The experiences of teacher aides who support students with disabilities and learning difficulties: A phenomenological study

by

Patricia E. Bourke
BA, Grad. Dip. Teach, Grad. Dip. Rel. Ed, MA

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education

Queensland University of Technology

2008

Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature

Date

Acknowledgements

This PhD is dedicated to all the teacher aides with whom I have associated during my teaching career. They have supported and inspired me through their dedication and care for students.

I also wish to acknowledge the support of my family especially my husband, Vince. His technological knowledge and skills have been of enormous support during my PhD journey, as well as his encouragement and untiring willingness to accompany me on the long and frequent drives to Brisbane.

To my children Michael, Jane and Tim and my daughter-in-law Kirsty, and son-in-law Rob, I express my gratitude for showing me how such a journey could be successfully and joyfully undertaken in the midst of serious health concerns and continuing family and work commitments.

I also thank my supervisors, Professor Suzanne Carrington and Associate Professor Lisa Ehrich, for their encouragement, continuing support and excellent supervision.

Abstract

Schools in Queensland, Australia, are undergoing inclusive education reform, following the report of the Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusive Education (Students with Disabilities) in 2004. The State government's responses to the taskforce report emphasise a commitment to social justice and equity so that all students can be included in ways that enable them to achieve their potential. Teacher aides are employed in schools as ancillary staff to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Their support roles in schools are emerging within an educational context in which assumptions about disability, difference and inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties are changing. It is important to acknowledge teacher aides as support practitioners, and to understand their roles in relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties as inclusive education reform continues.

This study used a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of teacher aides as they supported students with disabilities and learning difficulties in primary schools. Four key insights into the support roles of teacher aides in primary schools in Brisbane, Queensland emerged from the study: 1) teacher aides develop empathetic relationships with students that contribute significantly to the students' sense of belonging within school communities; 2) lack of clear definition of roles and responsibilities for teacher aides has detrimental effects on inclusion of students; 3) collaborative planning and implementation of classroom learning and socialisation programs enhances inclusion; and 4) teacher aides learn about supporting students while on-the-job, and in consultation and collaboration with other members of the students' support networks.

Keywords

Inclusive education; teacher aides; support for students; professional development; collaborative teaming.

Table of contents

List of tables

.

List of Acronyms and Codes

Acronyms

AVT	Advisory Visiting Teacher
DETA	Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Queensland)
EAP/BSP	Education Adjustment Program/ Beginning School Profile
HOSES	Head of Special Education Services
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
LST	Learning Support Teacher
PEG	Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy – a treatment for those who have trouble swallowing.
SEN	Special educational needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEU	Special Education Unit.
TA	Teacher aide
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Codes

A a/1	Participant A; prompt *a* '*Describe an experience of supporting a student that you perceived was successful'*; description of experience 1.
A b/2	Participant A; prompt *b 'Describe an experience of supporting a student that you perceived was unsuccessful';* description of experience 2.
A c/3	Participant A; prompt *c 'Describe an experience of learning about supporting students that was meaningful for you';* description of experience 3.

The same coding was used for all of the specific descriptions of experiences for participants A – H in relation to descriptions of experiences of supporting students *a* and *b*, and descriptions of experiences of learning about support *c*.
.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background to the study

Disability and education

In the past, definitions of disability have been based on psycho-medical diagnoses of individual deficit. Disability and its related learning difficulties were located "in the children themselves" (Thomas & Loxley, 2001, p. 124). Students who were labelled as 'handicapped', 'invalid' or 'slow' were excluded from the 'normal' school, and placed in segregated educational settings. This special education model emphasised individual deficit and dependency which required intervention by medical specialists and specialist teachers who had the 'scientific' knowledge to design and implement special education programs (Gallagher, 1998; Thomas & Loxley, 2001). With the best of intentions these special education programs were attempts to change a problem within individuals "to fit the demands of what is assumed to be a rational system of education in a good society" (Sleeter, 1995, p. 156). Researchers like Smith (1999) and Gallagher (2007) argue that in practice, the application of a psychological, behaviourist cartography of disability in a mechanistic and functionalist way, based on a positivist epistemology of 'special education'(Thomas & Loxley, 2001), did not enable students with disabilities. Rather it contributed to their continued marginalisation and exclusion within society (Slee & Allan, 2001).

In the past two decades, a sociological view of disability has lead to a different understanding of difference. In this view disability does not exist within a person, a pathological condition, but is influenced by environmental, structural

and attitudinal influences within society (Allan, 2003a; Barton, 1996; Carrier, 1989; Oliver, 1996; Vlachou, 2004). This changing paradigm assumes a different set of beliefs and assumptions, and demands different practices in schools, based on the principles of inclusion (Carrington, 1999). An inclusive education framework assumes acceptance and respect within the school community (Carrington, 2000). Inclusive education is about responding to diversity, respecting different ideas, empowering all members of a community, and celebrating difference (Barton, 1997). It recognises that many students have been marginalised in their education in the past through negative labelling and isolation (Slee & Allan, 2001).

Historical development of models of inclusive education

In the past, education for students with disabilities, based on a medical/deficit model of disability, meant that education was provided in segregated school settings or 'Special Schools' (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001; Slee, 2002). However during the last thirty years, human rights and social justice theories have influenced the development of an inclusion paradigm which has promoted access by students with disabilities to mainstream schooling (Mc Laughlin & Jordan, 2005; Mitchell, 2005b; Thomas & Loxley, 2001). But defining exactly what the inclusion paradigm means in educational contexts has been extremely difficult. Inclusive education theorists characterise inclusive education reform as "a cultural project intent on exposing the politics of identity and difference and establishing representation for those marginalised and excluded by the power relations exerted through the dominant culture and constitutive power relations of schooling" (Slee, 2007, p. 178-179). However the rhetoric has yet to match the reality (Allan, 2008; Gallagher, 2007).

Slee (2006a) advances the proposition that the political challenge for inclusion that has emerged from social justice and human rights movements has been "diverted by institutional predispositions consonant with the normalizing project of traditional forms of special education" (p. 109). During the past twenty years, in schools throughout the world inclusion has been used to refer to the placement of students with disabilities in classrooms alongside their peers (Kugelmass, 2004). It seems that because understandings about inclusive education have evolved from the notion of integrating students with disabilities into regular schools, the terms 'integration' and 'inclusion' are still confused (Gillies & Carrington, 2004). As Slee (2007) points out, the rhetoric of inclusive education is used in the academy, in educational bureaucracies and in schools in many different guises. In most cases "disability and education remain a technical set of problems separable from questions of rights and discrimination" (Slee, 2007, p.186).

In Australia 'inclusion' programs have attracted extra support in terms of special education funding from governments (Furtado, 2005). This funding has resourced special education support structures in schools under various names depending on the particular State e.g. Special Education Units (SEUs) in Queensland or Support Classes (SCs) in New South Wales. These units are staffed by specialist teachers and support staff (teacher aides). In Queensland, students with disabilities often spend time in the mainstream classroom and time in withdrawal sessions in the SEU. More recently, as changing discourses about inclusive education versus special education have begun to influence government policies, the school personnel who staff these SEUs have witnessed significant and ongoing changes to their roles. For the most part these changes

have been designed to improve appraisement processes for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and to support teachers in classrooms to develop alternate materials and programs to improve the 'fit' of the classroom to students' needs.

In Queensland some of these changes meant new nomenclature for positions due to remodelling and reclassification of roles e.g. Heads of Special Education Services (HOSES)[1], the Support Teacher (Learning Difficulties) (Forlin, 2000), or in Brisbane Catholic Education schools, Support Teacher (Inclusive Education).[2] Other changes include the development of more diagnostic categories for 'special needs' such as specific learning difficulties and social and emotional behaviours (Graham, 2006; Woods, Wyatt Smith, & Elkins, 2005), as well as new procedures for the enrolment, assessment and support of specified categories of students with disabilities e.g. the Enrolment Adjustment Program (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2004a). New classification structures for teacher aides have also been developed with advancement to higher levels tied to the recognition or attainment of qualifications.

There is also evidence that socio-cultural theories of inclusion, which argue that disability and difference do not lie within the pathology of the individual but are social and cultural constructs, are beginning to influence government education policies. The Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusion (Students with Disabilities) delivered its report in 2004 (Elkins, 2004). In this report it was stated that education in Queensland will be moving towards policies and practices that

[1] See details at http://jobs.govnet.qld.gov.au
[2] See details at http://www.brisbanecatholicschools.com.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=10737

promote an inclusive education system that values diversity and celebrates difference, and thereby ensures "the successful participation and maximised achievement of every student" (Elkins, 2004, p. 13) regardless of cultural, physical, social/emotional and behavioural differences.

The response from the Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA) to the Taskforce report recommended that policies and practices in schools undergo reform to be more inclusive. The department's response also seems to indicate that teacher aides will continue to be utilized as a resource to support the newly defined Educational Adjustment Programs (EAPs) for students with disabilities, by supporting the teacher who will be the key person who oversights all support provision for students with disabilities and learning difficulties in regular classrooms, as education practices are reformed to be more inclusive (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2004b).

Teacher aides who support students with disabilities and learning difficulties

The DETA website gives the following role description for a teacher aide:

> Teacher aides are employed to support teaching and learning in schools. They work closely with teachers, collecting or developing teaching resources, setting up and operating equipment, undertaking administrative and student supervision duties and participating in teaching activities under the direction of the teacher. Teacher aides support students who may need additional assistance to achieve particular learning outcomes (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2006d).

Students who require additional assistance are: 1)students who are ascertained with a physical or neurological disability as defined in the States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Act 2000 (e.g. those with cerebral palsy or autism) and 2) students who appraised as having "significant difficulties in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills due to factors that are

intrinsic to the individual, other than social, cultural or environmental factors (e.g. students with dyslexia or attention deficit disorders)" (Wyatt-Smith, Elkins, Colbert, Gunn & Muspratt, 2007, pp. 15-16). Elkins (2007) points out that, in Queensland, there has been another distinction made between support for students with learning disabilities as defined above, and support for students with learning difficulties in literacy and numeracy which have an endogenous origin "even though this often cannot be demonstrated and can only be inferred" (p. 393).

Historically, as a result of the special education model of ascertainment and appraisement and the funding which these processes attract, the roles of teacher aides have become specialised. Their role has been to support individual students who have been ascertained with specific disabilities with personal care and mobility needs, and to work with classroom teachers and specialist teachers to assist them in accessing a modified version of the curriculum, so that they achieve successful 'integration' into the 'normal' school. This role continues in Queensland as indicated on the departmental website (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2006d). Teacher aides are also working with teachers to support students with learning difficulties as these students are identified. There is also increasing evidence that teacher aides' roles are expanding to include support for students with behavioural difficulties (Howard & Ford, 2007; Kerry & Kerry, 2003). In this study, the terminology *students with disabilities and learning difficulties* will be used to cover the broad spectrum of students supported in schools by teacher aides.

As has been the case in overseas education systems, there is much confusion surrounding the many and varied ways in which teacher aides are deployed in schools to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties. This confusion in relation to roles and responsibilities stems from: 1) the historical development of the ancillary adult assistant role in schools from 'an extra pair of hands' to a quasi-professional role (Aylen, 2007; Wilkins, 2002); 2) the lack of empirical evidence regarding actual and appropriate roles for teacher aides (Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Kerry & Kerry, 2003; Mansaray, 2006; Takala, 2007); and 3) the variety of personal beliefs and practices that inform inclusive education policies and practices in education systems and in schools (Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Vlachou, 2004).

Proposed reforms of inclusive education policy and practice have implications for the role of teacher aides who support students with disabilities and learning difficulties. The first implication relates to their continued employment. Evidence in the literature on inclusive education reveals that specialist teachers (Forlin, 2000), parents (Foster, 2005), visiting health professionals (Tutty & Hocking, 2004), and especially teachers (Howard & Ford, 2007; Westwood & Graham, 2003) continue to request the support services of teacher aides for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and increasingly students with social and behavioural issues (Howard & Ford, 2007; Wyatt-Smith, Elkins, Colbert, Gunn, & Muspratt, 2007). Not surprisingly, teacher aide numbers are increasing. In Australia, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] (2003) reported a 38% increase in the number of 'integration aides' between 1996 and 2001, an increase of 7 519, while during the same period, the increase in special education teachers was only 741 (6.9%) (Shaddock, 2004). It is likely

that changes in inclusive education policies and practices could impact on the future employment of teacher aides in schools to support students. Many teacher aides are still employed on a part-time basis, and attached to individual students to meet specific medical, behavioural, or learning needs (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2003).

There are questions about whether their support role is needed in inclusive contexts that do not differentiate on the basis of special needs (Furtado, 2005; Shaddock, 2004; Slee, 2001). If students are no longer ascertained with individual needs that attract funding on the basis of their individual levels of disability and learning difficulties, then the government funds used to employ teacher aides may be withdrawn or reallocated. There are many examples in the literature where reports on inclusive education reform initiatives, designed to promote communication and mutual respect for key personnel within schools, fail to mention the teacher aides who support the students (Carrington & Robinson, 2004; Foreman, Arthur-Kelly, Pascoe, & King, 2004; Freeman et al., 2006). If their support role is unacknowledged in research reports and in official documents that proceed from these reports, then their future employment and deployment in these roles is uncertain.

The second implication relates to questions about the efficacy of their roles in supporting the social and academic outcomes of students (Woods et al., 2005). Overseas research has indicated that there are problems with the current model of teacher aide support in terms of diminished independence of students, limitations on social interaction with peers (Giangreco & Broer, 2005), and ineffective and/or misuse of teacher aide support by classroom teachers (French,

2001; Pearson, Chambers, & Hall, 2003). In these contexts their support role is under increasingly negative scrutiny (Crebbin, 2004; Smith, 1998).

The third implication relates to the assumption that the key personnel in inclusive education contexts understand what supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties means, or if they do not, they can find out through increased professional development or 'training' (Armstrong & Moore, 2004; Carrington, 1999; Forlin, 2006). Along with teachers, it is assumed that teacher aides need to be better trained and credentialed in order to improve their functioning as supporters of all students, not just those with identified 'special needs' (Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Mansaray, 2006). There is a danger in this quasi-teacher model of professional development that the current experiences, knowledge and skills of teacher aides, and other key support persons such as parents (Rogers, 2007) will be undervalued, and that their voices will be marginalized (Mansaray, 2006).

A review of the literature about teacher aides reveals there is ongoing confusion about the role of the teacher aide, and there is little research data about how teacher aides currently support students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Westwood & Graham, 2003). In 2005, Woods, Wyatt Smith, & Elkins, reported that the support provided by teacher aides in Queensland schools was "varied and unquantified" (p. 9). Redressing the lack of acknowledgement of, and research about, the support that teacher aides provide for students in schools and classrooms as they undergo inclusive education reform is not only necessary but important because of the implications of inclusive education reform for the conditions of their employment. It is also important because data

about what teacher aides do, and how they do it can lead to greater understanding of the content and contexts for the professional development offered to teacher aides, as recommended by the South Australian Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities (2005) and Takala (2007).

Research focussing on teacher aides is also necessary because new theories of inclusive education question personal assumptions that structure views about schools, teachers, students, teaching and learning; and the interconnectedness between individuals, education and society (Carrington, 1999; Deppeler & Harvey, 2004). Inclusive education reform requires fundamental attitudinal change in relation to notions of disability and of supporting students in ways that value diversity and celebrate difference (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2007; Woods et al., 2005, p. 9). If fundamental attitudinal change is needed then understanding the meanings attributed by the support personnel to their support roles is crucial. Teacher aides are support personnel and their experiences of supporting students need to be acknowledged, investigated and considered in the research data base about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties that informs inclusive education reform (Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Broadbent & Burgess, 2003b; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Howard & Ford, 2007). The experiences of teacher aides can provide useful insights into the essential structures of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties in the daily life of the classroom and school. This study aimed to give teacher aides the opportunity to share their experiences of supporting students with the inclusive education community. Their experience can partially illuminate the ways in which students are being included in their school environments.

A phenomenological research approach was used in this study, because phenomenology uses subjects' descriptions of rich experiences of the phenomenon to generate elements and relationships that can be used in determining the essential structures and meanings of the phenomenon (Valle & Halling, 1989). There are many versions of phenomenology which inform research approaches. In this study Giorgi's (1985b; 1985c; 2003) phenomenological psychological research methodology was used as this approach provided a way to understand teacher aides' experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in their everyday work, 'being-in-the-world' of school in contrast to meanings intended or imposed on their work by research and theoretical perspectives.

van Manen (1997, p. 12) states that "phenomenological research carries a moral force" because an awareness of the structures of one's own experience gives clues to orienting oneself to the phenomenon. It is therefore a search for a deeper understanding of human experience. Gaining a deeper understanding of the meanings that teacher aides attribute to supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties was a focus of the study. As well as describing "what is" i.e. the meaning of an experience for the teacher aide, phenomenological research findings can also provide a social critique that can and should bring in to critical view 'taken-for-granted' meanings about what it is that teacher aides actually do to support students and what the phenomenon of supporting students actually is (Crotty, 1998; Munhall, 2007b).

Significance of the Study

When reforms are introduced to schools and new policies are being implemented, on-site educational practitioners and students sometimes consider

that reforms are imposed on them (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2004; Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Gunter et al., 2005; Reinsel, 2004; Vlachou, 2004). This is especially so when complex issues such as inclusive education are involved (McLaughlin & Rhim, 2007; Slee, 2006a; Vlachou, 2004). In Queensland, inclusive educational policies and practices are being reformed in response to socio-cultural and human rights theories of disability and difference (Elkins, 2004). This reform process has implications for all of the key personnel involved in inclusive school settings, and especially for the teacher aides. Teacher aides are particularly vulnerable to changing conditions in their employment and deployment in schools because of what Sorsby (2004) has called their 'low position' in educational hierarchies. Most teacher aides work on a part-time basis, and are often unable, or disinclined because of lack of notification or pay, to attend staff meetings or inservice days. This leads to a degree of invisibility within the school community, and its decision-making hierarchy (Goessling, 1998).

An extensive review of the literature on inclusive education reveals that there has been very little empirical research about the roles of the teacher aides in Queensland. When information has emerged about teacher aides and their work in supporting students it is often gleaned from other key personnel within the school. There has been very little research that asks teacher aides themselves about their support roles. Their work has been described as extremely varied and difficult to quantify and "appropriate evaluation of the efficacy of the intervention methods, models and programs that teacher aides are involved in is scant" (Woods et al., 2005, p. 9).

Yet, as indicated earlier in this chapter, the support given by teacher aides to students with disabilities and learning difficulties continues to be requested and indeed valued by parents, teachers and support teachers (Farrell & Balshaw, 2002; Hill, 2003; Westwood & Graham, 2003; Woods et al., 2005). As well, the Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA) seems to indicate that teacher aides will continue to be employed to support students as schools are reformed to be more inclusive (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2004b). There are implications for the continued employment and deployment of teacher aides in this reform process. For these reasons the support role of teacher aides is worthy of investigation.

As well, teacher aides' experiences of supporting students is a valid source of data about the phenomenon of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties as schools respond to the policies of inclusive education. Investigating what teacher aides do and how they do it is a basic step in explicating the phenomenon of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, a phenomenon that is presumed as a 'given' in much of the inclusion literature, especially in medical/psychological studies, aimed at improving quality of support/inclusion through 'technical solutions' (Armstrong, 2005). As 'frontline workers' (Broadbent & Burgess, 2003b; Groom, 2006), the particular knowledge, skills and attributes that teacher aides bring to their roles can provide insights into the phenomenon of supporting students. These insights can inform inclusive policy development in relation to the roles, responsibilities and professional relationships of teacher aides. They may also provide empirical data to inform the development of "a sustainable framework for continuing professional development" (Groom, 2006, p. 203),

which addresses the learning styles and needs of support personnel as a community of learners together.

Research Question

This study had the following two questions:

What are teacher aides' experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties?

What are teacher aides' experiences of learning about their support role?

Objectives:

The objectives of the study were:

- to acknowledge teacher aides' experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties,
- to investigate and gain understanding of teacher aides' experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties,
- to gain insights into the phenomenon of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties by turning to the lived experiences of teacher aides, and
- to investigate how teacher aides learn about their support role.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher aides' experience of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in order to explicate a phenomenological description of the phenomenon of supporting students, and learning about supporting students as schools in Queensland undergo inclusive education reform. It aimed to explore the experience while it was being lived out in school. This is in contrast to other studies that have investigated practices and attitudes about teacher aides and support from the

points of view of other personnel, or in the process of professionally developing or 'training' teacher aides. It is argued in this study that there is a need to include teacher aides in the research because of the implications of new reform policies for their jobs, not only because they are 'frontline workers' in supporting students (Broadbent & Burgess, 2003b; Groom, 2006), but also because the phenomenon of support is a central philosophical, attitudinal and functional aspect of inclusive education (Campbell & Fairbairn, 2005; Howard & Ford, 2007; Kerry & Kerry, 2003; Sikma, 2006; Timmons, 2006). The aim of the study, through the process of phenomenological analysis, was to abstract the essential structures of the phenomenon of support presented by the reflections of teacher aides.

In summary Chapter 1 has provided background information about the conceptual basis for the reform of education to be inclusive, the position of the teacher aide in this reform process, and the purpose and significance of the study.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on teacher aides and their roles in inclusive education contexts. Section one defines the teacher aide role as it has developed in inclusive education contexts around the world. Section two considers the current theories of inclusive education and how they influence reform of inclusive policy and practice, including policies and practices for teacher aides. Section three examines the issues surrounding the lack of 'voice' of teacher aides in the inclusive education reform agenda especially in relation to ongoing reform in Queensland. Section four examines the literature on support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and how support is defined

and promoted in relation to the roles of teacher aides within inclusive education contexts in Queensland. The final section, section five, looks at ways in which teacher aides can have input into the reform of policies and practices, including professional development initiatives, because of their lived experience of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Chapter 3 discusses phenomenology as a philosophical perspective and outlines the research methodology. The approach of phenomenological psychologist Amedeo Giorgi (1985b, 1985c; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) is highlighted. This chapter also outlines the data collection and data analysis process.

Chapter 4 reports on the findings of the study. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings and relates the findings to the literature review. Chapter 6 is the final chapter and includes a summary and conclusion.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The literature on teacher aides who support students with disabilities and learning difficulties reveals that there are various theories and practices of inclusive education that underpin their employment and deployment in support roles. This chapter begins by reviewing the literature on the historical development of these models of inclusive education as a means of providing a background context for understanding the position and support role of the teacher aide. It then considers how changing models of inclusive education are impacting on the role of the teacher aide, and explores reasons for this impact. The great variety of roles and responsibilities of teacher aides is evident in the varied nomenclature in the literature including paraprofessional, paraeducators, learning assistant, teaching assistant, educational assistant, school officer and teacher aide. Because this study focuses on the inclusive education context in Queensland, Australia, the term teacher aide will be used. Other nomenclature is sometimes used when referring to teacher aides in particular countries.

The central focus of this chapter is an argument for the importance of studying the support provided by teacher aides for the following reasons. Firstly, the perspectives of the teacher aides need to be acknowledged and included as Queensland teachers and administrators engage with inclusive education reform in response to the Commonwealth Disability Standards for Education Act, 2004 (Smyth King, 2005). This reform of policies and practices has implications for their continued employment and deployment in inclusive school settings.

Secondly, the lived experience of the teacher aides is an important source of data about the phenomenon of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and thirdly, research into the phenomenon of support for students by teacher aides and other key personnel in inclusive education settings is needed so that reform of policies and practices to be more inclusive is informed by greater insights into the fundamental phenomenon of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

This chapter concludes by exploring ways in which teacher aides can be included in the research process so that their experience can be valued, and their insights into the phenomenon of support for students with disabilities can enrich the research data base that informs inclusive education reform initiatives.

Historical development of the position of the teacher aide

In the United States

Particular political and cultural agendas have underpinned and influenced the development of the American inclusive education paradigm since the early 1970s. Inclusive education in the United States developed out of a legislative culture in which individual states, followed by federal lawmakers, began to enact laws, to ensure the civil rights of students with disabilities and facilitate equal opportunities for them to benefit from educational services in the least restrictive environment (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001). This is when a new cadre of teacher aides or paraprofessionals were employed by education systems to look after students with disabilities in special school placements, because special educators and policy makers believed that “such work did not require skilled educators, so paraprofessionals would suffice and be less expensive” (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer et al., 2001, p. 46). Giangreco et

al (2001, p. 58)) note that, in the middle of last century, paraprofessionals were recruited to address the “persistent shortage of qualified professionals” within a culture that largely devalued people with disabilities.

In the United States, the combination of a human rights agenda and a medical view of disability as individual deficit resulted in a distributive justice philosophy of inclusion which underpinned reform of the American education system (Ware, 2002). This reform was based on policies that used what Slee (2001, p. 170) called a “comfortably inclusive lexicon” to set up what was in fact an integration or mainstreaming model of education. These reforms have concentrated on ascertaining types and degrees of disability, and ensuring equitable access for students with disabilities to mainstream classrooms. Equitable access is predicated on a deficit view that students with disabilities are unable to cope in regular classrooms and therefore need special re-mediated educational interventions from properly trained specialists and teachers so that they can be ‘integrated’ into the ‘normal’ academic and social curricula of schools (Brantlinger, 1997; Slee & Allan, 2001).

As students with disabilities moved into regular classrooms, teachers were overwhelmed by their new responsibilities and called for more in-class support (French, 1999; Hill, 2003). This support was provided by employing more paraprofessionals (teacher aides) to help with the implementation of compensatory intervention strategies, and to help students with disabilities to integrate into school environments (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer et al., 2001; Idol, 2006). However, using the historical precedent of paraprofessional support in an uncritical way has led to in an increase in recruitment of paraprofessionals,

and despite evidence from Broer et al., (2005), and Giangreco et al., (2005) that this paraprofessional model of support through supervised intervention did not necessarily facilitate quality inclusive education for students with disabilities, the model persisted. Idol (2006) states that this is particularly the case, when schools and teachers have not had preliminary preparation in building collaborative and inclusive environments.

Giangreco et al. (2001) point out that research in the United States has identified major problems with the use of paraprofessionals in the integration model of education. These include:

- untrained teacher aides are utilized inappropriately in instructional roles with children with very complex needs;
- proximity of paraprofessionals and their understanding of supporting can lead to dependence and social isolation of students from peers;
- teachers disengage with students because teacher aides are there to support them;
- uncertainty as to whether the primary role of the paraprofessional is to support the teacher or to support the student with a disability; and
- lack of data on the efficacy of the support role in improving student outcomes.

More recently, Giangreco et al (2005) have warned about the detrimental effects of assigning paraprofessionals to individual students. These researchers state that there are five reasons to be concerned about this practice: 1) the least qualified personnel are teaching students with the most complex learning needs;

2) students can become too dependent on the support of paraprofessionals and this can interfere with peer interactions; 3) teachers become less involved with students when paraprofessionals support them on a one-on-one basis; 4) teachers, parents and students may not get what they deserve and expect because of inadequacies in the training and supervision of paraprofessionals; and 5) providing paraprofessional supports may interfere with or delay the provision of needed changes in the school such as teachers engaging with differentiated instruction for mixed-ability grouping, and due attention being given to restructuring special education teachers' roles and responsibilities.

However other researchers in the United States such as Werts, Zigmond, and Leeper (2001) have found that students with severe disabilities were academically engaged during a significantly higher number of intervals when a paraprofessional was positioned close to the student. Others found that parents were pleased with the way in which teacher aides supported their children at school (Werts, Harris, Young Tillery, & Roark, 2004). Werts et al. (2001) conclude that this type of proximity can be desirable if the goal is academic engagement. For other students it may be non-desirable. Once again Werts et al. (2001) draw attention to the need to cater for each child's unique learning needs and styles. Marks, Schrader and Levine (1999) found that paraeducators were assuming most of the responsibility for the academic and behavioural needs of students with disabilities in inclusive settings because nobody else in the support team had the same close personal relationship with the student, and therefore knowledge of the students' immediate academic and behavioural needs. They concluded that the missing ingredient in inclusive practice was the notion of shared responsibility for addressing the academic and behavioural

needs of the students which meant that paraeducators were accepting the responsibility and “holding their own” (p. 325).

In 2007, Giangreco and Doyle (p. 437) cautioned that much more research is needed into the support provided by teacher aides if effective “culturally contextual” inclusion of students with special learning needs is to be progressed. Researchers from the United States, Canada and Europe also caution that equity issues for teacher aides, such as fair compensation, lack of appreciation and representation for teacher aides in the reform agenda need attention as well (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001b; Hill, 2003; Lacey, 2001; Sorsby, 2004), if “maximum benefit is to be gained from this valuable resource” (Logan, 2006, p. 98).

Education policy makers in the United States have responded to the research that expresses concern about the support provided by paraprofessionals by promoting notions of paraprofessional competency and the standards agenda (Hill, 2003). Inclusive education policies and practices based on a deficit view of disability/learning difficulties maintain that academic and social outcomes for students will improve through the development and implementation of programs to improve the performance of school personnel, including paraprofessionals. The emphasis has been on improved training (Christie, 2005; Dempsey, 2002; Urban Institue, 2006) and research initiatives designed to identify how paraprofessionals, teachers and specialist teachers can more effectively engage students with disabilities in the classroom, and work collaboratively in a team approach (Giangreco, 2002; Killion, 2004).

Meanwhile researchers who write from a socio-cultural or human rights perspective such as Biklen (2000), Slee and Allan (2001), Baker (2002) and Ware (2002) question the meaning of inclusion and whether current, organisational reform encompassing enhanced professional development and changes in practices can be effective in an education system that of its very nature differentiates and excludes. They argue that inclusion should entail a cultural, social and moral movement for change, not simply more efficient labelling of disability and learning difficulties, and measures designed to assist students with diagnosed disabilities and learning difficulties to 'fit in' more readily with the 'normal' students (Gallagher, 2007; Ware, 2006).

But while this debate continues and "ideology becomes the weapon with which each side berates each other" (Allan, 2008, p. 12), researchers such as Dempsey (2002), and McLaughlin and Jordan (2005) have found that in the current policies of educational reform in the United States, achievement of specific standards is taking precedence over all other educational goals, and an accountability system emphasising performance is endangering the feasibility of achieving more effective inclusive environments. Especially in the case of teacher aides, funding for special needs placement is being tied to educational outcomes for students, and achievement of professional standards for teacher aides is increasingly related to the acquisition of academic credentials (Killion, 2004).

In the United Kingdom and Europe

As in the United States, researchers in the United Kingdom and Europe have examined how inclusive education systems have been defined and developed (Clark, Dyson, Milward, & Robson, 1999; Dyson, 2005; Flem & Keller, 2005;

Mitchell, 2005a; Zoniou-Sideri, Deropoulou-Derou, Karagianni, & Spandagou, 2006). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) defines inclusion as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity among all learners. Its aims are to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability. Clark, Dyson. Millward and Robson (1999) argue that this statement became an impetus for the government in the United Kingdom to adopt the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there were compelling reasons for doing otherwise. Many other European countries undertook similar ‘mainstreaming’ reforms (McDonnell, 2003; Nes & Stromstad, 2006; Takala, 2007; Vlachou, 2006; Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2006).

However, inclusive education practices in Europe still tend to relate to what researchers identify as the persisting 'care',' treatment', and 'intervention' model of support for students who are identified as having ‘special needs’ (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006; Vlachou, 2004). This model of inclusive education is based on the understanding “that mainstream schools can and should undergo a progressive extension of their capacity to provide for children with a wide range of needs” (Clark, Dyson, Milward et al., 1999, p. 157). This extension of capacity involves reforming existing compensatory intervention models which persist because of the endemic nature of resistance in educational bureaucracies, in school communities and in the special education mentality. Well intentioned interventions designed to support special learning needs, continue to segregate and marginalise students, not only through withdrawal, but even within mainstream classrooms (Armstrong, 2005; Clark, Dyson, Milward et al., 1999;

Slee & Allan, 2001; Vlachou, 2004), and exclusionary pressures endemic to the current schooling paradigm as a whole continue to preclude effective reform (Gallagher, 2007; Mitchell, 2005a; Rix & Simmons, 2005; Slee & Allan, 2001; Vlachou, 2004; Waite, Bromfield, & McShane, 2005).

In Europe as well as in the United States, 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 (F. Armstrong, 2003; Demaine, 2003; Dyson, 2005; Evans & Lunt, 2002; Humes & Bryce, 2003). The emphasis in policy seems to be on initiatives designed to improve outcomes for students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Aylen, 2007; Cremin, Thomas, & Vincett, 2005; Taconis, van der Plas, & van der Sanden, 2004), and somehow these are different from outcomes for other students (Vlachou, 2004). Achieving better outcomes for students also includes: 1) employing more support staff because of the current recruitment and retention rate problems with teachers (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Mansaray, 2006; Mistry, Burton, & Brundrett, 2004); 2) restructuring their roles to cater for an increasingly diverse range of special needs (Aylen, 2007; Rhodes, 2006); and 3) an emphasis on accreditation of staff to improve performance (Mistry et al., 2004).

Summary of overseas models

The literature reviewed above reveals that, as in the United States, in the United Kingdom and Europe educational policy makers seem to view inclusive reform, as reforming the current interventionist model of provision of services to students with disabilities so that it is more efficient and student outcomes

improve. Reformers often find solutions for improving social and academic performance of students with disabilities and learning difficulties in measures designed to improve the performance of school personnel through reorganisation of structures and roles and responsibilities of specialist staff, and improved professional development. For example Giangreco and Doyle (2007, p. 434) argue that schools need to be "eminently clear about the expected roles of teachers and special educators in inclusive classrooms" and then they will be able to clarify teacher aide roles and improve training. The underlying presumption is that 'best' support for students is based on special educators, teachers and parents finding the correct medical diagnosis of disability/learning difficulty, and application of appropriate treatment regimes/interventions for the diagnosed disabilities. Within these intervention programs, designed to 'help the students with disabilities' to be a part of the 'normal' school (Brantlinger, 2006), it is also assumed that the roles of support personnel such as teacher aides need to be clarified and suitably upgraded so that the students with disabilities are being educated in an equitable way by suitably qualified personnel.

Brodin and Lindstrand (2007) argue that instead of integrating students who are diagnosed with 'special needs', the emphasis should be on 'special support'. They argue that, "pupils in need of special support should be able to obtain it, but perhaps it should be regarded instead as an obvious right of all children, with or without diagnosis, to receive the support they need to use the instruction available in their schools" (Brodin & Lindstrand, 2007, p. 3). They argue that in talking about support in schools the 'special needs' concept needs to be replaced by the idea that all children are in need of special support during different

periods and phases in their educational growth and development. As Slee (2007, p. 181) points out this type of all encompassing reform that treats each student as an individual with individual needs, and responds to these diverse and ever-changing needs as and when necessary, requires a much higher level of resourcing by governments. Thomas and Loxley (2001) cite examples in inner London schools where changes in funding structures and support arrangements to facilitate inclusion in schools have produced positive results. They argue that, while difficult, these kinds of changes are not impossible. However, as Dyson (2005) points out, the deeply complex nature of politics and schooling presents major obstacles to the development of inclusive education. In most cases it is easier for governments to redeploy existing structures and increase incrementally – an "industrially more palatable" option (Slee, 2007, p. 181). Allan (2008) points out that exclusion by means of segregation into 'special schools' may be considered by governments as becoming a 'thing of the past' as indicated by Her Majesty's former Inspector of Education Mike Gibson, addressing the National Association of Special Education Needs Conference in 2004, but policies and legislation continue to be excluding for students from minority groups because of "the search for the calculable and the certain" (p.25).

In Australia

In Australia, Carrington (1999), Graham (2006), Snelgrove (2005) and Slee (2005) argue that historical construction of beliefs about success and failure, and disability as individual deficit have influenced the development of school systems. They argue that educational reform for the 21st century needs to attend closely to understanding the cultural and social institutional settings of schools;

to increasing the participation of students within school cultures in ways that value diversity; and to decreasing exclusionary pressures such as labelling and differential treatment of students based on gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability, behavioural and socio-economic factors. Inclusive education reform in schools cannot be achieved without challenging "institutional predispositions consonant with the normalizing project of traditional forms of special education" (Slee, 2006, p. 109). Michael Furtado (2005) argues that:

> … discourses of special needs education have seen a shifting field of contestation and expansion in Australia as well as globally, between inclusivists on the one hand and the more technically and diagnostically inclined special needs recuperativists and various other groups committed to the provision of schooling in exclusivist or separatist modes (p. 434).

As a result of many factors including funding arrangements and underlying ableist normativity assumptions as outlined above, a "transmogrification" (Baker, 2002, p. 663) of the old special needs system has been common in Australia rather than a more extensive re-envisioning of education based on socio-cultural, disability and equity theories about inclusion as celebrating difference and valuing diversity. The emphasis has been on restructuring roles of special education teachers (Forlin, 2000; Stephenson, 2003), and pre-service training and professional development of teachers (Forlin, 2000; MacVean & Hall, 1997; Shaddock, Hoffman-Raap, Giorcelli, Hook, & Smith, 2004; Subban & Sharma, 2006; Westwood & Graham, 2003; Woods et al., 2005). Teacher aides have also been involved in professional development initiatives designed to keep them up-to-date with changing 'special needs' policies and 'best' support practices (Broadbent & Burgess, 2003a; Harling, 2006; Shaddock et al., 2004).

Meanwhile socio-cultural theorists argue that undertaking reform of inclusive education based on the notion of diversity involves *radical* reform that not only strives for organisational change, but also fundamental change in relation to teachers' attitudes, the inclusive culture of the school, and educational platforms (Allan, 2008; Gallagher, 2007). Integrating people into deficient educational organisations will not suffice because inclusive education is not a matter of linear progression from the discursive practices of special educational needs, but requires a fundamental paradigm shift because it is a social movement against structural, cultural and educational exclusion, and these problems are endemic to education as a whole (Carrington, 1999; Slee, 2005).

Inclusive education: A way to support all students

In Australia, Carrington (1999), Slee (2005), Graham (2006) and Deppeler and Harvey (2004) join socio-cultural inclusive theorists from the northern hemisphere (Baker, 2002; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Clark, Dyson, Milward et al., 1999; Vlachou, 2004; Ware, 2002) to argue that effective change in inclusive education policies and practices requires a whole school approach that aims for fundamental attitudinal, organizational, and practice-based change. There have been attempts to implement whole school inclusionary reform processes that address fundamental attitudinal change, and raise awareness about exclusionary pressures, and how to combat these in ways that value diversity and celebrate difference. Initiatives such as the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) have been trialled in Australia and overseas. These whole school development initiatives focus on a *process* of inclusionary change and whole school development that fosters participation by all in the school community in managing changes. Underpinning these initiatives is the argument

that changes are needed in the approach to organisation of students, models of support, roles and relationships of school staff, and approaches to learning and teaching (Carrington & Robinson, 2004). These whole school development initiatives have had success in engaging practitioners in critical examination of assumptions about inclusion ideals and practices in real school contexts (Ainscow et al., 2004; Carrington & Robinson, 2004; Deppeler & Harvey, 2004; Waite et al., 2005).

What about the teacher aides?

However this model of whole school inclusive reform raises questions about the continuing support role of the teacher aide. In the past, deficit labelling has categorised students with disabilities, ascertained their levels of special needs, and attracted funding on this basis (Furtado, 2005). This has resulted in the design of compensatory individual intervention programs and the employment of special education teachers and teacher aides to implement these programs. If this model of special needs intervention is no longer relevant or is being reformed in the light of new ideals and practices of inclusive education, then there are implications for the roles and continuing funding of employment for teacher aides who are employed currently to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties that are defined, designated and funded by governments.

There are also increasing concerns that the effectiveness of these whole school initiatives can be undermined because of the influence of other political agendas on school systems (Dempsey, Foreman, & Jenkinson, 2002; Slee, 2006). Inclusion rhetoric can be manipulated by governments as a vehicle to find political solutions or mechanisms to manage the excluded, to minimise risk

(Armstrong, 2005), and achieve social cohesion (Taylor & Henry, 2003), without actually engaging with the cultural politics of exclusion. Teacher aides might find themselves cast in the role of behaviour monitors of students with learning and behavioural needs in an inclusive education structure designed to diminish 'risk,' to schools' reputations, and to ensure the safety of school environments (Etscheidt, 2005). As Takala (2007) and Mansaray (2006) have found in European schools grappling with inclusion strategies for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, Harling's (2006) report to the South Australian government about teacher aides (School Services Officers) also indicates that teacher aides are becoming very aware of their needs for skills in behaviour management, as their roles continue to expand and diversify both within and beyond the classroom.

Implications of inclusive education reform for teacher aides

There seems to be ongoing confusion about the teacher aide support role in inclusive education, and how best to reform the role (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Harling, 2006; Shaddock, 2004; Takala, 2007; Westwood & Graham, 2003). Yet teacher aide numbers continue to increase in Australia and overseas (Farrell & Balshaw, 2002; Kingsbury, 2005; Pearson et al., 2003; Shaddock, 2004), indicating that their role is valued within school communities.

The literature on inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties reveals that their roles in supporting and caring for students with disabilities and learning difficulties are still valued by administrators (Idol, 2006; Logan, 2006; Salisbury, 2006), parents (Deppeler & Harvey, 2004; Farrell & Balshaw, 2002; Howard & Ford, 2007), specialist teachers (Forlin, 2000; Thornton, Peltier, &

Medina, 2007) and classroom teachers (Howard & Ford, 2007; Subban & Sharma, 2006; Westwood & Graham, 2003). While research about teacher aides has concentrated on defining roles and improving performance, researchers in Australia and overseas are beginning to acknowledge that their support roles for students and teachers can be significant in inclusive education contexts (Howard & Ford, 2007; Moran & Abbott, 2002). Furthermore there is a need for further research to investigate the potential of teacher aides' understandings about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties to inform inclusive education policies and practices (Aylen, 2007; Christie, 2005; Farrell & Balshaw, 2002; Groom, 2006; Lacey, 2001; Mansaray, 2006; Moran & Abbott, 2002).

Lack of acknowledgement of the support role of the teacher aide

Researchers such as Booth and Ainscow (2002), Carrington (1999) and Deppeler et al. (2006) argue that theoretical research about inclusion will continue to be ignored by teacher/practitioners unless they include the ways in which practitioners formulate the problems that they face and the constraints within which they have to work. Yet despite their day to day support for students and teachers, there is limited acknowledgement of the teacher aide as a practitioner (Butt & Lance, 2005; Farrell & Balshaw, 2002). Most of the research data about their roles and responsibilities is collected from 'key personnel' such as special education teachers, classroom teachers, administrators, and parents. Researchers have found that the students themselves (Allan, 2008; Biklen, 2000; Snelgrove, 2005), and teacher aides (Cremin, Thomas, & Vincett, 2003; Mansaray, 2006; Sorsby, 2004) are seldom identified as major stakeholders in the inclusive education context.

Mistry et al. (2004, p. 125) state that this situation arises in the United Kingdom because " lack of effective communication results in inefficient and arbitrary management of LSAs (teacher aides) by teaching staff," and as a consequence, lack of recognition or definition of their roles and responsibilities. Research with teacher aides by Takala (2007), Hall (2005), Mansaray (2006), and Rhodes (2006) has found that teacher aides, 'the invisible elves of the inclusive school' (Goessling, 1998, p.1) are being asked to mediate the environment and provide the necessary supports for students with complex needs in classrooms without the recognition, organisational support or training that they need to perform at an optimum level. Research into the roles and responsibilities of teacher aides in the United Kingdom by Kerry and Kerry (2003) prompted the question: what is the difference between the learning support that teacher aides provide in explaining, expanding, reinforcing and clarifying classroom input for students with disabilities and learning difficulties and what teachers do? This question is further complicated when teacher aides are asked to undertake lunch-time supervision, behaviour management, and whole class supervision. Farrell and Balshaw (2002) concluded from their research with teacher aides in school and classroom settings that the issues for further research included teamwork, pay, career development and training, and effective classroom support. In this study two of these issues were explored from the perspectives of the teacher aides: 1) what constitutes classroom support and: 2) what constitutes professional development.

Educational authorities, research and teacher aides

In 2004 in the United Kingdom, Sorsby found that education authorities responded in a top-down manner to issues surrounding clarification of role

descriptions and responsibilities, career structure, training, performance management, and issues of job satisfaction and inadequate remuneration for teacher aides. She asserted that the struggle for change/reform, especially fundamental inclusionary reform within school cultures, needed to involve the teacher aides, whose significant contributions to the support of students with disabilities and teachers within school contexts, was well documented. As a member of staff she conducted an action research project aimed at increasing the informed engagement of teacher aides with whole school inclusion reform, because her experience in schools with reform had revealed that teachers and support staff "would probably be the last to be involved in consultation and training" in terms of inclusion reform initiatives (Sorsby, 2004, p. 52).

Mansaray (2006, p. 184) argues that there is an urgent need to study the working lives of teacher aides as their professional identities are reformed under "quasi-market conditions, and internal organisational differentiation (the semi-professionalism of TAs)." Her research suggested that the restructuring of professional roles will have significant pedagogical implications and affect social relations within the schools. Rhodes (2006, p. 168) agrees and states that more research with teacher aides is needed "to avoid frustrated identity claims, dissatisfaction, poor morale, and exit from the education service of this important group of workers."

Other researchers in the United Kingdom have argued that, because of the support role that teacher aides perform, successful implementation of inclusive policy into classroom practice relies on including and acknowledging the role of teacher aides as members of the classroom support team for the students (Farrell

& Balshaw, 2002; Groom, 2006). Their contribution to the learning process in classrooms has been identified by a growing number of researchers (Farrell & Balshaw, 2002; Lacey, 2001; Mansaray, 2006; Moran & Abbott, 2002). These researchers have also identified the significance of the affective relationships that teacher aides develop with students with disabilities as they support them in negotiating the mainstream school environment (Chopra et al., 2004; Mansaray, 2006; Moran & Abbott, 2002). Because of this recognition of the emerging roles of teacher aides in inclusive education contexts, researchers such as Howes (2003), Cremin et al. (2005), and Fox, Farrell and Davis (2004) are arguing for the development of respectful, and collaborative relationships between teachers and teacher aides, team training, and valuing the teacher aide role in inclusion policies.

The 'voice' of teacher aides in research

Sometimes the choice of methodologies and/or instruments in research projects limits effective participation by teacher aides. Survey questionnaires, for example, rely on the goodwill of teachers and administrators, already time poor, to direct teacher aides to survey materials, or surveys carried out in schools are often accessed at staff meetings, where teacher aides rarely go (Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Griffin-Shirley & Matlock, 2004; Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). As well survey questions often use a terminology that is unfamiliar to teacher aides.

Action research projects often struggle with issues related to differential timetabling and consistent observation (Simpson, 2004), and how to include the teacher aide in inclusion reform initiatives when they occupy "a low position" within the school hierarchy (Sorsby, 2004, p. 49). Research by Farrell and

Balshaw (2002) found that, when planning for a child with special educational needs, the person who knows the child best may be the teacher aide. However because of the way support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties is planned for, those with the most responsibility and the highest job status have the most influence and the views of teacher aides are often overlooked by others. Teacher aides have also expressed a lack of certainty about their role/s in an inclusion paradigm within a whole school context (Carrington & Robinson, 2004; Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Rhodes, 2006; Takala, 2007). These findings indicate that teacher aides feel isolated and marginalised from the decision making structures of support networks in schools.

In the past, most research projects in inclusive education involving teacher aides have been concerned primarily with how to define their roles (see French, 1999; Shaw, 2001; and Kerry, 2005), how to improve their performance (See Giangreco, 2002; and Killion, 2004) and how to develop relationships with key personnel (See Calder, 2004; and Forlin, 2006). Even when teacher aides' own perspectives about their support roles have emerged in research projects, the variety and complexity of their roles have often surprised, and sometimes confounded, researchers. Many of these researchers find the solution to this confusion by calling for more research about the efficacy of their roles (Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, Doyle, Halvorsen, & Broer, 2004; MacVean & Hall, 1997; Werts et al., 2001; Westwood & Graham, 2003; Woolfson & Truswell, 2005). Most studies that have examined the efficacy of teacher aides' roles have concluded with recommendations for improved professional development (Broadbent & Burgess, 2003a; Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005a; Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001a; Hammeken, 1996;

Hardy, 2004). However teacher aides have expressed anxiety and apprehension about professional development programs that do not take into account the level of complexity of their roles and responsibilities (Broadbent & Burgess, 2003a; Ghere & York-Barr, 2007), and feel marginalised and disempowered when decisions about professional development are made for them without taking into account their perspectives about the training they need to support students.

Studies and reports commissioned by government education authorities are often looking for effective solutions based on quantifiable outcomes, and emphasise improved performance through professionalisation of the workforce (Barton, 2003; Harling, 2006; Rhodes, 2006). Mansaray (2006) concluded from her study of teacher aides in schools in the United Kingdom, that the open and emergent nature of their roles is being misinterpreted in policy discourses. She argues that more emphasis is needed on studying the work and experiences of teacher aides and this can contribute significantly to understanding the complex processes that are involved in restructuring of schools to be more inclusive. Marks, Schrader and Levine (1999) also pointed to the urgent need to back up surveys and observational studies of the work of teacher aides with examinations of individual experiences which can help researchers to understand the context that contributes to such observations. They maintain that it is the understanding of their experiences in context that can inform efforts to improve support practices and professional development.

Are teacher aides in Queensland 'The invisible elves of the inclusive school' (Goessling, 1998)?

The lack of acknowledgement of the support role of teacher aides in inclusive education contexts in Queensland is related to many factors, and in many ways

mirrors the experiences of paraprofessionals and learning support assistants in other parts of Australia and overseas. Historically teacher aides in Queensland relied on the educational bureaucracy to formulate generic teacher aide positions and special education policies and programs, from which their more specialised roles in the inclusive education classroom have evolved. Reforms to the generic teacher aide position, deemed fit and/or necessary by governments in responding to national and global trends in education, have been similarly mandated (Taylor & Singh, 2005).

In the past, there have been many factors that have contributed to their compliance with, and/or adaptation to mandated changes. The first factor is the relative instability of their employment - mostly part-time, reliant on changing government funding policies, and responding to variable enrolment of students with disabilities that occur locally (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2005a). The second factor relates to the uncertainty caused by their lack of voice in the reform of policies and educational structures which impact on their roles and employment (Slee, 2006a; Taylor & Singh, 2005).

Thirdly, they lack identity within the field of education (Sorsby, 2004). Their positions and work seem to be minimally acknowledged in official documentation about intervention strategies to support inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms in Queensland. There is no official position description for the teacher aide who supports students with disabilities and learning difficulties in Queensland, or on the Brisbane Catholic Education website, as decisions about the employment and deployment of teacher aides (in

administration, teacher support, or individual student support) have been made locally by principals and district and regional offices.

The generic teacher aide position is listed on the DETA website as an administrative ancillary position at the 002 level. At the beginning level of employment, level 002, training is on-the-job. There are no prior academic qualifications stipulated, but achievement of Year 10 level is desirable. For most teacher aides who are employed to work with one or more students with disabilities and learning difficulties, this type of training would seem insufficient to give them confidence to fulfil their support role, unless their school or region has very good professional development opportunities, to which teacher aides are invited, and excellent, collaborative learning environments for teacher aides.

Professional development for teacher aides

In Queensland, to progress beyond the base level 002, the teacher aide is required to undertake a Certificate III in Education Support (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2006a). This course consists of seven core units and six elective units. The teacher aide who works with students with disabilities will complete the seven core units (180 hours) and five of the elective units in the electives strand (225 hours). This strand includes the subject 'support the learning of students with disabilities', as well as subjects on supporting literacy and numeracy, technology, small group learning, and resource management.

For a teacher aide who is assigned to support a student with a disability, and is required to support the student's engagement with the classroom curriculum, the

choice of electives from the elective strands could be problematic, considering that the teacher aide's responsibilities often include instructional support in language and numeracy, and supporting the administrative and information technology needs of the students. As well, the general nature of the disability unit seems to presume that disability is something that is static, and could lead to an understanding which does not honour the individual experience of disability (Biklen, 2000; Snelgrove, 2005). These modules are offered online by various Vocational Education and Training (VET) accredited agencies.

There are provisions for recognition of associated qualifications and years of on-the-job training. Teacher aides can also apply for financial assistance from the Commonwealth government during their study, on the condition that: 1) the teacher aide is a permanent or permanent part-time (15 hours per week) employee i.e. not casual; or 2) the aide does not already have equivalent qualifications. The next level of progression to level 004 through the Certificate IV in Education Support was trialled by DETA during 2006. This certificate course requires further training in core competencies, as well as requirements for on-the-job structured activities and assessment. Opportunities to access this professional development regime, designed to support the work of teacher aides, have been in place since 2003.

This model of professional development seems to presume that on-the-job guidance and supervision for teacher aides in applying their new knowledge and skills will be provided by specialist support teachers, and by classroom teachers, in a traineeship model. However Forlin (2000; 2006) makes the point that the emerging role of specialist support teachers in Queensland focuses heavily on

appraisement, consultative and advisory tasks. The key issue that has emerged from studies of support teachers in their inclusion programs in other states is that of paucity of time to meet mandated responsibilities, including time to adequately select, train, and supervise support staff. Howard and Ford (2007) found in their study of secondary schools in South Australia that teacher aides who support students with disabilities and learning difficulties received only ad hoc feedback from teachers and learning support teachers. Teachers have also identified their own lack of knowledge and skills in meeting the pedagogical needs of a diverse population of students, especially those with disabilities and learning difficulties, and their lack of time or skills to work in collaboration with other adults (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005a; Chopra et al., 2004; Subban & Sharma, 2006; Woods et al., 2005).

Apart from the generic teacher aide position descriptions and classification provisions, the teacher aide positions seem to be minimally acknowledged in official documentation about the reform of inclusion strategies to support students with disabilities in regular classrooms in Queensland. The teacher aide is mentioned once in the twenty three pages of the report of the Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusive Education (Elkins, 2004) unless the reader finds the term teacher aide subsumed under the category “realignment of resources” (p. 11). The Education Queensland website has a link for teachers to explore options for in-class support for some categories of disability, including teacher aides as a resource on the inclusive education link. It also has a link for teacher aides to access a series of information booklets about various disabilities (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2003).

There is a reference to teacher aides on the Education Adjustment Profile (EAP) review process professional development web page (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2004a), but no specific mention within the EAP Guidelines and Procedures document. As outlined previously in this thesis perhaps the invisibility of the position of the teacher aide within the general inclusive education context in Queensland is a result of their employment and deployment at the local school level to meet specific local requirements for enrolments of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Or perhaps their positions and experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties have not been given enough attention and value by educationalists who are in the process of reforming education to be more inclusive.

Issues of identity and power

Without meaningful input into the reform process from the perspectives of the teacher aides themselves, there is the distinct possibility that they will be treated like some sort of a commodity, a resource to be reformed and re-allocated. By overlooking their input into the inclusion debate, despite their significant contribution to support of students with disabilities and learning difficulties and to inclusive classroom management, and their 'value' in the eyes of the teachers, support teachers and parents, researchers and reformers are likely to cast them as marginals, who are in Paulo Freire's (1972, p.48) terms, "oppressed." Freire's notion of the oppressed maintained that the oppressed are not outside of society, but inside the structure which made them "beings for others" (Freire 1972, cited in Crowther & Martin, 2005, p.8).

It appears that within the inclusive education paradigm teacher aides have become ‘beings for others.’ Historically they have been utilised by the dominant groups in the educational structure who have used those with less knowledge to fill gaps (Aylen, 2007), when those with more knowledge, the administrators, special needs teachers, and teachers, have been unable to do so. This inability stemmed historically from integration of students with disabilities into mainstream schools without adequate specialist resourcing (Giangreco et al., 2004; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer et al., 2001) and, more recently, from the increasing complexity and paucity of time associated with their professional roles (Farrell & Balshaw, 2002; Mansaray, 2006; Minondo, Meyer, & Xin, 2001; Rhodes, 2006). Another factor in this development was that employing teacher aides required less funding than employing specialist support teachers, with the effect of more adult bodies in the school during school hours.

In a similar vein in relation to the missing voices of children in social research, Grover (2004, p. 82) argues that “to have some control over how we are portrayed in the world by others is related to human dignity.” If discourses about the roles of teacher aides in inclusive education contexts are being developed through research from a variety of other sources and are informing policy, then teacher aides should be treated as research participants in ways in which they are empowered to contribute their unique perspectives (Mansaray, 2006), and can “challenge perceived misrepresentations arising out of data interpretations that they feel do not accurately reflect their own experience or understanding of who they are and how they function” (Grover, 2004, p. 82).

The discourses of inclusion, the restructuring of inclusive education, the demands of teachers and parents, and the Queensland government's emphasis on accountability and performance have combined to place teacher aides in a position of uncertainty in which their lack of identity and voice could lead to unintentional exploitation as principals respond to pressures from governments, parents and especially stressed classroom teachers, and use them to fill the gaps (Shaddock, 2004; Slee, 2007).

Implications of lack of identity/power/voice for teacher aides

Research from the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe, as outlined in the beginning of this chapter, has shown that the poverty of position of teacher aides due to their lack of identity meant that they needed refitting for new inclusive education policies and practices, as defined by the policy makers. This refitting is being addressed by increasing their cultural capital/credentials through professional development. Thus education packages are designed to improve teacher aide practice through better education management practices (Mistry et al., 2004; Rhodes, 2006; Urban Institue, 2006), and by improving hands-on knowledge and skills, and as a result, pay rates and professional status will increase (Hall, 2005; Hammett & Burton, 2005). Judgements about knowledge/skills needed are made by the 'consecrated', those with the cultural capital and symbolic power, who then design and implement professional development initiatives (Gunter, 2004; Webb et al., 2002). Edwards and Nicoll (2006, p.115) agree that the rhetoric of technical expertise, competence and reflective practice is being deployed "to mobilise professional practices and identities in particular ways and position certain practices and dispositions as specifically professional."

This model of "training up" teacher aides to prepare them for inclusive educational change, enshrined in the provisions of the "No Child Left Behind Act" for two year college degrees, and state certification in the United States (Dempsey, 2002; Urban Institute, 2006), the "National Agreement (2003)" in the United Kingdom (Department of Children Schools and Families, 2003), and the "Classification structure for Teacher Aides" in Queensland (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2006a), is premised on a view that providing teacher aides with more training will fix the perceived deficits in their repertoire of skills (Mansaray, 2006; Shepherd & Hasazi, 2007). Training will afford teacher aides with what they need to cope with their support roles, i.e. make them better technicians (Rhodes, 2006) and as a consequence, improve the social and academic skills of the students they support (Smyth, 2000). As Gunter (2004) points out, the emphasis in professional development is shifting from intellectual engagement with principles on which reform should be based towards a more mechanistic training for the job. She states that:

> … what is known and worth knowing is controllable through positivist epistemology regarding the conditions prior to training and measurable outcomes after training. Training can be staged into particular levels of a normal school hierarchy that enables a member of the school workforce to be trained at a time outside of their control but consistent with particular role incumbency (Gunter, 2004, p. 29)

She argues that "knowing is increasingly about complying with central requirements to implement reform" (Gunter, 2004, p.28). Rhodes (2006, p. 167) found that this type of training tends to produce "an instrumental technical identity characterized by compliance."

Beck and Young (2005) argue that, from a Bernsteinian perspective these types of generic courses emphasising trainability, reflect the need of policy makers to

engage with excision from courses of all but the most instrumentally relevant forms of educational theory. This “involves a silencing which abstract real experiences from the power relations of their lived conditions by denying access to forms of knowledge that permit alternative possibilities to be thought” (Beck & Young, p. 193). The experiences of teacher aides within the lived conditions in which they work give rise to alternative perspectives about the phenomenon of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties that have not been fully acknowledged. Therefore they have not been included effectively to develop better understanding of the phenomenon of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and to illuminate a clear understanding of how these practitioners learn about their support roles (Mansaray, 2006; Rhodes, 2006). Rhodes (2006, p.167) found that teacher aides need opportunities to develop “a creative professional identity characterized by an active involvement.” This active involvement depended on individual security in role definition and a sense of purpose in relation to perceived power differences between themselves and teachers. Active involvement also assumes respect and acknowledgement of the knowledge and skills that teacher aides have gained through their experience in supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties, as well as the development of collaborative, inclusive relationships with teachers and learning support teachers (Howard & Ford, 2007).

In summary the limited research that has been done to collect data about the perspectives of teacher aides indicates that, if teacher aides believe that decisions about new qualifications and career structures are made for them by educational bureaucrats, their self-esteem and motivation suffers (Hammett &

Burton, 2005), and they feel “marginalized and disempowered” in the hierarchies of schools (Sorsby, 2004, p. 57). Researchers in Australia and the United Kingdom have found that, when teacher aides feel ill-informed, confused about their roles, and/or un-included in discussions about work-related issues, they want to find ways to articulate, formulate and pursue their goals (Broadbent & Burgess, 2003a; Howard & Ford, 2007; Mansaray, 2006; Rhodes, 2006; Sorsby, 2004). Mansaray (2006) found that there were ambivalences around the roles of teacher aides created by the perceptions of teachers, parents and students. Teacher aides were sometimes cast in the role of teacher, but at other times excluded from that role by their lack of rational-legal authority within the institutional bureaucracy. She found that teacher aides did not want the teacher-like professional status. Nor did they want to be cast as deficit teachers, who needed professional development to attain those qualifications. Mansaray (2006) argues that policy discourses misinterpret the open and emergent form of the teacher aides’ role, because they do not understand it. It is important to discover what it is that teacher aides actually do, to acknowledge their roles as significant in the development of inclusive classrooms (Moran & Abbott, 2002), and to help them to find ways to improve their working life and conditions in ways that honour their current and particular knowledge and skills.

Research with teacher aides in the United Kingdom emphasises that effective participation of teacher aides in inclusionary reform requires more than offering regimes of formal professional development and pay rises. Hammet and Burton (2005) found effective participation of teacher aides in reform initiatives relies on including their perspectives in ways that enhance their identities and self-esteem within the school community structure. Sorsby’s (2004) action research

project also revealed how much more effective engagement with inclusion reform can be for teacher aides if their perspectives are included in the reform process. Teacher aides can better develop their understanding of inclusive values, processes and professional practices in relation to their work, if better structures and systems can facilitate their own reflection on the lived experiences of supporting students, and their experience and perceptions are valued and included as a valid source of research data to inform inclusive education reform initiatives (Mansaray, 2006; Rhodes, 2006).

The phenomenon of support

As well as providing opportunities for teacher aides to reflect and share their experiences with the research community, using a phenomenological approach can also provide insights into the phenomenon of support that is widely used in inclusive education rhetoric, but seldom defined. For example the principles of inclusive education are outlined in the policy statement of the Department of Education, Training and the Arts: Support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2005c)

These principles define inclusive education in Queensland as follows:

> Inclusive education ensures that schools are supportive and engaging places for all students, teachers and caregivers. It is about building communities that value, celebrate and respond to diversity. It is underpinned by respectful relationships between learners, teachers and caregivers. It is supported by collaborative relationships with communities and governments. It is about shaping the society in which we live and the type of society to which we aspire (p.1).

The policy document states that effective implementation of these principles "requires a refocus on understandings, relationships, policies and practices at all levels of the system" (p.2). Challenges are listed as: 1) valuing and responding

to diversity; 2) building social cohesion; 3) diversity not deficit; and 4) citizenship and student 'voice.' (pp. 3-5).[3] Included in these resources is a list of descriptors for schools and regional offices to use in monitoring particular school's progress towards meeting the inclusive education guidelines. The areas for monitoring are curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, reporting and professional development, school community, and school planning documents, policies and procedures. The list of descriptors give little detail about the 'what' and 'how' of supporting difference and diversity within the student population. Allan (2008) points out that definitions of difference and diversity remain trapped in a power relationship between those who define the concepts and those who live with them.

In Queensland, the Brisbane Catholic Education website refers to the roles of the Integration Support Teacher, and the Support Teacher (inclusive education) as sources of information for teacher aides. There are also DETA websites that provide information about how to support disability and difference. These resources, available to educationalists, specifically teacher aides in Queensland, still focus on disability and learning difficulties in terms of student deficits. The various resources available for teachers and teacher aides use medical or psychological categories of disabilities to define groups of students. These resources have been prepared by specialists such as doctors, educational psychologists, speech therapists, school counsellors, and occupational therapists. They provide detailed information about techniques and strategies for assisting students who have specific ascertained needs. They presume that teaching decisions and strategies are informed by needs that are specific or

[3] Guidelines and resources to support implementation of this policy are detailed at http://education.qld.gov.au/curriculum/learning/students/disabilities/process/support.html

distinctive to a group that shares common characteristics. Needs that are common to all and unique to individuals, although recognised, are more in the background (Norwich & Lewis, 2007).

The provision of these resources also assumes that effective support for students is achieved through training the supporters i.e. the specialist teachers, the teachers and the parents to use efficient techniques and strategies developed for a diverse range of physical, psychological and pedagogical needs. This understanding of support for students presumes that a person can be suitably trained and available to provide support for the students' educational and personal care needs e.g. monitor the students as they use the toilet, dress and undress for swimming, sport, art and drama activities, move around the school, and engage in learning, play and leisure activities. An example of these programs for teachers is 'Stepping Stones to Success.' This series of booklets provide strategies and techniques to assist students with special needs.

But this model of support of necessity relies on the utilization of another adult i.e. the teacher aide to support the students with these personal care needs when they are in school, outside of the classroom, and when engaging with learning activities within the classroom, because of the teacher's responsibilities with the rest of the class (Quilty, 2007; Takala, 2007). It also presumes that technical information can change attitudes about difference. To this end, teacher aides have their own resources as well. Examples include:

Intervenor/Teacher Aide Series: Tactile signs for students who are deaf/blind and/or multi-sensory impaired. This is a series of booklets designed to assist teacher aides learn basic tactile signs and strategies to assist school

age students who are deaf/blind in inclusive and special school environments. The booklets detail basic strategies and advice.

Teacher Aides Working with Students with Disabilities Series. This series provides relevant information so that teacher aides may feel better equipped to work with students with disabilities in preschools, primary and secondary schools. The booklets were developed in conjunction with the Bremer Institute of TAFE.

These resources provide information for teacher aides in relation to the following categories of disability: general disability; autistic spectrum disorder, hearing impairment, intellectual impairment, physical impairment, speech language impairment, vision impairment. The information in these booklets is based on the principles of inclusive education as defined by the Disability Support Unit of the DETA in 2003 (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2003). These principles are based on definitions of impairment, disability and handicap developed by the World Health Organisation in 1980 (revised 2002). Teacher aides learn how to support students from these booklets, and from the special education teachers and classroom teachers with whom they work. The document states that:

> A teacher aide will work as a team member to implement the agreed educational program. The teacher aide is likely to have a great deal of direct contact with the student. Opportunities arise to influence interactions with other students and staff and to provide support in social engagement. Modelling of appropriate social skills by team members will influence other students' behaviour (p. 8).

Brodin and Lindstrand (2007) argue that a more holistic perspective is needed, one which focuses on interventions that are non-segregating and ensures that every student receives the type and quality of support that they need, and is involved in decision-making about this support. In their research project on

Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision in the United Kingdom, Norwich and Lewis (2007) concluded that the focus for supporting students should shift from the 'special needs' of the students to supporting all students on a continua of common teaching strategies that are geared to differences by "degrees of deliberateness and intensity of teaching" (p.143). Kavale (2007) argues for shifting the focus from *special* education to special *education*. A competency model of supporting students based on practical knowledge and skills with support techniques and strategies needs to be underpinned by understanding of principles and concepts that make sense of such competencies, notably conceptual frameworks about disability and difference, and what support is. More research is needed into the ways in which conceptual frameworks about inclusive education inform the implementation of inclusive support strategies in classrooms (Norwich & Lewis, 2007). What meanings about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties inform the implementation of support strategies? What meanings about support emerge from the experience of those who support students with disabilities and learning difficulties in the lived realities of the classroom and school? These questions need to be asked of all support practitioners including teachers, LSTs and peripatetic support staff, but this study chose research with teacher aides.

Support by teacher aides

The resources currently recommended to teacher aides to help them in their support roles emphasise a competency model of professional development especially as teacher aides "will have a great deal of direct contact with the students" (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2006e, p. 8). This competency model also seems to be based on an assumption of a deficit model

of support staff (Mansaray, 2006). The underlying assumption of some of the studies is that teacher aides are deficit teachers (Moyles & Suschitzky, 1997, cited in Mansaray, 2006), and that remodelling for inclusive education is about changing what teacher aides do. The assumption is that, with proper training and restructuring of supervisory roles of learning support teachers and teachers, teacher aides can implement effective support strategies for students because they have gained a level of knowledge and skills commensurate with that of teachers through engaging in professional development. This includes knowledge about individual disabilities, about supporting personal care needs, about behaviour and socialisation, about pedagogy, and about the curriculum and its modification for students with complex needs (Keller, Bucholz, & Brady, 2007; Quilty, 2007).

Mansaray (2006) and Howes (2003) conclude that the focus on a professional development solution to improving the inclusion of students in mainstream classrooms "remains resolutely teacher focussed," and "is uninterested in the complex roles that teacher aides currently undertake" (Mansaray, 2006, p. 174). The emphasis on professional development excludes acknowledgement of teacher aides' current experience, knowledge and skills about supporting students from the data base that informs inclusive education reform.

Research does show that in many cases it is the teacher aide who assumes responsibilities such as providing personal care, direct instructional support, adapting curricula and instructional materials, behaviour management and developing relationships between students and staff because of time constraints and other realities of life in schools and busy classrooms (See Hill, 2003;

Howard & Ford, 2007; Moran & Abbott, 2002; Takala, 2007). For example Mansaray (2006, p. 178) found in her research in the United Kingdom that teacher aides support students by "bridging pedagogic boundaries" between the students with disabilities and other adults within school contexts.

In her research in primary schools in New Zealand, Chris Tutty, an occupational therapist, was surprised about the amount of direct contact and responsibility that teacher aides had in supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Tutty, 2003). Teacher aides established what Max van Manen (1991, p. 72) has called a "pedagogical relation" with the students. van Manen describes a pedagogical relation as "an intentional relationship between and adult and a child, in which the adult's dedication and intentions are the child's mature adulthood," a relationship that van Manen describes as important for students' learning (1991, p. 72). Fromm (1975, pp. 47-48) describes this type of love as '*motherly love'* that expresses itself as care for the child's growth and an understanding of the need for "the child's separation from herself" as essential for the child's growth and development.

Tutty (2003) found that the seven teacher aides in her study were unprepared for, and felt uncomfortable about, the huge responsibilities of their support roles. The teacher aides were also unprepared for the type of close, personal relationships with students that develop. Tutty and Hocking (2004) argue that there may be many reasons for this state of affairs. Reasons suggested in the literature include lack of clear role definitions for teacher aides (Butt & Lance, 2005; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Lamar-Dukes & Dukes, 2005), the uncertainty of classroom teachers about working with students with disabilities (Calder &

Grieve, 2004; Giangreco, 2001; Subban & Sharma, 2006), the increased demands on teachers from the standards agenda and performance criteria (Dempsey, 2002; McLaughlin & Rhim, 2007; McLean, Kirkpatrick, Payne, & Goodacre, 2005; Slee & Allan, 2001), and lack of leadership from learning support teachers (Stephenson, 2004; Vlachou, 2006). Another element in the discomfort experienced by teacher aides may relate to increasing negativity about the closeness of the relationships that develop between teacher aides and students with disabilities, a proximity which is deemed to lead to dependence of students on adult support (Giangreco et al., 2005). Carrington and Saggers (2008) suggest that rather than being viewed as detrimental to learning relationships between teacher aides and students, the development of caring relationships with students based on respect and empathy is essential if inclusive theory about understanding diversity and difference is to inform inclusive frameworks and practices in schools.

Listening to the experience of teacher aides

Support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties is a complex issue. Teacher aides support students every day in a variety of ways. What is their experience telling us about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties? What meanings do they attribute to what they do and how they do it? What helps them to learn about what they do? What constitutes this phenomenon called support for students in inclusive contexts?

Understanding the meanings attached to this phenomenon by teacher aides is essential: 1) to value the experiences of support that the teacher aides have; 2) to gain insights into the phenomenon of support; and 3) so that initiatives intended to reform policies and practices to be more inclusive are informed by insights

about what the phenomenon of supporting and including students actually is in the lived experience of the inclusive school context.

Conclusion

The inclusive education policies already in place in Queensland indicate that teacher aides will continue to be a resource for schools in supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. There are significant implications for their professional identity, roles and relationships within the support network for students as schools adjust to inclusive education reforms. They will have a direct influence on the effectiveness of reforms of pedagogy and relationships in classrooms as initiatives designed to support students in ways that value diversity and celebrate difference are implemented (Elkins, 2004). They *are* key stakeholders in inclusive education settings and have the right to have input into research about the processes and policies impacting on their jobs.

As well, the achievement of successful inclusive education environments is dependent on many changes in a complex educational context (Carrington & Robinson, 2006). Many researchers argue that to be successful in promoting inclusive ideals, the operational and instrumental changes need to be underpinned by attitudinal change in educational communities (Carrington, 1999; Slee & Allan, 2001; Ware, 2002). Attitudinal change presumes that there is an understanding of what needs to be changed, the personal meanings attributed to disability, learning difficulty, and support which inform what support personnel are doing and how they are doing it. Phenomenology provides one way to illuminate meanings attached to the phenomenon of supporting students through the description and explication of lived experience.

This study aimed to investigate the meanings of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties by examining the lived experience of teacher aides. The next chapter examines the methodology considered appropriate for such an investigation.

Chapter 3

Methodological Framework

Introduction

The literature review has revealed how teacher aides have a role in supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties as inclusive education policies and practices are reformed to be more inclusive. However policies in relation to the support provided by teacher aides are being informed by theoretical and political frameworks about inclusion that give little cognisance to the lived experience of teacher aides. Therefore the phenomenon of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties as experienced by teacher aides was the focus of this study. This study was undertaken within a qualitative framework, specifically drawing on understandings of phenomenology.

This chapter begins by exploring the term 'qualitative research,' its suitability for undertaking investigations of phenomena, and some of the types of qualitative research methods available to researchers, including phenomenological approaches. It then examines the various types of phenomenological philosophy, and how different conceptual interpretations of phenomenology have resulted in different versions of phenomenology. One of these versions is the empirical phenomenological psychological approach which has been derived from phenomenological philosophy and phenomenological psychology. Because this study is focussed on describing how the phenomenon of support for students presents itself to the consciousness of teacher aides in their lived experience Amedeo Giorgi's (1985b) empirical phenomenological

psychological approach to phenomenological research is discussed as the most suitable for this study.

Qualitative methodology: Why this approach for this study?

The qualitative or interpretivist approach emerged in contradistinction to attempts to apply positivist methodologies in the human sciences. In contrast to positivists who seek to identify universal features of humanhood, society and history through value-free, detached observation and to offer explanations of human phenomena that bring control and predictability, interpretivists look for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world (von Eckartsberg, 1998c). Qualitative approaches seek to portray a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and ever-changing (Glesne, 1999). Therefore qualitative methodological approaches tend to be based on recognition of the subjective, experiential 'lifeworld' of human beings, and description of their experiences in depth (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative methodological approaches use a range of methods to explore and interpret phenomena but are not usually intent on generating or testing hypotheses. The research strategies are inductive, attempting to make sense of the experience/situation through exploration and understanding (Creswell, 2005) rather than imposing pre-existing expectations on the situation. Therefore data or "empirical materials", the preferred term (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 23) in qualitative research, consists of detailed descriptions of situations, events, interactions and observed behaviours collected via interviews, observations , analysis of documents, video materials, personal experience, (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and open-ended narrative writings (Patton, 2002).

One qualitative approach that has been used successfully in educational research is the phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is the study of phenomena as people experience them. Since this research aimed to explore the phenomenon of support for students as it is experienced by teacher aides, a phenomenological approach was used. Because there are many meanings for phenomenology which has been described as a philosophy, a paradigm, and a qualitative research methodology, the following discussion endeavours to provide some clarity on this matter by looking at the development of the philosophy of phenomenology, from which phenomenological research approaches have evolved.

The basic concept of phenomenology

Phenomenology is defined as the interpretive study of human experience in which phenomena are examined and clarified through the human situations, events and experiences "as they spontaneously occur in the course of daily life" (von Eckartsberg, 1998b, p. 3), without recourse to theory, deduction, or assumptions from other disciplines (Dreyfus, 1999, cited in Munhall, 2007a). Phenomenology investigates the very nature of a phenomenon; not an explanation for it, but a description of it as it appears in consciousness. Phenomenology asks "what something 'is', and without which it would no longer be what it is" (van Manen, 1997, p. xv).

Historically phenomenology has construed itself as a philosophy, a perspective and a research approach as an alternative to the hegemony of the positivist perspective as it moved from the natural sciences to research in the human sciences (Munhall, 2007a). Phenomenology recognises that truths are grounded in human experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and gathering everyday

descriptions of experience can provide a way to get “back to the things themselves” (Giorgi, 1985b, p. 8). Crotty (1998) says that phenomenology allows the possibility for new meanings for phenomena to emerge or at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning through the laying aside, as best we can, of the prevailing understandings of those phenomena.

The methodology of phenomenology emerged from a philosophical framework (van Manen, 1997). It is important to consider this framework because it has shaped the ways in which phenomenology has been used in research approaches. The three major philosophical frameworks are now discussed, some of the research approaches that have emerged from them, and more specifically, the phenomenological psychological approach that was used in this study.

Transcendental phenomenology

As a response to the context-free generalizations of the positivist approach and the dualism of the natural sciences, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) wanted “to restore the ‘reality’ of humans in their ‘life-worlds’, to capture the ‘meaning’ of this, and to revive philosophy with new humanism” (Munhall, 2007a, p. 160). Husserl was critical of how psychology was imitating the natural sciences and rejecting the part that human consciousness played in the construction of meaning (Ehrich, 1997). For him phenomenology became the study of meanings as constituted in the stream of consciousness. He articulated the central insight of phenomenological philosophy that consciousness is always intentional, is always consciousness of something.

The two aspects of phenomena that reveal themselves to consciousness are the *noema* and *noesis*. Spinelli (1989) describes *noema* as the directional element

of experience (the what) while *noesis* is the referential element of experience (the how). These two aspects of experience are internally correlated and lead each individual to interpret an experience in different and unique ways. For Husserl consciousness constructs as much as it perceives the world (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003a). These understandings of performance of consciousness and the intentionality of human conduct or 'transcendental subjectivity', led to the development of transcendental phenomenology which focused on the phenomena of consciousness in order to clarify their role in the process of meaning construction, and then to set aside or 'bracket' them in order to "arrive at a more adequate (if still incomplete) knowledge of reality" (Spinelli, 1989, p. 3). Bracketing or 'epoche' means assuming a phenomenological attitude rather than an uncritical natural attitude so that we describe something as it presents itself to our consciousness, rather than in terms of what we already know or presume about it (von Eckartsberg, 1998a).

This phenomenological reduction through bracketing is augmented through a process that Husserl called 'free imaginative variation', so that it is possible to delimit the essence of a phenomenon, by a process of elimination of those aspects of the phenomenon that were not essential to its basic structure (eidetic reduction) (von Eckartsberg, 1998c). Husserl's eidetic phenomenology, transcendental consciousness and exclusion of the natural world were criticised as idealistic. According to von Eckartsberg (1998a) Husserl eventually moved away from an idealistic notion of 'transcendental subjectivity' and turned his attention to the world as experienced – the life-world. He came to believe that "the life-world is the unexamined foundation and matrix of scientific activity,

and phenomenology makes these commonsense constructs and phenomena its object of investigation" (von Eckartsberg 1998a, p. 9).

Hermeneutic phenomenology

Heidigger (1927/1962) elaborated on Husserl's concept of 'life-world' by exploring the concept of 'being in the world'. He proposed that consciousness is not separate from the world but a formation of lived human experience within cultural, social and historical contexts (Polkinghorne, 1983). Heidigger (1962) and his pupil Gadamer (1975) stand in the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, which emphasises that phenomenology includes an interpretive element as well as a descriptive element (Ehrich, 2003).

Meaning is found in the transaction between an individual and a situation so that the individual both constitutes and is constituted by the situation. Language is the key which imbues and informs experience because language does not exist apart from thought or perception. Our communications in language allow us to produce approximations of each other's experience of the world, and although we can improve the adequacy of our approximations, they remain approximations (Spinelli, 1989).

Existential phenomenology

In 1962, Merleau-Ponty elaborated on the concept of experiential knowledge of things by arguing that the unity of mind and body becomes a means of experiencing through a sensory awareness of and response to the environment. He emphasised that human beings in their totality are intentionally related to the world, and the importance of the body as a bridge to the world. Being-in-the-world i.e. human existence and a person's concrete way of living became the focus of a new approach to phenomenology called existential phenomenology.

The central theme of this approach was not just with unveiling the lived reality of experience by generating phenomenological description through imaginative variation as in transcendental phenomenology, the 'what' and 'how' of phenomena, but also with experience in the every day world, and the fundamental tensions between essence and existence, between meaning and being. Two concepts central to this relationship between meaning and being were freedom and authenticity. Human beings are "situated" in the world and make choices and create themselves in authentic ways when they take responsibility for themselves, the world and others (Spinelli, 1989, p. 109). For the existential-phenomenologist, reality is therefore a mixture of objective and subjective. There is an inevitability of subjectivity in any exploration of reality, and acknowledgement of this subjectivity expands and enriches the authenticity of perceptions of experience.

Valle and Halling (1989) also argue that the personal-existential and the general-phenomenological components are inextricably intertwined and collaborative in the creation of human experience in a particular situation. They call this ongoing stream of consciousness, of experience and action 'experiaction', and state that this is the process through which "living-out is humanized into living-with-awareness" (Valle & Halling, p. 52). However the depth or ground of living eludes objectification or final conceptual grasp. "We can only tune in and become involved." (Valle & Halling, p. 59).

Eventually Husserl developed both a phenomenological philosophy and a phenomenological psychology which, when further developed by hermeneutic and existential phenomenologists, enabled phenomenologists to view "human

relationships in the world in terms of the individual's concrete experience" (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 64). However Husserl's phenomenological stance was philosophical, and what was needed according to psychologists was a method more suited to scientific/psychological analyses of phenomena (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

Phenomenological psychology

In Europe the major philosophers in the continental tradition as it developed in the second half of the 20th century believed that phenomenological philosophy could benefit psychology. During the same time a phenomenological movement in psychology was also taking place in America, which argued for a phenomenological 'approach', 'perspective' or 'frame of reference' (Giorgi, & Giorgi, 2003). In 1970, Amedeo Giorgi began to develop an approach which aimed to marry some of the insights of the philosophy of phenomenology to psychological inquiry.

Historically psychological inquiry was based upon the positivistic assumptions of the natural sciences. Following Husserl (1970/1900), Giorgi rejected the idea that the 'naturalism' of the natural sciences was applicable to human science. Human consciousness is not an entity to be measured but to be understood in human experience. For Giorgi (1985b), the essence of phenomenological psychology is to try to understand 'consciousness' and all its objects. Phenomenological psychology is a perspective that acknowledges the reality of the realm of meaningful experience as the fundamental locus of knowledge (Polkinghorne, 1989). According to Valle and Halling (1989, p.13), the goal of existential phenomenological psychology is to "reveal the structure of experience through descriptive techniques." Therefore research investigations in

phenomenological psychology aim to produce clear and accurate descriptions of a particular aspect of human experience, recognising that experience is different from the objects of nature (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Phenomenological psychology in research

Phenomenological psychological approaches to research have evolved from existential-phenomenological philosophical reflection and empirical psychology. Researchers have described many ways to 'do' existential phenomenological investigations including Colaizzi (1973; 1978), von Kaam (1966), and Giorgi (1985b). These approaches to research proceed on the assumption that "identically named experience refers basically to the same reality in various subjects" [and that] "we rely on the supposition that people in a shared cultural and linguistic community name and identify their experience in a consistent and shared manner" (von Eckartsberg, 1998a, p. 14). They study phenomena in the 'life-world' of subjects as part of the unfolding existence of the individual (Valle, 1998).

In nursing research, Crotty (1998) and Munhall (2007a) have used phenomenological methods to bring focus on what manifests itself in experience not on what the subject has made of it. In the description and naming of these experiences including descriptions of the body's subjective reactions, it is possible to study in subjects the object of their experience (Crotty, 1996), and to illuminate meanings of the phenomenon that may even be radically different from what is taken for granted (Crotty, 1998) i.e. the perceived wisdom. Willis (1999) has examined how phenomenological methods can inform reflexive practice for those who are describing their experience by giving insights into the meanings attributed to or that inform personal experience. Crotty (1998, p. 85)

argues that, because it is “rooted in immediate social experience” phenomenology offers “a most valuable starting point and touchstone” for social inquiry.

Descriptive phenomenological psychology

Phenomenological psychologist Amedeo Giorgi developed his systematic approach to phenomenological psychological research using Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the three orders of structure, and their relationship to the life-world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In 1985, Giorgi outlined an approach to phenomenological psychological research. His stated aim was to provide a means to mediate the two traditions of phenomenological philosophy and phenomenological psychology so that researchers could have a model for conducting phenomenological psychological research which remains consistent with the principles of phenomenological philosophy while making it “proximately helpful to psychological praxis” as a human science which includes others as subjects (Giorgi, 1985b, p. 47). As such it moves from philosophy to psychology – from self to others (Ehrich, 1997).

For Giorgi (1979) the origin of data for human science is the structures of human experience. But in order to investigate the structures of human experience researchers need to move from these structures to psychological meaning. Giorgi’s (1985b) approach to research proposes a basic descriptive-reflective approach. This approach begins with expression and description by subjects of their lived experience of a phenomenon to create a ‘life-text.’ Next there is a movement from individual descriptions to the unique structures of psychological meaning for the individual, a process which respects the integrity of each individual. However, an inverse movement is also necessary from the

life world of the individual to the invariant psychological phenomenological structures. More general descriptions of the phenomenological structures of meaning or essences are then explicated by the researcher using a process of "scientific phenomenological reduction while simultaneously adopting a psychological perspective" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 247).

The emphasis in this movement from 'situated structure' to 'general structure' is a necessary process in transcending "essentially situated specificity in favour of an essential transsituational understanding" (von Eckartsberg, 1998b, p. 42). Giorgi describes his method of multi-level analysis as a procedure for analysis of linguistic descriptions of the perceptions and thoughts of human beings – a reflexive, self-referential movement that phenomenology tries to comprehend (Giorgi, 1975).

Giorgi's (1985) methodological approach to phenomenological psychology is built upon the basic concepts of phenomenology, as discussed by Husserl (1970 [Original work published 1900]), Heidigger (1962), Spiegelberg (1975) and on a reworking of Merleau-Ponty's (1962) four criteria of description, reduction, essences and intentionality. These modifications of the criteria are now described.

Description

Giorgi (1985b) modified Merleau-Ponty's (1962) criterion of description by arguing that collecting and analysing original naïve descriptions of experience of a situation from another subject can allow the researcher to obtain the meanings constituted by the description of that experienced situation. In this way empirical existential phenomenological psychologists can study

phenomena in and through life-texts provided by subjects. This argument supports the development of empirical phenomenological psychology as a human science, interested in personal, subjective experience, rather than as a sub-field of philosophy (Spinelli, 1989, p. 30).

Reduction

For Giorgi, the subjects describe phenomena within the natural attitude that is within their own situated historical, social and cultural contexts (Munhall, 2007a). Reduction occurs when the researcher begins to analyse the descriptions. The reduction is partial, insofar as the object pole (noema) is reduced while the subject pole (noesis) is not (Ehrich, 1997). A teacher aide may describe a memory of an experience of supporting a student that may not be complete in every detail. However the consciousness of the teacher aide is an important process which is of interest to the study as the teacher aide makes sense of the phenomenon of support in her world. Within the analysis a reduction can be performed on the experience as described, the noema. The experience can be 'bracketed' to arrive at a description of the essence of the support experience. Similarly researchers need to maintain critical awareness of their presuppositions during reduction. Giorgi and Giorgi (2003, p. 249) refer to this stance as "disciplined naiveté."

Essences

Phenomenological psychology seeks to uncover general essences or structures of meaning which are context related rather than universal (Ehrich, 2003). Giorgi (1985b, p. 50) argues that the use of free variation to uncover 'invariants' is similar to that of the phenomenological philosopher because, although the

range of essences is limited by their dependency on contingencies, “they still transcend the facts on which they are based – just as universal structures do.”

Intentionality

For Giorgi (2003) the notion of intentionality involves more than phenomenological comprehension of consciousness intended towards an object. In psychology, behaviour is seen as intentional, behavioural descriptions involve the body, and behaviour is seen as always “directed to situations that transcend the behaviour itself” (Giorgi, 2003, p 251).

Research Design

In 1985 Giorgi modified the philosophical phenomenological method of Merleau-Ponty (1962) in a way that has been successfully applied and adapted in many research fields of human science including nursing (Berg & Dahlberg, 1998; Parse, Coyne, & Smith, 1985) psychology, (See Valle, 1998 for many studies), and education, and especially in research that focuses on adult experiences of phenomena (Ashworth, Giorgi, & Koning, 1986; Ehrich, 1997; Groenewald, 2004).

Understandings of the application of any phenomenological methodology in research, and especially a methodology that is informed from a psychological perspective, point to the need to be critically aware of the initial aims of phenomenology. As well as describing ‘what is’ i.e. the meaning of an experience, phenomenological findings can also provide a social critique that can and should bring into critical view ‘taken-for-granted’ meanings (Crotty, 1998; Munhall, 2007a).

Giorgi's (1985b) phenomenological psychological method was therefore relevant and applicable to the study of human experiences in educational contexts as it was a search for a deeper understanding of the human experience of support for students. It did this by asking teacher aides to reflect on their practice as they described it. By gaining insights into the meanings of support for teacher aides, this study also provided enrichment and critique of assumed meanings of the human experience of supporting students. More recently Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) have explained how this systematic methodology fits the criteria of scientific inquiry as well because it is systematic, methodical, critical and general, and how the knowledge gained by conducting research using his descriptive phenomenological psychological method can be applied to other situations.

The findings of this study give both a deeper understanding of the human experience of supporting students, and move from that understanding to an insight into, or a renewed understanding of, what makes support for students the entity that it is (Crotty, 1998; Munhall, 2007a). In this way, taken-for-granted assumptions about supporting students and learning about supporting students that have been assumed or elicited from other research are enriched and critiqued. The philosophical and methodological framework of phenomenological psychology can also be used with other key personnel within inclusive education contexts to further enrich understandings of this key concept of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Aims of Research

Informed by the empirical phenomenological approach, this research aimed to gain insights into the phenomenon of supporting students with disabilities and

learning difficulties as it was experienced by teacher aides. It provided teacher aides with the opportunity to "gain insights into the realities of their lived experience" (Churchill, Lowery, McNally, & Rao, 1998, p. 83) in the process of describing their lived experience of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties. This research valued the perspectives of the teacher aides in their support role in inclusive education by giving them input which adds to the qualitative research data base which informs the reform of education in Queensland to be inclusive. It illuminated some essential meanings or essences of the phenomenon of support of students with disabilities from the perspectives of the teacher aides (Broback & Bertero, 2003, p. 340). It did this:

1. By inviting teacher aides to articulate and describe through phenomenological interviewing 1) experiences of supporting students, and the meaning it has for them: 2) how they have learned about supporting students and what this means for them. This process was intrinsically worthwhile because it valued the experience of the teacher aides and provided them with opportunities to engage in reflection on the meaning of their practice.
2. By applying empirical phenomenological psychological principles of analysis to the descriptions to gain insights into the phenomenon of support for students. In this way accounts about the meaning of supporting students, in educational research on inclusive education, were enriched.

Although there are many aspects of teacher aides' roles in need of attention from the research community, this research took its starting point from the experiences of teacher aides themselves in supporting students. This research

aimed to provide opportunities for teacher aides to share with the research community their lived experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in mainstream classrooms using a descriptive phenomenological approach. This approach allowed the unique voices of teacher aides to be heard in relation to the lived conditions in which they support students, by recognising experience "as the source which stares us in the face and as the ultimate court of appeal in our knowledge of these things" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 23).

From descriptions of their lived experiences in classrooms, insights and understandings have been gained into some of the essential meanings of the phenomenon of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in a changing educational landscape. Findings from this study that explicate some of these essential meanings of supporting students add to the research data base that informs inclusive education reform in relation to students with disabilities and learning difficulties and their support needs. Because they are significant stakeholders in the inclusive education classroom, the experiences of teacher aides can inform the inclusive education reform processes, and contribute to more effective inclusionary reform for students with disabilities.

This chapter has so far outlined the philosophical, psychological and methodological frameworks that underpin phenomenological psychological research. This discussion has pointed out how Giorgi's (1970; 1985a; 1985b; 2003) systemic methodological approach to phenomenological psychological research was considered relevant and appropriate for this study. In the next section Giorgi's approach to phenomenological psychology in research is

described more fully as it applied to this study. Methods of selecting participants, collecting data and analysing data are now described.

Selection of Participants

As Hycner (1999, p.156) states, “the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants.” This study focussed on teacher aides in mainstream primary schools who are employed to support individual students with disabilities and learning difficulties as defined by DETA in Chapter 2. The eight teacher aides who took part in this study had experiences relating to the phenomenon (Ghesquière, Maes, & Vandenberghe, 2004; Groenewald, 2004; Silverman, 2000), and these participants were willing to speak about their experiences to an empathetic listener (Munhall, 2007a). This acknowledged the phenomenological perspective that the emergent meaning is co-constituted by the description of the experiences and the interpretive process of the person seeking to explicate the meaning of the experiences (Seidman, 1998; Shertock, 1998). The number of participants reflected an understanding that phenomenological interviewing is about quality i.e. rich, thick description not quantity (Ehrich, 2003; Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995; Willis, 1999).

The teacher aides were approached personally through a network of the researcher’s contacts gained over twenty one years of working in primary schools in Brisbane. When initial approaches were unsuccessful in gaining eight participants, a snowball technique was used to find further participants (Creswell, 2005; Groenewald, 2003; Seidman, 1998). Teacher aides who recommended others for the study were not informed about those who chose to participate. Participants were selected in this way rather than by making formal

approaches to principals in schools because teacher aides were assured that their anonymity would not be compromised, and that their participation in this research study would not knowingly impact on the terms of their employment, or their relationships within the school environment.

Data Collection

In keeping with the aims of the study, in-depth phenomenological interviewing was used to pursue the twin aims of this research: 1) to provide opportunities for teacher aides to reflect on the meaning of their support practices in the process of phenomenological description; 2) to allow the experiences and meaning of supporting students to give insights into the phenomenon of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties and therefore to inform the research data base for inclusive education policy and practices, including approaches to professional development.

The in-depth interview was selected from a range of phenomenological data collection tools including documentary evidence, in-depth interviews, case study analysis and writing down of experiences (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). The researcher's professional experience in schools, and previous research studies (Broadbent & Burgess, 2003b; Hammett & Burton, 2005; Logan, 2006; Mistry et al., 2004; Rustemier & Shaw, 2001) had shown that teacher aides wanted to be involved in talking about their own personal experiences with students. This study therefore used in-depth interviewing for data collection. This type of interviewing gave teacher aides the opportunities to talk, and thereby to reflect on the meanings that they attributed to their support roles. It provided access to what Schutz (1967) called their 'subjective understanding'. Seidman (1998, pp. 7-8) stated that interviewing is "most consistent with

people's ability to make meaning through language" and "confirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration." Giorgi (1985a) also used interviews as his main data source.

The aim of the study was not dialectical i.e. to test the truth of opinions. It did not ask teacher aides to justify 'why' they do what they do, but rather sought insights into what they do, and how they do it by allowing privileged access to their basic, lived experience of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties i.e. what constituted support for them (Kvale, 1996). Two focussed interviews were conducted as follows.

Interview One: Phase One (See Appendix C for Interview Guide One)
The first interview was designed to raise the awareness of teacher aides regarding the phenomenological nature of the study and specifically the interview. This involved entering the life-world of the teacher aide, to 'understand the world' from their point of view, in order to unfold the meanings of their experiences. The focus was on 'what goes on within' i.e. their feelings, beliefs and convictions during their experience of supporting students. This interview was designed to help the teacher aides to feel comfortable in the interview situation, to develop rapport with them, and to assist them to understand that this study was focussing on their lived experiences of supporting students not on theoretical or political propositions about support. At the beginning of the interview the researcher gave background details of her work as a former teacher aide, classroom teacher and Assistant Principal, and assured them of the intention to listen attentively, and to respect and value the meanings that they brought to their roles of supporting students.

The aims and processes of the study were explained through discussion of the information letter. The participants were asked to consent to the interviews being audio-taped for later transcription and analysis, and informed that the digital recordings would be kept secure. Teacher aides were asked to be aware of the need to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of their students and other school personnel during the interviews by not using people's names. Personal contact details of the participants were requested for later cross checking of information. Anonymity, and confidentiality of the data through the use of pseudonyms in transcriptions, was assured as far as is possible. (See Appendix A for Information Letter and Appendix B for Consent Form.)

In this way a rapprochement with the teacher aides was built in order to minimise the distinction and power differential between researcher and researched (Denzin, 1997; Patton, 2002). This stance is referred to as standpoint epistemology in which the researcher self-consciously empathizes with the teacher aides as individuals, but also self-consciously sympathizes with their goals as a collective within the educational sector (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003b). It is an approach to interviewing that requires an interviewer who listens empathetically, identifies with participants, and shows respect for the meanings that participants attach to their actions (Ellis & Berger, 2003). This approach suits the empathetic nature of a phenomenological study, and foregrounds voice and reflexivity in the research approach (Patton, 2002).

Interview One: Phase Two

A series of questions were posed that were designed to help the researcher to understand the individual life-worlds (Ehrich, 1997) of the teacher aides. The interview was focussed while still allowing a conversation to develop in which

teacher aides indicated the dimensions that they found significant within the focus area. These details provided the researcher with an understanding of the individual backgrounds of the teacher aides. At the end of this interview, the teacher aides were informed about what they would be asked to describe in the second interview i.e. descriptions of their experiences of success/non-success in supporting students and learning about support. (See Appendix C for Interview Guide One.)

Interview Two

The second interview focussed on the theme of support for students but at the same time allowed the teacher aides to bring forth the dimensions that they found significant within this focus area (Kvale, 1996). The interview proceeded as follows and the interviewees were asked to:

a) Describe an experience of supporting a student that you perceived was successful

b) Describe an experience of supporting a student that you perceived was unsuccessful

c) Describe an experience of learning about supporting a student that was meaningful for you.

These interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Emphasis during the interviews was on how the teacher aides acted, thought and felt in the most direct way. Because the teacher aides' actions had meanings in relation to their intentions and understandings, the language they used to describe their actions was part of their "life-world" and was a language of "attention and contemplation that allows the world to be" for them (Willis, 1999, p. 97). Interview guides were used, but ones that afforded the interviewer the flexibility to build a conversation, while maintaining a listening focus on the

experience (Ehrich, 1997; Minichiello et al., 1995; Patton, 2002) of the teacher aides in supporting students. Giorgi (1975) refers to the interview as questioning dialogue. In order to understand the meanings attributed to these actions, and not misrepresent them, careful checking for meanings by the researcher confirmed or altered the information as the interviews were proceeding through gentle probing (Ehrich, 1997). (See Appendix C for Interview Guide Two)

During both interviews non-verbal communication patterns in terms of pitch, volume, pace and pause were noted and, if they indicated hesitation or lack of clarity, then further probing of these issues ensued, in a reflexive manner that included participants and researcher in a conversation about clarifying meaning (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Munhall, 2007a; van Manen, 1997). This process was not about negotiated text but rather an attempt to clarify understanding of the meanings attached to the actual words of the teacher aides, in a phenomenological way.

During this data collection phase of the research study, the attitude of 'empathic dwelling' (Churchill et al., 1998), a stance that patiently listens to and stays with the subject's description was needed so that "resonating attunement" (p. 66) could be achieved in the data analysis phase i.e. a process whereby the researcher, while maintaining a critical awareness of his or her presuppositions, gradually feels his or her way into the other's experience. This stance is supported by Kvale (1996, p. 54) when he explains that "phenomenological reduction does not involve an absolute absence of presuppositions, but rather a critical analysis of one's own presuppositions". Munhall (2007a, pp. 186-187) calls this process the "coming and going", the varying of perspectives, and the

responses of the participants that attempts to make the descriptions and phenomenological explication or interpretations of the phenomenon as inclusive as can be, “a deeply embroidered tapestry of meaning” on which other studies and other meanings for the phenomenon can build.

This interaction and the cross-checking of meanings also provided elements for reflection on practice (Crotty, 1998; Munhall, 2007a). Although the primary aim of this study was to explore the phenomenon of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, this study by its very nature in asking teacher aides about their lived experience valued that experience, and provided opportunities for reflection on practice.

Phenomenological interviewing supports participants in their search for meaning because it is a way to gain insights into the realities of their lived experience and to the meanings of that experience, while it provides a valid source of human science data (Churchill et al., 1998).

Risk Assessment

The interviews were conducted at times and places convenient to the teacher aides. Because the locations of the interviews were outside of the teacher aides’ own school campus, Workplace Health and Safety issues needed to be considered. The interview participants were asked to ensure that another person was aware of the time and place of the interview/s, and approximate duration. The participants had access to a telephone during the interview. This was in keeping with the requirements of the Ethical Clearance for the study.

Data Analysis

Hycner (1999) points out that, for Giorgi, research methods must arise out of attempts to be responsive to the specific phenomenon being explored. Therefore analysis of data arises out of an investigative posture rather than specific 'recipes'. However various phenomenological researchers in education have developed useful strategies for approaching the data and identifying essential structures of meaning. In 2003, Giorgi modified his original four steps for data analysis, and these modified steps were used to guide this study. In keeping with phenomenological research, it was important to pay critical attention to the acknowledgement and bracketing of the researcher's theoretical understandings of the concepts of supporting (including) students in school contexts, and to getting back to the meanings of the experiences for the teacher aides. The four steps are outlined below.

1. Reading the entire description to get a sense of the whole statement by each teacher aide

The researcher read through the entire description to get a sense of the whole experience because the "phenomenological perspective is an holistic one" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 252).

2. Determination of parts: Establishing meaning units

Assuming the perspective of the phenomenological reduction with a psychological attitude the researcher reread the text and broke the text into more manageable units or 'meaning units' focussed on the phenomenon of support for students. This was a practical step to identify words and phrases that revealed transitions in the experience. These meaning units were not 'objective' or theoretically weighty, and were expressed in the language of the participants.

3. Transformation of meaning units into psychologically sensitive expressions

There was a progressive refinement of the original description with respect to its sense. This step involved a process of reflection and 'free imaginative variation' (See page 61 of this study for Husserl's (1900/1970) explanation of this term). Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) describe this process as a method to discover and articulate the psychological meanings being lived by the participant that reveal the nature of the phenomenon of supporting students. Everyday expressions from the participant's world are full of meaning but are often idiosyncratic. The meanings expressed by the participants needed to be made psychologically explicit with regard to the phenomenon and not directly as revelatory of the participant in her personal existence. It was important to avoid the use of theory-laden psychological jargon. These processes "want to elucidate the psychological aspects in a depth appropriate for the understanding of the events" (Giorgi, 1985b, pp. 17-19). This involved moving from teacher aides' concrete descriptions of supporting students to more general categories by using "the language of common sense enlightened by a phenomenological perspective" (Giorgi, 1985b, p. 19), or "ordinary language twisted toward psychologically heightened revelations" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 253). Giorgi and Giorgi (2003, p. 257) explain that, "the purpose of the transformations is to make as explicit as possible the psychological dimensions" of the concrete experience.

4. The determination of the structure

This step involved synthesising the insights within the meaning units into a consistent description of the structure of the phenomenon so that a 'situated' or 'specific' description was written. This involved a process of free imaginative

variation on the transformed meaning units to find what was truly essential about them. The final part of this step involved carefully describing the most invariant connected meanings belonging to the experience, and that was the general structure or statement. These structures are not meant to be universal but general or typical.

Ehrich (1997) introduced an intermediate step to facilitate the movement from specific statements to general structures. Identification of tentative themes that were common to all of the specific statements lead to the explication of essential themes, which then helped in the writing of the general structures, because it recognised the commonalities across the teacher aides' experience. Implementing this step recognised that phenomenology assumes a commonality in human experiences. Ehrich (1997) described the steps of her modification of Giorgi's (1985) method as a staged process. Stage 1 consists of Giorgi's four steps, but without the final synthesis or determination of the structure of the phenomenon, rather an identification of tentative themes. In Stage 2, from the tentative themes that emerged from the specific descriptions, essential themes common to all of the specific statements were identified. Stage 3 represented the process of thorough cross-checking of specific descriptions with essential themes that ensured that commonalities were identified and expressed the essential structures of the phenomenon of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and learning about supporting students. These essential themes were then used to help in writing the general structures.

Validation

Validity

Guba and Lincoln (1989) outline how issues of validity in social science research are increasingly being questioned in terms of foundational issues such as what the nature of social inquiry ought to be rather than in relation to specific criteria. However they do propose that there are still non-foundational criteria that are relevant for judging a piece of research work. These criteria are 'trustworthiness'(Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and 'authenticity' or 'credibility' (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) which relate to research design, processes and outcomes.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was considered during the research design process and during data collection. Polkinghorne (1983) stated that trustworthiness of the data in a phenomenological study can be judged using the four criteria of quality: 1) vividness that draws the reader in; 2) accuracy or believing the readers will recognize the phenomenon in their own life-world; 3) richness which refers to the depth and quality of the description; and 4) elegance or descriptive economy and the disclosure of the phenomenon in a graceful manner. He states that phenomenological studies are deemed valid if they convince the reader that the findings are accurate and that the argument is persuasive (Polkinghorne, 1989).

He added that accuracy in the findings can be promoted by the researcher asking herself the following questions during the data collection and analysis phases:

- Did the interviewer influence the contents of the description so that the description does not accurately reflect the participants' actual experience?

- Is the transcript accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?
- Does the general structural description provide an accurate portrait of the common features and structural connections that are evident in the descriptions collected?

During data collection and analysis, these questions guided the research and phenomenological 'bracketing' of presuppositions of the researcher.

After data analysis and writing the general descriptions of the structures of the experiences of the teacher aides, these descriptions were returned to the teacher aides for comment about how well they reflected their experiences of supporting students and learning about support. The teacher aides indicated that the descriptions accurately and comprehensively reflected their experiences.

Credibility

In terms of the credibility of the phenomenological psychological method Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) argue that the criteria of science are met when the knowledge obtained is systematic, methodical, critical, and general. Credibility is achieved when there is a systematic connection established between subfields within a given discipline e.g. between support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties and teacher aiding. Although this study cannot establish these connections on its own, it can highlight areas to be explored such as the type of support provided by teacher aides. To be methodical means that certain basic steps are available and can be followed to test the knowledge that the study presents. To be critical means that other members of the scientific community can challenge the procedures or the knowledge including trying to replicate the study. It also means that the researcher is reflexively aware of the limitations of the study. Finally generality means that the knowledge gained is

applicable to situations other than the specific one in which the knowledge was obtained (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, pp. 258-259).

Ethical Considerations

Glesne (1999, p 113) states that, "ethical considerations are inseparable from your everyday interactions with research participants and with your data." Ethical considerations were taken into account when recruiting teacher aides for this study, by ensuring as far as possible that their anonymity was protected. This was necessary because the conditions of employment of teacher aides are subject to local educational authorities. Some principals or learning support teachers (LSTs) may have felt uncomfortable with teacher aides being involved in a study about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties, supposing that policies and practices at their individual schools were under scrutiny. Although this was not the case, the researcher erred on the side of caution by interviewing teacher aides outside of their own school environments, where practical for the teacher aides.

Privacy and confidentiality were assured by informing the participants how the data was to be used and stored securely. Participants were voluntary participants in the research. They were free to withdraw from the research project at any stage. Informed consent was obtained from participants.

Ethical clearances

Ethical clearances were obtained from the QUT Ethics Committee for Human Level 1 research. Ethical Clearance number is 0700000148 issued on March 14, 2007.

Limitations of the Study

No research methodology can provide all answers or provide total insight into any one phenomenon. The goal of this study was to gain insights into the phenomenon of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Teacher aides became the focus for this study because: 1) they have experience of the phenomenon because they are employed for this support role for students with disabilities and deployed to support students with learning difficulties; and 2) their voices have been marginalised in the research that informs reform of policy and practice in inclusive education. More qualitative research is needed with the other key personnel, but exploring the lived experience of teacher aides was considered to be a significant beginning that valued their input, and gained insights into the meanings for them of supporting students and learning about supporting students in the Queensland primary school context.

A possible limitation of this study may be the issue of researcher bias. To minimise this risk, the researcher used a reflexive approach, with 'bracketing' as far as is possible of presuppositions that were brought to the research. Diarising helped the researcher to be more aware of personal bias during the interviews. The participants' positive responses to the cross-checking of the general descriptions of their experiences also indicated that the researcher had captured their experience accurately and therefore without the imposition of presuppositions from the researcher.

Summary

This chapter has explored the philosophical and methodological traditions of phenomenology and psychology and indicated why Giorgi's (1985a; 1985b; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) approach of empirical phenomenology psychology was

considered to be the most relevant and appropriate methodological approach for this study. This chapter has discussed the methods of selection of participants, data collection, and data analysis and presentation for this phenomenological psychological study of the phenomenon of support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Ethical considerations and possible limitations of the study have also been discussed.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

This study investigated teacher aides' experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties and learning about supporting students. Descriptions of these experiences were analysed using a phenomenological psychological methodology.

This chapter provides some background information about the participants. It then describes the process used in analysing the data that was collected, based on the methodological chapter, Chapter 3. Finally the findings are presented. The findings are made up of a specific or situated statement representing each experience, a validation process which shows how the researcher moved from tentative themes derived from the specific statements, to essential themes, and then a series of general statements representing all of the experiences guided by the essential themes.

Participation of subjects in the study

There were eight teacher aides in the study. The teacher aides worked at six primary schools in the metropolitan area of Brisbane. All teacher aides supported students with disabilities and learning difficulties in regular class settings in primary school classes. Their length of experience ranged from eighteen months to fourteen years with an average of six and a half years. All of the participants were part time employees. Seven were female and there was one male. Three of the teacher aides worked in the same school with different students. The other five teacher aides were from different schools. All of the participants were parents of school age children.

The participants supported students with a wide range of disabilities and learning difficulties, from skeletal physical disabilities, to those with Asperger's syndrome, Down syndrome, vision impairment, and intellectual impairment or cognitive delay, and those with serious behavioural issues. Six of the teacher aides were employed specifically to support students with ascertained special needs, but were sometimes deployed on other assignments such as supporting students with (non-ascertained) learning difficulties. The other two teacher aides supported students with learning difficulties, but were also assigned to support and monitor ascertained students during part of the day.

In the interviews, teacher aides were asked to: (a) Describe an experience of supporting a student that you perceived was successful; (b) Describe an experience of supporting a student that you perceived was unsuccessful; and (c) Describe an experience of learning about supporting students. The descriptions varied greatly in number and in length. The number of experiences described by the teacher aides is indicated in Table 1. In response to the prompts some teacher aides described only one experience that they thought was significant. Others described many experiences. Some teacher aides described experiences of how they learned to support students with disabilities in the first interview, when they responded to the question: "What prompted you to take the job?" These descriptions of experiences have been included in the data analysis because they are descriptions of the teacher aides lived experience of learning about supporting students. When experiences were not related to supporting students or learning about supporting students they were not included in the analysis. In phenomenology there are no perfect descriptions, only adequate or inadequate ones (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Inadequate descriptions cannot be

used as data e.g. when teacher aides described what they thought about their experience without any concrete description of an actual experience.

There were a total of 66 experiences described by the participants: 39 experiences of supporting students with disabilities or learning difficulties; and 27 experiences of how they learned to support students with disabilities or learning difficulties. In Table 1, the experiences have been separated into two categories generated from the three separate description prompts given to the teacher aides; successful and unsuccessful experiences of supporting students denoted as *a* and *b*; and experiences of learning about supporting students denoted as *c*.

Participant	**Supporting *a* and *b***	**Number of experiences**	**Learning *c***	**Number of experiences**	***Total***
A	a/1; a/2; b/1; b/2	4	c/1; c/2; c/3	3	7
B	a/1; b/1	2	c/1; c/2/; c/3; c/4	4	6
C	a/1; b/1	2	c/1; c/2/ c/3; c/4; c/5; C/6	6	8
D	a/1; a/2; a/3; a/4; b/1	5	c/1; c/2	2	7
E	a/1; a/2; a/3; a/4; a/5; a/6; b/1	7	c/1; c/2; c/3	3	10
F	a/1; a/2; a/3; b/1; b/2; b/3; b/4	7	c/1; c/2; c/3	3	10
G	a/1; a/2; a/3; b/1; b/2; b/3; b/4	7	c/1; c/2	2	9
H	a/1; a/2; a/3; a/4; b/1	5	c/1; c/2; c/3; c/4	4	9
Total		**39**		**27**	**66**

Table 1: Experiences of supporting and learning about support described in interviews.

The interviews

After email or telephone contact to establish meeting arrangements, the researcher met seven of the participants in their own homes. One of the participants preferred to meet after school at his workplace, in the office that he shared with other teacher aides. All interviews were conducted personally by the researcher. The first interview established that the teacher aide was aware of the nature and purpose of the study by referencing the information letter (Appendix A). Each teacher aide then gave informed written consent. During this interview, to set the scene for the in-depth second interview, the teacher aides were encouraged to talk about their length of service, reasons for taking the job, the students with whom they currently worked, and their qualifications. The interview was digitally recorded which helped to accustom the interviewees to the process for the second interview. This interview took approximately three quarters of an hour.

All of the participants were keen to then continue with the second interview rather than having to meet for a second time. After a short refreshment break, the second interview was conducted. This interview took between one and two hours. The transcripts of interviews were coded A – H for the eight participants.

Findings

In this study essential structures of the phenomenon of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties and learning about supporting students were sought from the interview transcripts. Giorgi's (1985b; 2003) phenomenological research methodology involving four key steps was used in the analysis within the context of this investigation. An additional step was included in the

validation of the essential themes of teacher aides' experiences of supporting students.

In Step 1 the researcher read the data from the transcripts to get the sense of the whole. The researcher then examined each of the teacher aide's experiences individually. Table 1 above summarises the number of experiences that were included in the transcripts for each teacher aide. In Step 2 the researcher read the descriptions more slowly to identify transitions in the meanings in order to break down the whole text into manageable parts. Words or phrases expressing a meaning about the experience were identified as meaning units and rewritten. The researcher used the language adopted by the teacher aides. In Step 3 the researcher transformed these meaning units into more psychological language (psychological meanings lived by the participants) while eliminating redundancies. The intention was to transform the concrete descriptions of the teacher aides based on the transcriptions of their interviews into a more general language category which revealed the meanings of their experiences of supporting students and learning about support. For example:

Experience B a/1

Meaning Unit 6: Then they left thinking it was all done and dusted, and R got what he had to do.

Transformation 6: The teacher and counsellor left R with B, thinking that it was settled, that R had learned what to do in that situation.

The fourth step, following Giorgi (1985b), consisted of two parts: in part one specific statements emerging from each of the experiences were developed and in part two general statements were developed. After part one of the fourth step had been completed, Ehrich's (1997) validation process was introduced.

Tentative themes emerged from the specific descriptions. The tentative themes from each specific description were examined and a set of essential themes were identified by the researcher. The tentative themes that did not coincide with the essential themes were discarded and not considered as essential to the experiences of supporting students or learning about support. Those themes considered to be essential were validated by cross-checking against all of the specific descriptions. For example, H stated that another teacher was surprised when she caught up with the student (H a/1). This particular description (transformation) was not considered by the researcher to coincide with any of the five essential themes about supporting students and so was discarded. The validation process of cross checking essential themes against specific descriptions was tabulated (See Tables 2 & 3 in Appendix D.) An example of Giorgi's (1985a) step by step procedure for analysing a specific description of an experience i.e. moving from transcript to meaning units to transformation units and finally to specific descriptions is provided in Appendix E. Included in this example are the tentative themes identified by the researcher from each specific description.

Finally in Step two, part two of Giorgi's (1985a) methodology, the researcher developed a single general structural description or statement that represented the total experience of each of the two phenomena: supporting students and learning about support. The researcher wrote the general statement of the experience of supporting students around the five essential themes that emerged through the validation process, and the general statement of the experience of learning about support around the three essential themes that emerged from the same validation process. The general descriptions of teacher aides' experiences

of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties showed the five essential themes as common experiences of the teacher aides. The general descriptions of teacher aides' experiences of learning about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties showed the three essential themes as common experiences of the teacher aides.

In the specific descriptions that follow each teacher aide was given an upper case letter of the alphabet after 'specific description' for anonymity. After this upper case letter there is a lower case letter which represents the descriptions as either descriptions of supporting students *a* and *b*, or learning about support *c*. The numbers following this lower case letter represents the number of the experience as described by the teacher aides. For example Specific description A a/1 reflects experience 1 for teacher aide A in relation to the prompt *a* "Describe an experience of supporting a student that you perceived was successful." A b/1 reflects experience 1 for teacher aide A in relation to the prompt *b* "Describe an experience of supporting a student that you perceived was not successful." A c/1 reflects experience 1 for teacher aide A in relation to the prompt *c* "Describe an experience of learning how to support students." Four of the specific descriptions B c/4, C c/6, E c/3 and H c/4 came from experiences described in interview one when the participants responded to the question "What prompted you to take this job?" and they described how they learned to support students from past experience.

The specific descriptions of teacher aides' experiences of supporting students and learning about support are presented below. Tentative themes emerged from these specific descriptions.

Specific descriptions for teacher aides lived experience of supporting students for experiences a and b

Specific descriptions for first participant A-H

Specific description A a/1

A worked with D who had tubular myopathy and scoliosis[4]. D attended school in a wheelchair. D struggled with literacy. A was assigned to work with D on a literacy program called MultiLit which is 'making up lost time in literacy.' The program was set up by the learning support teacher (LST). A worked with D on a one-on-one basis three times a week. On the other days another teacher aide worked with D. A stated that the LST made sure that the teacher aides worked in a consistent way. There was a whole system that went with the program. D struggled with spelling and word attack, the skills needed to recognise sound patterns in words. D had to say each word without hesitating. A had to introduce some new words and then test D on the old. There was a system of colour coding in the program. A worked with D in a withdrawal room called the 'rainbow room.' A felt that D did not have an issue with being withdrawn, but unlike some other children with whom A had worked, considered himself lucky to go to the 'rainbow room.' A stated that the program was a familiar routine for D. However D used to stay on one word list for more than one week, struggling many times over a word such as 'gull' which he would pronounce 'glug'. D found this frustrating. A tried different strategies with D to help him move on. Recently D was able to move on through a list a day, after getting the words correct two days in a row. D was slow and deliberate, but moving on every day.

[4] Tubular myopathy occurs when amorphous materials aggregate in muscles causing atrophy, myalgia, cramps, or episodic weakness. See http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/dispomim.cgi?id=160565. Scoliosis is an abnormal lateral curvature of the spine. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scoliosis

D’s demeanour and attitude changed as he gained confidence. Being more confident, D asked A to allow him to practise for the reviews and A let him because A thought if the practice would help D to achieve and find success it was necessary. A felt that D was happy and secure because the people in the program who worked with D used a structured and consistent approach.

Specific description A a/2

A had worked with K, a student with Down syndrome since year 1. K was now in year 7. A had developed a good understanding of K’s needs and abilities over the years. A stated that K was positive about her reading ability. K was reading at Reading Recovery level 19. K’s teacher was new to the school that year. K had finished all of the reading books at level 19. A felt that there was no point in moving her on to the next level of that program. A felt that the teacher did not have much hands-on experience with K’s reading program, so would not be able to give A any directions about where to begin K’s program for the year. A went to the teacher and suggested that they should not move K on to the next level of the same program. A found a different reading program at the same level. A suggested to the teacher that they should use that program. A said to the teacher that she hoped that the teacher did not think that she was interfering, or over-stepping the mark by suggesting to the teacher what to do with K’s program. A felt that the teacher was grateful and accepted her suggestion. A reflected that because the teacher had twenty-six students in the class, she would not have such personal knowledge of K’s reading levels as A had. A considered that she had a responsibility to use her knowledge to inform the teacher about K’s reading program.

Specific description A b/1

A arrived at the classroom and was reassigned from the student with whom she was supposed to be working at that time to work with another student and D on a comprehension exercise. (A usually worked with D on a one-on-one literacy program in a withdrawal situation.) A was familiar with both of the students and considered that the passage would be a challenge for both of them to read. A read the passage to them. D procrastinated, fiddled with things and could not keep on track. A suggested that D could underline the part in the passage that answered the question and copy that into the answer sheet. D misspelt words and did not use capitals when he was copying from the text. A noticed that the other student who had similar problems was not having the same amount of difficulty with the exercise. A realized that D was out of his normal routine of working with A, and did not feel confident about doing the exercise. A felt frustrated with D by the end of the session, because A had to remind D every single time to use a capital letter at the beginning of a sentence. A reflected that D was not in his usual classroom as well because this exercise was part of a rotation. A did not normally work with D in this environment. A felt that she was quite capable of doing the exercise, but felt totally frustrated by the situation. A documented that she had assisted by reading and guiding in the text so that the students could find the answer. A did this because A thought that it was obvious that D was not capable of doing this work on his own. A found the experience very frustrating because D was not supposed to be working with the other student but they both had to work on the same exercise. A had to support both of them. A did this by reading the text to both of them and they shared a rubber. A considered that D did not learn much from the experience although D

had something to hand up and A had documented that she had assisted him. A noted that D did not feel good about this experience. At morning tea, A reflected on the experience and felt frustrated when she compared it with the Multilit session with D an hour earlier. A reflected that the earlier experience was so much more successful, positive and achievable for D.

Specific description A b/2

A carefully documented the work she did with K, a student with Down syndrome, with a date and a detailed description so that the teacher and others knew how K was going. A attended an Individual Education Program meeting for K. A was surprised that the teacher did not bring any of A's documentation to the meeting. A found the IEP meeting frustrating because the teacher spoke about the K as though she knew everything about K. A reflected that although she was not the teacher, her records of K's learning could have made a valuable contribution to the meeting. A did contribute anecdotally from her personal store of knowledge about K.

Specific descriptions for second participant B

Specific description B a/1

In year 1, B worked with R who had behavioural problems. There had been many incidents in the playground so R had a timetable which meant that he would come back to class after playground and have quiet time, to cool down, before B came to collect him from the class for his individual program. One day when B arrived at the classroom to pick R up, the other students were chanting that R had done something wrong. B, the teacher, and the school counsellor had been trying to teach R not to lash out, but to tell the teacher what had happened or if someone had done something to him. On this day R came in from playtime

very upset because he was being told by his peers that he had made a wrong choice. With the teacher and counsellor, B asked R to draw in comic strip form what had happened, what he could have done, and what was said. The teacher and counsellor left R with B thinking that it was settled, that R had learned what to do in that situation. R exclaimed to B that there was more that he wanted to say. R said he would draw and asked B to write the words. R drew a speech bubble and told B to write that he had said sorry to the girl. R would not let B leave the classroom until he had explained exactly what he had done, and that he had made a correct choice. B said that R was very excited because B had listened to him and understood that he tried to do the right thing. B reflected that R was often blamed for things that happened in the playground by the other children. B realised that R had listened to what he had been told. B reflected that this incident was a huge breakthrough for her when she realised that R would tell in minute detail if he had done something wrong, but also if he had done something right. B told the teachers about the incident and how R did not have the language to express himself. Since this experience most of the teachers try to really listen to R with patience, rather than thinking that he is just a naughty little boy. B reflected that since this incident she has had a really good relationship with R. B attributed the huge breakthrough to R himself. All R needed was somebody there to listen.

Specific description B b/1

B was assigned to support J a child with autism who was part-time at the pre-school and local special education unit. B stated that her work with J had very little impact on him as he did not listen to her and there was no rapport. At pre-school, the other teacher aide seemed to have more success with J than B, yet B

was expected to continue to work with J on fine motor rotations and other activities in the classroom because J's parents did not want J to be withdrawn. B endeavoured to work with J, but J did not appreciate any of B's efforts to work with him; he refused her offer of support and help and ignored her. B noted that there was one incident when J took some notice of her and that was during a PE lesson. B attended the class mainly to watch J so that he did not run away. Although he stayed with the class, he ignored B and ran away from her. B noted that part of the problem J faced was that he was being given instructions from many adults and he found this difficult to cope with. B reflected that although the experience was unsuccessful for her because and she was unable to provide the support and help that she wanted to give, she pointed to the set-up itself as being problematic.

Specific descriptions for third participant C

Specific description C a/1

L, who was ascertained speech/language impaired was in the third term of year 4 when C became his teacher aide. C stated that L's classroom teacher and the Learning Support teacher devised a totally independent program for him, because L just couldn't cope with the classroom literacy program, because he could not understand that particular classroom program. L left his classroom every day at the same time to work with C on one-on-one on the program. C stated that she always collected L in case she was held up. L was usually ready to come out with C. When L started he knew about twenty sight words. C used a reading program with very simple, basic books. C reflected that L did not seem to mind, because he was doing it one-on-one with C, and nobody else knew what he was doing. L made a big effort with the new sight words and those he

already knew. C and L played Snap, GoFish, sight word Bingo, sight word Memory; anything they could think of to play with the sight words so L could remember them. The sight words were in lists and C went through the list with L. C gave L Smarties when he got the list right. Before the holidays C challenged L and said that she would give him a Smartie for every word that he got right. After the holidays C went through two lists in random order, and L knew the 24 words. C noticed that L seemed so proud of himself and smug. C thought that L was thinking, “You didn’t think I could do it. But I could!” C reflected that L hid his emotions well, but C felt that L was pleased with himself, with the fact that he could read, and he could take books out of the library. C noted that when L was in year 6, L took books out of the library, and L could not read every word, but he could read enough to know what was going on, and it gave him a lot of confidence. L’s confidence made C feel really good because what C had done with L seemed worthwhile.

Specific description C b/1

C worked with a little girl, N, who was diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). C stated that the only way N could do any maths, plus or minus, was counting on her fingers. C tried to introduce a number line and numbers chart, but N could not work with them. C stated when N was in Year 5 the school adopted the GoMaths program which is based on mental maths. C noted that N was unable to do the work, and N could not keep up with the rest of the class. C was aware that N could not instantly recall the individual facts, but N had learnt her tables through perseverance and rote learning. N could go through the table of facts until she arrived at the required fact. C noted that the other students called out the facts before N had done the sum. N became

increasingly frustrated. C even used to sit with N and tell N the answers. N did not like that either because N wanted to do it herself. C felt that N learned nothing and made no progress. C watched when N clenched her fists, threw down the pencil and tears welled in her eyes. C noticed as N became frustrated and upset. N turned away from everyone, crossed her arms, and turned her back and declared that she was not going to do the work. C noted that she did not really blame N because C knew that N could not do it and C felt that there was nothing to be gained by putting N through that. C stated that after 6 months they finally got N onto a separate program. N came out every day to do maths. C stated that this was really successful. However C observed that in year 6 with a new teacher, N was back to where she was last year. C has observed N throwing tantrums, pushing books off desks, tantrums like a baby. C reflected that the other students in N's class were really good to N. They understood that N was different and they tried to comfort and help her. They did not laugh at her. C stated that she knew that N was never going find success in this type of maths program. C felt really heart-broken about N, and C could not understand why she was put through this frustrating experience again.

Specific descriptions for fourth participant D

Specific description D a/1

D worked with a student J who had severe gastric reflux problems and was PEG fed milk through a tube in his stomach, in his preschool year[5]. D PEG fed J twice a day. J also had bowel control problems and D often had to change his soiled pants. D described J's posture as like an old man. D noted that the other

[5] PEG stands for Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy – a treatment for those who have trouble swallowing.

students would often move away from J when he spoke to them. D reflected that this happened because he had speech problems and they found it difficult to understand him. D reflected that when D was first assigned to J she was unsure whether she could work with him, but that she came to care for him very much. D received training about PEG feeding from J's mother because initially the trainer did not arrive. D reflected that interaction between teacher aides and parents was not usually encouraged, but when medical conditions like J's were involved, her interaction with J's mother proved to be very helpful. D reflected that the interaction during training allowed D and J's mother to set up a pattern of regular communication about what happened at home. D could then work out how events at home might impact on J's school day. D was able to alter her work with J accordingly, give him additional support when needed, and alert the teacher to any issues arising from home.

Specific description D a/2

J had severe gastric reflux problems and was PEG fed milk through a tube in his stomach. D reflected that one of the many challenges in year 1 with J was the fact that he still soiled his pants regularly. J used to call out what had happened. D reflected that because of his calling out J's peers were aware of J's problem. D and the teacher devised a coded message system for the student to alert them of his toileting needs, and to send in a discreet way for D who would come to help him. D reflected that she understood that the aim of the coded message strategy was to get help for J in a discreet way so as to avoid embarrassment for J in front of his peers and possible stigmatization in the future.

Specific description D a/3

J had severe gastric reflux problems and was PEG fed milk through a tube in his stomach. When J was in year 1, D was directed by J's dietician to teach him how to eat solid food. D reflected that forcing J to eat resulted in J crying day after day. D stated that halfway through the year there was a crisis meeting with all of J's specialists and a decision was made to stop the feeding program with J, and to forget about food at school. At that time, D was assigned to the classroom almost full time and noticed that J started to access the curriculum and although he did not catch up to the other students, he showed marked improvement. D credited taking the focus off food for J's improved learning. D also worked consistently during that year with J on his motor skills. D reflected that because of her good relationship with J's mother, the mother sent her materials supplied by J's private occupational therapist. D stated that working together with the mother, and through her the occupational therapist, they kept a motor skills program going for J.

D noted that J's motor skills also improved markedly when he was in year 2. D stated that because J had many problems and was being treated by many specialists, his week used to be full of appointments. In year 2, J's mother wound back this complex treatment regime with speech and occupational therapists, and dieticians and D noticed an improvement in J's motor skills as well as in his learning in the classroom. D attributed these improvements to the fact that the focus on what J could not do had been removed.

Specific description D a/4

D worked with J who also had speech/communication problems. In year 2 J's teacher remarked to D that often J did not pay attention to his work. D had

noticed that if J was interested he would be very attentive. During literacy block in J's classroom, the teacher read a story to the students. D was asked to withdraw J and listen to him retell the story. D wrote down the words (scribed) for J as he retold the story. D noted that J retold the story in correct sequence with exact details. D reflected that she was aware that J had a good memory, and attributed J's ability to retell the story to his ability to learn things by rote. When D returned to the classroom and showed the teacher the story that she had scribed for J, the teacher expressed disbelief, amazement and then scepticism, asking D if she had helped J to retell the story. D denied helping him. D reflected that it was after the retelling session that the teacher realized that J had a love of stories. D and the teacher used this understanding to focus more on J's literacy development, building on his interest in stories. J began to write down his own stories and although they could not always be understood, J could tell D what the words were for her to rewrite for him. D reflected that she felt very proud of J's achievement in literacy.

Specific description D b/1

During his preschool year D PEG fed J who had severe gastric reflux problems with milk through a tube in his stomach. During the year J's specialist directed D to teach J how to eat solid food as well. D stated that J used to nibble on a sandwich and store the tiny pieces of food up near the roof of his mouth beside his teeth. D reflected that J did not want to swallow the food. D had to put her finger into J's mouth to retrieve the food. D described lunch time for J as terrible because the aim was to socialise J with the other students, so J sat with his peers to eat. D was with him, teaching and encouraging him to eat. D felt

that the other students became much more aware of J's problems when they saw D trying to get him to eat, and viewed him as a naughty boy.

D stated that if J did not eat, she was allowed to give him his drip (PEG) milk. (She believed that J waited for the milk rather than eat the food.) D realized when she came to give him the milk, that J had food stored in his mouth. She waited until the other students had returned to class before she removed the food with her finger, so that J could not choke or be embarrassed in front of the other children. Then D gave J his milk. D reflected that J knew that the other children were back in the preschool classroom playing while he was still outside with her and she was pressuring him to eat. D felt that J was being punished by this eating regime. D stated that after the first lunch time session of trying to make J eat had lasted for three quarters of an hour she devised various strategies to encourage J to eat more quickly with the preschool teacher's approval. D tried putting J on a time limit, preparing her own lunch with food items similar to his so they could enjoy playing with the food, an experience that D surmised he had missed out on as a baby when he was very sick. After D noticed how carefully J watched her mouth as she was eating, she asked him if he would like to see himself trying to eat the food. D then brought in a mirror. D reflected that these strategies had a novel appeal for J for a few days. D noticed that he still had great difficulty coordinating his tongue and swallowing. D reflected that it took her fifteen minutes to get J to swallow a medicine cup of water and even then he gagged on it. D stated that despite the trauma to J and to herself that the forced eating regime caused, the consensus amongst the specialists was that she continued with the feeding regime.

D stated that the specialists decided to take J off the drip (PEG) in an attempt to make him hungry so that he would eat. D reflected that J stopped growing and was very unhappy. The specialists then restored the drip. J then consumed so much milk that he became tired and had digestion problems. D used to walk J backwards and forwards from the school office, or roll him on his stomach on an exercise ball until he could ease his indigestion. D was very concerned about this feeding regime and researched eating disorders and shared the information with the teacher and LST who, D reflected, did not pay much attention. D stated that despite her fear of getting into trouble, she told the LST that she was going to give the information to J's mum. J's mum then took J to another swallowing clinic. However at school J's force-feeding regime continued directed by the dietician. D had to continue to try to get J to eat and observed how he spent day after day crying. D became really concerned about J and his feeding regime. D worried that the special school teacher might be getting frustrated at the feeding regime like she was. She wondered if she, the special school teacher (where J went on two days a week) and J's mum were all putting pressure on him to eat in the same way, or if she was doing something wrong. D asked to visit the special school with J to see what the process for feeding was there. D visited the special school and observed what the teacher did with J during eating time. D found that the special school teacher used a similar routine to hers with as little success as she had experienced.

Specific descriptions for fifth participant E

Specific description E a/1

E noticed that when student C who had Down syndrome first started at primary school, rather than ostracizing her, the teachers, parents and other students

treasured C like a little puppy and the students crowded around her. E felt that the students and teachers did not know how to treat C appropriately. E cited an experience with C during a sporting activity. E saw C hit another student on the head with a tennis racquet. E reflected that C did this because she wanted to get ahead of the other student. E recalled other incidents where other students either hit back at C, or became very upset. E moved C away and told her that she needed to say sorry to the other student or she would not be allowed to continue playing. E stated that the sport teacher was willing to keep C in the activity despite her aggressive behaviour. E attributed this to the fact that the teacher recognised that C had a disability. E refused to let C return to the activity until she had said sorry. C eventually apologised to the other student and the student accepted the apology just like an apology from any peer. E reflected that this was a good thing for C because she learned that she was expected to follow the same rules as everybody else when she participated in joint activities. C's teacher and peers also learned that in joint activities, C could follow the rules like everybody else, and that E's role was not to afford C 'special' favours because of her disability.

Specific description E a/2

E recalled that even though C was nasty and spat at the other students, this type of behaviour settled down as the year progressed. E reflected that C's peers accepted that C could be good and bad, when earlier in the year they would have dismissed such behaviour by laughing at C. E noted that although there had been some acceptance of C's behaviours like those of the other students, and therefore needing to be addressed like those of other students, she felt that there should be more organised education for the student community about Down

syndrome. E stated that she did what she could to educate other students, by speaking to them when incidents arose, and by talking to her own child about C. E noted that although there were circumstances where the same rules could apply to C as well as to the other students, circumstances for C were different. For example when C was with E she took her to the toilet when needed. In the classroom with the teacher that was not possible. When C started wearing pull-ups to allow for toileting accidents, the other students were aware of this difference. E explained to C's peers that C needed them to avoid accidents, and that this was acceptable.

Specific description E a/3

E worked with C every day from nine till about half past one**.** During lunch time, C ate with the other students and then E accompanied her when she went out to play in the playground. E stated that she supervised C in the playground because of some of her aggressive behaviours. E tried to step out of the play, because she understood that the idea was not to walk around holding C's hand. E stated that she tried to encourage the other students to play with C. E brought in her own activities such as colouring competitions, so that other students could join in with C and she could feel part of the whole student group. E reflected that although the other staff were aware that her lunch time role was with C, her supervisory role became extended and 'full-on' because of all the other students who joined in to the activities which she organised. E attributed feeling very tired at the end of the day to this extended role.

Specific description E a/4

E worked with C on an individual education program (IEP) put together by the learning support teacher (LST), the school guidance officer. E stated that the

LST and the guidance officer discussed the program with her and were very supportive of her ideas because they knew her background. (E previously worked with groups such as Endeavour doing social skills training for adults with disabilities). E withdrew C from class every morning to work with her on the individual education program. The program was broken into sessions. E noted that C willingly came out of class, which E attributed to C's understanding of her need to work on her own special program of work, and the routine nature of the withdrawal from class in the morning session and return to class for the afternoon session. E took C to the Prep classroom for play-based socialization activities. E stated that she stepped back and allowed C to learn social skills from the Prep students. E noted that the younger students were very good with C. They seemed to recognise that C was different but were able to accept her.

Specific description E a/5

E noticed early in her work with C that she had problems with speech, so E organised a speech therapist who came to the school and showed her some ideas and programs which she used with her. E worked with C on basic speech and counting skills. E succeeded in getting C to slow down her rate of speech so that other people could understand her better. E doubted that C's speech would ever be perfect, but they worked on improving it by having conversations about daily events and weekend experiences. E worked with C on writing skills using the computer, and noted that C worked well on the computer. E noted that C was better at copying words on the computer than actual writing. E stated that she needed to work with C on correct spacing between words, because on her own C scribbled whole pages without any spaces.

Specific description E a/6

E stated that C read at a level appropriate for her year level. E was part of the group reading program in the classroom twice per week. E noticed that C participated in class story time with some prompting, and enjoyed reading groups. C was better at reading out aloud than some of her peers, but had problems with comprehension and writing responses. E recalled how C's poor comprehension showed up when she began a new program for speech therapy. E described how C answered the questions with rote answers or 'yes' and 'no', and often digressed from the meaning. E talked to the LST about C's rote responses to the questions in the program. E stopped using that program. E then concentrated on teaching C comprehension skills using retells and directed questioning techniques. E reflected that C sat and listened and enjoyed being in the classroom, but she did not access the curriculum e.g. comprehension and writing skills while she was there. E stated that when she was in the classroom for show and tell, she used a simple and closed question technique with C.

Specific description E b/1

E stated that she told other students about how to respond to C's behaviours through personal interaction with students when incidents occurred because opportunities to inform the school community about C's disability happened only through her personally when she was with students. When other students did not know how to react to C when she was crying, E told them that when C was really hurt then she could show them where she was hurting. If C showed that she was really hurt E asked the students to come to get her. E stated that the other students approached C regularly and said, "Hello! Hello! Do you remember me?" E spoke to the other children about how to behave with C in the

same way as they do with other children and their friends. E reflected that when C spoke to students in rude ways, the other students wanted to laugh at C or engage in discussion with her. E asked them to simply say, “Speak nicely” to C and walk away. E reflected that the other students’ inappropriate ways of interacting with C was a source of frustration for her as she tried to teach her student how to speak and act appropriately.

Specific descriptions for sixth participant F

Specific description F a/1

F worked as the school cook in a cooking program designed to engage the interest of students with learning difficulties. F taught D, a student with speech/language impairment, how to cook. F reflected that D loved this experience. When he got out the ingredients to cook there was a great deal of mess but that revealed to F his enthusiasm and willingness to be part of the cooking sessions. F cooked a meal every week with D, one that they could whip up quickly such as spaghetti bolognese. They put it in the oven over lunch time, or if it was ready before lunch, D ate it for lunch. F stated that with her guidance D did all the cooking from measuring to producing the meal. Because D could not read very well, F read the words in the recipe to D, they then read the words together, and then D repeated them by himself. F reflected that this process reinforced the words for D. F stated that D also learned to measure things. He learned about the science and maths involved in cooking. They used lots of different maths and science terms, and developed a vocabulary about measuring and comparing. F reflected that D developed his speaking skills during these sessions but continued to have difficulty with reading. F observed that D enjoying making the food and seeing it ready to eat. She stated that when they

prepared a dinner party for the learning support teacher, D got a great sense of enjoyment and achievement out of the experience.

Specific description F a/2

F observed that D was prepared to try new things. F knew that D was a good runner so she focussed their social chat on things that he was good at, and things that people admired him for. D developed the ability to chat about things that he liked. Building on this understanding, F and the learning support teacher made up some books based on D's activities at home such as when he went to bed. D's mum took photographs of things that D was interested in the garden including his dad's big truck which was of great interest to D. F and the learning support teacher designed a literacy program around trucks. F reflected that D maintained interest in language activities that were based around subjects with which he was familiar, so it was important to build literacy activities around his interests.

Specific description F a/3

F stated that in a day's work she went from grade 1 where she worked at a conceptual level with which she was comfortable, to grade 7 where she was suddenly asked to work on concepts or processes that she could not remember. F stated that she had to use strategies with the teacher to remind herself about the particular concept like asking the teacher to tell her how she was meant to teach that concept. F recalled being asked to teach onomatopoeias. Because she could not remember what onomatopoeia was, she asked the teacher to give her a couple of examples. F stated that she never refused, but rather found out from the teacher how she should teach the particular concept or process. F cited the example of teaching percentages which she taught in the way she learnt which

was a different process from the one that the teacher used. F reflected that different ways of learning were not a problem if the student could use one but not the other, but F believed that, because she did not want to teach students who already had learning difficulties in a different way from the teacher, it was important to replicate the processes used by the classroom teacher. F stated that she used strategies such as sitting in class and watching what the teacher said and did, or she took the book out with her when she withdrew the students. F reflected that she knew how to do things most of the time, but she needed time to adjust to the sudden changes between class levels. F noted that even the teachers said that they found some things difficult. F stated that this was a relief to her because she wanted to live up to the teachers' standards, but that there was a lot required.

Specific description F b/1

F worked with D, a student with speech/language impairment, from year 1 to year 5. F was not sure what exactly his problems were, but after trying many reading programs with D, F felt that he lacked motivation and confidence about his reading ability. F recalled doing a reading program with D that used a key word recognition strategy. D knew a difficult word such as 'swimming', and F reflected that he probably recognised a pattern of letters within the word. At other times D did not know the words. F stated that in the many years that she worked with D on his reading programs, they never seemed to get very far, because of this inconsistency in D's reading performance and achievements. F felt that this was frustrating for both of them. F recalled days when D achieved even a small step, and he was enthusiastic, smiling and chatting recognising that he had achieved. But F recalled other days when D felt that he had not achieved

and he was quite sombre. F reflected that she was getting somewhere with D's reading but she also thought that she was letting him down. F stated that D felt as though he was letting her down as well.

F recalled how, when D was able to read good sentences, not for his age, but at his reading level, he moved on to learning how to use expression in his reading. F reflected that this was difficult because D used few words and had a monotone speaking voice. However F took on the role of improving his expression and went on her own initiative to the speech therapist and asked for some ideas to help D to develop some range in his voice. The speech therapist gave F some strategies with words such as 'squeak' which D had to say in a squeaky voice. Another strategy involved D raising and lowering his intonation as he repeated sentences about going up and down the stairs. F observed that D acted as if he was very embarrassed in the beginning, but eventually he found that it was a fun activity and he liked the way he sounded. F reflected that even though D ended up enjoying these activities, he would revert to his monotone voice the next day, which was frustrating for them both. F reflected that when she worked with D helping him with his literacy in class later on in grade 5, she noted that D got on with his work and did well at his level while in the class. She sat with him and she noticed that he did not like this because, being older, he was aware that this made him different from his peers. F reflected that her working with him one-on-one was not so much of a problem for D when he was younger.

Specific description F b/2

When D returned from holidays F began D's new term's reading program by asking him to read a book at his previous level. D was unable to read it, so F considered that they had to repeat that level again. F was disillusioned and D

was too. F noticed that D was upset because he was adamant that he did not want to read the book because he had read it before. D questioned F about it, and F found it hard to answer him. F tried to coax D by telling him that he would know the words if he gave it a try. She tried to get him to sound out the words and look at the pictures to give himself some hints. In the end F tried the 'I'll read, we both read, and then you read strategy.' F stated that she was just trying to help D regain his confidence. F stated that she still thought about this experience with D. Although she was no longer at D's school, she saw him around the local neighbourhood and she hoped that he was going ok. F recalled that D had been bullied and she hoped that he was surviving at school. She hoped that D could at least gain confidence from knowing that he could read.

Specific description F b/3

At a previous school F worked on a social skills program over the lunch period with five or six students who had ascertained disabilities. F prepared physical games and games like Snap for the students to play. F allowed the students to play on the computer in the room as well. F stated that most of the students wanted to play on their own or they fought with each other. F tried to teach them to negotiate but that did not work. F found the experience really frustrating because she felt that these students were withdrawn over the lunch period and therefore did not have the opportunity to socialise with the wider school population.

F stated that the students went outside to eat with their peers and then came to the room. Some of her students did not turn up at the room. F wondered if they had just decided not to come. F only had two or three students who came, but she could not leave them to find the others, because she was on her own. Their

peers reminded her students to come if they saw them. The students were from grade 1 to 5. F reflected that this made the situation difficult because a grade five child does not want to play with a grade 1 child. F stated that they could not play a stimulating game together because of their different levels of vocabulary development. Also the year 5 student was a girl with Autism who always demanded F's attention for herself. F stated that it was also really difficult with only one computer in the room. F set up a system where there was a bell that she rang after a student had a certain time on the computer. But the students wanted to play particular games and they could not finish the game before the next one had a turn. F banned computer play. F reflected that this frustrated the students and made the situation more difficult and problematic.

F stated that this lunch time task took up five of her nine contract hours. She came to school in the middle of each school day which meant that although it was only a nine hour contract, she had no full days off. F felt like she was not part of the school because she saw few members of staff at lunch or before and after school. F recalled that people said to her that they did not know that she was still working there. F felt like that too.

F reflected that the program did no work but that she was not part of setting it up. It was set up by the learning support teacher and the principal. She managed to last half of the year doing this job. When she left she told the learning support teacher and principal that the program was not working and one of the reasons that she was leaving was that she was disillusioned and did not feel like a team member, or feel that she was doing her job properly. F also told them that, in her opinion, it was a task that needed to be shared because it was not conducive to

an adult wanting to be there. It was not achieving much for the kids either because they wanted to do their own thing or they disrupted each other, so they were not learning how to socialise.

Specific description F b/4

F worked with a student R on a language program with two sight words. F understood that R had short term memory problems because he could not remember the words ten minutes after he had learned them. F tried to use the whiteboard to help him because she knew that children liked to write on whiteboards and pretend to be the teacher. F tried writing the words with shaving cream and string so that R could visualize them. F stated that she has been told that was what she had to do because R needed to learn sight words. F felt as if she was lost because she had come in halfway through R's program. F did not know if R even knew his alphabet or his sounds. F reflected that she felt unsure about what to do next, so approached the learning support teacher and asked if there were any other ways to teach R his words. F felt that she needed to sit down with the teacher and the learning support teacher to work out what she was supposed to be doing with R because F did not know where R was in his program. F supposed that the teacher knew where he was. F wanted to start at the beginning and to know what skills had been achieved, so that she could move on in a set program for R. F felt that as a teacher aide she did not have the right to ask the teacher to fill her in and in any case the teacher did not have enough time to talk to her. F stated that this made her feel like there was nowhere else to go. But F felt strongly that R needed more support than the one half hour a day that she worked with him. F stated that she did not like being with a student who needed support for half an hour because it was such a short

time. F reflected that just to get any child settled in the classroom or outside needed more than half an hour.

Specific descriptions for seventh participant G

Specific description G a/1

G was coaching cricket at lunch time. G noticed that M, a student with Asperger's syndrome with whom he worked in the year 5 classroom, wanted to be part of the cricket team with all of the other boys from his class. G reflected that M did not want to be the odd one out. M joined in the cricket game, and one of the other boys told M to wait his turn, rather than jump right in and start batting. The other boy told M about the safety rules that G had put in place because they used hard balls, and G did not want to see anyone get hurt. M turned around and kicked the boy who had spoken about the rules. Another boy then stepped in and told M not to be like that and then M hit this boy with the cricket bat and spat at him. G stated that these were violent actions. G told M that he could not act like that or he would have to sit out of the game. M told G that he would bash his head in with the cricket bat. G sat down in front of M and dared him to go ahead and do it. G stated that he did this to call M's bluff because G knew from having a brother with Asperger's syndrome that an Asperger's child's defence was attack. M dropped the cricket bat and cried. G stated that J eventually calmed down and everything was good until the head of special education (LST) intervened. M threatened to kill her and started to rant again. G observed that whenever her name was mentioned in M's presence he ranted and raved that he hated her. G reflected that luckily for M's sake this happened after the bell had rung and the other students had returned to class. G reflected that he had a rapport with M because he looked after the sport at lunch

time. M knew that if he did the right thing while G was within earshot, then G would reward M with a game. G reflected that this was the one certainty that M seemed to have.

Specific description G a/2

G concluded that M hated women because G witnessed him abusing the female teacher and his mother. One day when M had been unruly his mother was told to come and collect him from the classroom. M swore repeatedly at his mother and the teacher, saying that he was going to kill everybody. G watched as M called his mother abusive names. His mother tried to calm him down and told him not to be silly. G reflected that if he had been the mother he would have reprimanded him severely. But M's mother kept taking the abuse. At the time, G reflected that this was not the way to handle M. G reflected that M's misogyny was particularly difficult when he drew a picture of a decapitated body one day in class, and called out to the class that the teacher's head was cut off. The teacher did not know what to do, so she sent to the office and asked for help. G stated that he was called to the classroom to try to calm down the situation. G went in, sat beside J and talked to him over and over again about what he should not do. G sat there the whole lesson with M. While G was in the classroom the teacher told the students to get out their maths books. M said, "How about we get our bums out?" G noted that the other students laughed, as 10 year olds would. G stated that here he was in the middle of thirty laughing children and the teacher looked as if she was about to have a nervous breakdown. G stated that the teacher eventually left the school. G felt sorry for her and wondered how she had coped as long as she did. Meanwhile G sat with M and told him not to do the wrong thing. G encouraged M to get out his maths book, telling

him that he liked maths. G reminded him what would happen if he did his work. G stated that he stayed close to M, continued talking to him and encouraged him by reminding M about the reward for doing his work which was to join in the cricket at lunch time. G stated that this strategy worked eventually for that session.

G reflected that M was a difficult student to support especially when he sat in the classroom and drew pictures of the decapitated teacher. G stated that M had come to the school from another school because he had been expelled, could not be handled at G's school, so he moved on to another school. G saw M and his mother at a shopping centre when he was in year 7 or 8. G greeted M and asked how he was. M proceeded to tell G a long story about weapons of mass destruction, and about killing everybody. G stated that M's mother tried to calm him down but M just kept on with his rant. G felt sorry that M had not moved on from this destructive talk.

Specific description G a/3

G was asked to work one-on-one with A, a student in year 4. The teacher and learning support teacher told G that A could not read or write and that A's two brothers were intellectually impaired. When G worked with A over many sessions he found that he was an enthusiastic reader who did not have to be corrected. G stated that A attempted big words that other students would not, and six out of ten times he got the words correct. G expressed incredulity that A was considered to be a bad reader. After sessions with G, A wanted G not to leave but to read with him for two hours. G only had about fifteen minutes with A. G also realized that with little chapter books if he read for a longer time in each session, A might move on too fast and get ahead of his peers. G regretted

that A's reading progress was restricted by the short book length and the time he was allocated for A. When recalling his work with A, G expressed interest in the fact that no two days were the same and no two children were the same. G reflected that even though he was told that students had disabilities like intellectual impairment or could not read, there was always something at which the students excelled. G reflected that this is what made the job so amazing and different from other jobs. Despite the frustrations that made G want to pull his hair out, when a little diamond like A shined in the dark, it helped to affirm G's work.

Specific description G b/1

G stated that at lunch time M would go crazy. G had to march him round to the office to get his medication. G observed as M stood there, took his medication from the office staff and then dropped it on the floor and stood on it. He refused to take the pill and crushed it and said that he did not want it, while swearing and cursing. M put the pill in his mouth and hid it up in his gums or under his tongue and then walked away and spat it out. G knew this had happened when other students came and told him. M also spat the tablet in the toilet. G stated that another boy with ADHD also did this and it became a bit of a game with them. G reflected that it was hard when he was dealing with older boys like M who were as big as men who could attack him and he could not retaliate or defend himself. G felt sorry for the female staff who had to deal with these older students. G stated that when incidents arose he filled in an orange slip, and said what had happened. This was a level 1 behaviour report. G reflected that he had written such a report on a student five or six times but nothing had been done about the behaviours. G stated that if a classroom teacher filled out a report even

once then action was taken to address the behaviours. G wondered if it there was a vendetta against him personally, or was it that he was just a teacher aide. G reflected that he might as well have spoken to a brick wall because no action was taken after his reports to address the students' negative behaviours.

Specific description G b/2

G had worked with a student D who had Asperger's syndrome since year 1. D was in year 6. G worked with D one-on-one on literacy. G observed that D was away from school a lot. G reflected that this was because D often said that he was sick, and so he was not brought to school. When D was at school, G worked with him on his typing skills while the rest of the class did Religion class. G stated that he realized that D did not have to become a touch typist, but that D needed keyboard skills so that he could type up his essays, reports and projects. G reflected that D needed to be at least at a level with the bottom of his class, not three years behind them. G stated that the work was frustrating because he just sat with D and said, "Type the teddy bear had a picnic" which was very basic drill for D to locate keys on the keyboard. G reflected that they had only started last week and D was away again. G predicted that it was going to be like pushing stones uphill with his nose. It was hard work when D was there and when he was so often not there G considered that there was little chance to make progress. G stated that the week before D typed about ten sentences down a page. After about six sentences D had figured out how to do it without constant correction. But on the following day G stated that D seemed to have completely cleared his mind. G had to take D back to steps two and three again. G felt that this was really frustrating because D was not able to retain the knowledge. G stated that D had a very short memory which made it more

difficult. G stated that D also had a problem with drooling. D wiped the dribble on his fingers and then rubbed it all over the keyboard. G was reluctant to touch the keys in order to help D because of the hygiene issues. G reflected that it was very, very hard to deal with a student of that age who was so physically underdeveloped compared with his peers, but showed great happiness when he achieved. G stated that despite his elation at achieving D still forgot how to do it. D thought that because he had done the task once he could stop there and go on to something else. But when G told D that they were going to continue on the same task, G noticed that D became frustrated and it was hard for G to get him on task again. D became distracted and talked to himself and told himself that he was silly and not to do that. G reflected that it was comical to watch but he knew that it was very serious. G stated that he did not know, as a teacher aide, how to keep D on task. G felt that being involved in this particular situation with D was really frustrating. Part of the frustration came from the fact that he was just told by the teacher that this is what we are doing with D now. G was told an area they were focussing on. But G understood that they were working with every area of D's development. On this occasion G was simply told that D needed to learn how to transfer his written notes to a typed form. G reflected that he did not appreciate the way in which he was spoken to, as though he was an imbecile, by the teacher who was a new graduate, when he had been in the job a lot longer than the teacher had. G did not understand why, when there were four special needs student in that class, and a special education unit teacher aide present a lot of the time, he was put with D. G reflected that sadly, D just seemed to go backwards.

Specific description G b/3

G reflected that the students with Asperger's like D all needed help. As they matured and became more self-reliant they were not so dependent on having a teacher aide. But when they worked in a group situation they needed to be supervised to keep on task. (G did not work with D one-on-one in the classroom but only when the class was in Religion). When working in the classroom G tried to keep D on task on writing activities in his language group. G reflected that D worked quite well in a group situation. G also stayed with D for reading. G stated that D's reading was ok, and not as painful as his writing or his typing. But G reflected that it still was not easy because D's reading ability was that of a year 3 or 4 student, and the class was working at year 5 or 6 level. D was put in a group of good readers and when he struggled with a word, the other students tried to say the words for him to speed him up. G knew that they should not do that, and he stamped it out by explaining to the other students that D needed to say the words so that he would learn the words. G reflected that working with D in class was a painful process because he could be jumping out of his skin in the morning session, and half asleep in the middle session, moaning that he was really tired although he did not take medication at school. D never had two sessions in a row that were the same. G stated that although he loved D dearly not knowing how he would be from one session to the next made him want to scream.

Specific description G b/4

G worked with a year 6 student who was taken out of the special education unit maths group and put in to a classroom maths group. It was a year 5 group so that the work was not too hard for him. G stated that L complained that he could

not do the work. G reflected that L wanted the work done for him because he was lazy. G stated that L saw an orange sheet that G used as a notepad, in G's pocket. L thought that it was an actual orange behaviour slip. G told L that if he did not do his work that G would write his name on the list. G stated that from then on, all he had to do was pull out the orange piece of paper and L freaked out and got his work done in record time. G stated that after he had to write out an orange behaviour sheet for L two days in a row, L was sent back to the SEU. G considered that he was punished so severely because he got orange slips daily from his teacher, up to two or three a day. L would not do what he was told. L's parents came up to the school and G spoke to the father. G knew that L was harassing another boy in the maths group who was already being bullied at home by his big brother. This boy told G that L told him that he was dumb and copied his work. But L told his parents that he was the one being bullied. G confronted L with his bullying behaviour and lying about it, and with evidence of his cheating. When the boys were split up and G worked one-on-one with L, his work was completed, but when they were put together on the verandah so that G could work with the two of them away from the larger group of twenty students, L continued to bully the other boy. G stated that this showed that L did know how to do the year 5 maths work but that he preferred to play the dunce card and make excuses about his work. Eventually L was taken out of G's maths group and returned to the SEU group. G reflected that L was frustrated and hated going back. G stated that L needed the severe punishment to show him that his excuses for not doing his work and his bullying behaviour would not be accepted. But G hoped that L would come back into his maths group.

Specific descriptions for eighth participant H

Specific description H a/1

H worked with M a student who arrived at the school unexpectedly to begin year 1. M's mother stated that M had not spoken for about three years. M had not been to kindergarten or preschool. H stated that this meant that he displayed limited communication and social skills, and was not used to sitting still in a group of peers. M had an older and a younger sibling. The family lived in a nearby motel. H stated that she was assigned to M for six weeks. H reflected that this was a bit of a shock to her as during her teacher aide time of only a few years she had not actually been assigned to one student full time before. Because H had worked in the class where M was previously, H was asked by the principal to take on the assignment for a short period of time. H considered that she could handle the assignment for the six weeks. H was with M full time for five days a week, except for the lunch period when H had a break from M, but still did her normal rostered lunch time duties. H stated that one incident with M particularly stood out for her. The school had an environmental education program and twice a week every class worked in the garden to plant, mulch, weed and water. H accompanied M's class to the garden on the other side of the school wearing her joggers as usual. H kept near M to keep an eye on him. M participated with a little group in what they were doing while H stayed close by. Then H observed M moving off in a different direction from where he should have been. H felt concerned about where M was heading. H called out his name and he turned around, looked at her and then ran off very quickly. H was at the other end of the oval at the other end of the school, an area isolated from the rest of the school, so she ran after M. Another teacher was on the oval

taking Friday afternoon sport and saw H chasing M at full bore. H stated that this teacher thought about backing her up, but before he could, H caught up with M after about 100 metres and grabbed him by the scruff of the neck. H told M that he was not allowed to run away. H stated that when the teacher reached them he expressed surprise that she had been able to catch M. H stated that was the first time that M had actually run away from them. He had wandered before but she was able to get him back quickly. After this incident she was very aware that there was a danger that he might run off quickly. H stated that she and M's teacher had a discussion about how to handle this situation because they wanted to make sure that M understood that running away was not acceptable. H stated that she and the teacher planned that H would hold M's hand for a length of time because he did not like being close to anybody. They told M that H was going to hold his hand for a while because he was not allowed to run away. Over a period of a day H sat him down and held his hand and M glared at her. H reflected that this showed that he did not like it. But H reflected that they had to be strict with M to make sure he knew that running away was not acceptable behaviour. The next day H told M if he wanted her to stop holding his hand, he was not to run away. H reflected that M did not run away after that because he did not want her to hold his hand. H considered that this was a successful outcome for M in terms of his safety.

Specific description H a/2

H worked full time with M a student in year 1 who had communication and behavioural problems. M was supposed to get off the play equipment and come into class when the bell rang. At times M would not do that, but hid in the tunnel so that he could continue playing. H stated that when she and the teacher

became aware of this behaviour, they had a discussion with the principal. As a result, M was confined to the verandah for play time, and was not allowed to play. H stated that they used the verandah strategy for a couple of playtimes, reminding M that if he did not come back to class when the bell rang, he would be playing on the verandah rather than on the play equipment. H stated that they had to use the strategy a couple of times before M realized that he preferred to play on the play equipment rather than on the verandah, but in the end H reflected that the strategy was successful.

Specific description H a/3

During M's first year at school H was assigned to work with M full time, one-on-one. H reflected that floor time activities were a large part of year 1. H stated that M did not want to participate in the floor based activities. Forcing him onto the floor did not work. He lay on the floor, he did not sit up straight, and he got under the desk. H tried to get him out but he did not move. The teacher sent M to the principal but this strategy did not work either. H stated that the teacher tolerated M's non-compliant behaviour for a while because they were just trying to assess M's reactions to strategies. (M had arrived at the school to begin year 1 with no previous experience of kindergarten or preschool.) H stated that eventually the teacher got quite a few colouring and activity books for M, and H bought some herself. M was quite happy to sit and do jigsaw puzzles or mazes. H noticed that M could actually write the alphabet very well, but that he seemed to have no idea what the letters meant. M sat there quietly and copied letters and copied pages of the book. H began placing pages from the other students' workbooks into M's activity book. H sat with M and he did some of the work on the page. H stated that each week M did a bit more of the work. He began to

respond to H's questions using 'yes' or 'no' answers. H reflected that M was very good at 'no'. H stated that eventually M settled down and worked on many of the class based activities.

Specific description H a/4

H worked with B a year 7 student who had learning difficulties. H stated that B had not been ascertained because the system had not found a 'box' or a label that applied to his situation. B worked at a grade 2 level academically, and was unable to distinguish numbers or do simple addition. H stated that B seemed to have a short memory because he could not remember what she had shown him from one day to the next. B's support was not funded, but the school provided support for him which H reflected was questioned in terms of the allocation of her time. H stated that B's teachers concentrated on teaching B life skills such as money, time and basic arithmetic with a calculator. H sat with B and did the calculator work. H stated that the teachers tried to modify the year 7 program a fair bit for B and for another girl S who had trouble keeping up with year 7 work. H worked with B and S in a little group. She also worked with them on a modified program based on the classroom health and fitness theme. Together they prepared for a 'slurpie' (fruit drinks with crushed ice) day for the class. B and S sourced the recipes on the internet and in a recipe book, worked out how much milk, juice and fruit to buy. H helped them to calculate how much of each ingredient they needed for the slurpies and for the fruit kebabs in order to provide for the whole class. The learning support teacher took the students to the shop and bought the ingredients. The students needed to know the prices of the ingredients so that they could work out how much to charge each child in the class for the slurpies and the kebabs. In order to do this, and after the

students had calculated how much milk etc. they needed, H entered the ingredients on an Excel spreadsheet, and showed them how it could calculate the cost for them. The students had already worked out the number of punnets of strawberries or bananas that they needed and H showed them how the spreadsheet calculated the total cost. H stated that she instigated using the spreadsheet because she saw the value in putting it all up on a spreadsheet for the students to have at the ready, rather than having them work it out each time with a piece of paper and a calculator. Then H assisted B and S to actually make the slurpies. They poured in the milk, put the strawberries and the bananas in, whizzed it up in the blender, poured them and then sold them to the students. H reflected that B and S enjoyed this experience. H stated that the class also responded well. H reflected that that was part of the aim of this process because the class peers knew that B and S could not do exactly the same as they did, but saw that they were still able to participate successfully. H observed the smiles on the faces of B and S. S thanked H for helping her and she recalled S's beaming face when she was making the slurpies and kebabs. H reflected that it was so nice to see that, and to hear thank you. H stated that the teachers thanked her too, which was really good. H reflected that it was a joint effort between her and the learning support teacher - a team effort. H reflected that B and S felt as though someone had taken notice of them and helped them in a way that allowed them to achieve success in front of their peers. She felt that although students who need help often resist and want to do it themselves, B and S realized that accepting help had allowed them to achieve success in a way that was enjoyable and gratifying. H reflected that this was a good program and that they had a great time.

Specific description H b/1

H worked with a vision-impaired student T. (H had worked with T for three years). H reflected that some days T would act as if he did not want to work. H worked with T and three other students who struggled in the same areas as he did. H stated that she took the group outside or sat at a table on the side of the classroom depending on what the class was doing. H stated that if the students in her group needed to concentrate on an activity she took them outside so they were not distracted by the other members of the class. H reflected that a different environment sometimes made the learning situation better. Outside in the fresh air could be better for the group, or it could be party time. One time, H set up a game outside the classroom with the group and T did silly things like reading the wrong word on the card, and using words that were not appropriate for the game. One of the other students was silly too. H gave them a warning that they would have to return to the class and do less fun things like writing if they did not want to participate or if they were naughty. T and the other student indicated that they understood. H stated that T was silly again. T put on a little show for his audience. He made silly noises and silly names. He got off his seat and wandered around. H reflected that T gave the impression that he was master of the show. H ignored T at first and his behaviour became worse. She told T that if he played up again he would go back to the classroom. T's behaviour deteriorated again. This second time H sent him back to the class. H stated that the teacher understood why she had sent T back because she had reported to this teacher previously. The teacher told T that he would not be able to work in a group situation with H the next day. T was upset. H reflected that T knew the boundaries with her but thought he would test them. H considered that T learned

something from the fact that his stepping over her boundaries did not work. H reflected that the unsuccessful part for her was having to send T back to class because the idea was for him to work in a small group. H tried to ignore T's behaviour, and when that did not work she sent him back to class. H had hoped that T knew her well enough that he understood that she would not tolerate that sort of behaviour. H felt disappointed for T because he knew that neither she nor the teacher would tolerate it, but he still tried it on. H expected that T would figure it out eventually. But H noted that every day with T was different. T's behaviour was erratic and therefore unpredictable from one day to the next. H stated that this presented her with an ongoing problem.

Specific Descriptions of learning about supporting students for experience c

Specific descriptions for first participant A

Specific description A c/1

A learned about how to support a student with Down syndrome from her past experience of working with another child with Down syndrome, who was much more severely affected. A reflected that the mother of the past student had high expectations of what educators could do for her child. The mother of A's past student worked in the association and gave A material to read. A reflected that the mother was very supportive and made aids. A stated that she learnt from the mother about repetition and consistency. A met with another teacher aide to devise a teaching plan for these two students (with Down syndrome) for the following week. A remembered that in the past the teachers would simply hand the two students over to the teacher aides. They had little help from the LST at that time. A reflected that the teacher aides used to joke that they could have

played with the two students in the sandpit every day because no-one ever questioned them about what they were doing with the students.

Specific description A c/2

A asked the teachers why something was happening. A consulted with the learning support teacher (LST) when problems arose in relation to teachers or students, when something was not working. A reflected that the LST dealt with problems well. A met with the LST and other teacher aides weekly to discuss issues with students and how they were interacting with teachers e.g. if teachers were not allowing them to carry out their assigned tasks. The LST also provided educational materials for A and the other teacher aides. A reflected that the LST read a lot and attended a lot of courses, was extremely knowledgeable, and provided input and learning opportunities. The LST also applied for funding for the teacher aides to attend in-services and professional development days such as SPELD[6]. A reflected that the LST has provided a great deal of support and experience for her to learn.

Specific description A c/3

A completed the Certificate III in Education Support. A used the techniques and strategies she learned in the course with student K in her literacy and numeracy program. A reflected that K has benefitted in her reading ability from A's learning, although K still does not have the comprehension.

[6] A charitable, non-profit association of parents and professionals dedicated to helping children and adults with Specific Learning Difficulties/Disabilities.

Specific descriptions for second participant B

Specific description B c/1

B learned about how to support students from on-the-job experiences. B learned from the LST who B felt trained the teacher aides pretty well. The LST organised specialists to come to the school and talk to B and show her what to do. B reflected that after the training what she did was really up to her.

Specific description B c/2

B attended IEP meetings and gained an insight into what the kids were like at home. She listened to the parents and spoke with them. B gained information about what worked for the parents in terms of behaviour and motivating the student..

Specific description B c/3

B gained accreditation through the requirements of the Recognition of Prior Learning process. B analysed her work with the students and handed in the information for feedback. B had to provide more information. B stated that through the process she gained an understanding that what she was doing with her students was correct.

Specific description B c/4

B helped in the classroom as a mother and was asked to help a student who was having difficulties with his sounds. B realized that she quite enjoyed working with the students who were having difficulties and that the students reacted to her in a positive way. But while B has attended inservice courses on ASD and Autism organised through her employers she had not received any inservice

training on social emotional issues with students per se, and therefore relied on her own experiences working with other students and as a parent.

Specific descriptions for third participant C

Specific description C c/1

C watched the learning support teacher and teachers when they gave lessons to learn about supporting students with learning. C copied the teachers' approaches and methods when she worked one-on-one with students.

Specific description C c/2

C attended a one day inservice on supporting students with Autism. C attended with the classroom teacher. The teacher stated that she was unaware that Autism could not be cured. C reflected that what she learned was useful when she and the teacher shared the learning experience.

Specific description C c/3

C stated that the formal Certificate III in Education Support course that she completed was not very useful. C reflected that the most useful thing she gained from the course was improved confidence in using the Internet. But C was unable to use Internet skills with her students who could not read.

Specific description C c/4

C learned about working with students from the visiting speech pathologist. C worked on a special speech program with some children who were ascertained SLI. The speech pathologist came to the school, demonstrated the lesson with the child, and C watched. C stated that she then knew exactly what she wanted to do. C stated that the speech pathologist was readily available with feedback, and came back to see how the students were going on the program. The speech

pathologist took the student through the program again, and C was able to see if she was doing the wrong thing, or if she needed a refresher course. C reflected that this way of working with the visiting speech pathologist was a successful learning experience.

Specific description C c/5

C learned from other teacher aides who had worked with the students in the lower grades when she began working with students as they entered year 4. C reflected that teacher aides from the lower school had useful ideas about what had worked previously for students. But C felt that the expectations of teachers were different in the upper school. C cited the example of a student with Autism girl who seemed to cope in the lower grades, but was still working at year 3 level in year 6. C reflected that the gap between the students just seemed to get wider as the students entered higher grades. C felt that there was little that was useful for the teacher aides to hand on to the next teacher aide, because teachers' expectations of the students were different in the upper school. C reflected that her work with the student could benefit from the knowledge passed on by the previous teacher aide when the students were on an independent program.

Specific description C c/6

C worked as a parent helper in her children's schools and recalled how there was one student who came to her reading group who was not as fluent at reading the assigned text as others in the group. When the student hesitated, the other students called out the word. The student became restless when the rest of the group was reading. C asked the other students to wait, not to call out, and to

give him the chance to work out the word for himself. F reflected that the student just needed time. Gradually he gained more confidence in reading in front of others.

Specific descriptions for fourth participant D

Specific description D c/1

D learned about supporting students' needs from the formal Certificate III in Education Support. D did the course through an agency accredited by Education Queensland. D did not qualify for funding from the school, so she paid for the course herself. D reflected that this might be why she was motivated to participate fully in the course. Part of the course required D to speak to parents of children with disabilities. D learned from the parents about their experiences of the medical system and feelings of inadequacy before their children even started school. D did case studies of the students with disabilities with whom she worked. The course required D to approach the teacher with suggestions of activities that she wanted to undertake with the students. D reflected that she found this daunting, but it worked out well. The teacher now trusts D more to prepare materials for the students with whom she works because the teacher has been exposed to the course process, and has seen the materials that D has acquired from the disability course. D also reflected that undertaking the diversity units in the course gave her the opportunity for experiences she otherwise would not have had. D interviewed three migrants about their experiences of coming to Australia and the difficulties that they faced. D found this really interesting and informative.

Specific description D c/2

D stated that she used the Internet to research particular medical disabilities to find out if there was anything more that she could do to better support the students. D stated that did not get much detailed information about the students with whom she worked at school and had to rely on her own initiative. She cited the example of J who had gastric reflux problems and was PEG fed milk through a tube in his stomach. J came back to school after the holidays and was not settled. D contacted his mum and found out from his mum over coffee, that he was moving house. D found a website which outlined strategies to use with children who were moving house. She used some of the strategies with J. D also sensed that J had another concern about moving house. She talked to J and discovered that he was worried about leaving his grandma. D talked with J's parents and they worked out a way to address J's worries about his grandma. D reflected that in this way she learned about the student's needs through establishing communication with the parents. She also learned by paying attention to the child's changing moods and behaviours when he was with her at school.

Specific descriptions for fifth participant E

Specific description E c/1

E attended an IEP meeting but was not sure if she was supposed to be involved in the IEP. E noted that the IEP was written in dot points e.g. here do this, with no description of the skills and knowledge required to enact the program. E reflected that teacher aides and parents could meet at IEP meetings and the parents could get to know the person with their child. E met C's mum when she

invited her over for coffee, to talk about some trouble that C was having when she first started.

Specific description E c/2

E reflected that it was it was important for her to have on the job training with her student. E learned about working with C on her speech problems by watching a speech therapist do a practical exercise with the student. E worked out how to adapt what she had learned from the speech therapist to C's particular behaviours and individual needs on any given day. E used insistence and waiting strategies to encourage C to complete tasks.

Specific description E c/3

In her previous working life, E started a program for young disabled adults for a local council. Also, when E was at university, she undertook recreation officer work with adult students training them in social skills. E also had a personal background with disabilities because both her parents were psychiatric nurses and her mother had a disability. E used to go into work with her mother (similar to Endeavour Foundation) and therefore was used to having people with Down syndrome around her. She felt as though she was always part of the world of people with disabilities

Specific descriptions for sixth participant F

Specific description F c/1

F stated that she learned a lot from in-services because she did them with other teacher aides who were doing the job as well. At in-services F talked with other teacher aides about their experiences. F stated that she learned from in-services run at school by people from central office or the learning support teacher. She

has learnt lots of different ways of teaching through in-services, particularly a way of teaching spelling through visualization, which F felt was a great way. F stated that she passed on this spelling method when she did relief work in schools where students were unable to spell. F reflected that the staff were surprised how well the visualization technique worked.

Specific description F c/2

F stated that she learned how to support students emotionally through being a parent. As a parent F felt that she learned to care for kids and that she often became emotionally attached to the students with whom she worked. She tried to be supportive and helped them to gain a positive feeling about themselves. F reflected that she had not been taught how to support students emotionally but had to rely on her own experiences. She had not been taught how to really speak to students and lift their confidence, or how to work with teachers and get the most out of that working relationship for both teacher and teacher aide. F felt that this type of learning would be very beneficial.

Specific description F c/3

F reflected that inservice learning was useful in some ways. F adapted what she had learned at inservice sessions on the job for the particular child's circumstances, because she tried anything to try to get a positive outcome for the child. F learned from an inservice how to help a student to visualise spelling words. F used 'wave' and 'beach' and drew pictures to facilitate learning to spell for her student using visualisation.

Specific descriptions for seventh participant G

Specific description G c/1

G stated that he learned how to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties by using a reward and punishment strategy learned from experience. G learned that when he first started he was very generous and used to hand out stickers too readily. This taught him that the students took advantage of frivolous generosity. G stated that over the three or four years that he has worked as a teacher aide he had learned to set the bar high, and the students who knew him responded by working well to earn a reward. Those who did not know him very well tried to demand a reward for any effort. But G used these opportunities to explain to the students that they needed to do a good job and put in the time. G reflected that he did not think that anything could have prepared him for what he has faced on the front line. G felt that he could learn a lot from books, but he learned much more from the experience of being on the job.

Specific description G c/2

G stated that the teacher aides with whom he worked had been working at the school for at least two years and they were pretty knowledgeable about what happened on the job. G stated that he learned by talking to the other teacher aides about the students, and what they were doing on a daily basis. G reflected that the teacher aides were happy to do this. He talked to teacher aides who had worked with the students previously and asked about individual student's learning and tried to develop understanding of common patterns of behaviour.

Specific descriptions for eighth participant H

Specific description H c/1

H completed the Diversity unit in the Certificate III in Education Support course. H stated that when she first looked at the tasks in the course she wondered if she would find much diversity in a small school. H noted that one of the teachers was born in India, so she decided that she could use her as an example of diversity in the educational environment. However H stated that she was amazed at what she discovered during the course. Even though she had been there for four years, the course made her look around more closely for the diversity that existed in the school environment. H stated that as she walked past the amphitheatre she saw a mum teaching the students how to do a Fijian dance. H also realized while helping the teachers with their computers in the classrooms that there were a lot of parents who came in to help the students to make artefacts from a variety of places e.g. Japanese shibori or tie-dying, and batik from Indonesia. H realized that the students learn dances from other countries and do lots of research on other cultures as well. H reflected that when she sat down to write up the task she realized that she had no trouble finding diversity in the school environment. She observed how people came and shared their ideas and the students put on a craft show for their parents. The students then had the opportunity to answer their parent's questions about the crafts, how they did them and where they came from. The students also did three dances. H reflected that it was eye-opening for her to do this sort of thing in her studies, because it reminded her to be more aware of the diversity in the school environment.

Specific description H c/2

H worked with a group of students who struggled with maths. She was assigned to help them with problem solving. H stated that she learned how to help them from a poster in the classroom which indicated a variety of different strategies to use such as guess and check or make a graph. H stated that she has learned how to help with maths from her own knowledge and from the charts and other things available in the classroom. H has not had any inservice on maths. H supposed that it was presumed by the teachers that she would know how to teach maths. H felt that the teachers presumed that since she was an adult and because it was year 4 or 5 work that the students were learning, and then she knew how to teach the maths concepts and processes. H reflected that the teachers did not realize that what she learnt at school was very different from what is taught now. H stated that even things like addition and subtraction, multiplication and division were completely different. H used the example of 'chunking' which was a big challenge for her at one stage. H stated that she had never heard of the term, so she had to learn about it by working with the students over the years. H stated that when the teacher asked her to work on a page with the students she found the page in the maths book and an example of the concept. She worked with the students from that. H expressed her frustration about learning about maths concepts and processes on the job while simultaneously trying to help students who were struggling with maths anyway. H stated that she also was assigned to work with students in the Support-a-Reader program without any inservice. (Support-a -Reader is a program designed to help students who have learning difficulties with reading.) H

reflected that she learned about how to do that through on-the-job experience as well.

Specific description H c/3

H stated in order to know what to do with a particular student or group of students she talked to the teacher after every session, because she did not work with the students every day. H worked with the two students in year 7 once a week and the learning support teacher worked with them the next day. So because they worked in tandem H informed the LST about what she had done in the time she was allocated so they did not double up. H stated that because she worked in a small school community where they saw each other every day, communication between teachers and staff was easy. She understood that they did not formally write down what they did with the students. H stated that anyway she preferred to talk to the teachers so that they related to the information better. She spoke to the learning support teacher in the corridor and told her what she did with the students. The LST then told H what she needed to do with the students the next week.

Specific description H c/4

H stated that she had a passion for working with children based on her experience of working with her own children and working as a parent volunteer at her children's primary school. H's son (assessed as having auditory processing difficulties in year 3) had difficulty keeping up with his peers on the playground equipment and when kicking a ball. The other students tended to ostracise him. H found out that her son was experiencing problems socialising with his peers from teachers and from her son. One time H's son came home from school upset. When H asked him what was upsetting him he stated that the

other students would not let him play and they did not want him to play. So H took her children to the park and played football with them regularly and, even though her son did not have much sporting ability, he learned about the game. H also played cricket and soccer with her children in the park and invited the neighbourhood children to join in the games. H deliberately provided her son with opportunities to interact with children other than those at school so that he could learn social skills in a different environment. H stated that, although it was hard to measure, this strategy did help him to interact more confidently.

H saw the same difficulties with students at school where she now works and she used a similar strategy when she was on playground duty. H observed a boy who was having difficulty because his abilities did not seem to match those of his peers. H interacted with him suggesting a person to play with and a game to play. H grabbed a ball and kicked it with him so that he was not sitting on his own doing nothing. H reflected that whatever year students are in, and whatever their disability or difficulty, encouraging that type of interaction can help their socialisation skills and self confidence.

Summary

This section of the chapter presented findings from the transcriptions of the digitally recorded interviews of eight teacher aides in the form of specific descriptions of their experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties and learning about support. The specific descriptions represent consistent statements of each of the experiences of the teacher aides.

Tentative themes emerged from these specific experiences using Giorgi's (1985a) Steps 1 to 4a. The researcher identified as essential themes those

tentative themes that were experienced by each of the participants at least once. Tables 2 & 3 in Appendix D reflect the method used in validating the themes as essential which was achieved by cross checking the essential themes against the specific descriptions of the experiences of all of the participants. For example participant A must have experienced that theme once amongst all of her other experiences. For the supporting theme "Support involves emotional investment and responsiveness to students' welfare" (S1), participants A to H must have experienced it at least once and this is evident when participant A experienced it in A a/2 and Participant B experienced that theme in B a/1. (See Table 2 in Appendix D). Descriptions of experiences that did not coincide with essential themes were discarded because they did not fit in with the criteria set by the researcher. The essential themes represent the general statements of experiences.

The next section turns to the general descriptions that resulted from the five essential themes for supporting students based on the 39 specific descriptions and the three essential themes for learning about support, based on the 27 specific descriptions of learning about support.

General Descriptions – supporting students

Essential Themes – Supporting students

- **S1** Support involves emotional investment and responsiveness towards students' personal welfare.
- **S2** Supporting students with learning involves building a personal rapport and working relationship with them in order to understand their individual learning needs and behaviours.

- **S3** Supporting students effectively requires regular consultation and planning with all members of the support team including parents, principals and teacher aides.
- **S4** Supporting students sometimes requires improvisation within individual education programs to meet individual needs and circumstances.
- **S5** Supporting students means taking responsibility for their learning and behaviour.

The general structured descriptions of these five themes and their descriptions are provided below. These general descriptions were written based on the specific descriptions of each participant's experience, and this is Step four, part two of Giorgi's (1985a) research methodology.

S1 Support involves emotional investment and responsiveness towards students' personal welfare.

For teacher aides supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties involves their emotions. In getting to know the students to whom they are assigned, teacher aides become very aware of their students' feelings. They refer to the student as 'my student.' They are aware of the student's diagnosed disability or appraised learning difficulty, but they see the individual child, not the label. If they perceive that their student is experiencing a sense of achievement at learning tasks they experience a feeling of satisfaction and achievement too. Teacher aides recognise that feelings of success and achievement for the students increase their confidence and self-esteem. Teacher aides use this awareness of positive feelings in the students to encourage them to continue striving in their learning. They also feel that supporting students in

learning involves enjoying the learning process with them, and engaging them through their interests and talents.

Teacher aides perceive that students often experience feelings of frustration with the level or complexity of learning tasks. They feel that their students suffer when support structures do not meet their needs. When this happens teacher aides perceive that the students experience a sense of failure when they fail to achieve the goals set for them in their individual programs, and they want to give up. This often results in negative behaviours. Teacher aides feel a sense of frustration and failure too. Teacher aides empathise with their students. This leads them to try to intervene with other members of the support team to try to fix the problem and alleviate what they perceive as the students' suffering. They want to improve the situation for their students. However they often feel frustrated by their inability to change learning programs. Apart from minor changes within the individual learning sessions, teacher aides can feel powerless to change the situation for their students especially when they are not regular attendees at Individual Education Program (IEP) planning or review meetings, or their opinions are overlooked. They worry about approaching teachers and parents directly, and sense that this is not their place. However they often have the courage to do this because their overriding concerns are for the physical and emotional welfare of their students, as they try to maintain a positive learning environment for them. Their concern for their students' happiness and well being means that sometimes teacher aides get caught in the middle between the expectations of parents for their children and the expectations of the teachers, or the school administration team. They do not want to be the teacher but sometimes feel like they are cast in this role, and other times excluded from it.

Their support roles therefore place huge demands in time and personal energy on the teacher aides. This is especially so for teacher aides who support students with moderate to severe physical or behavioural needs. They are often assigned to these students for many hours each day including lunch time. They recognise that their students need to develop social skills as they mature so that they can learn to live in the wider community. They also recognise that their students need to develop independent living and coping skills. However teacher aides feel that timetabling structures and one-on-one behaviour monitoring duties often mitigate against successful outcomes in the development of social skills and independent coping strategies for their students. Teacher aides wonder and worry about how their students will cope in the future, but are well aware of the need for their one-on-one learning support role to be gradually withdrawn, or reconstituted as the students move from the lower, through middle and upper grades. They are concerned that their students suffer insecurity when teachers across the school in lower, middle and upper grades have such different expectations about their roles, some assigning them to one-on-one support of the students and others utilising them as general classroom support persons. They worry about their students' welfare in the future, and where possible continue to inquire about them after they leave the school.

S2 Supporting students with learning involves building a personal rapport and working relationship with them in order to understand their individual learning needs and behaviours.

Teacher aides support students with disabilities and learning difficulties by developing a very good understanding of their students' individual personalities and their learning needs and abilities. They gain this understanding from a

working relationship with their students often over a number of years, sometimes over the seven years that the students spend in the primary school. The one-on-one closeness of these relationships in the early years allows teacher aides to be with the students, listen to them closely and develop an understanding of their individual personalities and their individual learning needs and abilities. For the most part teacher aides try to develop a good rapport with their students so that they can more readily attune to the feelings of the students and the behaviours that result from these feelings. Teacher aides recognise that students' positive demeanours and behaviours e.g. happiness, excitement, comfort, and engagement in set tasks indicate feelings of achievement which bring the students increased confidence and self-esteem. This happens when the individual learning program suits their individual learning styles and extends their learning in ways that meet their individual needs. Yet negative demeanour and behaviours indicated by feelings of frustration, misunderstanding, anger, and non-compliance indicate to the teacher aides that the learning program does not suit their students' learning style or levels and therefore does not meet their individual needs.

Teacher aides observe that withdrawal and one-on-one support programs are beneficial for students' learning outcomes especially in the early years when the student is unable to cope with the classroom program. However providing support relies on the student accepting help. Teacher aides can offer support, but if the student does not accept the offer, no rapport or relationship can develop between the student and the teacher aide, and little learning progress can be made. Similarly if the student is allocated a different teacher aide too regularly then a successful working relationship with a teacher aide is less likely to

develop, and the quality of support for the student suffers. The quality of support for the individual student also suffers when teachers utilize teacher aides to withdraw a group of students who all have learning difficulties, and negative behaviours such as bullying result.

For students with physical disabilities who require toileting or feeding, or who have moderate to severe intellectual impairment, teacher aides support students' learning in withdrawal situations where they can monitor and address the students' physical and intellectual needs without causing the students embarrassment or discomfort in front of their peers. But they also recognise from close monitoring of the students' demeanour and behaviour that students begin to resent being treated differently from their classroom peers as they mature into the upper grades. In the upper grades students prefer to work in class with their peers. This can cause problems in establishing relationships with students if the classroom teacher still requires the teacher aides to work exclusively with the student.

S3 Supporting students effectively requires regular consultation and planning with all members of the support team including parents, principals and teacher aides.

Teacher aides rely on the information about students that they are given by the learning support teacher when they are assigned to support individual students with personal care needs and individual education programs. When teacher aides are newly employed in a school they feel as if they have to rely on their own life experiences e.g. being parents, knowledge about disabilities and understanding about learning from their own background to cope with the demands of their roles. In time this experiential knowledge helps them to build

relationships with their students, and support the students with learning tasks. Teacher aides often feel as if they are floundering until they can establish effective communication channels with other key support personnel within the school environment. They want to be better informed about students' individual needs and about how to address them. They rely heavily on effective communication with the learning support teacher (LST), and look to the LST for guidance when problems arise with teachers, with individual learning programs, or with the students themselves.

They also want to establish effective communication with classroom teachers about the students' learning programs – their aims and content. Teacher aides realise that a consistent approach to learning tasks and a shared understanding of the student's needs are important if the support they provide is to be effective in helping the students to engage with the curriculum and to develop positive relationships with peers.

Although other teacher aides who have worked with the students can provide useful information about the students' learning needs and behaviours, this information becomes less useful as the students and/or the teacher aides move from one class level to another. Teacher aides note that the expectations of teachers differ between the lower, middle and upper grades, and even between teachers at the same grade level, in relation to how the student will be included in classroom learning activities, and therefore how teacher aides will support them. Because teacher aides are rarely part of the planning sessions for the student's individual education program they have to rely on establishing effective communication with classroom teachers to gain an understanding of

their role with the student in that particular classroom setting. Time constraints and lack of opportunities to meet with teachers mitigate against this happening, as does the reluctance on the part of some teachers to view teacher aides as an integral part of the support team. When effective and respectful communication patterns are established and maintained between teachers and teacher aides in relation to demonstrating tasks, recording learning and behavioural outcomes, progress in learning tasks and positive behavioural outcomes for the students are achieved.

A major source of frustration for teacher aides is timetabling. For them providing effective support relies on workable timetabling, because they realise that their assigned students need dependable routines to feel secure with them especially in the withdrawal context. This means sufficient time allocation for withdrawal sessions. It takes more than half an hour to accompany the student to the withdrawal area, settle him or her down, and then initiate, work through and complete a learning task. Even when supporting students in the classroom, or on rotation tasks, working with a student with a disability or learning difficulty requires the allocation of more time for the task than is often allowed in the rotation. This leads to frustration for the teacher aides, who often feel as though they have had to help too much just to get the task done so that the student at least leaves with a sense of achievement or is not embarrassed in front of peers. Even when they carefully document how exactly they had to help, they are not sure that the teacher understands their dilemma when there is insufficient time or opportunities to communicate with him or her. This is compounded if teacher aides are not part of the IEP process, or the records that they have carefully kept on the students are not referred to by the classroom teachers in these meetings.

Teacher aides sometimes feel as though the teachers really do not care what they do with the students so long as they keep them occupied and out of trouble. Sometimes teacher aides feel as though their lack of acknowledgement in reviewing support programs for the students, results in ineffective support structures being maintained when their time and energy could be more effectively utilised elsewhere.

Teacher aides feel that one-on-one withdrawal programs can help their students to achieve in learning tasks. However if their students are supported in these particular learning programs by multiple support personnel e.g. when different teacher aides or the LST support the student on a rotational basis, then teacher aides note that using a set program in a consistent way provides the best learning outcomes for the students. This requires regular communication and consultation with the LST and other teacher aides. In relation to classroom teachers, teacher aides are concerned that often when they arrive at the classroom door they are asked by classroom teachers to withdraw the student to work one-on-one on a particular learning task without sufficient direction from the teacher. Examples include maths processes e.g. ‘chunking’ or a language concept such as ‘onomatopoeia’. The teacher aides feel as if they are need more demonstration of the process, or information about the concept especially before they can help a student who already has learning or behavioural issues to deal with. Teacher aides devise strategies such as asking the teacher for examples or taking the text book with them when available. They consider that these ad hoc strategies and intermittent consultation with teachers are not in the best interests of their students.

When they see that their students are unhappy or frustrated within their individual programs, and there are limited opportunities or encouragement to discuss this with classroom teachers, teacher aides seek help from whatever source they can identify. Although they perceive that they are not supposed to communicate directly with parents, in the case of students with severe physical disabilities, teacher aides will approach parents directly for information. Teacher aides find that parents are very willing to help, and are a source of current information about the students' home life and idiosyncratic behaviours that they can utilise to support the students' day-to-day engagement with learning and socialising. Teacher aides also appreciate information that the parents can supply about students' physical disabilities and specific treatments for them such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, dietary requirements. Teacher aides share this information with the LST. For teacher aides participation in IEP review meetings gives them an opportunity to learn from parents and education professionals about the students' disabilities, the associated behaviours and learning needs. When they are not included in these meetings they feel as if they are not part of the team, and that effective support for the student suffers as a result because they have to rely on brief notes, information from parents, or anecdotal information about what to do with a student who may have a moderate or severe physical or intellectual disability. They also feel that regular and comprehensive reviews of IEPs are necessary to address issues about behaviour and learning that they have noticed in their close working relationship with the students.

When teacher aides perceive that learning programs are not achieving desired results, or that the student is not engaging with the learning tasks, or that the

student's behaviour is deteriorating, they feel obligated to bring this to the attention of the learning support teacher or the guidance officer, and in some cases the school administration team. This is especially important when the students do not have an IEP and regular review process, but have been identified as experiencing learning difficulties, and the teacher aides have been assigned to these students to support their learning. However they feel frustrated when their approaches are not taken seriously. They feel that developing understanding and planning for particular behaviour strategies for their students need to be consistent and predictable across the whole school community, and that their support role is compromised if the rest of the staff is ignorant of these strategies. Because teacher aides are aware of the unpredictable nature of the behaviour patterns of students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and when there appears to be no whole school approach to individualised behaviour management for their students, they feel as though they have to watch the students all of the time even during lunch times to keep them from getting into trouble, and compromising the behavioural goals and associated confidence and self-esteem that have already been achieved by their students. They sometimes feel the same about supporting their students within the classroom context. Especially when behaviour issues emerge in classroom contexts, teacher aides will sit and listen carefully to their students' protests and explanations, and want to be involved in working through the problems. It seems to them that they are the ones who have this close relationship and subsequent intimate understanding of the students' behavioural patterns and motivations, often because they spend so much time with their students. It is therefore frustrating to them when there

are limited opportunities to share this understanding with the support team, apart from anecdotally.

S4 Supporting students sometimes requires improvisation within individual education programs to meet individual needs and circumstances.

Teacher aides work closely with the students to whom they are assigned. Teacher aides feel that through this close working relationship they can develop a personal rapport with the students – a connection which enables them to gain insights into the students' individual personalities. Teacher aides develop an understanding of their students' behaviours and their positive and negative responses to learning tasks. While following any directions that they are given by learning support teachers and classroom teachers, teacher aides are often on their own when working with the students. Especially when teacher aides are with a student who has physical disabilities, they often have to use their own initiative to work out exactly how they will meet these needs in ways that protect the students' privacy and maintain their dignity e.g. in relation to toileting, and feeding. In one-on-one withdrawal situations teacher aides try various strategies to keep the students focussed on tasks e.g. offering incentives, setting up reward structures. The same improvisation often occurs during learning tasks when teacher aides perceive that the student just needs a little more encouragement or stimulation than the set tasks provides i.e. demonstration or visual or auditory prompts. When teacher aides perceive changes in behaviour patterns with their students they look for the underlying causes and attempt to address these by seeking advice from parents or specialists e.g. speech therapists, and by adapting learning tasks. However if the behaviour becomes increasingly negative, teacher aides feel that it is their

responsibility to bring this to the attention of the learning support teachers and the school administration. Teacher aides are encouraged when their adaptations and intervention efforts are appreciated. Often teacher aides become frustrated if they perceive that their observations of the students' need for different approaches to learning and behaviour are not taken seriously.

S5 Supporting students means taking responsibility for their learning and behaviour.

For teacher aides supporting students involves taking responsibility for their learning. This does not mean that they want to assume the role of teacher, but when they are with their student in withdrawal situations, they are often cast in this role by the expectations of teachers and administration. What teacher aides try to do is to create a secure learning environment for the students so that they can have the confidence to apply themselves to the learning tasks that have been set by the teacher and/or learning support teacher. They are conscious of the students' feelings about being withdrawn from class by them. They monitor these feelings and realise that as students mature they are less comfortable with being treated differently in the learning environment i.e. having teacher aides sitting with them or being withdrawn on their own. Teacher aides take responsibility for the learning outcomes that do or do not occur when they are with the students. They try to motivate the students and enjoy learning experiences with their students that respond to their interests. When possible they report on the students' learning outcomes to the teacher or learning support teacher. They are concerned that often this is achieved anecdotally, and worry that the students' learning may be adversely affected when their observations or records of work are not taken seriously.

Teacher aides also take responsibility for the student's behaviour. Because they work closely with the students they notice behavioural changes. They perceive that positive learning experiences for the students result in positive demeanours and behaviours. However when behaviour deteriorates they try to find out why this is happening. They take it upon themselves to investigate the causes of the behaviours and approach other members of the support team and even parents for information and guidance. Teacher aides realise that students with disabilities and learning difficulties do not always display predictable behaviours. They are aware of the need to understand the individual child's reactions to situations and contexts. They assume the responsibility for monitoring the students' behaviours when they are alone with the students, or when they withdraw the students in a group situation. They are often with students and their class peers outside the confines of the classroom e.g. in the environmental garden or on excursions. Many teacher aides are also required to support the students through the lunch break. They are very aware of the physical environment where they work with the students, and health and safety issues in these environments. In these situations, teacher aides go to great lengths to ensure the safety of their students. Yet they are aware that the students do not want them to 'hold their hands'; that the idea is for the students to achieve independence socially. Especially when students have moderate to severe physical disabilities e.g. in wheelchairs, are PEG fed, have Down syndrome or visual acuity problems this constant monitoring, encouraging and protecting from harm puts huge demands on the time and personal energy of the teacher aides. When their students have serious behavioural issues e.g. related to Autism or Asperger's Syndrome, or as often happens are not ascertained but

identified by the school as having behavioural issues, teacher aides accept the responsibility of monitoring their behaviours when they are with them in withdrawal situations, in group learning situations, when the students are at play, and even in the classroom. Teacher aides inform the classroom teacher, the learning support teacher or the school administration when their students' behaviour is causing problems for other students. They then try to work with these personnel to address the behavioural issues. This is not always successful because the teacher aides perceive that some of these behavioural issues with their students need a whole school approach to be successful.

General Descriptions – learning about supporting students

Essential themes - Learning about support

- **L1** Learning about supporting students emotionally and socially comes from life experience.
- **L2** Learning about support happens on the job.
- **L3** Consultation and communication with teachers, learning support teachers, parents and health professionals supports learning.

L1 Learning about supporting students emotionally and socially comes from life experience.

For most teacher aides finding work supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in schools follows on from their roles as parents in their local schools. Often the job of supporting individual students is offered to them by the principal when students are enrolled and funding becomes available for supporting those students. Teacher aides begin their role of supporting students relying on the information given to them by the learning support teacher. This information is usually about the students' particular disabilities and their

learning needs. In terms of the emotional and social development of the students, teacher aides rely heavily on the knowledge they have acquired from life experiences e.g. being parents, working with, and watching children develop. There are limited opportunities for teacher aides to undertake professional development that deal specifically with emotional and social skills development, and in relation to their particular students' needs. Especially when they begin working with a newly assigned student with a disability, teacher aides have to rely on the knowledge and skills needed to support students emotionally, and to understand their particular behavioural patterns from previous association with family members who have disabilities. For others past experiences of working with adults with disabilities gives them insights into the emotional and social needs of their students. Therefore for most teacher aides learning about their students' emotional and social development comes from reflection on their personal life experiences.

L2 Learning about support happens on the job.

Teacher aides learn about supporting students on the job. They learn from other staff members including learning support teachers and other teacher aides. They watch the learning support teachers or teachers working with their students and practise what they have learned with their students. When they acquire new skills or knowledge from learning support teachers or specialists, or from in-services with education personnel, teacher aides practise these skills on the job with the students and modify or adapt what they have learned to suit the particular learning needs of their students. Inservice sessions are considered to be of value when what they learn can be readily transferred into the classroom or withdrawal learning contexts. This transferral of learning is successful if

teachers and teacher aides attend the same or similar in-services and therefore develop common understandings of how to meet the needs of the students. It is difficult for teacher aides to apply newly acquired skills and strategies in behaviour management or learning tasks if the classroom teacher has different understanding and expectations about the students' needs and capabilities.

Formal courses for accreditation such as Recognition of Prior Learning are sources of reassurance for the teacher aides and confirm on-the-job learning. Teacher aides find this process beneficial because they can analyse their work with the students and gain new insights. The Certificate III in Education Support provides teacher aides with opportunities to learn about specific disabilities in the disability strand of the course. Teacher aides also appreciate being able to engage with concepts such as diversity. However the courses are completed outside of work hours and on line. For teacher aides this type of learning is only effective when it relates closely to what they are experiencing on the job, and informs their support of the students' learning directly.

L3 Consultation and communication with teachers, learning support teachers, parents and health professionals supports learning about supporting students.

Teacher aides want to learn better ways to support their students as learners and members of society. They need direction and guidance from learning support teachers (LSTs). They rely on learning support teachers to provide them with information, resources and training for their roles with students with disabilities and learning difficulties. When teacher aides encounter problems in their work with students or teachers they go to the learning support teacher for advice and work with the learning support teacher to find effective solutions. Teacher aides appreciate regular opportunities to meet with the learning support teacher to

discuss their work with the students. If they are unable to establish regular communication channels with the learning support teacher they feel isolated and then have to rely on their own judgements and initiative to help the students. They consider that this is not acceptable for the students.

When teacher aides are assigned to support students with physical disabilities, teacher aides find that opportunities to learn from visiting health professionals such as speech therapists are most effective when the health professionals come to the school and demonstrate techniques and strategies while working with their students. Teacher aides also appreciate opportunities to review what they are doing with the health professionals. Learning support teachers also lobby for funding for teacher aides to attend professional development opportunities outside of school with organisations such as SPELD[7] and the Autistic Association. These opportunities to learn are appreciated by teacher aides. However teacher aides find that what they have learned is most useful when the classroom teachers have also attended the same in-services and both teachers and teacher aides are working from similar perspectives with the students. Teacher aides feel as though the professional development has been a waste of time if they are unable to utilise their learning because the teacher is not on the same wavelength.

The Independent Education Program (IEP) process provides opportunities for teacher aides to learn about their students, and their roles with the students. Teacher aides are not part of the initial planning sessions, and have to rely on the learning support teacher and classroom teachers for information about their roles with the individual students. After the IEP has been documented, teacher

[7] SPELD – Specific Learning Difficulties Association

aides are informed of their particular roles, which originate in the IEP, by the learning support teacher. It is often assumed that they have the knowledge of the particular disability or learning difficulty or the curriculum knowledge and skills needed to implement their part of the program. If teacher aides request more training, the learning support teacher has to approach the school administration for funding. Even if the funding is available, appropriate professional development opportunities are not always available. Training for specific tasks is often on an ad hoc basis until the teacher aides can access the required training. Teacher aides then use the informal means available – the internet, parents, watching classroom teachers, other teacher aides, and their own life experiences to find information to guide their work with the students until more formal training is available. This network of consultation and communication is extremely important for teacher aides. Some teacher aides are involved in the IEP review sessions and appreciate this opportunity to discuss their students' progress and problems. They also find the sessions beneficial when they can find out more about the students' home situation, dealing with disabilities, and individual idiosyncrasies from the parents. They can also be part of the discussion about learning and behaviour issues with teachers and learning support teachers. Although they consider that they can offer a lot of insights into the students' learning at these meetings, teacher aides find these sessions a little frustrating and intimidating if their carefully documented records of the students' learning or behaviour issues are not presented to the meeting by the teachers. They then have to talk about their students in front of educational professionals, which is often quite daunting if educational and medical

terminology is being used. However they do see the IEP review meetings as opportunities to go into bat for their students.

Summary

This chapter presented findings of the current study which examined the experiences of teacher aides as they support students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and they learned about supporting these students. The chapter began with a discussion about the teacher aides who participated, their experiences and frequency of data provision. Eight teacher aides participated in this study. The participants included seven female teacher aides and one male teacher aide who worked in primary schools in metropolitan Brisbane. The teacher aides were voluntary participants.

Data was collected via interviews in which the teacher aides were asked to describe experiences of supporting students with disabilities or learning difficulties, and experiences of learning about supporting these students. The experiences described by each of the participants varied in number and in length.

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Giorgi's (1985b) method of data analysis was used to analyse the transcripts. From the transcripts of the interviews 66 experiences were made available for analysis. The researcher began the analysis by reading through the transcripts to get a sense of the whole. The researcher then read the transcripts more closely to identify the transitions in meaning to find meaning units which were phrases or sentences describing the meaning within each experience. The third step involved eliminating redundancies and transforming the meaning units into a

meaningful language to write a specific description of the experience. Tentative themes were identified from each specific description. (See Appendix E for example).

The final stage in the process involved the identification by the researcher of five essential themes about supporting students, and three essential themes about learning about supporting students which were common across all of the teacher aides' experiences. Tentative themes that did not coincide with the essential themes were discarded and not deemed as essential to the experience of teacher aides in supporting students or learning about support. These essential themes were then validated as essential by cross-checking against the specific descriptions (See Tables 2 & 3 Appendix D). The essential themes about supporting students were used to write the general descriptions which represent what it is to be a teacher aide experiencing supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in primary classrooms as they live through that experience. In the same way the essential themes about learning about supporting students that were derived from the specific descriptions and validated as essential were used to write the general descriptions which represent what it is to be a teacher aide experiencing learning about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties as they live through that experience of learning.

The five essential themes of the lived experience of supporting students were:

- **S1** Support involves emotional investment and responsiveness towards students' personal welfare.

- **S2** Supporting students with learning involves building a personal rapport and relationship with them in order to understand their individual needs and behaviours.
- **S3** Supporting students effectively requires regular consultation and planning with all members of the support team including parents, principals and teacher aides.
- **S4** Supporting students sometimes requires improvisation within individual education programs to meet individual needs and circumstances.
- **S5** Supporting students means taking responsibility for their learning and behaviour.

The three essential themes of the lived experience of learning about supporting students were:

- **L1** Learning about supporting students emotionally and socially comes from life experience.
- **L2** Learning about support happens on the job.
- **L3** Consultation and communication with teachers, learning support teachers, parents and health professionals supports learning.

Finally in this chapter, general descriptions of each essential theme were written to represent the experiences of the teacher aides as they support students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and learn about supporting students. The next chapter discusses the findings based on the essential themes and general descriptions.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter examines the findings discussed in the previous chapter in light of the literature and the two research questions,

> What are teacher aides' experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties?
>
> What are teacher aides' experiences of learning about their support role?

There are two parts to this chapter. The first part discusses the findings in relation to the general statements derived from the five essential themes relating to research question 1, and the three essential themes relating to research question 2. The second part of the chapter considers some of the implications arising from the discussion.

Five essential themes were identified from the phenomenological analysis of the teacher aides' experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and three essential themes from the teacher aides' experiences of learning about supporting the students. In February 2008, themes and their general statements were taken back to the teacher aides to check their authenticity. Upon reflection the teacher aides indicated that they were satisfied that the general statements captured their experiences of supporting students and learning about support. Each of these themes is now discussed in terms of sub-themes that emerged in the light of relevant existing literature.

Essential themes of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties

(S1) Support involves emotional investment and responsiveness to students' personal welfare.

For teacher aides in this study, supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties involved emotional investment and responsiveness towards students' personal welfare, as they developed personal, affective relationships with them. Although teacher aides were aware of the students' particular category of disability or learning difficulty, they saw the child, not the label. They developed affective relationships with students built on an empathetic understanding of their needs as teacher aides sat with, walked with, and experienced the classroom, withdrawal contexts, playground, and toileting, feeding and medicating routines with students, and observed their students' emotional responses and reactions to learning contexts and social situations. This theme is now examined in relation to the perceived disadvantages and advantages of developing close, personal relationships with students that have been identified in the literature.

Disadvantages of close relationships with students

There is criticism in the research literature of the closeness of the personal bond that develops between teacher aides and students. Researchers have found that this level of close proximity is detrimental to the students' development of independence and social skills (Broer et al., 2005; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007). Terms such as 'joined at the hip' (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007), 'mothering' (Broer et al., 2005), 'nannying' (Moran & Abbott, 2002) and the 'Velcro' model of support (Farrell & Balshaw, 2002) are used to describe this emotional bond.

Giangreco and Doyle (2002) agree with Davern et al. (1997, p.6) that under pressure from parents and teachers, principals sometimes make "fragmented efforts that are labeled inaccurately as inclusive education," but in reality utilize teacher aides as intensive one-on-one child minders or, as Tutty (2003, p. 147) found, "surrogate mothers." Some researchers have found that because many teacher aides find work through their contacts with the school as parents, and most teacher aides are female, then there is a tendency to 'mother' the students (Broer et al., 2005). This tendency is viewed as detrimental because the students are "denied typical opportunities to develop peer relationships and a sense of self that is so important for social maturation" (Broer et al., 2005, p. 425). Tutty (2003) also adds that *mothering* students can lead to stigmatization and stereotyping of students with intellectual disabilities as unable to cope on their own. In another study Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron and Fialka (2005) concluded that excessive proximity by paraprofessionals also caused teachers to become less involved with students.

Advantages of developing affective bonds with students

In contrast with these negative findings, other studies have found that emotional investment and responsiveness towards students' personal welfare was typical of teacher aides, and usually had a positive influence on their inclusion in school communities. In their study of teacher aides who worked in secondary schools in Adelaide, South Australia, Howard and Ford (2007) reported that teacher aides indicated that their support for the student was vital for their students well being and success in school. Teacher aides saw themselves as 'life-lines' or 'safe-havens' for the students when there was no other adult to take their issues seriously (Howard & Ford, 2007, p. 34). Moran and Abbott (2002) reported that

teacher aides in Northern Ireland played a pivotal role in promoting inclusion because of their personal interactive relationship with the students. Logan (2006, p. 98) found that teacher aides have both a “care and an educational” role with students with special needs, and Farrell and Balshaw (2002) highlighted the unbounded enthusiasm of teacher aides for their work as an extremely committed and dedicated group of individuals.

In her study of the work of teaching assistants in the United Kingdom, Mansaray (2006, p. 178) stated, that teacher aides develop “a personal and affective bond with the students” and that this bond “ is able to compress the normal social and status difference between adults and children in school” so teacher aides are able to develop a “dynamic and penetrating” understanding of students’ experiences as they change in different spaces in the school i.e. classroom, playground and at different times of the day (Mansaray, 2006, p. 179). This is a level of understanding and responsiveness that teachers cannot develop so readily because teacher aides are with the students for many hours of the day and in many different spaces, and contexts that are inaccessible to the teacher. These contexts include personal care routines with toileting and medicating, moving around the school, and in local community environments often unfamiliar to the teachers, but very familiar to the teacher aides who live in the local community. Teacher aides perceived their roles as grounded in an holistic sense of care for their students. This is what makes teacher aides’ roles particularly “enabling and inclusive” (Mansaray, 2006, p.178).

A new insight about the affective relationship with students that emerged from this current study is that the affective bonds teacher aides developed with

students were based on more than sympathetic caring and nurturing attitudes. The relationships were based on an empathetic understanding of their students' learning and social situations because they experienced these situations together. Teacher aides indicated that it was this empathetic relationship with students that led them to advocate for changes for students when they perceived that students were being misunderstood or poorly understood by teachers and decision makers. Their advocacy was one way in which they hoped to influence outcomes for their students, and improve their sense of belonging and inclusion in their school communities. Marks, Schrader and Levine (1999) also found that teacher aides took on an advocacy role in order to represent students in ways that would support their greater acceptance and inclusion.

In summary, teacher aides in this study described as successful experiences of supporting students as those in which they were able to establish a personal bond and an empathy with their students and therefore understand and respond to the students' individual needs as expressed in their unique emotions and behaviours. Whether their role is described as a "caring encounter" (Tutty & Hocking, 2004, p. 10), nurturer (Takala, 2007), connector (Chopra et al., 2004), or mediator (Howes, 2003) teacher aides experienced this role as crucial for students as they helped students to negotiate the learning and social environment of the school community, and learned with their peers about how to belong.

Because they empathised with students, teacher aides sought to change and improve their students' engagement with learning tasks, and to address significant personal care, and behavioural issues through advocacy and

intervention with other members of the students' support network so that the students could learn and grow in independence, and be accepted into their communities. They therefore made a significant emotional investment in the students' present and future well being. The level of personal proximity seems neither excessive nor unnecessary, but a significant part of the support role of the teacher aides resembling what Fromm (1975, pp. 47-48) has described as 'motherly love' when he states that "the very essence of motherly love is to care for the child's growth and that means to want the child's separation from herself." The empathetic relationship of teacher aides and students needs to be acknowledged as making a significant contribution to the inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties in school communities.

(S2) Supporting students with learning involves building a personal rapport and working relationship with them in order to understand their individual learning needs and behaviours.

In the experiences described in this study providing support with learning was a particularly important role for teacher aides, because they were regularly assigned to this task with students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Supporting students in learning, involved building a personal rapport with them. This personal rapport facilitated the development of a viable and successful working relationship. This working relationship developed with the students over a number of years, sometimes over the seven years that the students spent in the primary school, depending on how often they were assigned to the student. A viable working relationship meant that teacher aides could develop a good understanding of the individual student's learning needs and behaviours. With this understanding, teacher aides were able to support students' engagement with the curriculum both within the classroom and in withdrawal

situations. The working/learning relationship between teacher aides and students is now discussed in relation to the pedagogical roles of teacher aides identified in the literature, and the types of assignments that are given to teacher aides.

Pedagogical roles

This study supports the findings of other studies that have found that teacher aides now undertake a significant amount of teaching, previously the preserve of teachers (Chopra et al., 2004; Farrell & Balshaw, 2002; French, 1999; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Hill, 2003; Mansaray, 2006; Minondo et al., 2001; Moran & Abbott, 2002; Sorsby, 2004; Takala, 2007). But there is a distinction in the literature between the two roles for teacher aides of monitoring and teaching. Monitoring students happens in class and in group situations and involves keeping students on task, but staying in the background, while teaching involves teaching students specific skills (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000). In this study, teacher aides acknowledged their roles in monitoring students' learning during class time both on a one-on-one basis, and in a group. They also worked with students in one-on-one withdrawal, or small groups to teach students specific skills.

Teacher aides indicated that experiencing successful learning sessions and thereby achieving successful outcomes for their students depended on the quality of the rapport and working relationship that they could establish and maintain with their students. Teacher aides expressed concern about the negative impact on their working relationships with students that resulted when their roles in supporting learning were not clearly defined. They were confused by the different preferences of teachers in relation to working arrangements, and unrealistic expectations about the outcomes of assigned learning tasks especially

when directions from teachers were vague or contradictory. These issues are now examined in relation to the types of assignments given to teacher aides by teachers.

One-on-one and small group support

In this study teacher aides were often assigned to students one-on-one, to work in either withdrawal or in-class situations. Researchers have cautioned that matching of individual students to teacher aides can lead to unintended negative consequences such as dependence and/or stigmatization of students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Broer et al., 2005; Giangreco et al., 2005). But Farrell and Balshaw (2002) acknowledged that for many students with special learning needs, one-on-one attention for part of the day is necessary to achieve specific learning outcomes.

In this study, teacher aides found that one-on-one withdrawal sessions provided effective learning support conditions for students, in the acquisition of specific skills, especially when students accepted withdrawal as routine, and were therefore able to engage in learning without the distractions of the classroom. In their experience, working one-on-one with the students initially, and in the lower grades, facilitated building and maintaining this rapport, and therefore a viable working relationship based on understanding of individual needs and behaviours. Part of this rapport related to understanding the possible sensitivity of their students to being withdrawn or singled out as ‘different/dumb/special kids.’ For example participants A and C were aware of how their students reacted to being withdrawn one-on-one. They understood that their students had individual pedagogical needs that required one-on-one support, but understood that they needed to feel comfortable in withdrawal situations and that they kept

on a par with their peers so that they would not become isolated from the rest of the class.

As well as having regard for the feelings of their students about one-on-one learning contexts, teacher aides described as successful experiences of supporting students one-on-one when they were part of the planning process, part of a team approach, or had undergone formal and/or on the job training in the particular skills (A a/1; C a/1; D a/3; E a/4; H a/3). The findings of this study reflect the findings of many studies that have shown that one-on-one withdrawal programs can be successful in achieving specific learning outcomes when teacher aides have been informed and trained to work with the students on particular skilling tasks. But, as Causton-Theoharis et al. (2007) warned, teacher aides need to have access to ongoing supervision, dialogue and coaching from teachers or specialist teachers.

For teacher aides in this study, the success of one-on-one learning contexts for specific learning outcomes was very dependent on how well the teacher aides understood the requirements of assigned tasks, how well they were supported by LSTs, specialists, and teachers, and how skilled they were in specific pedagogical strategies. They needed input and training for specific tasks in order to build and maintain rapport with the students, and this depended on many factors beyond their control. These factors include understanding of set tasks, time-tabling and the unpredictability of assignments, lack of planning time, expectations about behaviour management, and working relationships with teachers whether in class or in withdrawal contexts.

Understanding of the tasks

Working one-on-one or with groups in withdrawal situations or in classrooms was problematic when teacher aides had no prior training for the specific learning tasks, were not included in planning, or were assigned to the task without time to prepare. Problems arose for teacher aides when they were asked to withdraw students if they were unsure of the aims of the learning task. What they did and how they did it, and therefore the success of the learning experience for the students, depended on the quality of the direction and demonstration of the task by the teacher.

In this study, participant F cited an experience of arriving at the classroom door to be asked to withdraw students with learning difficulties to work on "onomatopoeias" (Fa/3). In a similar situation H was expected to know what "chunking" in maths meant (H c/3). The teacher aides stated that the sudden requests from teachers to teach concepts or maths processes to students as they arrived at the classroom door was unsatisfactory because it meant that they had to search out information there and then, while the students waited, as teacher aides watched and listened to the teacher, or searched through students' text books to find the information and appropriate terminology. As a result, the on task period was shortened, teachers aides were unsure of the terminology they were to use, and they worried that students would be confused. This type of experience impacted on the rapport and subsequent working relationships between teacher aides and students, and therefore adversely affected the students' engagement with learning during subsequent sessions with the teacher aide (F b/3; G b/2). Takala (2007) and French (1999) also found that teacher aides spent a lot of time waiting and watching the teachers so that they knew

what they were expected to do with the students. They concluded that this happened because there was not enough time allocated for planning between teacher aides and teachers.

The literature on the roles of teacher aides in supporting learning of students with specific disabilities or learning difficulties emphasises that teacher aides can teach specific skills successfully when they are fully informed about the specific learning needs of the students, and they have undergone the necessary training (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005b; Ghere, York-Barr, & Sommerness, 2002; Malmgren, Causton-Theoharis, & Trezek, 2005; Moran & Abbott, 2002; Taconis et al., 2004). In this study, there were many experiences described by teacher aides where the forward planning and coordination of teacher aide assignments with information about the student's specific learning needs, and skills training to address those specific needs were inadequate. Teacher aides coped, but realised that this type of situation was unsatisfactory for students, if the teachers expected the students to achieve set learning outcomes. It is also inequitable if those with the least qualifications and least pay are expected to take responsibility for the learning outcomes of the students with the most complex needs (Farrell & Balshaw, 2002; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Minondo et al., 2001).

Time-tabling issues and unpredictability of assignments

In this study, another unsatisfactory element for the teacher aides in the classroom instructional environment was the constant need to adjust learning environments for their students because of timetabling issues. When the timetable was set and teacher aides had been informed of and prepared for their specific duties, either monitoring work or practising skills, they were

comfortable and able to help their students to engage with the learning process in withdrawal contexts and within the classroom. Their students benefitted from the regular routine, the familiar personnel and familiar environments (E a/4). Teacher aides indicated that if they were assigned for too short a period to work with students and were still expected to achieve specific learning outcomes they found this frustrating for themselves and for their students (F b/4).

Teachers also made sudden or indiscriminate changes in the working arrangements with individual students without time for teacher aides to adjust to new routines or expectations. For example, participant A was suddenly assigned to work with a student in the classroom on a peer activity when the student was used to working with her in withdrawal mode one-on-one (A b/1). She described the experience as unsuccessful because she was unfamiliar with the assigned task, and the student became frustrated and distracted by the unfamiliar environment. Researchers have encouraged the use of peer support and partnering activities to encourage peer interaction and less dependence on teacher aides (Hill, 2003; Malmgren et al., 2005)**.** But they also recommend that teacher aides are included in the planning for these different approaches so that they understand the aims of the activities and acquire the knowledge and skills required to successfully work on assigned tasks such as partnering activities with their students, and the quality of their working relationship with students is not adversely affected (Groom, 2006; Lacey, 2001; Moran & Abbott, 2002; Rose, 2000).

Lack of planning time

In this study, when teacher aides planned lessons with teachers or LSTs, and were given adequate information about the students' particular strengths and

weaknesses, they perceived that successful learning resulted and they were able to maintain their positive working relationship with the students. Good communication and consultation about lesson plans and realistic outcomes with teachers and/or LSTs also helped students to maintain a sense of belonging with their peers. When they were not included in the planning of the lessons or programs by the teacher and/or the LST they struggled with the tasks. This caused their working relationship with the students to deteriorate as both they and their students became frustrated, and students responded with negative behaviours in front of their peers. These findings reflect the findings of studies that have established that lesson planning with teachers and teacher aides is vital for student learning (French, 1999; Groom, 2006; Howard & Ford, 2007; Howes, 2003; Takala, 2007). As in this study, using teacher aides effectively through organising time for consultation and planning is recognised as a key factor in promoting inclusion (Rose, 2000), but using them ineffectively without adequate time to plan or familiarise teacher aides with tasks impacts on students' sense of achievement and self-esteem, and sense of belonging within peer groups.

Expectations about behaviour management

Another problem identified by teacher aides in this study, were the expectations of the teachers that they were able to manage the behaviour of their assigned student within a group of students with learning needs in a withdrawal or rotation situation and achieve the set learning goals. In these situations, teacher aides tried different strategies to motivate students, but perceived that they were unprepared to manage students' negative behaviours if they did not have the support of the teachers, the LSTs or the school administration. Teacher aides

had to make decisions about behaviour management interventions on the spot because of the unpredictability of students' attitudes to working and subsequent behaviours on any given occasion. Teacher aides considered that the students did not learn anything when behavioural issues dominated their interactions with them or their peers in withdrawal situations or in the classroom. They worried about whether they did the right thing for the student and whether these decisions should be left to them anyway. Although there will always be times when teacher aides need to respond immediately to behavioural issues while students are with them, Hickey (2006), Dean (2006) and Etscheidt (2005) warn that the behaviour management duties of teacher aides need to be under the supervision of qualified professionals such as the teacher. Teachers need to be aware of their responsibility when they make decisions about working arrangements for teacher aides, individual students and groups of students.

Working with teachers in class

In this study, teacher aides worked with students in whole class activities, both within the classroom and outdoors. Teacher aides were aware of students' need to socialise with their peers and to become independent learners especially as the students moved into the upper grades. As in other studies, teacher aides rated their peer facilitator responsibilities highly (French & Chopra, 1999; Minondo et al., 2001), and when working with groups of students were concerned that their students interacted in positive ways with their peers in learning groups, classroom or playground situations.

But as with withdrawal assignments, the expectations of teachers dictated what they were to do in the classroom, and similar problems arose. The first problem for teacher aides was the variety of expectations of teachers about how they

should work with the students. This was confusing for teacher aides and for their students. Some teachers only wanted them to monitor the students in the classroom. Others wanted them to monitor them and help them to achieve specific learning outcomes, sometimes by sitting with the students. As has been discussed earlier, concerns have been expressed in the literature about close proximity of teacher aides to students and its potential detrimental effects on students in terms of the development of independence and social skills (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Lacey (2001) also found that, for students with severe and profound learning difficulties, the support given by teacher aides was more effective when directed towards groups of students rather than individual students, because adult support was particularly effective in promoting social interaction within groups of disabled and non-disabled students. However, according to Giangreco & Broer, 2005 and Lacey, 2001, teachers need to be wary of assigning teacher aides to sit beside individual students in the classroom to support their learning in ways which could lead to stigmatisation. But giving teacher aides groups of students to support without adequate knowledge of, and training for, learning and socialisation tasks is also problematic.

In summary, teacher aides in this study were concerned about many factors that impacted on their working relationships with students. Many of these factors relate to their working relationships with teachers. There have been concerns raised in the literature about how teachers work with teacher aides in classrooms because of their lack of training in people management and supervision (Calder & Grieve, 2004; French, 1999; Giangreco, 2001; Howard & Ford, 2007; Soan, 2004). This concern is magnified when the fundamental issues about inclusion of all students are being addressed. Moran and Abbott (2002) found that it was

assumed that schools had procedures in place for teachers to facilitate the participation in learning for students, including assigning learning tasks and directing teacher aides about learning tasks. They found that this was seldom the case. Teachers were ill-prepared to handle the complex roles and varied deployment of teacher aides (Moran & Abbott, 2002). It has also been noted that personal assumptions about difference and disability underpin teacher practices when assigning tasks to teacher aides (Carrington & Saggers, 2008; Gallagher, 2007; Harvey-Koelpin, 2006; Slee, 2003; Stephenson & Carter, 2005; Wright, 2005), and these assumptions are also influenced by the need to meet targets and get through the curriculum (Howes, 2003). The need to meet targets and achieve year level standards meant that sometimes teacher aides were assigned to work with a group of learners whose inability to concentrate and/or distracted behaviour was disruptive within the classroom, so they were withdrawn by teacher aides.

The findings in this study indicate that reforms for inclusive education need to address the fundamental importance of the relationship between teacher and teacher aides in supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties within school communities. There needs to be clearer definition of the roles and responsibilities of teachers and teacher aides as they work together to support students. Teacher aides and teachers need procedures in place that provide the time and space needed to communicate, to consult, to plan and to monitor the learning and socialisation programs of students, with each other and with parents and specialists. Teachers need to understand how utilisation of teacher aides contributes towards inclusion or exclusion of students within school communities.

(S3) Supporting students effectively requires regular consultation and planning with all members of the support team including specialist teachers, teachers, parents, health professionals, principals and teacher aides.

In this study, teacher aides relied on communication with other members of the support team for information and direction about how to work with the students to whom they were assigned. This was especially so when they were first employed or assigned to a new student. They relied on this communication whatever form their assignment took: one-on-one withdrawal; small group withdrawal; in whole class programs. Teacher aides also looked for opportunities to consult with other peripatetic members of the support team about their students' health care, learning and socialisation needs. These communication and consultation arrangements are now discussed.

Planning and consultation with learning support teachers (LSTs)

In Queensland, the specialist teacher role is undergoing restructuring. A distinction has been made in the development of policies between the roles of specialist teachers who have qualifications in special education, called Heads of Special Education Services or HOSES (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2008), and those who work with students with learning difficulties called Support Teacher (Learning Difficulties) or ST (LD). In this study, teacher aides referred to the specialist teacher at the school as the learning support teacher (LST). The Head of Special Education Services was mentioned when the school had a Special Education Unit (SEU) on site. (One teacher aide in this study referred to the Advisory Visiting Teacher (AVTs)[8] who is available to

8 (See role description at http://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/learning/disability/specialists/avt/index.html) .

visit schools to advise on interventions for students with the six categories of disability used by DETA.)

Teacher aides stressed the significance of their relationship with LSTs for their work in supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in school environments. Researchers such as Forlin (2001) and Stephenson (2003) have argued that the specialist teacher role is fundamental for the achievement of inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties in mainstream schools (Forlin, 2001; Gerschel, 2005; Lamar-Dukes & Dukes, 2005). LSTs have extensive and overlapping roles and responsibilities in inclusive education settings premised on special needs identification and intervention, and more recently on supporting teachers as they plan to cater for the diverse needs of students from many cultural and social backgrounds within their classrooms. One of the principal roles that LSTs have is directing the work and developing the skills of teacher aides (York-Barr, Sommerness, Duke, & Ghere, 2005). In Australia, Forlin warned as early as 2001, that an increasing focus on appraisement, consultative and advisory tasks, meant a paucity of time for LSTs to meet mandated responsibilities, including time to adequately select, train, and supervise support staff. Despite this warning York-Barr found in 2007 that, as well as their mandated responsibilities, “coaching, providing feedback, dealing with conflict, and counselling were routine parts of the job” with teacher aides (p. 197). This type of work was intensely interpersonal, developmental and time consuming.

Teacher aides in this study indicated that the direction and guidance provided by LSTs impacted directly on their ability to provide successful learning and

socialisation experiences for the students to whom they were assigned. In many cases their input was valued as much as that of teachers, especially in terms of provision of resources and providing opportunities for professional development. However communication and consultation with LSTs was often on an ad hoc basis and in reaction to issues raised by the teacher aides. Mansaray (2006) found in her study of teacher aides in the United Kingdom that the teacher aide role was experienced as "reactive" as well (p. 177).

Planning and consultation with teachers

As discussed in relation to (S2), teacher aides were assigned to specific tasks with students by the classroom teachers. They relied heavily on classroom teachers for information and direction about content and processes for specific learning tasks when students were withdrawn for individual or group learning tasks, and when they were working in the classroom. Successful experiences of working with students resulted when there was good communication with teachers about the students' individual learning programs, and teacher aides had a clearer idea about what they were supposed to do with the students. Especially in relation to behavioural and socialisation issues the work of teacher aides in supporting their students benefitted from their being included in planning sessions with teachers, or at least having the opportunity to share their observations with teachers.

There have been many studies into teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards including students with disabilities and learning difficulties in their classrooms. (See Calder & Grieve, 2004; Cook, 2004; Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007; McNally, Cole, & Waugh, 2001; Stephenson & Carter, 2005; Subban & Sharma, 2006; Westwood & Graham, 2003). In these studies, teachers called for

additional classroom support, especially personnel support if inclusion of students with disabilities and learning needs was to be successful. But as Calder and Grieve (2004) point out, if other adults such as teacher aides are working in classrooms, then outmoded concepts such as teaching as a solitary activity carried out by a trained individual in a classroom must be altered so that the roles which other adults play can be understood by teachers. They and other researchers in the field of inclusive education reform call for remodelling of the teacher role to that of manager and leader in the classroom learning environment (Andrews & Forlin, 2002; Gallagher, 2007; Giangreco, 2001; Gunter et al., 2005; Mistry et al., 2004; Shepherd & Hasazi, 2007).

For the teacher aides in this study, this changed role would be welcome if it meant the allocation of more time to plan and consult with teachers as Hammett and Burton (2005) and Gerschel (2005) found in their research in the United Kingdom. However if, as Howes (2003) points out, this new management role means that a core-periphery model of classroom organisation i.e. leaders and led, managers and managed continues to exist, then no concept of effective team working can emerge. Teacher aides in this study resented simply being told by teachers, “This is what you have to do!” This was unsatisfactory for their personal motivation, and resulted in unsatisfactory learning outcomes for their students. They also had ambivalent feelings about going beyond what they perceived as the accepted communication channels i.e. talking only to teachers and/or learning support teachers , not to parents or health professionals, to find out what the directions from teachers actually entailed.

Teacher aides and parents

In this study, teacher aides were unsure about their role in relation to communication with parents. They expressed uncertainty about whether this was allowed. They noted that parents were a source of important information for them about their children, especially when the students had severe physical disabilities which required specific personal care regimes. Parents would sometimes approach them when they were concerned about their children's welfare. However when teacher aides were able to set up regular patterns of communication with the parents, through the IEP process, or personal contact, they found that this was extremely beneficial for their student's well being.

Studies by Rissman (2006) and French and Chopra (1999) have found that parents were pleased with the ways in which teacher aides supported their students who had disabilities. Parents wanted teacher aides to be included in IEP processes with them as an avenue for collaboration and consultation about their children's individual personal care and behavioural needs. They also wanted better communication channels to be established between them and the school (French & Chopra, 1999; Werts et al., 2004; Rissman, 2006), although as Howard and Ford (2007) and Minondo et al. (2001) found, teachers considered communication with parents as solely their responsibility.

Regular consultation and communication between parents, teachers and teacher aides is essential for the continuing well-being of all students, particularly for students with physical and emotional disabilities, when students enter mainstream schools. Inclusion does not deny the different levels of health and safety provisions needed for particular students, but promotes the development of inclusive education policies and procedures that can help all students to

understand and value these differences and the diversity within their school communities. Parents, teacher aides and students themselves need to be part of collaborative teams that design and implement such policies and procedures.

Consultation with health professionals

In this study teacher aides were given opportunities to attend inservice or on-the-job training in relation to particular disabilities when they approached LSTs. But they also made independent approaches to health professionals such as speech therapists and occupational therapists to obtain information and advice when they noticed that students were struggling with assigned learning tasks. Tutty and Hocking (2004) and Hemmingsson, Borell and Gustavsson (2003) found that teacher aides were often left with the responsibility of training for and implementing therapeutic interventions. This meant that teachers were less involved with students, contributing to less understanding of the students' particular physical and emotional needs and responses, and how these needs impacted on their participation in assigned learning and socialisation tasks.

There are logistical and funding rationales that contribute to this situation including time constraints on teachers, and the amount of funded teacher aide time. Therefore it is even more crucial to include teacher aides and include their knowledge and skills about supporting students in a collaborative teamwork approach to supporting students with inclusion.

In summary, teacher aides in this study described as successful their experiences of supporting students when they were able to communicate and consult regularly with other members of the students' support networks about planning for students' learning and socialisation. Teacher aides perceived that there was

confusion about their roles and responsibilities. This led to lack of regular communication and consultation with other members of students' support networks. Teacher aides experienced a sense of isolation because they were marginalised within decision-making structures, a consequence that teacher aides indicated contributed towards continued segregation and stigmatisation of students.

(S4) Supporting students requires improvisation within individual education programs to meet individual needs and circumstances.

Although disquiet has been expressed in the past about the tendency of teacher aides to remove the challenges of learning tasks by doing too much for the students (Ainscow, 2000), in this study, teacher aides were aware of the need for students to develop independence as learners and as members of the school community. Teacher aides relied on information, direction and resources provided to them by the learning support teacher and the classroom teacher as they worked with students on learning tasks. However teacher aides often had to make decisions on the spur of the moment about adapting or modifying assigned learning tasks for their students using their own initiative and experience because, when interest or attention lapsed, they wanted to stimulate and maintain interest for students. They did not want to see their students' suffering evidenced by deterioration in confidence and self-esteem, and stigmatization by peers.

When they had the rapport with, and knowledge of, students to make these modifications, they did so, although they were often unsure about their modifications unless or until they checked with the teacher, LST or the individual student's health professional. Even then, they still worried if they had

done the right thing for the student in the circumstances. Teacher aides were also well aware of the problems caused for students in terms of their development of independence in learning if they helped them too much with tasks so they documented what they had done, and/or reported orally to the learning support teacher or classroom teacher. Unfortunately teacher aides seldom had regular or formal opportunities to communicate or consult with classroom teachers or LSTs because they moved on quickly to different classrooms according to their timetables, and were not sure about their roles at IEP review meetings.

The findings of this study in relation to the way in which teacher aides can use their flexibility to improvise on tasks for the benefit of their students reflects the findings of Moran and Abbott (2002) who cite the National Association for Special Educational Needs in the United Kingdom. This association perceived that the success of teacher aides "was encapsulated in a combination of their own qualities, their willingness to develop existing skills and acquire new ones, and the ability to be flexible as circumstances demand" (Moran & Abbott, p. 163). However Wall (SENCO Update, 5, May 8-9, p. 8, cited in Moran & Abbott, 2002) warned that, for these qualities of teacher aides to be effective in working with students, they need support in their school communities, and clear definitions of their roles and responsibilities. Downing et al. (2000) argue that some independent decision-making by teacher aides is inevitable as circumstances arise. But teacher aides "should follow the program as determined by team decision making" (p.172).

As teacher aides in this study have revealed, major issues arose for them because they were *not* part of the team that made and reviewed the decisions about learning programs, programs which they had to implement. This meant that they were placed in the unenviable position of having to make decisions with limited knowledge about their students' programs of learning or behaviour management. They were also subject to the direction of teachers about behaviour management, and were aware that individual teacher's attitudes about disability, difference and behaviour dictated their responses. Teacher aides did not always feel comfortable about these decisions. For example participant F was assigned to monitor five students from years 1 to 7 who were withdrawn from the playground each day during lunch time because of their 'anti-social' behaviour. The students had been identified as having social-emotional problems such as Autism. F indicated that this regime was unsuccessful because it did nothing to help the students to learn how to socialise with others in the school community, and instead excluded them further as it led to their increased stigmatisation.

In summary teacher aides indicated how they were able to improvise on set learning and socialisation tasks in ways that responded to the immediate and varying moods and behaviours of the students. However, especially in relation to behavioural interventions, teacher aides were often uncertain about their roles and responsibilities. They appreciated collaboration in decision-making with other members of the students' support networks, and especially with the students' teachers.

(S5) Supporting students means taking responsibility for their learning and behaviour.

In this study, teacher aides took responsibility for the learning and behaviour of the students with whom they worked because they recognised that poor performance on learning tasks and negative behaviour impacted on their learning and acceptance within the school community. They did not want this responsibility on their own, but they accepted it anyway when it was left up to them. They perceived that while the students were in their care, and this was often many hours in the week for students with disabilities, they were responsible for how the students behaved and therefore engaged with learning on the learning tasks that were set by the teachers. For example participant B accepted the responsibility for helping her student to express his version of the events that had happened in the playground after he returned to class. She reflected that if she had not sat and listened carefully to his explanation then the other support personnel, his teacher and his peers, would have continued to misunderstand his behaviour, and treat him as 'the naughty boy' (B a/1). Participant B was uncertain about the goals of the differentiated program that had been set up for the student, indicating that it contributed towards his stigmatisation with peers and teachers.

As with other experiences described in this study, teacher aides took on the responsibility because they were on the spot. They were uncomfortable about making decisions about modifying learning tasks unless they could check with the learning support teacher or the classroom teacher, but did so when they considered it was beneficial for students' continued engagement with learning tasks. They were also extremely nervous about intervening with behaviour,

especially in a group or classroom situation, even when these decisions were eventually sanctioned by the teachers. They worried that what they did might cause problems for students' sense of self-esteem and belonging in the school community. Their sense of isolation from decision-makers was a major concern for them, but they assumed responsibility for the on task learning behaviour and safety of their students and the school community when students were with them.

Marks, Schrader and Levine (1999) found that teacher aides were assuming most of the responsibility for the academic and behavioural needs of students with disabilities in inclusive settings because nobody else in the support team had the same close personal relationship with the student, and therefore knowledge of the students' immediate academic and behavioural needs. However, in their study teacher aides (paraeducators) were often trained professionals. In this study, no teacher aides had professional qualifications in health related fields, yet were often left with responsibilities for students' learning and socialisation. Groom and Rose (2005) stated that teacher aides were often given responsibility for an individual student's behaviour because students with emotional and social behavioural difficulties often established a more trusting relationship with them rather than teachers because of the 'authority figure' status of teachers and LSTs. In a study of teacher aides in New Zealand, Tutty (2003) found that teacher aides did shoulder the responsibility for students' behaviour, safety and acceptance within the school community. But this led to feelings of isolation and marginalisation within the school community. Downing et al. (2000) also identified that teacher aides experienced feelings of isolation when they had to make decisions about

modifying learning tasks or behavioural interventions and felt unprepared for that responsibility.

In South Australia, Howard and Ford (2007) found that increasingly teacher aides were being expected to implement behavioural interventions with students. These intervention practices were often dependent on the practices of individual teachers rather than the dictates of school policies or procedures. These findings support the findings of the current study in which teacher aides were also dependent on the practices of individual teachers, practices based on assumptions about what was acceptable behaviour for students with identified behaviour problems. Graham (2006) argues that 'norms' about behaviour are derived from assumptions about what is abnormal, legitimises the exercise of disciplinary power, and excludes the student through psychological branding. In this study, teacher aides were sometimes uncertain about the way in which students' behaviour was handled by teachers and administration staff, when the management of the problem situations seemed to contribute to the students' stigmatisation.

Marks et al. (1999) concluded that the missing ingredient in inclusive practice was the notion of shared responsibility for addressing the academic and behavioural needs of the students which meant that teacher aides were accepting the responsibility and "holding their own" (p. 325). But researchers such as Dean (2006) and Etscheidt (2005), who have examined legal issues in relation to risk management in schools, warn that while pedagogical roles of teacher aides need to be guided by teamwork and shared responsibility with other members of the support team, the behaviour management duties of teacher aides

need to be under the direct supervision of qualified professionals. Because teacher aides are the support personnel who tend to have a very good relationship and rapport with the students, then their knowledge of students and mediation skills could be extremely useful for teachers in classroom management situations. These attributes and skills could be incorporated in programming in ways that model respectful social and working relationships to students, while still maintaining appropriate supervisory elements.

In summary the first part of this chapter discussed the five essential themes about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties that emerged from the study and were confirmed by the literature on teacher aides and inclusion. These themes indicated that teacher aides supported students with disabilities and learning difficulties by developing affective relationships built on empathy. These relationships helped teacher aides to understand the students' individual needs and behaviours. Teacher aides supported students more effectively when they were part of a collaborative support network. With this type of collaboration teacher aides were able to improvise on set programs, and understand and accept their responsibilities for supporting learning and behaviour.

The three essential themes of learning about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties are now discussed.

Essential themes of learning about supporting students

(L1) Learning about supporting students emotionally and socially comes from life experience.

In the absence of pre-service training or information about specific disabilities, teacher aides in this study found that they often had to rely heavily on their own

life experiences such as being parents, their previous work experiences, or on their experiences with family members or acquaintances, who had disabilities, in order to begin building personal rapport and subsequent good working relationships with their students. For example, G had a brother who had Asperger's Syndrome and acknowledged the help that this prior experience afforded him when he worked with a student who also had Asperger's Syndrome (G a/1; G a/2). Participant E worked with a student with Down syndrome and credited her ability to help her student emotionally and socially to her previous work and family experiences (E a/1; E c/3). Participant F emphasised that learning about supporting students emotionally came from her personal experiences of caring and instilling positivity in her own children as a parent (F c/2).

These findings support the research that there were personal qualities that teacher aides brought to their role. These qualities included patience, a caring nature, being able to be firm and consistent without being overbearing (Downing et al., 2000; Logan, 2006; O'Brien & Garner, 2001), and "to love being around children, and to want the best for them" (Downing et al., 2000, p. 178). Harling's (2006) report to the New South Wales teachers federation outlined the personal qualities that teacher aides brought to their job. These included patience, flexibility, personal resourcefulness, consistency, calmness and a sense of humour. The teacher aides in this study indicated that their personal qualities stemmed from life experiences such as family life and parenthood, and work experiences especially in caring professions such as disability services or health. For example, D used her experience with feeding babies and toddlers and her own initiative to devise strategies such as playing

with food to try to encourage her student to eat (D b/1; D c/2). But as well as relying on her own experience, she had to seek information to assist the student with his feeding regime from other sources such as parents and the Internet because she was not included in planning sessions with the LST and dietician.

The teacher aides in the current study requested opportunities to build on the personal qualities that they brought to the job through opportunities to access information about the students' specific disabilities and learning difficulties - their particular physical, social/ emotional and developmental needs. Even with this information, the teacher aides often found the role more challenging than they had expected and needed more than their own personal qualities and resourcefulness to cope with the social and emotional needs of their students and the demands of their various roles. In a similar vein, teacher aides in Hipsky's (2007) study also asked for professional development that provided input on the specific physical, and socio-emotional developmental characteristics of their students. The teacher aides stated that they needed this input because of their roles of supporting, assisting, managing and teaching.

In terms of understanding individual behavioural responses, Downing and Ryndak (2000) found that teacher aides had to rely on their instincts to read each individual situation to find out why a particular behaviour was being demonstrated. Then they had to make a decision spontaneously about an appropriate response. Teacher aides "expressed fear that they could inadvertently reinforce undesired behaviour" (p.177). In the current study teacher aides also relied on their instincts and life experience to make decisions in situations that required instantaneous responses. They too were uncertain

about whether they should have been making the decisions, and if they had made the right ones.

van Manen (1991) states that knowledge of pedagogical methods and educational philosophies are important resources for pedagogy, and can be a direct result of training in facts, programs, methods and techniques. But what to do in the pedagogical moment cannot be inductively derived from these empirical and ethical-moral principles i.e. the 'facts' (1991, p. 44). The concrete and practical response to a child that is needed in any given situation needs to be context sensitive i.e. "situation-specific and oriented to the particular child with whom we are concerned" (1991, p. 47). Walter and Petr (2006) argue from their research with students with mental health problems that the personal and empathetic qualities that teacher aides bring to their roles were more important for success in supporting students than higher educational qualifications.

So although teacher aides in this study expressed concern about making decisions about students, they made them using their life experience and context sensitive knowledge about the students' needs and behaviours. But they wanted better information and support from the support team. Teacher aides need to have access to professional learning that can enhance the knowledge of their students' emotional and social needs. Especially when they are newly employed or first assigned to students, this could help to reduce the need for teacher aides to have to rely so heavily on their own life experiences, and support their decision-making in the many situations when they are on their own.

(L2) Learning about support happens on the job.
Teacher aides in this study experienced learning about their roles and responsibilities on the job from being with students, from teachers and from LSTs.

Being with students

Teacher aides learned about their students' personalities and idiosyncrasies by observing their moods and behaviours as they worked with them. They learned how to motivate, to maintain interest, to reinforce positive behaviours and discourage negative behaviours through long experience, day to day contact, and by building a close personal and working relationship with their students. Participant E stated that being with her student every day was important on the job training. Participant G commented nothing can prepare him until he was out there on 'the front line' (G c/1). As in this study, overseas studies have emphasised the importance of the affective knowledge that teacher aides gain from 'being with' students and establishing and maintaining a close personal relationship with them (Groom, 2006; Hauge & Babkie, 2006; Mansaray, 2006). Groom (2006), Harling (2006), Takala (2007), and Vlachou (2006) have argued that this affective knowledge of students gained on the job is an essential element in the knowledge base needed for the effective inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties in mainstream schools.

Ghere and York-Barr (2007) make a distinction between explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. They argue that tacit knowledge includes insights and understandings about a job and the organizational culture gained from being there. This is the hardest type of knowledge to gain because it is learned on the job. Explicit knowledge is acquired through training in specific skills and

programs. In this study teacher aides identified that the tacit knowledge gained from ‘being there,’ was an essential part of their learning about their roles working with students. They indicated that learning about students’ needs and behaviours took place primarily by being with the students as they tried to meet the students’ personal care needs, and implement programs designed for the students by others - teachers, LSTs, and health professionals.

Being with teachers

Teacher aides shadowed work colleagues such as teachers and other teacher aides to learn about the pedagogical and behaviour management aspects of their roles. Teacher aides watched what teachers did in class to learn about curriculum content and processes or ‘picked their brains’ about what they were expected to do with their students. But using classroom teachers as models for inclusive practice seemed problematic, especially when teacher aides considered that school and teacher practices were excluding the students rather than including them. For example, participant C worked with a student in class on a maths program which the school had adopted for the upper grades. C realised that this program was not addressing the student’s needs and resulted in negative behaviour and possible stigmatisation by her peers. When the behaviour of the student was significantly adversely affected, a new individualised program was devised, but the next year the same in class scenario was repeated.

Teacher aides learned from teachers about working with students with disabilities and learning difficulties but what they learned depended on many factors related to the underlying assumptions of the teachers about inclusion. These underlying assumptions were important because they underpinned the

ways in which teachers utilised teacher aides. Lindsay (2007) concluded that, “the role of teachers in developing inclusion is essential to its effectiveness” (pp. 12-13). But Lindsay’s (2007) review of the inclusive education research literature, found that, although teacher attitudes towards inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) were generally positive and based on principles of social justice, their practices were tempered by practical considerations such as their own experiences of contact with students with SEN, resourcing, and structural and organisational changes needed to support inclusion. Teachers were generally positive about the support given by teacher aides, and there is evidence of improved teaching environments in classrooms when teacher aides are present (Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown, & Martin, 2007).

However there is also evidence from this study that teacher aides are utilised by teachers in ways that are contrary to the principles of inclusion which value difference and diversity. Efficiency, lack of disruption and charity are sometimes paramount motivations for their assignment of students to teacher aides. In the current study, participant E worked with a student with Down syndrome. She worked one-on-one with the student for most of each school day, including lunchtime. She was the support person who developed strategies to facilitate social inclusion for the student in the school community. The structure of the student’s individual education plan set up by the LST, meant that the student spent very little time with her own teacher and peers. Even when working in the classroom it was E who interacted with the student more than the teacher (E a/2; a/6). Participant E learned from her interaction with the teacher and LST that the student was being marginalised, and that a more coordinated

approach was needed for effective inclusion of the student within the classroom and community.

In order to learn from teachers, Giangreco and Doyle (2007) argue that teachers and teacher aides need to engage in regular communication and consultation with each other. Setting up “an instructional dialogue” between LSTs, teachers and teacher aides should help to address the problems associated with service delivery to students. For example teacher aides could share and model for teachers how they develop affective relationships with students through understanding and empathy, as a basis for supporting students’ engagement with learning and socialisation, and development of a sense of belonging. Improving teacher-student engagement is seen as a critical factor affecting the success of inclusive efforts (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007, pp. 435-436).

Learning from LSTs

Teacher aides in this study often worked on individualised programs with the LST. Teacher aides learned a great deal from the LST when they worked together, communication was open, and there were opportunities for consultation and communication about the student’s programs on a regular basis. Teacher aides also learned about working collaboratively when LSTs listened, respected and responded to their observations. Feedback from the teacher aides informed the LST about their professional development needs. LST then organised in-services for the teacher aides and supplied them with information and resources. Teacher aides appreciated very much the practical hands-on help organised by LSTs. Teacher aides found that when opportunities to communicate and consult with LSTs about students’ needs were irregular or unwanted they had to seek out information by themselves for their day to day

work. Although the information that they received was valuable, they felt isolated, and unable to ascertain the quality of the information as readily as when LSTs were involved.

The LST also organised health professionals to come to the school and work with the staff in inservice mode, or work with the teacher aides and their individual students on particular skills. Teacher aides learned on the job by engaging in hands-on learning experiences from visiting health professionals. They worked with individual students through processes of demonstration, practice and review (A c/2; B c/1; C c/4; D a/3). The research literature reveals that student learning outcomes improve when teacher aides work in partnership with health professionals such as speech therapists (Arthur, Butterfield, & McKinnon, 1998; Hemmingsson et al., 2003).

However there are also concerns expressed about how health professionals interact less with the teachers and more with the teacher aides to teach and demonstrate particular skill sets for working with the students (Hemmingsson et al., 2003). Health professionals questioned whether such practices contribute towards inclusion of students if teachers become less engaged with students as a result, and whether this is equitable for students and teacher aides (Tutty & Hocking, 2004).

As the special educators' roles are being restructured there is a danger that learning about roles and responsibilities, and their day to day work with students will become even less informed by regular communication and consultation with LSTs. Vlachou (2006) stated that reforms of this nature with specialist teachers were intended to promote inclusive practices but serve rather to divide

and isolate support personnel through division of roles, categorisation of individual responsibilities, and individual education programs organised to require separate objectives for different personnel. In this study, teacher aides expressed alarm when the LST presented them with a set of objectives for students, which were to be implemented by them, and they were presented as just a series of dot points (E c/1), or they were assigned to a student with little information or consultation with the LST about the student's specific needs in relation to the learning tasks (F b/4).

Forlin (2001) argues that in Queensland because the roles of special educators have changed to focus heavily on appraisement, consultative and advisory tasks, a top-down hierarchical model has emerged and they spend even less time with students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and more time managing and developing intervention programs and training classroom teachers and teacher aides, to administer them. Rather than creating a collaborative sharing of information, planning and co-teaching model, this focus causes problems with teachers, and limits the time that special educators can spend in-class and/or supervising the work of teacher aides.

As discussed earlier, recent developments in Queensland with restructuring of the roles of HOSES and LSTs and Advisory Visiting Teachers (AVTs), and giving the responsibilities for planning for all students to teachers, suggest that these problems will be exacerbated. The restructuring of these roles need to be examined in relation to the increased isolation of teachers and teacher aides from advice and support from specialist educators, especially when informed responses to learning needs and behaviours are often needed quickly.

L3 Consultation and communication with teachers, learning support teachers, other teacher aides, parents and health professionals supports learning.

In this study, teacher aides indicated that learning about how to support students involved the acquisition of knowledge about their students' reactions and responses, the way in which support for them was organised in the school, and training for specific skills to meet individual needs. For teacher aides the most successful way to acquire this knowledge was from being there with students, LSTs and teachers, and job-embedded learning experiences. Therefore effective learning and the acquisition of knowledge and skills relied heavily on communication and consultation with other members of the student's support network. This support network included teachers, learning support teachers, parents and health professionals.

In this study teacher aides found that in-services i.e. workshops and seminars organised by the LST were useful if the teacher or LST and the teacher aide attended together, or at least used the same approach learned at the inservice sessions. For example, participant C worked with a student with Autism, and when she attended a workshop with the teacher she was surprised that the teacher had less of an understanding about Autism than she did. Knowing this was significant for understanding how to work with this teacher. Participant F stated that in-services were also useful for learning when she attended with other teacher aides because they are the people "that are doing it as well. So you get to talk about your experiences" (F c/1). Teacher aides revealed that, for them, most effective learning for improving practice happened when they shared the learning with others with whom they work.

Hunt el al. (2003) and Cremin et al. (2003) stressed the importance of support team members having time to reflect together. Cremin et al. (2007) emphasised that the success of intervention programs for students with disabilities and learning difficulties depended on a reflective team model of learning and working in which teachers and teacher aides undergo training to improve their team-working skills. This model included the development of planning and evaluating skills based on respectful communication and valuing of the individual perspectives, knowledge and skills of team members.

The findings of this study support the findings of studies that have established that the development and maintenance of a teamwork approach to supporting students, which draws on the skills and abilities of all of the personnel in the students' support networks, is effective in achieving positive social and learning outcomes for students (Cremin et al., 2005; Fox et al., 2004; Gunter et al., 2005; Hauge & Babkie, 2006; Howes, 2003; Hunt et al., 2003). For instance, Howes (2003, p. 152) states that changes in the roles of support staff, including teacher aides need to be grounded in a "notion of inclusive development" beginning with what support staff already know, with everyone learning together through critical reflection. A team approach to professional learning would also facilitate critical reflection on the assumptions that underpin inclusive practices. Researchers such as Howes, 2003, and Cremin et al, 2005, argue that within a reflective teamwork approach an ethos of inclusion can develop, and the particular knowledge and skills of team members, including teacher aides, can be recognised, and valued. The reflective process can contribute to a more holistic and cohesive approach to inclusion where the particular knowledge and skills of the individual members of the team can be included in planning and

reviewing programs so that the affective and pedagogical needs of students with disabilities and learning difficulties can be more adequately addressed (Carrington, 1999; Cremin et al., 2005; Groom & Rose, 2005; Howes, 2003; Mansaray, 2006).

In summary, the second part of this chapter has discussed three essential themes about learning to support students that emerged from analysis of descriptions of the experiences of teacher aides. Teacher aides brought their own life skills and knowledge about children to their support job. They build on these skills and knowledge as they learned about supporting students' learning and socialisation on the job. An essential part of learning on the job was through consultation and communication with other members of the students' support networks. The insights about supporting students, and the issues and implications of these insights for teacher aides, are now discussed.

Insights, issues and implications for inclusive practice

This study has examined the nature of teacher aides' experiences as they worked with students in inclusive settings. In this current study, four key insights into the ways in which teacher aides supported students with disabilities and learning difficulties emerged. These key insights about teacher aides' empathetic support roles, about the inconsistency and confusion about their roles and responsibilities, their marginalisation within organisational support structures in schools, and about how they learn most effectively on-the-job about their support roles provided important data about teacher aides' significant roles in supporting the effective inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties in Queensland primary school settings. It is argued here that this information needs to be acknowledged and addressed in inclusive education

policy formulation. Lack of understanding and acknowledgement of their roles has led to significant issues for teacher aides in relation to their employment and deployment in schools to support students. These issues include misinterpretation of their affective roles, their utilisation in roles that contribute to the segregation of students, their marginalisation within decision-making structures, and the imposition of training regimes which did not meet their on-the-job learning needs. These issues and their implication are now discussed in detail.

Issue 1: The significance of empathetic relationships in supporting students in inclusive education.

The experiences of teacher aides in this study reflect the findings of other studies about the significant role that teacher aides take on in connecting students with their new learning and social environment and mediating their interactions with it (Groom & Rose, 2005; Mansaray, 2006). Teacher aides travelled with the students, and developed personal, affective relationships with them. However a key insight from this study is that these affective relationships were based on an empathetic understanding of the students and their circumstances, not sympathy or pity or philosophical notions of social justice. This sense of empathy formed the basis of teacher aides' work in supporting students and informed how they understood them and how they responded to them. This empathetic relationship with students was a key issue for teacher aides in their support roles, but was also prone to misinterpretation in the research literature and by other practitioners as the source of problems of interference, excessive proximity and dependence of students. This misrecognition of teacher aides' meanings and contributions to supporting

students in the literature underscored how influential underlying assumptions about difference, disability and schooling are as they inform the ways in which students are 'labelled', and how support for them is structured in inclusive education settings especially in relation to the utilisation of teacher aides.

In the experiences that teacher aides have described in this study this affective bond with students did not lead to excessive or unnecessary proximity as was deemed to be the case in Giangreco and Broer's (2005) research in the United States. In fact, if teacher aides considered that students were not gaining confidence and independence they took steps to adjust their working relationships with the students in ways that enhanced their self-esteem and sense of belonging with peers. Unfortunately their power to make adjustments was often dependent on the way in which they were assigned to work with the students by decision makers within support and school hierarchies.

Implications

The empathetic bond that teacher aides develop with students provides a caring link which is important in the early years of school if students with disabilities and learning difficulties are to make a successful transition to mainstream schooling. Teacher aides sustain students' engagement with learning and socialisation through this personal caring encounter during their primary years. This type of support seems to be an essential element for successful inclusion of students if the mainstreaming model of inclusive education is to continue. This type of close relationship cannot be replicated by teachers because of the way in which students move from one class to the next each year. If schooling remains the same with one teacher classrooms, lock-step progression annually, large

classes, and insufficient or remote specialist teachers, then this personal empathetic relationship between teacher aides and students is a significant element in successful inclusion, and needs to be acknowledged and understood by policy makers, by teachers and by specialist teachers. When the basis for this relationship is understood, then the members of students' support networks can use this understanding to utilise the contributions of teacher aides to supporting students in a more proactive and positive way. School leadership teams can use this understanding to foster a spirit of empathy and positive engagement with difference and diversity within their teaching staff and whole school communities.

If this attribute of support by teacher aides continues to be unappreciated and indeed misinterpreted, there is a danger that these valuable human resources will lose enthusiasm for their roles of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in inclusive education classrooms. Studies by Logan (2006), Sorsby (2004), and Ghere and York-Barr (2007) have already indicated that retention rates for teacher aides are falling because their contributions to inclusion of students are undervalued and un-included.

Issue 2: Lack of definition of roles and responsibilities

The issue of lack of clear definition of roles and responsibilities for teacher aides has been identified in the literature on inclusive education, and has been widely acknowledged as problematic (Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Hammett & Burton, 2005; Hemmingsson et al., 2003; Slee & Allan, 2001; Toppo, 2004; Gessler Werts et al., 2001). The lack of clear definition of roles and responsibilities has lead to problems such as inappropriate assignment of teacher aides to individual students, teacher disengagement with students, excessive

proximity and lack of independence in learning or socialisation for students, and students with the most complex needs being taught by those with the least training. In the research literature there has been a tendency to locate the problems with the teacher aides' roles in inclusive education settings as inherent in the teacher aides themselves often because of their deficits i.e. they are not trained teachers.

This diagnosis has lead to the development of reclassification structures for teacher aides based on increased emphasis on formal training (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2006a). Through this process of training and accreditation it was assumed that teacher aides would have better explicit knowledge of the 'nuts and bolts' of their roles, and with improved generalist education qualifications they would be considered knowledgeable about their place within the support hierarchy of the school i.e. how they were to work with teachers and specialist teachers on programs and how they were to be managed (Butt & Lance, 2005; Calder & Grieve, 2004; Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Hammett & Burton, 2005; Mistry et al., 2004; Stephenson, 2003). In this way, it was anticipated that support staff would better understand their roles and responsibilities and therefore their support roles would be more efficient and effective, and as a corollary, equitable inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties could be achieved. Another assumed beneficial side effect of better training for teacher aides is that better credentials from training could lead to more equitable pay rates and working conditions (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2006c; Giangreco, Edelman et al., 2001b; Hall, 2005; Hammett & Burton, 2005).

In the experiences that the teacher aides described as successful and unsuccessful in this study there was little reference to issues about pay rates and conditions by the teacher aides themselves. However, in the descriptions of their support roles with students, they revealed that they were very aware of the issues about students' learning and socialisation, and sense of belonging in the school community which resulted from the various ways in which they were assigned to support students. They were aware that the definition of their role i.e. how they were assigned to students and how they were to work with students depended on the LST or teacher with whom they were working at the time. The suddenness and variation in assignments from teachers from one classroom to the next, and even within one classroom caused them concern. They experienced confusion and frustration as this "thrownness" (Tutty & Hocking, 2004, p. 8) characterised their roles and caused deterioration in their relationship with students, through their own lack of information, fluctuating behaviour patterns of students, variations in teacher expectations, and subsequent unsuccessful learning sessions.

Teacher aides responded to these deteriorating learning situations with a sense of care to ensure that students kept up with their peers and maintained a sense of achievement, confidence and belonging. In terms of behaviour management teacher aides were there, so they responded in the best way they could although they were uncertain about their responsibilities, or the efficacies of some of the strategies modelled by teachers. They did this because they were concerned for the reputation and well-being of their students within the community, and the safety of peers and teachers.

Implications

A lot of research questions the validity of current models of employment and deployment of teacher aides in relation to justice and equity for students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Allan, 2003b; Davern et al., 1997; Gallagher, 2003; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Pandey, 2006; Slee, 2001; Taylor & Henry, 2003; Taylor & Singh, 2005; Urban Institute, 2006). The implications for teacher aides are that their roles have become a focus for what is problematic in the inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. Yet in this study, it was a lack of clear definition of roles and responsibilities by schools that meant that teacher aides were put in a position of responsibility for student learning and behaviour management that was unjust for them and exclusionary for their students.

At the same time, teacher aides continue to be employed at an increasing rate as the number of specialist teachers decline (Shaddock, 2004). As well, the literature on inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties reveals that their roles in supporting and caring for students with disabilities and learning difficulties are still valued by administrators (Idol, 2006; Logan, 2006; Salisbury, 2006), parents (Deppeler & Harvey, 2004; Farrell & Balshaw, 2002; Howard & Ford, 2007), specialist teachers (Forlin, 2000; Thornton et al., 2007) and classroom teachers (Howard & Ford, 2007; Subban & Sharma, 2006; Westwood & Graham, 2003).

This indicates that many school administrators, teachers and parents assume that teacher aides are an additional and necessary resource that helps students to fit in to mainstream schooling because teachers and specialists are busy with other responsibilities. This assumption indicates that the underlying paradigm is a

special needs paradigm of inclusion (Bailey, Booth, & Ainscow, 1998; Carrington & Robinson, 2006; Slee, 2005), and that teacher aides will continue to be utilised by teachers and specialist educators as 'integration' resources in ways that contribute to segregation rather than inclusion.

Slee and Allan (2001) argue that effective inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties cannot be addressed by transposing a special needs schooling paradigm onto mainstream schooling unless exclusionary pressures endemic to schooling as a whole are addressed. Other theorists such as Allan, 2008, Carrington, 1999, and Gallagher, 2007 argue that undertaking reform of inclusive education based on the notion of diversity involves *radical* reform that not only strives for organisational change i.e. restructuring and defining roles and responsibilities, but fundamental attitudinal change in relation to teachers' attitudes, the inclusive culture of the school, and educational platforms. Recently researchers have concluded that until there is a whole school approach through which a process of collaborative teamwork can identify and critically examine assumptions that underpin pedagogical, organisational and behaviour management practices, effective inclusion will not happen (See Ainscow et al., 2004; Gallagher, 2007; Hauge & Babkie, 2006; Hunt et al., 2003; Robinson & Carrington, 2002; Todd, 2007). Within a collaborative and mutually respectful community framework, the practices of teachers and support personnel which contribute to the marginalisation of students can be identified, addressed and reformed in light of the ideals of inclusion, including how they utilise teacher aides to support students. Through this process of examination and reflection in a collaborative teamwork approach, the roles and responsibilities of teacher aides can be more clearly understood and defined.

From this study, it is evident that this process of collaboration and critical examination of assumptions and practices requires the inclusion of the voices of teacher aides. Their unique contributions to the inclusion of students need to be understood, acknowledged, respected and included in the planning and implementation of inclusive practices in schools and classrooms. Until then no clearer definition of appropriate roles and responsibilities for teacher aides will be identified and teacher aides will continue to be treated as a resource to be retrained and reallocated in ways that marginalise students (Bourke & Carrington, 2007).

Issue 3: Isolation and marginalisation

Principles and policies underpinning the reform of schools to be more inclusive in Queensland, mention teacher aides within the category of resources to be reallocated rather than as members of a support team for students with disabilities and learning difficulties (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2003, 2004b, 2006b). Researchers in the field of inclusive education, such as Farrell & Balshaw 2002, and Howes, 2003, have identified this lack of identity of teacher aides in inclusive education contexts. Research by Farrell and Balshaw (2002) found that, when planning for a child with special educational needs, the person who knows the child best may be the teacher aide. They are centrally involved in the process of support for students and therefore their perceptions about what support for individual students entails are highly relevant (Howes, 2003). However, because of the way support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties is planned for, those with the most responsibility and the highest job status have the most influence and the views of teacher aides are often overlooked by others.

Mansaray (2006) stated that there was ambivalence around teacher aides' identity created by the perceptions of teachers, parents and students, and misinterpretations of their roles and responsibilities by policy makers and administrators. Sorsby (2004), Logan (2006) and Ghere and York-Barr (2007) found that this ambivalence and lack of a consistent role definition caused teacher aides to feel marginalized and disempowered in the hierarchies of schools.

In this study, teacher aides described successful experiences of supporting students to achieve learning and socialisation goals when they were included in planning and review with LSTs, and occasionally with teachers. However they indicated that they often supported students' learning and behaviour management in an ad hoc way because they had not been involved in decision making about students' programs, and lacked sufficient information to support students' learning and achievement of set goals. As a result, teacher aides experienced a sense of isolation and disempowerment within the school community. The ways in which they were assigned to tasks with students, and were given opportunities to communicate and consult with teachers, parents and support personnel were haphazard and arbitrary, and at the discretion of teachers, as Mistry (2004) also found in the United Kingdom.

Teacher aides were greatly concerned about the lack of acknowledgement and inclusion of their perspectives and understandings about the needs of the students' with whom they worked. They indicated that lack of adequate information about learning tasks and students' needs before assignments were made impacted on their work with students and therefore disadvantaged the

students in terms of learning outcomes and socialisation. The lack of whole school approaches to inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties and comprehensive behaviour management plans left teacher aides feeling unsupported and yet responsible for interventions to ensure safety. Teacher aides were concerned that the lack of 'voice' in decision making about students' programs disadvantaged students and contributed towards their segregation and stigmatisation. Therefore for teacher aides, when they were isolated and marginalised in the decision-making process, whether deliberately or inadvertently, their students were isolated and marginalised too.

Implications

The implications of these findings are that, within the current organisational and philosophical contexts of schools, establishing collaborative planning policies and procedures, which include teacher aides in the processes of decision making for the students to whom they are assigned is a prerequisite for inclusive education to progress. Establishing such a process requires changed attitudes on the part of teachers, LSTs and administrators about the significance of the support roles of teacher aides as carers, connectors and mediators of the learning and social environment for students with complex needs in inclusive schools which have been identified in the research literature (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005b; Chopra et al., 2004; French & Chopra, 1999; Moran & Abbott, 2002).

A necessary first step in building collaborative support frameworks for students is developing policies and procedures for effective communication and consultation between teachers and teacher aides because the quality of the relationships between the teachers and the teacher aides has a significant effect

on the confidence and morale of the teacher aides and as a consequence on the learning relationships that developed with students (Howard & Ford, 2007). To utilise teacher aides' contributions in a more effective way, Howes (2003) argues that the periphery model of the classroom learning environment i.e. leader and led, manager and managed needs to change to a concept of team working. This would entail attitudinal change, but also significant logistical support from school administration in terms of timetabling, relief staff, and provision of facilities.

The establishment and maintenance of collaborative teamwork approaches can provide an effective means to support students, not only students with disabilities and learning difficulties but all students, by including the perspectives of all members of students' support networks including teacher aides, parents and the students themselves (Ainscow et al., 2004; Fox et al., 2004; Hauge & Babkie, 2006; Hunt et al., 2003). These approaches can also provide opportunities for critiquing assumptions about difference and diversity and about inclusion, and the pedagogical practices and utilisation of teacher aides which ensue from these assumptions (Cremin et al., 2005; Farrell & Balshaw, 2002).

For collaborative teamwork approaches to be established and maintained the roles of specialist teachers such as HOSES and LSTs also need to be examined so that their administrative, supervisory, and managerial functions do not remove them from active participation with students in learning programs in schools and classrooms, and in collaborative teaming with teachers, teacher aides, parents and health professionals as they work with students daily in the

school environment. In Queensland, there is a danger that, for those with qualifications in special education, new coordinating functions from remote placements in district schools, will limit the time available for their active and regular involvement in team building with teachers, teacher aides, health professionals and administrators (Forlin, 2001; Ghere et al., 2002; Hauge & Babkie, 2006; Lamar-Dukes & Dukes, 2005).

Issue 4: Learning about supporting students happens on-the-job

In this study the most effective way in which teacher aides learned about their roles in schools was through on-the-job learning. This learning built on the personal qualities of patience, flexibility, personal resourcefulness, consistency, calmness and a sense of humour that teacher aides brought with them to the job; qualities related to their life experience as parents, as workers in health fields, and with siblings or relatives with disabilities or learning difficulties.

Teacher aides learned about how to build on the personal qualities and experiences about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties from on the job experiences. A most significant element in this on the job learning about supporting students in inclusion is the example set by teachers. Teachers are role models for teacher aides in relation to the pedagogical and organisational practices that promote inclusion of students in classrooms and within the school community. Elkins (2007) and Rose (2007) found that teachers' assumptions about learning and curriculum and the practices that ensue from these assumptions have the most influence on how students are included or marginalised in the community of learners. As new theories about inclusion inform policy development, teachers need to examine their practices in the light of these theories. Booth et al. (2000) have developed whole school

approaches such as the *Index for Inclusion*, to support identification and promotion of inclusive practices within schools, and this tool has proved to be adaptable to different contexts (Slee, 2006a). Carrington & Robinson (2006) argue that identifying and changing practices is not enough without a thorough examination of the theoretical assumptions that underlie practices. Such examination of underlying assumptions is essential for all members of the students' support network including teacher aides.

Teacher aides need to be an integral part of this whole school approach so that teachers and teacher aides learn from each about how to support students in day to day experience, and how this can be achieved in ways that promote inclusion. Teacher aides have unique insights into how empathetic bonds based on 'being with' students can support their learning and sense of belonging in the school community. Carrington and Saggers (2008) argue that this type of empathetic understanding of students is essential for successful engagement with inclusive ideals of justice and equity for all students. Students benefit when pre-service teachers have opportunities to interact with people from diverse backgrounds during training. Developing empathy with, rather than tolerance for, diversity and difference helps to inform inclusive practice. These authors argue that for inclusion to be successful teachers need to develop this type of ethical framework, based on understanding and empathy for students, so that in their classrooms they can address the inequities that schools perpetuate. Teachers also need to appreciate and acknowledge the relational skills and understanding of students that teacher aides develop, and utilise these skills in planning for learning and socialisation tasks within classrooms.

For teacher aides, learning about skills related to the specific disabilities of the students and curriculum content was accessed via formal in-services and courses, but this learning was most effective when it related directly to their students' individual needs, and where there were opportunities to watch demonstrations and to practise the skills on the job. Whatever explicit knowledge teacher aides gained was only able to be applied as they worked with students in learning situations if the classroom teachers shared the same understandings of the students' needs, and there was respectful collaboration with assigned tasks.

Implications

One of the main initiatives of inclusive education reform in Queensland is the restructuring of roles of support personnel so that inclusive education policy is embedded in the system, in districts and in schools (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2005b). To support these changes, professional development of support personnel about their new roles and responsibilities including how to build community partnerships, to build an ethos of social justice and democratic practices, and to account for their performance is deemed necessary. The professional development offered to teacher aides entails gaining new qualifications/credentials through recognition of prior learning (RPL) or by undertaking a Certificate III course in Education Support (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2006a), which allows them to access higher classifications and pay scales. Other sources of information offered by the department to teacher aides include websites about the six recognised categories of disability, and programs for personal care requirements of students with disabilities.

These professional development packages for teacher aides are based on assumptions that inclusive education reform can be achieved through training regimes delivered in external forums. These forums deliver knowledge and skills about curriculum that often have little direct relevance for the day to day work of teacher aides with their individual students, in school organisational structures that mitigate against consultation with other members of support teams. In this study, teacher aides have indicated that for them most effective learning occurs when it is embedded in their day to day work with students, and their on the job interactions with members of the students' support networks, especially teachers.

This finding is similar to other studies with teacher aides in which they have emphasised the importance of practical, hands-on training which is related to their particular work situation (Hauge & Babkie, 2006; Howard & Ford, 2007). It also relates directly to the need, recognised by other researchers such as Deppeler et al. (2006) and Robinson and Carrington (2002), to design procedures in which teacher aides can participate in, and learn from, collaborative planning and review processes with teachers and other support personnel. In this way, teacher aides can learn about students' needs, and programming to meet those needs, in ways that relate directly to their individual students and the social and learning environment of the classrooms in which they work i.e. what to do and how to do it on-the-job. Teacher aides need to participate in individual education program (IEP) and educational adjustment program (EAP/BSP) processes to learn about the students and their individual programs before, during and after they work with them.

Summary

This chapter began by examining the eight essential themes that emerged from the study of teacher aides' experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties and learning about supporting students. The study used Giorgi's (1985b) phenomenological psychological research methodology. The essential themes that arose in this research were discussed in the light of the literature on teacher aides who support students with disabilities and learning difficulties in inclusive education contexts. All of the essential themes were supported at least in part by research and writing in the field.

Although many of the current findings reflect research on teacher aides' roles in supporting students in inclusive education contexts in overseas contexts, explication of the experiences of the teacher aides in this study added significant new insights into the experiences of teacher aides who support students with disabilities and learning difficulties as schools undergo inclusive education reform in Queensland. These new insights are now summarised.

1. Teacher aides support students through building affective relationships with them based on empathy. Previous research has established that an important role for teacher aides in inclusive education is building affective relationships with students. The findings of this study indicate that this relationship is based on the empathy that results from the personal qualities and life experiences that teacher aides bring to their roles, combined with their 'being with' students as they journey into the mainstream school environment. Empathetic relationships with students form a solid basis for inclusion.

2. The lack of clear definitions of roles and responsibilities for teacher aides in this study meant that teacher aides assumed significant responsibility for learning and behaviour management with students without the necessary qualifications or legal protection. This is inequitable for students who have the right to "successful participation and maximised achievement" regardless of cultural, physical, social/emotional and behavioural differences (Elkins, 2004, p. 13). This situation resulted because of the differing expectations of teachers, parents, health professionals and administrators about how students with disabilities and learning difficulties are supported by teacher aides and included in mainstream schools. More consistent and appropriate definitions of roles and responsibilities are needed so that students can achieve successful participation and maximised achievement. This process of role definition needs to be undertaken in ways that critically examine underlying assumptions about inclusion in a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration, so that teacher aides' roles and responsibilities are understood and defined in a consistent way by all members of staff within local school communities.

3. In this study, marginalising the 'voice' of teacher aides within the organisational structures of schools effectively excluded the significant relational skills and knowledge of students that teacher aides have from decision-making about support programs. This in turn contributed to less effective planning for learning and socialisation, and questionable utilisation of teacher aides by classroom teachers in ways that contributed to segregation and stigmatisation of students with disabilities

and learning difficulties rather than their inclusion within school communities. Including teacher aides in collaborative decision-making processes for students' programs of learning and socialisation, can contribute to more successful inclusion of students in classrooms and school communities.

4. Teacher aides learn on-the-job. The external Certificate courses offered by the department through the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector are time consuming, and mostly completed online in their own time. However, while these courses help teacher aides to learn about curriculum, they do not provide teacher aides with learning that they consider essential for performing their support roles in ways that help them to identify and respond to the needs of their individual students on-the-job. Teacher aides learn successfully when they learn from other members of the support networks for students, through hands-on demonstration and supervision, and from active involvement in planning and reviewing processes.

These insights indicate issues that are significant for teacher aides within the context of education in Queensland as it engages with inclusive education reform. Although the Inclusive Education Statement (Department of Education Training and the Arts, 2005b) expounds policies based on social justice and democratic schooling, students are still required to be labelled by virtue of their differences whether through diagnosis of categories of disability or degrees of learning difficulty. Schooling in Queensland continues on assumptions of normative practice based on an ableist normativity discourse and labelling

(Brantlinger, 2006). As a result, there is a danger that inclusive education reform will continue to operate out of a special educational needs interventionist model (Baker, 2002, p. 663), and teacher aides will continue to be employed as a resource to support the intervention programs in ways that hinder the development of more inclusive policies and practices.

Given this situation, examination of the lived experiences of the teacher aides as they supported students illuminated practices in schools that contributed to "excluding the included" (Slee & Allan, 2001) through inappropriate utilisation of teacher aides. The experiences of teacher aides also provided insights into the affective dimensions of support that are significant for the inclusion of students with disabilities and learning disabilities in current inclusive education contexts, affective dimensions that teacher aides can share in a collaborative way with teachers and other members of the support staff. The teacher aides have also provided insights into what type of professional development initiatives are most useful for learning about supporting students. They have emphasised the importance of consultation and collaboration in learning within a culture of mutual respect.

The final chapter of this thesis provides a summary of the study, and a discussion of limitations and recommendations arising from this study of teacher aides' lived experience of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in inclusive education.

Chapter 6

Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter summarises the purpose of the study, the phenomenological psychological methodology that was used, the findings of the study, the discussions of the findings and the key issues which arose from it, and the study's contribution to and implications for practice. It concludes by outlining recommendations for further research on the implementation of inclusive education reforms in Queensland as they relate to the roles of teacher aides who support students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Purpose of the study

Socio-cultural and human rights theories about disability, difference and inclusion are influencing education policies and procedures in Queensland following the report of the Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusion (Students with Disabilities) in 2004 (Elkins, 2004). In this report, it was stated that education in Queensland is likely to be moving towards policies and practices that promote an inclusive education system that values diversity and celebrates difference, and thereby ensures "the successful participation and maximised achievement of every student" regardless of cultural, physical, social/emotional and behavioural differences (Elkins, 2004, p. 13).

There is a substantial amount of literature about theories of inclusion and how they inform education policy development, but far less research that explores the implementation of inclusive education policy in schools, and how policy decisions impact on practitioners and influence their practice. In Queensland,

inclusive education policy and procedural reforms are impacting on the roles of educational practitioners who support students with disabilities and learning difficulties in schools such as specialist teachers and classroom teachers. However there is little acknowledgement in policy documents of the roles of teacher aides who support students with disabilities and learning difficulties in inclusive education settings especially in primary schools. Teacher aides continue to be viewed as a resource to be utilised and reallocated.

The purpose of this study was to address these imbalances in research about actual support practices in inclusive education by acknowledging the roles of teacher aides in supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and examining their experiences in terms of the essential meanings of supporting students that they bring to their role. There was a need to include teacher aides in the research because of the implications of new reform policies for their jobs, because they are 'frontline workers' in supporting students (Broadbent & Burgess, 2003b; Groom, 2006). This research was also significant because the phenomenon of support is a central philosophical, attitudinal and a functional aspect of inclusive education (Campbell & Fairbairn, 2005; Howard & Ford, 2007; Kerry & Kerry, 2003; Sikma, 2006; Timmons, 2006), which needs examination and clarification in terms of policy directions and decision-making in school communities. Through the process of phenomenological analysis, the essential structures of the phenomenon of support and learning about support for teacher aides were explicated.

Phenomenology: the methodology

A phenomenological psychological research methodology was used to examine teacher aides' experiences of supporting students in this study. Phenomenology

describes human experience as it is lived (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), and uncovers and describes the internal meanings of the structures of the lived experience (van Manen, 1997). Phenomenological psychology as developed by Giorgi (1985b) was the methodology deemed appropriate to guide this study.

This method was relevant and applicable because this study aimed to search for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties. It did this by asking teacher aides to reflect on their practice and to describe their experiences. The objectives as outlined in Chapter 1 were met in this study. The objectives were:

- to acknowledge teacher aides' experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties,
- to investigate and gain understanding of teacher aides' experiences of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties,
- to gain insights into the phenomenon of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties by turning to the lived experiences of teacher aides,
- to investigate how teacher aides learn about their support role.

During the data collection and analysis phases it was important for the researcher to bracket her own presuppositions about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties and learning about support. Although the researcher suspended her biases and presuppositions and knowledge gained from empirical research on teacher aides and supporting students, it is acknowledged that the researcher interpreted the data. Although the issue of eliminating bias altogether is problematic for some types of research, from a phenomenological perspective the emergent meaning is co-constituted by the

description of the experiences and the interpretive process of the person seeking to explicate the meaning of the experiences (Seidman, 1998; Shertock, 1998).

Giorgi's (1985b) methodological process, with an extra validation step taken from Ehrich (1997), was followed very closely to explore the phenomenon of supporting students and of learning about support. From this method, a specific statement representing each individual's experience, and general statements of all of the experiences representing the phenomenon of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties, and of learning about support were derived. Essential themes about the two phenomena were explicated.

Findings

The data analysis resulted in the explication of five essential themes for supporting students and three essential themes for learning about support. These themes and their descriptions represent the general structured descriptions. These five themes about supporting students are:

- **S1** Support involves emotional investment and responsiveness towards students' personal welfare.
- **S2** Supporting students with learning involves building a personal rapport and working relationship with them in order to understand their individual learning needs and behaviours.
- **S3** Supporting students effectively requires regular consultation and planning with all members of the support team including parents, principals and teacher aides.
- **S4** Supporting students sometimes requires improvisation within individual education programs to meet individual needs and circumstances.

- **S5** Supporting students means taking responsibility for their learning and behaviour.

The three themes for learning about supporting students are:

- **L1** Learning about supporting students emotionally and socially comes from life experience.
- **L2** Learning about support happens on the job.
- **L3** Consultation and communication with teachers, learning support teachers, parents and health professionals supports learning.

The findings in this study reinforced the findings from more recent research in Europe and the United Kingdom about the meaning of supporting students for teacher aides as they are replicated in the Queensland primary school inclusive education context. These findings illuminated the meanings that teacher aides bring to their support roles and provide insights into how these meanings contribute to the unique and significant role that teacher aides have in the inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties in inclusive education settings, and how they learn about this role. However, the findings of this study also added new insights into how relationships built on empathy can support inclusion of students, the impact that lack of clear definitions of roles and responsibilities for teacher aides has on inclusion of students, the ways in which organisational support structures in schools include or exclude students, and the ways in which teacher aides learn about their support roles. These insights highlighted four key issues which are significant for teacher aides as they support students with disabilities and learning difficulties in primary schools, but also have implications for policy makers as they implement procedural reforms such as restructuring of roles and designing professional

development initiatives for specialist teachers, classroom teachers and teacher aides.

Key insights and implications for policy and practice

Insight 1: Teacher aides support students with disabilities and learning difficulties through the development of affective relationships with them based on empathy. The implication is that this empathetic relationship of teacher aides and students is a significant role for successful inclusion of students, and even more so if current logistical and funding models of primary schooling with one teacher classrooms, lock-step progression annually, large classes, and insufficient or remote specialist teachers continue.

Insight 2: Lack of clear or consistent definition of the roles and responsibilities of teacher aides leads to misinterpretation of their roles by administrators, teachers, parents and other support personnel. The implications are that teacher aides are utilised by teachers and other support personnel in ways that exclude rather than include the students to whom they are assigned.

Insight 3: Teacher aides feel isolated and marginalised within the decision-making structures of schools when the affective knowledge about students with disabilities and learning difficulties, gained from their close working relationships with them, remains unacknowledged and un-included in decision-making and program planning for these students. The implications are that there are risks that teacher aides are left to make decisions about learning and behaviour, and this is inequitable for them and for the students. There is an urgent need to acknowledge the attributes, knowledge and skills of teacher aides as support practitioners, and to include them in mutually respectful and

collaborative teamwork models of decision-making and planning for supporting students.

Insight 4: Teacher aides learn on-the-job from other members of the students support network, and through hands on demonstration and supervision. The implications are that more emphasis needs to be placed on approaches to professional development that provide procedures and timetabling in schools so that learning about supporting students can take place through collaborative teaming between all members of the students' support networks, and especially between classroom teachers and teacher aides. This type of professional development can also facilitate a critical examination of the underlying assumptions about disability, difference and inclusion that inform support practices in schools.

Implications for research

Giorgi's (1985b; 2003) phenomenological psychological approach used in this study illuminated new insights about the phenomena of supporting students through phenomenological analysis of descriptions of the lived experiences of teacher aides in inclusive school settings. This type of research into support practices in schools is necessary as educational systems and school communities grapple with the complex issues related to inclusive education reform. While attitudinal studies about inclusive principles are important, as are action research projects to inform and develop staff, studies that explore lived experiences through rich description provide opportunities for in-depth explication of structures and meanings. These studies provide empirical data which can contribute towards identifying and acknowledging the variety of

inclusive practices that happen daily in schools, and illuminate the meanings that these practices have, for the individual research participants. From this illumination, mutually respectful discussion and critical examination of these meanings and practices, and the assumptions about inclusion which underpin them, can be more readily facilitated.

Limitations of the study

The study was limited to primary school settings and did not include teacher aides from secondary school settings. Although the sample size was small, the sample of eight participants was deemed adequate for a phenomenological study. The sample was also drawn from schools across the Brisbane metropolitan area, and from state and Catholic school settings. Therefore the study, while not attempting to generalise, was able to illuminate significant new insights into the meanings of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in the experiences of teacher aides based on a wide spectrum of primary schools undergoing inclusive education reform.

These insights, and their implications, give rise to recommendations for further research, and for consideration by policy-makers, administrators and practitioners as schools in Queensland engage with inclusive education reform.

Recommendations for teachers and administrators

This study explicated eight essential meanings of supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties from rich descriptions of teacher aides working in six schools across Brisbane. The findings from this study highlight the experiences of teacher aides as inclusive education reform is occurring, and indicate issues and areas of concern about how notions of inclusive education and the reform initiatives that ensue from these notions are impacting on teacher

aides as support practitioners, and influencing their understandings of inclusive practice. The following recommendations are made in view of the findings of this study and the essential themes that emerged from it.

It is recommended that:

- The support roles of teacher aides for students with disabilities and learning difficulties are acknowledged and respected in educational policy documents, leadership teams and the school community
- Schools examine how their policies and procedures promote inclusion of all students in a collaborative way that includes the perspectives and contributions all members of the student's support network, including teacher aides.
- Schools develop policies and procedures to facilitate collaborative team building and decision-making in relation to structures and practices that provide individual support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties in ways that improve their effective inclusion within school communities. These include enrolment procedures, individual programming, pedagogies for differentiated learning, withdrawal and classroom management for teacher aides, behaviour management programs, and effective professional development for all of the above.
- Schools develop procedures to establish and structure times and places for regular consultation and collaboration between teachers and teacher aides about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties with differentiated tasks in intensive withdrawal and/or whole class programs.

- The roles and responsibilities of case managers, HOSES and LSTs are examined in relation to their impact and influence on inclusive practice in schools.

Recommendations for further research

This study revealed that phenomenological psychological research is useful for illuminating the meanings about supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties that teacher aides bring to their roles. This type of research adds significant insights into the way in which support personnel structure the meanings that inform their practices. Reflective understanding of these meanings is essential for a process of critical examination of policies, procedures and practices as schools engage with inclusive education reform. It is recommended that:

- Phenomenological psychological research methodology be used more widely in studies that seek to understand the human experience of inclusion in practice
- Further studies of this nature explore the experiences of students, parents and teachers during inclusive education reform
- Further studies explore the role of empathy in supporting inclusive relationships and practices with students from diverse backgrounds
- Further studies explore collaborative teaming models for inclusive education
- A study that explores the classroom teacher/teacher aide working relationship
- A study that explores the case manager's role with students with disabilities

- A study that explores the enrolment and school adjustment processes for students with disabilities

Conclusion

Writing policy about inclusive education and actualizing inclusion in practice in schools through reform initiatives is a complicated process which has serious implications for support practitioners and for their students. It is evident from this study that there are implications for teacher aides in terms of how inclusive education policy initiatives in Queensland impact on their roles and responsibilities in schools. This study reveals that teacher aides have significant insights into the meaning of the phenomenon of supporting students and learning about how to support students from their lived experiences with students with disabilities and learning difficulties in primary schools in Brisbane. Their empathetic relationships with students, and their experiential knowledge and skills contribute substantially towards a sense of belonging for students within the school community. However this study also reveals that their roles and responsibilities are often misinterpreted by administrators, teachers and parents in ways that can contribute towards exclusion of these same students.

During the process of conducting this study, the researcher observed much confusion in schools about the inclusive education reform initiatives, and it seems to be this confusion that leads to misinterpretation of roles. There is confusion created in schools when policy reforms are introduced in a top-down manner, practitioners adopt an inclusive education rhetoric, and roles of specialist teachers, teachers and support personnel are substantially restructured and this happens without critical examination of underlying assumptions. These

assumptions about schooling, about disability and difference, and about power relations within schools, structure personal and organisational responses to reforming the existing parameters within which support for students is provided. The researcher found examples of inclusive practice in schools where support networks worked collaboratively to develop support processes which included all students in the learning process. However there were many schools where understandings about 'integration' and 'inclusion' are still confused, and support practices continue to marginalize students with disabilities and learning difficulties and their support staff.

While the issues remain complex, it is important for policy makers to provide the ways and means for teachers and indeed the whole school community to examine underlying assumptions about teaching and learning and about disability, difference and inclusion as a continual process of reflection as reforms are implemented. In Queensland there is an urgent need to scrutinize inclusive education policies such as the EAP process, restructuring of support roles, teacher practices, and procedures for professional development. All of these factors impact on the working lives of support practitioners, and influence how students are included or excluded within the school learning community.

References

Ainscow, M. (2000). The next step for special education: Supporting the development of inclusive practices. *British Journal of Special Education, 27*(2), 76. Retrieved January 30, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Ainscow, M., Booth, T., & Dyson, A. (2004). Understanding and developing inclusive practices in schools: A collaborative action research network. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 8*, 125-139. Retrieved April 30, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Allan, J. (2003a). Introduction. In J. Allan (Ed.), *Inclusion, participation and democracy: What is the purpose?* (Vol. 2). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Allan, J. (2003b). Productive pedagogies and the challenge of inclusion. *British Journal of Special Education, 30*(4), 175-179. Retrieved June 28, 2007, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Allan, J. (2008). *Rethinking inclusive education: The philosophers of difference in practice*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Andrews, D., & Forlin, C. (2002). Changing leadership constructs in the 21st century : Reimaging roles, relationships and redefining professional development [Electronic Version]. *Occasional paper. University of Southern Queensland. Faculty of Education ; n.1 2002*, 4-87. Retrieved July 12, 2007 from http://www.usq.edu.au/faculty/educate/publish/PDF%20files/OC%20No.1,%202002%20-%20electronic.pdf

Armstrong, D. (2005). Reinventing 'inclusion': New Labour and the cultural politics of special education. *Oxford Review of Education, 31*, 135-151. Retrieved May 25, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Armstrong, F. (2003). Difference, discourse and democracy: The making and breaking of policy in the market place. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 7*, 241. Retrieved April 30, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Armstrong, F., & Barton, L. (2007). Policy, experience, and change and the challenge of inclusive education: The case of England. In L. Barton & F. Armstrong (Eds.), *Policy, experience and change: Cross cultural reflections on inclusive education*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Armstrong, F., & Moore, M. (2004). Action research: Developing inclusive practice and transforming cultures. In F. Armstrong & M. Moore (Eds.), *Action research for inclusive education : Changing places, changing practices, changing minds* (pp. 1-16). London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Arnesen, A.-L., & Lundahl, L. (2006). Still Social and Democratic? Inclusive Education Policies in the Nordic Welfare States. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 50*(3), 285-300. Retrieved October 17, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Arthur, M., Butterfield, N., & McKinnon, D. H. (1998). Communication intervention for students with severe disability: Results of a partner training program. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 45*, 97-115. Retrieved May 12, 2006, from Meditext (via Informit) database.

Ashworth, P. D., Giorgi, A. P., & Koning, A. J. J. (1986). Theoretical justification for the use of descriptions in psychological research. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3-22.

Aylen, M. (2007). From Teacher Aides to Teaching Assistants: How Plowden Promoted Parental Participation in Our Primary Schools. *FORUM: for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education, 49*(1), 107-114.

Bailey, J., Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (1998). Australia: Inclusion through categorisation? In T. Booth & M. Ainscow (Eds.), *From them to us* (pp. 186-192). London: Routledge.

Baker, B. (2002). The hunt for disability: The new eugenics and the normalization of school children. *Teachers College Record, 104*, 663-704. Retrieved May 7, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Barton, L. (1996). Sociology and disability: Some emerging issues. In L. Barton (Ed.), *Disability and society : Emerging issues and insights* (pp. 3-17). New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

Barton, L. (1997). Inclusive education: romantic, subversive or realistic? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 1*, 231-242. Retrieved October 31, 2007, from Informaworld database.

Barton, L. (2003). *Inclusive education and teacher education : A basis of hope or a discourse of delusion*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.

Beck, J., & Young, M. (2005). The assault on the professions and the restructuring of academic and professional identities: A Bernsteinian analysis. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 26*, 183-197. Retrieved May 17, 2007, from Informaworld database.

Berg, M., & Dahlberg, K. (1998). A phenomenological study of women's experiences of complicated childbirth. *Midwifery, 14*(1), 23-29.

Biklen, D. (2000). Constructing inclusion: Lessons from critical, disability narratives. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 4*, 337-353. Retrieved April 30, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Blatchford, P., Russell, A., Bassett, P., Brown, P., & Martin, C. (2007). The role and effects of teaching assistants in English primary schools (Years 4 to 6) 2000-2003. Results from the Class Size and Pupil-Adult Ratios (CSPAR) KS2 Project. *British Educational Research Journal, 33*(1), 5-26. Retrieved May 18, 2008, from Informaworld database.

Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2002). *Index for inclusion : Developing learning and participation in schools*. Bristol, UK: Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education.

Booth, T., Ainscow, M., Black-Hawkins, K., Vaughan, M., & Shaw, L. (2000). *Index for Inclusion*. Bristol, UK: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

Bourke, P., & Carrington, S. (2007). Inclusive education reform: Implications for teacher aides. *Australasian Journal of Special Education, 31*(1), 15 - 24. Retrieved June 5, 2007, from Informaworld database.

Brantlinger, E. (1997). Using ideology: Cases of nonrecognition of the politics of research and practice in special education. *Review of Educational Research, 67*, 425-459. Retrieved April 7, 2007, from ProQuest 5000 International database.

Brantlinger, E. (2006). Conclusion: Whose labels? Whose norms? Whose needs? Whose benefits? In E. Brantlinger (Ed.), *Who benefits from special education? Remediating (fixing) other people's children* (pp. 233-247). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Broadbent, C., & Burgess, J. (2003a). *Building effective inclusive classrooms through supporting the professional learning of special needs teacher assistants*. Paper presented at the Communities of learning : Communities of practice : 43rd Annual ALA National Conference. Retrieved August 12, 2006, from http://www.ala.asn.au/conf/2003/broadbent.pdf

Broback, G., & Bertero, C. (2003). How next of kin experience palliative care of relatives at home. *European Journal of Cancer Care, 12*, 339-346. Retrieved May 27, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Brodin, J., & Lindstrand, P. (2007). Perspectives of a school for all. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 11*(2), 133-145. Retrieved May 12, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Broer, S. M., Doyle, M. B., & Giangreco, M. F. (2005). Perspectives of students with intellectual disabilities about their experiences with paraprofessional support. *Exceptional Children, 71*(4), 415-430. Retrieved May 14, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Butt, G., & Lance, A. (2005). Modernizing the roles of support staff in primary schools: Changing focus, changing function. *Educational Review, 57*(2), 139-149. Retrieved 31 May, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Calder, I., & Grieve, A. (2004). Working with other adults: What teachers need to know. *Educational Studies, 30*, 113-126. Retrieved May 12, 2007, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Campbell, A., & Fairbairn, G. (Eds.). (2005). *Working with support in the classroom*. London: Sage.

Carrier, J. (1989). Sociological perspectives on special education. *New Education, 11*, 21-31.

Carrington, S. (1999). Inclusion needs a different school culture. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 3*, 141-153. Retrieved May 17, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Carrington, S. (2000). *Accommodating the needs of diverse learners: Teacher beliefs.* Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Brisbane.

Carrington, S., & Robinson, R. (2004). A case study of inclusive school development: A journey of learning. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 8*, 141-153. Retrieved May 12, 2006, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Carrington, S., & Robinson, R. (2006). Inclusive school community: Why is it so complex? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 10*(4/5), 323-334. Retrieved July 11, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Carrington, S., & Saggers, B. (2008). Service-learning informing the development of an inclusive ethical framework for beginning teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(3), 795-806.

Causton-Theoharis, J., Giangreco, M. F., Doyle, M. B., & Vadasy, P. F. (2007). Paraprofessionals. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 40*(1), 56-62. Retrieved June 11, 2008, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Causton-Theoharis, J., & Malmgren, K. (2005a). Building Bridges: Strategies to Help Paraprofessionals Promote Peer Interaction. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 37*(6), 18-24. Retrieved 31 May, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Causton-Theoharis, J., & Malmgren, K. (2005b). Increasing peer interactions for students with severe disabilities via paraprofessional training. *Exceptional Children, 71*, 431-444. Retrieved May 14, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Chopra, R. V., Sandoval-Lucero, E., Aragon, L., Bernal, C., De Balderas, H. B., & Carroll, D. (2004). The Paraprofessional Role of Connector. *Remedial and Special Education, 2007*, 219-231. Retrieved May 5, 2007, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Christie, K. (2005). Paraprofessionals on the Front Line. *Phi Delta Kappan., 87*(3), 181-183. Retrieved June 25, 2007, from ProQuest Education Journals database.

Churchill, S. D., Lowery, J. E., McNally, O., & Rao, A. (1998). The question of reliability in interpretive psychological research: A comparison of three phenomenologically based protocol analyses. In R. S. Valle (Ed.), *Phenomenological inquiry in psychology. Existential and transpersonal dimensions* (pp. 63-85). New York: Plenum Press.

Clark, C., Dyson, A., Millward, A., & Robson, S. (1999). Theories of Inclusion, Theories of Schools: Deconstructing and reconstructing the 'inclusive school'. *British Educational Research Journal, 25*(2), 157. Retrieved January 25, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Colaizzi, P. F. (1973). *Reflection and research in psychology: A phenomenological study of learning*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing.

Colaizzi, P. F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R. S. Valle, M. King & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological alternatives for psychology* (pp. 48-71). New York: Oxford University Press.

Cook, B. G. (2004). Inclusive Teachers' Attitudes toward Their Students with Disabilities: A Replication and Extension. *The Elementary School Journal, 104*, 307-322. Retrieved May 12, 2007, from ProQuest 5000 International database.

Cook, B. G., Cameron, D., L., & Tankersley, M. (2007). Inclusive Teachers' Attitudinal Ratings of Their Students With Disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education, 40*, 230-239. Retrieved May 9, 2007, from ProQuest Education Journals database.

Crebbin, W. (2004). *Quality teaching and learning : Challenging orthodoxies*. New York: P. Lang.

Cremin, H., Thomas, G., & Vincett, K. (2003). Learning zones: An evaluation of three models for improving learning through teacher/teaching assistant teamwork. *Support for Learning, 18*(4), 154-161. Retrieved June 28, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Cremin, H., Thomas, G., & Vincett, K. (2005). Working with Teaching Assistants: Three Models Evaluated. *Research Papers in Education, 20*(4), 413-432. Retrieved May 15, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research : Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Merrill.

Crotty, M. (1996). *Phenomenology and nursing research*. Melbourne: Churchill Livingstone.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin.

Crowther, J., & Martin, I. (2005). Twenty-first century Freire. *Adults Learning, 17*(2), 7-9. Retrieved May 12, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Davern, L., Sapon-Shevin, M., D'Aquanni, M., Fisher, M., Larson, M., & Black, J., Minondo, S. (1997). Drawing the distinction between coherent and fragmented efforts at building inclusive schools. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 30*(3), 31-39. Retrieved February 4, 2007, from Informaworld database.

Dean, J. (2006). Risk management in the context of challenging behaviour. *15*(1), 3-10. Retrieved May 13, 2007, from A+Education (via Informit) database.

Demaine, J. (2003). Social reproduction and education policy. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 2007*, 125-140. Retrieved June 5, 2007, from Informit database.

Dempsey, I. (2002). National reporting and students with a disability in the United States and Australia. *Australasian Journal of Special Education, 25*, 16-31.

Dempsey, I., Foreman, P., & Jenkinson, J. (2002). Educational enrolment of students with a disability in New South Wales and Victoria. *International Journal of Disability, Development & Education, 49*, 31-46. Retrieved July 6, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Denzin, N. K. (1997). *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21st century*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. (2000). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 1-28). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Department of Children Schools and Families. (2003). Teaching assistants: The National Agreement. Retrieved July 12, 2007, from http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/teachingassistants/

Department of Education Training and the Arts. (2003). Learning and Disability Support. Retrieved July 23, 2007, from http://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/learning/

Department of Education Training and the Arts. (2004a). Education Adjustment Program. Retrieved July 30, 2007, from http://education.qld.gov.au/students/disabilities/adjustment/index.html

Department of Education Training and the Arts. (2004b). Government response to The Ministerial taskforce on inclusive education (students with disabilities). Retrieved May 12, 2006, from http://education.qld.gov.au/students/disabilities/adjustmhttp://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/learning/docs/inclusedstatement2005.pdf

Department of Education Training and the Arts. (2005a). Education adjustment program: Guidelines and procedures. Retrieved September 24, 2007, from http://education.qld.gov.au/students/disabilities/adjustment/pdfs/eapguidelines-may05.pdf

Department of Education Training and the Arts. (2005b). Inclusive Education Statement. Retrieved May 14, 2008, from http://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/learning/docs/inclusedstatement2005.pdf

Department of Education Training and the Arts. (2005c). Support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties from http://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/learning/docs/inclusedstatement2005.pdf

Department of Education Training and the Arts. (2006a). Classification structure for teacher aides. Retrieved July 12, 2007, from http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/employee/teacheraide/classification_structure_06.html

Department of Education Training and the Arts. (2006b). CRP-PR-009: Inclusive Education. Retrieved September 19, 2007, from http://education.qld.gov.au/strategic/eppr/curriculum/crppr009/

Department of Education Training and the Arts. (2006c). Teacher aides. Retrieved April 20, 2008, from http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/employee/teacheraide/index.html

Department of Education Training and the Arts. (2006d). Teacher aides. Retrieved September 17, 2007, from http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/employee/teacheraide/.

Department of Education Training and the Arts. (2006e). Teacher aides working with students with disabilities. Retrieved September 17, 2007, from http://education.qld.gov.au/studentservices/staff/publications/teachaideseries.html

Department of Education Training and the Arts. (2008). *Position description: Head of Special Education Services*. Retrieved May 8, 2008. from http://jobs.govnet.qld.gov.au.

Deppeler, J., & Harvey, D. (2004). Validating the British Index for Inclusion for the Australian context: Stage one. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 8*, 155-184. Retrieved August 12, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Deppeler, J., Loreman, T., & Sharma, U. (2006). Improving inclusive practices in secondary schools : Moving from specialist support to supporting learning communities. *Australasian Journal of Special Education, 29*(2), 117-127. Retrieved May 31, 2007, from A+Education (via Informit) database.

Downing, J. E., Ryndak, D. L., & Clark, D. (2000). Paraeducators in inclusive classrooms: Their own perceptions. *Remedial & Special Education, 21*(3), 171-181. Retrieved September 17, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Dyson, A. (2005). Philosophy, politics and economics? The story of inclusive education in England. In D. Mitchell (Ed.), *Contextualizing inclusive education: Evaluating old and new perspectives.* (pp. 63-88). London: Routledge.

Edwards, R., & Nicoll, K. (2006). Expertise, competence and reflection in the rhetoric of professional development. *British Educational Research Journal, 32*(1), 115-131. Retrieved June 25, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Ehrich, L. (1997). *Principals' experience of professional development and their response to teachers' professional development: A phenomenological study.* Unpublished Doctor of Philosophy thesis, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Qld.

Ehrich, L. (2003). Phenomenology : The quest for meaning. In T. O'Donoghue & K. Punch (Eds.), *Qualitative educational research in action : Doing and reflecting* (pp. 42-68). London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Elkins, J. (2004). The Ministerial Taskforce on Inclusive Education (Students with Disabilities). Final Report. Retrieved January 25, 2006, from http://education.qld.gov.au/students/disabilities/adjustment/development/docs/disable-report.pdf

Elkins, J. (2007). Learning Disabilities: Bringing Fields and Nations Together. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 40*(5), 392-399. Retrieved September 13, 2007, from Academic search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Ellis, C., & Berger, L. (2003). Their story/my story/our story : Including the researcher's experience in interview research. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Postmodern interviewing* (pp. 157-183). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Etscheidt, S. (2005). Paraprofessional Services for Students with Disabilities: A Legal Analysis of Issues. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 30*(2), 60-80. Retrieved June 25, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Evans, J., & Lunt, I. (2002). Inclusive education: Are there limits? *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 17*(1), 1-14. Retrieved May 1, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Farrell, P., & Balshaw, M. (2002). Can teaching assistants make special education inclusive? In P. Farrell & M. Ainscow (Eds.), *Making Special Education Inclusive* (pp. 39-50). London: David Fulton.

Flem, A., & Keller, C. (2005). Inclusion in Norway : A study of ideology in practice. In J. Rix, K. Simmons, M. Nind & K. Sheehy (Eds.), *Policy and power in inclusive education: Values into practice* (pp. 25-35). London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2003). The Interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 61-106). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Foreman, P., Arthur-Kelly, M., Pascoe, S., & King, B. S. (2004). Evaluating the educational experiences of students with profound and multiple disabilities in inclusive and segregated classroom settings: An Australian perspective. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 29*(3), 183-193. Retrieved August 12, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Forlin, C. (2000). Support Teacher (Learning Difficulties): Changing roles in Queensland. *Special Education Perspectives, 9*(2), 3-12. Retrieved July 12, 2007, from A+Education (via Informit) database.

Forlin, C. (2001). The role of the support teacher in Australia. *European Journal of Special Needs, 16*, 121-131. Retrieved June 25, 2006, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Forlin, C. (2006). Inclusive Education in Australia ten years after Salamanca. *European Journal of Psychology of Education 21*(3), 265-277. Retrieved April 30, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Foster, G. (2005). The nature of educational inclusion for students diagnosed autistic spectrum disorder with challenging behaviours (Doctoral Thesis). *Queensland University of Technology. School of Learning and Professional Studies.* Retrieved June 2, 2007, from http://adt.library.qut.edu.au/adt-qut/public/adt-QUT20060421.124308/

Fox, S., Farrell, P., & Davis, P. (2004). Factors associated with the effective inclusion of primary-aged pupils with Down syndrome. *British Journal of Special Education, 31*(4), 184-190. Retrieved September 17, 2007, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Freeman, R., Eber, L., Anderson, C., Irvin, L., Horner, R., Bounds, M., et al. (2006). Building Inclusive School Cultures Using School-Wide Positive Behavior Support: Designing Effective Individual Support Systems for Students With Significant Disabilities. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 31*(1), 4-17. Retrieved July 20, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Freire, P. (1972). *Cultural action for freedom*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.

French, N. K. (1999). Paraeducators and teachers: Shifting roles. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 32*, 69-73. Retrieved August 12, 2006, from Proquest 5000 International database.

French, N. K. (2001). Supervising Paraprofessionals: A Survey of Teacher Practices. *Journal of Special Education, 35*(1), 41-53. Retrieved September 17, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

French, N. K., & Chopra, R. V. (1999). Parent perspectives on the roles of paraprofessionals. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 24*, 259-272. Retrieved August 12, 2006, from EBSCOhost database.

Fromm, E. (1975). *The art of loving*. London: Unwin Paperbacks.

Furtado, M. (2005). The end of modernist approaches to school funding policy in Australia: A new rationale for funding with inclusive implications for all Australian schools? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 9*, 431-448. Retrieved May 10, 2006, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Gallagher, D. J. (1998). The scientific knowledge base of special education: Do we know what we think we know? *Exceptional Children, 64*(4), 493. Retrieved October 29, 2007, from ProQuest Educational Journals database.

Gallagher, D. J. (2007). Challenging orthodoxy in special education: On longstanding debates and philosophical divides. In L. Florian (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Special Education* (pp. 515-527). London: Sage Publications.

Gallagher, D. J. (Ed.). (2003). *Challenging orthodoxy in special education: Dissenting voices*. Denver: Love Publishing Co.

Gerschel, L. (2005). The special educational needs coordinator's role in managing teaching assistants: The Greenwich perspective. *Support for Learning, 20*(2), 69-76. Retrieved 31 May, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Ghere, G., & York-Barr, J. (2007). Paraprofessional Turnover and Retention in Inclusive Programs: Hidden Costs and Promising Practices. *Remedial and Special Education, 28*(1), 21-33. Retrieved May 26, 2007, from ProQuest 5000 International database.

Ghere, G., York-Barr, J., & Sommerness, J. (2002). Supporting students with disabilities in inclusive schools: A Curriculum for job-embedded paraprofessional development. *Facilitator manual [and] paraprofessional handouts.*, from http://gateway.library.qut.edu.au/login?url=http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&an=ED468320

Ghesquière, P., Maes, B., & Vandenberghe, R. (2004). The usefulness of qualitative case studies in research on special needs education. *International Journal of Disability, Development & Education, 51*, 171-184.

Giangreco, M. F. (2001). *Teacher leadership: Working with paraeducators.* Unpublished manuscript, U.S. Vermont.

Giangreco, M. F. (2002). Model for paraprofessional and supervisor training designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities in general education settings. Final report. Retrieved 9 May, 2007, from http://gateway.library.qut.edu.au/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED471808&site=ehost-live

Giangreco, M. F., & Broer, S. M. (2005). Questionable utilization of paraprofessionals in inclusive schools: Are we addressing symptoms or causes? *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 20*, 10-26. Retrieved April 30, 2005, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Giangreco, M. F., & Doyle, M. B. (2007). Teacher assistants in inclusive schools. In L. Florian (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of special education* (pp. 429-439). London: Sage Publications.

Giangreco, M. F., Doyle, M. B., Halvorsen, A. T., & Broer, S. M. (2004). Alternatives to overreliance on paraprofessionals in inclusive schools. *Journal of Educational Leadership, 17*(2), 82-90.

Giangreco, M. F., Edelman, S. W., & Broer, S. M. (2001a). *A guide to schoolwide planning for paraeducator supports.*Unpublished manuscript, U.S. Vermont.

Giangreco, M. F., Edelman, S. W., & Broer, S. M. (2001b). Respect, appreciation, and acknowledgement of paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 67*, 485-498. Retrieved May 12, 2006, from ProQuest 5000 International (via EBSCOhost) database.

Giangreco, M. F., Edelman, S. W., Broer, S. M., & Doyle, M. B. (2001). Paraprofessional support of students with disabilities: Literature from the past decade. *Exceptional Children, 68*, 45-63. Retrieved May 12, 2006, from ProQuest 5000 International (via EBSCOhost) database.

Giangreco, M. F., Yuan, S., McKenzie, B., Cameron, P., & Fialka, J. (2005). "Be Careful What You Wish for ...": Five Reasons to Be Concerned About the Assignment of Individual Paraprofessionals [Electronic Version]. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37, 28-34. Retrieved 17 May, 2007 from http://gateway.library.qut.edu.au/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tfh&AN=16832497&site=ehost-live

Gillies, R. M., & Carrington, S. B. (2004). Inclusion: Culture, Policy and Practice: A Queensland Perspective. . *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, 24*(2), 117-128. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from Informaworld database.

Giorgi, A. P. (1975). Convergence and divergence of qualitative methods in psychology. In A. P. Giorgi, C. Fischer & E. Murray (Eds.), *Duquesne studies in phenomenological phenomenology: Volume II* (pp. 72-79). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. P. (1979). The relations among level, type, and structure and their importance for social science theorizing: A dialogue with Schutz. In A. P. Giorgi, R. Knowles & D. L. Smith (Eds.), *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology* (Vol. 3, pp. 81-96). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. P. (1985a). The phenomenological psychology of learning and the verbal learning tradition. In A. P. Giorgi (Ed.), *Phenomenology and psychological research* (pp. 23-85). Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. P. (1985b). Sketch of a psychological phenomenological method. In A. P. Giorgi (Ed.), *Phenomenology and Psychological Research* (pp. 8-85). Pittsburgh, P.A.: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. P. (Ed.). (1985c). *Phenomenology and psychological research*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Giorgi, A. P., & Giorgi, B. M. (2003). The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. In P. M. Camic, J. E. Rhodes & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design* (pp. 243-273). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

Goessling, D. P. (1998). *The invisible elves of the inclusive school - paraprofessionals.* Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference. from http://gateway.library.qut.edu.au/login?url=http://search.epnet.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&an=ED421806

.

Graham, L. (2006). Caught in the net: A Foucaultian interrogation of the incidental effects of limited notions of inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 10*, 3-25. Retrieved April 30, 2006, from Professional Development Collection via EBSCOhost database.

Griffin-Shirley, N., & Matlock, D. (2004). Paraprofessionals speak out: A survey. *RE:view, 36*, 127. Retrieved May 12, 2006, from Proquest 5000 International database.

Groenewald, T. (2003). Growing talented people through cooperative education: A phenomenological exploration. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education [electronic resource]* Retrieved 12 August, 2006, from http://www.apjce.org/volume_4/volume_4_2_49_61.pdf

Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Research Methods, 3*(1). Retrieved July 7, 2006, from http://www.ualberta.ca/-iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf/groenewald.pdf

Groom, B. (2006). Building relationships for learning: The developing role of the teaching assistant. *Support for Learning, 21*(4), 199-203. Retrieved 9 May, 2007, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Groom, B., & Rose, R. (2005). Supporting the inclusion of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in the primary school: The role of teaching assistants. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs 5*(1), 20-30. Retrieved May 14, 2007, from Blackwell-Synergy database.

Grover, S. (2004). Why Won't They Listen to Us?: On Giving Power and Voice to Children Participating in Social Research [Electronic Version]. *Childhood*, 11, 81-93. Retrieved May 18, 2008 from http://ejournals.ebsco.com/direct.asp?ArticleID=0A3A0N35YDNBETYU4FBV

Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. (1989). *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2003a). Analyzing interpretive practice. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (2 ed., pp. 214-248). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (Eds.). (2003b). *Postmodern interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Gunter, H. (2004). Labels and labelling in the field of educational leadership. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 25*(1), 21-41. Retrieved May 12, 2006, from Academic Search Elite via EBSCOhost database.

Gunter, H., Rayner, S., Thomas, H., Fielding, A., Butt, G., & Lance, A. (2005). Teachers, time and work: Findings from the Evaluation of the Transforming the School Workforce Pathfinder Project. *School Leadership & Management, 25*(5), 441-454. Retrieved 31 May, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Hall, W. (2005). Making the most of the teaching assistant for special educational needs. In A. Campbell & G. Fairbairn (Eds.), *Working with support in the classroom* (pp. 24-39). London: Sage.

Hammeken, P. A. (1996). *Inclusion: An essential guide for the paraprofessional. A practical reference tool for all paraprofessionals working in inclusionary settings.* Minnesota, U.S.

Hammett, N., & Burton, N. (2005). Motivation, stress and learning support assistants: An examination of staff perceptions at a rural secondary school. *School Leadership & Management, 25*, 299-310. Retrieved September 16, 2006, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Hardy, L. (2004). The well-trained aide. *American School Board Journal, 191*(10), 32-35. Retrieved August 12, 2006, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Harling, V. (2006). *The impact of on going professional training and development for teachers of students with disabilities*. Retrieved May 2, 2007. from http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/docs/files/communities/docman/1/School_Services_Officers_R.pdf.

Harvey-Koelpin, S. (2006). The impact of reform on students with disabilities. In E. Brantlinger (Ed.), *Who benefits from special education? Remediating (fixing) other people's children.* Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hauge, J. M., & Babkie, A. M. (2006). Develop Collaborative Special Educator--Paraprofessional Teams: One Para's View. *Intervention in School & Clinic, 42*(1), 51-53. Retrieved May 15, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Heidigger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Hemmingsson, H., Borell, L., & Gustavsson, A. (2003). Participation in school: School assistants creating opportunities and obstacles for pupils with disabilities. *Occupational Therapy Journal of Research: Occupation, Participation and Health, 23*(3), 88-98. Retrieved 26 March, 2007, from ProQuest 5000 International database.

Hickey, C. (2006). Managing risk: Risk management strategies and violent student behaviour. *Independent Education. 36(3)*, 28-29. Retrieved May 31, 2007, from A+Education (via Informit) database.

Hill, C. (2003). The role of instructional assistants in regular classrooms: Are they influencing inclusive practices? *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 49*(1). Retrieved May 7, 2007, from ProQuest 5000 International (via EBSCOhost) database.

Hipsky, S. (2007). The Paraprofessional Perspective [Electronic Version] from http://gateway.library.qut.edu.au/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED495285&site=ehost-live

Howard, R., & Ford, J. (2007). The Roles and Responsibilities of Teacher Aides Supporting Students with Special Needs in Secondary School Settings. *Australasian Journal of Special Education, 31*(1), 25-43. Retrieved August 4, 2007, from Informaworld database.

Howes, A. (2003). Teaching reforms and the impact of paid adult support on participation and learning in mainstream schools. *Support for Learning, 18*(4), 147-153. Retrieved June 28, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Humes, W., & Bryce, T. (2003). Post-structuralism and policy research in education. *Journal of Education Policy, 18*, 175-187. Retrieved August 12, 2006, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Hunt, P., Soto, G., Maier, J., & Doering, K. (2003). Collaborative Teaming to Support Students at Risk and Students With Severe Disabilities in General Education Classrooms. *Exceptional Children, 69*(3), 315-332. Retrieved May 12, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Husserl, E. (1970 (Original work published 1900). *Logical investigations* (Vol. J.N. Findlay, Trans.1). New York: Humanities Press.

Hycner, R. H. (1999). Some guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. In A. Bryman & R. G. Burgess (Eds.), *Qualitative research* (Vol. 3, pp. 143-164). London: Sage.

Idol, L. (2006). Toward Inclusion of Special Education Students in General Education. *Remedial & Special Education, 27*(2), 77-94. Retrieved September 17, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Kavale, K. A. (2007). Quantitative research synthesis: Meta-analysis of research on meeting special educational needs. In L. Florian (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of special education* (pp. 207-221). London: Sage Publications.

Keller, C. L., Bucholz, J., & Brady, M. P. (2007). Yes, I Can! *Teaching Exceptional Children, 39*(3), 18-23. Retrieved June 25, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Kerry, C. A., & Kerry, T. (2003). Government Policy and the Effective Employment and Deployment of Support Staff in UK Schools. *International Studies in Educational Administration, 31*(1), 65-81. Retrieved July 4, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Killion, J. (2004). "No paraprofessional left behind" means hard choices on training. *Journal of Staff Development, 25*(1), 63-64. Retrieved May 15, 2007, from ProQuest Education Journals database.

Kingsbury, A. (2005, 2005/03/21/). Education. *U.S. News & World Report,* p. 48.

Kugelmass, J. W. (2004). What is a culture of inclusion? *EENET-Enabling Education* Retrieved 17 August, 2006, from http://www.eenet.org.uk/newsletters/news8/page14.shtml

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Lacey, P. (2001). The Role of Learning Support Assistants in the Inclusive Learning of Pupils with Severe and Profound Learning Difficulties. *Educational Review, 53*(2), 157-167. Retrieved May 9, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Lamar-Dukes, P., & Dukes, C. (2005). Consider the Roles and Responsibilities of the Inclusion Support Teacher. *Intervention in School & Clinic, 41*(1), 55-61. Proquest Education Journals via EBSCOhost database.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 163-188). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Lindsay, G. (2007). Educational psychology and the effectiveness of inclusive education/mainstreaming. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 77*(1), 1-24. Retrieved September 17, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Logan, A. (2006). The role of the special needs assistant supporting pupils with special educational needs in Irish mainstream primary schools. *Support for Learning, 21*(2), 92-99. Retrieved May 9, 2007, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

MacVean, M. L., & Hall, L. J. (1997). The integration assistant: Benefits, challenges and recommendations. *Australian Disability Review*(2), 3-9. Retrieved July 11, 2007, from Australian Public Affairs Fulltext (via Informit) database.

Malmgren, K. W., Causton-Theoharis, J. N., & Trezek, B. J. (2005). Increasing peer interactions for students with behavioral disorders via paraprofessional training. *Behavioral Disorders, 31*, 95-106. Retrieved April 30, 2006, from ProQuest 5000 International database.

Mansaray, A. A. (2006). Liminality and in/exclusion: Exploring the work of teaching assistants *Pedagogy, Culture and Society, 14*(2), 171-187. Retrieved 16 May, 2007, from Informaworld database.

Marks, S. U., Schrader, C., & Levine, M. (1999). Paraeducator experiences in inclusive settings: Helping, hovering, or holding their own? *Exceptional Children, 65*(3), 315-328. Retrieved August 12, 2006, from Proquest 5000 International (via EBSCOhost) database.

Mc Laughlin, M. J., & Jordan, A. (2005). Push and pull : Forces that are shaping inclusion in the United States and Canada. In D. Mitchell (Ed.), *Contextualising inclusive education: Evaluating old and new international perspectives*. London: Routledge.

McDonnell, P. (2003). Developments in special education in Ireland: Deep structures and policy making. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 7*(3), 259 - 269. Retrieved June 28, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

McLaughlin, M. J., & Rhim, L. M. (2007). Accountability Frameworks and Children with Disabilities: A test of assumptions about improving public education for all students. *International Journal of Disability, Development & Education, 54*(1), 25-49. Retrieved 24 May, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

McLean, P., Kirkpatrick, D., Payne, T., & Goodacre, C. (2005). Benchmarking disability support : the webCATS project. Retrieved July 4, 2007, from A+Education (via Informit) database.

McNally, R. D., Cole, P. G., & Waugh, R. F. (2001). Regular teachers' attitudes to the need for additional classroom support for the inclusion of students with intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability, 2007*, 257-273. Retrieved May 11, 2007, from Professional Development Collection database.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Minichiello, V., Aroni, R., Timewell, E., & Alexander, L. (1995). *In-depth interviewing* (2nd ed.). Melbourne: Longman.

Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students With Disabilities. (2005). *Professional development for school services officers in South Australia*. Retrieved 13 May, 2007. from http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/docs/files/communities/docman/1/School_Services_Officers_R.pdf

Minondo, S., Meyer, L., & Xin, J. F. (2001). The role and responsibilities of teaching assistants in inclusive education: What's appropriate? *The Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps 26*(2), 114-119.

Mistry, M., Burton, N., & Brundrett, M. (2004). Managing LSAs: An evaluation of the use of learning support assistants in an urban primary school. *School Leadership & Management, 24*(2), 125-137. Retrieved August 12, 2006, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Mitchell, D. (2005a). Introduction. In D. Mitchell (Ed.), *Contextualizing inclusive education : Evaluating old and new international perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Mitchell, D. (Ed.). (2005b). *Contextualizing inclusive education: Evaluating old and new international perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Moran, A., & Abbott, L. (2002). Developing inclusive schools: The pivotal role of teaching assistants in promoting inclusion in special and mainstream schools in Northern Ireland. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 17*(2), 161-173. Retrieved May 14, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost0 database.

Moyles, J., & Suschitzky, W. (1997). 'Jills of all trades?…': classroom assistants in KS1 classes. *London: Association of Teachers and Lecturers*.

Munhall, P. L. (2007a). A Phenomenological Method. In P. L. Munhall (Ed.), *Nursing research: A qualitative perspective* (pp. 145-210). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.

Munhall, P. L. (Ed.). (2007b). *Nursing research: A qualitative perspective* (4th ed.). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.

Nes, K., & Stromstad, M. (2006). Strengthened adapted education for all: No more special education? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 10*(4/5), 363-378. Retrieved May 29, 2007, from Professional Development Collection via EBSCOhost database.

Norwich, B., & Lewis, A. (2007). How specialized is teaching children with disabilities and difficulties? *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 39*(2), 127-150. Retrieved May 10, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

O'Brien, T., & Garner, P. (2001). *Untold stories : Learning support assistants and their work*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Oliver, M. (1996). A sociology of disability or a disablist sociology? In L. Barton (Ed.), *Disability and society: Emerging issues and insights* (pp. 18-42). New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

Pandey, S. (2006). Para-Teacher Scheme and Quality Education for All in India: Policy Perspectives and Challenges for School Effectiveness. *Journal of Education for Teaching, 32*(3), 319-334. Retrieved May 27, 2007, from InformaWorld database.

Parse, R. R., Coyne, B. A., & Smith, M. J. (1985). *Nursing research: Qualitative methods*. Maryland: Brady.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Pearson, S., Chambers, G., & Hall, K. (2003). Video material as a support to developing effective collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants. *Support for Learning, 18*(2), 83-87. Retrieved June 25, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Polkinghorne, D. (1983). *Methodology for the human sciences: Systems of inquiry*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Polkinghorne, D. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology* (pp. 41-60). New York: Plenum Press.

Quilty, K. M. (2007). Teaching Paraprofessionals How to Write and Implement Social Stories for Students With Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Remedial & Special Education, 28*(3), 182-189. Retrieved June 25, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Reinsel, M. D. (2004). Playing by someone else's rules: A phenomenological study of vocational teachers' lived experiences under school reform. [Electronic Version]. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3, Article 4. Retrieved May 13, 2007 from http://www.ualberta.ca/~ijqm/english/engframeset.html

.

Rhodes, C. (2006). The impact of leadership and management on the construction of professional identity in school learning mentors. *Educational Studies (03055698), 32*(2), 157-169. Retrieved June 25, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Rissman, B. M. (2006). *They didn't ask the question…An inquiry into the learning experiences of students with spina bifida and hydrocephalus.* Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Queensland.

Rix, J., & Simmons, K. (2005). Introduction : A world of change. In J. Rix, K. Simmons, M. Nind & K. Sheehy (Eds.), *Policy and power in inclusive education: Values into practice* (pp. 1-9). London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Robinson, R., & Carrington, S. (2002). Professional development for inclusive schooling. *The International Journal of Educational Management, 16*(4/5), 239. Retrieved June 3, 2007, from ProQuest 5000 International database.

Rogers, C. (2007). Experiencing an 'inclusive' education: Parents and their children with 'special educational needs'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 28*(1), 55-68. Retrieved May 25, 2007, from InformaWorld database.

Rose, R. (2000). Using classroom support in a primary school: A single school case study. *British Journal of Special Education, 27*(4), 191-196. Retrieved February 11, 2008, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Rose, R. (2007). Curriculum considerations in meeting special educational needs. In L. Florian (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Special Education* (pp. 295-306). London: Sage Publications.

Rustemier, S., & Shaw, L. (2001). *Learning supporters and inclusion: Next steps forward. Report of National Conferences in London and Manchester.* (No. 1872001971). England, UK.

Salisbury, C. L. (2006). Principals' Perspectives on Inclusive Elementary Schools. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 2007*(11 May), 70-82. Retrieved May 17, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Schutz, A. (1967). *The phenomenology of the social world* (G. Walsh & F. Lenhert, Trans.). Chicago: North Western University Press.

Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Shaddock, A. (2004). Education, work, career and security. *39th National Conference of the Australasian Society for the Study of Intellectual Disability Visions and Realities* Retrieved 30 September, 2006, from http://www.canberra.edu.au/schools/ecs/education/inclusion/papers/shaddock2004b

Shaddock, A., Hoffman-Raap, L., Giorcelli, L., Hook, J., & Smith, S. (2004). Students with disabilities in mainstream classes: Validating exemplary classroom practice in Australian schools. Retrieved 30 September, 2006, from http://www.canberra.edu.au/schools/ecs/education/inclusion/papers/shaddock2004

Shepherd, K., & Hasazi, S. B. (2007). Leadership for social justice and inclusion. In L. Florian (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of special education* (pp. 475-485). London: Sage Publications.

Shertock, T. (1998). Latin American women's experience of accomplishing goals. In R. S. Valle (Ed.), *Phenomenological inquiry in psychology: Existential and transpersonal dimensions* (pp. 157-174). New York: Plenum Press.

Sikma, S. (2006). Staff perceptions of caring: The importance of a supportive environment. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing, 32*(6), 22-31. Retrieved February 22, 2007 from CINAHL with Full Text database.

Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook.* London: Sage.

Simpson, L. (2004). Students who challenge: Reducing barriers to inclusion. In F. Armstrong & M. Moore (Eds.), *Action research for inclusive education : Changing places, changing practices, changing minds* (pp. 63-76). London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Slee, R. (2001). Social justice and the changing directions in educational research: The case of inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 5*, 167-177. Retrieved March 30, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Slee, R. (2003). Teacher education, government and inclusive schooling: The politics of the Faustian waltz. In J. Allan (Ed.), *Inclusion, participation, and democracy : What is the purpose?* (pp. 207-224). London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Slee, R. (2005). Education and the Politics of recognition: Inclusive education - an Australian snapshot. In D. Mitchell (Ed.), *Contextualizing inclusive education. Evaluating old and new international perspectives.* (pp. 139-165). London: Routledge.

Slee, R. (2006). Limits to and possibilities for educational reform. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 10*(2/3), 109-119. Retrieved May 12, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Slee, R. (2007). It's a fit-up! Inclusive education, higher education, policy and the discordant voice. In L. Barton & F. Armstrong (Eds.), *Policy, experience and change: Cross cultural reflections on inclusive education* (pp. 177-188). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Slee, R., & Allan, J. (2001). Excluding the included: A reconsideration of inclusive education. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 11*(2), 173-191. Retrieved June 5, 2007, from Informaworld database.

Sleeter, C. (1995). Radical structuralist perspectives on the creation and use of learning disabilities. In T. M. Skrtic (Ed.), *Disability and democracy : reconstructing (special) education for postmodernity* (pp. 153-165). New York Teachers College Press.

Smith, A. (1998). Crossing borders: Learning from inclusion and restructuring research in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and the United States [Electronic Version]. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 29, 161-166. Retrieved May 12, 2007.

Smith, P. (1999). Drawing new maps: A radical cartography of developmental disabilities. *Review of Educational Research, 69*(2), 117. Retrieved October 29, 2007, from ProQuest Education Journals database.

Smyth, J. (2000). Reclaiming social capital through critical teaching. *Elementary School Journal, 100*, 491-511. Retrieved May 30, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Smyth King, B. (2005). How do we meet the challenge of diversity? *Scan, 24*(3), 16-19. Retrieved July 4, 2007, from A+Education (via Informit) database.

Snelgrove, S. (2005). Bad, mad and sad: Developing a methodology of inclusion and a pedagogy for researching students with intellectual disabilities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 9*, 313-329. Retrieved April 30, 2006, from Professional Development Collection via EBSCOhost database.

Soan, S. (Ed.). (2004). *Additional educational needs : Inclusive approaches to teaching*. London: David Fulton.

Sorsby, C. (2004). Forging and strengthening alliances. In F. Armstrong & M. Moore (Eds.), *Action research for inclusive education : Changing places, changing practices, changing minds* (pp. 48-62). London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Spiegelberg, H. (1975). *Doing phenomenology: Essays on and in phenomenology*. The Hague: Martin Nijhoff.

Spinelli, E. (1989). *The interpreted world: An introduction to phenomenological psychology*. London: Sage Publications.

Stephenson, J. (2003). Inclusion of students with high support needs: The place of the special educator. *Special Education Perspectives, 12*(2), 13-33. Retrieved May 12, 2006, from A+ Education via Informit database.

Stephenson, J. (2004). Controversial practices in the education of students with high support needs. *4*(1), 58-64. Retrieved May 13, 2007, from A+Education database.

Stephenson, J., & Carter, M. (2005). Student teachers' perceptions of best practice in practicum with learners who have high support needs. *Australasian Journal of Special Education, 29*(1), 60-83. Retrieved 11 May, 2007, from A+Education database.

Stewart, D., & Mickunas, A. (1990). *Exploring phenomenology: A guide to the field and its literature* (2nd ed.). Athens: Ohio University Press.

Subban, P., & Sharma, U. (2006). Primary school teachers' perceptions of inclusive education in Victoria, Australia. *International Journal of Special Education [electronic resource], 21*(1), 42-52. Retrieved May 11, 2006, from Directory of Open Access Journals database.

Taconis, R., van der Plas, P., & van der Sanden, J. (2004). The development of professional competencies by educational assistants in school-based teacher education. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 27*(2), 215-240. Retrieved May 30, 2006, from Professional Development Collection via EBSCOhost database.

Takala, M. (2007). The work of classroom assistants in special and mainstream education in Finland. *British Journal of Special Education, 34*(1), 50-57. Retrieved June 20, 2007, from Blackwell-Synergy database.

Taylor, S., & Henry, M. (2003). Social justice in a global context: Education Queensland's 2010 strategy. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 7*, 337-355. Retrieved May 15, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Taylor, S., & Singh, P. (2005). The logic of equity practice in Queensland state education—2010. *Journal of Education Policy, 20*, 725-740. Retrieved May 12, 2006, from Academic Search Elite (via Ebscohost) database.

Thomas, G., & Loxley, A. (2001). *Deconstructing special education and constructing inclusion*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

Thornton, B., Peltier, G., & Medina, R. (2007). Reducing the Special Education Teacher Shortage. *Clearing House, 80*(5), 233-238. Retrieved August 2, 2007, from Academic Search Premier (via EBSCOhost) database.

Timmons, V. (2006). Impact of a multipronged approach to inclusion: Having all partners on side. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 10*(4/5), 469-480. Retrieved May 29, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Todd, L. (2007). *Partnerships for inclusive education: A critical approach to collaborative working*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Toppo, G. (2004). Teacher's aides filling growing gap. *USA Today J1* Retrieved May 12, 2006, from http://gateway.library.qut.edu.au/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=J0E408059923304&site=ehost-live

Tutty, C. (2003). *A shackled heart: Teacher aides' experience of supporting students with high support needs in regular classes.* Unpublished Masters of Health Science, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, N.Z.

Tutty, C., & Hocking, C. (2004). A shackled heart: Teacher aides' experience of supporting students with high support needs in regular classes. *Kairaranga, 5* (2), 3-9.

UNESCO. (1994). The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education. Retrieved October 30, 2007, from http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF

Urban Institue. (2006). "Crisis Brewing?" Paraprofessionals and the No Child Left Behind Act. Retrieved 3 May, 2007, from http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311269_crisis_brewing.pdf

Urban Institute. (2006). "Crisis Brewing?" Paraprofessionals and the No Child Left Behind Act. Retrieved 3 May, 2007, from http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311269_crisis_brewing.pdf

Valle, R. S. (Ed.). (1998). *Phenomenological inquiry in psychology: Existential and transpersonal dimensions*. New York: Plenum Press.

Valle, R. S., & Halling, S. (Eds.). (1989). *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology*. New York: Plenum Press.

van Manen, M. (1991). *The tact of teaching: the meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness*. New York: State University of New York Press.

van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). London, Ontario: Althouse Press.

Vlachou, A. (2004). Education and inclusive policy-making: Implications for research and practice. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 8*, 3-21. Retrieved May 12, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Vlachou, A. (2006). Role of special/support teachers in Greek primary schools: A counterproductive effect of 'inclusion' practices. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 10*, 39-58. Retrieved May 30, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

von Eckartsberg, R. (1998a). Existential-phenomenological psychology. In R. S. Valle (Ed.), *Phenomenological inquiry in psychology: Existential and transpersonal dimensions* (pp. 3-20). New York: Plenum Press.

von Eckartsberg, R. (1998b). Existential-phenomenological research. In R. S. Valle (Ed.), *Phenomenological inquiry in psychology: Existential and transpersonal dimensions* (pp. 21-61). New York: Plenum Press.

von Eckartsberg, R. (1998c). Introducing existential-phenomenological psychology. In R. S. Valle (Ed.), *Phenomenological inquiry in psychology: Existential and transpersonal dimensions* (pp. 1). New York: Plenum Press.

von Kaam, A. (1966). *Existential foundations of psychology*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University press.

Waite, S. J., Bromfield, C., & McShane, S. (2005). Successful for whom? A methodology to evaluate and inform inclusive activity in schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 20*(1), 71-88. Retrieved May 25, 2007, from Professional Development Collection via EBSCOhost database.

Walter, U. M., & Petr, C. G. (2006). Lessons from the research on paraprofessionals for attendant care in children's mental health. *Community Mental Health Journal, 42*(5), 459-475. Retrieved March 27, 2008, from ProQuest 5000 International database.

Ware, L. (2002). A moral conversation on disability: Risking the personal in educational contexts. *Hypatia, 17*(3), 143-172. Retrieved May 12, 2007, from Academic Search Elite (via Ebscohost) database.

Ware, L. (2006). Urban educators, disability studies and education: Excavations in schools and society. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 10*(2/3), 149-168. Retrieved May, 27, 2007, from Professional Development Collection via EBSCOhost database.

Webb, J., Schirato, T., & Danaher, G. (2002). *Understanding Bourdieu*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Werts, M. G, Harris, S., Young Tillery, C., & Roark, R. (2004). What Parents Tell Us About Paraeducators. *Remedial & Special Education, 25*(4), 232-239. Retrieved 31 May, 2007, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Werts, M. G., Zigmond, N., & Leeper, D. C. (2001). Paraprofessional proximity and academic engagement: Students with disabilities in primary aged classrooms. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, 36*(4), 424-440.

Westwood, P., & Graham, L. (2003). Inclusion of students with special needs: Benefits and obstacles perceived by teachers in New South Wales and South Australia. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities, 8*, 3-15. Retrieved June 25, 2006, from A+ Education (via Informit) database.

Wilkins, R. (2002). From assistants to paraprofessionals. *Education Journal*(62), 13. Retrieved May 12, 2006, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Willis, P. (1999). Looking for what it's really like: Phenomenology in reflective practice. *Studies in Continuing Education, 21*, 91-112. Retrieved August 12, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Woods, A., Wyatt Smith, C., & Elkins, J. (2005). Learning difficulties in the Australian context: Policy, research and practice. *Curriculum Perspectives: An Australian Curriculum Journal., 25*(3), 1-14.

Woolfson, R. G., & Truswell, E. (2005). Do classroom assistants work? *Educational Research, 47*(1), 63-75. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Wright, N. (2005). *Disability discourses in classroom practice*. Paper presented at the Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, . from http://www.aare.edu.au/04pap/wri04466.pdf

Wyatt-Smith, C., Elkins, J., Colbert, P., Gunn, S., & Muspratt, S. (2007). *Changing the nature of support provision. Students with learning difficulties: Interventions in literacy and numeracy project (InLan).* Volume 1. Retrieved May 8, 2008. from http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/D3DEA915-6828-476E-A06E-E9B1ADE7C233/18597/InLaN_Volume1.pdf.

York-Barr, J., Sommerness, J., Duke, K., & Ghere, G. (2005). Special educators in inclusive education programmes: Reframing their work as teacher leadership. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 9*, 193-215. Retrieved April 24, 2007, from Academic Search Elite (via EBSCOhost) database.

Zoniou-Sideri, A., Deropoulou-Derou, E., Karagianni, P., & Spandagou, I. (2006). Inclusive discourse in Greece: Strong voices, weak policies. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 10*, 279-291. Retrieved August 12, 2006, from Professional Development Collection (via EBSCOhost) database.

Appendix A: Information letter for participants

The Experience of Teacher Aides who support Students with Disabilities: A phenomenological study

Research Team Contacts	
Patricia Bourke (07) 54922949 pe.bourke@student.qut.edu.au	Associate Professor Suzanne Carrington (07) 3864 3725 sx.carrington@qut.edu.au

Description

This project is being undertaken as part of a PhD project for Patricia Bourke.

The purpose of this project is to respect and explore the lived experience of teacher aides who support students with disabilities. In this way new insights may be gained into the phenomenon of support for students with disabilities in schools.

The research team requests your assistance because you have experience in supporting students with disabilities.

Participation

Your participation in this project is voluntary. If you do agree to participate, you can withdraw from participation at any time during the project without comment or penalty. Your decision to participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT (for example your grades) or your employment.

Your participation will involve two individual interviews of approximately forty-five minutes. Interviews will be conducted at times and places convenient for you during first and second terms of 2007.

Expected benefits

It is expected that this project will benefit you by giving you the opportunity to reflect on your work with students. Other personnel involved in supporting students with disabilities may also benefit from your insights into the meaning of supporting students.

Risks

There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project.

Confidentiality

All comments and responses are anonymous and will be treated confidentially.

Your consent is sought for the interviews to be audio-taped for later transcription. Your name and the names of students and other school personnel will not be used in the interviews or any audio recording, transcription or published document. The audiotapes will be kept secure and destroyed after the project concludes.

You may be asked to clarify some of your words and meanings as the project proceeds.

Consent to Participate

We would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate.

Questions / further information about the project

Please contact the researcher team members named above to have any questions answered or if you require further information about the project.

Concerns / complaints regarding the conduct of the project

QUT is committed to researcher integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Officer on 3138 2340 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The Research Ethics Officer is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner. Ethics Approval Number 0700000148.

Appendix B: Participant consent form

CONSENT FORM for QUT RESEARCH PROJECT

The Experience of Teacher Aides who support Students with Disabilities: A phenomenological study

Statement of consent

By signing below, you are indicating that you:

- have read and understood the information document regarding this project
- have had any questions answered to your satisfaction
- understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team
- understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty
- understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Officer on 3138 2340 or ethicscontact@qut.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project. Ethics Approval Number 0700000148.
- agree to participate in the project
- understand that the project will include audio recording

Name .....

Signature .....

Date ..... / ..... / .....

Appendix C: Interview Guides 1 & 2

Interview Guide One

Phase One: Introduction

1. Familiarisation

- Background of study
- Purpose of study
- Nature of phenomenological interviewing
- What is required of participants

2. Discussion of Information Letter

- Audio-taping
- Confidentiality
- Anonymity

3. Consent Form

4. Personal contact details

Phase Two: Background Information

1. Questions:

How long have you been working as a teacher aides supporting students with disabilities or learning difficulties?

What prompted you to take the job?

Describe the students with whom you are currently working?

How important is your support for the students?

Did you have any specific training for this support role? Describe this training.

2. Preparation for next interview

- Scheduling
- Details of types of descriptions that will be required

Interview Guide Two

In-depth interview

Preamble

To help you describe as fully as you can, you might like to think about what happened, when it happened, where it happened, who was involved, who gave you directions, how it happened, and how you felt.

Open-ended questions

a) Describe an experience of supporting a student that you perceived was successful.

b) Describe an experience of supporting a student that you perceived was unsuccessful.

c) Describe an experience of learning about support that was meaningful for you.

Probes will seek clarification of meaning, and further descriptive information about the experiences.

Appendix D: Validation of Essential Themes with Specific Descriptions

Table 2 Cross checking of essential themes with specific descriptions- Supporting students

Legend for essential themes – Supporting students

S1 Support involves emotional investment and responsiveness towards students' personal welfare.

S2 Supporting students with learning involves building a personal rapport and working relationship with them in order to understand their individual learning needs and behaviours.

S3 Supporting students effectively requires regular consultation and planning with all members of the support team including parents, principals and teacher aides.

S4 Supporting students sometimes requires improvisation within individual education programs to meet individual needs and circumstances.

S5 Supporting students means taking responsibility for their learning and behaviour.

Table 2: Cross checking of essential themes with specific descriptions- Supporting students

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
A a/1	A worked with student D who suffered from tubular myopathy and scoliosis. D had problems with literacy.		S2				
	A worked one-on-one with D three times a week and another teacher aide worked with D on the other days.			S3			
	The literacy program was set up by the LST who ensured that D and the other teacher aides worked consistently with D.			S3			
	D struggled with spelling and word attack, and the skills necessary to recognise sound patterns in words. The literacy program had a system for introducing and testing word recognition.		S2				
	A worked on the literacy program in a withdrawal room which became an accepted and familiar routine for the student which and this gave the student a sense of security and confidence.	S1					
	D found that having to stay on one word list for more than a week frustrating.	S1					
	A tried different strategies to help D to move on.				S4	S5	
	Although D was slow and deliberate he was able to move on and gained confidence.	S1					
	As D's attitude changed and he gained confidence A allowed D to practise for the weekly reviews because A thought that it was necessary for D to help him achieve and remain secure and confident.	S1			S4		
	D was happy and secure because the people in the program who work with D used a structured and consistent approach.	S1		S3			
A a/2	A worked with K a student with Down syndrome for different periods over each year from year 1. K was in Year 7. A stated that she could almost forget that K was Down syndrome because she was quite social and fun to be with, had a great sense of humour but still was very stubborn.	S1	S2				
	A had developed a really good relationship with K over the years. They could laugh together. Because K was quite stubborn A did have to correct her occasionally to keep her on task. A considered that at the end of the year, K could go off quite confidently to high school and that she had played a part in that.	S1	S2			S5	
	A had developed a good understanding of K’s needs and abilities over the years. A stated that K was positive about her reading ability. K was reading at Reading Recovery level 19. K had finished all of the reading books at level 19. A felt that there was no point in moving her on to the next level.		S2			S5	
	K's teacher was new to the school that year, and so A thought that the teacher did not have much hands-on experience about K's reading levels, so would not give her any directions about it.		S2	S3			

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
A a/2 (cont.)	A approached the teacher and suggested that they should not move K on to the next level. A found a different reading program at the same level. A suggested to the teacher that they should use that program.		S2	S3		S5	
	A said to the teacher that she hoped that the teacher did not think that she was interfering or over-stepping the mark by suggesting what to do with K's reading program. The teacher was grateful and accepted her suggestion.	S1		S3			
	Because the teacher had twenty-six students in the class, she would not have such personal knowledge of K's levels as A had. A considered that she had a responsibility to use her knowledge to inform the teacher about K's reading program.		S2	S3		S5	
A b/1	A arrived at the classroom and was reassigned from the student with whom she was supposed to be working at that time to work with another student and D on a comprehension exercise. (A usually worked with D on a one-on-one literacy program in a withdrawal situation.)			S3			
	A was familiar with both of the students and considered that the passage would be a challenge for both of them to read. A read the passage to them.		S2		S4		
	D procrastinated, fiddled with things and could not keep on track. A suggested that D could underline the part in the passage that answered the question and copy that into the answer sheet. D misspelled words and did not use capitals when he was copying from the text.				S4	S5	
	The other student who had similar problems was not having the same amount of difficulty with the exercise and A realized that D was out of his normal routine of working with A, and did not feel confident about doing the exercise.	S1	S2				
	A was frustrated with D by the end of the session, because A had to remind D every single time to use a capital letter at the beginning of a sentence.	S1					
	D was not in his normal classroom as well because this exercise was part of a rotation. A did not normally work with D in this environment. A considered that she was quite capable of doing the exercise, but felt totally frustrated by the situation.	S1	S2			S5	
	A had not expected any more direction from the teacher in that situation. A was confident and comfortable in knowing what was required.	S1		S3			
	A documented that she had assisted D by reading and guiding in the text so that D could find the answers, because A thought it was obvious that D was not capable of doing this exercise on his own.		S2	S3	S4		
	A considered that D did not learn much from the experience although D had something to hand up and A had documented that she had assisted him. A noted that D did not feel good about the experience.	S1	S2	S3			

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
A b/1 (cont.)	At morning tea, A reflected on the previous session and felt frustrated with the experience when she compared it with the Multilit session with D an hour earlier. A reflected that the earlier experience was so much more successful, positive and achievable for D.	S1		S3		S5	
B a/1	In year 1, B worked with R who had behavioural problems. There had been many incidents in the playground so R had a timetable which meant that he would come back to class after playground and have quiet time, to cool down, before B came to collect him from the class for his individual program.		S2	S3			
	When B arrived at the classroom door one day to pick R up, the other students were chanting that R had done something wrong.						D
	B and the teacher and school counsellor had been trying to teach R not to lash out, but to tell the teacher what had happened or if someone had done something to him.		S2	S3			
	R came in from playtime very upset because he was being told by his peers that he had made a wrong choice.	S1	S2				
	Then B, with the teacher and counsellor, got R to draw in comic strip form what had happened, what he could have done, and what was said.			S3			
	The teacher and counsellor left R with B thinking that it was settled, that R had learned what to do in that situation.			S3			
	R exclaimed to B that there was more that he wanted to say. R said he would draw and asked B to write the words. R drew a speech bubble and told B to write that he had said sorry to the girl. R would not let B leave the classroom until he had explained exactly what he had done, and that he had made a correct choice.	S1	S2				
	B said that R was very excited because B had listened to him and understood that he tried to do the right thing. B reflected that R was often blamed for things that happened in the playground by the other kids.	S1	S2				
	B realised that R had listened to what he had been told and R had done the right thing, but that no-one took the time to listen to him. R did not let B go, but made B stay in the room until he had communicated what he had done.	S1	S2		S4		
	B reflected that this incident was a huge breakthrough for her when she realized that R would tell in minute detail if he had done something wrong, but also if he had done something right.	S1	S2				
	B told the teachers that R did not have the language to express himself. Most of the teachers now try to really listen to R with patience, rather than thinking that he is just a naughty little boy.	S1		S3		S5	
	R reflected that since this incident she has had a really good relationship with R. But the huge breakthrough was achieved by R himself. All R needed was somebody there to listen.	S1	S2				

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
B b/1	B was assigned to work with a boy with autism who was part-time at the pre-school and local special education unit. B stated that her work with him had little impact on J as he did not listen to her and there was no rapport.		S2				
	B worked with the student in the classroom on fine motor rotations and other activities, but the student ignored her offers of help.		S2				
	At the pre-school, the other teacher aide seemed to have more success with J than B, yet B was expected to continue to work with J.		S2	S3			
	Because J's parents did not want J to be withdrawn, B continued to sit with J during fine motor rotations and activities within the classroom groups. B noted that she was unable to do anything for J as he ignored her.		S2	S3			
	B noted that only once J took notice of her and that was during a PE lesson. B attended the class mainly to watch J so that he did not run away. Although he stayed with the class, J ignored B and ran away from her.		S2			S5	
	B noted that apart of the problem that J faced was that he was being given instructions by from many adults and J found this difficult to cope with.	S1	S2	S3			
	B reflected that although the experience was unsuccessful since she was not able to provide the support she wanted to give, she pointed to the set-up itself as problematic.	S1	S2	S3			
C a/1	L, who was ascertained speech/language impaired was in the third term of year 4 when C became his teacher aide.						D
	C always went to collect L in case she was held up. L was always ready to come out with C.	S1	S2				
	When L started he knew about twenty 'sight words' i.e. words that he could recognize instantly. C used a reading program with very simple, basic books. C reflected that L did not seem to mind, because he was doing it one-on-one with C, and nobody else knew what he was doing.	S1	S2				
	L made a big effort with the new sight words and with those he had already learned. With these sight words, C and L played Snap, GoFish, sight word Bingo, sight word Memory; anything they could think of to play with the sight words so L could remember them.		S2		S4		
	The sight words were in lists and C went through the list with L. After a while C gave L a Smartie when he got the list right.				S4		
	C challenged L before the holidays and said that C would give L a Smartie for every word that L got right. After the holidays C went through two lists in random order and L knew the 24 words.		S2		S4		

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
C a/1 (cont.)	C noticed that L seemed so proud of himself and smug. C thought that L was thinking, “You didn’t think I could do it. But I could!” C reflected that L hid his emotions well, but C felt that L was pleased with himself, with the fact that he could read, and he could take books out of the library.	S1	S2			S5	
	C noted that when L was in year 6, L took books out of the library, and L could not read every word, but he could read enough to know what was going on, and it gave him a lot of confidence. L’s confidence made C feel really good because what C had done with L seemed worthwhile.	S1					
C b/1	C worked with a little girl, N, who was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). C stated that the only way N could do any maths, plus or minus, was counting on her fingers. C tried to introduce a number line and numbers chart, but N could not work with them.		S2		S4		
	When N was in Year 5 the school adopted the GoMaths program which is based on mental maths. C noted that N was unable to do the work, and N could not keep up with the rest of the class.		S2				
	C was aware that N could not instantly recall the individual facts, but N had learnt her tables through perseverance and rote learning. N could go through the table of facts until she arrived at the required fact.		S2				
	The other students called out the facts before N had done the sum. N became increasingly frustrated. C even used to sit with N and tell N the answers. N did not like that either because N wanted to do it herself. C felt that N learned nothing and made no progress. N became more and more frustrated.	S1	S2		S4	S5	
	C watched as N clenched her fists, threw down the pencil and tears welled in her eyes. C noticed that N became frustrated and upset. N turned away from everyone, crossed her arms, and turned her back and declared that she was not going to do the work.	S1	S2				
	C stated that she did not really blame N because C knew that N could not do it and C felt that there was nothing to be gained by putting N through that.	S1	S2				
	After 6 months they finally got N onto a separate program. N left the classroom with C every day to do maths. C stated that this was really successful.			S3		S5	
	C observed that in year 6 with a new teacher, N was back to where she was last year. C has observed N throwing tantrums, pushing books off desks, tantrums like a real baby.	S1		S3		S5	
	C reflected that the other students in N’s class were really good to N. They understood that N was different and they tried to comfort and help her. They did not laugh at N.	S1					

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
C b/1 (cont.)	C knew that N was never going find success in this type of maths program. C felt really heart-broken about N, and C could not understand why N was put through this frustrating experience again.	S1		S3		S5	
D a/1	In his preschool year, D worked with a student J who had severe gastric reflux problems and was PEG fed through a tube in his stomach twice a day by D. (PEG stands for Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy – a treatment for those who have trouble swallowing.) J also had bowel control problems and D often had to change his soiled pants. D described J's posture as like an old man. D noted that the other students would often move away from J because he had speech problems and the other students could not understand him. D reflected that when D was first assigned to J she was unsure whether she could work with him, but that she came to care for J very much.	S1	S2				
	D received training about PEG feeding J from J's mother when the trainer did not arrive. D reflected that interaction between teacher aides and parents was not usually encouraged but when medical conditions like J's were involved, her interaction with the mother was helpful.			S3		S5	
	The interaction during training allowed D and J's mother to set up a pattern of regular communication about what happened at home, and D worked out how events at home might impact on J's school day. D was able to alter her work with J accordingly, and alert the teacher to any issues arising from home.		S2	S3	S4		
D a/2	One of the many challenges with J in year 1 was the fact that he still soiled his pants. J used to call out what had happened. D reflected that J's peers would always be aware of J's problem.	S1	S2				
	D understood that the aim of the coded message strategy was get help discreetly for J, and to avoid embarrassment and stigmatization for J in front of his peers.	S1		S3		S5	
D a/3	When J was in year 1 D was directed by J's dietician to teach him how to eat solid food. D reflected that forcing J to eat resulted in J crying day after day.	S1		S3			
	Halfway through the year there was a crisis meeting with all of J's specialists and a decision was made to stop the feeding program with J, and to forget about food at school. D was assigned to the classroom almost full time and noticed that J started to access the curriculum and although he did not catch up to the other students, he showed marked improvement. D credited taking the focus off food for J's improved learning.	S1	S2	S3			
	D noted that when J went to year 2, his motor skills improved. D attributed the improvement to the motor skills program that she worked on with J. D reflected that because of her good relationship with J's mother, the mother sent her materials supplied by J's private occupational therapist. D stated that working together with the mother, and through her the occupational therapist, they kept J's motor skills program going.	S1	S2	S3			

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
D a/3 (cont.)	J had many problems and was being treated by many specialists. His week used to be full of appointments. D stated that in year 2 J's mother wound back this complex treatment regime and D noticed an improvement in J's learning. D attributed this improvement to the fact that the focus on what J could not do was removed.	S1	S2	S3			
D a/4	In year 2 J's teacher remarked to D that J did not pay attention to his work. D reflected that if J was interested he would be very attentive.		S2				
	During literacy block in J's classroom, the teacher read a story to the students. D was asked to withdraw J and listen to him retell the story. D wrote down the words (scribed) for J as he retold the story. D noted that J retold the story in correct sequence with exact details. D was aware that J had a good memory, and attributed J's ability to retell the story to J's ability to learn things by rote.		S2	S3			
	When D returned to the classroom and showed the teacher J's story that she had scribed for him, the teacher expressed disbelief, amazement and then scepticism, asking D if she had helped J to retell the story. D denied helping him.	S1	S2				
	D reflected that it was after the retelling session that the teacher realized that J had a love of stories. D and the teacher used this understanding to focus more on J's literacy development, building on his interest in stories. J began to write down his own stories and although they could not always be understood, J could tell D what the words were for her to rewrite for him. D felt very proud of J's achievement in literacy.	S1	S2	S3		S5	
D b/1	During his preschool year D PEG fed J who had severe gastric reflux problems was PEG fed with milk through a tube in his stomach. During the year J's specialist directed D to teach J how to eat solid food as well.			S3			
	J nibbled on a sandwich and stored the tiny pieces of food up near the roof of his mouth beside his teeth. J did not want to swallow the food. Every day D had to put her finger into J's mouth to retrieve the food.	S1					
	D described lunch time for J as terrible. Because the aim was to socialise J with the other students, J sat with his peers to eat. D was always with him, teaching and encouraging him to eat. D felt that the other students became much more aware of J's problems, saw D trying to get him to eat, and viewed him as a naughty boy.	S1				S5	
	If J did not eat, D was allowed to give him his drip (PEG) milk. D felt that J waited for the milk rather than eat the food. D realized that J had food stored in his mouth, but waited until the other students had returned to class before she removed the food so that J did not choke, and the other children did not witness this process.	S1	S2			S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
D b/1 (cont.)	D considered that J was being punished by this eating regime. D reflected that J knew that the other children were back in the preschool classroom playing while he was still outside with her and she was pressuring him to eat.	S1					
	After the first lunch time session trying to make J eat lasted for three quarters of an hour, she devised various strategies to encourage J to eat with the preschool teacher's approval. D tried putting J on a time limit, preparing her own lunch with food items similar to J so they could enjoy playing with the food, an experience that D surmised J had missed out on as a baby when he was sick. After D noticed how carefully J watched her mouth as she was eating, D asked J if he would like to see himself trying to eat the food. D then brought in a mirror. These strategies had a novel appeal for J for a few days.	S1			S4		
	D noticed that J still had great difficulty coordinating his tongue and swallowing. It took her fifteen minutes to get J to swallow a medicine cup of water and even then he gagged on it. But D recalled that the consensus amongst the specialists was that she continued with the feeding regime.	S1		S3			
	The specialists then decided to take J off the drip (PEG) in an attempt to make him hungry so that he would eat. J stopped growing and was very unhappy. The specialists then restored the drip. J then consumed so much milk that he became tired and had digestion problems. D used to walk J backwards and forwards from the school office, or roll him on his stomach on an exercise ball until he could bet rid of the wind.	S1		S3			
	D researched eating disorders and shared the information with the teacher and LST who did not pay much attention. D stated that despite her fear of getting into trouble, she told the LST that she was going to give the information to J's mum. J's mum then took J to another swallowing clinic. However at school J's force-feeding regime continued directed by the dietician. D continued to try to get J to eat and observed how J spent day after day crying as she tried to get him to eat.	S1		S3		S5	
	D was really concerned about J and his feeding regime. D worried that the special school teacher might be getting frustrated at the feeding regime like she was. She wondered if she, the special school teacher (where J went on two days a week) and J's mum were all putting pressure on J to eat in the same way, or if she was doing something wrong. D asked to visit the special school with J to see what the process for feeding was there. D visited the special school and observed what the teacher did with J during eating time. D found that the special school teacher used a similar routine to hers with as little success as she had.	S1		S3		S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
E a/1	E noticed that when student C (Down syndrome) first started at her school, rather than ostracizing her, the members of the school community treasured C like a little puppy and the other students mobbed her. E felt that the students and teachers did not know how to treat C appropriately.						D
	E accompanied C to a sporting activity. E saw C hit another student on the head with a tennis racquet. E reflected that C did this because she wanted to get ahead of the other student. E recalled other incidents where the other student either hit back at C, or became very upset. So E moved C away and told her that she needed to say sorry to the other student or she would not be allowed to continue playing.	S1	S2			S5	
	The sport teacher was willing to keep C in the activity despite her aggressive behaviour. E attributed this to the fact that the teacher recognised that C had a disability. E refused to let C return to the activity until she had said sorry.		S2			S5	
	C eventually apologised to the other student and the student accepted the apology just like an apology from any peer. E reflected that this was a good thing for C because she learned that she was expected to follow the same rules as everybody else when she participated in joint activities. C's teacher and peers also learned that in joint activities, C could follow the rules like everybody else, and that E's role was not to afford C 'special' favours because of her disability.	S1	S2			S5	
E a/2	C was nasty and spat at the other students. E reflected that this type of behaviour settled down as the year progressed. C's peers accepted that C could be good and bad, when earlier in the year they would have dismissed such behaviour by laughing at C.	S1				S5	
	Although there had been some acceptance of C's behaviours as like those of the other students, and therefore needing to be addressed like those of other students, E felt there should be more organised education for the student community about Down syndrome. E did what she could to educate the other students, by speaking to them when incidents arose, and by talking to her own child about C.					S5	
	E noted that there were circumstances where the same rules could apply to C as to the other students. But that was not always the case. When C was with E she took her to the toilet when needed. In the classroom with the teacher that was not possible. When C started wearing pull-ups to allow for toileting accidents, the other students were aware of this difference. E explained to C's peers that C needed them to avoid accidents, and that this was acceptable.	S1	S2				

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
E a/3	E worked with C every day from nine till about half past one. During lunch time, C ate with the other students and then E went with her when she went out to play in the playground. E stated that she supervised C in the playground because of some of her aggressive behaviours. E tried to step out of the play, because she understood that the idea was not to walk around holding C's hand.	S1					
	E stated that she tried to encourage the other students to play with C. E brought in her own activities such as colouring competitions, so that other students could join in with C and she could feel part of the whole student group.	S1			S4	S5	
	E reflected that although the other staff members were aware that her lunch time role was with C, her supervisory role became extended and 'full-on' because of all the other students who joined in to the activities which she organised. E attributed feeling very tired at the end of the day to this extended role.	S1			S4		
E a/4	E worked with C on an individual education program (IEP) put together by the learning support teacher (LST), the school guidance officer and E. E stated that the LST and the guidance officer discussed the program with her and were very supportive of her ideas because they knew her background. (E previously worked with groups such as Endeavour doing social skills training for adults with disabilities.)	S1		S3			
	E withdrew C from class every morning to work on her individual education program. E noted that C came willingly. E attributed this to C's understanding of her special work program, and the routine nature of the withdrawal from class in the morning session and return to class for the afternoon session.	S1	S2				
	The IEP was broken into sessions. First E took C to the Prep classroom for play-based socialization activities. E stepped back and allowed C to learn social skills from the Prep students. E noted that the younger students were very good with C. They seemed to recognise that C was different but were able to accept her.	S1	S2				
E a/5	E noticed that C had problems with speech. E organised a speech therapist who came to the school and showed E some ideas and programs which E used with C.		S2	S3		S5	
	E worked with C on basic speech and counting skills. E succeeded in getting C to slow down her rate of speech so that other people could understand her better. E doubted that C's speech would ever be perfect, but they worked on improving it by having conversations about daily events and weekend experiences.		S2		S4	S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
E a/5 (cont.)	E worked with C on writing skills using the computer. E noted that C worked well on the computer. E reflected that C was better at copying words on the computer than actual writing. E stated that she worked with C on correct spacing between words, because on her own C scribbled whole pages without any spaces.		S2			S5	
E a/6	C could read at a level appropriate for her year level. E was part of the group reading program in the classroom twice per week. E noticed that C participated in class story time with some prompting, and enjoyed reading groups. C was better at reading out aloud than some of her peers. But C had problems with comprehension and writing responses.		S2				
	C's poor comprehension showed up when she began a new program for speech therapy. C answered the questions with rote answers or 'yes' and 'no', and often digressed from the meaning. E talked to the LST about C's rote responses to the questions in the program.		S2	S3		S5	
	E stopped using that program. E then concentrated on teaching C comprehension skills using retells and directed questioning techniques.			S3			
	C enjoyed sitting in the classroom although she was not learning much. E stated that when she was in the classroom for show and tell, she used a simple and closed question technique with C. E reflected that C sat and listened and enjoyed being there in the classroom for the show and tell sessions.		S2		S4	S5	
	E stated that when she was in the classroom for show and tell, she used a simple and closed question technique with C.		S2				
E b/1	E told other students about how to respond to C's crying behaviour through personal interaction with students because opportunities to inform the school community about C's disability happened only through her personally when she was with students.	S1	S2			S5	
	When other students did not know how to react to C when she was crying, E told them that when C was really hurt then she showed them where she was hurting. If C showed that she was really hurt E asked the students to come to get her.	S1				S5	
	The other students also ran up to C all the time and said, "Hello! Hello! Do you remember me?" E spoke to the other children about how to behave with C in the same way as they do with other children and their friends.	S1				S5	
	E reflected that when C spoke to students in rude ways, the other students wanted to laugh at C or engage in discussion with her. E asked them to simply say, "Speak nicely" to C and walk away	S1				S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
F a/1	F worked as the school cook in a cooking program designed for with students with learning difficulties. F taught D, a student with speech/language impairment how to cook. F reflected that D loved this experience.	S1	S2	S3			
	When D got out the ingredients there was a great deal of mess but that reflected D's enthusiasm and willingness to be part of the cooking sessions.		S2				
	F cooked a meal every week with D, one that they could whip up quickly such as spaghetti bolognese. They put it in the oven over lunch time, or if it was ready before lunch, D ate it for lunch.				S4	S5	
	D did all the cooking from measuring to producing the meal. Because D could not read very well, F read the words in the recipe to D, they then read the words together, and then D repeated them by himself. F reflected that this process reinforced the words for D.	S1	S2		S4		
	F stated that D also learned to measure things. He learned about the science and maths involved. They used lots of different maths and science terms, and developed a vocabulary about measuring and comparing. F reflected that D developed his speaking abilities but still had difficulty with reading.		S2		S4	S5	
	F observed D enjoying making the food and seeing it ready to eat. F stated that they prepared a dinner party for the learning support teacher and noted that D got a great sense of enjoyment and achievement out of that experience.	S1			S4		
F a/2	D was prepared to try new things. F knew that D was a good runner so she focussed their social chat on things that he was good at, and things that people admired him for. D developed the ability to chat about things that he liked.	S1	S2				
	F and the learning support teacher made up some books about things from D's home such as when he went to bed. D's mum took photographs of things that D was interested in the garden including his dad's big truck which was of great interest to D. F and the learning support teacher did a project for D about trucks e.g. the things on trucks.		S2	S3			
	F reflected that D maintained interest in language activities that were based around subjects with which he was familiar so it was important to build literacy activities around his interests.	S1	S2				
F a/3	In a day's work F went from grade 1 where she worked at a level with which she was comfortable, to grade 7 where she was suddenly asked to work on concepts or processes that she could not remember.						D

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
F a/3 (cont.)	F had to use strategies with the teacher to remind herself about the particular concepts like asking the teacher to tell her how she was meant to teach the particular concept. Arriving at year 7 F was asked to teach onomatopoeias. Because she could not remember what onomatopoeia was, she asked the teacher to give her a couple of examples. F stated that she just needed to be reminded.			S3	S4		
	F never refused, but rather found out from the teacher how she should teach the particular concept or process. F cited the example of teaching percentages which she taught in the way she learnt which was a different process from the one that the teacher used. F reflected that different ways of learning were not a problem if the student could use one but not the other. F believed that, because she did not want to teach students who already had learning difficulties in a different way from the teacher, it was important to replicate the processes used by the classroom teacher.	S1	S2	S3		S5	
	F sat in class and watched what the teacher was saying and doing, got the teacher to give examples, or took the book out with her when she withdrew the students. F reflected that she knew how to do things most of the time, but she needed time to adjust to the sudden changes between class levels.			S3	S4	S5	
	F noted that even the teachers said that they found some things difficult. F stated that this was a relief to her because she wanted to live up to the teachers' standards, but that there was a lot required.						D
F b/1	F worked with D, a student with speech/language impairment, from year 1 to year 5. F was not sure what his exact problems were, but F felt that D lacked motivation and confidence about his reading ability, after trying many reading programs with him.		S2				
	F used a reading program with D that used a key word recognition strategy. D knew a difficult word such as 'swimming', and F reflected that he probably recognised a pattern of letters within the word. At other times D did not know the words. F felt really frustrated by the inconsistency in D's achievements.					S5	
	F thought she was getting somewhere with D's reading but she also felt as though she was letting him down. F stated that D felt as though he was letting her down as well.	S1				S5	
	In the many years that F worked with D on his reading programs, they never seemed to get very far, which was frustrating for both of them. F recalled days when D achieved even a small step, and he was enthusiastic, smiling and chatting recognising that he had achieved. But F recalled other days when D felt that he had not achieved and he was quite sombre.	S1				S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
F b/1 (cont.)	When D could read good sentences, not for his age, but at his reading level, he moved on to learning how to use expression in his reading. F reflected that this was difficult because D used few words and had a monotone speaking voice.		S2			S5	
	F went on her own initiative to the speech therapist and asked for some ideas to help D to develop some range in his voice. The speech therapist gave F some strategies with words such as 'squeak' which D had to say in a squeaky voice. Another strategy involved D raising and lowering his intonation as he repeated sentences about going up and down the stairs. F observed that D acted as if he was very embarrassed in the beginning, but eventually F felt that he found it a fun activity and he liked the way he sounded. F reflected that even though D ended up enjoying these activities, he would revert to his monotone voice the next day, which was frustrating for them both.	S1	S2	S3		S5	
	When F worked with D in class later on in grade 5, she noted that D got on with his work and did well at his level while in the class. She sat with him and she noticed that D did not like this because, being older, he was aware that this made him different from his peers. F reflected that her working with him was not so much of a problem for D when he was younger.		S2	S3			
F b/2	When D returned from holidays F began the new term's program by asking D to read a book at his previous level. D was unable to read it, so F felt that they had to repeat that level again. F felt disillusioned and she felt that D did too. F felt that D was upset and adamant that he did not want to read the book because he had read it before. D questioned F about it, and F found it hard to answer him.	S1	S2				
	F tried to coax D by telling him that he would know the words if he gave it a try. She tried to get him to sound out the words and look at the pictures to give himself some hints. In the end F tried the 'I'll read, we both read, and then you read strategy.' F stated that she was just trying to help D regain his confidence.	S1	S2		S4		
	F stated that she still thought about this experience with D. Although she was no longer at D's school, when she saw him around she hoped that he was going ok. F recalled that D had been bullied and she hoped that he was surviving. She hoped that D could gain confidence from knowing that he could read.	S1				S5	
F b/3	At a previous school F worked on a social skills program over the lunch period with five or six students who had ascertained disabilities. F prepared physical games and games like Snap for the students to play. F allowed the students to play on the computer in the room as well.			S3		S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
F b/3 (cont.)	F stated that most of the students wanted to play on their own or they fought with each other. F tried to teach them to negotiate but that did not work. F found the experience really frustrating because the students were with her over the lunch period and therefore they were not socialising with the wider school population anyway.	S1	S2				
	The students went out to eat with their peers and then came to the room. Some of the students did not turn up at the room. F wondered if they had just decided not to come. F only had two or three students who came, but she could not leave them to find the others, because she was on her own. Their peers reminded her students to come if they saw them.	S1				S5	
	The students were from grade 1 to 5. F reflected that this made the situation difficult because a grade five child does not want to play with a grade 1 child. F stated that they could not play a stimulating game together because of their different levels of vocabulary development. Also the year 5 student was a girl with Autism who always demanded F's attention for herself.		S2		S4	S5	
	It was really difficult with only one computer in the room, so F banned computer play. She even she set up a system where there was a bell after a student had a certain time on the computer. But the students wanted to play certain games and they could not finish the game before the next one had a turn. F reflected that this frustrated the students and made the situation more difficult and problematic.				S4	S5	
	This lunch time task took up five of F's nine contract hours. She came to school in the middle of each school day which meant she had no full days off. F felt like she was not part of the school because she saw few members of staff at lunch or before and after school. F recalled that people said to her that they did not know that she was still working there. F felt like that too. She managed to last half of the year doing this job.						D
	When she left she told the learning support teacher and principal that the program was not working and one of the reasons that she was leaving was that she was disillusioned and did not feel like a team member, or that she was doing her job properly.			S3			
	F reflected that the program did no work but that she was not part of setting it up. It was set up by the learning support teacher and the principal. F told them when she was leaving that, in her opinion it was a task that needed to be shared because it was not conducive to an adult wanting to be there. It was not achieving much for the kids either because they wanted to do their own thing or they disrupted each other, so they were not learning how to socialise.	S1		S3			
G a/1	G coached cricket at lunch time. G noticed that J, a student with Asperger's syndrome in year 5, wanted to be part of the cricket team with all of the other boys from his class. G reflected that J did not want to be the odd one out.	S1					

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
G a/1 (cont.)	When J was in the cricket game, one of the other boys told J to wait his turn, rather than jump right in and start batting. The other boy had told J about the safety rules that G had put in place because they used hard balls, and G did not want to see anyone get hurt. J turned around and kicked the boy who had spoken about the rules. Another boy then stepped in and told J not to be like that and then J hit this boy with the cricket bat and spat at him. G stated that these were violent actions.	S1				S5	
	G told J that he could not act like that or he would have to sit out of the game. J told G that he would bash his head in. G sat down in front of J and dared him to go ahead and do it. G stated that he did this to call J's bluff because G knew from having a brother with Asperger's that an Asperger's child's defence was attack. J dropped the cricket bat and cried.					S5	
	J eventually calmed down and everything was good until the head of special education intervened. J threatened to kill her and started to rant again. G observed that whenever her name was mentioned in J's presence he ranted and raved that he hated her. G reflected that luckily this happened after the bell had rung.	S1	S2	S3			
	G had a rapport with J because it was a sport thing. G reflected that J knew that if he did the right thing while G was within earshot, then G would reward J with a game. G reflected that this was the one certainty that J had.		S2		S4	S5	
G a/2	G worked with J a student with Asperger's syndrome in year 5. G stated that J hated women and abused his mother. One day when J had been unruly his mother was told to come and collect him from the classroom. J swore repeatedly at his mother and the teacher, saying that he was going to kill everybody.						D
	G observed as J called his mother every name under the sun. His mother tried to calm him down and told him not to be silly. G reflected that if he had been the mother he would have knocked J into next week. But J's mother kept taking the abuse. G thought to himself that this was not the way to handle J.						D
	G reflected that it was particularly difficult when J drew a picture of a decapitated body and called out to the class that the teacher's head was cut off. The teacher did not know what to do, so she sent to the office and asked for help. G stated that he was called to the classroom to try to calm down the situation. G went in, sat beside J and talked to him over and over again about what he should not do. G sat there the whole lesson with J.		S2	S3		S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
G a/2 (cont.)	While G was in the classroom the teacher told the students to get out their maths books. J said, “How about we get our bums out?” G noted that the other students laughed, as 10 year olds would. G stated that here he was in the middle of thirty laughing children and the teacher looked as if she was about to have a nervous breakdown. G stated that she ended up leaving the school. G felt sorry for her and wondered how she had coped as long as she did.						D
	G sat with J and told him not to do the wrong thing. G encouraged J to get out his maths book, telling him that he liked maths. G reminded him what would happen if he did his work. G stated that he stayed close to J, continued talking to him and encouraged him by reminding J about the reward for doing his work which was to join in the sport at lunch time. G stated that this strategy worked eventually for that session.	S1	S2			S5	
	G reflected that J was a difficult student to support especially when he sat in the classroom and drew pictures of the decapitated teacher.	S1					
	G stated that J had come to the school from another school because he had been expelled, could not he handled at G’s school, so he moved on to another school.						D
	G saw J and his mother at a shopping centre when he was in year 7 or 8. G greeted J and asked how he was. J proceeded to tell G a long story about weapons of mass destruction, and about killing everybody. G stated that J’s mother tried to calm him down but J just kept on with his rant.	S1					
G a/3	G was asked to work one-on-one with A, a student in year 4. The teacher and learning support teacher told G that A, whose two brothers were intellectually impaired, could not read or write.			S3			
	When G worked with A over many sessions he found that A was an enthusiastic reader who did not have to be corrected. G stated that A attempted big words that other students would not, and six out of ten times A got the words correct. G expressed incredulity that A was considered to be a bad reader.	S1	S2				
	A asked G not to leave but to read with him for two hours. G only had fifteen minutes. G also realized that with little chapter books, A might move on too fast and get ahead of his peers. G regretted that his work with A was restricted by book length and time.	S1	S2				
	G expressed interest in the fact that no two days were the same and no two children were the same. G reflected that even though he was told that students had disabilities like intellectual impairment, there was always something at which the students excelled. G reflected that this is what made the job so amazing and different from other jobs. Despite the frustrations that made G want to pull his hair out, when a little diamond like A shined in the dark, it helped to affirm his work.	S1	S2				

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
G b/1	G stated that at lunch time J who had been diagnosed ASD would go crazy. G had to march J round to the office to get his medication. G stated that J stood there and took his medication from the office staff and then dropped it on the floor and stood on it. He refused to take the pill and crushed it and said that he did not want it, while swearing and cursing.		S2			S5	
	J put the pill in his in his mouth and hid it up in his gums or under his tongue and then walked away and spat it out. G knew this had happened when other students came and told him. J also spat the tablet in the toilet. G stated that another boy with ADHD also did this and it became a bit of a game with them.		S2			S5	
	G reflected that it was hard when he was dealing with older boys who were as big as men who could attack him and he could not retaliate or defend himself.						D
	G felt sorry for the female staff members who had to deal with this situation.						D
	G stated that when incidents arose he filled in an orange slip, and said what happened. This was a level 1 report.					S5	
	G had written a report on a student five or six times but nothing had been done about it. G stated that if a classroom teacher filled out a report even once then action was taken. G reflected that he might as well have spoken to a brick wall because no action was taken to address the students' negative behaviours.					S5	
	G wondered if it there was a vendetta against him personally, or was it that he was just a teacher aide.						D
G b/2	G had worked with a student D who had Asperger's syndrome since year 1. D was in year 6. G worked with D one-on-one on literacy. G observed that D was away a lot. G reflected that this was because D often said that he was sick, and so he was not brought to school. When D was at school, G worked with him on his typing skills while the rest of the class did Religion class.		S2				
	G stated that he realized that D did not have to become a touch typist. But D needed keyboard skills so that he could type up his essays, reports and projects. G reflected that D needed to be at least at a competency level with the bottom of his class, not three years behind them.	S1	S2				
	The work was frustrating because G just sat with D and said, "Type the teddy bear had a picnic" which was very basic drill for D to locate keys on the keyboard. G reflected that they had only started last week and D was away again. G predicted that it was going to be like pushing stones uphill with his nose. It was hard work when D was there and when he was not there G considered that there was little chance to make progress.	S1	S2			S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
G b/2 (cont.)	The previous week D typed about ten sentences down a page. After about six sentences D had figured out how to it without constant correction. But on the following day G stated that D seemed to have completely cleared his mind. G had to take D back to steps two and three again. G felt that this was really frustrating because D was not able to retain the knowledge. G stated that D had a very short memory which made it more difficult.	S1	S2			S5	
	D also had a problem with drooling. D wiped the dribble on his fingers and then rubbed it all over the keyboard. G was reluctant to touch the keys in order to help D because of the hygiene issues.						D
	G reflected that it was very, very hard to deal with a student of that age who was so physically underdeveloped compared with his peers, but showed great happiness when he achieved.	S1				S5	
	G stated that D still forgot how to do it. D thought that because he had done the task once he could stop there and go on to something else. But when G told D that they were going to continue on the same task, D became frustrated and it was hard for G to get him on task again.		S2			S5	
	D became distracted and talked to himself and told himself that he was silly and not to do that. G reflected that it was comical to watch but he knew that it was very serious. G stated that he did not know, as a teacher aide, how to keep D on task. G felt that being involved in this particular situation with D was really frustrating.	S1	S2	S3		S5	
	G was just told by the teacher that this is what we are doing with D now. D needed to learn how to transfer his written notes to typed form. G was told what area they were focussing on with D. But G noted that they were working with every area of D's development.	S1		S3			
	G did not appreciate the way in which he was spoken to, as though he was an imbecile, by the teacher who was a new graduate, when he had been in the job a lot longer than the teacher had. G did not understand why, when there were four special needs student in that class, and a Special Education Unit teacher aide present a lot of the time, he was put with D.			S3			
	G did not understand why, when there were four special needs student in that class, and a Special Education Unit teacher aide present a lot of the time, he was put with D. G reflected that sadly, D just seemed to go backwards.	S1		S3		S5	
G b/3	G reflected that the students with Asperger's like D all needed help. As they matured and became more self-reliant they were not so dependent on having a teacher aide. But when they worked in a group situation they needed to be supervised to keep on task.		S2			S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
G b/3 (cont.)	In class G tried to keep D on task writing in his language group. G stayed with him for reading. G stated that D's reading was ok, and not as painful as his writing or his typing. But G stated that it still was not easy because D's ability was that of a year 3 or 4 student, and the class was working at a year 5 or 6 level.		S2				
	D worked quite well in a group situation. D was put in a group of good readers and when he struggled with a word, the other students tried to say the words for him to speed him up. G knew that they should not do that, and he stamped it out by explaining to the other students that D needed to say the words so that he would learn the words.	S1	S2			S5	
	For G, working with D was a painful process because he could be jumping out of his skin in the morning session, and half asleep in the middle session, moaning that he was really tired although he did not take medication at school. G used to tell D that the sooner he finished the work the sooner he could have a sleep, and G could go to the next class.	S1	S2			S5	
	G reflected that they never had two sessions in a row that were the same. G stated that although he loved D dearly not knowing how he would be from one session to the next made him want to scream.		S2				
G b/4	G worked with a year 6 student who was taken out of the special education unit maths group and put in to a classroom maths group. It was a year 5 group so that the work was not too hard for him. G stated that L complained that he could not do the work. G reflected that L wanted the work done for him because he was lazy.					S5	
	L saw an orange sheet that G used as a notepad, in G's pocket. L thought that it was an actual orange behaviour slip. G told L that if he did not do his work that G would write his name on the list. G stated that from then on, all he had to do was pull out the orange piece of paper and L freaked out and got his work done in record time.		S2			S5	
	After G had to write out an actual orange behaviour sheet for L two days in a row, L was sent back to the SEU. G considered that he was punished so severely because he got orange slips daily from his teacher, up to two or three a day. L would not do what he was told.		S2		S4	S5	
	L's parents came up to the school and G spoke to the father. G knew that L was harassing another boy in the maths group who was already being bullied at home by his big brother. This boy told G that L told him that he was dumb and copied his work. But L told his parents that he was the one being bullied.	S1				S5	
	G confronted L with his bullying behaviour and lying about it, and with evidence of his cheating. When the boys were split up and G worked one-on-one with L, his work was completed, but when they were put together on the verandah so that G could work with the two of them away from the larger group of twenty students, L continued to bully the other boy.	S1		S3		S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
G b/4 (cont.)	G stated that this showed that L did know how to do the year 5 maths work but played the dunce card and would not do his work.		S2	S3			
	Eventually L was taken out of G's maths group and returned to the SEU group. G reflected that L was frustrated and hated going back.		S2	S3			
	G stated that L needed the severe punishment to show him that his excuses for not doing his work and his bullying behaviour would not be accepted. But G hoped that L would come back into his maths group	S1		S3		S5	
H a/1	H worked with M student who turned up at the school unexpectedly to begin year 1. M's mother stated that M had not spoken for about three years. M had not been to kindergarten or preschool. H stated that this meant that he displayed limited social skills, and was not used to sitting still in a group of peers. M had an older and a younger sibling. The family lived in a nearby motel.		S2				
	H was assigned to M for six weeks. H was with M full time for five days a week, except for the lunch period when H had a break from M, but still did her normal rostered lunch time duties.			S3			
	This was a bit of a shock to H as during her teacher aide time of only a few years she had not actually been assigned to one student full time before. Because H had worked in the class where M was previously, H was asked by the principal to take on the assignment for a short period of time. H considered that she could handle the assignment for the six weeks.						D
	The school did environmental education, and twice a week every class went out into the garden to plant, mulch, weed and water. H went out with M's class to the garden on the other side of the school with her joggers on as usual. H kept near M to keep an eye on him. M participated with a little group in what they were doing and H was close by.		S2			S5	
	H observed M moving off in a different direction from where he should have been. H was concerned about where M was heading. H called out M's name and he turned around, looked at her and then bolted. H was at the other end of the oval at the other end of the school, an area isolated from the rest of the school.					S5	
	H ran after M. H caught up with M after about 100 metres and grabbed him by the scruff of the neck. H told M that he was not allowed to run away.	S1				S5	
	Another teacher was on the oval taking Friday afternoon sport and saw H chasing M at full speed. This teacher thought about backing H up.						D
	H reflected that when the teacher caught up with H he expressed surprise that H had caught M.						D
	That was the first time that M had actually run away from them. He had wandered before and but H was able to get him back quickly. After this incident she was very aware that there was a danger that he might run off quickly.	S1	S2			S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
H a/1 (cont.)	H and M's teacher had a discussion about how to handle this situation because they wanted to make sure that M understood that running away was not acceptable.			S3		S5	
	H and the teacher planned that H would hold M's hand for a length of time because he did not like that. M did not like to be so close to anybody. They told M that H was going to hold his hand for a while because he was not allowed to take off.	S1	S2	S3			
	Over a period of a day H sat him down and held his hand and M glared at her. H reflected that this showed that he did not like it. But H reflected that they had to be strict with M to make sure he knew that running away was not acceptable behaviour.	S1	S2			S5	
	The next day H told M if he wanted her to stop holding his hand, he was not to run away. H reflected that M did not run away after that because he did not want her to hold his hand all the time. H considered that this was a successful outcome.		S2			S5	
H a/2	H worked full time with M a student in year 1 who had communication and behavioural problems. M was supposed to get off the play equipment and come into class when the bell rang. At times M would not do that, but hid in the tunnel so that he could continue playing.		S2			S5	
	When H and the teacher became aware of this behaviour, they had a discussion with the principal. M was confined to the verandah for play time, and was not allowed to play.			S3			
	They used the verandah strategy for a couple of playtimes, reminding M that if he did not come back to class when the bell rang, he would be playing on the verandah rather than on the play equipment. H stated that it took a couple of days for M to realize that he did not like playing on the verandah rather than on the play equipment, but in the end the strategy was successful		S2	S3		S5	
H a/3	H worked with M a year 1 student who had communication and behavioural problems. H was assigned to M full time, one-on-one. H reflected that floor time activities were a large part of year 1. M did not want to participate in the activities. He lay on the floor, he did not sit up straight, and he got under the desk. H tried to get him out but he did not move.		S2			S5	
	Forcing him onto the floor did not work. The teacher sent M to the principal but this strategy did not work either.			S3		S5	
	H reflected that the teacher tolerated M's non-compliant behaviour for a while because they were just trying to assess M's reactions to strategies.		S2	S3		S5	
	Eventually the teacher got quite a few colouring and activity books for M, and H bought some herself. M was quite happy to sit and do jigsaw puzzles or mazes.		S2		S4		
	H noticed that M could actually write the alphabet very well, but that he seemed to have no idea what the letters meant. M sat there quietly and copied letters and copied pages of the book.		S2			S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
H a/3 (cont.)	H began placing pages from the other students' workbooks into M's activity book. H sat with M and he did some of the work on the page. H stated that each week M did a bit more of the work. He began to respond to H's questions using 'yes' or 'no' answers. H reflected that M was very good at 'no'. H stated that eventually M settled down and worked on many of the class based activities.	S1	S2		S4	S5	
H a/4	H worked with a year 7 student B who had learning difficulties. H stated that this student had not been ascertained because the system had not found a 'box' to put him in. B worked at a grade 2 level academically, and was unable to distinguish numbers or do simple addition. H stated that B seemed to have a short memory because he could not remember what she had shown him from one day to the next.	S1	S2				
	B was not funded (through the ascertainment process), but the school provided support for B which H reflected was questioned.						D
	B's teachers concentrated on teaching B basic life skills such as money, time and basic arithmetic with a calculator. H sat with B and did the calculator work.		S2	S3			
	The teachers tried to modify the year 7 program a fair bit for B and another girl S who had trouble keeping up with year 7 work. H worked with B and S in a little group on a modified program based on the classroom health and fitness theme.		S2	S3			
	H worked with B and S to prepare for a 'slurpie' day for the class. The students sourced the recipes on the internet and in a recipe book, worked out how much milk, juice and fruit to buy. H helped them to calculate how much they needed for the slurpies and for the fruit kebabs in order to provide for the whole class.		S2	S3		S5	
	The learning support teacher took the students to the shop and bought the ingredients. The students needed to find out the prices so that they could work out how much to charge each child in the class for the slurpies and the kebabs.			S3			
	After the students had calculated how much milk etc. they needed, H set the ingredients out on an Excel spreadsheet, and showed them how it could calculate the cost for them. The students had already worked out the number of punnets of strawberries or bananas that they needed and H showed them how the spreadsheet calculated the total cost. H instigated using the spreadsheet because she saw the value in putting it all up on a spreadsheet for the students to have at the ready, rather than having them work it out each time with a piece of paper and a calculator.	S1			S4	S5	
	H assisted B and S to actually make the slurpies, pouring in the milk, putting the strawberries and the bananas in, whizzing it up in the blender, pouring them and then selling them to the students.					S5	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
	H reflected that B and S enjoyed this experience.	S1					
H a/4 (cont.)	The class also responded well. H reflected that that was part of the aim of this process because the class peers knew that B and S could not do exactly the same as they did, but saw that they were able to participate successfully.	S1					
	H observed the smiles on the faces of B and S. S thanked H for helping her and recalled S's beaming face when she was making the slurpies and kebabs. H reflected that it was so nice to see that, and to hear thank you. H reflected that this was a good program and that they had a great time.	S1					
	The teachers thanked H too, which was really good. H reflected that it was a joint effort between her and the learning support teacher - a team effort.			S3			
	H reflected that B and S felt as though someone had taken notice of them and helped them in a way that allowed them to achieve success in front of their peers. She felt that although students who need help often resist and want to do it themselves, B and S realized that accepting help had allowed them to achieve success in a way that was enjoyable and gratifying.	S1				S5	
H b/1	H worked with a vision-impaired student T. (H had worked with T for three years). H reflected that some days T would act as if he did not want to work.		S2				
	H worked with T and three other students who struggled in the same areas as T did. H stated that she took the group outside or sat at a table on the side of the classroom depending on what the class was doing. If the students in her group needed to concentrate on an activity H took them outside so they were not distracted by the other members of the class. H reflected that a different environment sometimes made the learning situation better. Outside in the fresh air could be better for the group, or it could be party time.		S2	S3		S5	
	H set up a game outside the classroom and T did silly things like reading the wrong word on the card, and using words that were not appropriate for the game. One of the other students was silly too. H gave them a warning that they would have to return to the class and do less fun things like writing if they did not want to participate or if they were naughty. T and the other student indicated that they understood.					S5	
	T was silly again. T put on a little show for his audience. He made silly noises and silly names. He got off his seat and wandered around. H reflected that T gave the impression that he was master of the show.		S2				

Experience	Specific Descriptions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	Discarded
H b/1 (cont.)	H ignored T at first and his behaviour became worse. She told T that if he played up again he would go back to the classroom. T ‘s behaviour deteriorated again. This second time H sent him back to the class. The teacher understood why H had sent T back because she had reported to this teacher previously.			S3		S5	
	The teacher told T that he would not be able to work in a group situation with H the next day. T dropped his lip. H reflected that T knew the boundaries with her but thought he would test them. H considered that T learned something from the fact that his stepping over her boundaries did not work.		S2	S3			
	H reflected that the unsuccessful part, for her, was having to send T back to class because the idea was for him to work in a small group. H tried to ignore T’s behaviour, and when that did not work she sent him back to class. H had hoped that T knew her well enough that he understood that she would not tolerate that sort of behaviour. H felt disappointed because T knew that neither she nor the teacher would tolerate it, but he still tried it on.	S1	S2			S5	
	H expected that T would it figure out eventually. But H noted that every day with T was different. T’s behaviour was erratic and therefore unpredictable from one day to the next. This presented her with an ongoing problem.	S1	S2			S5	

Table 3 Cross checking of Essential Themes with Specific Descriptions – Learning about Support

Legend of essential themes – Learning about support

L1 Learning about supporting students emotionally and socially comes from life experience

L2 Learning about support happens on-the-job

L3 Consultation and communication with teachers, learning support teachers, parents and health professionals supports learning about supporting students.

Table 3: Cross checking of Essential Themes with Specific Descriptions – Learning about Support

Experience	Specific Descriptions	L1	L2	L3	Discarded
A c/1	A learned about how to support a student with Down syndrome from her previous experience of working with the mother of another child.		L2	L3	
	A reflected that the mother had high expectations of what educators could do for her child.				D
	The past student's mother worked in the association, and she gave A material to read. The mother was very supportive and also made aids. A learnt from the mother about repetition and consistency.		L2	L3	
	A met with another teacher aide to work out what to teach the two students in the following week.	L1		L3	
	A remembered that in the past the teachers would simply hand the two students over to the teacher aides. They had little help from the LST at that time. A reflected that the teacher aides used to joke that they could have played with the two students in the sandpit every day because no-one ever questioned them about what they were doing with the students.	L1		L3	
A c/2	A asked the teachers why something was happening.			L3	
	A consulted with the learning support teacher when problems arose in relation to teachers or students, when something was not working. A reflected that the learning support teacher dealt with problems well.			L3	
	A learned a lot from the learning support teacher (LST) who A stated was extremely knowledgeable			L3	
	A met with the LST and other teacher aides weekly to discuss issues with students and how they were interacting with teachers e.g. if teachers were not allowing them to carry out their tasks.			L3	
	The LST provided educational materials for A and the teacher aides. The LST read a lot and attended a lot of courses, and provided input and learning opportunities. The LST often applied for funding for the teacher aides to attend inservices and professional development days such as SPELD.			L3	
A c/3	A used techniques and strategies she learned in the Certificate III course with student K in her literacy and numeracy program.				D
	A reflected that K has benefitted in her reading ability from this learning, although K still does not have the comprehension.		L2		

Experience	Specific Descriptions	L1	L2	L3	Discarded
B c/1	B learned about how to support students from on- the-job experiences.		L2		
	B learned about supporting students from the LST who trained the teacher aides pretty well.				
	The LST organised specialists to come to the school and talk to B and show her what to do.			L3	
	B reflected that after the training what she did was really up to her.		L2		
B c/2	B attended IEP meetings and gained an insight into what the kids were like at home. She listened to the parents and spoke with them.			L3	
	B gained information about what worked for the parents in terms of behaviour and motivating the student.			L3	
B c/3	B gained accreditation through the requirements of the Recognition of Prior Learning process. B analysed her work with the students and handed in the information for feedback. Sometimes B had to provide more information. B stated that through the process she gained an understanding that what she was doing was correct.		L2		
B c/4	B helped in the classroom as a mother and was asked to help a student who was having difficulties with his sounds.	L1			
	B quite enjoyed working with the students who were having difficulties and that the students reacted to her in appositive way.	L1			
	B had attended inservice courses on ASD and Autism organised through her employers but had not received any inservice training on social emotional issues with students per se.	L1			
C c/1	C watched the learning support teacher and teachers give lessons to learn about supporting students.			L3	
	C copied the teachers' approaches and methods when she worked one-on-one with students.		L2	L3	
C c/2	C attended a one day inservice on Autism with the classroom teacher. The teacher was unaware that Autism was not curable.				D
	C reflected that what she learned was more useful when she and the teacher shared the learning.			L3	
C c/3	C completed the Certificate III in Education Support but found that the main thing she learned was to access the Internet better.				D
	C was unable to use Internet skills with her students who could not read.				D
C c/4	C learned about working with students from the visiting speech pathologist. C worked on a special speech program with some children who were ascertained SLI.			L3	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	L1	L2	L3	Discarded
C c/4 (cont.)	The speech pathologist came to the school, demonstrated the lesson with the child, and C watched. C stated that she then knew exactly what she wanted to do.		L2		
	The speech pathologist was readily available with feedback, and returned to see how the students were going on the program. The speech pathologist took the student through the program again, and C was able to see if she was doing the wrong thing, or if she needed a refresher course. C reflected that this way of working with the visiting speech pathologist was a really successful learning experience.		L2	L3	
C c/5	C learned from other teacher aides who had worked with the students in the lower grades when she began working with students as they entered year 4. C reflected that teacher aides from the lower school had useful ideas about what had worked previously for students.			L3	
	But the gap between the students just seemed to get wider as the students entered higher grades. C felt that there was little that was useful for the teacher aides to hand on to the next teacher aide, because teachers' expectations of the students were different in the upper school.				D
	C reflected that her work with the student could benefit from the knowledge passed on by the previous teacher aide when the students were on an independent program.			L3	
C c/6	C worked as a parent helper in her children's school and recalled how there was one student who came to her reading group who was not as fluent at reading the assigned text as others in the group. When the student hesitated, the other students called out the word.	L1			
	The student became restless when the rest of the group was reading. C asked the other students to wait, not to call out, and to give him the chance to work out the word for himself.	L1			
	F reflected that the student just needed time. Gradually he gained more confidence in reading in front of others.	L1			
D c/1	D learned about supporting students' needs from the formal Certificate III in Education Support. D did the course through an agency accredited by Queensland Education.				D
	D did not qualify for funding from the school, so she paid for the course herself. D reflected that this might be why she was more motivated.				D
	Part of the course required D to speak to parents of children with disabilities. D learned from the parents about their experiences of the medical system and feelings of inadequacy before their children even started school.				D

Experience	Specific Descriptions	L1	L2	L3	Discarded
D c/1 (cont.)	Undertaking the diversity units in the course gave her the opportunity for experiences she otherwise would not have had. D interviewed three migrants about their experiences of coming to Australia and the difficulties that they faced. D found this really interesting and informative.				D
	D did case studies of the students with disabilities with whom she worked. The course required D to approach the teacher with suggestions of activities that she wanted to undertake with the students.		L2	L3	
	D found this daunting, but it worked out well. The teacher now trusts D more to prepare materials for the students with whom she works because the teacher has been exposed to the course process, and has seen the materials that D has acquired from the disability course.			L3	
D c/2	D used the Internet to research particular medical disabilities to find out if there was anything that she could do to better support the students.				D
	D stated that did not get much detailed information about the students with whom she worked at school.	L1			
	D found out from J's mum over coffee, he was moving house. D found a website which outlined strategies to use with children who were moving house.	L1		L3	
	D used some of the strategies with J.				
	D sensed that J had another concern about moving house. D talked to J and discovered that he was worried about leaving his grandma.	L1	L2		
	D talked with the parent and they worked out a way to address J's worries about his grandma. D reflected that she learned about the student's needs through establishing communication with the parents.			L3	
	D was also attentive to the child's changing moods and behaviours.	L1	L2		
E c/1	E went to an IEP meeting but was not sure if she was supposed to be involved in the IEP.				D
	E noted that the IEP was written in dot points e.g. here do this, with no description of the skills and knowledge required to enact the program.			L3	
	E reflected that teacher aides and parents could meet at IEP meetings and the parents could get to know the person with their child. E met C's mum when she invited her over for coffee, to talk about some trouble that C was having when she first started.			L3	
E c/2	E learned how to support her student by spending time with her and getting to know her		L2		

Experience	Specific Descriptions	L1	L2	L3	Discarded
E c/2 (cont.)	E stated that it was it was important for her to have on the job training with her student. E learned about working with C on her speech problems by watching a speech therapist do a practical exercise with the student.		L2	L3	
	E worked out how to adapt what she had learned from the speech therapist to C's particular behaviours and individual needs on any given day. E used insistence and waiting strategies to encourage C to complete tasks.		L2		
E c/3	E started a program for young disabled adults for a local council.	L1			
	When E was at university she undertook recreation officer work with adult students training them in social skills.	L1			
	E had a personal background with disabilities because her parents were psychiatric nurses and her mother had a disability.	L1			
	E used to go into work with her mother (similar to Endeavour Foundation) and therefore was used to having people with Down syndrome around her. She felt as though she was always part of the world of people with disabilities.	L1			
F c/1	F learned a lot from inservices because she did them with other teacher aides who were doing the job as well. At inservices F talked with other teacher aides about their experiences.			L3	
	F learned from inservices run at school by people from central office or the learning support teacher. She has learnt lots of different ways of teaching particularly a way of teaching spelling through visualization, which F felt was a great way.				D
	F passed on this spelling method when she did relief work in schools where students were unable to spell. F reflected that the staff were surprised how well the visualization technique worked.				D
F c/2	F learned how to support students emotionally through being a parent. As a parent F felt that she learned to care for kids and that she often became emotionally attached to the students she worked with. She tried to be supportive and helped them to gain a positive feeling about themselves.	L1			
	F had not been taught how to support students emotionally but relied on her own experiences. She had not been taught how to really speak to students and lift their confidence.	L1			
	She had not been taught how to work with teachers and get the most out of that working relationship for both teacher and teacher aide. F felt that this type of learning would be very beneficial.			L3	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	L1	L2	L3	Discarded
F c/3	F reflected that whatever inservice learning she has done has been useful in some way.				D
	F adapted what she had learned on the job, because she would try anything to try to get a positive outcome for the child.		L2		
	F learned from an inservice how to help a student to visualise spelling words. F used 'wave' and 'beach' and drew pictures to facilitate learning to spell for her student using visualisation.				D
G c/1	G stated that he learned how to support students with disabilities and learning difficulties by using a reward and punishment strategy.	L1	L2		
	G learned that when he first started he was very generous and used to hand out stickers too readily and he learned that the students took advantage of his generosity.		L2		
	G did not think that anything could have prepared him for what he has faced on the front line. G felt that he could learn a lot from books, but he learned much more from being out there doing it.	L1	L2		
G c/2	The teacher aides with whom G worked had been working at the school for at least two years and they were pretty knowledgeable about what happens on the job.			L3	
	G learned by talking to the other teacher aides about the students, and what they were doing on a daily basis. The teacher aides were happy to do this. He talked to teacher aides who had worked with the students previously and asked about the student's learning and tried to develop understanding of common patterns of behaviour.		L2	L3	
H c/1	H completed the Diversity unit in the Certificate III in Education Support course. H stated that when she first looked at the tasks in the course she wondered if she would find much diversity in a small school. H noted that one of the teachers was born in India, so she decided to use her as an example of diversity in the educational environment.		L2		
	H was amazed at what she discovered during the course. H reflected that doing the course assessment tasks made her look around in the school more. Even though she had been there for four years, the course made her look for the diversity that already existed in the school environment.		L2		
	H stated that as she walked past the amphitheatre she saw a mum teaching the students how to do a Fijian dance. H also realized while helping the teachers with their computers in the classrooms that there were a lot of parents who came in to help the students to make artefacts from a variety of places e.g. Japanese shibori, and batik from Indonesia. H realized that the students learn dances from other countries and do lots of research as well.		L2		

Experience	Specific Descriptions	L1	L2	L3	Discarded
H c/1 (cont.)	When H sat down to write up the task she realized that she had no trouble finding diversity in the school environment. She observed how people came and shared their ideas and the students put on a craft show for their parents. The students then had the opportunity to answer their parent's questions about the crafts, how they did them and where they came from. The students also did three dances. It was eye-opening for her to do this sort of thing in her studies, because it reminded her to be more aware of the diversity in the school environment.		L2		
H c/2	H has learned how to help with maths from her own knowledge and from the charts and other things available in the classroom. H has not had any inservice on maths.		L2		
	H supposed that it was presumed by the teachers that she would know how to teach maths. H felt that the teachers presumed that since she was an adult and because it was year 4 or 5 work that the students were learning, then she knew how to teach the maths concepts and processes.			L3	
	The teachers did not realize that what H learnt at school was very different from what is taught now. Even things like addition and subtraction, multiplication and division were completely different. H used the example of 'chunking' which was a big challenge for her at one stage. H had never heard of the term, so she had to learn about it by working with the students over the years. When the teacher asked her to work on a page with the students H found the page in the maths book and an example of the concept. She worked with the students from that.	L1	L2		
	H expressed her frustration about learning about maths concepts and processes on-the-job while simultaneously trying to help students who were struggling with maths anyway.		L2		
	H was also assigned to work with students in the Support-a-Reader program without any inservice. (Support-a -Reader is a program designed to help students who have learning difficulties with reading.) H learned about how to do that through on-the-job experience as well.		L2		
H c/3	In order to know what to do with a particular student or group of students H talked to the teacher after every session, because she did not work with the students every day.			L3	
	H worked with the two students in year 7 once a week and the learning support teacher worked with them the next day. So because they worked in tandem H informed the LST about what she had done in the time she was allocated so they did not double up.			L3	
	Because H worked in a small school community where they saw each other every day, communication between teachers and staff was easy.			L3	

Experience	Specific Descriptions	L1	L2	L3	Discarded
H c/3 (cont.)	H understood that they did not formally write down what they did with the students. H stated that she preferred to talk to the teachers so that they related to the information better			L3	
	H spoke to the learning support teacher in the corridor and told her what she did with the students. The LST then told H what she needed to do the next week.			L3	
H c/4	H had a passion for working with kids. H worked with her own children and worked as a parent volunteer at her children's primary school.	L1			
	H's son (assessed as having auditory processing difficulties in year 3) also had difficulty keeping up with his peers on the playground equipment and when kicking a ball. The other students tended to ostracise him.	L1			
	H found out that her son was experiencing problems socialising with his peers from teachers and from her son. One time H's son came home from school upset. When H asked him what was upsetting him he stated that the other students would not let him play and they did not want him to play.	L1			
	H took her children to the park and played football with them regularly and even though her son did not have much sporting ability he learned about the game. H also played cricket and soccer with her children in the park and invited the neighbourhood children to join in the games.	L1			
	H deliberately provided her son with opportunities to interact with children other than those at school so that he could learn social skills in a different environment. H stated that, although it was hard to measure, this strategy did help him to interact more confidently	L1			
	H sees the same difficulties at school where she now works. H uses the same strategy a lot when she is on playground duty.	L1			
	H observed a boy who was having difficulty because his abilities did not seem to match those of his peers. H interacted with him suggesting a person to play with and a game to play. H grabbed a ball and kicked it with him so that he was not sitting on his own doing nothing.	L1			
	H reflected that whatever year students are in, and whatever their disability or difficulty, encouraging that type of interaction can help their socialisation skills and self confidence.	L1			

Appendix E: Example Illustrating Giorgi's Methodology

1. Reading the entire description to get a sense of the whole statement

In this step the transcripts of interviews are read to get a sense of the whole. The following is an example of one of the teacher aide's experiences of supporting a student with a disability that she perceived was successful. This has been coded as (C a/1) in the findings chapter.

Transcript of interview C a/1

There is this little boy, L. who is diagnosed with Speech and Language and in the third term of year 4, I took over being his teacher aide, and his classroom teacher and our Learning Support teacher devised a totally independent program for him. Each day for every day of the week at quarter past ten he would come out of the classroom, it was the same time every day, and do his own program. And during that time she would do a literacy program with the class because he just couldn't cope. He just couldn't understand that particular program. So he would come out every day. I'd always go and get him in case I got held up. But he was always ready to come out. He wasn't reluctant to come and we got him reading. When he started he knew about 20 sight words, and we used the Fitzroy Reading program and they're very boring, very babyish books, but because he was doing it one-on-one and nobody else knew what he was doing, it didn't seem to worry him. He made a big effort with them and had some sight words and we would play Snap, GoFish, sight word Bingo, sight word Memory, anything we could think of to play with the sight words so he could remember it. I think the biggest thing was …. The sight words were in lists of words and you'd go down. After a while I would give him a Smartie. I challenged him before the holidays that he'd get a Smartie for every word he got right. And then after the holidays we went through the list but we didn't follow the order of the list. I'd pick a word and he would say it, and he knew 24 words. There were two lists and he knew the 24 words. And he just seemed so proud of himself. It was as if he was really smug. "You didn't think I could do it, but I could!" And he hides his emotions well, but I think he was pleased with himself, with the fact that he could read, and he could take books out of the library. Now he's in year 6 and he can take books out of the library, and he can't read every word, but he can read enough to know what's going on, and it's given him a lot of confidence. And it made me feel really good because I thought I wasn't really wasting my time.

2. Discrimination of Meaning Units

In this step meaning units are identified and separated using tow slashes (//). Each meaning unit is given a number. Meaning units are then recorded using as much of the teacher aide's language as possible.

There is this little boy, L. who is diagnosed with Speech and Language and in the third term of year 4, I took over being his teacher aide, //1 and his classroom teacher and our Learning Support teacher devised a totally independent program for him. Each day for every day of the week at quarter past ten he would come out of the classroom, it was the same time every day, and do his own program. And during that time she would do a literacy program with the class because he just couldn't cope. He just couldn't understand that particular program. So he would come out every day. //2 I'd always go and get him in case I got held up. But he was always ready to come out. He wasn't reluctant to come //3 and we got him reading. When he started he knew about 20 sight words, and we used the Fitzroy Reading program and they're very boring, very babyish books, but because he was doing it one-on-one and nobody else knew what he was doing, it didn't seem to worry him. //4 He made a big effort with them and had some sight words and we would play Snap, GoFish, sight word Bingo, sight word Memory, anything we could think of to play with the sight words so he could remember it. //5 I think the biggest thing was …. The sight words were in lists of words and you'd go down. After a while I would give him a Smartie. //6 I challenged him before the holidays that he'd get a Smartie for every word he got right. And then after the holidays we went through the list but we didn't follow the order of the list. I'd pick a word and he would say it, and he knew 24 words. There were two lists and he knew the 24 words. //7 And he just seemed so proud of himself. It was as if he was really smug. "You didn't think I could do it, but I could!" And he hides his emotions well, but I think he was pleased with himself, with the fact that he could read, and he could take books out of the library. //8 Now he's in year 6 and he can take books out of the library, and he can't read every word, but he can read enough to know what's going on, and it's given him a lot of confidence. And it made me feel really good because I thought I wasn't really wasting my time. //9

3. Transformation of the subject's expression into a psychological language

Giorgi (1985) states that this step moves from the participant's language of concrete description of experiences to a more general description. A transformation unit for each meaning unit was written at this stage.

Meaning Unit 1: C took over working with a student L who was diagnosed speech-language impaired, in term 3 of Year 4.
Transformation 1: L, who was ascertained speech/language impaired was in the third term of year 4 when C became his teacher aide.

Meaning Unit 2: C stated that L's classroom teacher and the Learning Support teacher devised a totally independent program for him. L just couldn't cope with the classroom literacy program. L could not understand that particular program. L left his classroom at the same time each day to work with C on his totally independent program.
Transformation 2: C stated that L's classroom teacher and the Learning Support teacher devised a totally independent program for him, because L just couldn't cope with the classroom literacy program. L could not understand that particular program. L came out every day at the same time to work with C on one-on-one on the program.

Meaning Unit 3: C would always go to collect L in case she was held up. L was always ready to come out; he was not reluctant.
Transformation 3: C always went to collect L in case she was held up. L was always ready to come out with C.

Meaning Unit 4: C stated that when L started he knew about twenty 'sight words'. C used the Fitzroy reading program with L which was a very simple program with babyish books. L did not seem to mind because he was doing it one-on-one, and nobody else knew that he was doing it.
Transformation 4: C stated that when L started he knew about twenty 'sight words' i.e. words that he could recognize instantly. C used a reading program with very simple, basic books. C reflected that L did not seem to mind, because he was doing it one-on-one with C, and nobody else knew what he was doing.

Meaning Unit 5: C reflected that L made a big effort with the sight words and had some sight words as well. C and L played Snap, GoFish, sight word Bingo, sight word Memory; anything they could think of to play with the sight words so L could remember it.
Transformation 5: C reflected that L made a big effort with the new sight words and with those he had already learned. With these sight words, C and L played Snap, GoFish, sight word Bingo, sight word Memory; anything they could think of to play with the sight words so L could remember them.

Meaning Unit 6: The sight words were in lists and C went down the list with L. After a while C gave L a Smartie.
Transformation 6: The sight words were in lists and C went through the list with L. After a while C gave L a Smartie when he got the list right.

Meaning Unit 7: Before the holidays C challenged L and said that she would give L a Smartie for every word he got right. After the holidays C went through the list with L but C did not follow the order of the list. C picked a word and L said it. L knew the 24 words on the two lists.
Transformation 7: C challenged L before the holidays and said that C would give L a Smartie for every word that L got right. After the holidays C went through two lists in random order and L knew the 24 words.

Meaning Unit 8: C noticed that L seemed so proud of himself and smug. C thought that L was thinking, "You didn't think I could do it. But I could!" C reflected that L hid his emotions well, but C felt that L was pleased with himself, with the fact that he could read, and he could take books out of the library.
Transformation 8: C noticed that L seemed so proud of himself and smug. C thought that L was thinking, "You didn't think I could do it. But I could!" C reflected that L hid his emotions well, but C felt that L was pleased with himself, with the fact that he could read, and he could take books out of the library.

Meaning Unit 9: C noted that when L was in year 6, L took books out of the library, and L could not read every word, but he could read enough to know what was going on, and it gave him a lot of confidence. And it made C feel really good because C thought that she was not really wasting my time.
Transformation 9: C noted that when L was in year 6, L took books out of the library, and L could not read every word, but he could read enough to know what was going on, and it gave him a lot of confidence. L's confidence made C feel really good because what C had done with L seemed worthwhile.

4a. Synthesis of transformed meaning units into a specific statement describing the experience

> *In this step the insights within the meaning units are synthesized to write a specific description of that experience.*

L, who was ascertained speech/language impaired was in the third term of year 4 when C became his teacher aide. C stated that L's classroom teacher and the Learning Support teacher devised a totally independent program for him, because L just couldn't cope with the classroom literacy program. L could not understand that particular program. L left his classroom every day at the same time to work with C on one-on-one on the program. C stated that she always went to collect L in case she was held up. L was always ready to come out with C. When L started he knew about twenty sight words. C used a reading program with very simple, basic books. C reflected that L did not seem to mind, because he was doing it one-on-one with C, and nobody else knew what he was doing. L made a big effort with the new sight words and those he already knew. C and L played Snap, GoFish, sight word Bingo, sight word Memory; anything they could think of to play with the sight words so L could remember them. The sight words were in lists and C went through the list with L. After a while C gave L a Smartie when he got the list right. Before the holidays C challenged L and said that she would give him a Smartie for every word that he got right. After the holidays C went through two lists in random order, and L knew the 24 words. C noticed that L seemed so proud of himself and smug. C thought that L was thinking, "You didn't think I could do it. But I could!" C reflected that L hid his emotions well, but C felt that L was pleased with himself, with the fact that he could read, and he could take books out of the library. C noted that when L was in year 6, L took books out of the library, and L could not read every word, but he could read enough to know what was going on, and it gave him a lot of confidence. L's confidence made C feel really good because what C had done with L seemed worthwhile.

From the specific statements, meaning units, transformed units and the transcripts of interviews tentative themes about supporting students emerged for (C a/1)

- One-on-one independent programs provide support for student's learning.
- Effective learning support can require withdrawal of the student from the classroom program.
- Knowledge of the student's individual learning style is essential when designing support programs.
- Providing motivation is important to support learning.
- Teacher aides use their own initiative to adapt learning programs to better motivate students.
- Student's positive demeanour and behaviour are indications of successful support.

4b. Synthesis of all of the specific statements into a general statement

In this step all of the specific statements are synthesised into a general statement of that experience. This has not been demonstrated here because only one specific description has been used as an example.

Appendix F: List of Papers

Bourke, P. (2007) Inclusive education research and phenomenology . In Jeffery, Peter L., (Ed). *Proceedings Australian Association for Research in Education. Research impacts: Proving or improving?* Fremantle, Western Australia. Available online at http://www.aare.edu.au/index.htm

Bourke, P., & Carrington, S. (2007). Inclusive education reform: Implications for teacher aides. Australasian Journal of Special Education, 31(1), 15 - 24. Available online from Informaworld database at http://www.informaworld.com/10.1080/10300110601184701

Bourke, P. (2008) Inclusive education reform in Queensland; Implications for practice. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. In press.

Bourke, P. (2008) International research on inclusive education: Where are we going? Paper presented at AASE conference, Cairns, 6-8 April, 2008. Unpublished paper.

Bourke, P. (2008) Professional development and teacher aides in inclusive education contexts: Where to from here? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. In press.