabilities or learning difficulties
3. Plan activities for each lesson for TAs to implement or supervise
4. Allocate a meeting time each day with TA to discuss teaching program and talk about students’ needs and achievements
5. Include TA in developing learning goals for ILPs and provide TA with a copy of the completed ILP
6. Include TA in ILP meetings if TA works with student
7. Supervise and monitor performance of TA when working with students
8. Provide feedback to TA on performance
9. Model and provide TA with appropriate strategies to use with students
10. Model and train TA to facilitate learning to groups of students
11. Model appropriate supportive and corrective behaviour management strategies
12. Ensure TA attends training in Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and other training as required.