

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

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Rosemary Butt

February 2014

Declaration on Ethics

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

- University of Canberra: Committee for Ethics in Human Research approval: 10-53 (2010)
- ACT Department of Education and Training approval of research proposal: 2010/00226-7 (2010)

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Dedication

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

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Abstract

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

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

The findings identify the mismatched perceptions regarding the role, qualifications, skills and training requirements for TAs. Discrepancies in practices pertaining to the funding and employment of TAs are highlighted, specifically in public schools in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The findings are vital to future educational policy-making and school and classroom practice if education agendas are firmly focused on improved educational outcomes, specifically for students with disabilities and learning

difficulties and all students in general. A policy review of the employment conditions of TAs and the processes and practices associated with their deployment is of the utmost importance and is long overdue to ensure the efficient use of resources and quality educational outcomes. The analysis indicates that the issues are not isolated to the ACT; thus, the findings have implications for policy-makers and education systems Australia-wide.

This study provides an alternative model for TA deployment to address the shortcomings in current practices. With the introduction of the proposed alternative model, the challenges facing TAs regarding their role at the school, class and student levels will be addressed, resulting in quality education and improved student learning.

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List of Abbreviations

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACT ETD	ACT Education and Training Directorate
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
CIT	Canberra Institute of Technology
CTP	Career Training Program
DISS	Deployment and Impact of Support Staff
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EHA	<i>Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975 (US)</i>
ESL	English as a Second Language
HLTA	Higher Level Teacher Assistant
HR	Human Resources
IDEA	<i>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1990 (US)</i>
ILP	Individual Learning Plans
IRSED	Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage
LSC	Learning Support Centre
LSUA	Learning Support Units/Autism
NAPLAN	The National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy
NP	National Partnership
NSW	New South Wales
PAL	positive approaches to learning
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PTAT	Preliminary Teacher Assistant Training
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
SCAN	Student Centred Appraisal of Need
SEN	special education needs
SES	socioeconomic status
TAAF	Teacher Assistant As Facilitator
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TAT	Teacher Assistant Training
TA	teacher assistant

TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VET	Vocational Education and Training