University of Southern Queensland

TEACHER AIDES IN INCLUSIVE, SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOMS: TOWARDS CHANGES IN POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Teacher Aides working in inclusive, supportive classrooms: Towards changes in policies and procedures

Students most at risk are regularly being taught by the least qualified people in schools. These are Teacher Aides (TAs) that are often required to make instructional decisions beyond their expertise. This study explores this claim by identifying the perceived roles of TAs and their ability to fulfil these roles competently, and by discovering the challenges faced by these paraprofessionals in carrying out their duties within inclusive classrooms. This thesis discusses how a descriptive, sequential mixed method design approach was implemented to gather data from approximately 100 participants representing both teachers and TAs that were supporting students with a full range of abilities in general education classes. Relying on an interpretivist approach, this research methodology followed a pragmatic research design. The data collection tools were created by using a previously validated quantitative questionnaire followed by a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews. The goal was to build on previous research and to use these new findings to promote changes to policies and practices designed to improve outcomes for all stakeholders. The analysed data found that there is ambivalence surrounding the question of the perceived roles of TAs from both the perspective of the TAs and their supervisors. An unspecified, de facto role description agreement between TAs and their supervisors appears to exist. The absence of appropriate institutionally mandated role descriptions means that it remains unclear whether these identified roles are the ones that TAs should be fulfilling. It was found that TAs were not competent in carrying out their perceived roles due chiefly to an absence of appropriate professional development (PD). The research identified an extensive list of challenges facing TAs in their understanding, skills, knowledge, and practice in supporting teachers in an inclusive classroom. Recommendations from this research include the urgent implementation of a well thought out rigorously monitored role description for TAs ensuring role certainty, job security and appropriate remuneration. This role statement must be supported by an adequately targeted, funded and compulsory PD program for TAs and their supervisors provided by schools on a regular basis. This PD program would be expected to promote an understanding of what constitutes inclusive education and the role of TAs in supporting its implementation. In addition, there is a critical need to upgrade the current role of TA to that of a fully trained, appropriately recognised and adequately rewarded Assistant Teacher (AT). This role would be pivotal in ensuring that both the teachers and the students receive the classroom support necessary for inclusive education to flourish.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I, Daniel Joseph Lucey, declare that the PhD Thesis entitled, *Teacher Aides in inclusive, supportive classrooms: - Towards changes in Policies and Procedures*, is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

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Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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DEDICATION

I am very fortunate to have come from a family that has always valued education highly. My parents, at high cost to themselves, always made it clear that learning and job security were significant goals to achieve. As the youngest in a family of five, I also had the example and encouragement of my older siblings to inspire me. They all have led inspiring lives and have motivated me to do likewise. In this regard I dedicate this thesis to the members of my family with humble gratitude. Special mention is made of my recently deceased ‘big sister’, Shelia who, while being blessed with many academic gifts, was born too early and was thus not given the chance to use them to their full potential.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
A.S.D.	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
ATA	Australian Teacher Aide Association
AT	Assistant Teacher
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BESD	Behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties
BSM	Business Service Manager
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DET	Department of Education and Training
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DISS	Deployment and Impact of Support Staff
DoE	Department of Education
DSP	Disadvantaged Schools' Program
EASIE	The European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education
EQ	Education Queensland
EFA	Education for All
FTE	Full time equivalent
IEP	Individual Education Plan
LEA	Local Education Authority
MAST	Making a Statement
NAPLAN	National Assessment Plan-Literacy and Numeracy
NSW DoE	New South Wales Department of Education
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education
PD	Professional Development
PR	Principal Researcher
QINSEC	Queensland Inservice Education Committee
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RQ 1	Research Question One

RQ 2	Research Question Two
RQ 3	Research Question Three
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEU	Special Education Unit
TA	Teacher Aide
TAA	Training and Assessment
STAR	Tennessee Student Teacher Achievement Ratio
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Education and Science Organisation
UNICEF	The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UniSQ	University of Southern Queensland
VET	Vocation Education and Training
WCEFA	World Conference in Education for All

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter preamble

The atmosphere inside the classroom was warm and engaging. The teacher had introduced the math lesson for the day in a stimulating and engaging manner and the follow up activity was promising to be exciting for the children as they moved to their designated workstations around the room. That is except for four boys, it always seemed to be boys, who trailed out of the classroom into an annex followed by their class's Teacher Aide (TA) who was charged with keeping them busy for the next thirty minutes. Not for them the buzz around handling concrete math materials or the fun of experimenting with new ideas and concepts. For these were students with special needs and their activity was to be colouring in prepared sheets of paper away from their friends and the meaningful activities just about to start.

This was not an isolated scene but a pattern that was witnesses personally in classrooms within public and private schools across the State. Clearly, this was not as it was meant to be, as the Queensland Education Department had adopted a policy based upon the principles of inclusion. Every child at the school was meant to have their needs met within the classroom in the company of their peers and to be taught by the qualified teachers allocated to the school. Learning was meant to be challenging and fun for all, not just for some. What was happening? Why was it happening? What role were the TAs playing in this scenario and why?

The current research was undertaken as a direct result of this tableau being witnessed in too many schools in too many locations. To a trainer who was meant to be educating TAs in how to provide effective student support, it was a question that needed to be researched. The situation sketched out above, does not need to be permanent. This study has been undertaken in the confident expectation that there are models of inclusive education involving the utilization of teacher aides in existence that can be used as models for a truly inclusive curriculum.

1.2 Introduction

Following on from the preamble, Chapter One provides a background to this research study. Section 1.3 deals with the background to this research and covers the history of TAs working in the USA, UK and in Australia and this history extends to cover the implementation of integration and inclusion with a Queensland focus. Section 1.3 also covers

the reasons behind the expanding numbers of TAs that occurred and the interconnection between TAs and inclusion from a local, UK and global perspective. Biographical information on the Principal Researcher is shared in Section 1.4, while the study's research aim is addressed in Section 1.5. The research questions are introduced in Section 1.6 and an overview of the thesis structure can be found in Section 1.7 and a chapter summary in 1.8.

1.3 Background to the research

This study was designed to explore the roles and competencies of TAs working in inclusive classrooms as well as the challenges that these paraprofessionals faced in carrying out these roles. While this may appear to be a straightforward process there are several issues that emerged in relation to its implementation. The first was the ongoing lack of clarity for education workers, authors, and researchers about what constituted *inclusion*. The second was a limited awareness about the role that TAs were expected to play in its implementation. Because TAs were being engaged in many jurisdictions worldwide to support the development of inclusive classrooms it was very important that they and their employing authorities had a clear idea of what constituted inclusion and their role in its promotion.

A comprehensive review of the work of TAs in inclusive schools worldwide, conducted by Sharma and Salend (2016), identified a key issue relevant to this present research. They found that there was confusion in terms of how TAs were being used in the pursuit of inclusion. Washburn-Moses, Chun and Kaldenburg (2013), stated that TAs are, "critical to special service delivery in inclusive classrooms" (p. 34) and then concluded that there was a need to move towards, "greater integration" (p. 47). The merging of the terms *inclusion* and *integration* indicated a possible reason why, "the role of paraeducators has also been identified as problematic" within the context of inclusive education (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012, p. 288).

In Queensland, the Department of Education (DoE), clearly includes in their inclusion policy that students enrolled into mainstream schools could be included fully in all the experiences available to their similar-aged peers. This means that, while in some cases, reasonable adjustments tailored to individual needs may be required that, "Inclusion is embedded in all aspects of school life, and is supported by culture, policies and everyday practices" (Queensland Department of Education, 2021, p. 5). The Department also stated that when students are integrated into mainstream classes and reasonable adjustments are not made to meet their individual needs then their ability to fully participate in learning is limited and that, "Integration is not necessarily a step towards inclusion" (p. 5).

While Education Queensland had made the distinction between inclusion and integration clear, the ways that teacher aides were required to support inclusion practices were not apparent. Within the generic role description for teacher aides there was no mention of inclusion or how that teacher aides were to assist in its implementation. It did state that one of the roles was to assist students with special needs but goes no further in indicating what this entailed. Reading the generic role description for TAs operating at the classification level two, three and four (TA002 to TA004 level), it was evident that the workers were not charged with any real responsibility to further the promotion of an inclusive culture within their classrooms.

The term, *special needs,* is likely considered as being no longer contemporary and in some quarters even derogatory. There are other terms now in use such as "students with non-standard support needs" (Giangreco, 2021, p. 278) that may be regarded as more acceptable. Referring to a child as a special needs student is likely to cause offence whereas describing the same student as a student with special needs may be less problematic. As the term special needs occurs so frequently in the literature and in interviewee responses it is the intention in this study to persevere in using it while acknowledging the advent of change surrounding the term.

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." (Shakespeare, ca. 1600). With apologies to William Shakespeare, it seems that in education literature, for TAs at least, names did matter. TAs in the literature have been referred to under many different names and this added to the confusion regarding their role and status within schools. Harris and Aprile (2015) stated that,

> "The plethora of titles used internationally to describe teacher aides (e.g., paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, school officers, instructional assistants, education assistants, classroom assistants, learning support assistants, support staff, paraeducators, integration aides and special needs assistants) was further evidence of the widespread ambiguity about the roles these paraprofessionals should and do play within the school community" (p. 142).

To avoid any confusion and for the purpose of this thesis the term Teacher Aide (TA) is used to define those who are employed by education organisations to assist and support teachers in the provision of quality education and associated activities.

Traditionally, it appears that most TAs have carried out their assigned roles to parental and teacher satisfaction. This claim is supported by Haycock and Smith (2011), who confirmed that TAs, "have been perceived by teachers as making an important contribution to

the delivery of educational inclusion in schools and to the enhancement of pupils' learning" (p. 836). Despite this, it was the inclusion of children with special needs into the mainstream classroom that really challenged their capabilities. According to Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008), "The roles and responsibilities of a paraprofessional have evolved over time by becoming more widespread, complex, and demanding in nature" (p. 170). Butt and Lowe (2012) stated that the demands on the responsibilities and skills of TAs increased as more students, needing extra assistance, were enrolled into mainstream classes.

The lack of clearly defined role descriptions for TAs and their associated low status (Bourke & Carrington, 2007) led TAs to occupy a position within the school hierarchy that was regarded as being essential, yet generally underappreciated. Giangreco, Broer and Suter (2011) described them as, "some of the most marginalised people within school hierarchies" (p. 59). It became apparent that, as the least qualified people in schools, TAs were being asked to make pedagogical decisions that were sometimes, outside their expertise (Webster et al., 2010). There was considerable evidence to show that the reliance on TAs to support students with special needs had become accepted practice world-wide. It was also apparent that while their work with children needing extra support was appreciated, it was in this area where both the quality and the benefit of their involvement was also being questioned. (Butt, 2018; Giangreco et al., 2011; Rutherford, 2012; Shaddock, McDonald, Hook, Giorcelli, & Arthur-Kelly, 2009; Webster et al., 2010).

Some role frustrations surfaced from a lack of appropriate training for TAs. In Queensland Government schools, the only formal requirement to be employed as a TA is a satisfactory mandatory police check. In Australia, registered training packages have been available through the Vocation Education and Training (VET) system. This existed in the form of vocational Education Support courses at Certificate III and Certificate IV levels and until recently also at the Diploma level (ASQA-Australian Skills Quality Authority). However, because of their somewhat limited scope and considering the expanding skill set required of TAs, these courses may not adequately have equipped them to meet the demands of the role. Apart from some exceptional circumstances the possession of these qualifications was not mandated for initial employment but did factor in TAs moving from one employment level to the next.

It has been asserted that employing unqualified staff in schools should be considered an equity issue, as it was often the students with the greatest need that were taught by the least qualified people (Butt, 2018). She also stated that all students had the right to receive instruction from a qualified teacher and suggested that the practice of using unqualified TAs,

"warrants further research" (p. 229). While the quantitative questionnaire section of this study was open to all interested TAs and supervising teachers in Australia, the vast majority were drawn from local state and private schools across the Darling Downs and Southwest Queensland. All TAs who participated in the qualitative interview process were likewise employed within the Queensland education system. Therefore, the context for considerations regarding inclusion policies and procedures are drawn from those currently proposed by Education Queensland (EQ).

To avoid confusion about the role that TAs are expected to play in schools in relation to the systemic implementation of inclusion, it is necessary to refer to The Queensland Department of Education's Inclusive Education Policy Booklet (2018). This policy supports a "shared vision and the rights for students of all social, cultural, community and family backgrounds, and of all identities, and all abilities to receive high quality education" (p. 4). There are some factors that need to be considered when referring to this policy that if not understood can lead to some confusion. The first is that Education Queensland (EQ) considers that inclusion has not been attained as yet and that they are on a "journey towards a more inclusive education system at all levels" (p. 4). The EQ policy booklet points out that "Schools across Queensland are at different stages on their journey towards adopting inclusive education" (p. 6). The policy booklet makes it clear to parents that EQ still retains, "highly individualised programs including special schools and academies" (p. 6).

The commitment to "promote and develop policies, programs and practices to remove barriers and promote inclusive education across the department and within local school communities" (p. 6) is contained within the EQ policy statement booklet (2018). As the research questions refer to TAs working in inclusive classrooms it is important to understand that this is a contextual consideration and that not all TAs involved in the study are expected to be at the same point on this journey. However, in line with EQ policy all staff are expected to be progressively working to remove the roadblocks that stand in the way of maximizing inclusion for all.

1.3.1 The history of TA use in US/UK/Australia (QLD)

The intent of this research study was to focus on the roles, competencies and challenges of TAs working in inclusive classroom environments. It was therefore considered important to trace how these workers emerged onto the education landscape and to explore the events relating to their increasing significance in the pursuit of inclusive education. To trace the emergence of TA use in Australian schools it was advantageous to examine the

evolution of paraprofessional educators in other western countries. This provided a better understanding of their role in schools as well as their relative importance in education changes worldwide.

Having a sound comprehension of the roles and responsibilities of TAs was something that could be considered as essential knowledge and yet these have often been poorly defined. Rose and Forlin (2010), in recognising the frustrations felt by TAs, asserted that the absence of proper role descriptions, "provides an indication that the impact of training on changing practice was likely to be limited until such time as the roles and responsibilities of support staff in classrooms are more clearly articulated" (p. 320). This limited view of the status of education paraprofessionals has become a model that in many cases still resonates around the status of TAs (Paul, 2016).

The appearance of classroom assistants in the United States of America could be traced back to the 1820s but the first formal use of what we now understand to be TAs occurred in the 1950s (Brotherson & Johnson, 1971). As a response to the continued shortage of teachers during that decade there was a perceived need to lessen the administration burden of teachers and allow them to spend more time on their core teaching duties. Out of this necessity the role of TAs was established and according to Bennett and Falk (1970), they soon came to be regarded as, "The third arm of the harried teacher" (p. 23).

While the use of volunteer help in schools in the United Kingdom (UK) already had a long history (Dimmock, O'Donoghue & Robb, 1996), it was not until 1967 that the first official reference to the presence of regular TAs in the classroom was made. This was recorded in a report entitled, Children and their Primary Schools: A Report for the Central Advisory Council for Education, England, better known as the Plowden Report of 1967 (Gillard, 2002). Several significant outcomes flowed into UK schools as a result of this seminal report. The first was that it demonstrated vision in its desire to have more adults supporting children within the classroom. "In the report, the term 'teacher aides' was used to describe what had previously been termed ancillary staff" (Aylen, 2007, p. 107) The use of TAs was also presented as an efficient way of ensuring a better classroom adult-pupil ratio.

Commenting on the Plowden Report, Aylen (2007) claimed, "The report was also farsighted in its recommendations for TAs not just to wash paintbrushes, but to guide children through their talk, and therefore thinking, into work" (p. 110). It was also asserted by Aylen (2007) that up to the time of the Plowden Report (1967), the use of TAs in the classroom was patchy. He used figures provided by the National Union of Teachers in 1962 to justify this claim. These figures demonstrated that TAs were used as staff members in only

22% of classes. It seems probable that the recommendations made by Plowden (1967), on the need for an improved ratio of aides to children and the establishment of a national scheme for the employment of TAs was based upon this small uptake.

In Australia, Samuel Cohen (1967), referred to the existence of sub-professional TAs which establishes that TAs existed in Australia contemporaneously with their overseas counterparts. Similar to the UK, it also took an Australian government commissioned report to provide an impetus to initiate the widespread use of TAs. This occurred through The Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) that was one of the outcomes of the Karmel Report commissioned by the new Labor Government under Whitlam in 1972 (Connell, 1993). Karmel, at that time Professor of Economics at the University of Adelaide, was appointed by the Federal Government to chair a committee, "to provide advice on the immediate financial needs of government and non-government schools throughout Australia" (Connell, 1993, p. 109).

The Karmel initiative led to the appointment of TAs to Queensland schools for the first time in 1973. Following on from the introduction of these paraprofessional educators into schools and their sometimes transient, temporary engagement through the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP), it was difficult to find any reference to TAs in the written history of Queensland Education. Bourke and Carrington (2007) commented that this relative invisibility within the overall context of the system, "is a result of their employment and deployment at the local school level … or perhaps their positions have not been given enough credence and value by educational bureaucrats" (p. 7). This apparent absence of profile, according to van Zanten (2005), might relate to their "poverty of position" (p. 682) within the existing school context.

Within Queensland, the practice of TAs moving from a parent-volunteer role to a part-time and then full- time employment role was common. This practice had unfortunate consequences (Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Bourke, 2008) as when newly appointed TAs had been part of the school volunteer environment for some time, often no induction or follow up training was provided. In this way, an untrained but supportive volunteer moved from "being an extra pair of hands to a quasi-professional" (Bourke, 2008, p. 7). Their assignments were often little changed from the type of assistance that they had given as volunteer helpers. As well, perhaps the too generic catch all formal role descriptions provided by the employers were to blame as, "historically teacher aides in Queensland have relied on the educational bureaucracy to formulate generic teacher aide positions and special education policies and programs, which inform their support role in schools" (Bourke & Carrington, 2007, p. 6).

These recently appointed TAs found their way into classrooms where the teacher assumed that they had been selected on the basis of previous training and experience and therefore did not require any formal induction or subsequent monitoring or tutoring. As the practice did not usually involve teachers in the recruitment process, "they had assumed that TAs had qualifications that were appropriate for the student learning support role they were employed to perform" (Butt, 2018, p. 223). The inexperienced TA, for their part, would naturally, but erroneously, assume that the school would, in some way, provide the necessary training to equip them for their roles. This absence of effective training and teacher supervision was a problem for TAs at the start of their employment and according to Butt (2018) remains an issue in schools today.

1.3.2 Integration and inclusion – Queensland focus

In Australia, the new century brought many changes including the introduction of a National Curriculum and in the Queensland context, the subsequent movement of Year Seven students from primary school into high schools. Despite these innovations, the most daunting challenge that classroom teachers and their supporting TAs faced, was when the policy of integrating students with special needs changed to one of inclusion. This policy change from integration to inclusion followed the inauguration of the Queensland Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusive Education (students with disabilities) in 2004. The Education Queensland policy on inclusion was quite aspirational, as it stated that it was on a journey towards the goal of inclusion. While this policy committed the system to work towards achieving inclusion for all, it did not mandate any target date for this achievement.

However, the policy itself was clear that *inclusion* differed from *integration, segregation,* and *exclusion* and that the intention was for all children and young people of all identities and all abilities to "access and fully participate in learning, alongside their similar aged peers" (Queensland Department of Education, Inclusion Policy, 2021, p. 1). The term integration in this context could be most clearly understood as simply placing, "children with special education needs … in a mainstream school environment" (Kalambouke et al., 2007, p. 365). This Committee followed up by describing inclusion, more helpfully, as a systemic process of change and modification that overcomes, "barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences" (p. 3).

In 2003, the then acting Assistant Director General of Education Queensland, Roger Slee, asserted that when schools choose to adopt an integration approach, they were not

opting to change the curriculum provisions, but only modifying them so that students with special needs could be accommodated (Slee, 2003). He perceived integration as a form of exclusion and argued for the adoption of the newly promoted policy of inclusion. Slee (2003) said that inclusion involved identifying and then dismantling the roadblocks that stood in the way of any and all students not just those who may have had a disability. He further asserted that as schools clung to integration practices, "inclusive education has, in some quarters, become generalised and diffused, domesticated and tamed" (p. 210).

This issue was addressed by Slee (2003) within a local, Queensland context while other researchers had similarly identified the distinction between integration and inclusion as being a contentious issue. Baker (2002) talked about it as being an intractable problem and described the relabelling and repackaging of integration into inclusion as merely "transmogrification" (p. 663), that is defined in the 2022 Macquarie dictionary as, "to change as by magic". According to Carrington (1999), despite the superficial move to inclusive education, "A number of educators continue to subscribe to the traditional medical paradigm that treats disability as a disease and difference as a social deviance" (p. 258). This led to a place where students coming into schools were the ones that were expected to change in order to accommodate the dominant culture. When this happened, the school's focus appeared to be restricted to "imparting of set curricula rather than the meeting of students' needs as learners" (p. 262).

In an article, a decade later, Slee (2013) presented the issue in the form of a paradox where he contended that despite the optimistic move to inclusive practices within organisations what had actually occurred was that the mechanism used to promote inclusive schooling contributed directly to exclusion. When consideration was not given to how a student can be supported emotionally and socially, in what to them was an alien environment of being included, then the fear of grasping their opportunity to be included may actually force them to self-exclude. This point was also argued by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) who said that students ascertained with special education needs were very much at risk of exclusion due to the confusion that existed between inclusive education and inclusive practice, where inclusive practice related to the pedagogy that was used to make inclusive education possible. This pedagogy, "focuses on how to extend what is ordinarily available in the community of the classroom as a way of reducing the need to mark some learners as different" (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 826).

1.3.3 TAs and inclusion

During the later years of the 20th Century TAs played a major role in the enactment of the inclusion policy within the classroom. It was, however, the inclusion of children with special needs into the mainstream classroom that came to really challenge their capabilities. According to Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008), "The roles and responsibilities of a paraprofessional have evolved over time by becoming more widespread, complex, and demanding in nature" (p. 170). Butt and Lowe (2012), asserted that the demands on the responsibilities and skills of TAs, increased as more students needing extra assistance were enrolled into mainstream classes. Tragically, in these schools, it appeared that the roles of the TA had come to be synonymous with the belief that they were becoming the main "solution to inclusion" (Rutherford, 2012, p. 757).

Much of the research into TAs has not collected data from the TAs themselves. Bourke (2009) asserted that despite their ongoing support for both students and teachers there was "limited acknowledgement of the teacher aide as a practitioner" (p. 208). She went on to say that while the research data about their roles and responsibilities were collected from a range of school stakeholders this hardly ever included the TAs themselves and that, "Teacher aides are seldom identified as major stakeholders" (p. 820). This was supported by Butt (2016), who indicated that nothing had really changed by asserting that, "most research excludes the voice of the TAs" (p. 64). This research project was designed to address this issue as it gathered the opinions of not only teachers but also of TAs.

According to Bourke and Carrington (2007), students with special needs accessed, "a suitably modified curriculum through a combination of in-class support and regular withdrawal to onsite Special Education units, for small group or one-on-one remediation by specialist teaching staff, supported by supervised support staff" (p. 4). This, in some instances, came be seen as a two-edge sword. On the one hand the students with special needs had special Individual Education Plans (IEPs) formulated for them by teachers trained for this role. On the other hand, this often meant that the students spent increasingly longer and longer periods of time within the special units as negotiation of placement in mainstream classrooms stalled. TAs were and still are, often engaged in supporting these students that have been caught in this limbo situation.

This stalling occurred when the Unit staff were unable to negotiate placements in mainstream classes with reluctant teachers that were unable or unwilling to comply with the IEP challenges. One of the associated events that occurred at this time was the growth in employment of TAs specifically to work with children with special needs. Butt (2016), after

accessing available Education Departmental figures in 2012, was able to report that, "to accommodate the growing numbers of students with disability and learning difficulties enrolling in mainstream schools, an increase in the employment of TAs has occurred" (p. 64). While some of the TAs recruited could have had special needs training it did not appear that this was an essential criterion for their employment (Butt, 2016).

1.3.4 TAs' expanding numbers

Following the decision by the Ministerial Taskforce (Queensland State Government, 2004) on inclusive school practices there was a surge in the employment of TAs. There was little further research interest into the role of TAs until the increasingly frequent practice of using TAs as the apparent main method of achieving inclusion came into question. One of the critical concerns identified in many education systems internationally hovered around the question of whether TAs actually helped students appropriately with their day-to-day academic work. In commenting on this situation Giangreco (2021) summarises these concerns when he says, "the lowest paid, least qualified, often insufficiently supervised personnel have been assigned to support the students with the most challenging and behavioural characteristics" (p. 280). However, according to Harris and Aprile (2015), this was still a moot point with evidence showing that, "When teacher aides have been trained to deliver specific instructional interventions, impact generally improves" (p. 141). However, they also acknowledged that there was research that showed that this was not always the case.

A clearer picture regarding the expansion of TA use over the past 30 years can be seen when comparing the statistics from 1990 to those provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics following the 2021 national census. In 1990 there were 146,751 teachers for 2,197,701 students in 7,535 schools with 24,011 TAs in support. As a matter of comparison in 2021, there were 303,539 full time equivalent (FTE) teaching staff that were teaching 4,030,717 students in 9,581 schools supported by 104, 290 TAs (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). While the number of teachers in Australian schools had effectively doubled in the past 30 years the number of TAs had more than quadrupled. Surprisingly, "In the past 5 years, the Australian TA workforce has grown by a staggering 33.9%, which is 27% more than all other occupations" (Australian Teacher Aide, 2017).

The expansion became even starker when it was seen that the average number of TAs on average per school in 1990 was three and that this has now expanded to eleven (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2021). As TAs have been employed, often casually, under a number of categories, when Education Queensland (EQ) makes use of them in specific support roles, it was not a surprise that the numbers had increased in this way. This would be

a cause for celebration, if it could be ascertained that an improvement in inclusive education was commensurate with these statistics. The results from this current research study unfortunately do not support this aspiration. This has come at a cost, not only educationally but also financially.

An article published by the media outlet, *The Conversation* (August 2022), provided some interesting data relating to current TA numbers and the cost to the nation. New research conducted by this online outlet showed that according to their analysis, based upon Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 data, more than five billion dollars was spent across Australia annually on the employment of more than 105,000 TAs. They also confirmed that this was a four-fold increase in TA numbers since 1990 and proportionally well in excess of the increase in student and teacher numbers over the same period. While acknowledging that they do not know why this is the case, this article asked, just what are these TAs deployed to do? A considered answer to this question is one of the outcomes of this research.

1.3.5 Inclusion/integration in the UK and TAs

It was in the UK that the intersection of both the evolution of inclusion and TA usage became most prominent. Inclusion was frequently mentioned in the UK context but there was a blurring of the distinction between the terms, integration, and inclusion. For example, Webster and Blatchford (2015) discussed the results from the longitudinal Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project (2003-2009), to examine the effect that TAs had on student learning. They asserted that the project outcomes, "raised serious questions about the way TAs have become inextricably linked to processes of inclusion" (Webster & Blatchford, 2015, p. 325). They then inexplicably identified the integration processes used by describing how TAs were actually, "spending most of their time supporting lower-attaining pupils" (p. 325) and that, "Teachers favour this arrangement: it allows them to teach the rest of the class, whilst struggling pupils receive much-needed individual attention from TAs" (p. 325). This demonstrated the confusion created by discussions of inclusion that effectively described classroom integration processes.

In the UK, (remembering that each part of the Union operates, in education, independently of the other), according to Webster and Blatchford (2013), there had been a noticeable increase in the number of children and young people with special needs being educated in mainstream schools since the 1980s. "The 1981 Education Act gave legal weight to the recommendations of the Warnock inquiry into SEN and also introduced a system of statutory assessment for pupils in England with the highest levels of need" (p. 463). The

abbreviation SEN in this context stands for *Special Educational Needs* and was used to describe students with learning difficulties or disabilities that made it more difficult for them to learn compared to most children of the same age.

Baroness Mary Warnock presented a report in 1978 to the Thatcher government in Britain that promoted the somewhat controversial policy of including pupils with special needs into the mainstream school (Norwich, 2014). This was the Warnock Report (1978) that was to become the basis of the UK's Education Act of 1981 that, in turn, attempted to address the issue of inclusion through national legislation. The legacy of the 1978 Warnock Report (Norwich, 2014) provided the framework for a conceptualisation of the needs of SEN students allied with an appreciation of the role that assessment and planning play in the establishment of statutory protections. Similar to events in Australia, this long-term growth in the number of SEN students joining the mainstream resulted in an increase in the number of TAs being employed. The number of full-time TAs in UK schools nearly doubled in the first decade of the new century (Webster & Blatchford, 2013). This, it seems, had been an international phenomenon with paraprofessionals increasingly becoming a feature of education systems worldwide (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007).

It appeared that this increase in TA employment could be conflated with an increased drive to foster inclusion practices in UK schools. Blatchford, Russell, and Webster (2012), said that primary head teachers had reported that without the availability of TAs within the system that inclusion policies would be, "impossible to implement" (p. 464). At the same time the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project, "raised serious questions about the way TAs have become closely connected to policies of including pupils with high level SEN in mainstream schools" (Webster & Blatchford, 2013, p. 464). This DISS project carried considerable weight as it was described as being the most comprehensive study of TAs and other school staff up until that time (Webster & Blatchford, 2013).

This DISS research, conducted between 2003 and 2009, was named by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) as one of the most notable landmark studies to have had a significant impact on education in the last 40 years (Blatchford, Russell & Webster, 2012). This report confirmed that TAs were commonly found to adopt a basic pedagogical role centred on the support of SEN pupils. The benefits of this, as observed by Webster and Blatchford (2013) were that "it allows hard-pressed teachers to devote their time to the rest of the class, in the knowledge that the most needy pupils receive potentially valuable individual attention from TAs" (p. 464). This indicated that, like Australia, the UK

plan to develop inclusive practices defaulted to a pragmatic form of integration facilitated by the utilisation of increasing numbers of TAs.

The DISS report found that there were serious unintended consequences arising out of the practice of using TAs in this manner. “The more support pupils received from TAs, the less progress they made, and this was not explained by pupil characteristics, such as prior attainment, SEN status or income deprivation” (Webster & Blatchford, 2013, p. 464). The DISS study explained that the current practice meant that the SEN students spent less time in the classroom with their class teacher and were often separated from their classmates resulting in them making less progress than their peers (Blatchford et al., 2012). The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) independently concluded that there was a misplaced belief that it was good practice to use TAs to support SEN students.

The 2013 Making a Statement (MAST) project was a UK study of the teaching and support experienced by pupils, with a statement of special educational needs, in mainstream primary schools. It was also set up to obtain systematic data on the composition of the everyday educational experiences of primary-aged pupils with *Statements*, relative to pupils without SEN (Webster & Blatchford, 2013). Statements was a term synonymous with SEN and was used within the UK system for those students identified as requiring extra assistance due to an identified special need. The results of these MAST findings highlighted the drawbacks related to the excessive use of TAs in supporting SEN students and included the charge that SEN students appeared to be constantly shadowed by their TAs thereby limiting their independence and their ability to interact with their peers (Webster & Blatchford, 2013).

The MAST Project also found that several other negative outcomes occurred even when TAs were used in these shadowing support roles. SEN students experienced less whole class and teacher interaction and the TA sometimes provided answers for them but unfortunately these are not necessarily always the correct ones (Webster & Blatchford, 2013). They also found that, in general, when TAs were involved with SEN students that task completion over learning was often prioritised. In reference to TA use the study found that there was limited evidence of an adoption of an effective pedagogical approach. This was unsurprising given the absence of any training for TAs in this area (Webster & Blatchford, 2013).

1.3.6 Global perspective on the emergence of inclusive education

The global challenge regarding inclusion had been addressed over the past half century through a considerable body of research, a wide variety of journal articles as well a

range of significant conferences. According to Ainscow (2005), the issue of inclusion, "is the big challenge facing school systems throughout the world" (p. 109). Irrespective of the different definitions and perspectives of inclusive education, the inclusion of students with disabilities in general, mainstream education contexts had become a worldwide movement over the last half century. Milestone reports from the inclusion movement included seminal documents such as, The Warnock's Report (1978); The World Declaration on Education for All (1990); The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994); The Dakar Framework for Action (2000), and the 48th International Conference on Education by UNESCO (United Nations Education and Science Organisation) in 2008.

As the convention with the highest number of opening day signatories in history in 2006, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was one of the most important inclusion milestones (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022). One of its more remarkable achievements was that it sought to establish a perspective of people with disabilities as individuals with rights rather than subjects of charity (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2016). These vital conferences were one of the major catalysts for change in the world of inclusive education policy and therefore it was considered worthwhile to examine their impact on the inclusion movement. Ultimately all of these inclusion advance had an impact on the perceived use of TAs.

The *Education for all* (EFA) world declaration was established at the UNESCO conference convened in 1990 at Jomtien, Thailand. This 1990 World Conference in Education for All (WCEFA) expanded the concept of education for all by creating a vision of education that, "was recognised as being more than just access to primary education, and also addressed the basic learning needs of all children, youth, and adults" (King, 1993, p. 5). Subsequent to this a conference held in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994 produced the ubiquitously named Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. In June 1994 this World Conference on Special Needs Education involved representation from 92 governments as well as 25 international organisations and "went on to promote inclusive education in country-specific visions and principles" (Artiles et al., 2011, p. 4).

The Salamanca Statement (1994) called for inclusion to be the norm and laid claim to being one of the most significant international documents on education ever produced. The Salamanca Statement's (UNESCO, 1994) significance was that it explained why mainstream schools with an orientation towards inclusive practices were, an effective and efficient way to

overcome discrimination. At the same time, this statement proposed creating an inclusive society that promoted the ideals of achieving education for all. The Salamanca Statement (1994) also proposed that inclusion had the potential to, "provide an effective education for the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system" (Ainscow, 2005, p. 110).

The focus of the Salamanca Statement (1994) was on the principles, policy, and practice in special needs education and in this way made an important contribution to the Education for All (EFA) movement that aimed at encouraging schools to be more effective in supporting the learning of all students. It called on international schooling systems to adopt inclusive schooling and to ensure that special needs education became an essential part of mainstream schooling. The statement contended that, "the challenge confronting the inclusive school was that of developing a child-centred pedagogy capable of successfully educating all children, including those who have serious disadvantages and disabilities" (p. 6). One of the major successes of the Salamanca Statement was that since its inception in 1994 most European countries have, at least in their formulated policies, acknowledged that inclusive education was an important premise for education systems to uphold if equal education rights for all was to be achieved. Unfortunately, it also unwittingly played a part in ensuring that most organisations started to conflate inclusive education with special needs and then seemingly failed to bridge the gap between policy and practice (Haug, 2017).

The EFA forum that came into being following the Jomtien Conference (1994) essentially laid the groundwork for a conference held ten years later in Dakar (Senegal). This conference, the first international education conference of the new millennium, produced the ubiquitous Dakar Statement. The Statement, better known as the *Framework*, incorporated results from six regional conferences (Johannesburg, South Africa; Bangkok, Thailand; Cairo, Egypt; Recife, Brazil, Warsaw, Poland and Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic), held in 1999-2000. The outcomes from the six Regional Frameworks for Action conferences effectively set the targets for inclusive education to be met by 2015. The Framework called for total inclusion of children with special needs in mainstream schools and the creation of a supportive policy environment aimed at ensuring the inclusion of all students in education programmes (The Dakar Framework for Action, 2000).

The CRPD statement compiled in 2006, included Article 24 which stipulated that signatories must ensure students with disabilities "are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability and receive the support required, within the general education system to facilitate their effective education" (UN Committee on the Rights

of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2016, p. 17). Although international agreements and declarations were important, producing a document signed by representatives of different countries did not necessarily mean that more students with disabilities would actually gain access to general education settings nor did it guarantee that the instruction they receive in general education would be beneficial. Hardy and Woolcox (2015), raised this question, "If inclusion, for all its complexity, is such an important principle, why is it not a readily identifiable, stand-alone entity in policy? And why is inclusion so often only mentioned in passing in many policies?" (p. 117).

1.4 Biographically situated researcher

As the Principal Researcher (PR) I have had an extensive background in education stretching over almost six decades, beginning in 1964. This was initially as a teacher and then as a principal/administrator with Education Queensland. My career offered an opportunity to teach at all levels from pre-school through to Year 12, in all the Queensland Education Regions except Central Queensland. It also provided me with an opportunity to be involved in several innovative educational programs, relevant to this current study. Apart from being the principal of one of the first schools to employ TAs in 1973, these innovations included the integration initiatives of the 1980s. This involved the piloting of a designated specialised autism, special needs unit within the Peninsular Region and the trialling of the first Reading Recovery program set up in the same region in 1983. I also served on the Queensland Inservice Education Committee (QINSEC), while working in the Peninsular Region. This committee was responsible for allocating funding to schools for TA acquisition. I had an intimate involvement in the Leading School initiatives within the Darling Downs in 1997-98.

During my career as an educator, I participated in a teacher exchange program with a posting to Philomath Middle School, Oregon, USA in 1987. This year long exchange program provided me with an opportunity to work within and observe, close at hand, the philosophy, theory, and practice of another education system, built upon a different concept of inclusiveness to that of Australia. Subsequently, I was given the chance to act as the Assistant-Executive Director of Studies in the Darling Downs Region, during the first semester of 1996. This role included a requirement to visit most of the schools in the region as well as an opportunity to work with departmental executive officers, principals, teachers, and TAs.

Moving on from the Education Queensland experiences, I spent several years as a water researcher and educator with the National Heritage Trust Waterwatch program. In that capacity, I made presentations at international water quality conferences and published reports on behalf of the Queensland Department of Natural Resources. Subsequent to this, I was involved in the vocational education system for 15 years. Operating initially as a commercial workbook author, the PR also acted as a trainer and teacher within the vocational education system. In this role, I trained experienced TAs in Certificate IV and Diploma of Education Support and school-based trainees and beginning TAs in Certificate III in Education Support. For over a decade, training was also provided for candidates who required qualifications in Training and Assessment (TAA).

This involvement in vocation education also included serving three years as the Executive Director of a private, not-for-profit training organisation. Relative to this current research project, I have trained hundreds of TAs, many of whom went on to work with special needs students within Queensland Schools. This afforded me with the opportunity to visit numerous schools across every education region in the State including many special schools and special needs education units. In addition, I worked in collaboration with the Queensland TAFE (Training and Further Education) in several programs designed to review training and assessment programs.

While my previous experience in the field of education was comprehensive, and my involvement with TAs and the education of students with special needs was extensive, there are still some implications that need to be acknowledged. My experience with students from other cultures had been limited to experience working with pupils from the Torres Strait and living in a Torres Strait Islander community for four years. Furthermore, my previous research experience exists in the form of a case study research project completed in association with Master of Education by Research program. A thesis was submitted and accepted by the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) where a copy was retained. This Masters Research project also involved conducting semi-structured interviews with TAs who were using blended learning techniques in association with a return to formal education after an extended break, mostly associated with starting a family.

My position on this topic is that while I acknowledge that TAs fulfill a significant role in the current education landscape my personal experiences make me sceptical of their ability to support teachers effectively in the establishment of inclusive classroom environments. Having been closely involved in the training of TAs for over a decade I have come to the

realisation that the level of professional development available to them for the purpose of teacher support is inadequate. I believe that more targeted training, better working conditions and improved status are all essential components that are needed so that TAs can fulfill their assigned roles more professionally.

1.5 Research aim

The current EQ policy on inclusion was very clear and precise, stating that, "Inclusion is embedded in all aspects of school life, and is supported by culture, policies and everyday practices" (Queensland Department of Education, Inclusion Policy, 2020, p. 1). Yet it has been difficult to find many exemplars of this happening within schools. On the occasions that students have been assimilated into the mainstream classroom their education needs were often being met by TAs with little or no knowledge about how to manage these various special needs (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). This created a situation where the personnel with the lowest qualifications and the poorest pay rates were sometimes providing the majority of learning support to the students with the most complex learning needs. It was an issue that led Giangreco and Broer (2005), to question that, if you were a student enrolled in formal schooling whether you should, "receive the bulk of your instruction from paraprofessionals, with no guarantee of their qualifications?" (p. 24).

Given that almost all available research on the use of TAs appeared to see inclusion through the lens of supporting students with disabilities this study has the potential to refocus the discussion on what an inclusive classroom culture should really look like. The overall goal of this research was to build on previous research and to use these findings to identify the challenges and to promote the appropriate changes to policies and practices in relation to the effective use of TAs in supporting teaching practices and achieving truly inclusive learning. This can happen first, at a school level and then eventually at the various system levels. Targeted refinements that were necessary in order to customise the questionnaires in line with the aims of this study will also assist in making a meaningful contribution to methodological knowledge. Contribution to theoretical knowledge will come from the identification of the current knowledge gaps and the recommendations about how to address these.

1.6 Research questions

In their study into the use of TAs within Queensland regional schools, Harris and Aprile (2015), suggested that there was a need, both within Australia and internationally, for

further large, mixed method studies to be conducted. This would allow data to be gathered on the similarities and differences in the roles of TAs working in a range of other inclusive contexts. Sharma and Salend (2016) in their review of a decade of articles on TAs commented on the increasing use of these workers in supporting inclusive education practices around the world that, "there is a need to re-examine the roles, efficacy, training and experiences of TAs based on more recent research and from an international perspective" (p. 119). These comments indicate that there was a real requirement for further study into how TAs can be used to promote an inclusive school culture. An examination of the study's research questions outlined below will demonstrate the parameters of this research. It is anticipated that this current research will be able to cast some light on this deep, institutional shadow.

This research will focus on these issues within the Queensland context (Covid restrictions meant that the focus was chiefly Queensland centric) and explore solutions by answering the following research questions:

Research Question One: What are the perceptions of Teacher Aides and Supervising Teachers regarding the role of Teacher Aides working in an inclusive classroom?

Research Question Two: To what extent are Teacher Aides and their Supervisors both satisfied that the Teacher Aides are equipped to carry out these perceived roles?

Research Question Three: Where challenges may exist in their understanding, skills, knowledge, and practice what interventions are needed to help Teacher Aides to overcome these challenges and to competently carry out their roles of promoting an inclusive culture?

1.7 Overview of the thesis structure

This thesis was comprised of seven chapters with the first chapter setting out to identify and elaborate on this study's research problem and to introduce the three research questions. It also provided a background to the history of TA use locally and globally and identified how the growing use of TAs has become inextricably linked to the evolution of inclusive school practices. Chapter Two provides a comprehensive and up-to-date review of current literature on the interwoven topics of inclusive schooling and TA utilisation. It also identifies and expands upon a list of implications for this study. Chapter Three focuses on the methodology chosen for this research study as well as explaining the study's conceptual framework and research paradigm. It identifies the targeted participants, the sample sizes, the sampling procedures, the data collection instruments, the data analysis techniques and the study's ethical considerations.

Chapter Four concentrates on the analysis of the data gathered from the mostly quantitative questionnaires completed by both TAs and their supervising teachers. Chapter Five introduces the interview participants' profiles, outlines the analysis process used in connection with the semi-structured interviews and identifies the emergent themes. Chapter Six presents further analysis and synthesis of the research data in terms of answering the research questions. Chapter Seven expands on the findings from the research and concludes by drawing out the implications of the research and making a range of relevant, important recommendations designed to progress knowledge and further research in this field of study.

1.8 Chapter summary

Chapter One provided a background history to the issues that generated this research project as well as introducing the three research questions. The chapter also includes the biographical information on the Principal Supervisor. A section was set aside to discuss the thesis structure and to foreshadow what each of the seven chapters in the thesis would add to the overall project. The next chapter will explore the literature dealing with the interaction between the implementation of inclusive school practices and the effective use of TAs to support this implementation.

CHAPTER TWO: THE LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

There was a substantial amount of literature available on inclusion in education. How TAs were being utilised in effectively supporting inclusion was not always immediately evident within these works. In some cases, the two topics were closely interwoven but in others the overlap was merely tangential. To address this issue, the focus of this literature review is on the intersection between the implementation of inclusive school practices and the effective use of TAs to support this implementation. This review was presented in three parts with Part A covering the literature relevant to the overlap between these two connected topics. In this Part A, Section 2.2, concentrates on an analysis conducted into the diverse interpretations of inclusion. It also establishes a definition, for the purpose of this study, based upon the four dimensions of *placement*, *presence*, *participation,* and *achievement*. In section 2.2.1 the definition of the associated concept of *inclusive pedagogy* is presented.

The literature regarding the implementation of inclusive practices, especially in terms of the use of TAs, was then reviewed in two further parts. Part B (Section 2.3) looked at the historic literature available on this topic and reviewed the subject in the light of the implications for this study. This was based upon identifying and discussing the literature associated with six important implications. These concepts included the implementation of inclusion, professional development, importance of context, inclusion as a journey, the significance of TAs' voice and the imperative of developing an inclusive culture. Part C (Section 2.4) examined four systematic literature reviews covering the period between 2007 and 2019. The chapter concluded with a summary of the major implications identified and suggestions about how these implications impacted on and are therefore linked with the methodology issues covered in Chapter Three.

2.2 The Inclusion confusion

One of the major challenges in researching inclusive education has been to determine whether the topic discussed was inclusion or a variation such as exclusion, mainstreaming, assimilation or integration. There has been a tendency among authors and researchers to interchangeably use a range of synonyms for inclusion. This meant that finding a general

agreed upon definition for inclusion in education became a difficult task. Haug (2017) stated that it was quite difficult, “to find one universally institutionalised definition of inclusive education” (p. 207). However, there exists a considerable body of international literature on inclusion in education and it could be argued that examining this volume of work had become a challenge in itself. A major issue involved settling on an appropriate definition on what was actually meant by the term inclusion. This review presents a synopsis of the many, sometimes conflicting, definitions of inclusive education, in order to identify a suitable one for use within the context of this study.

While many education systems worldwide espoused inclusion, what they were actually pursuing was often some variation of this ideal. In some cases, it had been integration where students had to change to be part of the group, assimilation where the incomers were expected to blend with the established group and even exclusion where those that are different are left out. This situation represented an enigma where the more energy that was devoted to espousing this very misunderstood concept, the more chance there was that the actual outcome identified would be anything but inclusion. It was therefore important that this research project challenged this conundrum and arrived at a definition that was both understandable and applicable in the real world.

The same confusion about what was actually meant by inclusion also dominated the education reform agenda. In Europe, as well as in the United States, according to Bourke (2008), “neoconservative political and economic agendas, with an emphasis on accountability and performance, are further complicating inclusive education research, and impacting negatively on practical efforts to achieve educational reform that is more inclusive” (p. 25). Obtaining a clear definition of what constitutes inclusion would be a critical step forward in any attempt to participate in this increasingly important educational debate.

This review started with a search within the literature, for the ‘holy grail’ of a commonly agreed definition of the term, inclusion. Examined below are a number of examples from the many attempts by researchers and various educational organisations to define the meaning of the term, inclusion within the field of education. These examples provided help to highlight the wide variations of understandings and potential misunderstandings that emerged when attempts were made to clarify what was actually meant when undertaking discussions on the concept of inclusion.

Early adopters, French and Chopra (1999) portrayed inclusion in quite general terms as, “opportunities for interaction with same age peers and typical curriculum in general educational situations” (p. 259). Purposing a more useful definition, Slee (2003) attempted to

define inclusive education by explaining what it wasn't, when he described it as empowering, "members in a school community to identify and dismantle actual and potential sources of exclusion that limit opportunities and outcomes for all students, including students who have a disability" (p. 217). It was to Slee's credit that he had the insight not to claim that inclusion was confined to dealing with students with special needs.

In discussing the concept, Brodin and Lindstrand (2007) introduced the terms integrated, segregated, exclusion and inclusion within the same discussion and then raised what appeared to be the somewhat challenging concept of exclusion being a necessary precondition if, "inclusion is to follow" (p. 134). Hyde, Carpenter and Conway (2013) centred their definition on students' participation rights when they stated that, "Inclusion refers to the right of an individual to actively participate and attain equity through engagement in all facets of daily life" (p. 5). They then pointedly added that, "the meaning of inclusion is frequently confounded by earlier concepts of processes such as mainstreaming and integration" (p. 6). Ainscow (2005) made the broad statement that inclusion was "a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society" (p. 109).

Providing a different emphasis, policies and practices became the focus of the definition provided by Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, and Kaplan (2007). They described inclusive education as being, "complex, ambiguous and contested, and can refer to many different aspects of school policies and practices in relation to different groups of students" (p. 366). Kurth and Gross's (2014) pragmatic definition was, that inclusive education, "means that a student must have access to all of the supports and services, he or she will need, to participate fully in general education activities and curriculum" (p. 5). These were aspirational, but they did not move the discussion any closer to understanding what inclusion really meant.

It has been claimed that the confusion of terms regarding inclusion, arose out of unclear role and responsibility statements, as well as unresolved differences in expectations that exists across systems (Devecchi, Dettori, Doveston, Sedgwick, & Jament, 2012). They stated that this was often evident in the responses of teachers, support teachers, other professionals, TAs, and parents when dealing with inclusion. While this research by Devecchi et al. (2012) did not directly deal with the more limited view of inclusion i.e., that in which inclusion was chiefly about catering for special needs, the nexus between inclusion and disabilities seems to form the basis of the discussion. This circumstance was highlighted again in a comment made by an unnamed research participant who stated that, "I don't think mainstream is ideal for all children with such severe disabilities. It is hypocrisy. The school is

like a parking lot. This is not inclusion; this is forced integration." (Devecchi et al., 2012, p. 178).

An article on inclusion focussing on a chiefly European perspective by Ramberg and Watkins (2020) made use of data from The European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education (EASIE). Ramberg and Watkins (2020) argued that "as a concept and research object, definitions of inclusive education take different shapes depending on what perspective, starting point, target group and methodological approaches are being taken" (Ramberg & Watkins, 2020, p. 86). They stated that despite the "well-established evidence base on which inclusive education is founded" (p. 86), that there was still no consensus on a definition for inclusion. It was also claimed that while current definitions rely on context, culture, history, and methodology they should also consider societal, equity and organisational perspectives.

While definitions about what actually constitutes inclusion do exist in the literature, they often differ in their emphasis. Carter and Abawi (2018) said, "inclusion must be a way of thinking, a philosophy of how educators remove barriers to learning and value all members of a school community" (p.51). In similar terms, Koster, Nakken, Puji and van Houten (2009) defined inclusion as, "Maximizing the interaction between pupils with and without special needs" (p. 117). Avoiding the question, but quite tellingly for a study looking at international perspectives, Ainscow and Miles (2008) identified that one cannot find a unified perspective on inclusion within any single school let alone a single country. This introduced the idea of the importance of acknowledging that to define inclusion meant accepting that it has been influenced by the context within which it occurred.

Attempting to provide a definition of inclusive education within an Australian context Bourke and Carrington (2007), made suggestions about how to remove barriers to inclusion in the classroom. They made the point that inclusive approaches were actually about empowering all the members of a school community. They said that they were also about seeking to both identify and then remove the causes of exclusion, "that limit opportunities and outcomes for all students, including students who have a disability" (p. 4). This still does not attempt to define what inclusion was but rather how it was to be implemented and proves to be inadequate for the purpose of definitional clarity. The same charge can be made about the work entitled, *Index for Inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools* (Booth, Ainscow & Kingston, 2006). The Index provided a quite detailed list of what seeking to implement inclusion involved such as the need to investigate culture, policy and practice

and the imperative to combat all forms of discrimination, but it did not go the step further and attempt to explain what the term inclusion means.

A comprehensive definition of inclusive education was provided in the General Comment 4 on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations 2016). This international definition says that:

> "Inclusive education can only occur 'within 'mainstream' settings with all necessary adaptations and accommodations to '… content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment"

Many similar statements can be found such as the one proposed by Boyle and Anderson (2020) who state that "Inclusive education in its absolute form requires that all students, irrespective of ability, are educated in their local school through the provision of appropriate practices, pedagogies, and resources" (p. 204). While these are comprehensive statement that help to focus the search by stating the context within which inclusion can occur, they are still deficient as workable definitions as they are restricted by the mere fact that they concentrate primarily on the conditions under which inclusive education can occur and miss the broader picture.

In a Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research article an attempt was made to clarify the concept of inclusion. While asserting that it was not possible to find any formal consensus about what constitutes inclusion, Hauge (2017) attempted to provide at least a coherent way of resolving the issue. He said that "different meanings create tensions" (p. 207) and that it was therefore important instead, to understand that the issues inevitably centre on just how students, that require special education, are to be accommodated. Thus, these ideas circle back to the prevailing common misinterpretation that inclusion was only about servicing the narrow cohort of students with disabilities, as was raised at the start of this discussion.

Concern was expressed however, regarding his doubts about the suitability of conditions in relation to the social life and learning that students experienced at school (Haug, 2017). He asserted that in order to simply avoid segregation schools stressed placement of students over the quality of their education. These conditions, he claimed, were developed as an outcome of how the teaching was organised and brought about the idea of inclusion being the benefits gained from the support, involvement and participation of teachers and students in activities. He thus made a persuasive argument about the need to view the definition of

inclusion from a wider aspect and to accept that inclusion was actually about other things than placement.

This was expanded on within the article by Ramberg and Watkins (2020) that supported the recognition of the key concepts of *presence, placement, participation,* and *achievement* within inclusive education systems. Further support was provided by Ainscow (2016), who also argued that presence, placement, participation, and achievement were what inclusion should be about. Ramberg and Watkins (2020) explained these terms as ones that form a hierarchy where each one concept was reliant on the existence of the other. They said that while placement was self- evident, presence was about access and attendance, participation was about learning quality experience, and achievement about results.

To add weight to this determination these key concepts were initially promoted by Slee (2018), who stated that "inclusive education … seeks to identify and dismantle barriers to education for all children so that they have access to, are present and participate in and achieve optimal academic and social outcomes from school" (p. 2). The argument about the suitability of this definition could lie in the fact that used four concepts to explain one. However, as this seems to be the most comprehensive and comfortable explanation of inclusion available, for the purpose of this study, it is this Ramberg and Watkins (2020) definition that "Inclusion is about the presence, placement, participation and achievement of all students" (p. 89) that would be regarded as a workable definition within inclusive education systems.

2.2.1 What is inclusive pedagogy?

A dilemma was seen to occur when students with different learning needs were included in a classroom but then were provided with differentiated activities to such an extent, "that they end up isolated from the classroom community even though they may be physically present" (Florian & Beaton, 2018, p. 870). This was a further example of the prevailing malaise in inclusive education literature, in that it seemed to **i**nevitably revert to a position where inclusion could only be understood in the context of an enhanced provision for students with special needs. In discussing this, Florian, and Beaton (2018) also explained that inclusive pedagogy, "is a pedagogical response to individual differences between pupils that avoids the marginalisation that can occur with differentiation strategies that are designed only with individual needs in mind" (p. 870).

The most interesting aspect of this article was the positive methodologically stance that it adopted (Florian & Beaton, 2018). The study was based upon a craft knowledge approach and the research itself involved discussions with teachers across three sites. The

craft knowledge approach acknowledges the practical wisdom of educators in carrying out successful practice and "most importantly, it assumes that teachers are competent rather than deficient or lacking in skills that need to be developed" (Florian & Beaton, 2018, p. 873). The outcome of this study demonstrated that it was only when students came to believe and have trust that the teacher's assessment tools were authentic for them and that they, "will trust that teachers are listening and choose to engage and participate in activities that are genuine and meaningful to them as learners, thereby giving true meaning to the concept of inclusion" (p. 883).

It was encouraging therefore, to discover a study that came closest to addressing this problem. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) conducted a small-scale review in two Scottish primary schools that identified practical examples of inclusive pedagogy that aimed at providing education for all, rather than "differentiating for some" (p. 812). These researchers set out in their paper to, "draw distinctions between inclusive pedagogy and the terms inclusive education and inclusive practice" (p. 814). Recognising that achieving inclusion was "a complex pedagogical endeavour" (p. 814), they acknowledged that this, "requires a shift in teaching and learning from an approach that works for most learners existing alongside something 'additional' or 'different' for those (some) who experience difficulties" (p. 814). The research by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) was seemingly shaped by a desire to identify appropriate teaching strategies that maximised learning for all students.

Refreshingly, this article was also able to reflect that this could be achieved while effectively supporting all those who had additional needs. Secondly, they sought out exemplars that could be, "articulated in ways that are useful to other teachers and supportive of their practice" (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 815). It was also significant that they moved the focus away from seeing deficits in individual students to identifying challenges that existed in inclusive classroom practices. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) asserted that, "While the additional needs approach to inclusion focuses only on the student who has been identified as in need of additional support, the inclusive pedagogical approach focuses on everybody in the community of the classroom" (p. 820).

Themes identified by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), from their research included meeting the needs of all in a rich learning community and focussing on what was taught rather than who was taught. This simple statement carried with it a potential solution to some of the major issues that beset research in this area and applies to this study as well. It surely was advisable to start a discussion on inclusion by being clear about the inclusive, curriculum context. Once this was established and discussions held about how this curriculum supports

the concepts of inclusivity then making decisions about how this was to be achieved was made considerably easier. Florian and Black -Hawkins (2011) also rejected the "deterministic beliefs about ability as being fixed and the associated idea that the presence of some will hold back the progress of others" (p. 818). Importantly, taking the direction of this current research project into consideration, much of the literature, it appeared, dealt with the ideas and the philosophies behind the development of policies and procedures and considerably less dealt with the effectiveness of its practical application.

2.3 Important implications for this study

This section of the review has been devoted to examining a number of important implications related to this study that were seen to emerge out of the relevant literature. These were not intended to be presented in any order of importance but aimed to highlight a number of the reoccurring issues that form the background to relevant discussion about the dual topics of inclusion and the roles that TAs play in its implementation. Going forward they will be used in Chapters Six and Seven as a means of discussing the findings from the qualitative and quantitative data gathered.

2.3.1 Implementation (exemplars of practice)

The Australian Government provided a guidance document, via their website, on what was termed *Exemplars of Practice* (Department of Education and Training (DET), (2006). In this they described these exemplars as something that could be used as a guide to "good practice in developing reasonable adjustments for students with disability in line with the Disability Standards for Education 2005" (p. 1). They also claimed that the lessons learned from these exemplars are ones that, "are transferrable to educators across the country" (p. 1). The documents provided ten exemplars of practice in the form of small case studies, drawn from all levels of formal education, within the national school system. Each Australian case study related the story of a student that exemplified a particular disability and it described how the school provided a support response that could be regarded as an example of good inclusive practice.

The case studies (DET, 2006) also included what reasonable adjustments were required in each case and what outcome was achieved. Space was also allocated, in the document, to cover such issues as cost factors and the skills and behaviours required to achieve these exemplary outcomes. As a focus of this DET (2006), research project was to identify examples of sound inclusive practice in schools that could be seen as good models, it

follows that it was important to find evidence of this in the document. Unfortunately, the examples provided in this case were all related to students that had identifiable special needs so once again the real meaning of inclusive education for all was somewhat compromised.

No relevant research papers that demonstrated the impact of inclusive exemplars of practice on TAs were located but two studies involving educators generally were discovered. The first was a study by Carlson, Hemmings, Wurf and Reupert (2012) that was undertaken within four regional Australian schools and that set out to examine the strategies that effective teachers, in inclusive classrooms, used that made the classrooms successful. This article was especially relevant for this current study, as it also sought to identify the exemplars of practice that could be used to encourage the effective uptake of inclusive education The research suggested that if inclusive education practices were to be successful then the teachers charged with implementing these practices needed to create exemplars where others could learn from the strategies that they had employed. "Results indicated that effective teachers used a selection of strategies, with the most favoured being feedback, direct instruction, questioning, and cooperative learning" (Carlson, Hemmings, Wurf & Reupert, 2012, p. 1).

The others indicated in the previous paragraph were not all specified but could have also included the TAs who were employed within the school system. "The various support systems that teachers find useful, including collaborations and professional development activities, need to be actively encouraged" (Carlson et al., 2012, p. 24). The study found that the advent of the observed classroom differentiation process promoted the use of more and varied instructional strategies. However, the study also found that a variety of other commonly used strategies such as mastery learning, and metacognitive instruction were not employed. They put this down to a lack of in-service training. This and the lack of direct applicability to the use of TAs limited the usefulness of this document in relation to this current study.

In a second relevant study the outcomes were chiefly focussed on such dimensions as attitudes, concerns and sentiments relating to inclusive education. This study utilised a sizable data set of 603 participants drawn from Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, and Singapore. The research compiled by Sharma, Forlin and Loreman (2008) also showed that educators, including TAs, who demonstrated positive attitudes and modelled exemplary practices were able to influence colleagues positively. Importantly for this research, the authors found that, "Teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion more readily change and adapt the ways they work in order to benefit students with a range of learning needs" (p. 773). In an unusual

twist this article focussed on the importance of training pre-service teachers to implement inclusive classroom strategies but did, “not directly consider the benefits to be derived from including children with special needs” (p. 783). Much could be gleaned from this article about positive teacher and TA attitudes towards inclusion but there was limited guidance about how inclusion, as it was viewed in this study e.g., everyone was included, could be promoted.

It was relatively easy to find research data on the policies that organisations formulated with respect to inclusion, but it was not so easy to find information on how these policies were successfully implemented. That was why a research report by Porter and Towell (2017) that declared an intention to examine the inclusion program of a variety of schools in varied locations was interesting and informative and appeared to possibly be the guide that was being sought. This hope was only partially realised and ultimately, in respect to the needs of this current research project, it proved a little disappointing. The research occurred in seven schools located in New Brunswick, Canada (3); Newham, London (UK); Bogota, Columbia (2) and Lima, Peru.

In each case study a staff member, from the particular school, explained that they were able to make their schools exemplars of good practice and that, as well, better behaviours and overall achievements were attained by the adoption of inclusive practices. Even though the tone of each case study was an encouragingly positive one and themes regarding the development of a culture of inclusion were mentioned, the brevity of the reports did not permit the reporters to make a serious attempt to explain, in any detail, how these claimed outcomes were achieved.

While the Porter and Towell (2017) paper, confusingly at times, blurred the distinction between the terms integration and inclusion, each school’s spokesperson wrote about their inclusive policies and the supportive procedures that had been adopted. In some cases, they discussed their staff and student support networks, but in general they were restricted in being able to provide a clear picture about what an inclusive classroom looked like or how inclusive practices were made to work for all. Mention was made, in one case, regarding paraprofessional support and how TAs were assisted in supporting inclusion. Perhaps, these schools did achieve the ultimate goal of allowing everyone to feel that they belonged equally but being intentionally brief, the individual case study reports failed to satisfactorily explain how the identified inclusion policies and programs supported all children’s learning.

What these case studies set out to achieve was the identification a series of exemplars of practice that would engender inclusive outcomes. While this was achieved to some degree, the brevity of each report and, the tendency to concentrate on policy over procedure meant that the objective was not fully realised. Aspirational policies and procedures on inclusion are inspiring but they really don't change anything unless the school staff have clear ideas about how change is to come about. Webster and Blatchford (2013) made this point when they stated that "Without being clear about what these pupils experience, we cannot make effective judgments about which provisions, and the structural and classroom processes through which they are delivered, work best" (p. 466).

The pivotal roles that TAs play in the integration versus inclusion discussion became obvious when the available international studies were examined. In their article, Webster and Blatchford (2015) made the claim that while TA use across the world was growing, "compared to other education systems globally, no country has gone as far in its use of such staff as the UK" (p. 325). They recognised, at the same time, that the comprehensive 2007 DISS study mentioned earlier, questioned the way TAs and inclusion had become "inextricably linked" (p. 325). Various other articles pointed to similar issues in other European countries (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Devecchi et al., 2012). Washburn-Moses et al. (2013) stated that in the US, "as inclusive education has become more common, the primary job responsibility of paraprofessionals has changed from administrative and clerical roles to providing instructional support" (p. 34).

Research carried out in both the USA and UK argued that the pursuit of implementing inclusive settings, allied with the shortage of special education teachers, has meant that TAs had increasingly been charged with meeting the individual needs of children identified with disabilities (Killoran, Woronko & Zaretsky, 2014; Mueller & Murphy, 2001; Webster et al., 2011). In a US based study carried out in the state of Vermont, a report by Giangreco, Suter and Hurley (2011) discussed the concerning statistics that they found in relation to paraprofessional use in classrooms. They claimed that "It is troubling that approximately three quarters of all instruction provided by special education personnel in this sample was provided by paraprofessionals" (p. 130). This finding has direct applications to findings presented in this current project.

Similar attitudes to TA use were identified by an Australian qualitative data study carried out by Anderson, Klassen and Georgiou (2007). This study indicated that as well as more training, teachers wanted more TA time allocated when they were required to deal with inclusive practices. According to local Queensland research TAs have gradually become, an

integral part of an inclusive education model by working one-on-one with identified students within mainstream classrooms (Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Forlin & Rose, 2010; Harris & Aprile, 2015; Lock & Redmond, 2019; Moran & Abbott, 2002). Therefore, it was difficult to see how, despite there being a clear delineation between the two terms on paper, so many writers talked about inclusion while describing classic integration processes. Evidence of this confusion between integration and inclusion can be identified in many articles purporting to be advocating the latter while describing the former (Cologon, 2022).

An especially relevant article that appeared recently in a 2022 edition of *Teaching and Teacher Education* was an article by Woodcock, Sharma, Subban and Hitches (2022). This article entitled, *Teacher self-efficacy and inclusive education practices: Rethinking teachers' engagement with inclusive practices* was an examination of 41 primary teachers adopting inclusive practices in schools across New South Wales, Australia. While the mention of TAs occurred only briefly in this article, the statements made were very pertinent to the subject of this research study. Included within the article were a range of claims that provided a succinct portrait of many of the latest thoughts about inclusion and inclusive practices.

Woodcock et al. (2022), began with an explanation about how they viewed inclusion. The authors did not present a definition of their own but referred instead to a number of statements taken from UNESCO and the New South Wales Department of Education (NSW DoE) documents. They made the point that inclusion was about caring for all students equally and that all students have the right to a fair and equitable education despite any differences that they might have in their abilities or learning needs. The salient points made in this article were that for inclusion to be achievable then it needed a whole school approach, and they discussed the importance of viewing inclusion as occurring in three dimensions viz. "inclusive policy, inclusive culture and inclusive practice" (Woodcock et al., 2022, p. 2).

In respect to this current project, the most relevant section of this article, was the proposition that inclusive education should promote such values as student agency and self-determination. The argument was made that inclusion should be regarded as the end product of a process that involves the removal of barriers. Woodcock et al. (2022) reiterated this important point that inclusion was not just properly about serving those students with special needs, but it was also about teachers acknowledging the role they could play in facilitating learning and reducing the roadblocks to learning for all students.

This Woodcock et al. (2022) article proceeded to show how such approaches as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiated instruction techniques can be

harnessed in the practical application of inclusive teaching and learning practices. The challenging assertion was also made that "In Australia, there is no single agreed definition of inclusive education" (Woodcock et al., 2022, p. 3) and that therefore there are a range of inconsistencies evident across all levels of education. Evidence was provided of inconsistencies in the practices adopted by well-intentioned practitioners within the schools. The term *microexclusion* was used and defined as the type of exclusion that happens subtly, in mainstream settings, when teachers adopt practices that are labelled as inclusive but result in individuals or groups being excluded albeit only for short periods.

It was established that for inclusion to happen it was not enough that teachers **k**now what inclusion was but that they should receive guidance about how it can be made to happen. Woodcock et al. (2022) stressed the difference between those teachers who can be seen as highly efficacious and those regarded has having low efficacy. The authors asserted that the former group used teaching strategies that were strengths based and focussed on student's capabilities while the latter were often focussed on group learning, discipline, and the use of TAs. "Furthermore, they focused upon managing student behaviour, and unlike high efficacious teachers, reported the use of teaching assistants to aid in catering to students' needs" (Woodcock et al., 2022, p. 11). This introduced another interesting dimension to the discussion on inclusion as it seems to infer that the extent of TA use in inclusive classrooms was dependent upon teacher competency. This distinction also resonated with the conceptual framework for this study that asserts that the actions of TAs in the way they support students provides a clear marker of where they are placed on the inclusion journey continuum.

A recent publication that served as an omnibus edition for inclusion research was entitled *Inclusive Education for the 21st Century-Theory, Policy and Practice*. This book, edited by Linda J Graham (2020), provided a comprehensive overview of the foundation principles of inclusive education. Comprising 16 chapters with contributions from leading experts from Australia and the UK this book serves as a virtual summary of several decades of research into inclusion from the anglophile viewpoint.

Based upon underpinning research evidence it was designed to explore issues regarding the barriers and the access to inclusive classrooms. Chapter 16 of Graham's (2020) edited book proved to be the most relevant for this current study as it was devoted to rethinking the use of TAs. Unfortunately, its emphasis on the correlation between inclusion and special needs students lessens its relevance substantially. This current research project seeks to reiterate the salient point that an inclusive school was one that encompasses the needs of all students and not just those with special needs.

2.3.2 Professional development

A reoccurring thread that weaves through much of the literature regarding the use of TAs, in supporting the adoption of inclusive practices, was the barriers that they faced in pursuing appropriate and timely professional development. This thread reoccurred also throughout this research project and looms as one of the most intractable challenges facing TAs working within inclusive classrooms. More specifically, it was the question of training or rather the lack of training that got the most attention. Egilson and Traustadottir (2009), made an injunction that teaching assistants be trained in collaborative skill development. Carlson et al., (2012) called for active encouragement towards professional development, while Devecchi et al. (2012) pointed out the advantage that the Italian equivalent of TAs obtained from extensive professional training. Butt (2018), in her article, was critical of the minimal requirements requested of many TAs and went as far as saying that this lack of training should be regarded as an equity issue.

Within the literature, professional development has been viewed as having two dimensions. The first was the training that TAs receive about how to carry out their assigned roles and the second was the training that those responsible for training these TAs had themselves received. In the study by Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco and Pelsue (2009), it was stated that "less than half (46.1%) of paraprofessionals [sic. TAs] reported having ever attended a conference session" (p. 354). This was, by any measure, a disappointing outcome. What was meant by a conference in this context appeared to be an organised school-based training program. While the training of TAs did receive adequate coverage in the available literature, research on the training of those who trained TAs was mostly missing.

A small-scale Queensland study by Harris and Aprile focussed on a cohort of TAs similar to those involved in this current study (Harris & Aprile, 2015). This study's primary interest was on the use of TAs within regional schools. It also made several suggestions about the need for schools to provide enhanced professional learning opportunities. Its specific contribution to a discussion on the professional development of TAs skills and knowledge, was its finding that the role of TAs was so diverse that "it would not be possible to provide external support and training in relation every aspect of each of their roles "(p. 157). While not recommending any quick solution this study suggests that there was cause to, "question the academic benefit students receive from working with teacher aides" (p. 157).

A contribution to the professional debate was made by Rosemary Butt (2018) in a qualitative study involving four of Canberra's mainstream primary schools. This research was

an effort to explore what were the actual qualifications that TAs were bringing into inclusive classrooms as distinct from what were the somewhat limited organisational expectations. Her conclusions were that, over the past two decades, "qualifications required of a TA have not changed and a person can be a TA, employed to provide learning support to students, with no post school qualification and without passing a literacy or numeracy test" (p. 229). This claim appeared to be one that could be expanded upon to include many systems world-wide where TAs are currently employed.

In her article, it is strongly suggested that the employment of staff that are not properly qualified should be regarded as a question of equity and she alleged that, "surely all students have the right to receive instruction from a qualified teacher" (Butt, 2018, p. 229). In her summary, it is suggested that only minimal research had been undertaken within Australia when it comes to examining the impact that TAs have on student's learning outcomes. The conclusion drawn from her study, and one that was especially relevant to this current research, was that there was a pressing need to conduct further study as this topic "warrants further research" (Butt, 2018, p. 229).

2.3.3 Inclusion in context

One of the more interesting aspects of the literature on inclusion was the contrast that can be found in examining the contextual imperatives held by different nations. Fortunately, there were a range of relatively recent reports and articles that helped to provide an overall view about what was happening in this space, especially within the European context. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that despite an absence of reliable information, it was evident that rates of inclusion vary widely from country to country, even within the same region (UNESCO, 2015).

The European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education (EASIE) reported that data from Europe demonstrated a very mixed outcome with countries such as Portugal, Lithuania and Norway educating more than 80% of their students with disabilities within inclusive mainstream settings while in France, Germany, and Belgium they are educated in separate units (EASIE, 2009). Frustratingly, this was happening even in those countries where legislation had been passed into laws that protects the rights of students with disabilities attending schools (Hehir et al., 2016). It was also somewhat concerning that the discussion on inclusion was once again framed primarily around discussions regarding students with disabilities.

This feature also was seen, when examining other studies by researchers in countries across various continents. What was unmissable was that most reports reviewed did not help in obtaining a clear picture about what was actually happening in international school systems. When they were discussing their interpretation of inclusion, they were inevitably explaining how students with special needs were being brought into the mainstream education and not how the fundamental policy of education for all was being promoted.

UNICEF conducted research showing that in many low and middle-income nations, "children with disabilities account for a disproportionate percentage of children out of school" (Hehir et al., 2016, p. 6). In Thailand, UNICEF reported that even as far back as 2003 as a result of the National Special Education Plan (1995) and the National Education Act of 1999, that a majority of Thai students with disabilities attended integrated schools. In India, by comparison, the estimation was that only about half of children with disabilities were enrolled in school (UNESCO Institute for Statistics & UNICEF, 2015). Nigeria has a formal special education policy that required schools to provide inclusive education for students with a disability while South Africa had developed long term plans designed to promote inclusive practices by encouraging the transition of students with disabilities from segregated placements into a system of integrated neighbourhood, full-service, and specialized schools.

It was both interesting and instructive to be able to compare and contrast what was happening in two countries that while being very different, were nevertheless trying to achieve similar outcomes. Research by Devecchi et al. (2012) indicated that, "despite differences in training and qualifications, the comparison of the deployment of adults support in the classroom shows that both Italy and England face similar challenges and dilemmas" (p. 180). In both countries, according to the researchers, while the system asserted that inclusion was taking place, "in reality practices of exclusion and marginalisation of both adults and children within the classroom still exist" (p. 180). Devecchi et al. (2012) claimed that this situation arose out of unclear role and responsibility statements as well as unresolved differences in expectations that existed across the systems. This was evident in the responses of teachers, support teachers, other professionals, TAs, and parents. This research did not, however, directly deal with the more limited view of inclusion i.e., that which considers inclusion was about catering for special needs the connection between inclusion and disabilities was still inferred.

After acknowledging that it was difficult to make comparisons between the differing inclusive education practices across various national systems Devecchi et al. (2012) made the point that in both the UK and Italian systems above all, "the findings suggest the need to

acknowledge and respect the work of support teachers and TAs as equally valuable members of the classroom" (p. 182). The point was also made that the equivalent of TAs in Italy, received extensive professional training in contrast to the UK where TAs were not required to obtain any nationally accredited qualification (Devecchi et al., 2012). One of the issues that was immediately apparent, when attempting to compare the inclusion performance of school systems in different nations, were that students that were considered as having a learning disability in one country were not necessarily regarded as such in another.

A research study was carried out that involved 16 schools across five regions in Italy (Giangreco, Doyle & Suter, 2012). The study's aim was about finding ways of improving inclusive educational opportunities for students. However, once again the prime focus was on students with disabilities. In this study, Giangreco et al. (2012) made the claim that "Unless or until countries adopt similar definitions and reporting standards it will remain challenging to compare the nuances of regular class placement statistics" (p. 97). It seemed that in most cases the only point of comparison available was the percentage of students enrolled in special education schools. This was especially relevant when the alignment between national inclusion policies and the procedures used to enact them were examined. The variations between national imperatives around inclusive education was further highlighted when the focus of research turned northwards.

A study out of northern Europe compiled by Engsig and Johnstone (2015) had the intriguing title of, 'Is there something rotten in the state of Denmark? The paradoxical policies of inclusive education - lessons from Denmark'. According to these two authors, there exists, in Denmark, a Salamanca style equity inspired public statements of inclusion that set a target of 96% student mainstreaming by 2015. While this was cited as the national policy it was nevertheless compromised by a more US-inspired, accountability-focused inclusion practice. Engsig and Johnstone (2015) stated, "Through a discourse review, we discovered that Denmark's policy narratives were not aligned completely to either Salamanca or accountability models" (p. 343). Though the Danes had set such a high mark for inclusion, "the number of students receiving special education in the Danish public school system has decreased dramatically since the passage of the Inclusion Law" (p. 483). The outcome had seen the development of, "an accountability-based understanding of inclusion" (p. 483). This development has meant that academic success has come to be more valued than belongingness and the overall experience of inclusion (Engsig & Johnstone, 2015).

Staying in Scandinavia but going back a decade, Sweden was then regarded as the leading country across the world in providing social welfare and the pursuit of equality

(Fishback, 2022). Its education authority oversaw a policy that favoured equality of participation for all students in their schools. However, as a result of financial difficulties Sweden has experienced a change in ideology that has seen it lose its "leading position in the field of integration (inclusion) and has taken a step backwards" (Brodin & Lindstarnd, 2017, p. 144). The view of the decline in Sweden's reputation as a leader in the area of inclusive education was supported in research carried out by Göransson, Nilholm and Karlsson (2011). The Göransson et al. (2011) research found that, "Swedish national policy is not as inclusive as is sometimes stated, chiefly because student needs are still viewed in a negative way and that it was their weaknesses preventing them from achieving educational goals" (p. 551).

Because of this Sweden has now lost the crown of the world's most advanced country for inclusion and that Canada, "has gone far ahead and is probably today the most including country in the world for persons with disabilities" (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2007, p. 144). Sweden it seems had lost its perceived status as a bastion of inclusive education because they had started enforcing the early categorisation of their children and by minimising the opportunities for these students to have an impact on what happens within the school itself. Using examples drawn from a Swedish context, Brodin and Lindstrand (2007), while managing to use the terms inclusion and integration interchangeably, pointed out situations where children with functional disabilities were placed in classes comprising mostly of children with no identified disability. Because of this they were made to feel like outsiders and not fully members of the class community. Disappointingly, that class was held up by observers to be an example of inclusion.

In examining the role of TAs supporting students within an inclusive environment there were dimensions of equity that needed to be considered. These were the actual extent to which students with special needs were having their needs met and what part TAs could and should play in this endeavour. While this deviates from the basic tenants of this current study, this still has direct relevance as it speaks to the ways that TAs can impact upon a least a subset of the school population if not necessarily all students. While the scope of this chapter will not allow for an attempt to fully explore these topics, possibly the most comprehensive publication that sought to address them was a book entitled, *Inclusive Education*.

Edited by Artiles, Kozleski and Waitoller (2011), *Inclusive Education*. sets out to examine world-wide equity issues. Its content was premised upon the idea that there is no one-size-fits-all model for inclusion. The editors stated that, "despite the impressive growth in interest and enthusiasm around inclusive education throughout the world, how it is defined and implemented and for whose benefit, remains at best incompletely understood" (p. 2).

Artiles et al. (2011) edition's contribution to the discussion pertaining to the equity dimension of inclusive education was one of scope, in that it set out to examine the concerns emerging from its implementation in nine nations across five continents.

This work initially looked at the situation in first generation education systems as found in Austria, the USA, Germany, England, and Sweden (Artiles et al., 2011). It then examined the different circumstance that applied to second generation systems such as South Africa, Argentina, India, and Kenya. While the first generation of nations that supported policies and procedures were those that are now label as industrialised countries, "a second generation of inclusive education efforts followed the signing of the Salamanca Statement in 1994. Ninety-two nations committed to the ideal of inclusive education and went on to promote inclusive education in country-specific visions and principles" (Artiles et al., 2011, p. 4).

This edited book devoted most of its second section to discussing the often complex and challenging cultural practices of many of the second-generation or developing countries. It looked at how this complexity had impacted on the development of inclusive practices. In striving to make a coherent comparison between the two generations Artiles et al. (2011), made the interesting assertion that, "the review owes much to the notion that ideas like inclusive education exist in contrapuntal relationships to political, social and economic trajectories within and outside of national borders" (p. 1). The term *contrapuntal* used in this context, means to exist in counterpoint with each other and this helps to underline one of the important considerations in this whole study i.e., inclusion cannot be fully understood when it was not examined in the context of the society in which it exists. This was a useful consideration for the current study as the participants had been drawn from many different contexts within education generally.

It has already been argued that inclusion can only be fully understood when it was examined in context. One of the more important aspects of context was that of the culture in which it is located. An example of the significance of cultural considerations on inclusion can be found in an article by Forlin and Rose (2010). This article examined the move within Hong Kong to start catering for diversity within the government school's system. It commented on the strategies that were defined by the mainstream schools to help manage the transition. An approach that was adopted by government authorities could be labelled as a *resource school model* where, "Special and mainstream schools in Hong Kong are being invited to establish themselves as resource support hubs for partner mainstream school" (Forlin & Rose, 2010, p. 13). The authors revealed that Hong Kong had a relatively long

involvement with integration dating back until the 1970, and they emphasised that "The movement towards inclusive education practice in Hong Kong is consistent with the worldwide trend to focus on human rights, social justice and anti-discrimination" (Forlin & Rose, 2010, p. 14).

While three major themes were identified by this study that related to management issues and school ethos, it was the theme of culture that had the most significance. This was because it acknowledges that the ideas and practices that were imported from the western cultures, such as inclusion, take considerable time before they are absorbed into the native culture. It may be worth considering that inclusion, as was expressed from a western point of view, may never be fully accepted in eastern cultures where the celebration of difference was deeply embedded and has a long history. With Australia's growing recognition a multicultural nation, this factor is also of direct relevance to this current research project.

A book, edited by James M Kauffman, entitled, *On Educational Inclusion- Meanings, History, and International Perspectives (2020)*, dealt with international interpretations of inclusion along with its history and application. Comprising 12 chapters, this book also promised to be a compendium of relevant, recent, expert articles on inclusion. Unfortunately, from the standpoint of this literature review it dealt almost entirely with the topic from the perspective of the students with special need's end of the spectrum and was therefore another useful but unfortunately limited resource.

2.3.4 Inclusion as a continuum

Drawing from a New Zealand context, Rutherford (2012) asserted that for a child with a disability to enter the education system in New Zealand, was at most times, "reliant upon the availability of the untrained TAs that are often regarded as the 'solution to inclusion'" (Rutherford, 2012, p. 757). This issue of implementing inclusive practices, as seen by Rutherford (2012) was one that could be best represented as a journey along a continuum, "in which students' and aides' experiences ranged from inclusion to exclusion in school settings" (p. 762). Rutherford (2012) referred to an exploratory study by Mansaray (2006), who attempted to make sense of the role of TAs by utilising the concept of 'liminality'. The concept was useful for this purpose as it, "acknowledges the creative, open, ambiguous and ambivalent nature of the TAs' role and challenges policy discourse which tend to position the role as peripheral to teaching and learning in schools" (p. 171). Building on this idea and using the findings of a qualitative study involving 18 participants, Gill Rutherford (2012)

looked to develop an understanding of the experiences of students with disabilities from both their own and their TAs' perspective.

Interpreted within a framework of current disability, social justice and sociology of childhood theorising, Rutherford (2012) explored the participants' experiences in New Zealand primary, intermediate and secondary schools. These findings were analysed, and this led to the construction of a continuum across which the experiences of the TAs and their students could be measured. In recognising that each TA and their pupils were most likely to work in a range of different contexts and conditions during the course of a school day Rutherford (2012) identified, three positions on this continuum. The three positions were everybody in, most students in, and disabled students out. In this research study these positions, "are outlined in order to provide a framework for understanding the range of factors that influence participants' experiences" (p. 762).

Conceptually, this research study by Rutherford (2012) was centred upon the belief that the current negative policy, where some students experience exclusion and others restriction, was not sustainable. Therefore, there needed to be a realignment where a more inclusive education policy was adopted "that has as its foundation a genuine, unqualified commitment to socially just education for all students, and that is respectful of, and responsive to, the diversity of human difference and identity (everyone 'in')" (Rutherford, 2012, p. 770). This paper concluded with a plea for the adoption of socially just education practices and a change from the destructive practices associated with the current implications of the existing policies and practices. Sharma and Salend (2016) comprehensively summed up this sentiment when they stated that, "it is important to adopt and implement policies that ensure that TAs and the educators who work with them understand each other's roles and responsibilities, communicate and collaborate to support each other" (p. 125). The concept of an inclusion continuum is expanded upon in this study's conceptual framework and has been further explored in Chapter Three.

2.3.5 Teacher Aide voice (communication)

From their inception TAs have been disadvantaged chiefly owing to their low status on the school hierarchy. Recruited initially from a cohort of school mothers who were available to take on casual employment their role may have expanded but they have remained voiceless when it comes to engaging in education debate (Slee, 2006; Taylor & Singh, 2005). According to Bourke and Carrington (2007) this situation was related to "the uncertainty caused by their lack of an effective voice in the reform of policies and educational structures

which impact on their roles and employment" (p. 6). This has not changed over time as despite some expanding pathways for TAs, they still face many obstacles along the way (Gist, Garcia & Amos, 2022).

A useful article that does not set out to include only students with special needs in its discussion was, *Learning Support Staff: A Literature Review (2015)* by Francesc Masdeu Navarro. This review looked at the studies dealing with the growing international use of TAs and similar support workers in many nations world-wide. While acknowledging the potential for negative outcomes, it stressed instead the potential benefits. "Overall, these studies agree that learning support staff can contribute to student learning and well-being through, among others, a better classroom climate, individualised attention and increased overall teaching" (p. 39). The recommendations made in this review were modest and instead of calling for an upgrade or replacement of TAs, recommended an enhanced role for TAs that gave the support workers more say in their deployment and enhanced planning and preparation time. This was important as advocacy for encouraging a voice for TAs appears to be somewhat limited in literature across the board.

2.3.6 Inclusive culture

Interventions which focus on socio-cultural elements of school life, and which involve students actively in the process, are increasingly understood to be important (Jessiman et al., 2022). The term *culture* carried a limited meaning when used previously, in this study, as a subset of a discussion on context. Where it relates to factors such as race and ethnicity its focus was on the need to acknowledge how different cultures may perceive inclusion. However, the theme, *inclusive culture*, can be seen as acting as a catch all theme for the whole exercise, in that it demonstrated that nothing, including innovative practices, could actually, be seen to work if the school's culture was not one where inclusive practice could flourish. An inclusive culture needs to be regarded as something that permeated everything that happened at the school and if a culture exists in a school that does not operate in a way that supports everybody then it fundamentally does not operate for anybody. A walk around a school where observations can be made about how every person was treated can provide a very clear insight into what constitutes a school's true culture.

This concept of an inclusive culture highlighted the all-important connection that needs to exist between the creation of positive, supportive relationships and the existence of a healthy inclusive culture in schools. Pellicano, Bölte and Stahmer (2018) state that, "just as we need to encourage urgent local action on policies, systems and structures, those of us

committed to the ideal of inclusion also need to work more generally, across all jurisdictions, to promote cultural change among educators, parents and peers" (p. 2). It has been argued that inclusion can only flourish when schools realise that they need to promote the acceptance of what Carrington (1999) titled "cultures of difference" (p. 259).

She went on to elaborate that she believed that "Teachers working in successful inclusive schools have an explicit value base that provides a platform for inclusive practices" (Carrington, 1999, p. 261). This author also argued that inclusion required the establishment of an inclusive school culture to succeed. Zollers, Ramanathan and Yu (1999) claimed that failing to consider the organisational culture of a school may make any reform unsustainable. "At the very least, it would be an error to overlook the organizational culture of a school when implementing a reform as complex as inclusion" (Zoller, Ramanathan & Yu, 1999, p. 174).

2.4 Systematic literature reviews

This chapter has reviewed a substantial cross-section of the literature available on the twin topics of TAs and their role in supporting inclusive education. Out of this review has emerged seven distinct implications important in painting a landscape upon which this study can be positioned. This approach, while conducive to identifying associated concepts has a flaw in that it has not been able to encompass a sufficiently body of literature as would be wished. To address this potential flaw, this third part of the literature review is concentrated on the provision of a brief scan of a number of systematic literature reviews that have been produced in just over the decade from 2007 until 2019.

For the purpose of this paper, it was intended to analyse four of these systematic reviews. These are: - 1.) The Koster et al. (2009) examination of articles dealing exclusively with primary education and the social dimensions of inclusion; 2.) The Kalambouka et al. (2007), review that sets out to examine the research into the consequences of mainstreaming students with disabilities; 3.) The Sharma and Salend (2016), comprehensive, systematic analysis of TAs working in inclusive classrooms and 4.) The more recent review by Amor et al. (2019), that chiefly looked at the theoretical dimension of inclusion with some reference to practical application.

2.4.1 Primary education and the social dimensions of inclusion

While this systematic review covered a narrower scope than this research study chose to deal with, it also discussed the otherwise neglected aspect of the social dimension of inclusion in education (Koster et al., 2009). It examined 62 articles dealing exclusively with

primary education and was conducted by a team of researchers based in the Netherlands and published in 2009. The parameters of this systematic review were confined to a selection of three of the more significant journals published in the area of special needs education. These journals were the International Journal of Inclusive Education, the European Journal of Special Needs Education, and the Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research. As well the results of a search of two electronic databases covering the years between 2000 and 2005 were included. A thorough examination of the integration/inclusion discussion was undertaken by this systematic review.

In compiling this review several issues, chiefly related to the conceptualisation of the meaning of inclusion, were identified (Koster et al., 2009). The first issue, already observed in other literature, was the identification that various terms descriptive of inclusion were being used as interchangeable synonyms with considerable overlap. The analysis found that, "the concept of social integration and the related concepts of social inclusion and social participation were often described inaccurately, with only a few researchers providing explicit definitions or descriptions" (p. 117). Out of all the works reviewed it appeared that, "only nine articles presented an explicit definition of social integration" (p. 120). The outcome of this was, "a collection of studies reporting on very different aspects while using the same concepts and in studies using very different concepts but actually describing the same phenomena" (p. 137).

To provide some clarification to the discussion, Koster et al. (2009) suggested that the differentiation between the three terms was better achieved by regarding them as different dimensions of the one concept. It was reasonably clear that *social integration,* being the first dimension, referred explicitly to "being an accepted member of a group, having at least one mutual friendship and participating actively and equivalently in group activities" (p. 120). However, from then on, the distinction was less clear with *social inclusion* being seen as the second dimension or more accurately the intrinsic aspect and *social participation* being viewed as a third dimension including behaviours such as greetings and emotional support.

As a result, the authors made the decision, "to use only the term 'social participation' for the social dimension of inclusion" (p. 136). Through their analysis Koster et al. (2009) were also able to identify key themes central to social participation, i.e., friendships, relationships; interactions; contacts; perception of the pupil with special needs and acceptance by classmates. These themes were found to be helpful in describing the provisional formulation of social participation and the researchers maintained that this was going to matter more, as the inclusion of pupils with special needs continues to its worldwide

growth. In regard to this current research study this systematic review's limited scope in only reviewing articles dealing with special needs was disappointing from two perspectives. The first was its limited relevance to the inclusion practices associated with the development of effective inclusive cultures and second having chosen to make this limitation it served to reinforce the already established confusion existing between integration and inclusion.

2.4.2 Mainstreaming students with special needs

A systematic literature review was compiled to explore the research that had been carried out regarding the consequences of mainstreaming students with special needs, for both the included students and their already mainstreamed counterparts (Kalambouka et al., 2007). This approach was especially interesting as it concentrated on examining the connection that existed between inclusion of students with special needs and the impact that their presence had on the achievements of those students that traditionally comprised the mainstream classroom. While this was comprehensive, some issue could be raised about what metrics were used in making these assessments. Research into aspects such as the improvements in socialisation and growth in independence would have been valuable, however, "The majority of the studies (21) focused on academic outcomes and these were measured in a wide variety of ways, including class tests, national examinations and teacher ratings" (Kalambouka et al., 2007, p. 370).

This comprehensive systematic review concentrated, for the most part, on primary school children and ranged over a 23-year period (Kalambouka et al., 2007). Even though this was a wide time span the reality was that the majority of the articles reviewed were published in a shorter timeline between 1990 and 1999. The international spread of these studies was limited, with the majority being from the USA (21), with two studies from Australia and one each from Canada and Ireland providing some balance. The two secondary studies included a reference to students experiencing behavioural, emotional, and social difficulties (BESD), and "suggested that the impact of inclusion of students with BESD on outcomes for other children remains at best uncertain" (Kalambouka et al., 2007, p. 375).

A feature to note in this review was that "there was no study that reported negative outcomes of the inclusion of students with sensory and/or physical needs and/or communication/interaction difficulties" (Kalambouka et al., 2007, p. 376). Other reviews have shown similar results and it could therefore be stated that when it comes to inclusive education this systematic review provided little measurable evidence of any negative impact on the learning of children without an SEN identification (Kalambouka et al., 2007).

The authors reported that there had been numerous small-scale studies into the effect that including students with special needs had on these students themselves, as well as the other students that share the mainstream classroom. They pointed out that an early large-scale UK study that was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), relied on a "detailed statistical analysis of individual pupil data from the 2002 national pupil database" (p. 368). However, this study was especially important in that it demonstrated that at the LEA (Local Education Authority) level there was no evidence that inclusion had a negative impact on attainment (Dyson, Farrell, Polat, Hutcheson & Gallanaugh, 2004).

Accordingly, Kalambouka et al. (2009) reported that there were only a few nonsystemic reviews of literature that had been undertaken to address the effect that inclusion had on students that were not identified with a disability. They found that "In general the findings from these reviews suggest that there is little or no negative impact on children without SEN." (p. 368). As this had been a concern expressed by some critics of inclusion, this was a reassuring finding. However, this was not an entirely positive picture as they also discovered that in a review of seven studies by Petch-Hogan and Haggard (1999) evidence was found of some negative attitudes among non-special needs students towards their peers with disabilities.

2.4.3 TAs working in inclusive classrooms

A comprehensive, systematic analysis that focussed on TAs working in inclusive classrooms was compiled by Sharma and Salend (2016). The breadth of this study and its focus on areas within this research project made this systematic review especially relevant. Barriers to the adoption of inclusion such as unclear professional role descriptions, limited communication and inadequate collaboration were themes suggested by a range of authors in the Sharma and Salend (2016) systematic review. These factors were seen as having a negative impact on the work of paraprofessionals in the inclusive classroom. Sharma and Salend (2016) also found, in their literature under review, that both the TAs and their supervising teachers, in most cases, were not provided with adequate training. This coupled with poor supervision often led directly to TAs taking on important but inappropriate instructional and classroom management rolls.

In the opinion of the reviewers, it was the practice of providing ineffective and separate instruction that led to the unintended undermining of, "the inclusion, learning, socialization and independence of students with disabilities and the pedagogical roles of their teachers" (p. 118). One of the major findings from this systematic review was the seeming

confusion that existed across most of the literature as to how TAs support inclusion. When the part that TAs play in supporting international inclusive education was researched, the picture was equally diverse and managed to focus, once again, upon the narrow concept of inclusion for those with disabilities. “Interviews with students with disabilities conducted in Australia, Canada, Iceland, New Zealand and the United States indicate that these students reported having positive and negative experiences with TAs” (Sharma & Salend, 2016, p. 125).

However, a meaningful number of studies conducted in the UK and the USA found that generally the presence of TAs in inclusive classrooms, “inadvertently undermine the inclusion, learning, socialization and independence of students with disabilities, and the pedagogical roles of their teachers” (Sharma & Salend, 2016, p. 125). This statement, however, did not elaborate on the form that the international approaches to inclusion took. The Sharma and Salend (2016) review pointed out that often data about inclusion was gathered based on the experiences of students with disabilities, while little information was forthcoming on the experience of those not identified as having a disability i.e., the mainstream students.

2.4.4 Theoretical dimensions of inclusion

An extensive systematic review of peer-reviewed articles on inclusive education published in English and Spanish for the period between 2002 and 2016 was carried out by Amor et al. (2019). Overall, 2380 articles were examined, and the researchers said that the greatest number were articles dealing with theory or description with far fewer dealing with intervention practices. The findings overall, were reflective of the results of earlier systematic reviews in that they found that the concepts of inclusion and integration were used interchangeably. The reviewers summed this up by stating that, in many of these studies there were a variety of conceptualizations of inclusion that had an impact on the approaches taken. It appeared that in some articles the challenge of bringing inclusion into mainstream classrooms was achieved by making “it a matter of placement by substituting the former term ‘integration’ for inclusion” (p. 1277).

The other important finding was also supportive of earlier research, in that it found that it was necessary to reinforce the reality that achieving advancement in inclusive education development was about realising that, “Overall, inclusive education is a matter of adopting a socio-ecological approach regarding the interactions between students’ capabilities and environmental demands, stressing those educational systems must adapt to

and reach all students – and not vice versa" (Amor et al., 2019, p. 1278). This statement reenforced the generally accepted belief that students should not be expected to change to be included but that organisations need to change to accommodate the student.

2.5 Gaps in the literature

The volume of literature on inclusion and the effective use of TAs, covered by the articles and the systematic reviews mentioned in this chapter was comprehensive. The mere instance that Amor et al. (2019) examined 2380 peer-reviewed articles, and that Kalambouka et al. (2007) started with a pool of 7137 papers, when commencing their systematic review was testimony of the extent to which the topics have been covered. The systematic literature reviews did, however, indicate several gaps in the literature for future study. Within the Amor et al. (2019) review it was acknowledged that the terms inclusion and integration were used interchangeably so that valid conclusions become lost in the semantics.

Examples drawn from work based on the topic of mainstreaming students with special needs became the focus of the systematic review by Kalambouka et al., (2007). They suggested that further work on a largely ignored topic about how inclusion impacts on pupils without SEN would be valuable. The review by Koster et al. (2009) made suggestions about further work being needed on clarifying the integration/inclusion concepts and inferred that, studies regarding the "inclusion of pupils with special needs into mainstream education" (p. 136), would be beneficial. This statement alone speaks to some of the confusion that continues to percolate within this topic. Inclusion was certainly about incorporating pupils with special needs into the mainstream, but it has many other facets as well.

A substantial list of opportunities for further research, was provided by Sharma and Salend (2016). They suggested, amongst other considerations, that there was a need for larger studies looking at the experiences with inclusion for students with a range of disabilities as well as those with no disabilities at all. Sharma and Salend (2016) also promoted the need for studies to be held in a range of different countries and the need for a compilation of evidence of exemplars of practice. Studies of parental perspectives and how teachers can prepare TAs for inclusion were also mentioned. They concluded their systematic review by arguing that "there is also a need for research to develop and validate alternatives to the use of TAs that school districts can employ" (p. 128). This was significant for this study as finding alternatives to the current models of TA use in inclusive classrooms emerged as one of the study's suggested ways of overcoming current challenges regarding TA use.

This current literature review makes a number of observations regarding serious topics that were raised and that appear to be in need of more attention. These observations are that much of the development in inclusive education has been focussed on the theoretical dimensions of policies and procedures and that less effort has been focused on the practical application of actual implementation in the classroom. Added to this was the reoccurring theme of portraying inclusion as something that only applied to students with a disability rather than being something that needed to be applied to all students. This, of course, influenced some of the value of this literature under review, as it reflected an unclear conceptualisation of the issues being studied. Also explored in the literature, was the central idea that inclusion cannot exist in isolation but rather it has developed uniquely within different contexts and different cultures.

These critical issues of context and culture would also benefit from further exploration, for to ignore this reality, means that an inclusion process based upon the one size fits all paradigm would be difficult to sustain. An argument could also be made that inclusion and the issues surrounding its implementation needs to be reviewed through the eyes of the TAs themselves. To give these auxiliary workers a voice in reviewing a process, that they are so intimately involved with, has to be axiomatic and fundamental to voice any substantial, permanent change. It was evident that very little of the documented research looked at inclusion from the position of the TAs, a feature that was commented on by more than one researcher (Bourke & Carrington 2007; Gist, Garcia & Amos, 2022; Masdeu-Navarro, 2015).

2.6 Chapter summary

The major implication for this study that came out of this literature review was the emergence of the wealth of content, and a set of implications upon which this study could be predicated. These implications included the importance of discovering and recording exemplars of practice, the significance of observing inclusion in context, the crucial realisation of the importance of understanding that inclusion was a journey and not a destination, the fundamental implication of sustaining equity as well as the serious deficits observed in TA training. However, above all was the acknowledgement that the development of an appropriate classroom culture was the pivotal factor in ensuring the development of inclusion. How TAs were being used in inclusive classrooms speaks to the questions posed in this study and the set of seven implications identified have been carried forward to provide a rich background to the discussions taking place in this research project. Chapter Three

expands upon the study's conceptual framework and research paradigm as well as justifying the methodology chosen.

CHAPTER THREE: THE METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter begins by identifying the links to the Literature Review covered in Chapter Two and restates the study's three research questions. Section 3.3 outlines the study's conceptual framework; the research paradigm is discussed in Section 3.4. and the research design in Section 3.5. The alignment between the study's philosophical assumptions and the methodology is explored in Section 3.6. The quantitative method used in the study is discussed in Section 3.7 and the qualitative method in outlined in Section 3.8. Section 3.9 is devoted to exploring possible emerging issues while Section 3.10 deals with data collection and related complications. Section 3.11 explores the work's contribution to the field of research and a chapter summary is provided in Section 3.12.

3.2 Links to literature review

TAs have become an essential part of education systems worldwide, and the latest data indicates that the employment of these paraprofessionals has increased expediently over the past decade. Carter, Stephenson and Webster (2018) reported that "the number of education aides (including teaching assistants working with students with disability) employed in Australian schools continues to increase" (p. 1). This increase has been attributed to a need to support the growing number of students with special needs entering mainstream classrooms. This flood of students with special needs was initially promoted under the guise of integration, and then latterly, in relation to institutional, inclusion imperatives. Within this thesis the term institution represents educational institutions such as schools, colleges, School of the air, alternate schools etc. However, the iconic DISS research report, developed between 2003 and 2008 in the UK found that, "Those pupils receiving the most support from TAs made less progress than similar pupils who received little or no support from TAs" (Sharples, Blatchford & Webster, 2016, p. 6).

To understand the challenging nature of the connection between TA use and inclusivity there are other issues that need to be examined. These issues were highlighted as the implications emerging out of the literature review including the need for identifying exemplars of practice, the importance of understanding inclusion in context, the need to view

inclusion as a journey as well as equity imperatives, professional development deficits, the importance of a voice for TAs and an appreciation of the essential nature of developing in schools a culture that was conducive to inclusion. All of these implications centre on the decisions that are made institutionally about TA engagement and deployment within the existing school systems. The importance of this study has been its ability to explore these implications through the eyes of the TAs themselves. To give these auxiliary workers a voice in reviewing a process, that they are so intimately involved with, was axiomatic and fundamental to any substantial, permanent change. This research examines these issues through the following research questions:

Research Question One: What are the perceptions of Teacher Aides and Supervising Teachers regarding the role of Teacher Aides working in an inclusive classroom?

Research Question Two: To what extent are Teacher Aides and their Supervisors both satisfied that the Teacher Aides are equipped to carry out these perceived roles?

Research Question Three: How can Teacher Aides be assisted in overcoming challenges in understanding, skills, knowledge, and practice in order to promote inclusive cultures?

3.3 Conceptual framework

The Conceptual Framework for this study clarifies the difference in the perceived attributes of TAs working in a non-inclusive classroom environment in comparison with those working within an inclusive culture. Drawing upon the work of Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco and Pelsue (2008); Carter, Stephenson and Webster (2018) and Rutherford (2012) it illustrated how the main attributes demonstrated in the former compare and contrast with the latter. Rutherford (2012) said that TAs working in a non-inclusive environment are mostly required to demonstrate, monitoring, and controlling attributes, such as achieving compliance and reinforcement. Those working in the inclusive environment are more likely to be helping and empowering students and engaging in activities such as student interaction and interpreting (Rutherford, 2012).

To contrast the conditions under which these two cohorts generally work, this framework outlines a continuum moving from exclusion to inclusion. Although the goal was to develop classroom practices further along the inclusion side of the continuum the reality was that due to systemic inertia, many TAs have most likely, found themselves located, at the beginning of their journey or somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. This research explored the TA journey to support effective inclusion by identifying the many challenges

existing within the TA role and making recommendations about how these barriers could ultimately be overcome.

As this study proposes to highlight issues surrounding the effective use of TAs in collaboratively developing an inclusive classroom culture, Figure 1 has been provided to illustrate the continuum that highlights the steps that lie between exclusion and inclusion. There are several parameters for this conceptual framework. Firstly, inclusion was viewed as the ultimate goal of a process that extends from total exclusion through the steps of assimilation and integration. These steps towards inclusion were defined in Chapter Two as a) exclusion- where those that are different are left out; b) assimilation-where the incomers were expected to blend with the established group and c) integration-where students were required to change to become part of the group.

Within the continuum illustrated by Figure 1, under the column titled assimilation, it can be seen that TAs are operating within a very limited scope of practice using largely unprofessional methods. “Regrettably, the majority of participants were positioned in the assimilationist and excluded parts of the continuum and were stuck somewhere in between or outside the boundaries demarcating regular from ‘special’ education” (Rutherford, 2012, p. 770). In the assimilation space the TA’s role was one of being a temporary, superficial fix and their status was such that they were regarded as being generally unqualified and mostly operating with minimal support.

A journey along the continuum to the heading of inclusion demonstrates that the TAs’ scope had expanded to include all students by their helping the teacher to scaffold the learning for the student. In the inclusion space, TAs will be supporting the teacher by acting as their interpreter, translator, and exemplary role model. The status of the TA would now be that of a highly trained, valued, and respected paraprofessional. At each step along the continuum the TAs become less concerned with minding and controlling and more concentrated on helping and empowering. This study focuses on the right-hand side of the continuum where the effective use of TAs in achieving a collaborative, inclusive culture is illustrated. This conceptual framework is designed to illustrate how the TAs’ identified roles can be better utilised in assisting all students to progress from the integration stage towards a fully inclusive, learning environment.

The optimum use of TAs happens when these paraprofessionals work in collaborative partnership with teachers in inclusive contexts in which all students were included (Rutherford, 2012). Conceptually, this research study was based upon the strong belief that the prevailing deficit based policy involving TAs, where some students are excluded and

many students are restricted, was no longer viable and needed to be replaced by a more inclusive education policy, "that has as its foundation a genuine, unqualified commitment to socially just education for all students, and that is respectful of, and responsive to, the diversity of human difference and identity (everyone 'in')" (Rutherford, 2012, p. 770).

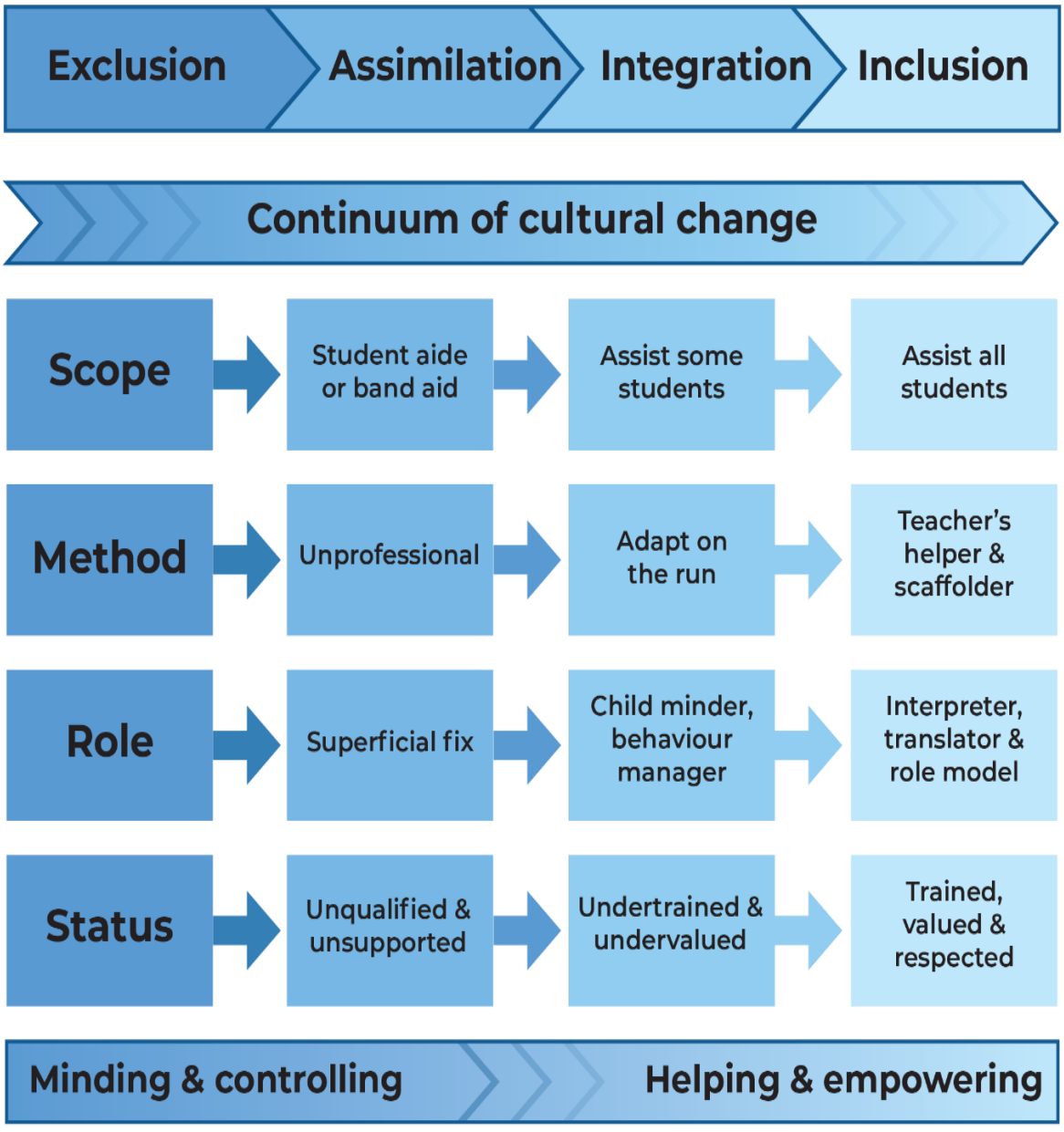

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (Adapted from Rutherford (2012)

3.4 Research paradigm

To connect the purpose of this study with the research approach taken, the ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs that underpin this research methodology paradigm are succinctly illustrated in Figure 2. This figure illustrates how the

descriptive, sequential**,** mixed methodology chosen for this research aligns with the relativist ontology, interpretivist epistemology and pragmatic paradigm to underpin the research approach. Relativist ontology according to Leavers (2013), "is the belief that nothing exists outside of our thoughts (p. 3) and that "there are as many different realities as there are people" (p. 2). This logically leads to a belief that one needs to engage with others to determine what was true and that because of this, knowledge was a social construction. Figure 2 demonstrates how relativist ontological beliefs are consistent with an approach that sets out to engage with as many participants as possible and to value each individual perspective and version of reality.

This study's epistemological approach has been based on a belief that answers are covered by engaging with the participants and not observing from a distance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It was also important to stress that to believe that truth evolves, it was necessary to adopt an interpretivist approach that accepts multiple meanings and ways of knowing, and acknowledges that, "objective reality can never be captured" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). This study was predicated on the view that truth can most successfully evolve out of engagement with participants, if the most appropriate research tools available are utilised. This research employed a descriptive, sequential, mixed method design that includes a mostly quantitative questionnaires and sequentially semi-structured qualitative interviews within a pragmatic research paradigm. While this study has adopted an interpretivist approach, the need to describe just what TAs do in creating an inclusive culture means that it was also a descriptive, sequential, mixed method study.

Creswell and Garrett (2008) proposed that, "Pragmatism, as discussed by the mixed methods writers means that the focus of research is on the research question and different methods can be employed to answer this question" (p. 327). In pragmatic studies, a researcher believes that the research should be used to "solve problems and improve human and ecological conditions" (Durham, 2012, p. 2). This approach was appropriate for this study, in that it involved conducting research whose results can be translated into practical ends and "this often involves policy recommendations or other real-world solutions" (Durham, 2012, p. 2). Figure 2 demonstrates the link between the chosen methodology and the three research questions.

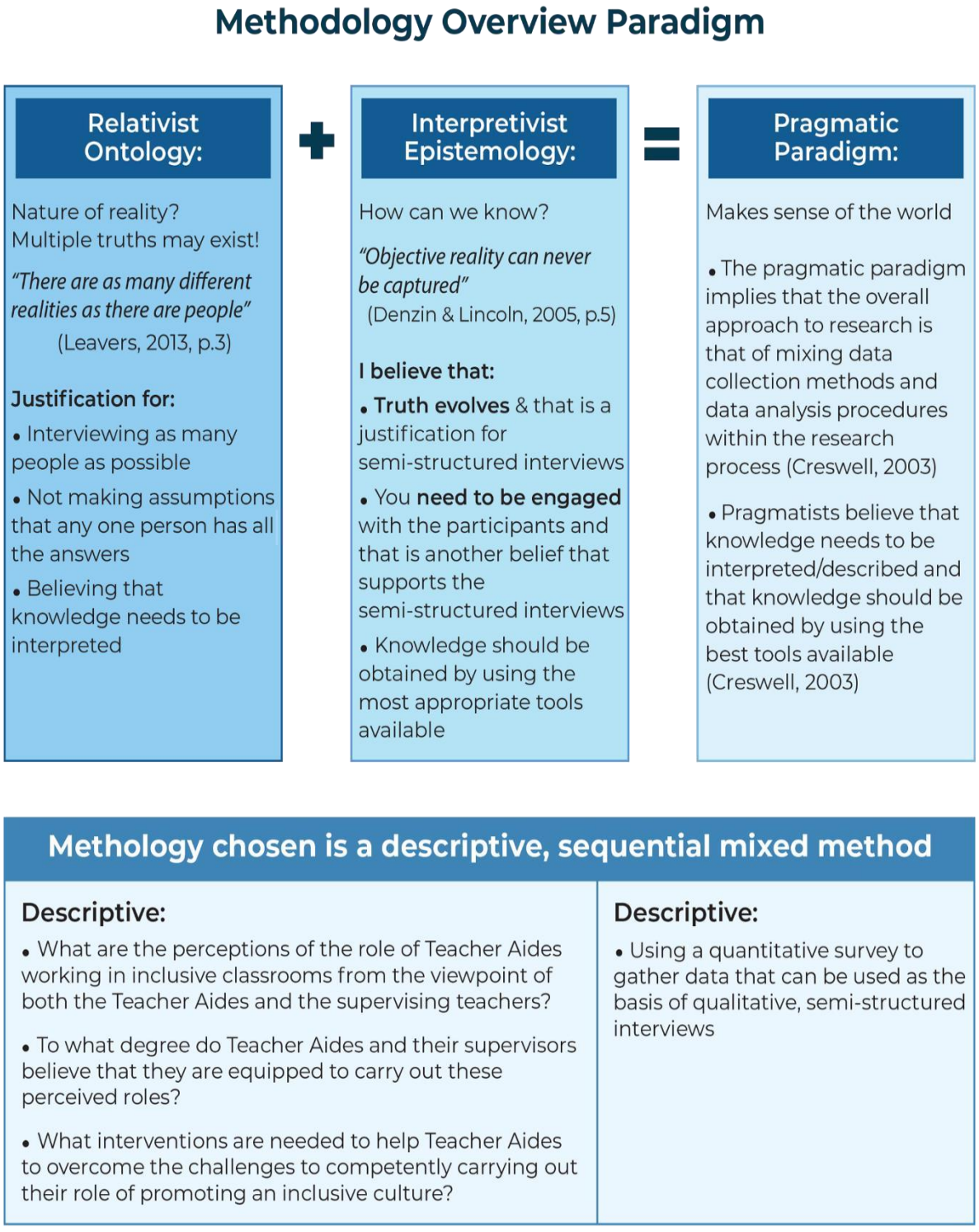

Figure 1: Methodology Overview Paradigm.

3.5 Research design

The reason a mixed method approach was adopted for this study was that it was seen to allow for a more detailed exploration in the qualitative interview of the data collected from the quantitative questionnaires (Creswell, 2008). This study was therefore designed with the intention that the qualitative semi-structured interviews could be used to answer a range of 'why' or 'how' questions generated from the mostly quantitative questionnaires. The interviews also provided an opportunity to interpret the narrow questionnaire responses within a broader context. The advantage of this approach was supported by Tariq and Woodman (2013), who said that such an approach could be used "to facilitate increased breadth and range of study findings; both illuminated different aspects of the same complex issue" (p. 2) The data obtained from both methods used in sequence also provided an opportunity for triangulation to occur where both methods helped in the collaboration of the findings.

The two data gathering methods used in the study were initially analysed separately and were then compared, contrasted, and combined by making use of a comparison device. This device that is expanded upon in Chapter Six helped to demonstrate how the implication drawn from the study's literature review were seen to mostly paralleled the themes identified in the interviews and the challenges for TAs that emerged as an outcome of the questionnaires. The results were then combined in order to come up with a set of responses to the study's three research questions and to make a series of recommendations needed to make a meaningful contribution to this field of research.

This research used this mixed methods approach to collect data from a range of key stakeholders. According to Creswell (2008), "A mixed method research design is a procedure for collecting, analysing, and "mixing" both quantitative and qualitative research and methods in a single study to understand a research problem" (p. 552). The initial plan was to gather quantitative data from a representative range of approximately 200 primary and secondary TAs, and their supervising teachers working within both the public and private school systems in urban and rural areas within the Darling Downs and Southwest Queensland educational region.

A tentative list of 20 schools comprising 15 state primary and five state secondary schools was drawn up, based chiefly on these school's previous working relationship with the Principal Researcher (PR). This plan included obtaining Queensland Education Department approval to approach the principals of these schools in to solicit their collaboration.

This plan needed to be revised due to COVID-19 restrictions and a randomised snowball selection process was used instead. When using this technique, a potential participant is approached and once convinced about the importance of completing the questionnaire, was sub-sequentially enrolled as an advocate that in turn approached others to participate.

The PR did not rely entirely, in the final circumstances, on the snowball technique to secure participants but also approached several professional education organizations by mail, email and phone to elicit their support. Disappointingly, several professional organizations, that could stand to benefit from the findings of this study, did not choose to acknowledge or respond. A notable exception was the energetic and forward-looking Australian Teacher Aide Association (ATA) that advertised the questionnaire in their monthly newsletter and extended an invitation to the PR to participate in a webinar on this topic, at a time yet to be determined. Their support ensured that responses were received from parts of Australia that were otherwise outside the immediate radius of the snowball technique.

This study was conducted with a UniSQ ethical clearance (H20REA029(v1), and a stringent confidentiality protocol was maintained. Equity issues required special attention considering the relative low status of TAs within the hierarchy of many schools. To minimise this issue, pilot activities with an experienced teacher and an equally experienced TA, on a one-on-one basis was undertaken to explore any potential equity issues before the full data collection commenced. The only issues that arose were minor ones, involving a need to clarify some of the language used in the questionnaires. Advice from the UniSQ's Statistical Consultation Group was sought to ensure that the necessary protocols were followed. These protocols were adhered to and there was no identified breach of confidentially recorded during the study.

3.6 Alignment between philosophical assumptions and methodology

In choosing the methodology for this research project it was important to obtain as much alignment between the ontological and epistemological beliefs and the chosen research methods as possible. Subscribing to the relativist ontological belief that "There are as many different realities as there are people" (Leavers, 2013, p.3) questionnaires became the obvious tool of choice, as they are relatively easy to distribute to a large number of people. The distribution logistics were the chief limitations on the distribution of these tools along with an appreciation about time constraints imposed by the need to transcribe and analyse the responses. The interpretivist epistemology supported by the belief that "objective reality can never be captured" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5) meant that truth needed to be allowed to

emerge. Making use of semi-structured interviews as a sequence to the questionnaires was important as that allowed the participants to exert some power in the transaction that was not necessarily afforded in completing a mostly structured questionnaire.

Believing from a pragmatic perspective, that knowledge needs to be interpreted and described using the best tools available, made choosing a mixed method approach appropriate as using "qualitative and quantitative methods in combination provided a better understanding of the research problem" (Creswell, 2008, p. 552). Obtaining advice from the University's Statistical Consulting Unit about the wisdom of accessing previously used and validated questionnaire was beneficial. It meant that considerable time was saved in the preparation and the task was able to be completed with confidence in the transferability of the resultant product. It also meant that being able to compare the data from two similar instruments used at different times with different cohorts could be used for purposes of confidence and dependability. The analysed data provided strong support to the reliability and credibility of the questionnaire as there was a high degree of alignment between the outcomes of both the new and previously used (Carter et al, 2018) questionnaires.

Following transcription and preliminary analysis, summaries of the interviews were returned to the participants for comment. In order to promote reliability, the data analysed from both the quantitative and qualitative data sets were used for triangulation purposes. The two data sets were not analysed concurrently but the data from the questionnaires were used as a template for the subsequent semi-structured interviews and the results from both tools were combined in order to arrive at the sets of findings and ultimate recommendations. The literature research was used to identify implications for the study while the interviews enabled the creation of a range of parallel themes. These themes combined with the data from the questionnaires provided sufficient data upon which to determine findings and to make recommendations for change.

3.7 Quantitative methods

The research method using questionnaires offered several advantages over other quantitative data collection methods. According to Creswell (2008), the advantages of questionnaires are that "you can administer them in a short time, they are economical as a means of data collection, and they can reach a geographically dispersed population" (p. 414). Creswell (2008) also stated that they have the further advantage of providing anonymity and help to avoid biasing responses. Questionnaires also have an in-built advantage as they can assist in minimising selection bias (Daniel, 2012).

The first questionnaire was designed to collect data from TAs. A similar questionnaire was also used to collect data from teachers and administrators supervising TAs. Although the majority of participants were, or had previously been, supervising TAs, Principals and other administrators also participated. The questionnaire was adapted from a previously validated instrument created by Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco and Pelsue in 2009 and subsequently adapted by Carter, Stephenson and Webster in 2018. Changes and additions were made to the original items to reflect local terminology and the ever-changing operation of schools. An option was built into the second section of the questionnaire that allowed the TAs, completing it, to self-nominate to participate in the qualitative interview aspect of the study.

The survey used by Carter et al. in 2018 involved questioning 361 TAs in New South Wales public schools and one that expressly targeted, "teaching assistants who were currently supporting students with disabilities" (Carter et al., 2018, p. 2). The reasons for using these questionnaires as a model, were that this was a choice recommended by the UniSQ's Statistical Consulting Unit. This recommendation was made on the basis that as well as having existing validation, the questionnaires were reasonably current, quite comprehensive and provided a data set of responses upon which future comparisons could be made. The deficit related to using these existing questionnaires lay in the reality that they were designed for a cohort of support workers, whose roles and responsibilities related to working with students identified as having special needs.

This was rated as a minor issue as the targeted TAs were not working with students enrolled in special schools. As a result, these New South Wales TAs' employment conditions were similar to the work carried out by the general TAs, who were the primary focus of this study. Despite this, the conditions of engagement for both groups were not identical. This meant that adjustment to the wording of the questionnaires was required. An example of this can be seen in the various ways that the roles of TAs, in relation to carrying out playground duty, are mandated, with some school systems encouraging the use of TAs for this purpose and others that prohibiting this practice. It was also necessary to adjust the existing instrument to accommodate data collection from supervising teachers and a different sample size.

Decisions about the structure and the subsequent distribution of these questionnaires was initially based on the assumption that the questionnaires would be presented to meetings of TAs and their supervising teachers, face-to-face and within state schools only. This belief influenced the structure of the questionnaires, in that the directions and the in-depth rationale for such a survey were intended to be delivered to the participants by the PR face to face. As

a result, the written directions were kept succinct and therefore possibly failed to provide to the participants, who were all required to complete their questionnaires remotely, with as much guidance as was desirable. Only when a larger number of incomplete questionnaires than anticipated were returned, was this pandemic induced impact realised. The Queensland Education Department's understandable prohibition on outside school research projects being conducted on site, meant that the opportunity to provide detailed verbal directions was lost.

Following experienced, professional advice from the University's Statistical Consulting Unit, the Questionnaire tools, developed by Carter et al. (2018) were modified and developed as a set of four distinct questionnaires. Two of these questionnaires were intended to be completed by TAs and the other two by their supervising teachers. The first of these questionnaires, in the case of TAs, was labelled Personal Inventory and asked questions targeted at eliciting demographic data as well as qualitative information regarding the challenges faced in the workplace by TAs and possible ways of overcoming these challenges. In the case of the supervising teachers, the personal inventory questionnaire was more limited in scope and was restricted to gathering descriptive, demographic details about the teachers. Considerable care was taken, under the University's Statistical Consulting Unit's advisement, in the composition of these amended questionnaires.

As already intimated, Education Queensland made the decision, in early 2020, that outside agencies would not be granted approval to conduct research within their premises during the pandemic. The departmental officer who contacted the PR, outlined this decision and its rationale, and suggested, that under the prevailing circumstances, an approach to TAs and teachers using the 'Snowball Technique' might be considered as an appropriate alternative. This, it was agreed, would be an acceptable approach as, according to Etikan, Alkassim and Abubakar (2016), the popular non-probability snowball sampling, "is particularly suitable when the population of interest is hard to reach and compiling a list of the population poses difficulties for the researcher" (p. 1).

One of the potential dangers with snowball sampling, according to Etikan et al. (2016), "is that respondents often suggest others who share similar characteristics, or the same outlook" (p. 1). Therefore, the PR's intention was to attempt to recruit an initial set of respondents that were as varied as possible, to avoid skewing the sample. An advantage that emerged from this approach, was an expansion of the research scope. While no longer having tight control over the administration of the questionnaire, within a known environment, the

scope was broadened to include participants from beyond the regional and Australian state school borders.

Responses were now possible from schools within the private sector, from interstate and even from those who were working within special schools. While no effort was made to track the origin of each response, it became clear representatives of all those discrete groups did in fact contribute. Unfortunately, there were also some downsides to the amended distribution model. Along with the challenging optionality about ensuring that as wide a scope of representative responses was received, there was similarly a limited capacity to clarify any unclear questionnaire instructions. Ultimately a volunteer TA and an experienced supervising teacher assisted in making suggestions about how the wording and instructions could be improved.

This latter issue meant that a disappointing number of participants completed only the profile section of the questionnaire (Part A) and failed to complete the targeted questions in Part B. There was possibly a belief among participants that doing just part of the questionnaire was enough but the failure to complete seemed more likely to be caused by the brevity of the written instruction. If the opportunity to sit with the groups completing the questionnaire, had been possible, it seemed likely, in hindsight, that the disappointingly large group of partially completed questionnaires received could have been avoided,

This impediment was somewhat ameliorated by the reality that the first part of the questionnaire was not intended to be used for a deep analysis but instead, rather as an opportunity to create a descriptive analysis of participating TAs and their supervising teachers. The actual questionnaire or, Part B, was however, completed by enough participants, (n = 20 for TAs; n= 36 supervising teachers), to provide confidence, that representative numbers of TA duties were identified and that valid comparisons could therefore be made between the responses provided by the TAs, their supervising teachers and those questioned originally by Carter et al. (2018).

As a number of the TA participants did not proceed through to the end of the questionnaire, they were not able to take up the option of volunteering to participate in a follow up semi-structured interview. Those that agreed to an interview were asked to submit their name and contact details to the PR. It was further indicated, that in this case, the PR would contact them back to make further arrangements regarding an interview. This was done and it subsequently emerged that the majority of participants would express a preference for a telephone interview. Because it had been predetermined, that approximately

20 interview participants would be desirable, it was a convenient and reassuring occurrence that sufficient TAs put their names forward for participation.

This judgement, on the desirable number required for the follow-up interview, was based upon the weight of research data related to the rationale behind appropriate sample sizes. There appeared to be no definitive answer on just how many interviews can assure data saturation, but according to research carried out by Francis et al. (2010), their findings, "permits some confidence that setting the minimum sample size at 13 is very likely to capture almost all the beliefs relating to Attitude, Subjective Norm and Perceived Behavioural Control" (p. 20). While supervising teachers were not invited to participate in the post questionnaire interview, a request was made by one teacher to be interviewed and while this occurred out of courtesy, it was not included in the final data analysis.

The snowballing technique of questionnaire participant recruitment, as initially suggested by an Education Queensland representative, was chosen as the means of participant recruitment. In an era where the prevalence of the Covid-19 virus had made gaining access to potential participants through the traditional portals of schools themselves, quite problematic, this was regarded as an appropriate solution. Snowballing had other advantages as well in that it had the potential benefit of acting as an actual snowball, and would rapidly grow through its own momentum, thus acquiring the number of participants required for this project. This also addressed one of the topics that emerged from the literature review viz. providing ways of authentically increasing the involvement of TAs in the research process. It also took advantage of social networking platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997).

This method of snowballing was not without its critics, as it had been seen to contravene the established conventions of random selection and appropriate levels of representativeness. However, the snowball sampling technique had become a sophisticated method of sampling that was now regarded as an acceptable part of a researcher's toolkit (Shaw, Bloor, Cormack & Williamson, 1996). This argument was supported by Benfield and Szlemko (2006), who stated that "snowball sampling not only facilitates the access to "hard to reach" population, but also can expand sample size and the scope of the study and reduce costs and time" (p. 62). The challenging restrictions that existed in the new reality of the Covid 19 pandemic meant that this technique offered the only viable access to the required population of TAs and their supervisors. The questionnaires were designed to be anonymous and consisted of demographic questions as well as open-ended questions on the

responsibilities, roles, and expertise of TAs, as seen by the TAs themselves and their supervising teachers.

In regard to the TAs 62 useable personal inventories were received and of these 20 also completed the questionnaire. For the supervising teachers 59 useable personal inventories were returned and 36 questionnaires completed. Qualitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics that were used to calculate the mean score for each question. Those responses with the highest mean ratings results were used as the basis of many of the semi-structured interview questions. Thereafter an Excel t-test was used to check the validity of the questionnaire, especially in respect to the responses from the teaching and ancillary staff. The following steps were then implemented.

Step one: An identification of the overall response rates and any response bias was made. According to Creswell (2008), response bias occurs 'in questionnaire research when the responses do not accurately reflect the views of the sample and the population (p. 403). This was recognised in the creation of the questionnaire and was a reason why the questionnaires used were based upon ones that had been previously used and validated. According to Daniel (2012), "Careful instrument design and pretesting may minimize this type of bias," (p. 49). After careful reading of all responses, it was determined that as far as it could be ascertained no apparent bias was obvious.

Step two: The data were:

- Descriptively analysed to identify general trends by calculating and presenting a table of descriptive statistics for each question on the instrument. For the personal inventories, results were expressed in simple percentage terms e.g., 64.4% of participating teachers worked within the primary sector. For the questionnaires the results were displayed in a table numerically and then converted to a percentage e.g., 16 TAs or (80%) assisted students to stay on tasks more than once a day. It was also displayed that 80% of those TAs carried out their duties either very competently or highly competently
- Analysed to develop a demographic profile of the sample, and
- Analysed to provide answers to the research questions in the study

Step three: A report was prepared presenting the descriptive results of the study (See Chapter 4).

3.8 Qualitative methods

Questions were developed for the semi-structured interview based upon a template included as Appendix I. The questions were designed to elicit the motivation behind the participants' involvement as well as an understanding of their interests, knowledge, and experience regarding inclusion etc. Appendix I also sets out in some detail the rationale behind the proposed questions. The structure was intended to be flexible so that topics and issues emerging from the interviews in progress could be easily assimilated into the process. As it happened on most occasions participants responded well to this flexibility and spoke of their insights and personal issues.

The participants in these qualitative, semi-structured interviews were TAs that had self-selected by checking a box included in the online questionnaire. One exception was Amy (pseudonym), who had been approached to serve as a volunteer for a pilot interview that was completed while the interview format was still a work in progress. Using the TA in the pilot was seen initially as a way to test out the questions intended to be used, and as a means of guiding the participants through the steps of the interview. It proved to be a wise decision, as it also provided a guide to the amount of time needed to complete a meaningful interview and helped to clarify the choice of questions made in constructing a scaffold for the final interview structure.

Interview times varied between 40 and 70 minutes. Some of the interviewees felt very strongly about the issues under discussion and so were given the opportunity to elaborate on their feelings at length. The latter interviews gradually became longer events as some important issues had emerged out of earlier interviews that proved to be worth discussing and therefore required an extension of time. The interview outline was regularly amended, as lessons were learnt in each subsequent interview. The importance of ice-breaker questions soon became evident, as most participants took some time to relax into the interview. It was obvious, on most occasions that the interviewees had arrived at this point of relaxation, when they started to ask for questions to be clarified or elaborated upon. Once this happened, the participants were generally able to move away from a position where they were responding in a fashion that was intended to please. Instead, they moved to a position where they appeared to be supplying responses that were well thought through and were more reflective of their true opinions and feelings.

Apart from the direct approach to Amy, to act as an interviewee trialist, all other participants were volunteers. There were no inducements offered to participants and every

TA that responded via the questionnaire was contacted back and included in the interview schedule. This resulted in 18 TAs participating in the interviews. Despite the fact that "Existing guidance on conducting these interviews does not specify the number of interviews necessary" (Francis et al., 2010, p. 1233), 18 interviews were considered to be an adequate number for this form of research as it allowed the PR to delve deeper into the participant's responses. To avoid any technical hitches and ensure confidentiality the interviews were recorded using two hard wired tape recorders. It was initially intended to use the NVivo transcription technology to analyse the interviews but ultimately a decision was made for the transcription to be carried out solely by the PR.

This decision was made after the pilot interview demonstrated that the process of playing back the recordings, and then replaying the recordings to secure an accurate copy proved to be very beneficial for several reasons. The benefits lay in the ability of the PR to really get to hear what the interviewees were saying, and in also being able to obtain a better idea about the intention behind many of the comments made. This repetitive process also provided the time needed to absorb and process the codes and ultimate themes that were created. It also meant that it was not possible to be affected by any outside factors as may have occurred if a third-party was engaged in the transcription process. This was also considered to be an acceptably secure way of ensuring participant confidentiality. The interviews were recorded, and the contents converted to a written script and were then stored confidentially in line with the UniSQ ethical requirement.

The interviews were scheduled at a time that best suited the participants, and as they were all mostly otherwise engaged during the day, the phone calls were conducted, for the most part, in the early evening period. Making use of a learning that came out of the pilot interview, the initial questions in the interview were adapted to try and create a relaxed atmosphere and to permit the interviewer to gently lead the participants to a discussion on their understanding of inclusion. The use of a diagram adapted from a Rutherford (2012) article proved to be very beneficial in stimulating discussion. Rutherford (2012) argued that inclusion should be seen as a journey rather than a destination. When this happened, it was reassuring to educators that it was considered appropriate to be at any particular point along the continuum and what they mostly needed to concentrate on was determining how they could best move forward. A diagram was constructed around this concept where various way points along the continuum were labelled, and this diagram was emailed to each participant prior to the scheduled interview (See Figure 3).

As each participant had this diagram ahead of time, it gave them the opportunity to reflect on its meaning. Once the interview was underway, and it seemed that the interviewee understood the process of question, answer and discussion, their attention was directed to the diagram. After a brief explanation and discussion, they were asked to plot first, where they saw themselves on the continuum, and then where they saw their classroom or school operating. This was an excellent device, as it allowed the participants to visualise where they would be operating and to facilitate their discussion on the concept of an inclusion continuum. Those who worked in a single classroom were encouraged to answer this question on the basis of the class orientation while those who worked across classes were instructed to adopt a whole of school focus.

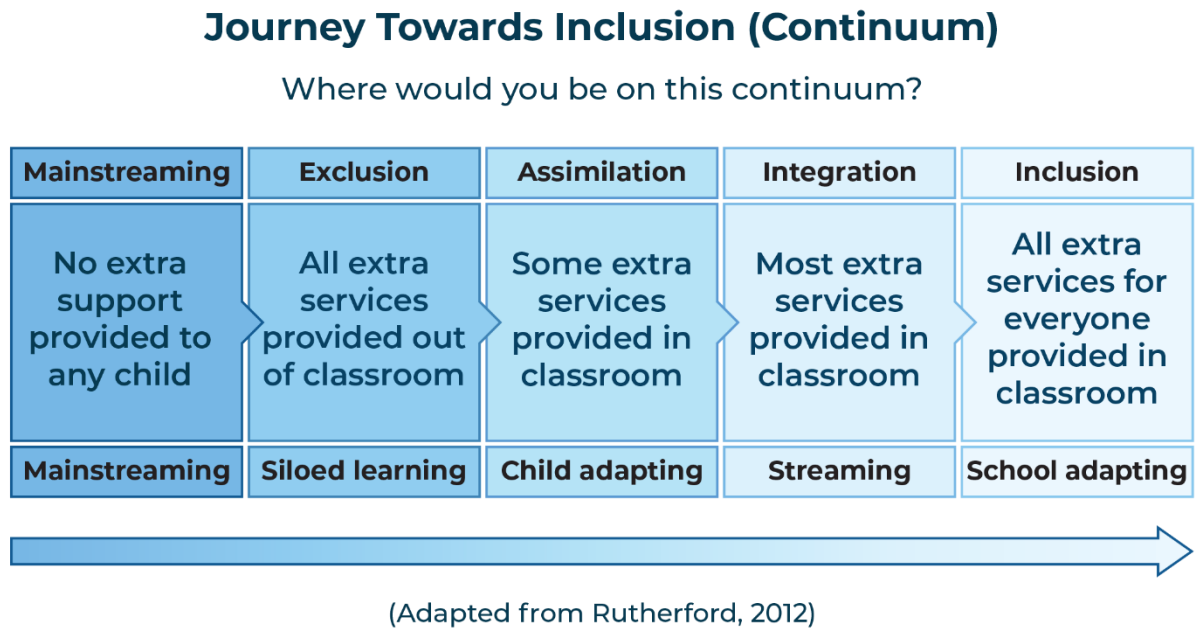

Figure 2: Journey Towards Inclusion Continuum

Once an interview and recording were completed, the scripts were read and reread in order to make the material familiar (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Transcription was completed by the PR typing the script out for secure storage on the designated computer. In this way it facilitated the PR task of becoming familiar with the emerging data. Glasser and Strauss (1967) refer to this as a constant comparison process and involves a coding of the data. Using a constant comparison process, according to Glasser and Strauss (1967) was seen as important as it gives the analysist an opportunity to scan the data harvest for similarities and differences.

The codes were initially colour coded and new codes were highlighted within the transcriptions as they were identified. This is referred to by Creswell (2008) as 'lean coding' and the process involved labelling the codes with headings such as 'attitude to inclusion' and

'TA Voice'. This process is recommended by Creswell (2008) as it helps reduce "a smaller number of codes to broad themes rather than work with an unwieldy set of codes" (p.252). This process of constant comparison permitted the PR to scan the data collected and, in this way to allow for the various themes embedded there to emerge.

Once the data had been coded the process of seeking out the relationships that existed between data sets was ongoing. Memos were written that kept track of these connections and the search for identifiable themes began. Coding was achieved through a thorough examination of the written copies of recorded responses and the use of a colour coding technique. The 43 codes that were identified and their meanings are attached in Appendix A.

As the interviews were designed in a way that allowed the participants to provide their responses in their own words, the relevant themes were able to be progressively created. In order to improve the validity and reliability of the process the interviewees were invited to participate in a follow-up member checking interview. According to Creswell (2008), "Member checking is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (p. 267). This was a useful process that involved concise sharing of the information gathered from the initial interview. "The follow-up interviews provide the researcher with a process to question and confirm understandings and provide opportunities for participants to discuss the data and to clarify any misunderstandings that may have otherwise contributed to the researcher's observation biases" (Peel, 2020, p. 7). This proved to be a beneficial process in that 12 of the initial participants chose to engage and this served as an excellent process in clarifying areas of potential misconception.

3.9 Exploring the gaps

Researchers investigating how TAs are required to support inclusive education agree that this has become an important, emerging issue. Egilson and Traustadottir (2009), argued, "Despite legal and international agreements and declarations about equal rights of all pupils, access to curriculum and adaptations of the teaching environment to include children with special needs varies immensely, reflecting a gap between intention and implementation" (p. 21). While there was general agreement, that a critical issue exists, where the neediest students were sometimes being taught by the least qualified educators, the solution was often seen to lie in ensuring that TAs were required to work in accordance with their established role description.

Just advising school systems to review their current practices cannot be considered a viable solution either. In the first place it was not something easily enforceable. Second, it

was unlikely to help overcome the perceived issue of supporting students with specific needs, when it was accepted that inclusion applies to all students and was not restricted to just those with a disability. Given that it was most likely, that schools will continue to use TAs in their current non-specific roles, there was a need to understand the situation and provide recommendations to improve it. “Catering for the diversity of all learners has become crucial in preparing students for participation in a global society” (Carter & Abawi, 2018, p.49).

The literature review, in this study, highlighted a variety of implications relating to TAs and their support of inclusive education policies and procedures that needed to be considered as part of research projects. While a major focus has been to establish that inclusion was about all children and not just those with special needs, it was also important to determine as to what extent the cohorts of students with special needs in inclusive mainstream classrooms, are having their education requirements met. These questions will be addressed as part of the research in this current study as they focus on how TAs are being trained, rewarded, and supported.

Finally, there was also the question about the real impact of inclusive education. To what extent are the students that are not receiving the same level of support as others in their class due to differences actually experiencing inclusion.? It could be argued that inclusion was not about adding children into an existing structure but starting afresh with a structure bespoke to all of their needs. Continuing to use TAs in ways that may be counterproductive cannot be considered as a viable option any longer. Alternative options need to be considered where TAs actually facilitate inclusion rather than becoming a barrier to it. This idea was supported in an article by Pellicano, Bölte and Stahmer (2018), who stated, “Instead, inclusion demands that we change the existing educational environment in order to respond to the diverse needs of all learners” (p. 387).

3.10 Data collection issues and complications

The data gathering phase of this research project took place during the difficult, destabilising global Covid-19 pandemic. The major impact on this study was the closure of schools and the pressure on teachers and TAs struggling with their role in supporting home schooling. Education Queensland made it clear that it was not supportive of data gathering within schools during that period and even when this initial pressure period was over, that it expected any data gathering to be completed using online technologies (R. Libke, personal communication, June 29, 2020). For this reason, the data gathering process was delayed several months and commenced in August 2020, when social media was used to start the

snowball technique of attracting participants. This was supplemented by the recruitment of TAs and supervising teachers who had already informally indicated their willingness to be involved by word of mouth.

The recruitment, contact, distribution and return of the questionnaires took two months and the last of the distributed questionnaires were received in early October 2020. Two months was allocated to the initial analysis and processing of these questionnaires so that it was December of that year before any of the semi-structured interviews took place. While some interviews were conducted in December 2020 and January 2021, the majority of interviews were held in February and March of 2021. The process of analysing and coding the transcribed data harvest took some significant time and was finalised by November 2021. Once the profiles of each participant were compiled, a copy was sent to each TA with a request that they review and respond if they believed that something needed alteration.

3.11 Proposed contribution to the field of research

The European Journal of Special Needs Education in 2021 published a special issue on the topic of TAs. Two of the journal articles published in this special issue were worthy of note in that they advocated for insightful contributions in both the areas of inclusion and the deployment of TAs. Giangreco (2021), in discussing the tendency for humans to overuse familiar tools to the exclusion of other more effective tools (Maslow's Hammer), argues that "In schools where TAs are treated as Maslow's Hammer, they are a primary, sometimes nearly exclusive, tool to educationally and socially include students with certain disabilities" (p. 281). In a supportive article in the same issue Webster and De Boer (2021) argue that where authors "have not given sufficient consideration to the Maslow's Hammer effect, they should be directed to address their revision" (p. 297). While these are important considerations the focus of these articles both fundamentally relate to the support by TAs of students with disabilities. This current study is intended to focus not on using TAs to foster inclusion for some but for all students.

Given that almost all available research on the use of TAs appears to see inclusion through the lens of supporting students with disabilities, this study has the potential to refocus the discussion on what an inclusive classroom culture should really look like. The overall goal of this research was to build on previous research and to use the findings to promote changes to policies and practices in relation to the effective use of TAs in achieving truly inclusive learning and teaching practices, in the first instance at a school level, and then eventually at an organizational level. This was to be viewed from the dual standpoint that

inclusion was a journey rather than a destination, and that inclusion was not about somehow juggling the classroom to fit more and different children in. Rather it is about reimagining a space where a culture of inclusive practices facilitated by TAs with a voice were able to flourish. The research findings and subsequent recommendations regarding the steps needed to remove the barriers to using TAs effectively have the potential to establish a model of effective paraprofessional use for the future.

3.12 Chapter summary

This Chapter has presented the methodology and the conceptual framework for this study. To support this, information has been presented on the research paradigm and the issues that had been identified in the previous research explored in Chapter Two. The chosen quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments were outlined and the proposed contribution to the field of research discussed. Chapter Four covers the collection and analysis of the data collected from the mostly quantitative questionnaires and Chapter Five was devoted to the analysis of qualitative data that emerged out of the semi-structured interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE QUANTATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the analysis of the data from the questionnaires, completed by both TAs and their supervising teachers. This data is displayed both in a table format and as a summary prelude, to further in-depth discussion regarding the research findings in Chapter Six. The questionnaires utilised, were comprised of four separate elements. Questionnaires, in Part A, were designed for the purpose of compiling descriptive analysis profiles of TAs and their supervisors and titled as Personal Inventories. Questionnaires in Part B were designed to identify the duties and competence of TAs, as judged by the TAs and their supervising teachers, chiefly in order to answer the first two research questions. These questions were, what are the perceptions of TAs and supervising teachers regarding the role of TAs working in an inclusive classroom? (RQ 1) and to what extent were TAs and their supervisors both satisfied that the TAs were equipped to carry out these perceived roles? (RQ 2).

The discussion in this chapter is conducted in two parts. Part A analyses the questionnaire dealing with the TAs' personal inventory (Section 4.2). This is followed by an analysis the supervising teachers' personal inventory (Section 4.3). The Part B analysis section of the questionnaires is included within Section 4.4. A combined analysis of both the TA's and supervising teachers' responses regarding role descriptions (including a Table 3) is made in Section 4.4.1. In Section 4.4.2 is a combined analysis of questions 1-60 for TA competency (Including Table 4). Sections 4.4.3 through to 4.4.5 describe the analysis of the supplementary questions 61-72 for the TAs and 61-62 for the supervising teachers. Finally, a chapter summary (4.5) was used to foreshadow how these results, combined with those from the qualitative interview data (Chapter Five). These were amalgamated to present a number of findings and ultimate recommendations to be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

4.2 Teacher Aide personal inventory questionnaire (Part A)

The Personal Inventory for the TAs consists of a set of enquiry style questions asking about age, years employed, hours worked, employment status, and access to professional development. The participating TAs were asked, as well, to identify what category of special needs students that they had worked with. They were also asked to provide a written response

regarding their understanding of the term *inclusion.* A set of 15 challenges that TAs might experience in carrying out their assigned role were provided, and the participants were asked to choose three that they regard as the greatest of those challenges. Finally, a set of 12 solutions to the challenges were provided and the TAs were asked to tick any that they consider would be helpful in meeting the challenges presented.

The TA personal inventory was commenced by 107 participants with 62 TAs completing it to an extent that it could be included in the analysis. Advice received from the University Statistical Unit's specialists suggested that it would be a safer proposition to focus on the analysis of completed questionnaires, rather than attempt to make a cohesive story out of those that were selectively incomplete. The intention of the personal inventory was to create a descriptive analysis of the TAs that would be beneficial in understanding the cohort targeted for engagement in the subsequent semi-structured interview. It was anticipated that the challenge of answering the research questions would be greatly reduced for the participating TAs by gathering as much ancillary information about them as possible. This information was amalgamated with the questionnaire data as well as the more in-depth data, sourced from the subsequent semi-structured interviews prior to any complete analysis taking place.

Considering age, gender, level of experience and training, the respondents were a representative sample of TAs working in the primary and secondary divisions of both state and private schools. This was confirmed when the demographic data was analysed, and the subsequent interviews conducted. Forty-two primary school sector TAs responded to the survey, and this was almost double the number (20), drawn from the secondary division. The average years of experience was 11.46 years. Just under half of those participating in the questionnaire (45.16%) were aged 50 or above and only 13% were younger than 30. The majority of the respondents were working as permanent employees (83.87%). These TAs were employed, on average, in excess of 24 full time equivalent hours per week (24.41 hrs).

It could be reasonably extrapolated, from these figures that the questionnaire participants were mostly experienced practitioners. This assumption of having recruited generally experienced workers, as participants in the questionnaire, was further supported by the details gathered from the subsequent interviews. Of the participating TAs 56.4% possessed either a Certificate III or IV in Education Support and a further 22.5% had a bachelor degree. Interview data provided confirmed that eight of the TAs possessed a Certificate IV in Education Support. Of the others, 8% had completed secondary school

education and a further 12.9% had completed a qualification up to diploma level, drawn from other related disciplines such as home economics and nutrition studies.

To inform the follow-up interviews, it was important to examine the context within which these TAs operated. For example, TAs working solely with one teacher, was a different context to TAs that work across multiple classes and, or multiple sections of the school. For this study the majority of TAs (90.3%) were working across multiple classrooms. This was a salient factor when it came to assessing the various practical ways that TAs could be used in supporting inclusive classrooms. Given the confused understanding that emerged out of discussions about inclusion and students with special needs, it was noteworthy that all, except one, of the participants had worked at some time, with students identified as having special needs. For 64.5% of the respondents working with special needs, was a current daily occurrence and for a further 11.29%, this happened, at least weekly. Approximately a quarter of the participating TAs (22.5%) reported that they worked with students with special needs, at least occasionally.

The majority (54.8%) of the TAs worked regularly with both mainstream pupils as well as those categorised as having special needs. A much smaller percentage (25.8%) worked with students identified as having multiple special needs. An even smaller number (4.8%), of participating TAs, identified as working solely within mainstream classrooms and the same number (4.8%) worked chiefly with an individual student. When the specific special needs were examined, it emerged that 51.6%, worked chiefly, but not exclusively, with students with mild intellectual disabilities and 77%, with students identified as being on the autism spectrum (ASD). Other results showed that 56.4% of TAs worked with anxious or depressed students and 35% with those suffering from a physical disability. Only 12.9% said that they worked with children on the gifted and talented end of the continuum. The full breakdown of TA engagement with specific student groups is provided in Appendix B.

The TA personal inventory profile questionnaire was also designed to determine the participating TAs' perceptions about the three greatest challenges they currently faced in carrying out their roles. This was followed by questions examining how these challenges could be best overcome. The greatest challenges for TAs, in the execution of their duties, were the behaviour of students (50%), time constraints (41.9%) and employment uncertainty (30.6%). Another factor that rated highly was a perceived lack of effective communication in the workplace (22.5%) and training issues (17.7%). Pay rate satisfaction came in at an unexpectedly low 19.35% and lack of collaboration between staff at 16.12%. A full list of these statistics is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Challenges Identified by Teacher Aides

	Challenges identified by TAs	Number (n)	%
1	Student behaviour issues	31	50%
2	Time constraints	26	41.9%
3	Employment uncertainty	19	30.64%
4	Lack of communication (staff)	14	22.%5
5	Pay rates	12	19.35%
6	Training	11	17.7%
7	Lack of collaboration (staff)	10	16.12%
8	Knowledge regarding disabilities	9	14.51%
9	Emotional strain	9	14.51%
10	Timetabling	9	14.51%
11	Adequate resources	5	8.06%
12	Role description uncertainty	4	6.45%
13	Status	2	3.22%
14	Work conditions	1	1.61%
15	Physical strain	0	0%
16	Other	0	0%

To discover, how the contributors believed these challenges could be overcome, the questionnaire provided 12 suggestions for consideration. The top recommendation, by a substantial degree, was a need to improve communication in the workplace (46.77%). The associated request for improved collaboration came in fourth, at 32.25%. The inconsistency was that while TAs did not rate communication in the top three challenges that they faced nevertheless, they saw it as the number one way to overcome other challenges.

While it was not rated highly as a workplace challenge about a third (35.48%) of TAs said that improved pay rates were important in assisting them in overcoming workplace barriers. It was feasible that respondents did not regard remuneration issues as most important in relation to all the other challenges that faced them in the workplace. Despite this view they might still see the intrinsic reward of better pay and the resultant improved status as one of the incentives that could help them to deal with the greater issues. An identical percentage (35.48%) of respondents said that overcoming employment uncertainty was important. This was surprising given the fact that most of the respondents were TAs working on a permanent

basis. More frequent and better training was also highly rated at 29.03% and 22.58% respectively**.** The complete list of recommendations about how the identified challenges could be overcome is included in Table 2.

Table 2

Ways to Overcome Challenges Identified by Teacher Aides

Rank	Ways to overcome challenges	Number (N)	%
1	Better communication	29	46.77
2	Increased pay	22	35.48
3	Improved job security	22	35.48
4	Improved collaboration	20	32.25
5	More training	18	29.03
6	More support (From professional staff)	16	25.00
7	More information on disabilities	16	25.00
8	Improved career opportunities	15	24.19
9	Better training	14	22.58
10	Improved status	7	11.29
11	Greater flexibility	7	11.29
12	Improved work conditions	3	4.83

The Personal Inventory also asked participants '*What is your understanding of the term, inclusion?'* The responses were many and varied and are included in Appendix D. An analysis of these responses showed that in attempting to provide an appropriate definition, 19 contributors fell into the semantic trap of attempting to define inclusion by using the term, *inclusion* itself. A further eight defined it in the restricted sense of merely managing the needs of students with disabilities. Another 23 participating TAs showed that they saw inclusion as something that was dealt with merely by creating policies and procedures. No respondents attempted to portray it as something relating to the existence of an overall school culture. Respondent two's (responses were confidential, so numbering was used) definition *came* closest to capturing the definitions discussed in previous chapters.

> '*Everyone in the education system should be and should feel included in the everyday working of a school. All employees from the principal, administration team, teachers, TAs, school officers, cleaners and of course the students have a vital role in providing a safe, clean, and educational journey for all students'*

4.3 Supervising teachers' personal inventory (Part A)

Included in Part A, along with the personal inventory for the TAs was a shorter version for supervising teachers. This personal inventory was regarded as relevant to the research questions, as it provides some useful background data for the study. From the 59 teacher respondents, 21 worked in secondary schools and the remaining 38 in the primary division. The average number of years working as a supervising teacher, by this cohort, was 14.22 years and 59.32% of these teachers reported that they currently worked with TAs daily and 17.8% on a weekly basis. Of this group, 44% worked in a single classroom while the remaining 56% worked across multiple teaching venues. Disappointingly, 66% of teachers reported that they had never received any professional development on how to work with their TAs.

The supplementary question in this section of the questionnaire asked the participating teachers to venture a definition of inclusion and this was very revealing. On reflection, the general understanding of inclusion by the teachers and their ability to consider what it means to them was very heartening. Apart from a small number that wanted to conflate inclusion with special needs, the vast majority saw it as a process whereby all students had their needs met in a universally inclusive environment. This study was chiefly intended to concentrate on the roles and views of TAs, but the depth and insights of the participating supervising teachers suggests a promising area for future research. It would be valuable to investigate, as a consequence of this current study, why the perception of teachers and TAs were so different regarding inclusion and what existing conditions have led to this disparity.

A particularly succinct definition provided by the supervising teachers was one that stated, '*Inclusion is not about every child receiving the same, rather every child being supported in order for them to participate in the classroom'*. However, on a note pertinent to this study, while a number of teachers spoke about an inclusive environment no one identified the importance of an inclusive culture in the creation of this environment and the distinction between the two. For the purpose of this distinction, according to Rutherford (2012) an inclusive classroom maybe the destination but it is the inclusive culture that allows us to reach this goal. A full list of the data extracted from this section of the questionnaire is included in Appendix C.

4.4 Analysis of questionnaires (Part B)

The second part of the questionnaire (Part B) included an initial set of 60 questions for TAs making use of the psychometric Likert scale. Participants were asked to rate tasks according to frequency and competency. Frequency options were restricted to: - a) Once daily, b) More than once a day, c) Weekly, d) Monthly, e) Once a year, f) Twice a year and Not relevant. The choices for competence were a) Competent, b) Limited competence, c) Very competent, d) Highly competent and e) Not relevant. The data gathered from this questionnaire was analysed question by question and set up in a tabula form included in Appendix E.

Added to the TA questionnaire was an extension comprising ten specific questions (61-70), about experiences that participants had as TAs and was designed so that the respondents needed to choose from seven pre-determined answers for each question. In order to inform the follow-up interviews the TAs were also asked to answer two further qualitative type questions about their experiences with inclusive education (Questions 71- 72). A final question asked the respondents whether they would like to be involved in a follow-up interview. In this case the supervising teacher questions 61 - 62 asked the teachers to add qualitative comments in regard to positive and negative experiences they had working in an inclusive culture.

The analysis of Part B of the questionnaires was broken into three separate subsections. The first 60 questions were combined for analysis. This allowed the responses made by the TAs and the supervising teachers as well as the previously analysed results taken from the survey conducted by Carter et al. in 2018 to be compared. The responses made by the TAs to questions 61-72 and the responses made to the qualitative questions 61-62 in regard to experiences with inclusion were analysed separately.

4.4.1 Combined analysis of questions 1-60 for TA role descriptions

The data provided by produced a pleasing volume of useful information. In order to discuss the data from the two questionnaires relating to the TAs' role descriptions, in a concise and meaningful way, a comparison table was used (Table 3). The table compares the responses of the TAs and their supervisors and also compares this with the results from the earlier Carter et al. (2018) questionnaire. While the comparison table was set out in full in Table 3, the findings in this section were restricted, for coherent discussion purposes, to the top 12 results that emerged from the completed questionnaires. For ease of reference, the comparison was made solely on the responses that referred to the frequency of carrying out

duties daily, as well as those completed at least once a day. The roles that TAs perform on less regular duties were still noteworthy and will be discussed in the outcome analysis.

A direct comparison between the responses provided by the TAs and those provided by the supervising teachers were quite straightforward, as the questions put to both were identical in intent. TAs were asked to answer the questions in relation to themselves while the supervising teachers were asked to base their comments on how they saw the TA that they usually worked with or the TA that they worked with most often. In making the comparison, however with the Carter et al. (2018) questionnaire, a number of adjustments needed to be made. Even though the intention was to base the new questionnaire's wording as close as possible to the original, in the compilation of the questionnaires some role description wording was altered, and some items included in the original questionnaires were omitted while others were added out of contextual necessity. This was done, as it was judged that some tasks identified in the original questionnaire did not necessarily apply in areas outside of New South Wales public schools.

Table 3

***Comparison Table of Competency Ratings*.**

TAs' Perceived Competency	**TAs (73.8%)**		**Supervisors (71.8%)**	
Providing encouragement and reinforcement	(1)	72.2%	(1)	79.4%
Seeking to include all children in classroom activities	(2)	75%	(8)	58.6%
Providing general instructional support (in class)	(3)	76.4%	(5)	73.5%
Assisting students to focus on task	(4)	80%	(2)	80%
Providing small group instruction within inclusive classroom	(5)	66.6%	(12)	70.9%
Assisting individual students (one at a time) within whole class lesson	(6)	80%	(3)	82.4%
Practising and consolidating skills previously taught by teachers	(7)	80%	(6)	67.6%
Checking students' understanding about how to complete assigned work	(8)	75%	(4)	67.6%

Providing behaviour management	(9)	66.6%	(19)	59.4%
Implementing teacher-planned instruction	(10)	53.3%	(7)	69.7%
Playground duty	(11)	87.5%	(11)	72%
Assisting small group of students within whole class lesson	(12)	73.3%	(9)	80.8%

Note. # Indicates rankings that fall outside of the top 12

Shaded sections highlight duties in the top 12 responses

The results published by Carter et al. (2018) rated the frequency of TA task performance based upon a calculated mean drawn from all responses. In taking this data and preparing it in such a way so that it could be compared with the current research, the frequency of task completion was reordered and converted to a percentage, based upon measuring the number of responses referring solely to duties carried out, on a once a day or on more than once a day basis. The number of potential TA tasks used in the Carter et al. (2018) questionnaire stood at 50 while the questionnaire related to this research project required the participants to respond to a list of 60 possibilities for both the TAs and their supervising teachers.

In Table 3, shared above, the shaded sections were intended to highlight the duties that showed up in the top 12 responses and the number in bracketed italics signified the rank order that each of these duties achieve in their respective questionnaires. The standout exceptions to these surprisingly consistent indicators of common agreement were that in the current questionnaire 52.7% of supervising teachers (ranked 19th) and 70% of their TAs (ranked 10th) saw providing behaviour management duties so differently. This may be related to the normal expectation that teachers are mostly responsible for class discipline, while TAs only exercise that responsibility at the teacher's discretion. Closely reflective of the recent questionnaire's TA response, the earlier Carter et al. (2018), questionnaire rated this duty as 12th most frequent at 68.2%. The other outlier task, *providing small group instruction within inclusive classroom,* had a less substantial difference.

4.4.2 Combined analysis of questions 1-60 for TA competency

For the purpose of data management and presentation of findings, only the responses to the competency questions related to the identified top 12 TAs' duties were further analysed (Refer Table 4). It was important to note that the ratings that reflected only very competent and highly competent were selected for this purpose. This approach was taken as it was

judged that simply being rated as competent or having limited competence was too low a bar to assess how well TAs were carrying out their duties. These competency questions were included in the questionnaire to answer Research Question Two (RQ 2), related to discovering how well participating TAs and their supervisors judged that they were equipped to carry out their perceived rolls. Therefore, a descriptive analysis was considered to be sufficient to make several salient observations.

The first of these observations was that while 73.8% of TAs, on average, believed that they carried out these selected duties to a high or very high competency level, 71.8% of the supervising teachers agreed. This indicated that the TAs and their supervisors were remarkably consistent in their appraisal of TA competence. However, on further analysis there were some significant anomalies. The most pronounced of these was, that while the TAs indicated that it was in the domain of instructional tasks that they saw themselves as least competent, their supervisors did not concur. *Implementing teacher planned instruction* at 53.3%, was the weakest outcome as perceived by the TAs, while their supervisors saw it as a relative strength coming in at 69.7%. While a modest 73.3 % of TAs believed that they were capable of very competently, *assisting small group of students within a whole class lesson,* a somewhat greater 80.8% of their supervisors rated them at this level. These two role descriptors appeared as outliers, as TA competence in other instructional attributes such as, *assisting individual students (one at a time) within whole class lesson, providing small group instruction within inclusive classroom,* and *providing general instructional support (in class)* were perceived by both TAs and teachers as similar.

There was a substantial difference between the two cohorts when it came to *playground duty*, with 87.5% of TAs indicating that they displayed above average competence while the teacher's perception of TA competence was only 72%. Playground duty had a special relevance to behaviour management as being 'on duty' was possibly the only time that a TA would have prime responsibility for behaviour management. When it came to those role descriptors that pertain to behaviour management, there was again a difference in how the TAs and the teacher's rated competence. *Providing behaviour management* itself was scored by TAs at 66.6% and teachers at a comparable 59.4%. As previously mentioned in this chapter this was possibly attributed to the different level of responsibility that schools normally expect of teachers when establishing student compliance.

Regarding the softer attributes such as, *practising and consolidating skills previously taught by teachers*' and *providing encouragement and reinforcement,* there was little agreement. In the former at 80%, TA have a higher opinion of their competence than their

supervisors at 67.6%. Looking at the latter the situation was reversed as here the competence of TAs was rated as 72%, by the TAs themselves and at a larger 79.4% by the teachers. TAs also saw themselves as being more competent in, *checking students' understanding about how to complete assigned work* (75% against 67.6%). Lacking any further context, it was difficult to extract any further meaning from these results, but they again left ample scope for clarification within follow up interviews where it was apparent that almost all TAs viewed these attributes as fundamental to their duties.

The role description attribute, *seeking to include all children in classroom activities*, was quite relevant. It was interesting therefore, to note that the TAs competence rating of 75% was considerably higher than that of the supervising teachers at 58.6%. This rating of TAs competence by their supervisors was the lowest of all. This is addressed in the discussion section in Chapter Six. If the classroom teachers currently did not have a high degree of confidence in their paraprofessional colleagues to effectively include all children in classroom activities, then this consequently questions the logic in employing them as catalysts for effective inclusion. The data gathered from this questionnaire was analysed question by question and can be reviewed in Appendix E and H.

Table 3

Comparison Table of Competency Ratings.

TAs' Perceived Competency	**TAs (73.8%)**		**Supervisors (71.8%)**	
Providing encouragement and reinforcement	(1)	72.2%	(1)	79.4%
Seeking to include all children in classroom activities	(2)	75%	(8)	58.6%
Providing general instructional support (in class)	(3)	76.4%	(5)	73.5%
Assisting students to focus on task	(4)	80%	(2)	80%
Providing small group instruction within inclusive classroom	(5)	66.6%	(12)	70.9%
Assisting individual students (one at a time) within whole class lesson	(6)	80%	(3)	82.4%
Practising and consolidating skills previously taught by teachers	(7)	80%	(6)	67.6%

Checking students' understanding about how to complete assigned work	(8)	75%	(4)	67.6%
Providing behaviour management	(9)	66.6%	(19)	59.4%
Implementing teacher-planned instruction	(10)	53.3%	(7)	69.7%
Playground duty	(11)	87.5%	(11)	72%
Assisting small group of students within whole class lesson	(12)	73.3%	(9)	80.8%

Note. # (1) Bracketed numbers reflect the rank order applied to the role descriptions analysis table

4.4.3 Analysis of TAs supplementary questions 61-70

Added to the questionnaire was an extension comprising ten specific questions (6170), about experiences that participants had as TAs and was designed with seven predetermined answers for each question. The first question was about how frequently the TA had the opportunity of discussing work practices with their supervising teacher. In this case only 35% of TAs had that opportunity more than once a day. A follow-up question about how frequently TAs were receiving positive feedback revealed that for 55% of TAs this was at least a weekly event. While these were somewhat unexpected low results, it meant that questions could be introduced into the follow up interviews in order to explore how TAs felt about this and whether the situation was as serious as the questionnaire result indicated. A recommendation was made at the conclusion of this research about how this issue may be resolved.

The third question was about the receipt of positive feedback from other employees, and it indicated that 70% of TAs receive positive feedback from others within the school. While it was tempting to assume that this means that there was a lot of peer support happening within well-functioning inclusive schools, the question itself does not allow for an accurate interpretation of the real situation. Even though the time poor regular supervising teachers have limited opportunities to provide this service, it was possible that perhaps the administrators, other teachers, colleagues, or specialist staff accounted for the increased affirmation. As with the previous questions, without more information made available through the interview questioning, any initial conclusion made could only be regarded as conjecture. This issue was added to the interview questions, and it transpired that the severe

time constraints that generally prevail in most schools makes opportunities to obtain feedback from anyone at all problematic.

Question 64 concentrated on the TAs' opportunity to receive positive feedback from parents and it seems that, on the surface at least, TAs do not have very much face to face contact in this space. In fact, 50% of TAs indicated that feedback from parents was not relevant and where it did occur, it was at best a weekly occurrence experienced by only 15% of TAs. This may be a contextual factor, as it could be concluded that TAs working in small schools would be more likely to come into contact with parents on a regular basis than those in larger more hierarchical structured institutions. In most organisations the parent/school communication was the purview of the class teacher or administrator and understanding this allowed a pertinent question to be introduced into the semi-structured interview. Responses from the interview did show minimal contact between TAs and parents except in special circumstances such as special events in the smaller schools.

Responses to a question on the frequency of feedback from students (Q 65), indicated that 25% of TAs received this daily. This was an impressive result, but it was difficult to know in what format this event occurs. The PR's lengthy experiences in classrooms showed that receiving positive feedback from a student would mostly be a random event and the findings of the questionnaire tends to support this conclusion. If the feedback was in the form of a compliment or a thank you, then it seemed that this could happen on a regular basis but a more formal thanks, might only occur on the annual Teacher Aide Day or at the end of the academic year. It was possible that a more formal, positive feedback referring to TA competence would come from older students, on special occasions, but the questionnaire alone does not allow for this assumption to be verified. Time constraints also meant that this question was not able to be explored further at the interview stage.

A question (Q 66) was also asked about how often TAs were made to feel empowered. Disappointingly, 35% of TAs reported that this never happens, and such a result reflected poorly on the working environment that TAs may find themselves toiling in. However, on a more positive note, 50% of respondents said that they have had the experience of feeling empowered on a weekly basis. Despite the realisation that these two pieces of data do not appear to reconcile easily, they served a useful purpose in providing an opportunity for the PR to seek a resolution by way of a clarifying follow up interview question. The questions asked in the semi-structured interview resulted in mixed responses with some TAs feeling bitter and disillusioned by their treatment while others reported as having frequent episodes of empowerment.

One of the more contested and controversial issues identified in this study related to the frequency and quality of TA professional development. TAs reported in question (Q 67) that while 75% of them receive some PD throughout the year only 5% received training on a regular basis. The question and the recorded responses were too limited in detail to be able to provide any conclusion. Once again, the data appeared to confirm the claims, made in the literature review, about the infrequency of professional training for TAs (Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco & Pelsue, 2009). The related question (Q 68) about whether TAs get to choose the PD that they attend was also difficult to analyse as the resulting statistic (65%) could be interpreted several ways. It may mean that 65% of TAs get to choose whether they attend, when the infrequent PD was provided, or perhaps it could be interpreted to mean that 65% of TAs had the opportunity to initiate a training request.

Concerning the often-vexed question (Q 69) as to whether TAs should be able to attend staff meetings, it seemed that 10% of TAs do attend weekly staff meetings regularly. Possibly the most disappointing statistic that emerged from the questionnaire, was that 45% of TAs reported that they do not attend staff meetings at all. The rest of the responses to this question do not really add to the clarification of this issue. When the respondents state that TA attend daily staff meetings, they may be referring only to meeting with a supervising teacher in a small school. Again, accentuating one of the weaknesses of some questionnaires, there was no way of properly interpreting the answer to this question. This issue was discussed in almost every subsequent interview, and it became quite clear that for almost all TAs attendance at formal staff meetings rarely occurred.

The final question (Q 70) showed that more than 45% of TAs appear to be attending weekly meetings, if not as a whole staff, then at least with colleagues. What form and for what duration these meetings take was unclear but again provided an opportunity for clarification to be achieved during the semi-structured interview and this was, after all, the primary intention of this set of questions. The interviews confirmed that with very few exceptions TAs are not included in staff meetings on a regular basis.

4.4.4 Analysis of TAs supplementary questions 71-72

The first question of this supplementary section sought out positive examples and the second the negative experiences with inclusion. The positive responses fell into two categories. The first was a collection of very positive motherly type expressions that could be seen as the type of warm and fuzzy outpouring that generally make us all feel good. An example of this was the comment, *'I feel humble to work with students of any ability and get pleasure out of seeing them achieve in whatever area it might be'* and '*I love working with*

students that I get to work with. I have been challenged in whole new ways and it has strengthened me, and my skill set so much. My superiors were always encouraging me and commending my work with the students'.

The second category were offerings that referred to the definition of *inclusion* rather than personal experiences. Some examples of these were, '*Acceptance and care of the majority of children provided to those who have a disability'* and '*I feel inclusive education is very important for student and there is a greater need for all staff to constantly update and encourage whole school involvement'.* This was an extract from a longer comment that combines aspects of the warm and fuzzy with an attempted definition, "*I would do this work for free I love it so much. The inclusive culture feels like a community, my second home the children are loved, and we all look after each other".*

Negative expressions regarding inclusion experiences fell into two categories as well. The first was drawn from the experiences that were had by TAs that were seemingly engendered by frustration. Frustrations mentioned included insufficient training, resentment over the lack of status, lack of professional support, ignorance, bias, and behavioural issues. The second category were those that demonstrate that the participants were not really sure what inclusion entails. A number of the comments were reflective of a lack of understanding about what inclusion should be, by equating it with special needs students only. One respondent spoke about *inclusive children,* and this can only be interpreted as referring to students with special needs e.g., '*Inclusive children sometimes refuse to work as well with their classroom teacher as they do with their teacher aide'.* One comment appeared to bridge the gap between the two previous categories of frustration with and understanding of inclusion. *'There are so many different social, emotional, ODD areas - labels we don't really understand - and to have to go into a classroom with six 'labelled' students, plus special ed. students can be really overwhelming and draining*". All of the responses submitted have been included in Appendix E.

4.4.5 Analysis of supervising teacher's questions 61-62

Extension questions 61 - 62 provided the teachers with the option to make comments about their positive and negative experiences working in an inclusive environment. The first question's intention was not appropriately interpreted by most teachers as they focussed instead on an appraisal of the TA that they were supervising rather than the inclusive cultural environment that they were asked about. Even so, they did make almost universal complimentary comments about their TAs, expressing their gratitude to them and their confidence in the work that they were doing. However, while only three referred to their

experience in an inclusive culture, these comments were generally positive. An example of such a response can be seen in this comment, '*Students are remarkably tolerant and respectful of other students, who demonstrate their desire to work hard to overcome difficulties in learning.*'

In the second question, asking about what they saw as the problems relating to TAs and inclusion, there was a surprising reversal, and a number of teachers did not hold back in their comments. An especially acerbic example was this comment made by an angry supervisor, '*I have had teacher aides swear at me and about me behind my back to the students. This really tears the side down*'. Another repeated a negative assertion that was made in the DISS Report from 2007 that '*One of the disappointing aspects that I have found in working with various education support staff is that more often than not they complete the work for the students or tell them what to do resulting in a huge reliance from students in adult help to solve problems*. It seemed in most cases that the intent of the question was not clear, as no one really attempted to comment about inclusive culture but centred instead on the inappropriate utilisation of TAs and other related complaints. The data gathered from Questions 61- 62 is provided in full in Appendix G.

4.5 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the perceptions of the roles of TAs as identified by both the TAs themselves and their supervising teachers, working in aspirational inclusive classrooms, was discussed with a specific focus on the top 12 items. In this way the selected roles were compared not just between themselves but with the responses made by the TAs from the 2018 questionnaire conducted by Carter et al. (2018). Interesting but sometimes contrasting beliefs about TA competence in carrying out these duties was outlined. Overall, the quantitative data analysed in this chapter demonstrated a strong cohesion between the views of the TAs and their supervisors on both the role descriptions and levels of competence.

It must be said, however, that the qualitative comments from both cohorts of participants have been surprisingly challenging as they were not always consistent with the opinions expressed in the quantitative section of the questionnaire. Added as an adjunct to the questionnaires, the comments from both the TAs and their teachers elicited quite a range of issues that were unfortunately outside the scope of this study. The quantitative data sets from this chapter are further discussed, along with the qualitative data that emerged from Chapter Five, in Chapter Six of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

This research utilises a mixed methods approach that relies upon a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collected from currently practicing teacher aides (TAs) and their supervising teachers. This chapter explains the qualitative data collection process and its subsequent analysis. Chapter Six demonstrates how these two methods interacted in supporting the research findings. The chapter is broken into four discrete sections. The first section presents information on the interview participants in the form of a profile (Section 5.2), the second section (Section 5.3) analyses and summarises the responses made by the participants under seven thematic headings. Section 5.4 identifies the emergent themes and provides some further explanation on their relevance to this study. Section 5.5 summarises the chapter and links it to Chapter Six and Chapter Seven.

5.2 Participant profiles

Eighteen TAs volunteered to take part in a semi-structured qualitative interview. Of these participants, 11 were primary school based and the other seven were working in various capacities within secondary schools. All were formally qualified, with four possessing a Bachelor Degree, one a Diploma, and the remainder had completed either a Certificate IV (ten) or Certificate III (three) in Education Support. Only three of the interviewees were currently working in private schools although several of the TAs had spent time in both private and state schools. Ten of the TAs were aged 50 and above and of the remaining eight all but one was older than 30. The fact that only one of this group was a male was not surprising, as it is reflective of the gender imbalance among TAs. According to the Australian Teacher Aide Website (2017), in Australia most TAs are female, aged between 35 and 54**.**

Based upon their demographic details as well as the analysed responses to the questions asked, the interviewees were clustered into three groups. For the purpose of this study, these groups were labelled - a) The Novices; b) The Traditionalists; and c) The Exceptionalists. These titles were chosen as they reflect the perspectives that each group of TAs brought to their assigned roles. The summary profiles of the participants have been provided below along with a justification provided for the allocated groupings. Before each interview the participants were sent a diagram (Figure 3) showing a continuum of the journey

to inclusion. This provided them with an opportunity to reflect on where they would place themselves and their school on the journey towards inclusion.

5.2.1 The Novices

The *Novices group* was comprised of three TAs, each with less than three years' experience working in the capacity of an education support worker. Two of this group held a Bachelor Degree while the third, with a Certificate III, demonstrated an insightful vision about the importance of working to create a positive school culture. While all three TAs lacked hands-on experience, they were well educated and possessed skills that were, in some part, missing from the other two groups, such as a capacity to bring new perspectives to old issues.

This novice group of TAs shared an enthusiasm for inclusion that was tempered by an inability to define inclusion and more importantly, explain how it could be implemented. While new to the profession, and still alert to any potential issues, this group were able to intuitively identify several obstacles to achieving an inclusive school climate. Fresh from training and not encumbered by years of established custom, they accepted that inclusion was a given and they expected that a way forward would ultimately be found, within their school community, to make inclusion a reality. Unfortunately, TAs such as these novices, were sometimes worn down by the challenges they experienced. As a result, their initial inspirations, far from being harnessed positively, became prematurely blunted or eliminated entirely.

Participant Fran.

Located within an urban, primary, state school, Fran asserted that her school, *'was trying to adopt workable inclusive practices'*. Unlike the other two Novices, Fran's qualification was a Certificate III in Education Support. She was, nevertheless, someone with a positive work ethic and an intrinsic understanding about what counts as positive and negative in school practices. She also had, despite her inexperience, an impressive grasp about the significance of creating and maintaining a positive school culture, commenting that '*Inclusion is more than what happens in a classroom, it is an attitude and a culture that permeates a school'*

Even though Fran held only a very junior position in the school hierarchy, she was still prepared to call out incidents that she observed to be inequitable and discriminatory. An example of this, within her situation, was an incident of discrimination that impacted on a visually impaired student with whom she was working. She stood up for him and identified

what was happening as discrimination. Using the continuum diagram provided (Figure 3) Fran located herself on the inclusion margin but then questioned whether the school was operating in that space when she commented that '*We think that we are being inclusive, but are we completely*?'

Participant Hillary.

Working full time within a Special Education Unit (SEU) that was embedded within an urban, secondary state school, Hillary was possibly the most academically qualified of all the TAs interviewed. Despite being an inexperienced TA, Hillary had extensive qualifications relating to other industries including two degrees, (Bachelor of Arts Language and Bachelor of Business), as well as an Associate Diploma of Business Marketing and a Diploma in Early Education. Hillary indicated that she was seriously considering upgrading her qualifications to include an education degree with a view to entering teaching. She located her school as operating out of the integration space on the continuum but confidently placed herself on the inclusion end on the spectrum. However, she seemed to equate inclusion chiefly with the support for students with special needs. Her explanation about how she saw her role was possibly more aligned with integration. Hillary explained that *'I think that I would be an advocate for inclusion'* Talking about her interaction with students she also said, '*It was not exactly one on one, but we would be physically distanced from other children*.'

While not in receipt of any specific training about inclusion policies and procedures Hillary had a good understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), thanks to her previous life experiences. This understanding made Hillary conscious of many of the issues that students with special needs face when attempting to fit into regular schooling. In common with the other novice TAs, she held the belief that teachers often do not respond well towards children with high needs out of fear and ignorance or both. In support of this belief, Hillary provided an example of what she had seen occur and summarised it by saying, *'I think it is the teacher's problem, because their instinct is to scream, get out, and just get out*!'

Participant Patricia.

Before working as a TA, Patricia had several years of broken teaching service behind her. While possessing a sound general education background she was relatively inexperienced as a TA, with just one year of practical service completed. Patricia was clear in her assertion that TAs needed to be proficient in communication as well as adept at creating sound relationships with both the children and staff. Coming from her somewhat unique perspective as a qualified teacher as well as a TA, Patricia mentioned, that she was concerned

about the ability of many other TAs to carry out their roles proficiently. Patricia expressed this concern by providing her view on the skill level of most TAs. She remarked that *'Most aides generally do not have the skill base or the knowledge base to actually, fulfil the role to the level that is required.'*

While locating herself in the inclusion space along the continuum, Patricia also expressed a belief that the TA training was not adequate for the role that they were expected to fulfil. She was also critical of the lack of professional development or training in general as well as the chronic underfunding of education. Even though the other Novices merely alluded to it, Patricia was able to share her critical view on the low status of TAs within the school hierarchy and their subsequent and seemingly inevitable, alienation and marginalisation. *'It depends on the individual child and their needs as to whether it [sic. Inclusion] could be sustained but sometimes it is just not possible'.* Commenting on the absence of a TA voice in her situation, she added that *'You can say what you think about the issues that concern us, but it doesn't mean that there is anything done about it'.*

5.2.2 The Traditionalists

The largest group represented in these interviews were those TAs that have been described as the *Traditionalists*. With an average length of working experience exceeding thirteen years, these TAs had all been working in classrooms that while they might have initially aspired towards inclusion were now, on close examination, almost entirely working along the lines of integration. While there were a couple of exceptions, nearly all these TAs had been rewarded a Certificate IV in Education Support, achieved through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process designed to reward years of practical service while providing minimal further training.

These experienced TAs, in most cases, were working as members of small teams that almost exclusively provided support to students with disabilities or those in need of literacy support. Ironically, they mostly verbalized their positive support for inclusion but were not sub-sequentially able to define how they were progressing in furthering that goal. Committed, positive people and skilled in working with both children and teachers, they were the traditional face of TAs. As a cohort diligently working to support classroom teachers, they represented the stalwart TA readily recognised throughout Australian education systems.

Participant Betty.

Equipped with a Certificate III in Education Support, capable and hardworking Betty, expressed some frustration with her workload. It would not be an exaggeration to surmise from her comments that she had possibly been fatally damaged by a system that she saw as broken.

'We are stretched to a limit, when we compare what we do, to what some of the teachers do. We have 30 classes a week, where the teachers are sitting on anywhere from 20 to 24 or 25 classes. I find that there are not many opportunities to have our voice heard as TAs'

Despite this, Betty, an endlessly cheerful individual, was working in a full-time casual position within a rural, secondary, private school. This perception of toiling against the odds was common amongst the Traditionalist TAs. Betty did not concern herself so much with what might be the systemic imperatives but concentrated instead, on doing as good a job as possible with whatever she was challenged to do. While Betty was positive about what she understood to be inclusion, she had difficulty positioning herself and her school on the continuum. Her comment in response to this question displayed ambivalence when she said, '*Probably inclusion, though we do run some programs outside the normal classroom, where the children are taken out of the class.'*

Participant Elaine.

Having recently obtained her Certificate IV in Education Support through the RPL process, Elaine worked as part of a team in a large, urban state school. Elaine was, however, quite ambivalent about the value of inclusion. She saw the school as being well intentioned but probably mostly located in the integration space on the continuum. ***'****There is a genuine attempt, yes, definitely, that the children are included but we don't always succeed. My preference is to do whatever suits the children in whatever environment they can learn in.'*

Standing out as an archetypical model for this variety of TA, Elaine worked very professionally, as she sought to find ways to support all children. It seemed that she had been operating from her own pragmatic instincts as she lacked any sound theoretical or philosophical base for her actions. A self-starter, Elaine gave the impression that she would be capable of dealing with any situation but found in her workplace, inadequate professional development and an ambivalent attitude from the institution towards her value within the system. She opined that, '*For TAs in the end, even if you might have an opinion, I don't know whether it is valued'*

Participant Joan.

While similar in many ways to Elaine, in that she also had a Certificate IV in Education Support and worked as part of a team, Joan's context, was instead that of a member of an SEU team, within an urban state secondary school. Encouragingly, Joan did appear to have an insightful understanding of what needed to happen for inclusion to be sponsored. Mature, with a clear picture in her head about how inclusion could be achieved, she worked in an environment where her vision of inclusion was seen as an achievable goal. Joan also presented as a self-starter that was prepared to seek ways to improve herself independently of any training the school might offer. She proudly commented that *'I have done a fair bit of study on my own.'*

Joan was not able to place herself or her school at any fixed position on the continuum but felt that she worked within a supportive environment and had a good relationship with her supervising teacher. She stated that *'I think it is more about openness and saying this is what we see and let's head the school in that direction and everybody being positive and working together.'* Joan was less happy with the diminishing physical support offered to her at her school, as well as the limited availability of professional development and the ever-growing workload. While she indicated that the potential for total inclusion was there, she was not clear that it was being entirely realized. *'The school is obviously not perfect, but it had gone a long way towards being that.'*

Participant Len.

Being a young male, Len did not fit easily into any of the stereotypes already identified. Working full-time in a secondary, special school and having completed a Certificate IV in Education Support, he demonstrated all the best qualities of the other Traditionalist TAs but being young he lacked some confidence in his own undoubted abilities. Len was philosophically aligned with inclusion but struggled to define it and to identify where both he and the school were located on the continuum. He worked as part of a collaborative team, that he perceived as both supportive and good at communication.

> *'Whatever is appropriate for each student is dependent on their ability. I guess everyone works together here at the school and there is always someone who is making sure we are on the same track'*

As the least qualified member of staff, he was naturally more inclined to follow the directions of the professional staff rather than pursue his own instinctive impulses**.** Loved by the students, as was evidenced by his shared anecdotes, and popular with the other members of staff, Len demonstrated many positive attributes useful in undertaking the TA role. While

Len appeared to be instinctively aligned with inclusion, he also found it difficult to verbalise his beliefs.

Participant Nancy.

Initially obtaining a Bachelor of Education Studies Nancy chose, instead of teaching, to work as a TA. Given her years of service and work context Nancy fitted neatly in with the cohort of the Traditionalist. Nancy appeared to have an emotional belief in the concept of inclusion and tried to do her small part in ensuring that all students felt that they belonged. While this was a trait that many of the Traditionalists shared it was not an adequate replacement for establishing an inclusive culture. Asked to locate herself on the continuum she responded in a somewhat non-committed fashion that **'***For me, we are pretty well in the middle of inclusion and integration.'*

Nancy was passionate about what she did and presented as one of those endlessly practical support people that can be found in many classrooms in many schools. Working in an urban, private, secondary school, special unit, her passion for education drove her to express some frustration, as she discussed how she navigated her way through the daily tasks, within a tightly bound school system that she did, still at times, attempt to confront. Nancy was moved to complain that ***'****Honestly, I would want to have the teachers really want to make an effort.'*

Participant Olivia.

Working chiefly in the area of home economics within an urban, secondary state school, Olivia had, almost, by omission, allowed herself to fall into the traditionalist TA role. Highly competent, energetically committed and skilled, as many Traditionalists TAs are, her achievements and qualifications chiefly lay in her previous work experiences outside of education. Unfortunately, hampered by little or no professional development, and having the minimal qualification of a Certificate III level in Education Support, she appeared to be frustrated by the manifold barriers that stood in the way of the pursuit of inclusion. As an example, she had been inexplicably required to toilet a student with special needs that was not connected to her work unit. Olivia complained that *'It is just very hard when we do have a child come and we don't have the facilities and we have not been trained as TAs to facilitate that child.'*

Apart from the lack of training, the many roadblocks that she verbalized included lack of adequate funding, inadequate professional development, severe time constraints, condescending teacher attitudes and heavy workloads. However, despite this, Olivia placed herself, and her school in the inclusion space. Further raising the issue of her understanding

about what inclusion really means she then offered the opinion that despite all the good intentions she didn't think inclusion was possible, given all the obstacles that lie in the way. Speaking about her heavy workload she said, *'There are 21 classes I look after a week, just to make sure that they have everything that they need for a particular lesson and that is a lot!'*

Participant Quentin.

Possessing a Certificate IV in Education Support, experienced, highly competent and caring, Quentin worked full-time in a large, urban, primary state school. She was quite clear, when asked to plot her location on the continuum that her school was positioned in the integration space. In Quentin's view, her school was doing well in moving towards inclusion but indicated that on occasions she favoured taking the children out of the classroom for special support. She expressed the opinion that *'Most teachers find it quite hard if a TA is in there in the classroom talking to the students and helping the students at their level.'*

Quentin could be described as another of the archetypical Traditionalist TAs that holds inclusion as a worthwhile aspiration but argues, at the same time, that integration is a more achievable goal. In this way she reveals the common proclivity among the Traditionalists who despite their best intentions continue to regularly conflate inclusion with integration and to equate inclusion as somehow meaning more work. This belief was reflected in her comment that *'Inclusion sounds great, but it is very difficult for a teacher with 24 or 25 children in the classroom.'*

Participant Roslyn.

Roslyn was a very experienced TA who had served in a wide range of school types but currently worked in a team environment within a large, urban, private, secondary school. While working within a different education sector (private/secondary) to Quentin, it seemed that Roslyn held much the same philosophical position about inclusion. Her belief was that inclusion, while fundamentally desirable, was nevertheless unachievable and she therefore tried to do her best under the prevailing circumstances. She explained that *'I just give the back up, so I am probably between the streaming and the integration where some services would be out of the classroom.'*

Roslyn argued, very strongly, over the course of the interview about the importance of the central role that TAs can and do play in education. She added her voice to the overwhelming criticism regarding the lack of available, appropriate professional development. Roslyn saw this as a serious problem, as she saw that it denied all those who worked in the education support field, an opportunity to develop and grow their skills. She

expressed her opinion that '*We do need to have more professional development, so even to know what the teachers are doing. That is one of our big bugbears, even at the beginning of the year.'*

Participant Karen.

Working within a medium sized, urban primary school and in possession of a Certificate IV in Education Support, Karen spoke quite enthusiastically about the work that she saw herself and her colleagues doing in promoting inclusive education for children with disabilities. Unfortunately, she was also one of the TAs that did not see the distinction between working with students with a disability and the inclusion of all students. She struggled to position herself and her school on the continuum but went on to suggest, with some uncertainty, that they were probably somewhere in the middle between integration and inclusion. This became evident when she said that *'The more that I thought about that, I thought that I don't quite know.'*

Karen was included among the Traditionalists, as her work practices mostly aligned with the others in that category. What these TAs had in common was that they had not received professional development in the area of inclusion which might have helped them to form a broader conception of the concept. During the interview, Karen identified several of the barriers to inclusion. This was reinforced with her comment relating to the paucity of professional development and inadequate school policies and procedures. *'I think if you want more inclusion then you need more clarity of instruction.*

Participant Clare.

Clare was also very experienced in that she had worked in a variety of schools of all types for almost a quarter of a century. Clare was a very cheerful and engaging personality that would be a positive presence in any workplace environment. She also had the qualification of Certificate IV in Education Support. Clare's response to the request to locate herself on the continuum was interesting, in that she said that it was a contextual thing and that where she would be sitting on the continuum, depended on the child's individual needs. At the time of the interview Clare was working in an all-girls, private school, in an urban environment. Clare is reflective of many TAs of her era who were flexible and reliable and capable of bringing creativity and collaboration to any work environment.

Clare qualifies as a Traditionalist, as she saw her strengths as fitting in and helping rather than pursuing any specific innovation. She appeared, on the surface, to be the model of the multi-skilled stereotypical TA but she also had other qualities that could be harnessed in

the cause of inclusion. Clare was a person who appeared to care deeply about every child being given a fair chance. She took considerable pleasure in relating a story about how she helped one of her students begin to gain success while being encouraged by the rest of her classmates. *'My big successes were like seeing a little girl at whatever level just standing up and reading something that she might have written, getting cheers from other kids in the classroom.'*

5.2.3 The Exceptionalists

The third identifiable group of TAs were the *Exceptionalists*, who collectively had moved beyond any conceivable TA role description and had instead, forged for themselves, an idiosyncratic role within their own organisations. Outside of the generic role descriptions, one of the more interesting aspects of the working life of TAs throughout the system was that nobody, when pressed, could articulate what their role was beyond generally supporting students and teachers. These enterprising TAs filled the ensuing vacuum with inventive role descriptions for themselves. Their exceptionalism did not lie in their formal levels of training but more in their innovative and creative approach to teacher aiding. While these TAs were not all creating environments that ensured inclusion, each, in their own way, had broken the traditionalist mould and allowed in a crack of light that, in the end, might help to illuminate that goal.

Participant Donna.

Providing community support to refugee families and others in need, Donna, worked within the flexible boundaries of her large, multi-cultured, urban, primary state school. She possessed a Certificate IV in Education Support and was very experienced in fulfilling a range of challenging, mostly administrative roles, previous to becoming a TA. She was energetic and had used her abilities to negotiate her way towards creating an environment that, while not classroom based, nevertheless helped create an inclusive school culture. Donna's role was exceptional and her focus different from most TAs, in that she concentrated on providing family support. Donna was very positive about inclusion and provided an example where she brought someone into the school to teach meditation skills to selected students. She explained that *'Dealing with non-curriculum life opportunities, what we do is absolutely phenomenal as it impacts on children in many different ways.'*

In Donna's case it would be accurate to state that the term TA had only been applied to her role as a title of convenience, as her duties exceed that of most TAs and aligned more closely with that of a mid-level administrator. Donna was an excellent communicator and a

creative innovator who had settled sometimes uncomfortably into a unique niche within her school community. She reported that she had recently undertaken some professional development of her own volition and brought up a complaint that was common to all of the participating TAs when she complained that *'I get very little professional development'.*

Participant Gina.

Utilised in the past, by the Education Department to develop community programs across several remote and rural areas, Gina had moved beyond that role to work within the school system once more in a small, rural, state school. She presented as a valuable TA who was exceptional in that she has had applied for and had been selected to work in developing collaborative community programs and these were experiences that most other TAs were not exposed to. Gina's own philosophy regarding inclusion appeared to align more with that of the Traditionalist TAs discussed previously. A lack of relevant PD did not assist the situation. She saw herself clearly working in the integration space and provided justification for withdrawing students out of the classroom. "If she [her student] is doing reading and things like that I can see the benefit for the class as well as well as for her to be doing it separate.'

A lack of relevant PD did not assist in changing Gina's opinion about inclusion. She confirmed this when she said, *'In inclusive education I have received very little training.'* Gina, trained up to a Certificate IV level in Education Support had, in the past, worked in many schools and in many locations and had used her unique set of skills to support the development of students across two decades. She was able to reflect on some of the practices that limited classroom inclusion uptake as she commented on her experience working with students with a disability. She said, '*We would just go and sit beside them in the class. We had up to two or three students and they would sit them together'.* She added that *'if they are not getting any outside support and need to catch up then if they are having difficulties, they do need to be withdrawn.'*

Participant Irene.

After more than 20 years working as a TA, and with a Certificate IV in Education Support, Irene represented a niche group of aides frequently found in small, rural state schools. In her school, Irene had become the fixed point of reliability in a sea of continually changing teachers. Her interview responses indicated that she was highly regarded by the school staff and the community. In respect to her and the school's place on the continuum Irene was phlegmatic but hopeful when she stated that *'We fall somewhere between assimilation and integration, and it would be nice to get to inclusion in my time of working.'*

Irene seemed to appreciate what inclusion meant when she acknowledged that inclusion was not just related to disabilities, but it was a huge challenge for everyone in education generally. In her own way, she was positively forging a path towards inclusion and taking the school with her. Adept at people management and possessing superior communication skills, Irene had been in the process of successfully merging an inspiring interest in all things educational with a practical hands-on approach. An informal leader among her peers Irene was very proactive and worked tirelessly to make positive changes within her environment. She commented that *'I guess that it [sic. Inclusion) is something that we are hoping to do as a school and with our cluster schools.'*

Participant Amy.

Amy volunteered to be involved in a pilot questionnaire for this study and to participate in a follow-up interview. She had qualified as a teacher at about the same time that she was involved in the research pilot and was appointed to teach in a mid-sized, urban, state primary school. As a TA that found herself situated neatly between the Traditionalists and the Exceptionalists, Amy had, through her well-earned reputation as a TA within the primary school and her progression into the ranks of qualified teachers, found herself operating in an unusual space. While recognizing the necessity of pursuing the long-term goal of inclusion she acknowledged that she had to reconcile herself to the pragmatic reality of her current context. Amy conceded that *'I would place myself between assimilation and integration. I take children out of the classroom to work on reading and math.'*

It seems that Amy, with the advantage of her university education, was well aware of the desirability of inclusive education and its undoubted advantages but she was also a pragmatist who realized that sometimes you needed to pick your battles. As a result, she had chosen the default position similar to that of a Traditionalist, so as to navigate her way, it seemed, through a mostly conservative environment. She said that *'I would have liked to understand more about just what inclusion is, and perhaps to have been shown some exemplars of practice.'*

Participant Michelle.

Being a well-educated and enthusiastic Exceptionalist, but with limited experience as a TA, Michelle appeared to have intuitive insights into what needed to be done to have students feel included. Michelle had obtained the professional qualification of Diploma of Domestic Science in her previous employment. She was quite clear on her own position on the inclusion continuum. Michelle said, *'I definitely think that we are heading more away*

from excluding kids from the classroom and more towards having them in the classroom with everything provided for every single child'.

Like every other TA interviewed, Michelle had not received any structured or targeted professional development dealing with inclusion. Despite this, Michelle was very positive and appeared to see possibilities and opportunities where others might have seen barriers. Impressively, she operated this way out of her own self-belief and strong volition. Focused on relationships and culture, Michelle was perhaps the type of TA that would be needed in all our schools if inclusion is to become achievable. She proudly commented that *'We are doing really well with the staff at the moment and the kids are definitely becoming more involved, but we need to draw the parents in.'*

5.3 Interview analysis

After conducting the 18 telephone interviews with the practicing TAs profiled above and carrying out an initial analysis, there emerged a collection of 43 identified codes. Fortunately, these codes folded effectively into the existing findings mentioned within the Literature Review with 'inclusive culture' emerging as a universal coverall theme. These codes were not important in themselves but only in as far as they collectively supported the identification of the themes that emerged out of the interviews. The codes and their definitions were included in Appendix A. Implications mentioned within the Literature Review proved to have had extra significance as they unexpectedly turned out to be very similar to the themes that ultimately emerged from the interviews. This happened despite efforts to try to silo the literature review findings from the observations made during the interviews (See Table 6). Before revealing the themes that emerged from the coalescing codes, it will be useful to briefly examine a summary of the more noteworthy interview responses and for this purpose these are analysed below.

5.3.1 An overview of important interview responses

The majority of the interview participants had only a vague concept of what constituted inclusion, but several were able to provide a cogent definition and appeared fully committed to its implementation. Most TAs identified that their particular schools operated at the integration stage on the inclusion continuum. The separation of students with disabilities from their peers was a factor that loomed large within the Literature Review, so it was a surprising but pleasing outcome to find that that there was little mention within the interviews of students being separated from their peers for TA based activities in these particular schools. This decision was not always presented as a black and white one however, as some

TAs, such as Exceptionalist Michelle, mounted the argument related to the advantages of withdrawal.

> *It is great to be able to withdraw that child whether it be to the library or to another classroom so we can sit down and do that together. I know that she would prefer to be in the classroom with the others, but I can see the benefit in that.* (Michelle)

There did not appear to be any school or even any individual classroom imperative in place about implementing inclusion. The TAs interviewed suggested that there were quite a few activities undertaken by individual teachers and TAs that might be termed insightful, inclusive practices. However, the TAs responses chiefly indicated that there was an almost complete absence of written inclusion policies evident at their school level, or that were ever made available to the auxiliary staff. There was also no evidence of in-service or ongoing PD related to the topic of inclusion on offer in any of the schools involved. As it was hoped that exemplars of inclusive practices might have been identified out of this process, this was an understandably disillusioning outcome.

> *No, we are always asking for PD and there is never any money. We haven't had any. The only PD we have is occasionally someone at school like a teacher shares an experience.* (Quentin)

It became clear that the interpersonal relationships between the TA and the supervisor/teacher were critical, if any aspect of successful education, not just inclusive education, was to thrive. As well, the best aspects of inclusion appeared to occur instinctively when the TA and student relationship was sound. Sound relationships lead to effective communication, and this emerged as possibly the best way to promote inclusion. Where effective communication was present creative, inclusive practices seemed to evolve organically. Unfortunately, and sometimes despite heroic efforts on the part of TAs there was very little evidence discovered of effective, positive communication occurring. However, it may be that effective communication is actually the *light in the mist* that if employed appropriately will guide us down the road to improved collaboration and ultimately inclusion. *Any time we need to talk to a teacher about a particular student it needs to be lunchtime or after the lesson in my own time and the teacher's own time as well.* (Roslyn)

> *Yes, we (teacher & I) have a good rapport. I think that we have a great relationship. She trusts my judgement and if I make a suggestion about Student X, she will go with my evaluation.* (Amy)

According to the interviewees, there were numerous barriers to overcome if inclusive education was to be achieved, including in random order: Time restraints; low TA status/voice; lack of PD; misunderstanding about what inclusion actually involves; non-existent professional vision and indifferent leadership as well as a general lack of impetus that could be identified as inertia. As previously acknowledged, the relatively low status of TAs exists as a serious barrier to inclusion and this has become, increasingly noteworthy as there as is an almost total lack of voice allowed to TAs in even the most progressive of schools. One TA put this sentiment into her own words.

> *You can say what you think but it doesn't mean that there is anything done about it. Whereas if Teachers voice their concerns that is acted on to a degree.* (Nancy)

The development of inclusion and a culture of inclusiveness are inseparable. From the responses received from TAs during the interviews there seemed to be an absence of intention or perception about what needed to occur to promote the development of an inclusive culture. These findings were supported by observations made by the PR in almost half a century of working in and with school systems. Maintenance of traditional power towers and an unhealthy obsession with grading, along with other teacher-centric practices such as an obsession with assessment and grading all stand out as blockers of innovation. As the interviews progressed, it became evident that very few schools seemed to be aware of how important an inclusive culture can be, not just in fostering inclusive learning but of fostering learning per se. However, Len in his special school was one of the exceptions, commenting that,

> *We always keep in contact and before the lesson we discuss, write up strategies, before the session. It is structured and organised.* (Len)

One interesting phenomenon observed during the interviews was that the TAs mostly felt that the part of the school that they inhabited, whether it was a single classroom or a secondary department, was generally a positive environment and that the staff there mostly worked diligently at creating a happy, caring environment. It was generally only when TAs started talking about the rest of the school as a whole that they become critical and dismissive. The assertion that bad things may happen in other schools or other parts of their own school, but that these things were *not happening in my back yard* became an underlining feature of a number of interviews.

When I work in the Home EC. Room I am working for the most marvellous team. I could not work for better people. When I work as a general aide there are some things that are a bit confusing. (Michelle)

5.4 Emerging themes

As each interview took place and the participating TAs, drawn from a range of different school contexts, expressed their opinions and answered the proffered questions seven specific themes emerged. These themes included the tendency of TAs to mistakenly believe what was happening in their classrooms was inclusion; the concentration of policy implementation over procedure; the absence of PD; the importance of collaboration; the consequences of embracing inclusion; the importance of effective communication and a catch all theme of the need for the establishment of an inclusive classroom culture.

5.4.1 The inclusion confusion

Confusion surrounding the implementation of inclusion appeared to exist in the minds of many TAs. They were able to talk about inclusion and in some cases, they had even taken steps to implement it but mostly inclusion remains a clouded concept that was not clearly defined or understood. This confusion highlights the difficulty that most TAs experienced when called upon to provide an acceptable definition of inclusion in their own words. It soon became evident that there was a pervasive tendency to conflate inclusion with the more commonly practiced integration. These TAs showed a tendency to see inclusion from the emotional/relational standpoint, and this was possibly best exemplified by the comments of the Traditionalist TA, Olivia.

Making sure everyone is comfortable, everyone is working together, and no one is left out. (Olivia)

Four of the TAs struggled for a coherent definition and fell back on explaining inclusion from what can be best termed as a structural perspective. They appeared to say, that if you made a classroom arrangement and ensured that everyone complied, then this was a form of inclusion. In other words, if you constructed an environment where inclusion could occur then that was all that you had to do as it was then likely to evolve spontaneously. Donna, the community support, Exceptionalist TA, summed up this particular view in her response to the question about her understanding of inclusion.

For me personally, I think that children need to be engaged in the classroom at whatever level they are, so that they have the potential to reach for something at the next level. (Donna)

The largest number of TAs (six) took a functional approach to explaining the connection between integration and inclusion. Michelle, the inexperienced Exceptionalist, outlined her somewhat naive understanding that inclusion meant putting all of the children in a class and seeking to meet their needs in that fashion. The experienced, highly competent, and caring, traditionalist TA, Quentin however, also took a functional route and tried to explain inclusion in a similar fashion.

My teacher has adjustments for all students, so for the students that are in our class, all the needs are met in our classroom. (Michelle)
Make sure all students are included in the classroom or the school setting but not singling them out to be different. (Quentin)

Three of the TAs attempted to define inclusion by saying what it wasn't. Traditionalist Elaine, saw inclusion as a default position for those students that cannot cooperate willingly. Traditionalist Nancy, seemed to say that inclusion was not for the average student but reserved for those with special needs, while Novice TA, Hillary, who presented as the most academically qualified of all the TAs interviewed, offered an equally backwards definition, when she proposed that, inclusion was a way of avoiding students with special needs impacting negatively upon the rest of the class.

We do put kids in by themselves because they can't do group work. (Elaine) *Because I work in a classroom with special needs kids, we are meeting the needs of all those special needs kids.* (Nancy)

I try to settle the child so that they don't upset the others. (Hillary)

However, two of those TAs taking part in the interviews agreed that it was an ability to forge relationships and to develop an appropriate culture that made the difference when it came to creating innovative practices. Karen, who had struggled to locate herself and her school on the continuum surprisingly suggested a very insightful description of an inclusive classroom while it was left to Fran, one of the novice TAs to verbalise this insight best.

Every child is welcome, supported and is part of the learning journey and is just part of our school learning community and it is regardless of any disabilities or cultural reasons. (Karen)

Inclusion is more than what happens in a classroom. It is an attitude and a culture that permeates a school, and it is about how people treat each other. (Fran)

5.4.2 Implementation

The gap that exists at all levels of the system between policy and implemented practice became the focus of this theme. To express it more precisely, the responses from the TAs showed that it was an almost universal tendency for organisations to focus on highlighting inclusion as a policy rather than identifying how it could actually be implemented in a meaningful way in the classroom. Based upon the TAs' responses to the interview questions, it seemed that they also found it easier to say what they were going to do, than actually explaining how they were going to go about doing it. Referring to her own school's context, where quite a lot of progressive thinking and planning has resulted in a system that promises much but as yet has failed to deliver, experienced TA and Traditionalist, Elaine admitted to lacking confidence about a positive outcome and another Traditionalist, Quentin shared this pessimistic view.

There is still a way to go until you could say it (sic. Inclusion) would ever be 100% effective. (Elaine)

Anyway, there are just a lot of needs, and they need that many people on the ground, and that is just the way it is. (Quentin)

5.4.3 Professional development

The focus of this theme was on the highly concerning lack of PD support for TAs, aimed at assisting them to implement inclusive practices. This absence of PD applied to nearly all other aspects of TAs' responsibilities as well. Its significance can be best understood through the statements of a number of those interviewed. It was not an entirely blank slate as a number of TAs had gone out of their way to obtain training at their own expense, and there were some schools that had recently attempted to take steps reversing the PD deficit. However, as can be seen from the comments below this continues to be an area of real concern

There was an almost unanimous negative response from the TAs when they were asked about their access to professional development. Georgina, Hillary, Karen, and Roslyn were adamant that they were not receiving enough PD. Quentin provided a justification of sorts for this deficit when she responded.

We are always asking and there is never any money. (Quentin)

Other relevant comments were focussed on the reasons for wanting more PD with even an offer to undertake it at the TAs' own expense.

> *I would like to understand more about what inclusion is and perhaps to have been shown some exemplars of practice.* (Amy)
> *There needs to be training for the TAs and for the teachers because they are expected to know how to use these systems.* (Jean)
> *We have to do the best we can when we don't have any special training. As TAs it is hard.* (Olivia)
> *I would be more than willing to attend more professional development alongside of what I am doing.* (Irene)

5.4.4 Collaboration

The theme of collaboration was expressed by most of the TAs interviewed. They believed that that there was a critical link between the creation of positive, supportive relationships and the establishment of an inclusive culture. Irene, one of the Exceptionalists TAs, and one that was also successful in helping to move her school towards a more inclusive environment, tried to explain what happened in her school when the staff collaborated in order to promote an inclusive culture.

> *We just want to help each other as much as we possibly can, and so all the students' needs are discussed.* (Irene)

Joan, who was identified as a Traditionalist, but one that approached inclusion with optimism and a clear head, put great store on her relationship with her supervising teacher and felt that it made all the difference when status and egos were put aside, and the major goal was the pursuit of a better cultural environment for the students.

> *She is really very good, and she treats me as basically an equal. She is amazing.* (Joan)

It was useful also to listen to the opinion of Patricia, who had been both a teacher and a TA and who was moved to say that a positive relationship depended very much on the supervising teacher. The last word could be given once again to the Novice, Fran, who strongly expressed the negative impact of poor relationships.

> *It is interesting as it really depends on the teacher. It's very much the attitude of the teacher that drives it (relationships).* (Patricia)

It frustrates me, and it makes you feel like you are doing all the hard work but are still not really a part of it. (Fran)

5.4.5 Consequences

The focus of this fifth theme was on the necessity to appreciate the inevitable consequences of embracing inclusive practices and the importance of confronting the barriers to its implementation. Inclusion was currently a challenge to most operating school systems, and it appeared to come with many fears for teachers and even more for the TAs that were in many cases being charged with supporting its implementation. Below are just a small sample of the fears expressed by the TAs interviewed.

In regard to behaviour management I have to manage the behaviour of those children who fail to keep up (Amy). *We are sort of thrown into the lesson to help the kids that are working there and most of our role is that the teachers need us there to deal with behaviour management.* (Betty)

Managing the crowded curriculum

All the online learning is to be done in our own time and I know that there is a lot that I have to do before next year. (Hillary)

Dealing with the unmet needs of students with diagnosed special needs

Every school, not just one or two, every school is getting students that need extra help and the teachers just can't give it to them. (Roslyn)

I somehow have to make their world a little positive and make them believe. (Irene)

The impact of the TAs' low status in the school's hierarchy

Teacher Aides! It is very awkward because they are at the bottom of the ladder in the school and that shouldn't be the case. (Patricia)

The significance of cultural differences

Trying to work with a lot of different cultures and cultural difference is a big barrier. (Michelle)

The struggle to deal with parental expectations

Parents expectations need to come into consideration as well. Parents accepting a child is different and can be quite traumatic. (Clare)

The continuation of poor working conditions

'No doubt there will be a lot of negativities, as there is with everything, whilst I am just a little bit concerned about how we are going to achieve inclusion in the real world. (Irene)

Surprisingly, inadequate pay generally did not feature highly in the concerns of those interviewed but it still bubbled below the surface. Ultimately this concern was reflected in the comments of another Exceptionalist who said,

I do feel concerned at the lack of responsibility that some TAs feel. I know that the motivation to be better, would come with better pay. (Robyn)

5.4.6 Communication issues

The theme of communication was important in that it focussed more precisely on the lack of it, across all levels of education, especially as it relates to inclusion. In nearly every case deficient communication emerged as a major debilitating factor for TAs. Whether it was between institutions and their schools or within schools between administration and teachers, this factor stood out as worthy of notice at all levels. Exceptionalist TA, Michelle expressed it coherently during her interview.

Funny enough, it is the other side of communication, the lack of it and that is the biggest barrier. (Michelle)

Positive communication may be the 'magic wand' when it comes to creating an inclusive environment and where effective communication was present things were seen to happen. However, for TAs effective, positive communication hardly ever seemed to occur. Amy, who was the TA involved in the pilot interview, and one who had experience both as a teacher and a TA had an interesting insight into the status of communication about inclusion in her school.

I don't hear teachers or TAs discussing inclusion within the classroom environment. (Amy)

Inefficient communication reflected one of the most serious of the existing barriers to the creation of inclusive cultures especially when it results in the loss of the TAs voice out of the equation. This theme highlights the almost total absence of a voice for TAs within the school hierarchy and where even the most positive of TAs expressed concern about how difficult it was for them to influence the debate within school because of their low status. Traditionalist Elaine and Olivia combined the two issues into one when they commented

about how they perceived some teachers condescending attitudes and the difficult challenges they faced as a result of these embedded practices.

> *TAs in the end, even if you might have an opinion, I don't know whether it is valued, to the benefit of the children.* (Elaine)
>
> *I am basically doing my own little thing. Do you know what I mean? I am just in my own little group, in my own area… Outside of that, no!* (Olivia)

5.4.7 Inclusive culture

The theme inclusive culture was related to how the TAs viewed their students and their awareness about how they could and should go about making every child feel that they belong. There is little point, the majority of TAs agreed, in pursing an inclusive school policy, if children at any level were made to feel that they were an outsider and someone who was being systematically alienated. It makes no sense at all, a number of TAs suggested, to try to develop an inclusion policy if any one individual within the school community is being marginalised. It was Amy, the TA who was both an aide and a teacher, who expressed this best. As all of the other six themes appear to centre on this common thread of the existence of a collaborative, healthy inclusive climate it should be regarded as the core theme for the research study.

> *I always ensure that I personally know their (the child's) name and I take time to speak with them. In this way they know that you care.* (Amy)

It was Fran again, who shared a story about the vision-impaired student, who was left out of a school fun day for no other reason than he could not see as well as the other students.

> *I was told "Oh no! He won't be doing it because it is a jumping castle and a water Slide" and I said, "Hey! That's not inclusive, is it? He could do it and I could do it with him."* (Fran)

Fran made the point that if you going to have a school where all are educated together, irrespective of their challenges and gifts, this relies upon an all-encompassing environment where no one is left out or left behind. A school where just one person thinks that it is alright to tell a blind student that he should not join in activities with his peers, is a school where an aspiration for inclusion was just an illusion. Traditionalist, Karen summed it up when she stated in her somewhat unique vernacular, that perhaps trust, is the real key to the inclusion doorway.

Well first of all they (the students) have to feel comfortable with you because they have heard it all before-the poor little darlings! (Karen)

5.5 Chapter summary

The data collection for this research was covered in two chapters with this chapter dealing with the conduct and analysis of the semi-structured interview with a representative group of eighteen TAs. The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the process followed in conducting the interviews, to share the profiles of the participants and to discuss the seven themes that emerged. The themes identified were seen to generally correspond with the seven implications that were identified in the Literature Review.

The interviews analysed in this chapter were set up primarily to answer Research Question Three regarding the challenges that may exist for TAs in supporting inclusive classroom practices and the interventions that were needed to help them competently to overcome these challenges. This question cannot be fully answered from this data alone but relies as well on the analysis of the questionnaire responses that were covered in Chapter Four. The findings of both these chapters will then be fully reported upon, and their significance discussed in Chapter Six and subsequent recommendations for change made in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the responses to this study's three research questions. Section 6.2 restates the research questions and provides a brief synopsis of the research findings as well as an introduction to Figure 4. This figure illustrates the interconnectivity of the implications drawn from the Literature Review, the challenges presented to TAs in supporting inclusive classrooms and the themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews and then displays them under seven topic headings. Section 6.3 discusses each of these topics in turn and in Section 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 the answers to the three research questions are proposed. Section 6.7 provides a brief summary of the chapter and linked it to Chapter Seven where the recommendations emanating from this research were presented.

6.2 Synopsis of research findings

Chapter Two of this research study provided a literature review of the available books, papers, and research studies dealing with the intersecting topics of the roles of TAs and the implementation of inclusive education. Seven implications were identified in this review including the need for a definition for inclusion, factors effecting the implementation of inclusion, professional development issues, the importance of viewing inclusion in context, inclusion as a journey along a continuum, the importance of recognising TAs' voices and the importance of establishing an inclusive culture.

Out of the interviews conducted with a select group of 18 TAs, seven discrete themes were developed by the PR. These themes mostly paralleled the seven implications from the literature review. As part of the questionnaire completed by TAs, 15 challenges to the implementation of inclusion were provided and the participating TAs were asked to rank

them in order of importance. Once analysed the challenges selected aligned with the seven implications sighted in the literature review and the seven interview-based themes. These are displayed for comparison purposes in Figure 4. The findings discussed in this chapter constitute this research's contributions made to the theoretical, methodological, practical and policy knowledge in this field of education endeavour.

Topics	Literature Review implications	Emerging themes from interviews	Challenges identified by TAs in Questionnaire
1 Inclusion confusion	Definition of inclusion	The inclusion confusion	Role description uncertainty (12)
2 Implementation	Implementation	Implementation	Student behaviour issues (1) Time constraints (2) Timetabling (10) Adequate resources (11) Pay rates (5) Physical strain (15)
3 Professional development	Professional development	Professional development	Training (6)
4 Context	Inclusion in context		Employment uncertainty (3) Work conditions (15)
5 Continuum	Inclusion as a journey (Continuum)	Consequences	Knowledge regarding disabilities (8)
6 Communication	TA's Voice	Communication Collaboration	Lack of communication (staff) (4) Lack of collaboration (7) Status (13)
7 Inclusive culture	Inclusive culture	Inclusive culture	Emotional strain (9)

Figure 3: Topics Emanating from Data Analysis.

Note. Numbers in Brackets e.g., (1) relate to ranking of identified challenges.

6.3 Topics emanating from data analysis

Based on the Literature Review implications, emerging interview themes and the challenges to inclusion implementation identified by TAs in the questionnaire, it was possible to cluster the outcomes under seven topics. These topics provided a coherent, platform for discussion of the research study's findings and included, untangling the confusion prevalent in the understanding of inclusion, the implicit difficulties in using TAs to implement inclusion in classrooms, the deficits in TA professional development, the need to examine inclusion in context, viewing inclusion as a journey along a continuum, communication issues and the imperatives for an inclusive culture. Each of these topics was used to further the discussion relating to the three established research questions.

Research Question One: What are the perceptions of the role of Teacher Aides working in an inclusive classroom from the viewpoint of both the Teacher Aides and the Supervising Teachers?

Research Question Two: To what extent are Teacher Aides and their Supervisors both satisfied that the Teacher Aides are equipped to carry out these perceived roles?

Research Question Three: Where challenges may exist in their understanding, skills, knowledge, and practice what interventions are needed to help Teacher Aides to overcome these challenges and to competently carry out their roles of promoting an inclusive culture?

It is important also to focus again on this study's Conceptual Framework and to reflect of how this framework aligns with the findings emerging from the data. The fundaments of the framework were based upon an understanding that the journey towards the establishment of a collaborative inclusive classroom was dependent of the school's capacity to support all students (not just some), and, allowing the TA to become more of a helper and empower, interpreter, translator, and role model. This transition was to be based upon TAs becoming a valuable, appropriately trained and, by necessity, a respected component of the classroom. Figure 3 is intended to serve as an illustration of how the various components of the research combine to focus on the challenges that need to be met and overcome for the journey along the conceptual framework continuum to be attempted.

In the following section each of the seven topics will be discussed by exploring the three components that have been amalgamated for the purpose of this study. First will involve identifying the implications, discovered in the Literature Review. Second, the themes developed from the interview and the data collected from the mostly quantitative questionnaire

will be analysed so that they can be used in answering the three research questions and making recommendations for necessary change.

6.3.1 Inclusion confusion

Identifying meaningful job descriptions for TAs in inclusive classrooms, was the genesis behind the development of the three research questions for this study. Each question was predicated, therefore, by a requirement to view the responses within the context of an inclusive classroom. For these questions to be addressed appropriately, it was important to identify what is understood by the term inclusion in the context of this study. It became clear, while reviewing the literature, that this task was especially important, as there was a frequent reference to the tendency of those working in schools to conflate the concept of inclusion with integration. According to Haug (2017), it was very difficult to find any education institution that has come up with an acceptable definition of the term inclusion.

Despite that assertion, it was stated in Chapter Two that for the purpose of this research study, the discussion about inclusion would rely less upon the mere locating of students within schools and more upon culturally inclusive imperatives such as, "how the teaching is organized (fellowship and placement), teacher and student activities (support, involvement and participation), and benefits from the teaching" (Haug, 2017, p. 207). After examining the many and varied definitions of the term inclusion it was concluded that, for the purpose of this study, Ramberg and Watkins (2020) definition that "Inclusion is about the presence, placement, participation and achievement of all students" (p. 89) would be regarded as a workable definition within inclusive education systems.

Beyond the definition of inclusion, the literature review provided substantial background information about the subject of inclusive classrooms. Several important implications emerged from previous studies. In discussing the implications of inclusive pedagogy in inclusive classrooms Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) focussed on teaching strategies that maximised the learning of all students. They also suggested the importance of adopting a pedagogical stance that puts the focus, on what was taught rather than to whom it was taught. Furthermore, Florian and Black- Hawkins (2011), challenged the argument, sometimes put forward by educators, that including students with special needs into a classroom somehow disadvantages other students.

The view that inclusion was something that occurred when a school progressively removes the barriers to its implementation was a recurring insight. It was recognised in the literature where Slee (2018) argued that inclusive education occurred when those barriers

were recognised and dismantled and when all children participated in receiving optimal access to both academic and social opportunities. This was supported by Woodcock et al., (2022) who said that "All inclusive culture is also one in which teachers recognise their ability to facilitate learning and reduce barriers to learning and participation for *all* students in their classroom," (p. 2)

Both TAs and supervising teachers, participating in the questionnaires, were given the opportunity to present their own definition of the term inclusion. The analysis of these TA responses showed that the majority of contributors either tried to define inclusion by using the term inclusion (n=19) itself or by identifying inclusion as merely a procedure (n= 23). Only one response from the TAs came close to being a definition that aligned with the predetermined concepts, of presence, placement, support, participation, and progress, assigned to this study. This definition was quite wordy and was set out in full in Chapter Five, but it was predicated on the understanding that inclusion is not just a policy and procedure set out as a guideline but a process where everyone in the organisation was made to feel included. One of the TA questionnaire participants explained this by stating that organisations play a '*vital role in providing a safe, clean and educational journey for all students.'*

The written responses made by the supervising teachers (n = 48) in their questionnaire in regard to defining inclusion were quite encouraging. The teachers generally demonstrated a more acute understanding of the concept of inclusion. Several teachers (n = 7), defined inclusion narrowly, as a way of dealing with special needs students. Others approached it from the already discounted general procedural viewpoint (n = 14) by recommending actions that should be done in a specific way in order to achieve what they saw as the desired inclusive outcome. However, a larger number (n = 23) offered on topic contributions that came over as intrinsically motherhood statements. Nevertheless, the confidential statements provided by two of the questionnaire participants demonstrated an understanding that inclusion should not be regarded as just another optional school procedure. The first proposed that inclusion was about '*Providing all students with educational opportunities, regardless of race, religion, gender or disability'* and the second offered that *'all students have the right to the same classroom education'.*

A small number of teacher participants (n = 4) demonstrated a sound philosophical understanding of what constituted inclusion. One teacher offered that, '*Just being at a school does not equate to inclusion',* while another said that inclusion was*, 'participating in a group environment which resembles real-life interactions.'* A third teacher provided an insightful

statement that, '*inclusion is not about every child receiving the same, rather every child being supported in order for them to participate in the classroom*'. Finally, one participant presented the idea that inclusion could be related to the culture within which it occurs. This teacher wrote that, '*Inclusive classrooms should be welcoming and should be supportive. They should support the diverse academic, social, emotional, and communication needs of all students.'*

No teacher was able to come up with a comprehensive definition, however, they collectively demonstrated a deeper and more informed set of ideas than those presented by the TAs. It could be argued that the unanticipated, gratifyingly positive attitudes and accurate perceptions of the concept of inclusion, demonstrated by so many teachers, would be sufficient to warrant a targeted research study of its own. The conventional wisdom that holds that teachers are so busy in their everyday work life that beliefs and convictions about inclusion would therefore not be high on their agenda was not borne out in all circumstances (Sharma, Forlin & Loreman, 2008). What did emerge from the teacher's attempts to provide an appropriate definition of inclusion was a realisation that many teachers have a sound understanding of the importance of inclusion and could therefore act on their beliefs once provided with appropriate organisational guidance.

The offering from TAs regarding a definition of inclusion, in the quantitative part of the study, was underwhelming. It was nevertheless determined that at the start of each of the subsequent semi-structured interviews, the participants would be asked to declare their understanding regarding the term inclusion. The TA responses were clustered into several distinct response types. The first of these was one that adopted a structural or optimistic procedural approach (n = 4), where it was believed that just setting a classroom up in a particular way would ensure that inclusion occurred. As expected, several (n =3) TAs defined inclusion by describing integration. Another group (n = 3), attempted to define inclusion by saying what it was not. The largest group (n = 6) opted for a functional approach that centred on the belief that inclusion could happen if only all of the children were put into the one class so that segregation was avoided. Just one TA described an inclusive classroom where diversity was allowed to flourish through the adoption of an approach that fostered an appropriate culture. Fran provided the insightful comment that inclusion, *'is an attitude and a culture that permeates a school, and it is about how people treat each other.'*

While none of the 15 challenges presented to TAs in the questionnaire mentioned inclusion specifically, it would be understood that each challenge, in its own way, impacted on the adoption of inclusion. The challenge that was most closely linked to the promotion of

inclusion was 'role description uncertainty'. If the definition used in this research was seen to incorporate the four values of presence, placement, participation, and achievement then for a TA being asked to work in an environment where no one was really certain about what they were expected to do would be the antithesis of inclusion. The ongoing confusion about seeking to include students by pursuing integration practices only serves to highlight the issue of role uncertainty. When asked to rank the challenges within the questionnaire, 'role description uncertainty' was placed 12th with just 6.45% of the participating TAs seeing it as an issue. Unfortunately, an improved role description was not included in the choices presented to the participants as a potential means of helping to overcome the challenges, so an opportunity was missed to collect TAs' thoughts on this issue.

The findings from this topic contribution to research in this area by stressing the necessity for all participants in promoting inclusive education to be confident that they know just what they are promoting. The confusion being addressed here is the subtle, even insidious tendency to conflate inclusion with topics such as special education and integration. When this occurs the real meaning of inclusion and the opportunity to implement it successfully "is lost in an earnest, convenient, or cynical misinterpretation of 'inclusion'" (Cologon, 2022, p. 397). If this research is able to signal an alert to the danger for educators and researchers of being seduced by the inclusion confusion, then it has made a worthwhile contribution to both the theoretical and policy knowledge regarding inclusion.

6.3.2 Implementation (making inclusion happen)

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While none of the 15 challenges presented to TAs in the questionnaire mentioned inclusion specifically, it would be understood that each challenge, in its own way, impacted on the adoption of inclusion. The challenge that was most closely linked to the promotion of inclusion was 'role description uncertainty*'*. If the definition used in this research was seen to incorporate the four values of presence, placement, participation, and achievement then for a TA being asked to work in an environment where no one was really certain about what they were expected to do would be the antithesis of inclusion. The ongoing confusion about seeking to include students by pursuing integration practices only serves to highlight the issue of role uncertainty. When asked to rank the challenges within the questionnaire, 'role description uncertainty*'* was placed 12th with just 6.45% of the participating TAs seeing it as an issue.

Unfortunately, an improved role description was not included in the choices presented to the participants as a potential means of helping to overcome the challenges, so an opportunity was missed to collect TAs' thoughts on this issue. There is an obvious methodological lesson to be learnt from the oversights identified in the current research**.** Making use of questionnaires created by others not fully conversant with local customs and conditions, as was the case in this research, can create problems such as those highlighted in this case**.** However, this oversight does not distract from the finding that there is an unfortunate connection between the absence of clear role descriptions for TAs and the lack of knowledge about what constitutes inclusion.

While the solution would appear to be the eminently practical one of creating an appropriate role description for TAs, it also has policy implication around the implementation of such a policy based upon both appropriate practical and theoretical understandings. "Governments must acknowledge the barriers that their current policies and structures erect and shift towards a more inclusive model of educational delivery for the benefit of all children and young people in Australia" (Anderson & Boyle, 2019, p.796).

6.3.3 Professional development

The lack of professional development for TAs emerged as a substantial implication within the literature review and one that impacted negatively on the implementation of inclusive classroom practices. Egilson and Traustadottir (2009), stated that TAs working in inclusive classrooms needed to be trained in collaborative skill development while Butt (2018) criticised the minimal training requirements expected of TAs. Using an Italian context Devecchi et al. (2012) made the point that the TA equivalent in that country benefited extensively from comprehensive professional training that stands in contrast to many other countries including Australia. The research by Carter et al. (2009) demonstrated that just under half of the TAs that participated in their Queensland study reported that they had ever received any in-school professional development. The reality that those most affected by insufficient training for TAs were the children they worked with was highlighted in a study by Harris and Aprile (2015) who alleged that because of this limited training "Teacher aides often asked less challenging questions, closed down instead of opened up student talk, and focused primarily on task completion" (p. 142).

Ranked only at sixth in the list of challengers was the ever reoccurring one of training and professional development (PD). For the purpose of this discussion the terms professional development and training will be regarded as the one item and referred to as PD. This was necessary as the participants in the study used the two terms interchangeably when writing comments, and when participating in the interviews. Given the data gleaned from the literature review regarding training deficits for TAs, (Butt (2018), Carlson et al. (2012); Devecchi et al. (2012); Egilson & Traustadottir (2009), it was expected that this would be ranked considerably higher. Almost without exception, the TAs interviewed raised their concern about being provided with inadequate and sometimes entirely non-existent PD. In the context of the TA's experience within their schools it seems that when and if PD occurred the actual event was almost always conducted in-house and was usually about providing upgrading on curriculum issues or syllabus change and rarely about upskilling.

In Chapter Five comments about PD from many of the interview participants were provided and therefore it is not the intention to repeat them verbatim here. Instead, a range of extracts have been used, to give a flavour of the sentiments expressed by so many different TAs in a range of differing contexts. Roslyn, a very professional and experienced TA, but one who admitted to having no clear understanding of the philosophies behind the policies she was required to adhere to, stated that professional development was necessary in order, '*to know just what the teachers are doing. This is one of our big bugbears'.* Amy, who had

recently qualified as a teacher while working as a TA, said, when discussing the school's policy of inclusion, that it would have been helpful, '*perhaps to have been shown some exemplars of practice'.*

The TAs left no doubt that it was not they who could be held responsible for the lack of PD. A recognised informal leader and advocate for inclusion, Irene, said that she was, '*more than willing to attend more professional development.'* Even Karen, an experienced TA working in a two-teacher school, echoed this sentiment when she commented*, 'You never have enough, you really don't.'* The tone of some of the TA's comments were more accusative. Gina, a TA of long experience, stated that '*I have received very little training'* and highly experienced primary school TA, Quentin saying*, 'we are always asking and there is never any money.' A*ccording to the industrially well qualified but inexperienced vocation education TA, Hillary, *'There isn't any professional development for TAs at my school. There just isn't.'*

When the TAs were asked, in the questionnaire, to comment on their negative experience working in inclusive environment, there were two statements that stood out regarding PD. These statements demonstrate the depth of angst and frustration felt by TAs when they were asked to carry out duties that they were not fully prepared for. The questionnaire responses were confidential so no attributions can be given to the authors.

The first of these confidential comments said,

'Working with behavioural students is incredibly challenging and an area in which, I feel, TAs do not have enough training. A lot of it seems like we make it up as we go … More training for TAs in this area would be fantastic but also necessary.'

The second contribution was even more scathing-

'A great majority of the TAs I work with in my department do not want to share information properly or teach any new staff any skills or tasks involved with the job. You have to figure it out on your own or be made to look stupid. I've been belittled in front of people, made to feel stupid, embarrassed and harassed by these people.'

The feedback from both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research were consistent in demonstrating the practice of schools engaging large numbers of highly motivated and often highly talented TAs. They did this ostensibly to have these employees carry out a wide range of roles, but they also did this, without providing adequate or in some cases any PD to the workers. The TAs were then expected to carry out critical roles within the schools with minimal preparation. A possible solution to this problem is to train up the TAs to a level of competence, commensurate with their responsibilities within given role

descriptions. The argument can then be seen to become somewhat circular, in that the role descriptions, of course, cannot be determined until the system knows what it wants TAs to do. The system will not know how to use the TAs unless they know what they can expect TA to be able to achieve in any specific context. This was a somewhat farcical situation and one that needs to be remedied as soon as possible.

There are practical and policy implication related to this issue as it has been suggested in this study, that if TAs are to be a functional presence within the classroom, they need to be used as support personnel tasked to assist teachers and not be ones that do their job for them by teaching children. If this was mandated and TAs were employed under that understanding then perhaps the existing Certificate III in Education Support course (CHC30213) may, with some upgrading, be made fit for purpose.

6.3.4 Inclusion context

An unavoidable implication in appreciating the relationship between TAs and inclusive classroom practices was a realisation that this relationship developed differently depending on the context in which it occurred. While context is multi-layered, one of the more important layers was that of culture. As inclusion has often been associated with the provision of education for students with special needs, it followed, that national determinations about what constitutes special needs was going to be significant (Devecchi et al., 2012). Examining the adoption of inclusion in the Asian context of Hong Kong schools, Forlin and Rose (2010) concluded that inclusion was not happening, and perhaps never would happen in the same way as it did in western countries. As Australia was recognised as a very multi-cultural nation, this realisation had important implications for how our schools plan the culturally appropriate implementation of inclusion.

The literature review demonstrated that rates of inclusion tended to vary from one country to the next. A report by EASIE (2009) reinforced this by stating that in the European context there was a great variation in the data obtained from different countries. In a Danish context, Engsig and Johnstone (2015) discovered that there had been a retreat from the inclusion of children with special needs, despite laws enacted to achieve the opposite. This was influenced by the negative view in Denmark that associated inclusion with the assimilation of low attaining students. Despite early success with inclusion in Sweden, Brodin and Lindstrand (2007) identified that students with special needs there, were still being made to feel like outsiders.

These contextual implications were concisely summed up by Artiles et al. (2011) who stated that “despite the impressive growth in interest and enthusiasm around inclusive

education throughout the world how it is defined and implemented and for whose benefit, remains at best incompletely understood" (p. 2). There were many other facets of context that impacted on the way schools might choose to implement inclusion and the way that they chose to use TAs for this purpose was not the least of these. The quantitative and qualitative data compiled for this current study has been used to examine these facets and the implications that followed.

If TAs are going to be used effectively in creating a potentially inclusive classroom environment, understanding the context in which this can occur was clearly important. Two of the fifteen challenges identified by the TAs in their response to the questionnaire were contextual, including collaboration (7), and work conditions (15). While it could be argued that every aspect of the challenges ranked by the participating TAs relates to context, these two dimensions each have a specific impact. It was difficult to perceive how inclusive practices could flourish in an environment that included such factors as lack of collaboration or inadequate or unsatisfactory work conditions.

The third largest challenge identified by the TAs in the questionnaire was employment uncertainty (30.6%). This initially appeared to be inconsistent as the personal inventory attached to the questionnaire showed that a high, 83.87% of TAs were employed in a permanent capacity. However, permanency for TAs may mean that they are confirmed in their positions only as long as the school's budget allocation does not change. With an average length of service for this group standing at 11.46 years, it was understandable that having invested a not insignificant part of their working lives in this occupation that security of employment in a historically casual workforce, regularly impacted by political decisions, would be rated highly (Butt, 2014). For most, working as a TA was clearly a career choice that they had invested many years of their working lives in pursuing and one that they would like to feel secure in. The solution suggested by 35.48% of the same group was the evident one of improving job security.

A number of TAs, in their interviews, touched upon this topic of employment insecurity at least tangentially. This was expressed by Novice TA, Fran when she commented on her situation by saying '*It frustrates me, and it makes you feel like you are doing all the hard work but are still not really a part of it'.* Employment security for TAs has been a longtime challenge as school's eligibility for ancillary staff was tied to often fluctuating student enrolment numbers. Sometimes the insecurity was not just about employment but also having the necessary resources to do their job properly. Highly competent TA, Olivia spoke out of her frustration when she said *'It is just very hard when we do have a child come*

and we don't have the facilities'. Government funding attached to special programs that can vary from one election cycle to the next means that TAs face an ever-changing environment in respect to their employment certainty even when they are classified as a permanent employee.

Even though very serious contextual challenges such as role description uncertainty, job status and work conditions did not appear in the top ten ranked challenges, they still collectively represented almost a fifth of the challenges selected by TAs. The saving grace lay in the previously mentioned intertwining nature of these elements which meant that being able to remedy one challenge will consequentially flow on to assisting in dealing with other related challenges. An exciting, novel approach to the use of TAs within educational institutions has been included in the recommendations outlined in Chapter Seven and if this innovation was to be adopted then almost all of the barriers to the effective use of TAs in inclusive classrooms could be addressed.

6.3.5 The inclusion continuum

A fifth implication identified within the literature review, was Rutherford's (2012) assertion regarding the benefit in perceiving the development of inclusive education, as being on a continuum. Inclusion was not to be viewed as a destination, where everything was set and finalised, but rather as a journey "in which students' and aides' experiences ranged from inclusion to exclusion in school settings" (p. 762). In recognising that each TA and their pupils were most likely to work in a range of different contexts and conditions during the course of a school day, Rutherford (2012) identified three positions on this continuum. The three positions were first that everybody was included in the learning event, and this would equate to inclusion. Second, most students were to be included and this was either assimilation or integration and third, exclusion where students with disabilities were left out entirely. In this study these positions, *"are outlined in order to provide a framework for understanding the range of factors that influence participants' experiences"* (Rutherford, 2012, p. 762).

The implications derived from articles by Rutherford (2011; 2012) had a major impact on this study as the concept of an inclusion journey along a continuum formed the basis of the study's adopted research paradigm. This idea of a continuum was especially helpful in framing the content of the interview discussions with the TAs. It also helped provide a lens through which definitions offered by TAs and their supervising teachers could be analysed.

The continuum concept served as a touchstone against which the definitions provided by the TAs and the supervising teachers in their respective questionnaire responses could be held.

This image of a continuum upon which TAs could locate themselves and their schools was especially useful in starting the interviews (Figure 3). It provided an image that allowed even the most reticent of the interviewees to engage with. The Rutherford (2011; 2012) articles were very persuasive in promoting socially just education practices that defied the destructive exclusive practices currently employed in many organisations. They also promoted the importance of realising that once the journey along the continuum has begun then it will bring with it inevitable consequences.

One of the consequences of adopting an inclusion continuum would be to appreciate how the range of students with or without disabilities can progressively be drawn into the forward journey. In the questionnaire, the TAs identified this deficit as the eighth highest challenge facing them in the pursuit of inclusion. In the subsequent interviews many of the TAs were able to identify other potential consequences. Reflecting on the TAs lack of training, Patricia said that *'Most aides generally do not have the skill base or the knowledge base'*. Olivia fearing the potential work implications for her in making changes to her approach complained that '*There are 21 classes I look after a week, just to make sure that they have everything that they need for a particular lesson and that is a lot!'.* Quentin foresaw the potential for consequential class disruption if she worked at including all children in the classroom and offered that '*Most teachers find it quite hard if a TA is in there in the classroom talking to the students.'* Karen felt that inclusion was not going to occur unless there was *'more clarity of instruction'* and Amy, reflecting once more on the absence of relevant PD said that she would have liked to *'have been shown some exemplars of practice'.*

6.3.6 Communication (collaboration)

While the issue of communication, in relation to the twin subjects of TAs and inclusion, ran as a subtle sub-text through most of the literature, it did not feature often as the main focus of interest. However, factors such as limited communication and inadequate collaboration were themes suggested by a range of authors in the Sharma and Salend (2016) systematic review. It appears that the voice of TAs was something that has traditionally been missing from education debates and this implication was generally supported by the absence of relevant articles on the topic within the literature review. This was partly addressed in an article by Navarro (2015) that stressed the potential benefits of engaging TAs as one of the major players in the debate. This article was especially useful as it avoided focussing on

special needs while espousing an enhanced role for TAs in inclusive classrooms. Angelides, Constaninou and Leigh (2009), reported, in their study, on the use of paraprofessionals in inclusive education that, "In many instances, we observed poor communication between teachers and paraprofessionals, and almost no collaboration." (p. 85).

In the questionnaire, TAs identified a 'lack of communication between staff'(22.5%) as the fifth greatest challenge. This was also identified as a challenge within the interviews, and it featured so prominently that it emerged as one of the interview's major themes. This issue was compounded by the fact that although teachers and TAs believe that they were communicating, in an environment, where no formal structure, such as staff meetings and allocated paid meeting time existed there were limited opportunities for this to effectively occur.

Communication and the issues that surrounded it, ultimately permeates every facet of TAs' work within schools. The lack of it also permeated the comments made by a number of TAs during the interviews. Traditionalist TA Olivia, when asked whether she had the opportunity to attend staff meetings responded, *'No, I am told I don't need to. It is just for teachers, I am told'.* Referring once again to questionnaire comments written confidentially by TAs about their negative experiences with inclusion, a number of relevant comments regarding communication were forthcoming. The first one is a rather sad indictment of the current system and touched on more than mere everyday communication. It spoke to an almost total lack of engagement that had also been witnessed by the PR in some school environments.

> *'As a Teacher Aide we sometimes are overlooked in a classroom environment. Teachers are unsure of how to fully use our skills and integrate us into their lesson structure. Some teachers have been known to totally ignore a TA in the classroom possibly not knowing we are there to assist, not take their jobs or criticise them'*

The second confidential comment, made within the TA questionnaire, painted an equally bleak picture of frustration from a TA who in wanting to carry out her role was instead confronted by an impenetrable wall. This TA made the statement that,

> '*Not given correct understanding and knowledge concerning individual student needs can be discouraging for all concerned. The ability to access an understanding of students and teachers needs are vital*.'

There were positive comments about communication, but these were few. One TA made a valuable link between communication and inclusion when she said, '*Great communication*

leads to an inclusive teamwork environment. Help is always available when seeking positive feedback'.

Almost half (46.77%), of those TAs participating in the questionnaire regarded effective communication as the number one way of overcoming the challenges that they confronted. It was also important to consider that communication was not just verbal. One study reported, that 93% of our communication was nonverbal relying on body language, while the other 7% relies on the actual words. "However, critical information is often transmitted via handwritten notes, e-mails, or text messages, which can lead to serious consequences if there is miscommunication" (O'Daniel & Rosenstein, 2008, p. 2). However, from the data gathered it appeared that most communication between TAs and their supervisors was verbal.

Communication sometimes appeared to be the magic wand because where effective communication was present things appeared to happen, but for TAs effective, positive communication hardly ever seemed to occur. A far too generic role description for TAs, along with serious time constraints and a lack of training all contributed to the existing unsatisfactory situation. While a number of TAs suggested solutions, their low status within the school hierarchy meant that on most occasions they were not in a position to initiate change. It was here that two issues of poor communication and lack of TA voice coalesce and were evident in Theme Six regarding the TAs' voice.

Carol, a TA with extensive experience in a number of contexts, suggested that '*I think that [Communication] is the big thing that everyone needs to work together, you can get success."* Elaine, an experienced primary TA, echoed a common refrain when she said, *'We report to one of the Deputies, but I think it all gets swept back to funding, with time and money. They are quite prepared to listen, but I think that is often as far as it goes'.* Secondary TA Roslyn, expressed her concern when she said, '*Any time we need to talk to a teacher about a particular student, it needs to be lunchtime, morning tea or after school or after the lesson in my own time and the teacher's own time as well.'*

An idea floated by Patricia, an experienced special education TA, had considerable merit. She suggested that *'If you have everybody working together for an outcome, it could be more structured as an equal team almost rather than just one person.'* If TAs found that they were working as part of an identified team, then they could benefit from all the advantages that teams can provide. They would no longer be seen as untethered single agents, nor would they have to contend so often with determining their place within the organisation. A work team including the teacher, the TAs and other ancillary staff could create an environment that was efficient, effective, and supportive. According to Sparks (2013), "Effective teams

strengthen leadership, improve teaching and learning, nurture relationships, increase job satisfaction, and provide a means for mentoring and supporting new teachers and administrators*"* (p. 28).

Reading the comments related to how information about relevant student disabilities was communicated to TAs was instructive as it provided an insight into how schools disseminate such important information. A number of TAs provided comments that were critical of the process followed in their schools. Some pertinent comments made were, '*Not given correct understanding and knowledge concerning individual student needs can be discouraging for all concerned. The ability to access an understanding of students and teachers needs are vital'* and from another contributor, '*Not getting enough support for some of these students and knowing if I had that support, I would have achieved a better outcome for them'.* The comments from a third TA possible sums this situation up when she complained that *'There are so many different social, emotional, ODD areas, labels we don't really understand…It can be really overwhelming and draining.'*

To discover, how the contributors believed these challenges could be overcome, the questionnaire provided 12 suggestions for consideration. The top three of these were reflective of the concerns surrounding the inadequate conditions under which most TAs perceived their workplace. However, they were not necessarily comparable with the challenges that this same group had previously identified in the questionnaire itself. The analysed results indicated that the top recommendation, by a substantial degree, was a need to improve communication in the workplace (46.77%). It was no surprise that the allied request for improved collaboration came in fourth, at 32.25%.

As collaboration and communication cannot exist in isolation these two interview themes were combined under the one topic heading. The challenge of 'lack of collaboration (staff)' *(16.12%)* ranked seventh in the questionnaire table and 'improved collaboration' was seen as the best way to overcome challenges by 32.25% of the responding TAs. To be an active part of a schoolwork team, positive collaboration was seen as an essential component. This challenge regarding collaboration was not so much about defining what it was but understanding why only one in six TAs saw collaboration as a challenge and yet almost a third (32.25%) as a solution. The simple answer to why collaboration was seen as a possible solution to the range of other challenges identified lies in the fact that TAs are in essence support workers.

When TAs are used collaboratively as support workers, they can join with others within the school environment, to improve communication and bring about change. The

sometime clouded distinction between supporting teachers that the term TA infers and supporting students has previously been stated. TAs are being required to collaborate on a daily basis with a number of groups from administrators to parents. Teachers would be the first of these groups targeted for TA support, but as support workers TAs are also expected to collaborate with other members of staff and in many different ways with students and parents. TA, Karen highlighted this when she commented plaintively that, *'Parents need to be drawn into the school, there needs to be more of a community'.*

Very few of the TAs interviewed raised collaboration directly as an issue but it appeared to be an under-current that ran through a number of the conversations. When the TAs were frustrated and reported that they were struggling with many of the challenges previously discussed, then requests about improved collaboration appeared to emerge as a plea for help. It became clear throughout the interview process that the interpersonal relationships that existed between the TA and the supervisor/teacher were critical to what happened for the children. One comment taken from the questionnaire was enlightening, '*It depends on the classroom teacher who may value your opinion. When I'm asked for my contribution, I feel respected*'. It was also made clear that collaboration was the cornerstone for all aspects of effective education not just those relating to inclusion.

Respect and trust are the essential components of collaboration, and these two qualities are also the essential components of attaining inclusion. The two aspects, respect, and trust lead to effective communication and this emerged from this research as possibly the single most important aspect for an inclusive classroom. TA Karen summed it up by saying '*Well first of all they [the students] have to feel comfortable with you because they have heard it all before'*. How attitudes such as respect and trust can be mandated was unclear, but the creation of an inclusive culture by means of positive school leadership and adoption of an educational team approach would be a positive start.

6.3.7 Inclusive culture

The seventh implication identified within the Literature Review was 'inclusive culture'. This implication highlighted the all-important connection that exists between the creation of positive, supportive relationships in schools and the establishment of an inclusive culture (Pellicano, Bölte, & Stahmer, 2018). While no literature was located that dealt specifically with ways that TAs could be used in supporting inclusive cultures, the focus was chiefly on how school leadership was a prime moving force in this endeavour. Carrington

(1999) spoke about how important it was to develop a "culture of difference" (p. 259) while Zollers et al. (1999) cautioned that failure to develop this culture would make any school reform, not just inclusion, unsustainable. A study of the work undertaken by five Canadian principals to develop inclusive cultures within their own separate contexts reinforced this idea. This study showed that for inclusion to be possible schools needed to manage the challenges of inclusive change through promoting a change to the school's culture (Osiname, 2018).

While the focus of the questionnaires only provided limited scope for exploring the inclusive culture concept, the responses by several participants in the qualitative interviews were more expansive. Fran, in her response made the telling point that '*Inclusion is more than what happens in a classroom, it is an attitude and a culture that permeates a school'*. Another TA, Michelle, focused on the wider dimensions of inclusive culture by commenting that in her school, they had success in engaging the staff and the students but there was a need to reach out beyond the school. She commented, '*We are doing really well with the staff at the moment and the kids are definitely becoming more involved, but we need to draw the parents in'.* TA, Karen, agreed that being able to create relationships was fundamental to creating innovative inclusive practices. She stated, '*Every child is welcome, supported and is part of the learning journey and is just part of our school learning community and it is regardless of any disabilities or cultural reasons'.*

Comments made by a number of the TAs during the interviews underlined the belief that inclusion and the existence of a supportive culture were inseparable. Despite that, there was no clear pathway identified that showed how such a culture of inclusion could be implemented. Some of the blocks to the development of these healthy inclusion promoting practices centred on an uneven distribution of power and a system induced obsession with the allocation of grades. This happens even among students with special needs, along with other similarly negative practices such as meaningless homework tasks that so often take up valuable instructional time. Research has found that 98% of younger school children are expected to do homework despite questions about its limited academic impact (Lehner-Mear, 2021).

While the TAs were able to discuss the relationship aspects of developing appropriate and healthy cultures of belonging, it became apparent that schools did not include TAs in the development of culture for the learning environment. Irene, who was possibly the best exponent of relationship building interviewed, offered that, *'We just want to help each other as much as we possibly can, and so all the students' needs are discussed*." Discussing how

she felt about the infrequent TA meetings and the school failure to consult, TA Joan, stated "*Yeh! We all feel a little bit second best!"* Small school TA Gina reported*, "We never have staff meetings and things like that as the principal we have does not believe in them."*

With reference to the interview responses that made up Theme Seven (*Inclusive culture*), the challenge was really a subset of a number of the challenges explored earlier. The solution to creating an inclusive environment has to be mostly centred on improved PD but that in itself will not provide a lasting fix. The need for TAs to have a defined role within the school is further underlined here. Many of these situations could be avoided by reaffirming that TAs are there, not to support students but rather to support the classroom teacher to support the students. If this change can be achieved, then the challenges of emotional strain and timetabling would also be resolved.

No longer having to juggle tasks that they have not been trained for with limited time and poor working conditions, TAs will be freed of an enormous emotional strain. This would allow them, if they chose, the potential to work collectively and collaboratively with other staff to achieve the elusive, inclusive culture that many of them had been initially employed to promote. Issues such as timetabling would be less challenging when team-based classrooms are the norm and where the registered teacher could become the leader of a professionally trained team of educators.

The realisation of the significance of creating a supportive culture within which inclusive education can flourish is possible the most important contribution that this study could bring to this topic. The practical implications arising from this include basing any inclusive education policy upon the theoretical construct that an inclusive culture requires the creation of classroom environments specifically design to promote inclusiveness. Adapting existing classroom practices may work but simply adapting and adjust practices can ultimately promote integration and even exclusion, "the ways in which current systems of education are set up makes inclusion for all 'impractical', without consideration of the pressing need for systemic change" (Cologon, 2022, p. 397). While the methodological approach necessary to achieve an inclusion culture may be difficult relevant recommendations made in chapter seven were designed to facilitate this process.

6.4 Responding to research question one

The first question proposed for this study was, what are the perceptions of the role of TAs working in an inclusive classroom from the viewpoint of both the TAs and the Supervising Teachers? The tool, primarily used for the purpose of answering this question in

this study, was the two-part questionnaire provided to both the TAs and the participating teachers. Further to that, detailed information was also elicited from the follow up semi-structured interviews conducted with a self-selected group of TAs. An advantage built into this study was the ability to develop the questionnaire based on one previously used, with a larger group of TAs in New South Wales (Carter et al., 2018). This meant that the results from this previous questionnaire could be used for comparison purposes. In identifying how TAs and their supervising teachers perceive the roles of the TAs, the results of the current study questionnaire and the preceding Cater et al., (2018) study provided a number of thought-provoking insights.

In examining this comparison table, it was important to note that the TAs surveyed in the current questionnaire and their supervisors, agreed on eight of the top ten TA roles. It was also evident that seven of the top ten roles were also nominated by the earlier, larger questionnaire conducted by Carter et al., (2018). When aligning the outcomes from the current TA, supervising teachers and Carter et al., (2018) questionnaires the agreed upon duties included a responsibility for providing encouragement and reinforcement to students as well as general (in class) and individuals (one at a time) instructional support, helping students to maintain focus on tasks, practice and help to consolidate tasks already taught (by teacher), as well as implementing teacher planned instruction. A seventh aligned duty was checking student's understanding about how to complete previously assigned work. Providing small group instruction within whole class lessons was ranked in the top ten by both groups of TAs surveyed and placed 12th by the supervising teachers.

From the results of these three, above mentioned, comparable studies, it can be extrapolated that those TAs and teachers, working within the system, were in a general agreement that the major roles of TAs centred on supporting the students both in group situations and individually. However, TAs, while not being asked to generate content, are nevertheless expected to be engaged in primarily instructional activities i.e., support practice and consolidation, implementation of teacher planned instruction, the checking of student's understanding. This became a cause for concern when revisiting the findings initially raised from the DISS project (2007). These findings said, "TAs should be adding value to what teachers do and not to be seen as replacing them and certainly not being used as an informal teaching resource for low attaining students" (Sharples, et al., 2017, p. 6). For TAs, this means, that they should only be asked to work with individuals or small groups in a class situation under direction of the class teacher. As well, TAs' role descriptions should mandate

that they adopt, as their primary role, the task of supporting teachers in providing instruction to the students rather than taking on that role themselves.

During the interviews almost every TA began by speaking positively of their own workspace but as the interview progressed it became evident that most TAs were taking on instructional roles that would lie outside of what would normally be expected of them. These comments below are a sample of what would be seen by anyone looking in at TAs within many classrooms. Busy TA Elaine reported that '*because there are so many demands in the classroom as you know because life being the way it is we are expected to teach everything*'. TA Roslyn was talking on another subject when she inadvertently admitted that there were times when she took over a teacher's role. She let slip that '*most of the teachers are so happy that you are there to look after those students so that they can look after the other students*' Talking with TA Quentin provided an insight into her busy schedule. She commented, '*I think the whole inclusion in a very crowded curriculum, like I am sitting in a LOTE lesson with students at a Year 1 level and I am conducting a Year 6 LOTE lesson with them. Do you know how hard that is*?'

This study demonstrates that there was an absence of any appropriate organisationally provided, definitive role descriptions within the Queensland context. The Queensland Education Department has separate role descriptions for TAs that work under the classifications of TA002, TA003 and TA004 (reference) For a TA003 to progress to TA004, they must satisfy a range of prerequisite criteria including a formal Certificate III qualification or higher. In most cases individual schools use these generic role descriptions as the basis for their own specific school's TA role documents.

The nature of this study and the limitations placed on outside research, during the Covid 19 pandemic, has meant that individual school role descriptions were not able to be easily accessed. Added to this was the impracticability of examining any documents coming from all of the study participant's individual schools. For this purpose and in the cause of clarity and brevity the assertions being made here are limited to referencing relevant sections of the role description developed for TA002 general TAs, by Education Queensland (EQ). This was a comprehensive document that, upon close scrutiny, displayed some contentious guidance.

This EQ description indicates that TAs, would assist both teachers and students in four broad activities only, specifically the supervision of education activities, playground and bus supervision, sporting activities and school excursions. The document informs TAs that they are expected to assist students with special needs, including specifics such as toileting,

dressing and consumption of meals. Other duties that the TAs are expected to fulfil, for all students, are to listen to them read and read aloud to them in turn. The list of duties for assisting teachers includes collecting money, performing playground duty, conducting bus supervision, delivery of first aid (once trained), assisting in science demonstrations, purchasing and preparation and storage of materials as well as other miscellaneous duties. Specific literacy and numeracy duties were listed as providing learning materials for students at risk, working with small groups and working with computers. General expectations such as effective communication, respect for confidentiality, tact, reliability, and sensitivity were all mandated.

This role description did not ask TAs to meet with their supervising teachers for any purpose. Apart from requiring TAs to communicate effectively and display a high level of interpersonal skills and to function as an effective team member, it did not mention any aspect of reciprocal communication or collaboration and it provided no clear direction about responsibilities regarding behaviour management and workplace health and safety. In short, it presented as a list of roles and provided little direction about how TAs are expected to work in the creation and maintenance of a supportive inclusive environment. The terms culture, inclusion and environment did not feature anywhere in the role description.

It could be argued that a written generic role description was just that, in that it purported to describe, in general terms, what an employee should expect to be asked to perform and therefore by its very nature it cannot be exhaustive. This only adds to the original assertion that there was a systemic problem in the effective utilisation of TAs for the purpose of supporting inclusive education. This problem was enhanced by an expectation from the employing organisation that TAs could be used as an effective tool for the purpose of assisting in the development of that inclusive culture. The assumption, by education systems locally and internationally, that TAs were the solution to inclusion had been explored in earlier chapters of this study and found wanting.

It also emerged from the questionnaire data that TAs removing students from the classroom for individual or small group instruction was a common practice. Carter et al. (2018) reported that 34.4 % of TAs were carrying out this practice daily or even more frequently. The current survey showed that from a TA and supervising teacher perspective this was 45%. When the participants were asked about withdrawing students for group activities such as reading, 25% of TAs indicated that this occurred, considerably less than the 61.9% result of 2018. In the current survey, supervising teachers indicated that this occurred comparatively frequently with a rate of 41.6%. This practice was regarded by the DISS

(2007) report, as one that mitigated against student progression. This situation is one that is deserving of more analysis than what is possible in this study. A recommendation is made in Chapter Seven that this be regarded as a possible topic for further research.

There appeared to be some inconsistency here, as when participating TAs were asked about this in the interviews the responses were predominantly an affirmation that this was something that no longer occurred. However, a number of TAs qualified their response and given the PR's multiple classroom observations in an unrelated role, this probably provided a more accurate reflection of the real situation. The statements made by a number of TAs reluctantly admitted that removing students from classrooms occurred under specific circumstances. TA Joan, who operates as both a mainstream general aide as well as a special need aide, stated. '*I don't know whether you want to hear this now, but we take a small group of students out into the hall, but we are still near the teacher'.* Small school TA Gina said, "*If she is doing reading and things like that, I can see the benefit for the class as well as for her to be doing it separate*" and "*If they are not getting any outside support and need to catch up then if they are having a difficult situation they do need to be withdrawn".* Special needs TA Karen explaining her context stated, *'It was not exactly one on one, but we would be physically distanced from the other children'.*

An issue standing out as one requiring some further exploration was in the area of responsibility for behaviour management. Both groups of TAs surveyed agreed that they frequently were required to manage student behaviour (70% - 2022 and 71.8% - 2018). The supervising teachers observed this happening at a considerably lower rate of 52.7%. Interpreting what this statistic really means is difficult, as there was insufficient information provided to know whether the three groups involved were viewing behaviour management in the same context. Teachers are mostly responsible for the everyday behaviour of students under their care and in most cases would not be expected to delegate this duty to their TAs. It was quite possible that the TAs completing the survey were indicating that while they played a part in supporting behaviour management, they were not actually claiming to be the main initiators. Operating from their position of low status in the school's hierarchy, TAs traditionally experience some resultant difficulties in accepting sole responsibility for student behaviour. This means that determining how behaviour features in TAs role descriptions could be a study also worthy of further research.

An area of potential difference also existed when determining the frequency with which TAs and their supervising teachers meet. In the current questionnaire, the TAs said that this did not happen daily, while according to the Carter et al. 2018 cohort it had occurred at a

quite high rate of 41.4%. That the supervising teachers said that it happened 25% of the time, again raises the question about the context in which these responses were made. There was insufficient ambient information available to know, just what the TAs in 2018 saw that constituting a technical meeting. What led to the discrepancies between the TA and supervising teachers' responses was also difficult to identify through the quantitative data. Careful analysis of the responses from the qualitative, semi-structured interviews assisted in developing further understanding of this situation. A number of the TAs interviewed expressed frustration about access to their supervising teachers for them it was a serious issue. In reporting on her role dealing with student health issues Joan said, '*I don't even have time after school to go and talk to the teachers about it.'* Most other TAs had similar concerns.

> *'I think lack of communication is one of the biggest things in the school I work in.'* (Gina)
>
> *'Any time we need to talk to a teacher about a particular student it needs to be lunchtime, morning tea or after school or after the lesson in my own time and the teacher's own time as well.'* (Karen)

Table 4 provides useful background as to how the TAs roles were seen by the three distinct participating groups. It emerged that TAs were not being involved in any of the individual curriculum planning meetings. As one of the staff that assists teachers in implementing special programs, it seems counter intuitive that TAs were not included in planning and that this is not mandated even within TAs' generic role descriptions. Even though some organisations do not ask TAs to perform playground supervision, each of the surveyed groups agreed that it was part of the TA's role for about 60% of the time. Another duty, where common agreement would be expected to be found, was associated with *assisting small groups of children within whole class lesson*. This was anticipated as being one of the duties that all TAs would be engaged in daily. However, this was not the case, as in the 2018 survey 66.3% of TAs were seen as carrying out this role, whereas in the current survey TAs said they only performed that duty 55% of the time. Supervising teachers saw it differently and said that TAs were currently assisting small groups within whole class lessons 69.4% of the time.

Other relevant outcomes that emerged from the TA questionnaire were that when asked to list the greatest challenges confronting them in carrying out their duties, only 6.45% of TAs surveyed, nominated 'role description uncertainty'. Other role related challenges such as 'dealing with student behaviour issues' (50%) and 'managing time constraints '(41.9%)

were rated considerably higher. The TAs also saw their limited knowledge about disabilities as a real issue (14.51%) and this, linked with concerns about lack of training (17.7%), indicated an area of concern regarding role competence. The other dimension for role descriptions was whether the roles that both TAs and supervising teachers said that they saw happening were, in fact, the ones that should be adopted. This was difficult to ascertain through the quantitative survey alone and so data from the semi-structured interviews was used.

The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to extend their responses into discussions beyond the direct scope of the questions presented to them. This helped to provide some useful insights into what the TAs saw as their roles and related issues of concern. These interviews reinforced the view that apart from the generic role descriptions, participants found it difficult to articulate the TA role beyond the statement that they support students and teachers. Patricia, who was categorised as an Exceptionalist TA because she had the almost unique perspective of being both a TA and a newly qualified teacher, made an insightful comment. She observed that, '*most aides generally do not have the skill base or the knowledge base to actually fulfil the role to the level that is required'.* Along with other TAs, also in this Exceptionalist category, it appeared as though she realised that there was a need to fill this vacuum by inventing a role description for herself.

While it seemed that no one participant had a clear idea of their role as a TA, there were nevertheless, several statements made by those interviewed that helped to underline the quite varied perception of the role responsibilities of practicing TAs. Betty, an experienced TA, said, '*We are sort of thrown into the lesson to help the kids that are working there and most of our role is that the teachers need us there to deal with behaviour management'.* While she could not definitely explain what her role was, TA Roslyn argued that her knowledge of the students equipped her to be in a position to know what her students needed her to do, *'I feel that I know the kids better and there are other people within the school that are not listening to what you know about the kids'.* Roslyn spoke very strongly over the course of the interview, about how important was the central role that she and other TAs can and do play in education.

Other TAs made similar assertions. To Karen, '*it was just my job to keep things going*,' while for Jodi it was, '*I am basically doing my own little thing, do you know what I mean?* Karen said that her role was to, '*spend five minutes with each child and to go around again and to go around again'*. Amy seemed to sum up the position that many TAs found themselves in, when she admitted that to her the TAs role was 50% administration but that, '*I*

don't know whether that is what it is meant to be?' This is concerning as the people charged with carrying out a pivotal role within schools do not have a clear direction in terms of what they are expected to do.

6.4.1 Research question one: summary

The first research question asked, 'What are the perceptions of the role of TAs working in an inclusive classroom, from the viewpoint of both the TA and the Supervising Teachers?' Based upon the analysed data drawn from both the questionnaires and the subsequent interviews, the answer to the question has to be regarded as one that cannot be answered simply. On one hand there was a clear alignment between each of the questionnaire results in about 70% of the tasks that TAs currently perform. However, there was also clear evidence that in a number of situations TAs were performing tasks that under current, albeit limited, role descriptions they should not have been doing. It could be argued that if the question was taken literally, then the perceived agreement between what the supervising teachers and the TAs see mostly happening, means that there must be a mutually recognised, if unspecified, de facto role description in play. This however ignored the interpretation of the question that speaks to whether these roles are the ones that TAs should actually be engaging in. It was also the case that, despite common agreement between the TAs and the supervising teachers in the questionnaire about what TA's mostly do, the response to this question was found to be influenced by other findings.

These findings included the negative comments made by some of the supervising teachers when asked to comment on their experiences with inclusive education. Despite the question not specifically asking the teachers to comment on their TAs, several chose this as an opportunity to express them anyway. There was also the difficulty TAs experienced, during the interviews, to clarify their role in context. Role descriptions that do not provide adequate detail add to this issue.as inadequate formal role descriptions lead to ambiguity, in this important area, and are unsatisfactory, potential harmful and ultimately unsustainable. Within the Queensland State Education system, a review of the existing role descriptions needs to be undertaken and there needs to be a clear alignment between the EQ policies on TA use and the pursuit of inclusion. TAs are not the sole solution to inclusion, but their role could be more clearly defined to align with the development of inclusive cultures.

6.5 Responding to research question two

The second question proposed for this study was, 'To what extent are Teacher Aides and their Supervisors both satisfied that the Teacher Aides are equipped to carry out these perceived roles?' As this question was not included in the questionnaire completed by Carter et.al, (2018), the only opportunity for comparison that was available were the outcomes of the current questionnaires completed by the TAs and that of their supervising teachers. Posing the same questions relating to the TA's role descriptions, the participants were asked to respond by commenting on their own perceived competence in the case of TAs, and in the case of the supervising teachers the perceived competence of a TA with whom they regularly worked.

The data gathered from these questionnaires were analysed question by question and set up in a tabular form (see Appendix H). In analysing these questionnaire responses, a decision was made to initially make use of the top 12 role description responses, in order to deal with a manageable amount of meaningful data. However, some allusions were still made to other relevant results to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the questionnaire outcomes. It was determined that the ratings of very competent and highly competent would be the focus of the analysis, as to be judged as being merely competent or to be displaying limited competence could be construed as having some unintended deficit connotation. The amount of data needed to be gathered by analysing all of the dimensions meant that a decision was made that having sufficient data that indicated appropriate competence was the more important measuring metric than the reverse. For the purpose of this study, it was judged that providing a descriptive analysis of TA competence would be sufficient to answer RQ2.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, when an averaged measure of perceived competence was made from the top 12 responses, the resulting outcome was surprisingly consistent. This became evident when 73.8% of TAs indicated that they carried out these selected duties in a high or very high competency level, and a comparable 71.8% of the supervising teachers agreed. A preliminary discussion of this analysis was provided in Chapter Four. This focused on those measures where the TAs and the supervising teachers either concurred or differed significantly. In the case of instructional attributes such as '*assisting individual students (one at a time) within whole class lesson', 'assisting small groups of students within whole class lesson', 'providing small group instruction within inclusive classroom'* and *'providing*

general instructional support (in class)' the responding TAs and the supervising teachers were seen to be in mostly general agreement about perceived competence.

It was acknowledged however, that the two groups had notable differences in how they perceived the TAs' competence in the related areas of behaviour management and playground duty. In these areas TAs had a much higher opinion of their competence than their professional teaching colleagues and this was probably due to the hierarchy of status existing within the organisations. When it came to the softer attributes such as, 'practising and consolidating skills previously taught by teachers' and 'providing encouragement and reinforcement', there was little agreement between the opinions of the TAs and those of the supervising teachers. In the former at 80%, TAs had a higher opinion of their competence than that of their supervisors who provided a rating of 67.6%. Looking at the latter, the situation was reversed as there the competence of TAs was rated as only 72%, by the TAs themselves and at a much larger 79.4% by the teachers.

TAs also saw themselves as being more competent in, 'checking students understanding about how to complete assigned work 'with results being 75% for TAs against 67.6% for the supervising teachers. An identical rating from both groups of 80% in respect to 'assisting students to focus on task', is contrary to the large discrepancy in regard to 'implementing teacher-planned instruction'. Here, 53.3% of TAs rated themselves as sufficiently competent compared to a substantially greater 69.7% of teachers. Further analysis of the data could not account for these differing views. It can be concluded, however, that as results were at the higher end of the scale, the overall perception of TA role competence was positive.

In respect to this study that focused on TA use in inclusive classroom, the role description attribute, 'seeking to include all children in classroom activities, was very relevant. It was interesting therefore, to note that the TAs competence rating of 75% was considerably higher than that of the supervising teachers' 58.6%. This rating of TAs competence by their supervisors was, in this case, the lowest of all analysed. Looking beyond the top 12 role descriptors, the responses to a related question, referring to TA competence in using appropriate inclusive language, also showed that the TAs' rating of 70.6% was somewhat well above that of the teacher's rating of 58.6% If the classroom teachers did not have a high degree of confidence in their paraprofessional colleagues to effectively include all children in classroom activities, then this questions the benefits of using TAs under the current system as catalysts for effective inclusion.

If the discussion is extended outside the top 12 responses, there were several results worth considering in regard to the measure of TA competence. There was general concern raised from many articles in the literature review about the efficacy of the practice of TAs removing students from the classroom, away from their peers for either group or individual instruction (Blatchford, et al., 2012). While this data did not comment on the effectiveness of this practice, 72.7% of TAs and an almost identical number of teachers (73.9%), agreed that this was a task that they carried out in a competent manner. When it came to demonstrating competency in removing students from classes, due to problem behaviours, the two groups were also in agreement (61.1% for teachers and 62.5% for TAs). However, given normal protocols, it can only be assumed that the TAs would only be removing students for this purpose under the instructions from the teachers who would have initiated the removal.

Despite some different evaluations, the consensus from both the TAs and their supervising teachers was a high opinion of the TAs' competency. The supervising teachers were overall quite complementary of their TAs' abilities across the whole range of duties. It came then, as something of a surprise, when analysing the responses made by supervising teachers to the question regarding negative experiences that they had in working within an inclusive culture. Instead of providing anecdotes regarding their experiences in such classrooms, several of the same teachers that had previously rated their TAs so highly, expressed a range of negative comments.

One supervising teacher said that '*some TAs lack the necessary skills and experience to adequately perform their duties'* while another said that '*some just snap at students and don't understand that they need a lot need kindness and understanding*'. Another alleged that she had, *'teacher aides swear at me and talk about me behind my back with the students'* and that *'a teacher aide wouldn't design resources but might only cut them out for me.'* Less judgemental but equally negative comments were that in regard to TAs, '*I feel that I see them less in a High School setting, than in a primary school setting, which is a shame*'. Echoing an issue that the seminal DISS (2007) research had raised, one teacher responded, '*One of the disappointing aspects that I have found in working with various education support staff is that more often than not they complete the work for the students or tell them what to do, resulting in a huge reliance from students in adult help to solve problems*.'

One responding teacher said that she experienced, '*Inadequately trained teacher aides in different disabilities, particularly around emotional self-regulation*'. The most damning comment however was aimed more at the system than the TAs personally, '*Drop them, Teacher Aides not useful. BSM assigning TA based on funding, not needs of children.*

Administration deciding how TA will be allocated for system priorities rather than child needs.' Included in the positive experience responses, was the statement, *'I worked with many different Teacher Aides. Many of them were great with clerical tasks but didn't feel comfortable working in a one-on-one situation with a child or providing some level of instruction to small groups.'*

In fairness, the number of negative comments from teachers were relatively small given the volume of overall comments. Considering that these negative appraisal comments were not specifically sought out but resulted out of an apparent misreading of the instructions they nevertheless offered opinions that needed to be taken into consideration when attempting to gauge the overall competency of the TA work force. There were also a number of positive unsolicited comments such as, *'I was fortunate to have worked with very caring, sensitive, confident and creative Teacher Aides who gave more than they were expected to do'*, *'I feel that Teacher Aides are the backbone of the school and our classrooms feel emptier and less productive without them'* and '*Very lucky that at my base school, I work with very competent Teacher Aides.'* The comments from the supervising teachers regarding their TAs was very revealing and included positive descriptors such as- Caring, sensitive, confident, creative, competent, knowledgeable, dedicated, essential, tolerant, and compassionate. All of these comments can be found included in full in Appendix G.

An interesting aspect of the interviews in regard to the question of TA competence was that in almost every case the TAs, at some stage, made a comment that reflected an insecurity or doubt about their ability. An outwardly confident Elaine stated that '*You always feel that you haven't quite done enough. Not the end of the lesson but the end of the whole time.*' TA Hillary at the end of her interview admitted that '*I am a little green because I have only been doing this job for a year and I have received no specialist training.*' Even the capable Olivia acknowledged in responding to an enquiry that '*I don't know because I am just a Teacher Aide. Sometimes a teacher will feel like they are just that little bit more important. It is a status thing. I get so frustrated.'*

6.5.1 Research question two: summary

In answering Research Question Two, regarding both the TAs and the supervising teachers' perception of the ability of TAs to competently carry out their perceived roles the answer comes down to context. If the statistical data was considered in isolation there must be a certain amount of satisfaction in the degree to which the TAs and their supervisors agree on how competently assigned roles are carried out. However, there are two dimensions to this particular question. If it was interpreted as discovering how competent the TA work force is

in performing their duties currently allocated to them, then the assessments made by both the TAs and the teachers must be seen in the affirmative. If the question was taken literally and the focus was on how well equipped were the TAs in carrying out their perceived roles, then the real answer lies in the generally disturbing data that emerged from the semi-structured interviews regarding the dire lack of appropriate PD and resultant low self-confidence. The answer to this question of competence in this context was a definitive 'no, they are not confident' and will form the basis of one of the research findings and recommendations presented in Chapter Seven.

6.6 Responding to research question three

The third research question for this study asked, 'Where challenges may exist in their understanding, skills, knowledge and practice, what interventions are needed to help TAs to overcome these challenges and to competently carry out their role of promoting an inclusive culture?' This section of the chapter was designed to bring those identified challenges together so that the appropriate interventions can be recommended. Several challenges regarding the role descriptions and the perceived competencies of TAs working in inclusive cultures have already been identified in answering RQ1 and RQ2. The questionnaire designed for this study asked TAs directly, to identify what they considered were the top three challenges in carrying out their role.

Participants were provided with a list of 15 potential challenges from which to choose. They were then asked to select solutions, drawn from a suggested list of 12, included in the questionnaire and that might be considered as the most appropriate ways to meet these challenges. Furthermore, the interviews allowed a series of themes to emerge that covered the fields of understanding, skills, knowledge and practice and these themes were examined beside the identified challenges. Data from these three sources were collated and analysed in order to arrive at a series of recommendations intended to achieve better outcomes for systems using or planning to use, TAs within inclusive classrooms. These recommendations are presented in the final chapter.

These challenges regarding understanding, skills, knowledge, and practice were discussed as part of the seven topics addressed earlier in this chapter. The response to RQ 3 was not immediately apparent as the 15 challenges discussed each had a separate context and each required a separate intervention, in order to assist the TAs in competently promoting an inclusive culture. While the topics enumerated in Figure 5, were seen as discrete entities, and were discussed as such, they also tended to become closely intertwined. This blending

occurred as the insight into the issues related to one topic was also sometime seen as the solution for another. As an example, it was recognised that a number of the findings that emerged out of the research data all engendered similar recommendations related to providing adequate, targeted, appropriate, and ongoing PD for the TAs.

6.6.1 Research question three: summary

In response to RQ3, it was clear that challenges do exist for TAs in their understanding, skills, knowledge, and practice. There were initially two major interventions suggested by this study that could help TAs overcome these challenges and competently carry out their previously presumed duties of promoting an inclusive culture. The first of these was an adequate, targeted, paid PD program included in industrial agreements and provided by the schools to all TAs on a regular basis. If this was mandated other challenges such as behaviour management strategies and knowledge regarding disabilities could also be effectively addressed. Challenges for TAs, such as effective communication, willing collaboration, unnecessary time constraints, limited resourcing, and timetabling issues could also be minimised if not completely overcome if they were able to work within a fully trained an environment where everyone had received appropriate PD. These changes would also need to involve several structural changes and the engagement and appropriate training of other school staff.

Second, the development and implementation of well thought out and industrially safe role descriptions for TAs would ensure that there was role certainty, job security, appropriate pay rates, adequate resourcing, and secure work conditions. If this was to happen issues surrounding the current low status of TAs including physical, mental, and emotional strain could be begun to be addressed. The reality that this would be very difficult to address without other significant changes foreshadowed the major recommendation made in Chapter Seven regarding the creation of the role of assistant teacher.

6.7 Chapter summary

This chapter was devoted to a discussion of the responses to this study's three research questions by making use of an especially designed figure (Figure 3) that blended the data from the literature review, the questionnaires, and the semi-structured interviews. The recommendations regarding RQ 3, as well as those related to the other two research questions, will be revisited in Chapter Seven where the relevant solutions have been proposed, and their implications explored. Chapter Seven will also discuss the limitations that

relate to this study as well as several considered suggestions about topics for further related research.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RECOMMENDATIONS, CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 follows on from the discussions included in Chapter Six and builds upon those discussions in order to make a range of relevant recommendations. These research

questions dealt with the perceptions of the role of TAs working in an inclusive classroom from the viewpoint of both the TAs and the Supervising Teachers. They also sought to determine to what extent were TAs and their Supervisors both satisfied that the TAs were equipped to carry out these perceived roles. Finally, where challenges existed in their understanding, skills, knowledge and practice the recommendations made, sought to determine what interventions were needed to help TAs to overcome these challenges and to competently carry out their roles of promoting an inclusive culture. This chapter makes use of Figure 5 to illustrate the thread that runs through the recommendations presented in response to the three proposed research questions.

These questions are set beside the response that emerged from the descriptive, sequential mixed method research conducted and these responses were aligned with a set of recommendations proposed as solutions to the issues and challenges identified. While recommendations one to five are proposed as urgent essential steps that need to be taken to ensure that TAs are able to effectively support the development of inclusive classrooms, it is recommendation six that is presented as the necessary long-term solution to the numerous challenges confronting TAs in effectively carrying out their roles in inclusive classrooms. The limitations to this research as well as recommendation of possible further research are added in the final section of this study. The summary of this chapter and the research study was provided in Section 7.6.

7.2 Recommendations

This research found that numerous challenges do exist for TAs in their understanding, skills, knowledge, and practice requirements necessary to support learning in inclusive classrooms. Figure 5 illustrates the responses and summarises the recommendations that have been made in order to address these challenges. In dealing with the issues and challenges identified in this study, it was unavoidable to have some overlap in the responses addressing the three research questions. The interconnected nature of the challenges and the intertwined responses they engender means that there will, by necessity, be some repetition and overlap. In addressing RQ 3 it will be noted that the responses to RQ 1and RQ 2, of establishing an agreed upon role description as well as providing appropriate PD are also suggested as the initial steps in addressing the challenges facing TAs in supporting inclusive classrooms. There are several other recommendations that are also presented as ways that the identified challenges can be addressed, and these are presented in turn.

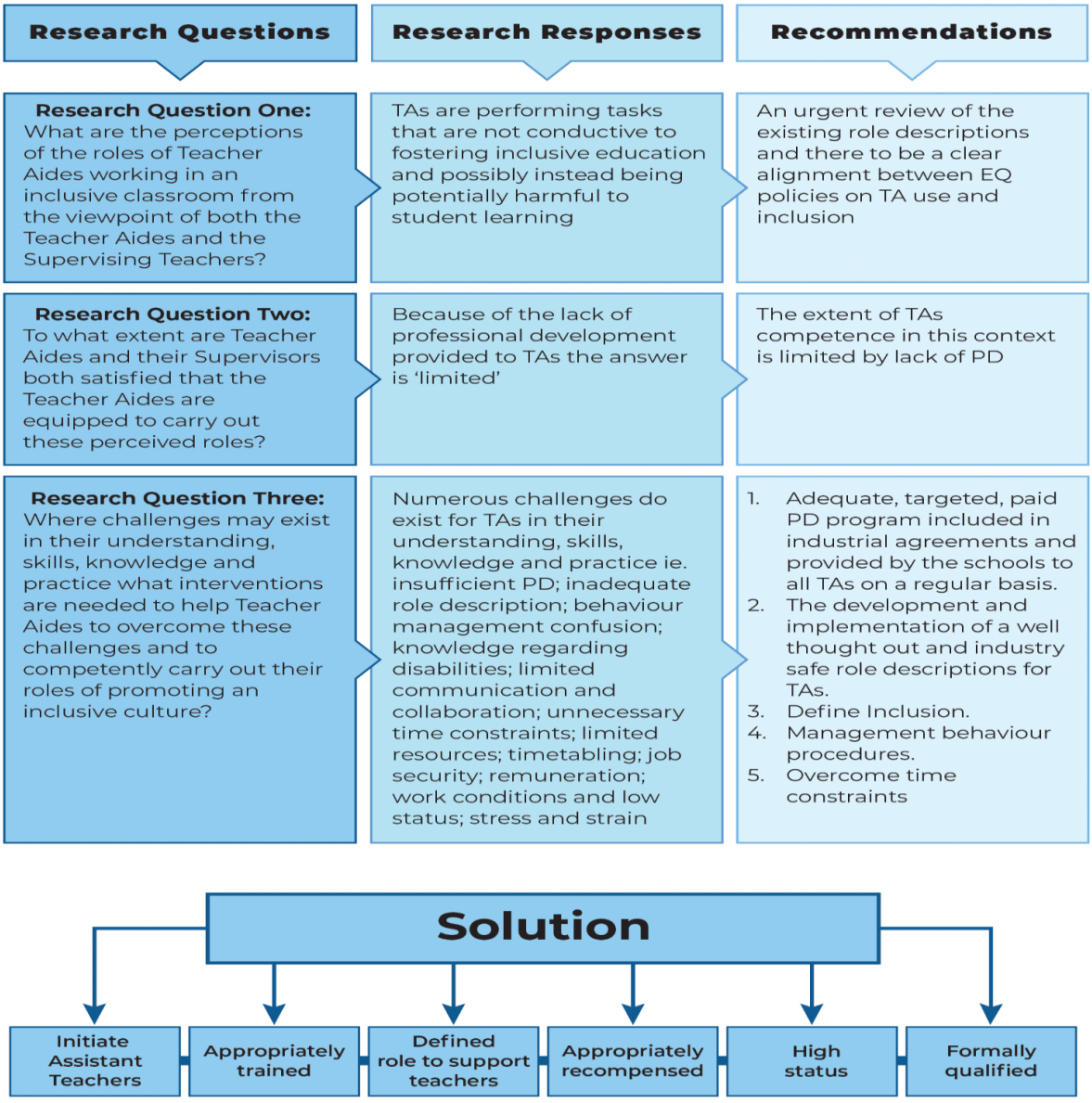

Figure 4. Research Questions, Responses and Recommendations

7.2.1 Mandate TAs' role description

The responses to the three research questions proposed for this study were discussed in Chapter Six. In response to RQ 1, it was found that TAs were performing tasks that were not conducive to fostering inclusive education and, were possibly instead, being potentially harmful to student learning. This research study found that in the Queensland schools where the participating TAs worked, there was an absence of any appropriate organisationally provided, definitive role descriptions for TAs. While Education Queensland provides its schools with access to a generic role description for all its TAs, this document proved to be inadequate for purpose and identified as being rarely utilised in the workplace. It was

revealed in the research that all TAs interviewed were uncertain about many of their roles and responsibilities. While teachers were not interviewed it was clear from their written responses that they too were unclear about the roles of the TAs they were supervising. In some cases, TAs simply created role descriptions for themselves that in too many situations had them carrying out roles that would normally be outside the scope of responsibility of any paraprofessional.

The PR in his almost half a century of involvement with education has witnessed TAs take on responsibilities that were not within their remit. These included taking unsupervised lessons, assuming responsibility for formal assessments, conducting school assemblies, monitoring the health of seriously ill students and in one notable case adopting responsibility for an entire school in the absence of any qualified registered teachers or principal. Admittedly these cases were outliers, but they served to emphasise the point that without an appropriate coherent, properly monitored role description the doorway was left open for cases of possible neglect and improper conduct.

What is recommended, in this instance, is the urgent development and implementation of a well thought out and industry safe role descriptions for TAs. This mandated role description for TAs working in inclusive classrooms, needs to reflect the two recommended guideposts that inclusion is a journey not a destination and that an inclusive classroom requires the creation of an inclusive culture with an understanding that no one is to be left out. The development and implementation of a well thought out and rigorously monitored role descriptions for TAs would help to ensure that there was role certainty, job security, appropriate remuneration for work done, adequate resourcing and safe work conditions for all.

7.2.2 Implement appropriate professional development

Because of the lack of adequate PD provided to both the TAs and their supervising teachers in regard to working effectively together it has transpired that TAs have demonstrated a restricted ability to carry out their roles competently. Once the employing authorities establishes an agreed upon functional role description for TAs, the next step would be to see this innovation effectively implemented. For this to happen, it will be once again the responsibility of the employing authorities to provide appropriate PD in a timely and effective method.

This would need to be an adequately targeted, appropriated funded PD program included in industrial agreements and provided by the schools to all TAs in school time on a

reoccurring basis. The provision of this PD cannot be left up to individual schools to carry out for, as it has been seen, the low status of TAs and the contest for available, limited funds within schools will ensure that it does not occur. There has to be a systemic program that was both compulsory and on-going. The inclusion PD for TAs needs to be based upon an understanding that it would be focussed on the creation of an inclusive supportive culture and that it was seen as part of an ongoing journey so that everyone will feel confident in starting their journey from wherever they were currently placed on the inclusion continuum.

7.2.3 Implement inclusive education policy

Whether they embraced it fully or not, many of the supervising teachers participating in the questionnaires appeared to have a reasonable understanding of what inclusion entails. This judgement was based upon the written responses that these teachers gave when invited to share their understandings about inclusion. It is also based upon the written responses and the subsequent verbal responses made by the TAs during the interviews. This understanding unfortunately, does not appear to be the same for their TAs. Some of the TAs that participated in the research demonstrated limited understanding, but the majority appeared to possess only a minimal comprehension of the concept of inclusion or what might be necessary to see its implementation. Steps therefore need to be adopted urgently that will assist schools to work with TAs in order to raise their awareness.

Thanks to EQ, there is, in existence a comprehensive Inclusive Education Policy Statement (2022), but this research found no evidence that this has been provided to the TAs either as a document to read or as a topic of PD. In order to raise the awareness of TAs, it is strongly recommended that an undertaking be given by employing authorities to implement a concerted and targeted in-servicing on this Statement and its implications for all ancillary staff on a regular basis. If TAs are going to be asked to support the implementation of inclusive practices within schools, it is axiomatic that they are assisted in having as sound an understanding as possible of what constitutes inclusive education before being asked to engage in its implementation.

7.2.4 Review behaviour management procedures

The majority of TAs involved in this study indicated that they were expected to play a part in their school's behaviour management program. It is a recommendation therefore, in relation to the challenge regarding behaviour management, that there needs to be an investigation conducted by employing authorities as to why schools still see TAs as being an integral part of their behaviour management procedures. To continue to persevere with this

practice when it was not a mandated role for TAs, especially when it appears that no efforts have been made to provide TAs with adequate training is irresponsible and a recipe for ongoing frustration and angst for all concerned.

A solution could be easily found by either establishing a formally adopted and properly in-serviced role description for TAs that includes behaviour management or by making it clear that behaviour management is not one of the roles in which TAs should be engaged. If the decision is to have TAs involved in behaviour management duties, then it follows that they must then receive appropriate training regarding the school's behaviour management policy and procedures. The PR has witnessed the very negative and disturbing results following TAs attempting to implement behaviour management procedures that they neither understood nor were qualified to implement.

7.2.5 Remove time constraints

In order that TAs have the opportunity to carry out their roles to a satisfactory level of competence, it is strongly recommended that their role descriptions, once reviewed, mandate regular meetings between these TAs and their supervisors. As this cannot happen without some time allowance being made, it follows that adequate paid time allocations be provided so that TAs can be involved in briefing and debriefing sessions with their supervising teachers. Adequate planning time needs to be added to daily schedules where TAs might be expected to undertake any supervised instructional roles. If this does not happen, then the anticipated outcome would be for mistakes to occur, students to be disadvantaged and employee frustration and disillusionment to grow.

Having several TAs report, during their interviews, that they dealt with multiple classrooms and therefore multiple supervising teachers, without any opportunity for before class briefings or after class debriefings was disturbing. The point has been made on several occasions throughout this study that TAs need to be true to their name and be seen to be primarily aiding teachers and not students. If the TA was not scheduled to have any planning time with the teacher because they have to move quickly to another classroom, then the ongoing situation becomes ultimately untenable. The existence of generic, non-specific role descriptions mitigates any successful, cohesive collaborative relationships and the reality that this appears still to be the case in many schools remains baffling.

7.2.6 Establish the position of Assistant Teacher

In answering RQ 3 of this study, an extensive list of challenges was identified and several solutions to a number of those challenges have already been suggested in response to

RQ 1 and RQ 2. Many of the recommended solutions to the identified challenges hinge on such identified attributes as effective PD and a mandated role description. Other challenges include the need to enhance TA status and make improvements in the areas of communication, collaboration, and time allocations. In addition, this study recommends that a serious investigation be undertaken into whether the practice of employing TAs under their current conditions should be abandoned. While there are numerous structural, professional, industrial, and financial hurdles to overcome with such an innovation the upgrading of TAs to teaching assistants or more appropriately assistant teachers (ATs), should be adopted. This was recommended as there would, in consequence, be many educational advantages such as improved quality of instruction, better student outcomes and greater accountability.

The qualifications for the ATs could be pitched at a Diploma level to ensure professional rigour and recognition. The required course could be designed to fill the gap left by the demise of the Diploma of Education Support Course that expired in 2015. In addition, the training could be designed so that, on completion, the participants would receive appropriate formal registration as deemed appropriate by the regulating authorities. This registration could, if correctly designed, qualify ATs to teach specific curriculum areas such as literacy and numeracy under either direct or indirect supervision of a registered teacher. In reality, they will be doing what many TAs are already unofficially engaged in, such as teaching children to read. If this potentially school changing move is swiftly adopted, current TA challenges regarding low status, absence of training, inadequate time allocation, staff meeting participation, behaviour management issues and many others, would potentially disappear. A new class of appropriately rewarded well-educated, purposely trained, highly regarded paraprofessionals would step up to an Assistant Teacher role (Refer Figure 6).

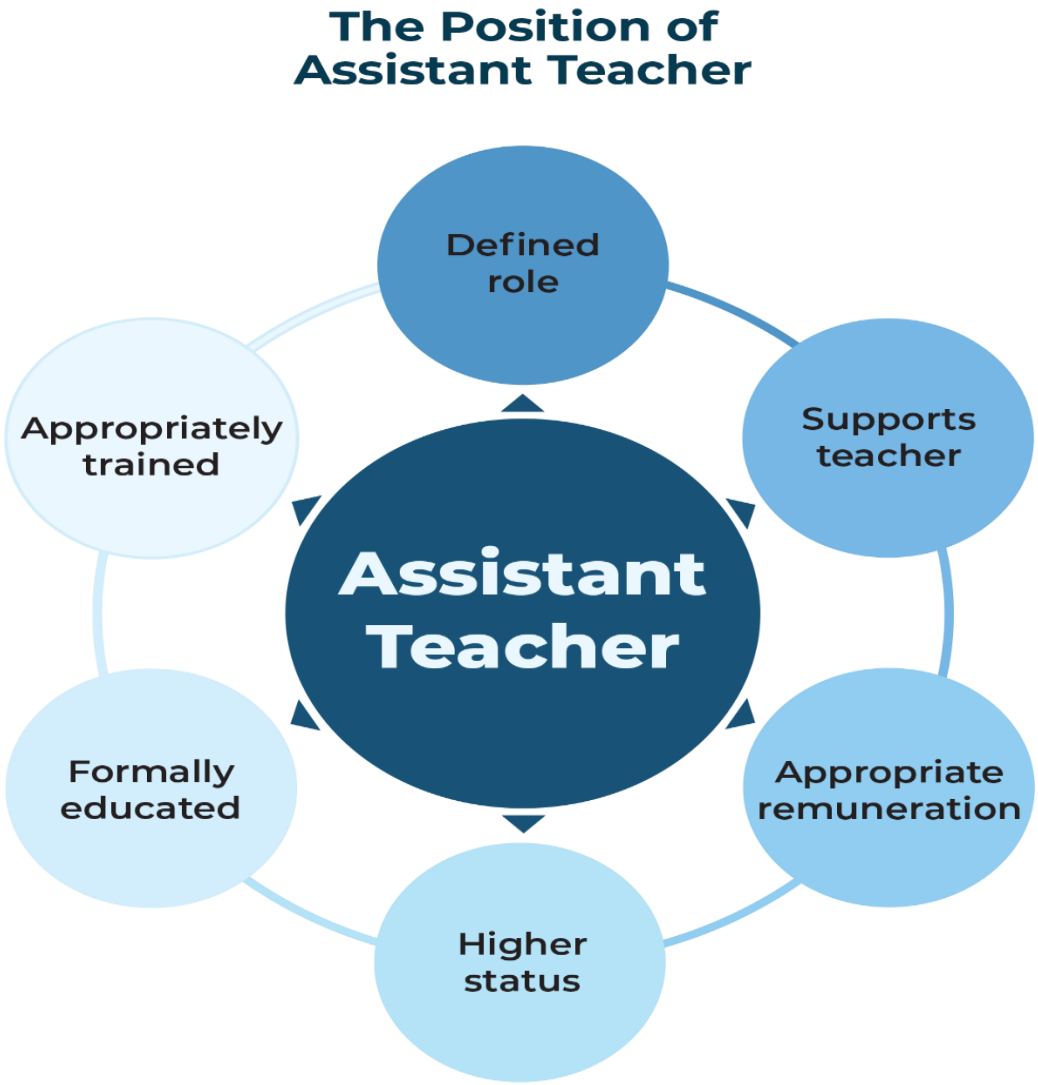

Figure 5: The Position of Assistant Teacher

The argument for some course of action to elevate the roles of paraprofessionals in schools is very persuasive. This research has provided evidence that there was no coherent understanding, at any level of education governance, about the role or the competence of TAs operating within the existing system. While EQ and others have not claimed that TAs are employed in any professional teaching role that was not what was happening. Personal testament to having seen TAs act as replacement teachers, coaches, behaviour managers and a range of other professional roles prompts a claim that the existing system is fraught with dangers to students and others and requires an urgent appropriate restructure.

Considerable money has been spent, every year, in employing highly motivated, often highly talented personnel to carry out the important educational role of TA. These workers have been engaged without the benefit of a coherent role description, with no PD and beset

by the numerous challenges highlighted in this study. The recommendation for change made here is just that, a recommendation. The imperative is for some form of meaningful change to occur that will meet the challenges first identified by the Plowden Report in 1967, the DISS report in 2007, numerous other studies outside of the current one and as demonstrated by the current study, still not implemented today.

This change may initially be seen to equate with the introduction in UK schools of the Higher-Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA). This occurred in the UK context partially as a way of responding to a national workforce reform policy undertaken in 2003 to ease the workload on teachers. The role of HLTAs seems to have evolved on the basis of what it was that teachers in the UK should no longer be expected to do rather than what HLTAs would do. There have been numerous other suggestions regarding changes to the ways that TAs work in schools. The Teacher Assistant as Facilitator (TAAF) model was promoted by Rosemary Butt (2016) as she saw it as an improved model for dealing with lack of supervision and limited time constraints for planning. This model also called for many of the changes recommended by this current study in that it involved changing entrenched teacher attitudes, capacity building for teachers, training to assist teachers, reconceptualised role description, appropriate training for both the TAs and their supervising teachers. However, this was designed more with the question about just who dealt with the students with special needs and as such is the anthesis of inclusive education.

For this system of training and employing assistant teachers to function effectively there would have to be established, at the start, a role description that is consistent across all schools but one that also allows for contextual flexibility. In a system as diverse as that currently operating, the roles of AT in small rural primary schools would have to be differentiated from that of an AT in a larger urban secondary school. ATs cannot be seen as quasi teachers but as comprehensively trained paraprofessionals with targeted training in specific areas such as reading and other syllabus areas that would equip them to carry out distinct roles with professional competence. It is evident that this change would also involve significant training for classroom teachers and others to learn how to supervise and collaborate with a whole new class of assistant.

Following an adoption of this innovation, current TA roles could revert to what they were intended to be when they were first engaged and that would be either involvement as volunteer parents or engagement as temporary casual employees that would be employed to assist the teachers and not to replace them. Their duties would be confined, once again, to specific areas such as the preparation of materials, the supervision of non-instructional

activities, the organisation and maintenance of teacher and learning environments, the task of creating classroom displays and sundry duties such as photocopying, money collection etc. It would be the clear role of this cohort of workers to assist teachers and not be engaged in any form of surrogate teaching seemingly condoned within the existing system.

This would possibly be seen as a radical and even a controversial move, and it would take a large degree of good will between various stakeholders including government agencies, unions, and private education providers for it to come about. However, the advantages would be considerable. Schools would have access to another whole class of appropriately qualified educators. Teachers could concentrate on their professional roles of establishing inclusive environments. They could do this, knowing that they had the support of an adequately trained class of paraprofessionals that could be relied upon to implement many of the inclusive programs that the teachers initiated. It may be possible under this new structure to develop effective professional work teams involving the teachers the ATs and other professional workers. For the assistant teachers what would be on offer would be a career structure with salary increments linked to qualifications, and what could euphemistically be termed *a voice in the choir*.

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to do no more than speculate, it could possibly be done in such a way as to be cost neutral. Continuing strategies that are seen to be flawed come at a very high cost anyway. It has already been asserted that 5 billion dollars a year is being spent on the employment of TAs across Australia. Under this recommended change classrooms would no longer be the static spaces where somehow every child, despite individual needs, is expected to thrive but be transformed instead into a fully inclusive environment where real opportunities for inclusive, inspired learning became possible for perhaps the first time. TAs would be paid appropriately for the professional work they perform and best of all they would be properly trained to carry out their enhanced duties. Scarce, valuable funding could be then used to actually achieve enhanced inclusive outcomes rather than be wasted on a futile continuation of existing strategies that the results from this study has identified have become compromised by manifold, seemingly unconquerable challenges. After almost sixty years working at every level within this space, it is clear to the PR that not to, at least, contemplate this change, is to condemn an already struggling system to perpetuate a set of conditions that for TAs, at least, are unjust and unsustainable.

7.3 Limitations

The initial intention in carrying out this research was to discover just how well-prepared TAs were in carrying out their assigned duties. It was soon apparent that simply examining the suitability of the courses availably to TAs for this purpose was not appropriate as this was limited by the reality that no clear role description was in place for TAs to be trained towards. It became clear that to carry out this research it was going to be necessary to first determine what it was that TAs actually do and second how competent they were in carrying out these duties and what were the challenges that they faced. The methodology chosen to best overcome these limitations was a mixed method approach where chiefly quantitative questionnaires could be supplemented by qualitative semi-structured interviews. Careful plans were formulated about how TAs could be recruited and how they could be assisted to participate in the planned research in an unbiased manner.

However, circumstances intervened and the greatest limitation that was imposed upon the research project became the need to navigate around the Covid-19 pandemic that occurred from March 2000 up until the current date. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the initial plans to conduct the data gathering for both the questionnaire and the interviews needed to be abandoned. This happened as Education Queensland and other employing authorities were not able to give permission for outsiders to access staff and students for research gathering purposes. While the replacement strategies, such as the reliance on the use of the snowball technique did suffice and, in some ways, provided access to a larger potential cohort of participants, they still did have an impact on the research itself. Being unable to meet with potential participants, both teacher and TA, face to face, meant that the PR was denied the opportunity to comprehensively explain the research goals and the data gathering processes as would have been desired. This resulted in a larger than desirable number of participants failing to complete their questionnaires fully.

While it is now impossible to know for certain, the reality that participants only had access to written instructions meant that these directions were open to misinterpretation. While carefully compiled and subsequentially checked out with the UniSQ statistical consultant it appears as though the actual intent of the instructions was open to misinterpretation. Discussing the instructions with the supervising teacher and TA who agreed to take part in the trial did not eliminate this issue. A subsequent discussion with those TAs involved in the interviews did not assist in clarifying the issue.

The pandemic imposed other limitations on the conduct of the research project.

Teachers and TAs were struggling, at the time, under severe work and personal pressures. Both the supervising teachers and the TAs were facing a range of drastically altered working conditions. Needing to adapt their interactions with students for extended periods of online learning, was for most a new and challenging experience. Periods of self-isolation and concerns for elderly or infirm family members also added to the stress being experienced by all. It was a reality that had to be considered when making plans to approach and enrol these potential participants into the research project. The fact that so many of this cohort were able to rise above these challenging circumstances was a tribute to their commitment to their work practices.

The greatest limitation, however, turned out to be time limitations and a consequentially discordant progress through the necessary early research stages. The initial Covid 19 lockdowns induced setbacks in gathering data that were exacerbated by the PR requiring reconstructive surgery of a hip during the course of the study. As well health issues associated with actually contacting Covid 19 and a prolonged injury to an eye caused some unfortunate delays in carrying out an analysis of the data and the finalisation of the thesis. While none of these events proved to be terminal, they did serve to absorb some of the limited time available and that prevented the PR from following up, at least preliminarily, on some potentially beneficial associated topics. These were instead collated in the section of this Chapter sub-titled as 'further research suggestions'

7.4 Further research suggestions

It could be argued that the unanticipated, gratifyingly positive attitudes and accurate perceptions of the concept of inclusion, demonstrated by so many supervising teachers, would be sufficient to warrant a targeted research study of its own. The conventional wisdom that holds that teachers are so busy in their everyday work life that beliefs and convictions about inclusion would therefore not be high on their agenda is not borne out in this circumstance. It would be valuable to understand first, what process the education system employed to ensure that their teachers have apparently become so aware of what constitute inclusion and second why this process was not extended to the TAs employed to assist them. One of the discussion points that came up on several occasions, within the Literature Review, was the advisability or otherwise of TAs taking students out of the classrooms and away for their friends for separate lessons. It was generally regarded by earlier researchers as a bad thing and was also commented on in the DISS (2007) study as an unfortunate practice. This research project found that in the responses made by TAs, during the interviews that this

practice of withdrawal of students had declined. However, during the interviews, there were sufficient reasons offered by some TAs for continuing working outside the classroom for this to be still considered a practice of some concern. The percentages of TAs in the questionnaires that indicated that they continued to withdraw students was also higher than anticipated. As this issue was not able to be resolved in this study it may constitute an important topic for future research.

The PR became aware, too late in the research process, of the potentially limiting flaw within the form of questionnaire used for the study. Adapted from a study that had in fact been adapted from another study, it became clear during the initial analysis phase that simply asking participants a lengthy series of questions with a requirement for Linkert scale form answers was very limiting. It generally became puzzling to interpret what the context was that lay behind a number of the participant responses. All that could be done, on most occasions, was to attempt to extrapolate just what the responses might have meant, when there was little contextual knowledge available about the situations that the responses referred to. This could be and was, clarified during the interview phase of the research, but this came at the risk of lengthening the interviews to sometimes undesirable periods of time.

It would be advisable that future questionnaires be designed to add more context to their questions so that more meaning could be extracted from the often-bland response choices provided to the participants. Questions could possibly be phrased within a hypothetical scenario so that the responses demonstrated some of the participant's thinking that lay behind their answers. It would be a valuable addition to the research methodology if some experimentation could be conducted into a resolution of this issue. This would have to be offset by the resultant limitations to the scope of the questionnaire itself so that it does not become too unwieldy.

7.5 Chapter summary

This research study was initially born out of a desire, by the PR, to address what was seen as a disconnection between what TAs were expected to do in inclusive classroom environments and the form of training that they were being offered. This rapidly expanded into a need to also understand what constituted an inclusive classroom and where TAs were engaged in schools, just how competently they were in carrying out their assigned duties. Once this research journey began it became evident that there were a number of misconceptions that needed correction before this study could be undertaken. Early engagement with the relevant literature demonstrated that there was a prevailing confusion

about the role that TAs should be expected to play in schools. This role confusion was exacerbated by a literature wide proclivity to conflate inclusion with the integration of students with special needs into the classroom.

Fortunately, ample previous research, related to this topic, had lain the groundwork upon which this study could be developed. Initial intentions to follow their methodology of carrying out the research face to face with participants in schools was blocked by the unfortunate Covid 19 pandemic. Thanks to suggestion made by EQ and the collaboration of a supervising teacher and a willing TA, a methodology was able to be adopted that meant the necessary data gathering could be carried out by the adoption of a 'snowball technique'. The University's Statistical Consulting Unit provided invaluable assistance in revising the existing questionnaires used in previous studies so that they could be adapted for this altered pandemic environment.

Once the data gathering process began the earlier hurdles were quite easily overcome thanks to the generosity, professionalism and honestly of the participants. The story of TAs working towards the creation of inclusive environments in schools was ultimately an emotional one of genuinely caring people negotiating numerous roadblocks to support all children under their care. If these amazing TAs are going to be able to achieve what they clearly all desired to achieve, then the recommendations made in this study need to be implemented as soon as practicable. This research has picked up the baton of earlier studies and has made achievable recommendations for change that, if implemented, will be just testimony to the work of generation of TAs that have already started their journey down the winding barrier strewn track to effective classroom inclusion.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Themes & Codes from Semi-Structured Interviews

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6	Theme 7
Inclusion confusion	Implementation	Professional development	Relationship	Barriers	Communication Issues	Inclusive culture
Definition	Effective support	Study	Relationship	Consequences	Communication	Building self-esteem and belonging (included)
Continuum	Inclusion in context	Professional development	Communication	Confidence	Use of technology	Enjoyment of school
Special Needs nexus	Staff Work attitude	Professionalism	Collaboration	Time	Type of Supervision	
	Work practice	Support received	Community	Barriers to inclusion	Attending Staff meetings	
	Work knowledge	Policy & Procedure rather than Function	Parental attitude	Restructuring	Rapport	
	TAs Role Description	Attitude to inclusion	In-service in Inclusion Policy	Remuneration	TA Voice	
	Use of technology	Average Day	Meeting with teachers about programs etc.	In-service in Inclusion Policy	TAs Role Description	
	Professionalism		The actual experience of inclusion by children		Attending Staff meetings	

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6	Theme 7
Inclusion confusion	Implementation	Professional development	Relationship	Barriers	Communication Issues	Inclusive culture
Most participants have only a vague concept of inclusion, but several are clear and fully committed	There does not appear to be any classroom imperative about implementing inclusion but quite a few what might be termed inclusive practices	An almost complete absence of written inclusion policy and no in-service or professional development	The interpersonal relationships between the TA and the Supervisor are critical. Inclusion occurs instinctively when the TA student relationship is sound. This appears to be the light in the mist.	There are numerous barriers including in no order of significance: - 1.Time 2.TA status 3. Professional development 4. Understanding 5.Leadership 6. Inertia	This is the 'magic wand'. Where effective communication is present things happen but for TAs this hardly ever happens. Absence of TAs' voice	All pointers lead to a conclusion that the development of inclusion and a culture of inclusiveness are inseparable. There seems to be an absence of intention or perception about the development of an inclusive culture.

Appendix B: Teacher Aide Personal Inventories

No	Questionnaire Teacher Aide profile headings	(n)	%
A	Years of experience working as a teacher's aide	11.46 years	
B	School level: -		
	Primary	42	67.75
	Secondary	20	32.25
C	Hours per week employment	24.41 hours	
D	Work situation: -		
	Mild intellectual disabilities	32	53.33
	Moderate to severe intellectual disabilities	18	29
	Profound and multiple disabilities	8	12.9
	Autism spectrum disorder (e.g., autism, Asperger's disorder)	48	77.41
	Behaviour problems	47	75.8
	Visual impairment	16	25
	Hearing impairment	25	40.32
	Learning disability	44	70.96
	Physical disability	22	35.48
	Speech/language impairment	34	54.83
	Gifted and Talented	8	12.9
	Itinerant	6	9.67
	Physical Injury	1	1.61
	Chronic illness]	4	6.45
	Social and Emotional Needs (Anxiety & Depression)	35	56.45
	Languages other than English	17	27.41
E	Frequency of attending professional development		
	Never	6	9.67
	Daily	3	4.83
	Weekly	1	1.61
	Monthly	11	17.74
	Twice Yearly	25	40.32

	Yearly	16	25
F	Professional development funding source		
No	**Questionnaire Teacher Aide profile headings**	**(n)**	**%**
	School	52	83.87
	Private	10	16.13
G	Time when professional development delivered		
	School	52	83.87
	Own	10	16.13
H	Type of class most commonly worked in		
	Single	6	9.67
	Multiple	56	90.33
I	Level of education/training		
	High School certificate	5	8.06
	Certificate III or IV	35	56.45
	Bachelor degree or higher	14	22.58
	Other	8	12.9
J	Employment status		
	Permanent	52	83.87
	Casual	10	16.13
K	Student categories		
	Mainstream only	3	4.83
	With single child	3	4.83
	Mainstream and additional needs	34	54.83
	Multiple special needs	16	25
	Other	6	9.67
L	Frequency of engagement with students with special needs		
	Never	1	1.61
	Daily (at least)	40	64.5
	Weekly	7	11.29
	Occasionally	14	22.58

M	Age		
	older than 50	28	45.16
	between 40 & 50	18	29
	Between 30 and 40	8	12.9
	younger than 30	8	12.9

Appendix C: Supervising Teachers' Personal Inventories

No	Questionnaire profile headings	(n)	%
A	Years of experience working as a teacher's aide	14.22 years	
B	School level: -		
	Primary	38	64.4
	Secondary	21	35.59
C	Hours per week working with a Teacher's Aide	10.8 hours	
D	Work situation: -		
	Mild intellectual disabilities	33	55.9
	Moderate to severe intellectual disabilities	9	15.25
	Profound and multiple disabilities	6	10.16
	Autism spectrum disorder (e.g., autism, Asperger's disorder)		59.32
	Behaviour problems	27	45.76
	Visual impairment	16	25
	Hearing impairment	12	20.33
	Learning disability	35	59.32
	Physical disability	13	22.03
	Speech/language impairment	22	37.28
	Gifted and Talented	6	10.16
	Itinerant	2	3.38
	Physical Injury	2	3.38
	Chronic illness]	5	8.47
	Social and Emotional Needs (Anxiety & Depression)	21	35.59
	Languages other than English	19	32.2
E	Frequency of attending professional development re TAs		
	Yes	20	33.89
	No	39	66.1
F	Professional development funding source		
	School	52	83.87
	Private	10	16.13
G	Time when professional development delivered		
	School	52	83.87
	Own	10	16.13
H	Type of class most commonly worked in		
	Single	26	44.06
	Multiple	33	55.93

Appendix D: Teacher Aide's Definitions of Inclusion

	Teacher Aides' Definition of Inclusion
1	To include all without prejudice
2	I believe the word 'inclusion' means just that. Everyone in the education system should be and should feel included in the everyday working of a school. All employees from the Principal, Administration team, Teachers, Teacher Aides, School Officers, Cleaners and of course the students have a vital role in providing a safe, clean, and educational journey for all students
3	That all children are made feel part of the class group no matter what their abilities or disabilities are
4	Helping all children reach their potential
5	Inclusion is all people having the same rights as each other and being involved in all aspects they are able to
6	That nobody is left out
7	Here every person is included and respected as an individual
8	Every child has the right to be included at every school
9	Every student has access to the same learning and teaching
10	Every person is included in all areas and activities which are offered
11	Everyone together, everyone's abilities/needs accommodated to effectively work together and participate together, team/group work no I
12	All students/staff are inclusive for their education
13	Access for all student to participate fully in mainstream classes with assistance given to teachers to provide extra support for those who require a little help, and specialised assistance for those students who require targeted support
14	Inclusion can be defined as to include all students and staff. To be part of the main group
15	Everyone being given what they need to succeed within society as a whole
16	When all students are given the same opportunities to learn together with respect
17	Inclusion to me means giving everyone the same opportunities to engage in activities or learning no matter what their physical, emotional, social, or economic status is
18	To be involved in a group and be treated fairly and equally
19	All students should be supported and included at school regardless of their potential or disabilities. Provision for all students to succeed and be celebrated as their goals/dreams are achieved or attempted
20	Being part of a group where you are treated fairly and equally
21	To be part of a group that is treated fairly and equally
22	Everyone participates to their ability with modifications and without discrimination
23	Where all children of all abilities are offered a safe nurturing environment to learn to their best ability
24	Included within a group, equal opportunity
25	All children participating in the curriculum to the best of their ability

Teacher Aides' Definition of Inclusion

26 The practice of including all children in the advancement of their education regardless of ability, into mainstream schooling

27 Including children with special needs to work in mainstream classrooms under the guidance of the classroom teacher, with/without the assistance of a teacher-aide

28 Inclusion means that all children have the opportunity to learn and enjoy their schooling experience. No child should not be discriminated against because they may have to do things or learn a little differently from others.

29 Each student given the opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability

30 Every person to be included

31 My understanding of Inclusion is to ensure that all students participate and gain equal access to opportunities and to make sure their specific needs and goals are met

32 Allowing all students, the ability to learn at their level and be included in a mainstream classroom

33 Inclusion is providing the same opportunity to every student at school

34 Where a student is able to be given the same opportunities as each and every other student is in school environment

35 Is when we provide equal opportunities and resources to students who might otherwise be excluded such as those who have physical or mental disabilities and members of other minority groups

36 Acceptance and inclusive of all diversity

37 Making education available to all students regardless of race; gender; culture; disability; socioeconomic level or religion etc.

38 To be included, maybe modified to ability, in activities that the rest of the students are involved in

39 Inclusion is working with everyone no matter what country they are from, what race or religion they are or if they have disability

40 No one is excluded on any grounds

41 My understanding of the term inclusion is that all students can experience mainstream classroom learning no matter their disability or learning abilities... (providing the school can cater to their needs)

42 Inclusion means that we enable all children, even those with disabilities or difficult social/family situations, have the same opportunities to learn and engage in education and life

43 Inclusion- all students have equal education and support within schools

44 Making sure everyone is included in a task that is being undertaken, a sense of belonging where everyone feels welcome

45 Students with additional needs are fully involved in classroom activities and have the same access to the teacher and curriculum that their peers have

46 Inclusion in Secondary is to be included in mainstream classes with support

47 Providing equal access to any individual irrespective of age, sex, race, etc.

48 Including all

49 Inclusion means being inclusive of all students in the classroom and organising and completing activities that would allow all students to participate no matter their physical or intellectual disabilities/difficulties/impairments.

Teacher Aides' Definition of Inclusion

50. Inclusion meaning that everyone is given the opportunity to participate in an activity, learning experience, or event etc. with all of their physical, emotional, mental, and intellectual abilities noted, worked with, and included.
51. Individualised plan to ensure achieve learning goal.

Appendix E: Analysis of TAs Responses to Questionnaire (Part B)

Attribute	n=20	Rating	%
1. Assisting students to focus on task			
Once daily	1	Competent	3
More than once a day (80%)	16	Limited competency	0
Weekly	3	Very competent	7
Monthly	0	Highly competent	5
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	5
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	0		
			80%
2. Providing encouragement and reinforcement			
Once daily	0	Competent	4
More than once a day (95%)	19	Limited competency	1
Weekly	1	Very competent	4
Monthly	0	Highly competent	9
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	2
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	0		
			72.2%
3. Providing general instructional support (in class)			
Once daily	0	Competent	3
More than once a day (85%)	17	Limited competent	1
Weekly	1	Very competent	4
Monthly	0	Highly competent	9
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	3
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	2		
			76.4%
4. Providing small group instruction within inclusive classroom			
Once daily	3	Competent	5
More than once a day (75%)	12	Limited competent	0
Weekly	2	Very competent	5
Monthly	0	Highly competent	5
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	5
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	3		
			66.6%
5. Assisting individual students (one at a time) within whole class lesson			

Once daily	2	Competent	2
More than once a day (75%)	13	Limited competence	1
Weekly	1	Very competent	6
Monthly	0	Highly competent	6
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	5
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	4		
			80%
6. Practising and consolidating skills previously taught by teachers			
Once daily	2	Competent	2
More than once a day (75%)	13	Limited competence	1
Weekly	1	Very competent	8
Monthly	0	Highly competent	4
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	5
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	4		
			80%
7. Implementing teacher planned instruction			
Once daily	2	Competent	7
More than once a day (65%)	11	Limited competence	0
Weekly	3	Very competent	5
Monthly	0	Highly competent	3
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	5
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	4		
			53.3%
8. Adapting lessons designed by mainstream class teacher			
Once daily	1	Competent	3
More than once a day (40%)	7	Limited competence	0
Weekly	2	Very competent	3
Monthly	0	Highly competent	3
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	11
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	10		
			66.6%
9. I mplementing instruction that you have planned			
Once daily	4	Competent	5
More than once a day (40%)	4	Limited competence	0
Weekly	3	Very competent	4

Monthly	1	Highly competent	2
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	9
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	8		
			54.5%
10. Checking students' understanding about how to complete assigned work			
Once daily	0	Competent	4
More than once a day (75%)	15	Limited competence	0
Weekly	1	Very competent	6
Monthly	1	Highly competent	6
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	4
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	3		
			75%
11. Assisting small group of students within whole class lesson			
Once daily	2	Competent	2
More than once a day (55%)	9	Limited competence	2
Weekly	5	Very competent	6
Monthly	0	Highly competent	5
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	5
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	4		
			73.3%
12. Teaching specific skills and concepts			
Once daily	2	Competent	5
More than once a day (55%)	9	Limited competence	1
Weekly	5	Very competent	4
Monthly	0	Highly competent	5
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	5
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	4		
			60%
13. Providing adaptations or accommodations for students with direction from teachers			
Once daily	0	Competent	3
More than once a day (55%)	11	Limited competence	1
Weekly	4	Very competent	6
Monthly	0	Highly competent	4
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	6
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	5		
			71.4%

14. Providing adaptations or accommodations for students without direction from teacher			
Once daily	2	Competent	3
More than once a day (45%)	7	Limited competence	2
Weekly	6	Very competent	5
Monthly	0	Highly competent	4
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	6
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	5		
			64.2%
15. Teaching small groups for reading/maths, etc. within the inclusive classroom			
Once daily	4	Competent	3
More than once a day (40%)	4	Limited competence	1
Weekly	6	Very competent	4
Monthly	0	Highly competent	5
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	7
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	6		
			64.2%
16. Withdrawing students to location outside the classroom to provide 1:1 or small group instruction			
Once daily	2	Competent	1
More than once a day (45%)	7	Limited competence	1
Weekly	6	Very competent	7
Monthly	1	Highly competent	5
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	6
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	4		
			85.7%
17. Assisting whole class within whole class lessons			
Once daily	3	Competent	3
More than once a day (55%)	8	Limited competence	0
Weekly	2	Very competent	6
Monthly	1	Highly competent	3
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	8
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	6		
			75%
18. Withdrawing small groups to teach reading/ maths, etc. outside the classroom			
Once daily	2	Competent	2

More than once a day (25%)	3	Limited competence	1
Weekly	7	Very competent	3
Monthly	1	Highly competent	5
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	9
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	7		
			72.7%
19. Writing lesson plans for students			
Once daily	1	Competent	1
More than once a day (10%)	1	Limited competence	0
Weekly	0	Very competent	0
Monthly	0	Highly competent	1
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	18
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	18		
			N/A
20. Administering assessments			
Once daily	0	Competent	4
More than once a day (5%)	1	Limited competence	0
Weekly	2	Very competent	2
Monthly	1	Highly competent	2
Once a Year	1	Not relevant	12
Twice a year	6		
Not relevant	9		
			50%
21. Participating in individual curriculum planning (ICP) meetings			
Once daily	0	Competent	3
More than once a day	0	Limited competence	0
Weekly	1	Very competent	0
Monthly	1	Highly competent	1
Once a Year	1	Not relevant	16
Twice a year	2		
Not relevant	15		
			25%
22. Providing behaviour management			
Once daily	1	Competent	4
More than once a day (70%)	13	Limited competent	1
Weekly	2	Very competent	5
Monthly	1	Highly competent	5
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	5
Twice a year	0		

Not relevant	3		
			66.6%
23. Intervening to problem solve where appropriate			
Once daily	3	Competent	4
More than once a day (55%)	8	Limited competence	0
Weekly	3	Very competent	6
Monthly	1	Highly competent	3
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	7
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	5		
			69.2%
24. Negotiating with teachers for amended tasks for particular students who were having difficulty with set materials			
Once daily	3	Competent	3
More than once a day (20%)	1	Limited competence	0
Weekly	8	Very competent	5
Monthly	1	Highly competent	3
Once a Year	1	Not relevant	9
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	6		
			72.7%
25. Facilitating social relationships			
Once daily	5	Competent	4
More than once a day (50%)	5	Limited competence	0
Weekly	3	Very competent	5
Monthly	1	Highly competent	3
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	8
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	6		
			66.6%
26. Removing student from class due to problem behaviour			
Once daily	0	Competent	
More than once a day (5%)	1	Limited competent	
Weekly	3	Very competent	
Monthly	2	Highly competent	
Once a Year	2	Not relevant	
Twice a year	1		
Not relevant	11		
			62.5%
27. Providing emotional support and advice to students			

Once daily	8	Competent	5
More than once a day (55%)	3	Limited competence	0
Weekly	5	Very competent	6
Monthly	1	Highly competent	4
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	5
Twice a year	1		
Not relevant	2		
			66.6%
28. Providing personal care assistance i.e., Dressing, grooming etc.			
Once daily	1	Competent	4
More than once a day (10%)	1	Limited competence	0
Weekly	4	Very competent	3
Monthly	3	Highly competent	2
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	11
Twice a year	2		
Not relevant	9		
			55.5%
29. Providing health care assistance i.e., Taking medication, applying lotions etc.			
Once daily (10%)	2	Competent	4
More than once a day	0	Limited competence	0
Weekly	4	Very competent	3
Monthly	3	Highly competent	4
Once a Year	1	Not relevant	9
Twice a year	1		
Not relevant	9		
			63.6%
30. Supervising peer supports (i.e., supervise buddy assisting student			
Once daily	1	Competent	3
More than once a day (10%)	1	Limited competence	0
Weekly	2	Very competent	2
Monthly	2	Highly competent	2
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	13
Twice a year	2		
Not relevant	12		
			57.1%
31. Acting on behalf of any student when that student is faced with inequities and discrimination			
Once daily	2	Competent	2
More than once a day (15%)	1	Limited competence	0
Weekly	4	Very competent	3
Monthly	1	Highly competent	3
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	12

Twice a year	1		
Not relevant	11		
			75.5%
32. Communicating with parents			
Once daily	3	Competent	1
More than once a day (20%)	1	Limited competence	0
Weekly	1	Very competent	5
Monthly	2	Highly competent	3
Once a Year	1	Not relevant	11
Twice a year	2		
Not relevant	10		
			88.8%
33. Lifting and positioning students			
Once daily	1	Competent	1
More than once a day (10%)	1	Limited competent	0
Weekly	1	Very competent	1
Monthly	0	Highly competent	1
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	17
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	17		
			N/A
34. Providing students with reassurance through appropriate physical contact			
Once daily	4	Competent	4
More than once a day (40%)	4	Limited competence	0
Weekly	3	Very competent	5
Monthly	3	Highly competent	5
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	6
Twice a year	2		
Not relevant	4		
			71.4%
35. Delivering speech therapy intervention			
Once daily	2	Competent	3
More than once a day (20%)	2	Limited competence	2
Weekly	2	Very competent	1
Monthly	0	Highly competent	1
Once a Year	1	Not relevant	13
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	13		
			28.6%
36. Assisting with physiotherapy or occupational therapy programs			
Once daily	0	Not competent	1

More than once a day	0	Competent	0
Weekly	0	Limited competence	0
Monthly	0	Very competent	0
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	0
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	20
Not relevant	20		
			N/A
37. Using appropriate inclusive language			
Once daily	3	Not competent	0
More than once a day (80%)	13	Competent	5
Weekly	2	Limited competence	0
Monthly	0	Very competent	8
Once a Year	1	Highly competent	4
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	3
Not relevant	1		
			70.6%
38. Seeking to include all children in classroom activities			
Once daily	6	Not competent	0*
More than once a day (85%)	11	Competent	3
Weekly	0	Limited competence	1
Monthly	1	Very competent	7
Once a Year	1	Highly competent	5
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	3
Not relevant	1		
			70.6%
39. Modifying or adapting materials for student use			
Once daily	2	Competent	4
More than once a day (45%)	7	Limited competence	0
Weekly	3	Very competent	3
Monthly	1	Highly competent	5
Once a Year	0	Not relevant	8
Twice a year	0		
Not relevant	7		
			66.6%
40. Assisting students with educational activities on computers/iPads, interactive whiteboards, assistive technology			
Once daily	2	Not competent	0
More than once a day (40%)	6	Competent	4
Weekly	7	Limited competent	2
Monthly	1	Very competent	5

Once a Year	0	Highly competent	4
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	5
Not relevant	4		
			60%
41. Participating in individual curriculum planning (ICP) meetings			
Once daily	0	Not competent	1
More than once a day	0	Competent	1
Weekly	1	Limited competence	0
Monthly	0	Very competent	1
Once a Year	1	Highly competent	1
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	16
Not relevant	16		
			N/A
42. Meeting with mainstream teacher			
Once daily	0	Not competent	0
More than once a day	0	Competent	3
Weekly	5	Limited competent	1
Monthly	3	Very competent	3
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	1
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	12
Not relevant	12		
			50%
43. Organising daily routines			
Once daily	3	Not competent	0
More than once a day (25%)	5	Competent	3
Weekly	2	Limited competence	0
Monthly	2	Very competent	7
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	4
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	6
Not relevant	6		
			78.6%
44. Meeting with special education teachers			
Once daily	2	Not competent	0
More than once a day (15%)	1	Competent	2
Weekly	7	Limited competent	1
Monthly	2	Very competent	5
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	4
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	8
Not relevant	6		
			75%
45. Performing clerical work			
Once daily	4	Not competent	0

More than once a day (45%)	5	Competent	3
Weekly	5	Limited competence	0
Monthly	1	Very competent	5
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	6
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	6
Not relevant	5		
			78.6%
46. Preparing instructional materials			
Once daily	4	Not competent	0
More than once a day (40%)	4	Competent	0
Weekly	2	Limited competence	1
Monthly	0	Very competent	4
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	6
Twice a year	3	Not relevant	9
Not relevant	7		
			90.9%
47. Completing administrative forms			
Once daily	1	Not competent	0
More than once a day (10%)	1	Competent	3
Weekly	4	Limited competence	1
Monthly	2	Very competent	3
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	2
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	11
Not relevant	10		
			55.5%
48. Marking students work			
Once daily	2	Not competent	0
More than once a day (20%)	2	Competent	1
Weekly	3	Limited competence	0
Monthly	1	Very competent	1
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	5
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	13
Not relevant	12		
			85.7%
49. Collecting data on students			
Once daily	1	Not competent	0
More than once a day (15%)	2	Competent	2
Weekly	4	Limited competence	1
Monthly	3	Very competent	3
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	5
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	9

Not relevant	9		
			72.7%
50. Spending own time researching and locating resource material to support students			
Once daily (10%)	2	Not competent	0
More than once a day	0	Competent	5
Weekly	8	Limited competence	1
Monthly	3	Very competent	3
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	5
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	6
Not relevant	5		
			57.1%
51. Assisting students with swimming lessons			
Once daily (15%)	3	Not competent	0
More than once a day	0	Competent	0
Weekly	2	Limited competent	2
Monthly	0	Very competent	2
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	1
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	15
Not relevant	15		
			60%
52. Assisting students in music lessons			
Once daily	0	Not competent	0
More than once a day	0	Competent	2
Weekly	6	Limited competence	0
Monthly	0	Very competent	0
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	3
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	15
Not relevant	14		
			60%
53. Assisting in art & amp; craft activities			
Once daily	1	Not competent	0
More than once a day (10%)	1	Competent	3
Weekly	8	Limited competence	1
Monthly	2	Very competent	4
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	5
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	7
Not relevant	6		
			69.2%
54. Training school sporting teams and accompanying students to sporting competitions			
Once daily (20%)	4	Not competent	0
More than once a day	0	Competent	3
Weekly	2	Limited competent	0
Monthly	0	Very competent	3

Once a Year	0	Highly competent	2
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	12
Not relevant	12		
			62.5%
55. Supervising bus/taxi arrivals or departures			
Once daily	0	Not competent	0
More than once a day (10%)	2	Competent	1
Weekly	2	Limited competent	0
Monthly	1	Very competent	1
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	4
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	14
Not relevant	14		
			83.3%
56. Playground duty			
Once daily	7	Not competent	0
More than once a day (60%)	5	Competent	1
Weekly	5	Limited competence	1
Monthly	0	Very competent	4
Once a Year	0	Highly competent	10
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	4
Not relevant	3		
			87.5%
57. Attending class excursions			
Once daily	0	Not competent	0
More than once a day	0	Competent	0
Weekly	0	Limited competence	1
Monthly	2	Very competent	4
Once a Year	4	Highly competent	8
Twice a year	10	Not relevant	7
Not relevant	4		
			92.3%
58. Attending school camps			
Once daily	0	Not competent	0
More than once a day	0	Competent	0
Weekly	0	Limited competence	0
Monthly	0	Very competent	2
Once a Year	5	Highly competent	4
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	14
Not relevant	14		
			100%
59. Transporting students (i.e., take students to work experience or other community activity)			

Once daily	0	Not competent	0
More than once a day	0	Competent	3
Weekly	0	Limited competent	0
Monthly	1	Very competent	3
Once a Year	3	Highly competent	3
Twice a year	5	Not relevant	11
Not relevant	11		
			66.6%
60. Providing first aid			
Once daily	2	Not competent	0
More than once a day	0	Competent	4
Weekly	4	Limited competence	1
Monthly	4	Very competent	3
Once a Year	2	Highly competent	7
Twice a year	3	Not relevant	5
Not relevant	5		
			50%
Questions 61-70 How often do you?			
61. Discuss work practices with supervising teacher 35% discuss work practices with ST < 1 a day			
Once daily	4		
More than once a day	3		
Weekly	10		
Monthly	2		
Once a Year	0		
Twice a year	1		
Not relevant	0		
62. Receive positive feedback from supervising teacher- 55%			
Once daily	3		
More than once a day	1		
Weekly	7		
Monthly	4		
Once a Year	1		
Twice a year	3		
Not relevant	1		
63. Receive positive feedback from another employee – 70% receive feedback			
Once daily	0		
More than once a day	3		
Weekly	5		
Monthly	6		

Once a Year	1		
Twice a year	3		
Not relevant	2		
64. Receive positive feedback from a parent – 15%			
Once daily	0		
More than once a day	0		
Weekly	3		
Monthly	3		
Once a Year	2		
Twice a year	2		
Not relevant	10		
65. Receive positive feedback from a student – 25%			
Once daily	4		
More than once a day	3		
Weekly	9		
Monthly	2		
Once a Year	0		
Twice a year	1		
Not relevant	0		
66. Feel empowered -50%			
Once daily	4		
More than once a day	1		
Weekly	5		
Monthly	1		
Once a Year	0		
Twice a year	2		
Not relevant	7		
67. Attend a professional development chosen by school- 75% at least once a year; 5% more frequently			
Once daily	0		
More than once a day	0		
Weekly	0		
Monthly	1		
Once a Year	8		
Twice a year	7		
Not relevant	4		
68. Attend a professional development of your own choosing			
Once daily	0		
More than once a day	0		
Weekly	0		
Monthly	0		

Once a Year	8		
Twice a year	5		
Not relevant			
69. Attending staff meetings – 55% - 45% never attend			
Once daily	1		
More than once a day	0		
Weekly	2		
Monthly	2		
Once a Year	1		
Twice a year	5		
Not relevant	9		
70. Attending meetings with other teacher aides (ancillary staff)			
Once daily	0		
More than once a day	0		
Weekly	9		
Monthly	3		
Once a Year	1		
Twice a year	3		
Not relevant	4		

	Positive comments about inclusion (Q 71)
1	Acceptance and care the majority of children provide to those who have a disability (Disability)
2	I love watching the students learn and grow. I enjoy watching them realize that how we behave towards each other has a profound effect on how each individual is able to achieve academically. Seeing how they respond to that news always gives me a good insight to that particular student and how best to interact with them in the future (Warm & fuzzy)
3	To see the students with their various difficulties, feel a sense of achievement at their improvements and to feel that you have assisted in helping that student maintain their self- esteem (Warm & fuzzy)
4	I feel inclusive education is very important for student and there is a greater need for all staff to constantly update and encourage whole school involvement (Motherhood)
5	I would do this work for free I love it so much. The inclusive culture feels like a community, my second home the children are loved, and we all look after each other. The staff are also present on the Autism Spectrum, so we know from personal experience the challenges faced by our younger friends. (Disability)

6	Most children in these situations develop positive interactions with their teacher aides, including trust, reliance, and dependence on them (Warm & fuzzy)
7	Great communication leads to an inclusive teamwork environment. Help is always available when seeking positive feedback. (Communication)
8	Working as part of a team who have genuine care and passion to support our students is wonderful to be a part of. Students who seek you out to share their good stories, and when they are feeling down, is lovely. The opportunity to be involved in a number of different cultural programs, and interact with staff from different backgrounds employed (Warm & fuzzy)
9	Watching the students' peers accept and embrace having them in the classroom. (Warm & fuzzy)
10	I feel humble to work with students of any ability and get pleasure out of seeing them achieve in whatever area it might be and in whatever amount it might be, no matter how big or small. (Warm & fuzzy)
11	I have a very different role to most aides. My job is all about providing an inclusive culture to our families as a whole (Explanation)
12	Working with Learning Support students is the most rewarding experience. Sharing every little success, watching them become independent, seeing them being empowered is an amazing thing. When they succeed you feel like you too have succeeded! (Disability)
13	I love working with students that I get to work with. I have been challenged in whole new ways and it has strengthened me, and my skill set so much. My superiors were always encouraging me and commending my work with the students. (Warm & fuzzy)
Negative Comments about Inclusion (Q 72)	
1	The behaviour on a couple of occasions of a child towards a child with a disability (Behaviour)
2	As a Teacher Aide we sometimes are overlooked in a classroom environment. Teachers are unsure of how to fully use our skills and integrate us into their lesson structure. Some teachers have been known to totally ignore a TA in the

	classroom possibly not knowing we are there to assist not take their jobs or criticise them. (Status)
3	Watching some students desperately try to understand something and just not have the capacity, that's always tough. (Frustration)
4	I have been lucky that I have not had hardly any negative experiences working in an inclusive culture. Working at a small school definitely assists in this arena. (Context)
5	Not given correct understanding and knowledge concerning individual student needs can be discouraging for all concerned. The ability to access an understanding of students and teachers needs are vital. (Frustration)
6	It takes a very long time for the parents to build trust with the SEP Teacher Aide. ((Frustration)
7	Inclusive children sometimes refuse to work as well with their classroom teacher as they do with their teacher aide. (Frustration? Who are inclusive children?)
8	Staff 'forgetting' they work with students that have a disability and expect them to remember things/behave as mainstream students would. Staff belittling/yelling at students. Teachers not making use of the relationship available to them with Learning Coordinators. Mainstream staff, who have the opportunity to interact with students from a Special Education Unit, don't deal with them but automatically call Special Ed staff to deal with issues. When you hear people complaining how there is soooo much funding for this or that, how it's a waste and how it would be better spent in this area!! (Frustration)
9	Difficulty in adjusting the curriculum for certain subjects such as HASS from a Year 6 to a Year 1 level. (Frustration)
10	Not getting enough support for some of these students and knowing if I had that support, I would have achieved a better outcome for them. (Frustration)

11	Frustration over the lack of understanding from some staff as to the depth and variations involved in being inclusive, to me, inclusiveness also should incorporate, the home situation that children come from. (Frustration
12	Working with behavioural students is incredibly challenging and an area in which, I feel, Teacher Aides do not have enough training. A lot of it seems like we make it up as we go. There are so many different social, emotional, ODD areas - labels we don't really understand - and to have to go into a classroom with 6 "labelled" students plus special ed. students can be really overwhelming and draining. More training for TAs in this area would be fantastic but also necessary (Training)
13	A great majority of the teacher aides I work with in my department do not want to share information properly or teach any new staff any skills or tasks involved with the job. You have to figure it out on your own or be made to look stupid. I've been belittled in front of people, made to feel stupid, embarrassed, and harassed by these people. (Status)

Appendix G: Analysis of Supervising Teachers Responses Questionnaire Part B

Teacher Aide tasks	N =36	Rank	%
1. Assisting students to get focus on task			
Once daily	2	Competent	6
More than once a day (88.8 %)	30	Limited competency	1
Weekly	4	Very competent	10
Monthly	0	Highly competent	18
Not relevant	0	Not relevant	1
			80%
2. Providing encouragement and reinforcement			
Once daily	1	Competent	6
More than once a day (91.6%)	32	Limited competency	1
Weekly	3	Very competent	6
Monthly	0	Highly competent	21
Not relevant	0	Not relevant	2
			79.4%
3. Providing general instructional support (in class)			
Once daily	3	Competent	7
More than once a day (77.7%)	25	Limited competency	2
Weekly	6	Very competent	7
Monthly	2	Highly competent	18
Not relevant	0	Not relevant	2
			73.5%
4. Providing small group instruction within inclusive classroom			
Once daily	6	Competent	7

More than once a day (61%)	16	Limited competency	2
Weekly	5	Very competent	7
Monthly	4	Highly competent	15
Not relevant	5	Not relevant	5
			70.9%
5. Assisting individual students (one at a time) within whole class lessons			
Once daily	4	Competent	4
More than once a day (86%)	27	Limited competency	2
Weekly	4	Very competent	9
Monthly	0	Highly competent	19
Not relevant	1	Not relevant	2
			82.3%
6. Practising and consolidating skills previously taught by teachers			
Once daily	7	Competent	9
More than once a day (72.2%)	19	Limited competency	2
Weekly	8	Very competent	10
Monthly	1	Highly competent	13
Not relevant	1	Not relevant	2
			67.6%
7. Implementing teacher-planned instruction			
Once daily	5	Competent	9
More than once a day (72.2%)	21	Limited competency	1
Weekly	5	Very competent	9
Monthly	2	Highly competent	14
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	3
Not relevant	2		
			69.7%
8. Adapting lessons designed by mainstream class teacher			
Once daily	10	Competent	4
More than once a day (47.2%)	7	Limited competency	5
Weekly	6	Very competent	6
Monthly	2	Highly competent	11
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	10
Not relevant	10		
			65.4%
9. Implementing instruction that you have planned			
Once daily	5	Competent	9
More than once a day (61%)	17	Limited competency	2
Weekly	3	Very competent	7
Monthly	3	Highly competent	13
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	5
Yearly	1		

Not relevant	5		
			64.5%
10. Checking students' understanding about how to complete assigned work			
Once daily	8	Competent	9
More than once a day (80.5%)	21	Limited competency	2
Weekly	6	Very competent	12
Monthly	0	Highly competent	11
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	2
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	2		
			67.6%
11. Assisting small group of students within whole class lesson			
Once daily	9	Competent	4
More than once a day (69.4%)	16	Limited competency	1
Weekly	3	Very competent	9
Monthly	1	Highly competent	12
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	10
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	7		
			80.8%
12. Teaching specific skills and concepts			
Once daily	7	Competent	7
More than once a day (55.5%)	13	Limited competency	3
Weekly	6	Very competent	8
Monthly	2	Highly competent	11
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	7
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	6		
			65.5%
13. Providing adaptations or accommodations for students with direction from teachers			
Once daily	7	Competent	7
More than once a day (66.6%)	17	Limited competency	2
Weekly	4	Very competent	12
Monthly	3	Highly competent	11
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	4
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	3		
			71.9%
14. Providing adaptations or accommodations for students with direction from teachers			
Once daily	9	Competent	7
More than once a day (58.3%)	12	Limited competency	4
Weekly	4	Very competent	7

Monthly	3	Highly competent	10
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	8
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	7		
			60.7%
15. Teaching small groups for reading/maths, etc. within the inclusive classroom			
Once daily	10	Competent	2
More than once a day (58.3%)	11	Limited competency	4
Weekly	4	Very competent	9
Monthly	1	Highly competent	11
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	10
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	10		
			76.9%
16. Withdrawing students to location outside the classroom to provide 1:1 or small group instruction			
Once daily	11	Competent	5
More than once a day (41.6%)	4	Limited competency	2
Weekly	5	Very competent	5
Monthly	4	Highly competent	10
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	14
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	12		
			68.2%
17. Assisting whole class within whole class lesson			
Once daily	12	Competent	7
More than once a day (61.1%)	10	Limited competency	0
Weekly	4	Very competent	10
Monthly	2	Highly competent	10
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	9
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	7		
			74.1%
18. Withdrawing small groups to teach reading/ maths, etc. outside the classroom			
Once daily	8	Competent	4
More than once a day (36.1%)	5	Limited competency	2
Weekly	6	Very competent	7
Monthly	3	Highly competent	10
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	13
Yearly	2		
Not relevant	11		
			73.9%
19. Writing lesson plans for student			

Once daily	1	Competent	0
More than once a day (0.5%)	1	Limited competency	2
Weekly	4	Very competent	4
Monthly	2	Highly competent	4
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	26
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	28		
			80%
20. Administering assessment			
Once daily	0	Competent	3
More than once a day (0.2%)	1	Limited competency	3
Weekly	5	Very competent	6
Monthly	9	Highly competent	5
Twice a year	5	Not relevant	19
Yearly	1		
Not relevant	15		
			64.7%
21. Teaching self-management skills			
Once daily	6	Competent	8
More than once a day (36.1%)	7	Limited competency	3
Weekly	9	Very competent	7
Monthly	1	Highly competent	9
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	9
Yearly	2		
Not relevant	10		
			59.2%
22. Providing behaviour management			
Once daily	9	Competent	6
More than once a day (52.7%)	10	Limited competency	5
Weekly	9	Very competent	8
Monthly	3	Highly competent	11
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	4
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	5		
			59.4%
23. Intervening to problem solve where appropriate			
Once daily	9	Competent	9
More than once a day (52.7%)	10	Limited competency	3
Weekly	11	Very competent	10
Monthly	1	Highly competent	10
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	4
Yearly	1		

Not relevant	3		
			62.5%
24. Negotiating with teachers for amended tasks for particular students who were having difficulty with set materials			
Once daily	6	Competent	5
More than once a day (22.2%)	2	Limited competency	2
Weekly	7	Very competent	5
Monthly	7	Highly competent	10
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	14
Yearly	1		
Not relevant	12		
			86.4%
25. Facilitating social relationships			
Once daily	7	Competent	6
More than once a day (62%)	11	Limited competency	3
Weekly	8	Very competent	7
Monthly	1	Highly competent	11
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	9
Yearly	1		
Not relevant	7		
			62.9%
26. Removing student from class due to problem behaviour			
Once daily (18.2%)	3	Competent	6
More than once a day	1	Limited competency	1
Weekly	9	Very competent	5
Monthly	4	Highly competent	6
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	18
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	19		
			61.1%
27. Providing emotional support and advice to student			
Once daily	7	Competent	9
More than once a day (47.2%)	10	Limited competency	3
Weekly	9	Very competent	8
Monthly	3	Highly competent	9
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	7
Yearly	2		
Not relevant	5		
			58.6%
28. Providing personal care assistance i.e., Dressing, grooming etc.			
Once daily	2	Competent	5
More than once a day (8.3%)	1	Limited competency	1
Weekly	7	Very competent	7

Monthly	6	Highly competent	6
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	17
Yearly	2		
Not relevant	16		
			68.4%
29. Providing health care assistance i.e., Taking medication, applying lotions etc.			
Once daily	2	Competent	2
More than once a day (22.2%)	3	Limited competency	0
Weekly	2	Very competent	6
Monthly	5	Highly competent	6
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	22
Yearly	1		
Not relevant	21		
			85.7%
30. Supervising peer supports (i.e., supervise buddy assisting student			
Once daily	5	Competent	4
More than once a day (19.4%)	2	Limited competency	1
Weekly	7	Very competent	7
Monthly	3	Highly competent	5
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	19
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	19		
			70.6%
31. Acting on behalf of any student when that student is faced with inequities and discrimination			
Once daily	4	Competent	8
More than once a day (16.6%)	2	Limited competency	2
Weekly	9	Very competent	4
Monthly	6	Highly competent	8
Twice a year	3	Not relevant	14
Twice a year	3	Not relevant	14
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	12		
			54.5%
32. Communicating with parents			
Once daily	0	Competent	4
More than once a day (2%)	1	Limited competency	0
Weekly	4	Very competent	4
Monthly	5	Highly competent	4
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	23
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	25		
			66.6%
33. Lifting and positioning students			

Once daily	4	Competent	2
More than once a day (16.6%)	2	Limited competency	0
Weekly	2	Very competent	5
Monthly	2	Highly competent	5
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	24
Yearly	1		
Not relevant	25		
			83.3%
34. Providing students with reassurance through appropriate physical contact			
Once daily	6	Competent	6
More than once a day (27.7%)	4	Limited competency	2
Weekly	4	Very competent	5
Monthly	2	Highly competent	6
Twice a year	3	Not relevant	17
Yearly			
Not relevant	17		
			57.9%
35. Delivering speech therapy intervention			
Once daily	1	Competent	2
More than once a day (5.5%)	1	Limited competency	0
Weekly	6	Very competent	4
Monthly	1	Highly competent	4
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	26
Yearly			
Not relevant	26		
			80%
36. Assisting with physiotherapy or occupational therapy programs			
Once daily	2	Competent	2
More than once a day (8.3%)	1	Limited competency	3
Weekly	4	Very competent	1
Monthly	1	Highly competent	3
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	27
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	28		
			44.4%
37. Using appropriate inclusive language			
Once daily	3	Competent	10
More than once a day (66.6%)	21	Limited competency	2
Weekly	7	Very competent	6
Monthly	1	Highly competent	11
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	7
Yearly	0		

Not relevant	3		
			58.6%
38. Seeking to include all children in classroom activities			
Once daily	6	Competent	8
More than once a day (72.2%)	20	Limited competency	4
Weekly	3	Very competent	6
Monthly	2	Highly competent	11
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	7
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	5		
			58.6%
39. Modifying or adapting materials for student use			
Once daily	3	Competent	9
More than once a day (30.5%)	8	Limited competency	3
Weekly	9	Very competent	4
Monthly	5	Highly competent	9
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	11
Yearly	1		
Not relevant	10		
			52%
40. Assisting students with educational activities on computers/iPads, interactive whiteboards, assistive technology			
Once daily	7	Competent	7
More than once a day (58.3%)	14	Limited competency	3
Weekly	5	Very competent	6
Monthly	5	Highly competent	12
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	8
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	5		
			64.3%
41. Participating in individual curriculum planning (ICP) meetings			
Once daily	0	Competent	2
More than once a day	0	Limited competency	3
Weekly	6	Very competent	6
Monthly	5	Highly competent	5
Twice a year	3	Not relevant	20
Yearly	2		
Not relevant	20		
			68.7%
42. Meeting with mainstream teachers			
Once daily	5	Competent	6
More than once a day (25%)	4	Limited competency	1

Weekly	8	Very competent	5
Monthly	6	Highly competent	9
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	15
Yearly	1		
Not relevant	11		
			66.6%
43. Organising daily routines			
Once daily	6	Competent	1
More than once a day (25%)	3	Limited competency	1
Weekly	2	Very competent	4
Monthly	1	Highly competent	5
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	25
Yearly	1		
Not relevant	22		
			81.8%
44. Meeting with special education teacher			
Once daily	4	Competent	3
More than once a day (16.6%)	2	Limited competency	1
Weekly	5	Very competent	3
Monthly	3	Highly competent	6
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	23
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	20		
			69.2%
45. Performing clerical work			
Once daily	5	Competent	4
More than once a day (25%)	4	Limited competency	1
Weekly	5	Very competent	7
Monthly	4	Highly competent	7
Twice a year	4	Not relevant	17
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	14		
			73.7%
46. Preparing instructional material			
Once daily	5	Competent	4
More than once a day (36.1%)	2	Limited competency	2
Weekly	14	Very competent	9
Monthly	2	Highly competent	10
Twice a year	3	Not relevant	11
Yearly	3		
Not relevant	7		
			76%
47. Completing administrative forms			

Once daily	3	Competent	2
More than once a day (11.1%)	1	Limited competency	1
Weekly	4	Very competent	3
Monthly	8	Highly competent	9
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	21
Yearly	2		
Not relevant	18		
			80%
48. Marking students work			
Once daily	3	Competent	4
More than once a day (8.3%)	0	Limited competency	2
Weekly	9	Very competent	6
Monthly	3	Highly competent	8
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	16
Yearly	3		
Not relevant	16		
			70%
49. Collecting data on students			
Once daily	2	Competent	5
More than once a day (11.1%)	2	Limited competency	1
Weekly	7	Very competent	5
Monthly	6	Highly competent	6
Twice a year	3	Not relevant	19
Yearly	1		
Not relevant	15		
			64.7%
50. Spending own time researching and locating resource material to support students			
Once daily	2	Competent	3
More than once a day (11.1%)	2	Limited competency	1
Weekly	11	Very competent	8
Monthly	1	Highly competent	7
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	17
Yearly	1		
Not relevant	17		
			78.9%
51. Assisting students with swimming			
Once daily	0	Competent	4
More than once a day	0	Limited competency	0
Weekly	4	Very competent	1
Monthly	0	Highly competent	6
Twice a year	5	Not relevant	25
Yearly	2		

Not relevant	25		
			63.6%
52. Assisting students in music lessons			
Once daily	0	Competent	4
More than once a day	0	Limited competency	0
Weekly	8	Very competent	1
Monthly	3	Highly competent	6
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	25
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	25		
			63.6%
53. Assisting in art & craft activities			
Once daily	3	Competent	6
More than once a day (11.1%)	1	Limited competency	1
Weekly	11	Very competent	7
Monthly	4	Highly competent	7
Twice a year	3	Not relevant	15
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	14		
			66.6%
54. Training school sporting teams and accompanying students to sporting competitions			
Once daily	0	Competent	2
More than once a day	0	Limited competency	1
Weekly	1	Very competent	3
Monthly	5	Highly competent	2
Twice a year	2	Not relevant	28
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	28		
			62.5%
55. Supervising bus/taxi arrivals or departures			
Once daily	4	Competent	1
More than once a day (13.8%)	1	Limited competency	0
Weekly	6	Very competent	5
Monthly	1	Highly competent	6
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	24
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	23		
			91.6%
56. Playground duty			
Once daily	15	Competent	5
More than once a day (58.3%)	6	Limited competency	2
Weekly	6	Very competent	6

Monthly	0	Highly competent	12
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	11
Yearly	0		
Not relevant	9		
			72%
57. Attending class excursions			
Once daily	0	Competent	8
More than once a day	0	Limited competency	0
Weekly	1	Very competent	8
Monthly	6	Highly competent	12
Twice a year	14	Not relevant	8
Yearly	9		
Not relevant	6		
			71.4%
58. Attending school camps			
Once daily	0	Competent	5
More than once a day	0	Limited competency	0
Weekly	0	Very competent	4
Monthly	0	Highly competent	4
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	23
Yearly	11		
Not relevant	24		
			61.5%
59. Transporting students (i.e., take students to work experience or other community activities			
Once daily	1	Competent	2
More than once a day (3.3%)	0	Limited competency	0
Weekly	0	Very competent	0
Monthly	1	Highly competent	2
Twice a year	0	Not relevant	32
Yearly	1		
Not relevant	33		
			50%
60. Providing first aid			
Once daily	2	Competent	6
More than once a day (8.3%)	1	Limited competency	1
Weekly	9	Very competent	4
Monthly	9	Highly competent	9
Twice a year	1	Not relevant	16
Yearly	1		
Not relevant	13		
			65%

Appendix H: Supervising Teacher's Questions 61 - 62

Q 61: -Please add any comments about positive experiences that you have had working in an inclusive culture
1. Great to see the student/s appreciate the support, T/aides have felt part of the learning environment
2. Seeing children when all of a sudden, the 'lights turn on' and they achieve success.
3. I was fortunate to have worked with very caring, sensitive, confident, and creative Teacher Aides who gave more than they were expected to do.
4. Very lucky that at my base school, I work with very competent teacher aides.
5. With adequate support for the students, in my experience, this has been highly successful in the classroom. Socially the students with extensive needs tend to be apart from the mainstream student
6. I feel that Teacher Aides are the backbone of the school, and our classrooms feel emptier and less productive without them
7. Our school is very inclusive of students with all individual needs. Work is adapted, adjusted, modified and students withdrawn from languages if the student is struggling with literacy/numeracy and work in small groups on a structured program within the VELS requirements (at the students' level.) Students in conjunction with parents and special needs faculty arrange one on one where required e.g. Vision impaired student. The main focus is trying to keep the student within the classroom environment with their peers working at their level of need.
8. Working with knowledgeable and dedicated TAs is a pleasure. They are an underrated resource in some schools.
9. Competent teacher aides and a limited number of diverse needs can be beneficial and positive for students and assisting adults.
10. Teacher aides are an essential part of our teaching model. They provide exceptional support to students and provide teachers an essential scaffold to ensure inclusivity occurs within the classroom. Students are remarkable tolerant and respectful of other students who demonstrate their desire to work hard to overcome difficulties in learning.

11. I have two teacher aides in the library. None of these questions really apply to them. They are brilliant, work autonomously and support my management of the library.
12. We work as a support team which include our valuable teacher aides. The TA are able to also provide behaviours that they see when working with the students and are able to provide feedback to the CT and support team.
13. I am blessed to have a very competent Teacher Aide. She has received training at the school to assist her implement special programs for student, mostly in the area of reading.
14. Teacher aides often have a closer contact with the struggling student than the teacher - and often are the ones to lift that student's spirit and performance.
15. I have a great TA. He is an IT person, and he really knows what he is doing. He also works with me at a Re-engagement Centre. An example of his work is that he went ahead and trained in Mine Craft Education and then I caught up to him later. It is not that I didn't know what I was doing it was just that he was better. He is also a NDIS Carer and so really understand special needs.
16. All children see each other as equals and celebrate strengths and help each other with challenges in peer teaching opportunities.
17. Depends on the classroom teacher who values your opinion. When I'm asked for my contribution, I feel respected.
18. I haven’t been involved in educating students for the past ten years as I retired at about that time. During my teaching career I spent six years as a special education teacher. My TA was involved with speech programs as well as administrative and clerical tasks during that period. After returning to mainstream teaching, I worked with many different teacher aides. Many of them were great with clerical tasks but didn’t feel comfortable working in a one-on-one situation with a child or providing some level of instruction to small groups.
19. Qualified permanent teacher aide attached to class works well.
20. The acceptance, tolerance, compassion, and kindness shown by some students to one another, or others. Students succeeding despite complex needs, because of an inclusive, supportive, safe environment.
21. The idea that inclusion means mainstreaming for all children at all times, does not work in favour of inclusion.

22. Watching children blossom when they achieve success at a task and gain self-confidence in front of their peers. Most people strive to be accepted and valued by their colleagues.
23. Disruptive children can affect the serenity of a class and cause discontent and jealousy. Maintaining a smooth learning scaffold can also be difficult.
24. Students don't achieve as they feel they don't belong.
25. These comments are almost universally complimentary of TAs with the teachers expressing gratitude and confidence. Only three of the comments spoke about TAs and inclusive classrooms.

Q 62: -Please add any comments about negative experiences that you have had working in an inclusive culture
1. Some T/aides lack the necessary skills and experience needed to adequately perform their duty rarely get consistency by having the same T/aide regularly - they often get shifted around to plug gaps, do other duties. Admin support is often lacking when needed
2. Sometimes there are School Staff who find it difficult to acknowledge that all students do not come from a supportive middle-class background.
3. Difficulty in programming tests where extra time is needed.
4. When certain sectors of the school didn't fully appreciate all the extra time and work that is required.
5. One of the disappointing aspects that I have found in working with various education support staff is that more often than not they complete the work for the students or tell them what to do resulting in a huge reliance from students in adult help to solve problems.
6. Some just snap at students and don't understand that a lot need kindness and understanding. Had an incident just a few weeks ago where an aide (at one of my small country schools) walked into my music classroom that I try to keep positive and inclusive, just barked orders at my very sensitive year 6 I.I. girl who loves music and does her best. She is very creative, loves singing and drama, not so much writing and playing. Anyway, yelled at her to move up more and start joining in. I felt dreadful. This girl used to be bullied at her old school, the teacher aide thought she was doing the right thing and just didn't think! The poor girl was mortified and embarrassed as we had a mutual understanding of what she can and can't do in my classroom, but she is always attentive. I felt like I had betrayed her. I ended up reporting the behaviour to one of her classroom teachers. But again, at my base school I work with the best aides.
7. Inadequately trained teacher aides in different disabilities, particularly around emotional self-regulation
8. Some students within an inclusive culture target and harass students who are ‘different’.
9. I feel that I see them less in a High School setting than in a primary school setting which is a shame.

10. I would say there are many challenges, (not necessarily negative). These difficulties are usually the amount of time especially for teachers to create the amount of work for such a diverse number of students within the classroom. The difficulties for a Learning Support Officer as we call them in our school (Teacher Aide) are keeping up to seven or eight students within one classroom who all have completely different
11. I have had teacher aides swear at me and about me behind my back to the students. This really tears the side down. That TA was replaced by the one I think of when filling out this survey. I do all of the planning (accept in the Mine Craft example). Sometimes I found these questions unclear. A TA wouldn't design resources but might cut them out for me.
12. Past workplaces have had challenges with some teachers resisting Inclusion or having a negative attitude towards it.
13. I sometimes worked in situations where students with special needs were unsupported. At times this was successful but at other times, these students were disruptive to mainstream students and took much time away from mainstream students who may have been struggling.
14. Sometimes it feels like you are the maid with tidying and cleaning up the main tasks
15. Drop I'm teacher aides not useful. BSM assigning TA based on funding not the needs of children. Administration deciding how TA will be allocated for system priorities rather than child needs
16. The idea that inclusion means mainstreaming for all children at all times, does not work in favour of inclusion. Inclusion can mean working in a space that is not necessarily the mainstream classroom. Teachers are struggling to determine exactly what inclusion means, what it looks like and how to be inclusive of all students in a classroom. Teachers and administrators can have very different expectations, views, and ideas about best practice for inclusion, often to the detriment of teacher's well-being. Teachers' experience, knowledge and professionalism is sometimes disregarded or devalued.
17. Disruptive children can affect the serenity of a class and cause discontent and jealousy. Maintaining a smooth learning scaffold can also be difficult.
18. Students don't achieve as they feel they don't belong

Appendix I: Interview Semi-Structured Questions (Anticipated)

Research Question 3		
Where challenges may exist in their understanding, skills, knowledge, and practice what interventions are needed to help Teacher Aides to overcome these challenges and to carry out their roles of promoting an inclusive culture competently?		
Topic	Relevant Interview Questions	Rationale
Motivation	What motivated you to agree to participate in this interview?	This question is designed to be an ice breaker and to set the interview going.
Motivation	How did you feel about the decision? Did you have any major hesitations or concerns?	Follow –up to find out about the student's motivation to participate
Understanding	Were there any of the survey questions that needed clarification?	This is a follow up question designed to find out more about the participation's interest and understanding
Previous interview experience	Have you participated in an interview of this type before?	This is intended to discover something of the participant's previous experience
Understanding of inclusion	What would you see happening in an inclusive classroom?	This question is intended to discover the participants understanding of what inclusion looks like

Research Question 3		
Where challenges may exist in their understanding, skills, knowledge, and practice what interventions are needed to help Teacher Aides to overcome these challenges and to carry out their roles of promoting an inclusive culture competently?		
Topic	Relevant Interview Questions	Rationale
Commitment to inclusion	Why do you think inclusive practices are important?	This question is intended to discover something about the participants philosophy
Opportunity for professional development	Do you have appropriate access to relevant professional development?	This question is intended to explore the opportunities that participants have had to engage in relevant professional development
Opportunity to plan cooperatively with supervising teachers	When do you have an opportunity to discuss what you are doing about inclusivity with your supervising teacher?	This question is intended to explore the opportunities that participants have had to engage in relevant professional discussion
Personal commitment	What do you do in your class to make students feel included?	This question is designed to specifically identify the things this participant does to support inclusion.
Aspirations	What more could you do if you had the opportunity?	This question is intended to challenge the

Research Question 3		
Where challenges may exist in their understanding, skills, knowledge, and practice what interventions are needed to help Teacher Aides to overcome these challenges and to carry out their roles of promoting an inclusive culture competently?		
Topic	Relevant Interview Questions	Rationale
		participant to aspire to better outcomes
Identifying positives	What is the greatest support in your classroom to achieving an inclusive culture?	This may be the most focused question as it deals with a school's intentions to pursue inclusive practices
Self-analysis	Do you feel that you have sufficient skills, knowledge and understanding to support inclusive practices?	A self-analysis question but one that might open the door to what TAs need to make them competent
Needs	What extra support do you think could be offered to assist you in developing inclusive practices?	Cutting to the chase about training and resources
Identifying negatives	What is the greatest barrier to achieving an inclusive culture in your classroom?	The only negative question but looking at barriers that exist in schools