

Classroom Assistants are Under-valued and Under-utilised

by

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ABSTRACT

This research project was initiated through a personal interest and involvement in training and assessing classroom assistants. With the arrival of new standards for a new breed of classroom assistant – Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) – their role is developing dramatically. In order to investigate current practice in Northern Ireland views of classroom assistants, teachers and assessors of classroom assistants were sought. Six themes provided the basis and focus of all investigative processes. They are:

- 1) Pertaining competence
- 2) Role in the interdisciplinary team in the school
- 3) Perceived contribution to the school
- 4) Impact upon the pupils in formal and informal (hidden) curriculum
- 5) Historicity of experience and reflective potential
- 6) Need for distinct and complementary in-service support.

The structure of the research was

C/As: Questionnaire and use of reflective logs

Teachers: Focussed semi-structured evaluative interviews

Assessors Focussed semi-structured evaluative interviews and use of field-notes.

The main conclusions were:

- In the main classroom assistants were not under-valued
- In the main classroom assistants were under-utilised.

The main recommendations are for

- Improved line-management
- Wider training opportunities
- Less restrictive contractual arrangements to facilitate planning with teachers

- Clear definition of specificity of job role to which teachers can give full support.

The most significant implication of these conclusions is that with clear proactive measures, this opportunity to develop the role of the classroom assistant could provide immense benefits to the current education system in Northern Ireland.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Focussed reports such as the OFSTED reports on classroom assistants (OFSTED, 2002b, 2003a, 2003c) have produced evidence of the worth and impact of support staff on classroom performance. The government is committed to developing their role:

‘The number of support staff working in schools is growing fast –in January 2002 there were over 216,000, an increase of 81,000 since 1997.....In 2003-04 the Government will ...provide £268 million specifically for support staff salaries and £37.45 million for their training... Schools will receive an additional £3 billion in revenue funding by 2005-06.... This equates to over £350,000 for an average secondary school ...and £70,000 for an average primary school to (help) increase the numbers of and training for support staff.’ (DfES, 2003a)

Classroom assistant is a generic term and in order to understand the wide variety of jobs, roles and responsibilities it is first necessary to attempt to define, through looking at the various titles, the evolution of the multifaceted role of these workers. They work with teachers in classrooms within primary, special and secondary schools, supporting the children’s learning. Some may have a general support role while others have specific responsibilities for an individual child, age group or subject area. They hold a range of about 300 different qualifications (Parkin, 2002), although according to Smith (2001 p.2)

‘60% (of classroom assistants) have little or no experience or knowledge of the complexities of working with children’.

General Assistants

Since Forster’s 1870 Education Act formalized education, the education of children has been dependent on some form of support staff. From the days of the Margaret McMillan’s Cinderella Club (Mansbridge, 1932 p.43), education went hand-in-hand with care. It was recognized that

children who were hungry or ill clad were not 'open' to education. Missionaries realized this quickly. Domestic assistants – in the form of volunteer parents – often provided the essential care required for young children. Health and safety staff, such as 'lollipop men/women', designated 'first-aiders', supervisory staff and 'dinner ladies' were eventually employed and paid by the Education Authority. McMillan (1900) earned the title of the '*caretakers' friend*' as she advocated and fought for decent wages for them (Mansbridge, 1932 p.46). Even today there are numerous 'breakfast clubs' and 'after-school clubs' where children may be left at school, outside of normal operating hours, supervised by support staff. Here children can avail themselves of various services e.g. assistance with homework, substantial snack/ meal and play opportunities. These 'general assistants' are employed and paid a minimal wage. With the move to provide more inclusion of children with special physical needs into mainstream education (DfEE, 1997a, 1997b), these duties are often extended to providing 'general care' throughout the school day. This may be to assist a child with cerebral palsy with toileting or accompanying a child who suffers from severe allergies. These staff are unqualified and are paid a minimal wage (often only the minimum wage). Any training available is only through self-funding and generally the courses are costly: a full National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) costs approximately £1000. The training available, though not essential to gain employment or full-pay rate, is geared, almost exclusively, to the care and education of the young child. The popular qualifications e.g. NNEB, NVQ, BTEC (see appendix 1) all reflected this emphasis in their original titles e.g. Nursery Nursing, Childcare and Education.

Classroom Assistants

The role of classroom assistant evolved from the need to assist teachers to deal with large classes of young children by maintaining a clean, organized learning environment. The idea of training these helpers to ensure that any assistance given to the children was given with knowledge and expertise became formal with the arrival of training schemes. Following the

publication of the White Paper 'Working Together: Education and Training' (DE/DfES, 1986), the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was set up. The NVQ in Early Years Care and Education was introduced in Feb 1998 by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) and City & Guilds, as successor to the NVQ in Childcare and Education. The Council for Awards in Childcare and Education (CACHE) Diploma in Early Years Care and Education has evolved from the National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) Award for Nursery Nurses. These changes have been a product of learning through dialogue and consultation with training centres and employers (DHSS, DENI and T & EA). The introduction in 1986 of the National Training Organisation (NTO) underpins central government's commitment towards training and involvement in determining qualification and training needs. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) was formed from NCVQ and the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA), placing the qualifications within the 2001 National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (appendix 2) and is monitored and validated by QCA requirements. The two courses (NVQ and CACHE), being the most popular in the list of accepted qualifications for qualified classroom assistants (appendix 1), are the courses that are referred to in this study. Both courses provide a training package, theoretical and practical, to enable the trainee to assist with children in the age range of 0-8 years. The urgent need for this assistance in the younger classes was acknowledged in Northern Ireland with the statutory provision in 1995 of a classroom assistant for every P1 class:

'From observed good practice, it is clear that the appointment of classroom assistants can contribute significantly to the effectiveness of teaching and learning attainments' (DENI, 1995 p.2)

This P1 Initiative was very successful (ETI, 1998) and has been continued until the present day.

Special Needs Assistant

The major move to provide inclusion of 'special needs' children in mainstream schools (DfEE, 1997b) has warranted a scheme whereby any 'statemented' child is 'awarded' a classroom

assistant. The funding and provision of this classroom assistant varies greatly and it is often left to the principal how he/she manages the allocated hours of assistance. In practice this scheme generally means that many classroom assistants are allocated to one particular child (charge) for the duration of their time in the school. The care or assistance required is sometimes of an intimate physical nature. In many cases the child is not in need of assistance educationally. This 'general assistant' (the official title for those performing physical duties) is consequently an asset to the whole class when the 'charge' does not require assistance.

Learning Support Assistant

With increasing accountability required from the education system, the government has now recognized that research indicates that classroom assistants do impact favourably on classroom performance '*when creatively and effectively managed*' (DfEE, 2000, p.3) and their ideas for the future demonstrate this. In the Introduction to the new NVQ units for literacy and numeracy the government anticipated the changing roles of both teacher and classroom assistant.

'The classroom assistant's role is to:

- *Support planned learning experiences for children in a variety of ways*
- *Interact with children – both in groups and individuals*
- *Question, listen to and respond to children*
- *Record any significant features of children's talk, discussion or work that could contribute to the teacher's assessment of children and share these findings with the teacher.'* (NEC, 1999 p.3)

The role of the teacher is directly involved in planning, preparation and assessment, this being formally described as:

- *'Plan the curriculum for the children in their class*
- *Organise and plan the learning experiences offered to the children*
- *Assess, record and identify achievement*
- *Evaluate the effectiveness of the learning experiences offered.'*
(NEC, 1999 p.3)

The National Association for Special Educational Needs endorses this role of increased involvement for LSAs (Learning Support Assistants), proposing that:

'LSAs should be seen as, and see themselves as, part of the multi-disciplinary team...valued members of a whole school approach to meeting special educational needs.' (NASEN, 2002 p.1)

The Paraeducator

This term is used in the United States for Learning Support Assistants. With the title goes status, acknowledgement of the level of work undertaken and a wage commensurate with the task. At the beginning of the 20th Century the idea of 'monitors' (school leavers), many of whom were interested, or developed an interest, in training as teachers, was most successful in supporting teachers with large, unmanageable classes. In 1946 in St Vincent's Primary School

'a few of the girls were persuaded by Sister Vincent to stay at school until eighteen; by calling them 'monitresses' and giving them duties as teaching assistants she allowed them to prepare for entry to the Catholic teacher training college.' (Rae, 2002 p.43)

This system gave many the opportunity to 'try' teaching before starting formal training but as the age of compulsory schooling was raised this system was phased out. It is interesting to note that this idea of 'teacher apprentice' is returning (see 'Training C/As For QTS' overleaf). In the USA and in England there is now the opportunity for classroom assistants to undertake a foundation course which will qualify them for entry to teacher education. Until recently in Northern Ireland many classroom assistants were able to gain direct entrance onto the Early Childhood Studies Degree Course, which now offers a route to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The NTO's framework of qualifications (appendix 2) shows a clear structure to ensure that classroom assistants have the opportunity for career development and training. The Level 11 progresses to Level 111 – a supervisory level with added competencies, such as observation, planning and evaluation. The CACHE Diploma in Early Years Care & Education is acknowledged and accepted for university entrance from this year (2004). The NVQ has a new qualification – NVQ for Teaching Assistants – which is specifically geared to a higher level of classroom involvement (City & Guilds, 2002). The DfES has developed a comprehensive

professional induction programme for teaching assistants in both primary and secondary schools in England (DfES, 2001) and also available in England is the Specialist Teaching Assistant Course (STAC) which can provide accreditation towards a teaching degree. Northern Ireland, currently (2004), has neither of these options.

Teaching Assistant

The recent development of a new qualification for classroom assistants recognizes the complex and inequitable employment conditions for them. Until recently (2002) there was no training accessible for those classroom assistants employed in the older age range (over 8 years). The courses available were geared to the early years, required practical experience within the specified age 0-8 years and thus excluded the assistants who were employed outside this age range. By widening the training to take in older children, it was appropriate to develop a completely new course, changing the emphasis to mainly educational classroom support for all children up to the age of sixteen. This new qualification is 'NVQ for Teaching Assistant' (see 'Definition for this study' overleaf). Many ELBs in Northern Ireland acknowledge its importance by providing funding for permanent employees. Since the course costs approximately £1000 per candidate, investment is substantial. Each area of the U.K. operates in a slightly different way. In Scotland the post of classroom assistant has been recognized only since 2000, whereas already in parts of England classroom assistants may be employed at one of three different levels of competence (Levels 2, 3 and 4) with a corresponding structured pay differential. Following the outcome of the DfES' consultation on Time for Standards: reforming the school workforce, (DfES, 2002a) there are now standard guidelines available (TTA, 2003b) for high quality, locally available training for Higher Level Teaching Assistants.

'These developments will be undertaken as part of the National Agreement between Government, employers and workforce unions to help schools, teachers and support staff meet the challenges that lie ahead. Higher Level Teaching Assistants will make an important contribution to pupils' learning by providing high quality support to teachers and schools' (TTA, 2003a)

This new course, because of its specific classroom orientation and the fact that it caters for all age ranges, should assist with standardising practice for the future. New training for teaching assistants involves an active, participatory, experiential approach with the implied involvement in teacher-like duties, such as, planning, observation and assessment.

Definition for this study

In order to provide manageable and meaningful research it was necessary to restrict the focus group for this study. The group selected was classroom assistants, trained or in training, who are generally working within mainstream schools that incorporate facilities for ‘statemented’ children, as specified in the Northern Ireland document dealing with inclusion (DENI, 1998a), and that follow the revised Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (effective January 2002) that embraces this principle. The study included special, primary and secondary schooling. This range enabled the more varied and complex roles of the job to be considered. Although the DfEE, (2000 p.3) states that *‘teaching assistant is the preferred generic term’*, this is not the term that was used in this study. This study is based in Northern Ireland and the term ‘teaching assistant’ has been problematic for the teaching unions. The training material for the new ‘NVQ for Teaching Assistants’ was required to change its title by the Northern Ireland teaching fraternity to ‘NVQ for Classroom Assistants’. This is because all teachers in Northern Ireland, apart from head teachers, are referred to as ‘assistant teachers’. The similarity of the terms ‘teaching assistant’ and ‘assistant teacher’ was thought to be inappropriate and, therefore, this study will refer to ‘classroom assistant’, hereafter abbreviated to C/A for ease of reading.

Official Views

The main driver of employment of C/As has been the government’s education policy of inclusive schooling (DfEE, 1997a, 1997b). Classroom assistants are recognized as playing an essential role in supporting children with special needs (OFSTED, 2003a). Other initiatives which highlighted their role were the P1 Initiative (see DENI, 1995), the National Literacy

Strategy (NLS), the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) (see OFSTED, 2000) and the Enriched Curriculum project (see BELB, 2002). In the research devoted to assessing the implementation of these initiatives, C/As have been seen to be in the forefront of delivery:

'teaching assistants continue to play an important and effective role in the delivery of these strategies' (OFSTED, 2003c).

The DfES is asking teachers who deliver the NLS to use the support available within the classroom to deliver the strategy effectively. It refers to C/As by saying:

'These people have a key role to play in the NLS (National Literacy Strategy), which should give them an enhanced sense of responsibility for the pupils they work with, and help them to focus on short term learning targets.'

(DfES, 2001 p33)

This view is also supported by Lee (2002), and the ETI (1998) evaluating the P1 Initiative who found that C/As made *'a good or excellent contribution to the quality of the children's educational experiences'* (ETI, 1998 p.7). The DfEE, acting on the Green and White Papers of the late 1990s (e.g. DfEE, 1997, 1998), has produced good quality guidelines for appointing and training C/As (DfEE, 2000) by focussing on extending their skill base. The National Agreement *'Raising Standards and Tackling Workloads'* was signed on 15th January 2003 and led to proposed radical reforms. *'Support staff are at the heart of the proposals for reform.'* (DfES, 2003b). The Government, local authority employers and school workforce unions (the signatories) were hoping to make a substantial reduction in teachers' overall burden of bureaucracy. The paper dealing with the question of reducing the bureaucratic burden on schools showed that both primary and post-primary teachers were spending *'6½ hours per week on 7 non-teaching tasks'* (DE, 2002 p9). To help reduce this, support staff numbers were to be greatly increased and utilised in a more productive manner by training them on, among other things, 25 tasks identified as appropriate for delegation (appendix 3). Findings thus far have not shown this to be the case. Smith et al (2004), OFSTED (2002b: 66) and Lee (2002) all found that the teachers' workload has actually increased as they now have the responsibility of

planning work for another adult, managing those adults and coping with competing priorities, whilst the more traditional tasks (Chapter 3 p.33) of the C/As risk becoming neglected.

Higher Level Teaching Assistants

The TTA believes that the time is ripe for developing the role of the classroom assistant:

'The National Agreement between Government, employers and school workforce unions has created the conditions in which teachers and support staff can work together even more effectively, in professional terms. In this context, some support staff – higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) - will be able to undertake a more extended role.' (TTA, 2003a)

These standards fit in with their present role - for example, knowledge, expertise and awareness of the curriculum and skills in planning, monitoring, assessing and classroom management (City & Guilds, 2002). However, the more finely defined

'knowledge and understanding in a specialist area', 'working with individuals, small groups and whole classes where the assigned teacher is not present' and 'guiding the work of other adults supporting teaching and learning in the classroom' (TTA, 2003b)

may prove more contentious issues. Twenty thousand of these senior assistants are to be trained each year (Mansell, 2002). The fact that supervision of this new 'super-assistant' '*need not always mean direct supervision exercised through being present in the classroom*' (DfES, 2003b) has prompted Doug McAvoy, the general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, to suggest that asking assistants to take on a more pedagogic role is like '*asking the theatre sister to take over the brain surgery*'. (McAvoy cited in Braid, 2002). Similar derision came from Nigel de Gruchy of the NASUWT teachers' union, cited in Smithers (2001):

'I wonder if these people are on planet Earth. They make teaching appear like the Clapham omnibus which people can jump on and off from at every other stop.'

Eight unions have agreed to allow teaching assistants to supervise whole classes from September 2005 (according to Ward, 2003). However the teachers' response is to consider strike ballots to prevent teachers being replaced by C/As. This stance was further entrenched at

the Teachers' Union general meeting on 9th April 2004. Meanwhile the union representing C/As calls for a better wage to reflect their increasingly professional role.

Problems

One of the most telling observations from Moran and Abbott (2002) was that assistants had a tendency to do *'too much'* for some children. They demonstrate that this can be taken to extremes by citing Ainscow (1999 p.63)

'two pupils with 'statements' completed the tasks of the lesson even though they were both absent! In fact, the classroom assistant did the work for them'

and a headmaster who describes seeing a Down's syndrome pupil arm-in-arm with a C/A as *'soul-destroying for me'* (Moran and Abbott, 2002 p.168). This is surely not as DENI (1998a) desired - that C/As should acknowledge differences whilst ensuring that those differences (special needs) are not made a negative issue. OFSTED warned about this over-indulgence as early as 1996:

'it is not helpful to the pupil if the support teacher or the LSA largely does the work for the child' (OFSTED, 1996 p.11)

and these fears were realised in the reports of 2003 (OFSTED, 2003a, 2003b), which showed that unsatisfactory deployment and inadequate supervision led to the pupils putting too much reliance on the C/As (OFSTED, 2003a p.6). DENI (1998b) suggested that C/As may be lacking the necessary skills and experience to measure the delicate balance between encouraging independence and interfering. In order for this problem to be addressed it is necessary to ensure that fine demarcation lines are drawn between teachers and C/As, roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, a tangible awareness of what to do and what not to do is made explicit, and better training is provided – not only for the C/As but also for the teaching staff who manage them. OFSTED's report (2002b) stated its concern over the very common problem that the least qualified people are often working with the most demanding pupils:

'Some schools may be unaware that some pupils of lower ability or with special educational needs spend too much time with teaching assistants and do not receive enough skilled teaching from a qualified teacher.' (OFSTED, 2002b)

Again, training of both C/As in dealing with specific learning needs, and teachers in directing and maximising such support, would greatly improve classroom practice. To develop a real partnership, mutual trust, respect and understanding of the differing roles is essential. It is best not to leave this to a trial and error basis.

Training C/As for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)

Recognised routes for C/As to work towards QTS are now in place in parts of the U.K. but the availability varies. Moran and Abbott (2002) made reference to a Northern Ireland initiative for the development of

'an Associate Bachelor's Degree for teaching assistants, to enable them to progress in their careers and to avail themselves of a teacher education course if they so wish.' (Moran and Abbott, 2002 p.171)

However this 'development' seems not to be yet completed (2004). There are many C/As who do not aspire to be teachers (Chapter 3 p.39) but the option should be made more available for those who do. In March 1999 it was recorded in the Board Meeting of the TTA that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment should be approached about current provision *'designed to take C/As to QTS.'* (TTA, 1999: 15) This option to train as a teacher while working as a C/A, through the Registered Teacher Programme or Licensed Teacher Scheme, could possibly incorporate a system currently used in parts of Canada. This is the School Associates programme whereby teachers volunteer to mentor and tutor trainee teachers, enabling them to access and benefit from an experienced teacher's services. In the Open University's STAC (U.K.) a mentor is provided in the form of a practising schoolteacher, but generally this transference of skills is an untapped source of training in Britain. The isolation and pressures encountered by school-based learners was considered in Edmond's study (2003), which suggested that there is a dichotomy in the *'workplace role as worker and as learner'* and that

'these roles may be in conflict with each other'. The Graduate Teaching Programme cites *'teaching and learning assistants as an important source of trainees'*. (OFSTED, 2002a: 11). Making teacher training a realistic and attractive option with flexible and accessible training and support available at work may certainly help to alleviate the current problems of teacher recruitment and retention. A consideration may be that to increase the salary of the C/A (£11 361 – £13 863) towards a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) wage (£18 105) (Wage source Woodhead 2003) could damage the recruitment of teachers.

Training Teachers to work with C/As

Being a trainer of adults is not necessarily or automatically a natural talent acquired through teaching children and teachers cannot be expected to be trainers or people managers, without training. Instigation and promotion of the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) demonstrated the government's appreciation of this distinction. To promote and develop a consistent and productive shared working environment it would seem logical that each party should be trained to that end. The reality however does not reflect this. A survey of 71 Institutes of Higher Education offering Initial Teacher Training (ITT) revealed that 59% did not provide any training *'to supervise C/As'*, 76% did not provide training *'to train C/As'* and 72% did not provide training *'to evaluate C/As'* (Morgan and Ashbaker, 1999). This was also the finding of Greene et al (2002 p.3) who, on investigating 600 schools, noted that the lack of training and management skills meant that *'the relationships between teachers and support staff were not always easy'*. With the specific and often specialised roles that C/As perform, it is common for them to work in conjunction with, not only the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), but also speech therapists, educational psychologists, behavioural experts and other outside agencies. It would appear appropriate that this role should be recognised, enhanced and properly managed. When mutual trust, respect and understanding for respective roles are not firmly established between teacher and C/A, difficult and potentially destructive

influences can emerge within the classroom. The teacher is intimidated by the presence of an additional adult in what is strictly the teacher's territory and responds by over-reacting to discipline problems in an attempt to demonstrate his/her authority. This embarrassment and feelings of inadequacy also mean that communication is a problem, with the teacher unable to make requests or give instructions for fear of offending the C/A. This scenario sometimes occurs when a young inexperienced teacher is matched with an experienced, mature, matriarchal figure. It may also happen when the teacher is changing year group or school and entering into a situation in which the C/A is much more comfortable and relaxed in his/her knowledge of the children, their learning abilities and their personal idiosyncrasies. Another scenario may be where the teacher and C/A are competing to demonstrate who can get the 'best work' out of the class. This could involve the teacher showing an unwillingness to accept that his/her teaching methods need adapting, or the C/A almost 'doing the work' for the pupil in order to demonstrate his/her ability to get the child to 'achieve'. These are natural human traits and must be addressed head-on in an understanding that each adult is a valuable part of the team. If the teacher does not give the C/A respect then the children are very quick to perceive this and some C/As have heard all too often 'we don't have to do what you say, you're not a teacher'. Similarly if the C/A does not give the teacher the respect he/she warrants, the pupils will immediately pick up that they (C/A and teacher) are not a united front. This may be brought about through lack of awareness rather than intent. It could involve such things as explaining what is being said whilst the teacher is talking, assisting the pupil by adapting the task without first conferring with the teacher, or marking work in a manner which is inconsistent with the teacher's system. An attempt to pass on sound advice, such as, 'my last teacher did it this way' may be construed as a criticism. The universality of this power struggle is apparent in Rueda and Monzo (2002), a study based in the United States, that highlighted problems impacting collaboration between teachers and paraeducators, and in two English based studies, Edmond

(2003) and Greene et al (2002). Scotland would appear to be the exception where the evaluation of the C/As Initiative (Schlapp and Davidson, 2001) found that

'surprisingly few problems in teamworking have emerged, ...The majority of class teachers with C/As found it easy to work with them and appreciated their flexibility, competence and initiative. C/As were equally positive: good relationships with teaching staff were characterised by mutual respect, good communication, being made to feel a valued part of the team and supportive teachers and headteachers.'

Perhaps this cultural difference could be investigated. Overall the results of this study (see chapter 5) seem to place Northern Ireland alongside Scotland. An atmosphere which senses change as weakness, suggestion as criticism and conformity as apathy spells disaster for those pupils caught in the middle. An atmosphere of trust, flexibility, openness, and honest communication is required in every classroom. This is not easy and must be worked at. If training is given to both parties the chances of sustaining a professional bond are greatly increased. This research project aspires to the contention that:

'Its (educational research) ultimate justification is that it lends to school improvement and professional development. The knowledge revealed by your research is inevitably incomplete but it can and does lead to improving the quality of education.' (Munn and Drever, p.65)

CHAPTER 2

Introduction

Cohen et al (2000 p.45) demonstrated how Kaplan (1973) suggested that methodology is the understanding, not of the outcome of the research, but the means of getting there. The evolution of not only the research but also the methodology must therefore be considered. Methods will not only vary in number and nature and be influenced by *'the particular stage of development a science has reached'* (Cohen et al, 2000 p.15) but they will also be dictated by *'the predilections of the researcher'* (Evans, 1984 p.31). This chapter seeks to set out a framework for the study by firstly identifying the main stakeholders involved, the research question and the research design, by selecting instruments of research, rationalising the selection, piloting the research,

effecting changes after the pilot and finally by considering implications for data analyses. Cohen et al (2002) identified various stages of scientific study: definition; observational; correlational; manipulative; outcome and further hypothesis, but recognized that these stages are constantly present and active, allowing scientists full utilisation. This open, flexible approach allows for revising the question, taking a lead from the data, creating or redefining the hypothesis, or even perhaps starting again with a new agenda. Kerlinger (1970) cited in Cohen et al (2000 p.16) recognized this:

'the original hypothesis may be changed. It may even be abandoned. One phase of the process may be expanded...another may be skimmed. These things are not important. What is important is the overall fundamental idea of scientific research as a controlled rational process of reflective inquiry, the interdependent nature of the parts of the process, and the paramount importance of the problem and its statement.'

Hypothesis

My hypothesis is '**Classroom assistants are under-valued and under-utilized**'. As noted previously (see Chapter 1 p.8) the term 'classroom assistant' is henceforth shortened to C/A. Kerlinger (1970) identified four reasons for the importance of hypotheses as tools of research. These reasons provide a focus when considering postulation of a hypothesis. To summarise - the reasons for the importance of hypotheses are that they:

- Can organise and focus the direction of the research
- Can be deduced from other theory or other hypothesis
- Can be formally tested
- Have the potential of becoming law

This study is about people and in that respect it is a sociological study. It attempts to interpret the way people work within a particular occupation. In the classroom situation this means how the C/As work with children, with the teachers and also how their role is perceived by themselves and others. Although some data was collected by means of a questionnaire, the data acquired through semi-structured interviews with teachers and assessors of C/As and through

use of field-notes, logs and diaries was, to some degree, more qualitative. The interviews were focussed and evaluative. This study investigated the role of C/As by firstly identifying the main stakeholders and then finding methods to investigate and record their input. The main stakeholders in this study are the C/As themselves, teachers working with C/As, and assessors of C/As. The ethical principles for conducting research with human participants were influenced by the professional codes of ethics laid down by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2002 pp.8-12). In considering the methodology best suited and most appropriate to this study, six themes were first established.

Themes

Six themes were identified before the research instruments were chosen and designed, in order to establish relevancy and direction for the instruments. Following Cohen et al's advice, consideration of various methodologies ensured that

'decisions on their (instruments) suitability avoid(ed) being arbitrary and the criterion for fitness for purpose is (was) held high.' (Cohen et al, 2000 p.243)

These six themes provided the basis and focus of all the investigative processes:

- 7) Pertaining competence
- 8) Role in the interdisciplinary team in the school
- 9) Perceived contribution to the school
- 10) Impact upon the pupils in formal and informal (hidden) curriculum
- 11) Historicity of experience and reflective potential
- 12) Need for distinct and complementary in-service support

The structure of the research was

C/As: Questionnaire and use of reflective logs

Teachers: Focussed semi-structured evaluative interviews

Assessors Focussed semi-structured evaluative interviews and use of field-notes

To ensure validity, consistency and reliability the multi-method approach, known as ‘triangulation’, will be used. This method is described in Open University Course material as:

‘cross-checking the existence of certain phenomena and the veracity of individuals accounts by gathering data from a number of informants and a number of sources and subsequently comparing and contrasting one account with another in order to produce as full and balanced a study as possible’

(Open University, 1988: 54)

A multi-method approach to data collection has been chosen in order to provide this degree of triangulation, counteracting any subjectivity in collecting and analysing data. The rationale behind each selected group and methodology is as follows.

Classroom Assistants (C/As) – Sample

The convenience sample used consisted of C/As who were undertaking training, either a NVQ Level 111 in Early Years Care and Education, a HNC in Early Childhood Studies or the new qualification NVQ 111 for C/As. This is a realistic sample of the total population as it included the following groups:

- Volunteer C/As who had been working in schools for some time
- Volunteer C/As who had just entered the school environment
- General assistants who had been employed in the schools for some time, but were changing their role to C/As
- Employed C/As who were new to the job
- Employed C/As who had been employed in schools for some time.

In order to reflect the diverse society in Northern Ireland this sample represented the full range of educational establishments –primary, secondary, special, voluntary, maintained and integrated.

Classroom Assistants (C/As) - Questionnaire

The questionnaire used utilized a full range of strategies. Important data for illustrating the target participants was collated from the structured questions at the beginning:

'Highly structured, closed questions are useful in that they can generate frequencies of response amenable to statistical treatment and analysis.'

(Cohen et al, 2000 p.247)

Further questions attempted to elicit answers that drew on the participant's own language, interpretation, values and opinions.

'Most of us would not wish to be called extremists we often prefer to appear like each other in many respects. For rating scales this means that we might wish to avoid the two extreme poles at each end of the scale ... the attraction of rating scales is they provide more opportunity than dichotomous questions for rendering data more sensitive and responsive to respondents. This makes rating scales particularly useful for tapping attitudes, perceptions and opinions of respondent '

(Cohen et al, 2000 pp.254, 255)

Consideration was given to using the Likert Scale which provides more choice and offers an uneven number of options, which allowed for the ambivalent positions to be recorded. However, due to the length of the questionnaire and the diversity of question-types, derivatives of this scale were used based on judgement of suitability. The questionnaire followed the common sequence as suggested in Cohen et al (2000 p.257) of commencing with unthreatening factual questions, moving to closed questions and interspersing these with more open-ended questions. One filter was used in Section 5. Funnels were also used but in a discrete fashion in order to avoid the respondent's anticipation of a particular question or direction of inquiry. The questionnaire revealed important data such as gender, age and qualifications. Other data regarding time spent on tasks was interpreted in a qualitative as opposed to a quantitative manner. As Bell (1998 p.6) contended:

'Researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are more concerned to understand individual's perceptions of the world. They seek insight rather than statistical analysis. They doubt whether social 'facts' exist and question whether a 'scientific' approach can be used when dealing with human beings. Yet there are occasions when qualitative researchers draw on quantitative techniques.'

Thus this study incorporated the quantitative method of questionnaire but with qualitative interpretations. The

'open-ended questions catching the authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candour which...are the hallmarks of qualitative data.'

(Cohen et al, 2000 p.255)

The questionnaire was distributed to C/As who were attending classes as part of their training. No distinguishing marks of any kind were on the questionnaire and they were returned to a box, which facilitated total anonymity. These arrangements were explained to the respondents before completing the questionnaire. Although they were given the option of returning the form at a later date, or not participating at all, this arrangement did ensure a high return rate (100%) as all participants (N = 44) completed and returned their forms that same session. It was intended to target classes in different parts of Northern Ireland in order to ensure as random a sample as possible but this proved too ambitious. Due to logistics, time restrictions, cost and the nature of the research question, only the convenience sample was used. In order to avoid the pitfalls illustrated by Munn and Drever (1990 p.9) of *'ambiguous questions, imprecise categories and alienation of respondents'*, time was given to piloting and re-drafting where necessary. The questionnaire was piloted and only minor changes were required (see appendices 4 and 5). For example, it was evident that an original question regarding gender of respondent was inappropriate as there was a single male in one class and a declaration would have lost him anonymity. The importance of piloting is highlighted by Cohen et al who proposed that the resulting survey should

'ensure(s) that the instrumentation, sampling and data types are appropriate to yield answers to the research questions, ensure(s) that as high a level of sophistication of data analysis is undertaken as the data will sustain (but no more)'
(Cohen et al, 2000 p.173)

Piloting was done with C/As in training but who were not part of the selected sample.

Classroom Assistants (C/As) - Reflective log books/diaries

Another source of data, which was used in this study to reflect on the practice of C/As, was the log or diary kept by them. These are reflective accounts of practice and focus on significant happenings during the school day and since they are written first hand they form an invaluable source of data. They were comprehensive, forthright and insightful pieces of informal writing which provided a holistic picture of C/As' practice. They also provided a background against

which all other data could be aligned and provided an alternative to the situation where the other research participants

'...can never eliminate all of their own effects on subjects or obtain a perfect correspondence between what they wish to study – the “natural setting” – and what they actually study – “ a setting with a researcher present”.'

(Bogden & Biklen, 1998 p.35)

Teachers – Sample

A focus group of five teachers were chosen at random from each of the four representative types of school in Northern Ireland– maintained, voluntary, integrated and special. The selection criteria were willingness to be interviewed and currently working with a C/A. This was intended as a guard against the uninformed perceptions of those who did not work alongside C/As in the classroom. These interviews took place in the school setting and were to be in the teachers' directed time. However, due to an industrial dispute, teachers were unable to use the directed time slot and the interviews were undertaken in the teachers' own time (free periods or time after school). The union action did however impact on the numbers willing to take part (see Chapter 4 p.48). Gaining access to educational buildings and, more importantly, to the actual working environment – in working mode – requires a professional and sensitive approach, as,

'...this stage of access and acceptance ...offers the best opportunity for researchers to present their credentials as serious investigators and establish their own ethical position with respect to their proposed research...They have to demonstrate that they are worthy as researchers...of being accorded the facilities needed to carry out their investigations' (Cohen et al, 2000 p.53)

This access was established through a phone call for the interview set-ups and a letter to inform all schools that observations of C/As may be used in research (appendix 6).

Teachers - Focussed semi-structured evaluative interviews

The interview has been chosen as the ideal tool for collecting rich, personal, relevant data from teachers. It was semi-structured (see appendix 7) and revolved around the stated themes identified above (p.19). These were to be made available to the teachers before the interview

date to enable them to give some forethought to the issues and possibly use the time between receiving this information and the interview to order, assess and evaluate their responses. However, this procedure was not used as it was considered that the loss of spontaneity would impact on the interview. All interviews were audiotaped. In order not to ignore the very important feature of non-verbal communication, the interviewer also took note of any body language by making private notes during the interview.

Assessors of Classroom Assistants – Sample

The assessors of C/As involved in this study are all qualified teachers who practice only as assessors. This background gives them the added knowledge and experience of classroom practice. They are welcomed into the classroom settings as professional, knowledgeable, non-threatening peers and are regarded as assisting the training programme for the assistants. All assessments are pre-arranged but must be part of the regular routine of the setting (see appendix 6). These assessors are also trained and skilled in the process of assessing particular performance criteria (see appendix 8) as set out in the QCA standards. They are adept at transcribing what they see as it happens, with accuracy, non-bias and in plain language. In this respect their field-notes are invaluable in ascertaining practice as it is. The range of establishments they visited covered all types of schools - primary, secondary, maintained, voluntary, integrated and special - reflecting the diverse society in Northern Ireland. Although McIntyre and Macleod's (1993 p17) remarks are about systematic observation, they hold true for the non-participant observations that were used in this study:

'...systematic observation has been criticized on the grounds that assumptions are made about the lack of influence of the observer on the classroom activity. This is a criticism which is unquestionably valid and of considerable theoretical importance. Provided that sensible steps are taken to win the cooperation of the teacher and pupils, however, and to accustom them to the observer's presence, and provided that it is recognized that the observer's presence is likely to reduce the incidence of acts which are perceived by participants to be nonconformist, we incline to the view that the influence of the observer's presence is not generally of major practical importance.'

Assessors of Classroom Assistants - Field-notes

The choice to use field-notes has been influenced by Bogdan and Biklen (1998 p106) who describe them as *'the mainstay of qualitative research'*. The field-notes used in this study have been taken by assessors over the last two years, being required as part of the NVQ work-based assessment. The notes taken during assessment conform to certain conventions which combine descriptive field-notes with a reflective input and also follow Bogdan & Biklen's (1998 p121) suggestion that whatever is observed *'should be presented in detail rather than summarized or evaluated'*. All these field-notes

- were carried out by trained assessors who are also qualified teachers
- were carried out unobtrusively without any interference by the observer
- recorded objectively stating only what was seen and not what was implied
- assessed the C/As performance against very specific and varied performance criteria (see appendix 8)
- provided examples of actual verbal exchanges between C/As and pupils, actions performed and exchanges of information between C/As and teachers
- were written at the time of the observation

These descriptive field-notes carry not only formative feedback but also a certain amount of professional judgement as the assessor has to make decisions regarding the competence of the C/As. In this regard they fulfil some of the criteria of reflective field-notes, in which Bogdan & Biklen (1998 p.123) suggest

'The emphasis is on speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions and prejudices.'

The field-notes are seen by the C/A but cannot be tempered by this fact as they must record accurately what happened, whether this is to the liking of the C/A or not. He/she does, however, have the option to appeal against a decision, question a record or explain an event. This study utilized 'investigator triangulation' by referring to field notes of assessors other than the main

investigator and by conducting semi-structured interviews with assessors other than the main investigator. By referring to field-notes taken over the last two years, ‘time triangulation’ was also used, the value of this method being emphasised by Bogdan and Biklen (1998 p.125):

‘Qualitative research requires long-term contact with people and places. The evidence that continually amasses can overwhelm groundless assumptions. Reflections facilitate and document this process.’

This has been possible as the C/As have been observed three times per year over a period of two years. Regardless of the rigour of the research it is important to take note of the weaknesses and strengths of qualitative research:

‘All research methods have their strengths and limitations. Some say that the weakness of the qualitative approach is that it relies too heavily on the researcher as the instrument. On the other hand, others say that this is its strength. In no other form of research are the processes of doing the study and the people who do it so consciously considered and studied as part of the project. The reflective part of field notes is one way of attempting to acknowledge and control observer’s effect. The reflective part of fieldnotes insists that research, like all human behaviour, is a subjective process.’

(Bogdan and Biklen, 1998 p125)

Assessors of Classroom Assistants - Focussed semi-structured evaluative interviews

A group of four assessors were selected for interview who were collegial professionals and used to frank and informed debate regarding practice in schools. The interview (see appendix 9) was based on the main six themes already identified and was recorded (permission received) for analysis.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the questionnaire will be tabulated, where appropriate, with bar graphs, pie charts and other visual representations. Interview evaluations will be collated under each theme to attempt to highlight any recurring, common or contradictory ideas. The field-notes and logs will not be directly recorded but will be used in a qualitative manner to assist authentication of other data.

Summary

The research question focussed on the issue of whether or not classroom assistants are undervalued and under-utilised. Given the nature of the question the most suitable approach was to achieve qualitative data and to ensure that the essential quantitative data was able to facilitate a qualitative interpretation. By selecting six specific themes a clear direction was given to the research and these provided the basis and focus of all investigative processes. They are:

1. Pertaining competence
2. Role in the interdisciplinary team in the school
3. Perceived contribution to the school
4. Impact upon the pupils in formal and informal (hidden) curriculum
5. Historicity of experience and reflective potential
6. Need for distinct and complementary in-service support

With knowledge of the approach it was determined to triangulate the study to avoid bias, and teachers, assessors and C/As were identified as the gatekeepers to the data. Instruments used were questionnaires and interviews, supported by logs, reflective accounts and field-notes. The samples used were convenience samples. The selected methodology produced good internal reliability and results were highly correlated thus demonstrating that this study produced meaningful and reliable indicators of the attitudes of this cohort of participants.

CHAPTER 3

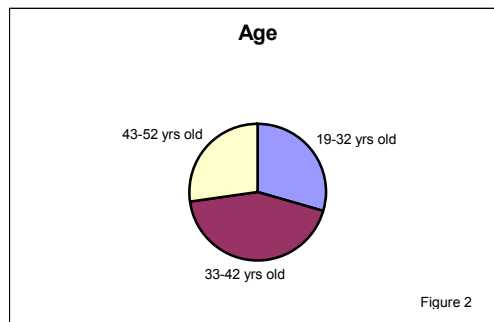
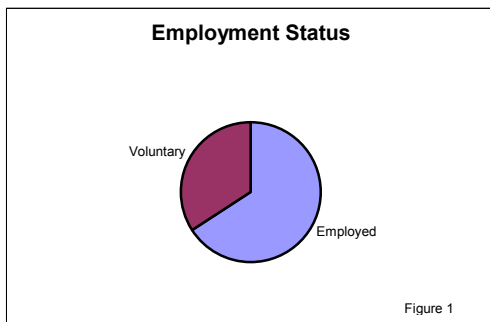
Introduction

This study was based on a convenience sample of C/As on training courses. Some had already achieved qualified status and were doing further study. It covered both experienced employed C/As and those voluntarily in placement in order to complete training (Figure 1). The actual number of respondents was 44 (N = 44). Twenty-eight of these were employed, with the remainder volunteers. For purposes of readability, in some instances percentages were applied

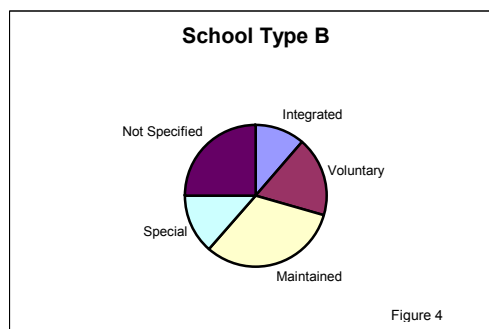
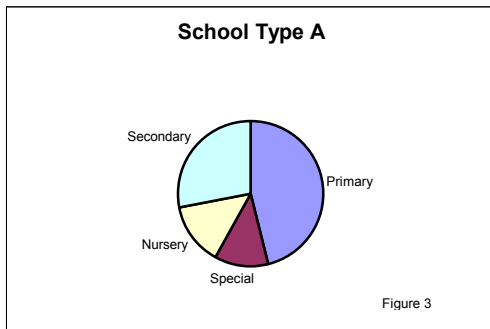
to cope with unwieldy splits of the numbers and chart representations. In order to avoid breaking the flow *bold italics* are used to denote a direct quote from the questionnaire and *bold italics within quotation marks* to denote a direct quote from respondents.

Background Information

The employed C/As worked between 20 and 37.5 hours per week with one working 12 hours per week. Their tenure of employment was between 15 months to 15 years. The voluntary C/As involved in this study were working in classrooms for at least 6 hours per week and some worked longer - 7 hours, 9 hours and one 15 hours. More than half of the volunteers had been working for more than 18 months and the remainder had volunteered for a minimum of 6 hours per week over a period of six months but were committed to a 2-year period. Because usage of their time would reflect that of employed C/As the areas covered by the questionnaire retained validity, although the one area where this would be affected would be Section 5 - Historicity of experience and reflective potential - and a filter was applied here to reflect this.



As noted previously (Chapter 2 p.22) only one male C/A was included in the study. A wide range of schools settings was involved as can be seen in Figure 3. Some respondents were unsure of the designation of the school regarding funding and as can be seen in Figure 4 were unable to give an answer.



Section 1: Pertaining Competence

As all participants were currently taking courses - either NVQ Early Years Care and Education or NVQ for C/As - it was not surprising to find that, along with their current qualifications (1 had a teaching qualification (PGCE), 4 had *degrees* 17 had *'A' levels or equivalent*, 19 had *GCSEs* and only 3 had *no qualifications*), a strong majority (79.5%) felt that they were *sufficiently qualified* even though many had not yet achieved the desired qualification for C/As. Of those that felt they were not suitably qualified, all believed that *by the end of their training they would feel suitably qualified*. Only one was unsure and one said he/she *would not feel suitably qualified even on finishing training*. Although 20 had a *line manager*, 11 *did not* and 13 were *not sure* (which does not reflect well on the line manager if he/she does exist). A very high percentage (75%) had *neither had a Personal Appraisal nor a Personal Development Plan*. Seven had a *Personal Appraisal but no Personal Development Plan*. One had a *Personal Appraisal and a Personal Development Plan*. Two did not answer.

Section 2: Role in the interdisciplinary team in the school

63% of C/As *never attended Staff Meetings*. Taking into account that volunteers may not be expected to attend such meetings, it should also be noted that considering that they were going to be part of the staff for a 2-year period, other meetings could have been offered. However, 43.1% *never attended a meeting with any member of staff*; 52.2% *never attended a meeting with any other support staff* and, surprisingly, 25% *never attended a meeting with the class teacher*. And, alarmingly, 22.7% *never attended a meeting of any kind*. Despite this, most

(75%) *took their break always or sometimes with the teachers* and 75% *always felt welcome in the staffroom*, with 70.5% always feeling *confident in the staffroom*. The integration into the interdisciplinary team was further explored by looking at meetings with the following: *speech therapist, educational psychologist, and support staff from the Education and Library Boards*. These results showed that 25% had *never met any of the above*; 25% had *met one*; 22.7% had *met two* and 25% had *met all three*. This reflected how involved C/As are with some interdisciplinary teams. A question was also asked about meeting the Inspectorate. This was deemed to be justified considering the length of service of most participants and its purpose was to probe the perceived importance of their role. 75% had *never met the Inspectorate*.

Section 3: Perceived contribution to the school

70.4% felt that they were *always/nearly always valued*, with the remainder (29.5%) feeling *valued sometimes*. As shown in Figure 5, the C/As thought that the teachers were in agreement with, or thought better of, their contribution in the classroom than they did themselves.

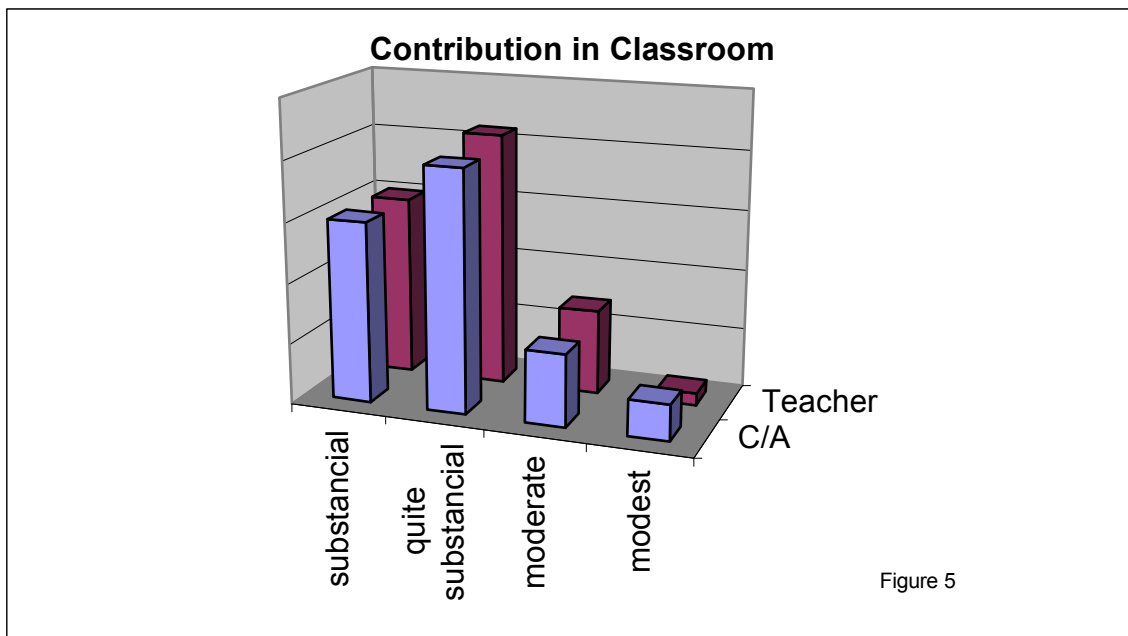
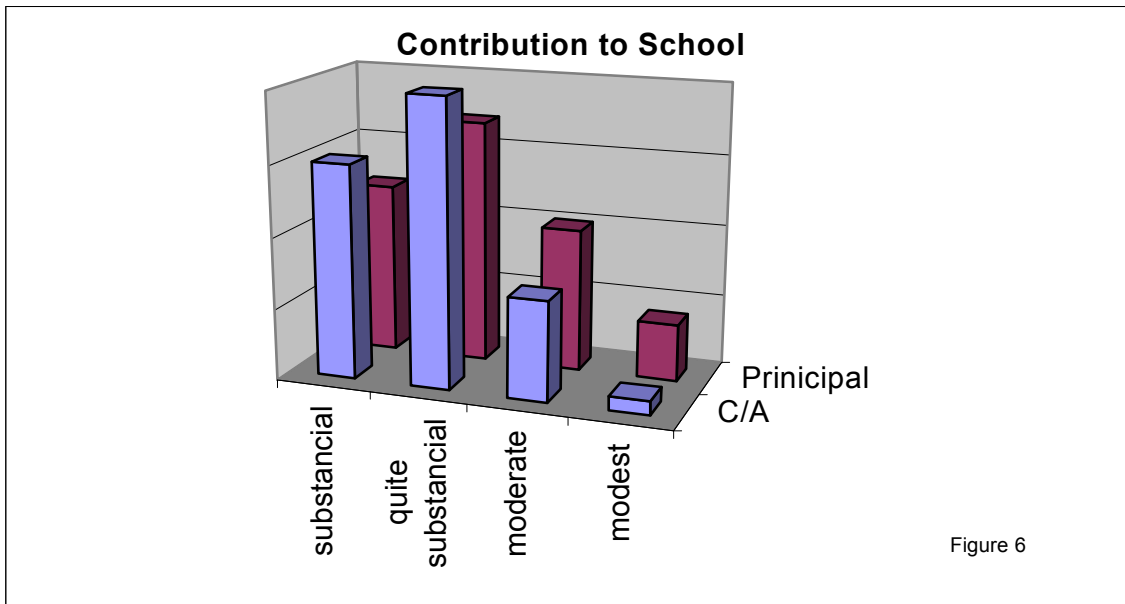
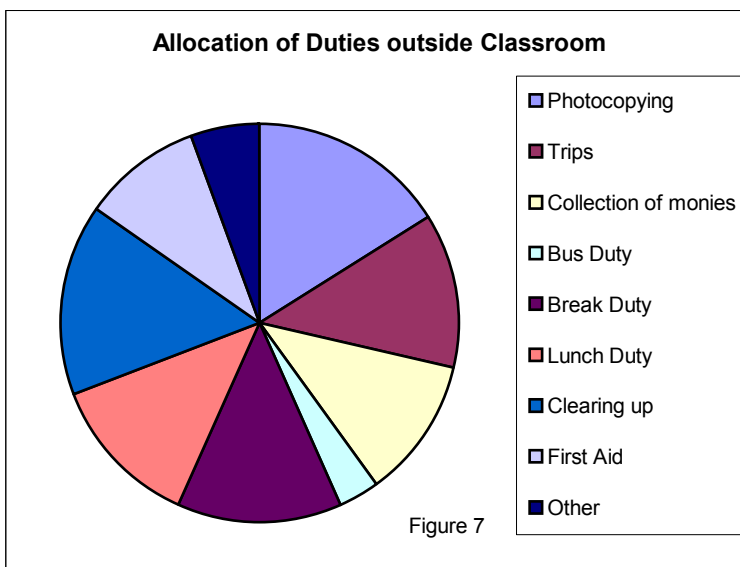


Figure 5

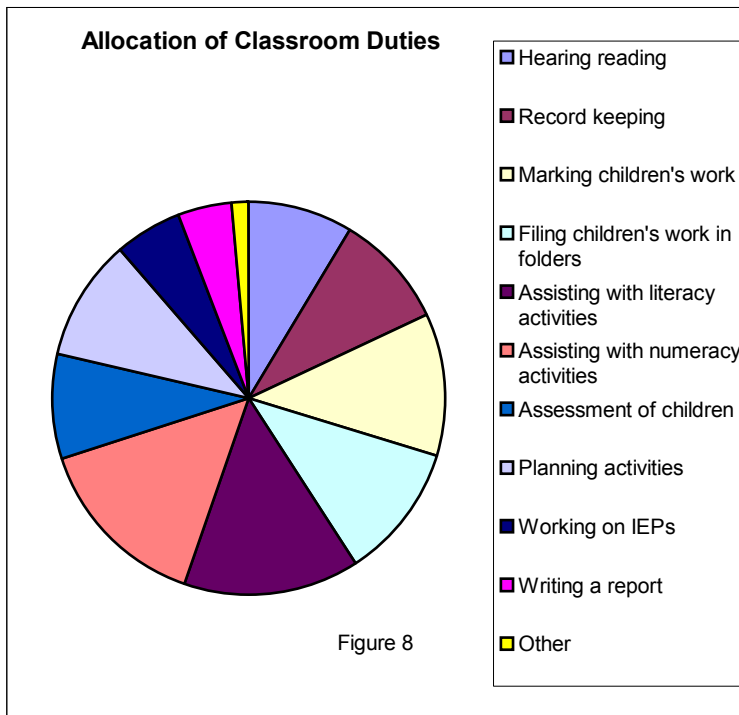
However, the C/As felt that the Principals' views of their contribution to the school were not as good as they themselves perceived (Figure 6).



All those participating were heavily involved, regularly or occasionally, in the duties listed below. The percentage tables (Figures 7 and 8) show the level of involvement in the respective tasks.



Photocopying	Clearing up	Break duty	Trips	Lunch duty
86.3%	84%	70.4%	68.1%	68.1% C
Collection of monies	First Aid	Other	Bus duty	
61.3%	52.2%	29.5%	18.1%	



Assisting numeracy	Assisting literacy	Marking children's work	Filing children's work	Planning activities	Record keeping
97.7%	95.4%	77.2%	75%	68.1%	63.6%
Hear reading	Assessment of children	IEPs	<i>Writing report</i> ^a	Other	
56.8%	56.8%	36.3%	29.5%	9%	

Although C/As are not insured to be left alone with a class, except under supervision, it was found that this was quite common practice. Often supervision took the form of an open door, with another teacher operating in an adjoining classroom or mobile (in the case of a double mobile). Almost 20% were *regularly left with a class* for a period of time. Of these 37.5% were left for *half a day*, 12.5% were left for *one hour* and 50% were left for *half an hour*. 61.3% were *occasionally left with a class* for a period of time. Of these 7.4% were left for a *full day*, 7.4% were left for *half a day*, 33.3% were left for *one hour* and 51.8% were left for *half an hour*. Only 18% of those participating were *never left alone with a class*.

Section 4: Impact upon pupil in formal and informal (hidden) curriculum

This section focussed on the respondents' relationships with the pupils. Pupils called 77.2% of respondents by their *surname* and 22.7% by their *Christian name*. Over half the respondents not only *supervised at break and at lunch* but exactly half (50% of all respondents) actually *played with the children at these leisure times*. It is not surprising, therefore, that although 22.7% saw themselves *mainly as educator* 50% saw themselves as *mainly a friend*. 27.2%, although not given this particular choice, specified *'both educator and friend'* under the option *'other'* demonstrating that they felt very strongly about their role in the children's lives. This was further reinforced in the question regarding children seeking help/advice about a personal problem. 31.8% thought that the children would approach *C/As first (ahead of the teacher) with a personal problem*. 47.7% thought that the children would approach *either* (teacher or themselves), with only 18.1% stating that they thought that going to the *teacher would be the child's first preference*. The reason for this is perhaps because children see C/As as having no authoritative role but this would not appear to be the case, as 56.8% *dealt with behavioural problems themselves*, with another 4.5% indicating that they would deal with such problems *alongside the teacher*. 59% felt that they got the *same respect as the teachers*, with a further 4.5% stating that they thought they got *more respect than the teachers*. Over a quarter (27%) of the C/As felt that they knew the children as individuals *better than the teacher*, with over half (59%) feeling that they matched the teacher's knowledge. Even when considering their knowledge of the children's academic abilities, the majority (59%) thought that they had the *same knowledge as the teacher*, with a reduced but still significant 9% thinking that their knowledge was *greater than that of the teacher*.

Section 5: Historicity of experience and reflective potential

This section looks at the experiences of the respondents, many of whom were allocated to one child. This very special feature of the relationship between a C/A and an individual pupil was investigated. Of the 65.9% who were employed (the other 34.1% being voluntary), 89.6% were

allocated to one child. Of the voluntary respondents, only 6.7% were *allocated to one child.* Of those allocated to one child (both voluntary and employed), 81.5% had *2 years or longer with one child*, 7.4% had *3 years with one child*, 11.1% had *4 years with one child* and 3.7% had *6 years with one child.* As would be expected this special relationship often involved *toileting assistance, personal assistance, giving the child medication and/or keeping records on medication.* 29.6% of those allocated to one child were involved in *one of these tasks*, 29.6% were involved in *two*, 3.7% were involved in *three* and 14.8% were involved in *all four tasks.* 22.2% were *not involved in any of these tasks.* It is not surprising, considering the intimate nature of this involvement, that 55.5% felt that they were *the most knowledgeable person in the school with regard to their particular charge.* Much valuable qualitative research was gathered and recorded in this section where comments made by the special child, or by any other child in the class, regarding the C/As were noted. Also, the C/As had free space to record how they regarded the special relationship with one child. Of those allocated to one child, only 14.8% did not record any particular *‘comments made by the special children or how they regarded their special relationship with the child’.* The rest (85.1%) were keen to express how the children regarded the relationship and how they themselves valued the relationship. All answers were very positive with words like *‘excellent’* and *‘very good’* used. The majority completed elaborate answers, focussing mainly on the relationship role as *‘supportive’*, *‘advisory’*, *‘friendly’*, *‘caring’*, *‘educative’*, *‘reassuring’*, *‘facilitating’* or *‘counselling’.* A few mentioned that they were often called *‘teacher’* and many mentioned that the relationship was *‘very respectful’.* Some mentioned that the relationship was more like a *‘buffer between child and teaching staff’*, *‘a go-between’*, and/or a *‘second mum’* (especially for two children who were in care). This aspect was reinforced by the frequency of comments such as *‘he knows I will always listen’*, *‘if he had any problems he would come to me’*, *‘the child would often tell me about what is happening at home’.* One theme which kept recurring was that the children

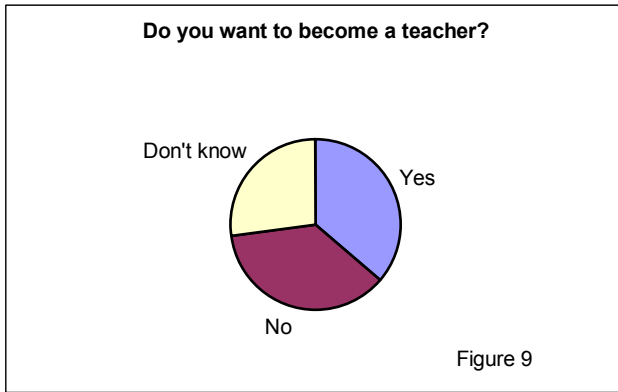
themselves seemed often possessive *'she's here to look after me'*, *'she's my helper'*, *'my classroom assistant is brilliant'*, *'he says I am the one who looks after him and helps him'*, with other children often envious saying, *'can you not help me?'*, *'why does he get most of your time and help?'*. One respondent did remark that *'when they called me by my first name they included me more and felt they could talk to me but when it changed to surname a barrier is put up.'* Epitomising the relationship one child asked, in all innocence, *'miss, where do you work?'* and another, seeing the C/A receive a salary slip, remarked with equal incredulity *'do you get paid for doing this? Is this your job?'*

In order to give those who were not allocated to one child an opportunity to reflect on their contribution to relationships within the class, the next section of the questionnaire asked **all** respondents to consider whether or not they had a special relationship with an individual child, or fulfilled a special role for all children in the class, and to explain this. Again the response was enthusiastic and comprehensive answers were received. 56.8% of all respondents stated that they currently *had a special relationship with one child* and a high 92% went on to *explain* this relationship. Considering providing a special role for all the children in the class, 54.5% of all respondents stated that they did and again, a high 87.5% of those went on to explain. Support, for both individuals and whole class, which was specified included: *'academic'*, *'behavioural'*, *'emotional and moral support'*, *'someone to relate to'*, *'someone to trust and respect'*, *'being another teacher'* and *'providing physical support'*. Mention was made of *'hugs'* and *'being a playmate'* (younger children), a *'willingness and ability to give the children time'*, *'to listen to all their worries'* and an ability to *'give approval and recognition'* to individuals. In secondary and special school settings, many realised that they were the *'constant'* in an ever-changing environment as the pupils moved from teacher to teacher. The respondents felt that they *'knew the pupils' ways, learning styles and characteristics'* and in this way were able to provide a very informed supporting role. Many recognised the *'need for*

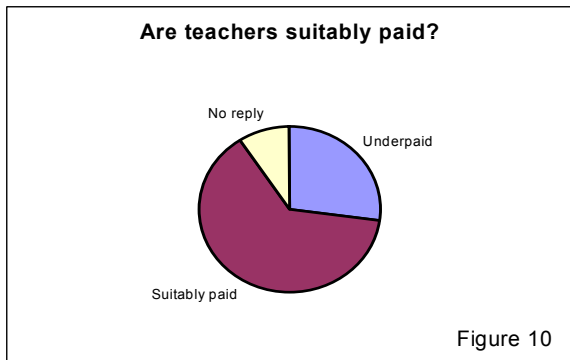
individual attention’ and felt they played a special role in *‘keeping the children on task*’ and *‘helping them to concentrate*’. Again mention was made of being *‘almost a second mum*’. One respondent referred to the personal gratification of *‘feeling at the end of the day as if you have achieved something, the children are happy to see you everyday and miss you when you are not in*’. Another stated that *‘the children see me as a strength for them regarding work and incidents that happen*’.

Section 6: Need for distinct and complementary in-service support

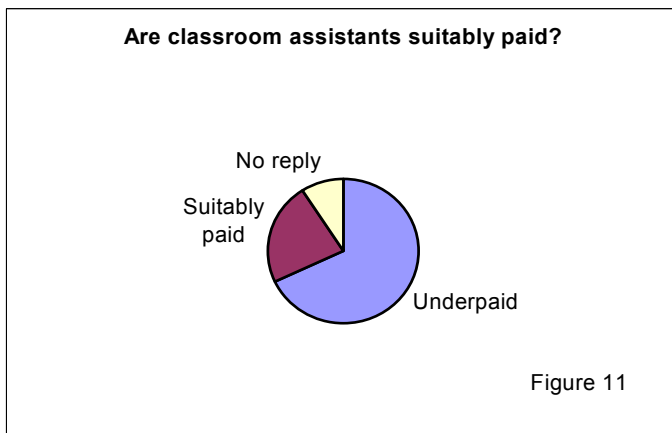
This section focussed on the pay, training and opportunities available. In order to introduce this section it was necessary to establish how the C/As regarded their role. The first two questions considered what qualities the job required and what qualities the respondents had. There was a high response rate for these two questions, 88.6% writing at least 2 or 3 full lines (out of a possible 4) of desirable qualities. Top of the list of desirable qualities was *‘patience*’ but also very commonly listed were *‘good listener*’ (to both teacher and children), *‘good team member*’, *‘understanding*’, *‘friendly*’, *‘caring*’, *‘kind*’, *‘calmness*’, *‘approachable*’, *‘fairness*’, *‘firmness*’, *‘confidentiality*’, *‘respect*’ (for both children and teachers), *‘a sense of humour*’, *‘empathetic*’, *‘supportive to the teacher*’ and *‘helpful to the children*’. One quality that received a few mentions was *‘the willingness to assist with mundane tasks*’. Topping the C/As’ lists of qualities they possessed was their *‘experience of being a parent and bringing up own children*’. Other popular qualities were *‘a love of children*’, *‘a love of my job*’, *‘being an extra pair of hands, eyes and ears*’ (for not only the teachers but also the pupils), *‘enthusiasm*’, *‘energy*’, *‘being a good role model*’, *‘reliability*’, *‘continuity*’, *‘value each child*’, *‘ability to act as buffer between pupils and staff*’, and *‘being able to work on one’s own initiative*’. One mentioned *‘academic expertise*’. The results regarding the desire to become a teacher (Figure 9) were 36.3% selecting *Yes* and the same number selecting *No*. 27.2% selected the option *Don’t know*, giving a full quota of returns.



A strong 63.6% thought *teachers were suitably paid*, 27.2% thought that *teachers were underpaid* and 9% did not respond (Figure 10). A few said that they were unaware of the pay structures.



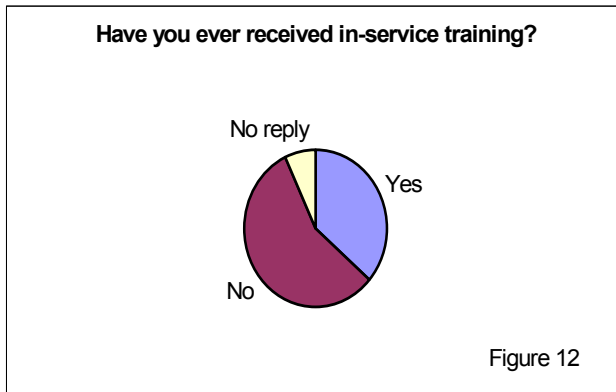
The question dealing with their own wages showed a strong 68.1% feeling that *C/As were underpaid*, with 22.7% feeling that *they were suitably paid*. One did remark that they should be paid during holidays. Again, 9% did not respond



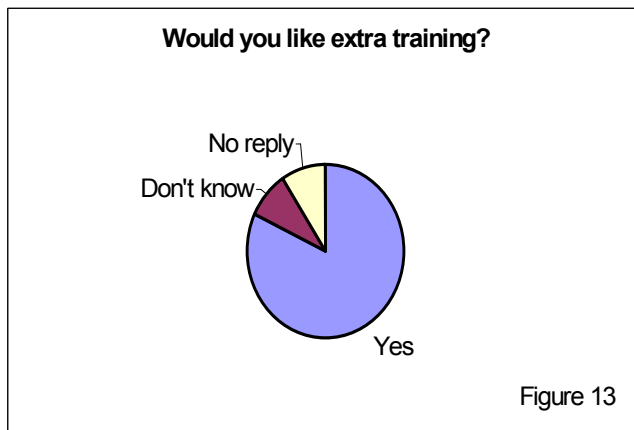
In response to defining the difference between teachers and C/As, a substantial 84% took the time to give a full response. A summary of the findings is as follows.

The main differences cited between teachers and C/As were that teachers had more whole class *'responsibility'* and *'better qualifications'*, often in a specific subject area. Teacher tasks specifically noted were *'planning'*, *'paperwork'*, *'class control'*, *'meetings'*, and *'assessment'*. The tasks of C/As were very clearly defined as that of an *'assisting and supportive role'*, including *'monitoring behaviour'*. In attempting to draw comparisons between the two jobs, some remarks made were: *'discipline should be left to the teacher'*; *'remember teacher is in charge and do not try and take over – keep your place'*, *'A C/A is supportive and helpful rather than teaching'*; *'the teacher has the last say – even if you don't agree with her'*; *'teacher definitely receives more respect especially by other professionals. Apart from that, not a huge difference'*; *'the teacher is qualified in specific subjects to deliver subject knowledge. We support pupils in all subjects where necessary and assist all teachers'*; *'assistant has more hands-on experience with the children'*; *'salary'*; *'role of the teacher is more disciplinary, C/As are more approachable'*; *'although teacher is main educator, the C/A plays a very valuable supporting role'*; *'the teacher is paid more and the C/A is doing the same job only at a lower rate'*, *'the teacher has the responsibility of the pupil's academic improvements whereas the C/A is there to assist and develop the children's skills'*.

With regard to the training section (Figure 12), more than half (56.8%) had received *no in-service training*.



As Figure 13 shows a high 81.8% stated that they *would like extra training* with 9% stating *'don't know'* and a further 9% not responding.



The question dealing with the desire for training in certain areas (Figure 14) brought a very enthusiastic response, with high recordings for all areas, as seen below. Those who responded to *'other'* specified the following, in order of popularity: *'Dyslexia'*, *'Asperger's Syndrome'*, *'Dyscalculia'*, *'Special needs'*, *'Computer training'*, *'Numeracy'*, *Literacy'*, *'Observation skills'*, *'Record keeping'* and *'Dealing with violence'*.

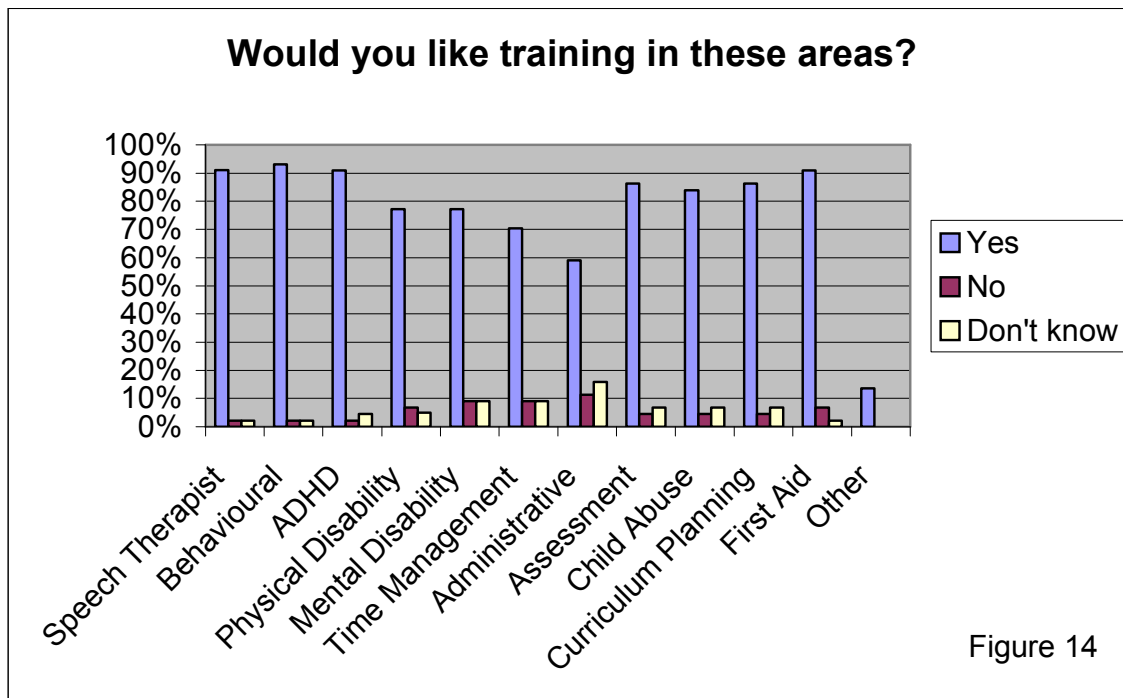


Figure 14

An open ‘*any other comments*’ section brought a few responses. 4.5% recorded that they felt that some of the questions were irrelevant to them as they were either voluntary or working in nursery schools. A few had very strong views about the under-utilisation of C/As and some comments that showed frustration read: ‘*The amount of help/support I’m able to give in the classroom depends on the teacher. Bad teachers don’t want me in the room*’, ‘*Not all teachers are aware of what C/As can offer. Perhaps they could use C/As more constructively in reading and numeracy groups etc. rather than photocopying duties which are often saved up by some (respondent’s emphasis) teachers for voluntary C/As who spend lots of time outside the classroom – more contact with children required*’, ‘*I feel that I am under used*’.

Summary

Background Information

The convenience sample was appropriate as it reflected the diverse population of C/As operating in schools: full-time and part-time employed, volunteers, experienced, inexperienced, trained and those in training. Those in training covered those who were in the first year of training and

those who were in second (last) year of training. The age range was also representative. As stated there was only 1 male out of 44 respondents which unfortunately is representative of the dearth of males in this career. Different types of schools in Northern Ireland were well represented.

Section 1: Pertaining Competence

A high level of confidence was apparent in this section, where almost all stated that they felt/would feel competent in the job either currently or by the end of their course. Their level of education would partly explain this but for many their wealth of experience (one third over 4 years in the job) would surely also have contributed. There is obvious reason for concern over the high percentage of those who have never had an appraisal or a personal development plan and operate without a line manager.

Section 2: Role in the interdisciplinary team in the school

This section attempted to identify how C/As are accepted into the school environment. Despite the fact that many took their break with the teachers and most felt welcome and confident in the staffroom, there were concerns regarding their involvement with other staff members. Although it was noted that the C/As included volunteers, it should be remembered that their long-term commitment to the school and the duties which they were asked to perform (see section 3 pp.33, 34) would appear to warrant some access to meetings with other staff. However, this did not seem to be the case. This section showed that although C/As are involved with speech therapists, educational psychologists and support staff from the Education and Library Boards, they appear to be a lot less involved with the teams within the school. Particularly revealing was the fact that a quarter of all respondents never attended a meeting with the class teacher and more than a quarter had never attended a school meeting of any kind. The fact that three quarters had never met any of the Inspectorate on one of their regular visits to the school does

not seem to reflect the importance that the government is now placing on the role of C/As within the school (see Chapter 1 p. 1).

Section 3: Perceived contribution to the school

In this section there was clear evidence of self-worth amongst the respondents. Their perceived ***substantial/quite substantial*** ratings for contribution in the classroom were reflected closely by how they thought teachers would rate this. However, the C/As' views of their contribution to the school, which again was rated quite highly, was not reflected in how they thought the Principals would rate them, their perception being that the Principals would not rate their contribution to the school as highly as they did themselves. Actual duties in the classroom were well documented and participation in all classroom activities was high, especially in the areas of numeracy and literacy, their involvement here being obvious and convincing. However the chart of duties outside the classroom (p.33) demonstrated the regularity of the more mundane tasks. Only a small proportion of those questioned were never left alone with a class but the regularity and the length of time that many were left on their own with a whole class revealed how, in actual practice, C/As are quite often placed in this position of trust and responsibility.

Section 4: Impact upon pupil in formal and informal (hidden) curriculum

This section attempted to reveal the impact that C/As have on the children with whom they are in contact, which often includes those outside of their class. Although most C/As were called by their surnames, by the children, almost a quarter of them were referred to by their Christian names. As one respondent, who had experienced both systems, remarked (section 5 p.37) ***'when it changed to surnames a barrier is put up.'*** Over half of the respondents did supervisory duties and during these leisure times of break and lunch half of ***all*** respondents played with the children. This was reflected in the fact that most regarded themselves as both ***'friend'*** and ***'educator'*** to the children and felt that they would be the most obvious choice for counsel about a personal problem. Classroom assistants generally also felt confident that they

knew the children well as individuals and also knew their pupils' academic abilities. Despite the fact that the C/As felt they were firm and strict with the pupils when necessary, they felt that they got the same respect as the teachers. One thought that he/she got more respect.

Section 5: Historicity of experience and reflective potential

The first section provided a filter for those who were allocated to one child. A very high proportion were involved in the personal care of one child (21 out of 27), most of the children's 'statements' appearing to be based on a physical, as opposed to an educational, need. The special nature of these relationships was demonstrated by over half stating that they were the most knowledgeable person in the school regarding their particular charge. When describing how the special children, other children and the C/As themselves felt about their relationship, there was evidence of a caring and warm professional ambience. The special children felt special and others envied the individual attention they received. The second section of the questionnaire allowed *all* respondents to reflect on what they offered either individuals or the whole class. This again brought an enthusiastic response from C/As, demonstrating that they were very much aware of their responsibilities for supporting and assisting all pupils. There was an obvious enthusiasm and love of their work and a high level of self-esteem and personal gratification from doing what they considered a worthwhile and important job.

Section 6: Need for distinct and complementary in-service support

This section focussed on the pay, training and opportunities available. The open questions, allowing a focus on skills and qualities that C/As should and do possess, demonstrated again the high level of self-worth and self-esteem felt by the vast majority. They were very astute in choosing and prioritising desirable qualities. The fact that most felt that teachers were sufficiently paid and C/As underpaid may have had some bearing and impact on the fact that more than one third had ambitions of becoming teachers. A high percentage took time to give a full response when asked for their opinion on the difference in roles between teachers and C/As

and, here again, they demonstrated a keen awareness and astuteness in summarising and describing those differences. The questions regarding training showed that over half had received no in-service training despite length of service (p.29) and a high proportion showed a desire and interest in all areas of training, were it available.

CHAPTER 4

Introduction

The focus groups were selected through requests to the Principals of the four types of school chosen for five teachers currently working with C/As. Due to industrial action by the teachers, the focus groups emerged as:

Primary School	4
Special School	3
Secondary School	3
Integrated Secondary School	4

This required more than one attempt to procure groups of this size. The assessors chosen were a convenience sample and the request was made to four assessors and all accepted. The semi-structured interviews (appendices 7 and 9) took the same theme format as the C/A questionnaire (appendix 5) which looked at the role of the C/As from six different angles. In order to complete the interviews within the estimated time-span of 30-45 minutes, they were tightly controlled but were, as far as possible, allowed to develop naturally. Initially the interviewees were asked, as they gathered, to complete a short questionnaire (appendices 10 and 11) and they all did this willingly. At this stage they were asked if they objected to the session being audiotaped and transcribed and they were also assured that all the information would be kept in strictest confidence. This they agreed to. All participants were genuinely interested and very forthright in giving opinions. The assessors were all qualified teachers who, although in the past

have worked with C/As, are currently involved only in assessment in the workplace. They were thus able to relate from both perspectives.

Results of Interviews

The results of the interviews are as follows. To aid analysis answers from each group will be collated together under the theme headings. Some interviewees were very passionate, articulate and focussed on specific points that they wanted to make. Their pertinent quotes are included here and those selected are representative and typical of the chosen group.

1) Pertaining competence

Primary. This group were all working in Key Stage 1 and worked closely with their C/As. They found them competent and confident in the job, *'once they were settled with the class teacher'*. Each teacher had different expectations, accepted that a settling-in period was natural and was grateful and appreciative of all that they did in the classroom. *'Often they would make changes that I just wouldn't have got around to.'* The knowledge and awareness of the C/As was also praised. *'A copy of the IEP (Individual Education Plan) is given to the C/A and they know the main aim and always work with you.'* Regarding appraisal, the teachers all agreed that this should come from the Principal, as they would not feel comfortable in providing it. They all felt that positive feedback would give C/As *'a real boost'*. The Principal meets each C/A every year to see where he/she would like to be placed the following year, as they are not allocated to one specific job for full tenure. Although this arrangement is very popular within this particular school it should be noted that this would not necessarily be normal practice in other schools.

Special. With 38 C/As in this special school, teachers had had varied experiences of all types of C/As. Generally they felt that their competence and confidence followed directly from their *'hearts being in working within a special school'*. If they were uncomfortable or not committed to working with special needs they were ineffective and diffident carrying out their duties.

Generally there was not a great turnover in C/As staffing rates and any job openings produced a good response. Early on in the interview the idea of a *'power struggle'* emerged and reference was made to some over-bearing C/As who were *'too confident'*. This meant that, not only did they intimidate and lessen the contribution of other C/As in the classroom (this case was illustrated), but also they frustrated the teacher. For handover of classes the C/A is always present, they attend all Baker Days and almost all inset training, they are each encouraged to keep a professional diary but have no formal appraisal, either verbal or written. The perceived main problems with appraisal were that it was time-consuming and an added responsibility, *'who was going to do it – an already over-burdened Principal?'* *'To be meaningful it must be matched with financial reward'*.

Secondary. Two of the teachers worked in the Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD) unit and the other in Special Needs within the mainstream. A very close relationship was evident, with the C/As fully involved with the teachers, both in the MLD Unit and with the SENCO who oversaw the special needs pupils within mainstream. Generally speaking, they felt that all C/As were confident and competent. They stated that they *'implicitly'* trusted the C/As who *'actually make IEPs after the teacher helps prepare them and they attend the annual reviews'*. The problems with appraisal were seriously considered. *'Appraisal needs to be taken slowly, own evaluation, start as part of the team; they have to become accustomed and familiar with it. It is not an easy process and would require careful handling'*.

Integrated Secondary. Subject knowledge and expertise play a big part in secondary schooling. Working with the C/A means that if he/she cannot assist his/her charge because of lack of subject specialist knowledge, then the C/A can attend to others and release the teacher to deal with a specific difficulty. In this way the teachers agreed that C/As were of great assistance. Their specific knowledge of IEPs assisted the teachers and they were often proactive in acquiring and adapting work for their particular charges (e.g. enlarging, retyping for a

visually impaired child). Each C/A has an interview with the Principal once a year. The teachers thought that *'appraisal would be threatening'* and appraisal linked to salary advancement was not deemed appropriate.

Assessors. Three of the four assessors interviewed had experience of the work of C/As in primary schools only and in this setting they did appear to have both confidence and competence in the classroom. Early in the interview the political implications of C/As threatening teachers' jobs was discussed. The unions appeared to endorse the idea that C/As were heading towards *'teachers on the cheap'* and one of the assessors saw a real crisis developing. Each assessor recognised that quite a few teachers did not appreciate the role of the C/A as a partner and dealt with him/her as a general assistant to do mundane tasks, such as clearing up, giving out resources, etc. The assessor who experienced secondary schooling had a different experience, often finding that C/As, through lack of training and opportunity, were neither confident nor competent to fulfil a meaningful role in supporting learning within mainstream schooling. They were often excluded from class, the teacher claiming *'he/she did not need them'*. If their 'charge' was absent, they were frequently excluded from *all* classes and they were only rarely given access to lesson plans, curriculum or IEPs, thus entering each lesson 'blind'. Other C/As working within a special MLD Unit, or with a 'slow learners' class, were a lot better informed and treated very much as part of a team.

2) Role in the interdisciplinary team in the school

Primary. Each of these teachers did utilise the C/As informally in their planning but only one out of the four was given time to do this. She stated that as the C/A had more experience than she had *'she (C/A) adds her ideas/expertise to early years/reception as she has had so much experience at this level – she keeps me right, knowing what works well'*. The others *'discussed things on the phone'* and *'did it (planning) in our own time'*. They all utilised their C/As in observations and assessment in these early years classrooms where the young children did not

distinguish between the C/As and the teacher, often referring to the C/A as *'teacher'*. This meant that the C/As made a major impact on the behaviour within and outside the classroom.

Special. In this setting the C/As were totally involved with all aspects of classroom practice (observation, assessment, etc.) but there was no specific planning time allowed. Some C/As who did an extended day had *'snatched moments'*, but the others who worked only school hours had *'no opportunity'* for discussions. Many of the 38 C/As work as part of the behavioural team and also follow through programmes such as Primary Movement. Some attend with their pupils for Water Therapy with the Physiotherapist.

Secondary. The C/As were deemed an important link from the MLD unit to mainstream. The pastoral team (C/As) devised 'team of the month' – awarding points system. *'They (C/As) do the positive behaviour management "for me" in the mainstream.'* The C/As linked with the teachers but they had no involvement in planning, although they did attend meetings and some training days. Some met with psychiatrists or specialists and liaised closely with the parents if a special needs child had severe problems. Knowledge of the children is utilised by the teachers and the C/As are continually consulted.

Integrated Secondary. It must be appreciated that mainstream secondary school teachers see maybe at least four C/As a day so planning time is not practicable. However, planning for specific severe disabilities is undertaken and essential. A lack of, and need for a clear job description was raised. Not only were teachers wary about utilising C/As if their charge was absent or did not require assistance, but C/As were also unsure of what they should do. Specific planning for a special child is frequently initiated and completed by the C/A but they attend no meetings. No planning time was deemed necessary by this group of teachers.

Assessors. The assessors found that all the Principals showed interest and support in the assessment and training of C/As, with mixed interest from individual teachers. Teachers and C/As generally were *'good mates'* and maintained a *'good working relationship – working to*

the same agenda'. A hidden agenda was perceived by all assessors with *'some teachers feel(ing) that C/As are thrust upon them and feel(ing) that their jobs are under threat'*. One stated that *'C/As hate having nothing to do'* and *'under-utilisation caused them great frustration'*.

3) Perceived contribution to the school.

Primary. All felt that the C/As made a *'substantial'* contribution to both the classroom and whole school activities. This school had a breakfast, homework and after-school club and all these were run by C/As. Regarding the usage of C/As to cover classes, this was a contentious point, causing one sharp intake of breath. The problem of *'insurance'* was discussed and it was discovered that, although the teachers did have confidence in the abilities of C/As, there was a general and genuine concern that it was not fair to leave C/As in charge of a class, when *'it was not their job or responsibility'*. Any covering undertaken at present was short-term and never for full-day absentees.

Special. As all the C/As attend staff meetings and all training they are part of the implementation teams for behaviour management, Primary movement, etc. and, therefore, their contributions to classroom activities were unanimously rated *'substantial'*, as was their contribution to whole school practice. Because of the nature of the children, splitting/moving a class in the case of absence of a teacher is not really an option. Quality substitute staff are hard to find and it is, therefore, a case of *'needs must'* and the C/A or C/As who belong in the class will sometimes take the class. There is, however, no presumption of this and some would refuse, stating that they would be *'unable to cope'*. They have all done *'breakaway training'* which gives them strategies for dealing with dangerous situations.

Secondary. The C/As were considered as having a *'big impact on settling the class'*. *The classes are very loyal to the C/As. They have a great relationship: if C/A is absent or taken out of class the kids immediately react'*. All thought C/As made a *'substantial'* contribution in the

classroom and to whole school practice. Coverage of classes was done only in emergency for very short interruptions. *'This is not in their remit, they do not have adequate training.'*

Integrated Secondary. Unanimous grading of *'substantial'* for contribution inside and outside classroom was recorded. Usage of C/As depended on ability: *'the better you are the more you're used'*. C/As were never used for class cover except for very short emergencies. There was again (see primary above) a demonstration of general and genuine concern for the C/As. *'You couldn't impose that on them. Union issue – should be paid as a teacher and if it happens "trained as a teacher". There has to be a necessary demarcation area. Unfair if you take on a job where you are not given that responsibility – unfair to ask you to do it.'*

Assessors. All four assessors thought that the C/As made a *'substantial'* contribution to classroom activities. Whole school contribution was considered as *'moderate/substantial'*. In primary settings the C/As were competent enough to take classes, often better than substitute teachers, but all felt that they should not be asked to do this unless they were appropriately trained and paid accordingly.

4) Impact upon pupil in formal and informal (hidden) curriculum

Primary. The younger children loved the C/As. They were *'very attached'* to them' and *'really missed them if they were absent'*. However, to avoid them being, as one teacher put it, *'velcroed'* to one child the Principal rotated their (C/As) jobs throughout the school (see section 1 p.49).

Special. Some C/As were more concerned with caring rather than educational needs and one teacher discussed the dilemma of curbing the *'mothering'* aspect of the C/A's personality *'because that's probably what brought her to the job in the first place and what makes her a good C/A'*. The pupils naturally become attached to individuals, inviting them to birthday parties or a special event. Some would be inclined to *'do too much'* and the teachers found this *'very frustrating'*. Examples given were: *'Some would ride roughshod over what you are trying*

to achieve; *'giving an answer out whenever you're trying to get the children to fill in – say - a missing word in a rhyme or mouthing the answer'*; *actually doing the physical task for the pupil – you turn around and the bread is suddenly perfectly buttered*'. Again this came down to communication channels being open. These teachers were very pragmatic stating *'it is all about people, personalities. It would be the same with any other adult in the room even another teacher. The bottom line is we couldn't do without them'*.

Secondary. This entire group agreed that the relationships between C/As and pupils were *'very strong, respectful, and very valuable'*. The teachers had great confidence in the C/As who *'knew instinctively'* when to help and never did *'too much'*. *'I've done a wee bit to get him started'* was a phrase used by a C/A, which one teacher said she heard quite often. Their knowledge of individual children was well utilised and they were present in all discussions with or about the child. One teacher summed up by making a very salient point: *'They know the line, know the balance, excellent judgement – it's the way we train them'*.

Integrated Secondary. There was a very positive feedback about the abilities of the C/A support. They were considered *'experts'* in being able to support individual secondary pupils within mainstream, unobtrusively *'working at arm's length, being very vigilant without sitting beside pupil'*. One teacher described how she refers to one C/A as *'Class 4G's C/A'* rather than *'Barry's C/A'*. Other examples followed where some classes did not know, nor could they work out from observing, why the C/A was present, except as an extra support for the whole class. Other benefits noted were: *'by being a constant companion to a disruptive child, the whole class naturally benefits'*; *'they really push pupils to be independent learners'* and *'they know the undercurrents of the class and provide teachers with essential "insider" information – maybe a potential bullying situation'*.

Assessors. All assessors agreed that most C/As were able to *'judge the distance for C/A/pupil relationships'* and *'had a real bonding with special needs kids, relaxed and trusting'*. The

problems of occasional *'over-prompting'* or *'breaching confidentiality'* were considered *'normal human failings'* and were *'far outweighed by the very special role seen, not only with the child, but also with the family'*. When assigned to one special child the C/A was often the parents' first line of contact with the school. The *'warm relationship'* between pupils and C/As was described as *'more affection than respect'*.

5) *Historicity of experience and reflective potential*

Primary. All felt that they made use of the experience of the C/As. *'They (other teachers) do it this way'* would be advice C/As offered. If the teacher was a Newly Qualified Status (NQS) teacher or new to the age group, this type of advice was invaluable. A younger teacher stated how, as a NQS, she did feel intimidated by an older assistant, finding it awkward giving instructions and insecure in asking for input.

Special. All felt that good usage was made of C/As' experience. The C/As would not move up the school with an individual. Experienced C/As did appear sometimes to intimidate newly qualified teachers. The newest and youngest member of staff stated that she would be *'scared stiff'* of some of the long established C/As and would *'hate'* to work with them. One area, which all felt very beneficial, was being trained together (C/As and teachers) in different aspects of classroom practice e.g. TEACCH (see acronyms). This meant that C/As could work alongside the teacher in a meaningful way.

Secondary The responsibility for problems was quickly accepted: *'As Head of department I would see "that" as my job to ensure that a younger teacher was not intimidated by an older C/A. It really depends on a whole school approach to the C/A. We did have a half day's training on the role of the C/A'*. All the teachers agreed that the C/As had a very special relationship with their special pupils, *'almost like a second mammy'*. The C/A moves with the teacher in the MLD Unit years 8-10. On leaving the unit to go into mainstream, year 11, *'the*

pupils are generally very frightened, lacking self confidence and anxious...If a named child has a C/A then he or she moves with the child. In such cases, the C/A is the "saving grace".'

Integrated Secondary. The experiences of the C/A were considered invaluable: *'from their experience of seeing different teachers' approaches they can tell us what works with them (individual pupils) or what sort of a mood they (the class) are in'*. The main point of contact with the school, for the parents of a special child, was through the C/A. The C/A attended out of school meetings, about or with the child, if they were concerning his special need. Some of the C/As took a most professional approach to their special child, becoming 'experts' in the field, attending specialist courses, cascading information back to the whole staff, spending many hours on adapting tasks, using specialist equipment or accessing specialist software. As one teacher described a C/A for a visually impaired child: *'his C/A is "his eyes"'*.

Assessors. Assessors saw the treatment of young C/As as different to that afforded to older ones. A totally different attitude was evident, as teachers knew they were *'in control'* with younger C/As. Younger teachers could benefit from experienced C/As who have intimate knowledge of children and of different teaching methods. However, sharing of this knowledge could be *'counterproductive giving children labels and perpetuating prejudices'*. Teachers, it was thought, *'would be very fearful of knowledge being passed on from one year to the next'*.

6) Need for distinct and complementary in-service support

Primary. With regard to meetings, the teachers unanimously did not see why a C/A should attend staff meetings *'unless it was specifically to do with them'*. They did attend meetings about Code of Practice and Autism but, as the discussion developed, it became clear that non-attendance at meetings was because of a pay issue. Generally the C/As had certain hours and then they *'were gone'*. *'If they weren't being paid it was unrealistic to ask them to attend meetings.'* Despite this, the C/As in this school were well trained in Reading Recovery, Primary Movement and Autism. Areas in which all the teachers wished to see C/As trained in was I.T.

and training from the Speech Therapist. Again this meant that they would need to be paid for these extra hours when they are not contractually employed.

Special. The need for parity of job description was discussed and the dilemma that to give all the same contract might mean fewer C/As being employed. It was thought that training as teachers would need an academic route. *'Because you are a C/A for 10 years doesn't necessarily mean you'll make a teacher.'* The English model was discussed and the group thought that an *'on-the-job'* teacher training scheme was mainly to fill teacher shortage. They would not like to see that in Northern Ireland, as they felt that this approach would *'lower'* the teaching standard. Three of the school staff (one of whom was present) had been C/As but had all taken an academic route, two through an Early Years' Degree. Training suggested for C/As included I.T., which was described as a *'marked need in many'*. Suggested training specific for this setting was: *'learning to use minimal language'; 'visual and verbal prompts'; 'rewards'; 'knowledge of medical conditions and awareness of how these impact the pupils' learning'; 'awareness of a wide range of disability – not just autism'; 'a simple task like taking off a sweater - the C/A should be able to breakdown and analyse a task -both backward chaining and forward chaining (verbalising the steps required to undertake a task) – taking a child through it slowly'*. Another point very passionately put was the need for specific language training: *'pointed training in written English to incorporate form filling; C/As should be trained to write for different audiences. Something like filling in an accident form can become so time-consuming. Sometimes you have to virtually write it out again yourself and then take it back as it has to be done in their own handwriting. Such a simple, straightforward task can end up taking nearly a whole day. C/As need to know how to write for different audiences. This is a legal document which goes to the Education Board and may eventually end up in a court'*.

Secondary. Regarding training for C/As, this group were most enthusiastic. Their C/As had attended various IT training and MLD Unit meetings. A day's training on working with C/As

was available only for SENCO and the Head of the MLD Unit. The group would have liked all teachers who work with C/As to have been included. One teacher was able to describe how the C/As struggled within the mainstream school: *'within the mainstream, many teachers were very reluctant to work with C/As. They are often turned away. They're told: I don't want you. Go somewhere else. I don't need you. Definitely doesn't happen as much now – teachers in mainstream are beginning to realise how useful C/As can be – they can be a back up and help classroom discipline. Real problem with sub teachers when the kids can go mad and the C/A, who could manage them, doesn't know what to do - in case the sub feels insulted. They (C/As) often say to their unit manager "I didn't know what to do that day". Knowledge of curriculum gets them better kudos with other staff, but some still ignore them. Whole staff should have laid down guidelines – it should be pointed out that it's a partnership'*. Specific training for C/As on dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism, IT, literacy and numeracy were some of the suggestions from this group. All thought that C/As were insufficiently paid. When the model for *'on the job'* training was suggested, this group responded in enthusiastic and unanimous chorus: *'on the job? What a better way to learn? Wish I had learnt that way. Best way to learn - better than all this PGCE nonsense. Hands on. Some would make excellent teachers'*. Following a discussion on oracy of C/As one teacher was horrified at a suggestion *'Correct their English? Oh, God no, that would be so rude.'*

Integrated Secondary. The C/As did all available in-service training and courses with teachers. A comprehensive induction was provided for each new C/A. Areas suggested for C/A training were basic skills, knowledge of the curriculum and examination syllabi. *'General dabs of knowledge'* were *'not useful'* but some C/As in the setting who were trained in Child Protection and First Aid actually trained the staff (Child Protection) and examined and helped teach the pupils (First Aid). One C/A works closely with a pupil's Occupational Therapist in order to use equipment available in school. Regarding pay, one teacher stated *'if they're not*

good they're paid too much, if they are good they're not paid half enough. Same as teachers'.

A point was made regarding the ever-changing contract under which C/As work. *'The old 52 week contract using flexible hours meant that we could use them much better. They stayed until 5 or 6 p.m. and saved up holidays for the summer and we got assistance with displays, filing, preparation of materials, etc. Now, that arrangement is changing'.* Teacher training opportunities for C/As were considered and the response was that this should not be automatic: *'teachers on the cheap were only half baked', 'subject specialist knowledge was required and that meant attending university and getting a proper degree'.*

Assessors. All assessors agreed that C/As, who are often *'adult returners'*, have a real thirst for knowledge and are very open to learning. They should be trained in behaviour management *'as they often work with the worst behaved children and as they work on the front line they often meet problem behaviour first'.* First Aid and Child Protection were also deemed to be appropriate. Many required basic numeracy and literacy help but this was often not provided, as the Vocational Courses that they followed (NVQ) did not regard these as relevant. One assessor thought that extra training brought them *'too near teachers'.* An interesting discussion followed regarding oracy. A few assessors felt that although oracy problems did abound, these should not be addressed. Local accents, dialects, colloquialisms, poor grammar *'give them street credibility - not only with children, but also, and maybe more importantly, with parents. They should be good role models but the fact that they are not so "correct" is almost an advantage.'* Others felt that incorrect grammar was one area that should be addressed *'in order to ensure that they could support the children with knowledge of correct usage'.* It was agreed that those working with a special child should be offered specialist help and training e.g. speech therapy, reading recovery strategies. This would require extra paid time to facilitate gaining specialist knowledge about a particular need. It was also agreed that C/As should be paid during the summer months but all felt C/As were sufficiently paid. The assessors considered the idea of

teacher training for C/As. The problems perceived by some teachers, such as, *'getting teachers on the cheap'* and *'undermining the profession'* were acknowledged as valid, but there was also acknowledgement of the *'talent, enthusiasm and dedication'* of many C/As. After discussion it was acknowledged that training *'on the job'* might be a better way of seeking committed teachers. Although appraisal was regarded as important, the problem of who would do this was raised: *'would this fall to already overburdened teachers?'* Another point raised was: *'what value would it be if not linked to financial incentive? And just look at the problems that would cause.'*

Results of Pre-interview Short Questionnaire - Teachers (appendix 10).

The range of age group covered was from Reception to Key Stage 4. Experience of working with C/As varied from one year to 26 years and most of the C/As allocated to one child also worked with the rest of the class. All respondents were pleased to have a C/A and would choose to have one even if it was not deemed necessary, and all but two out of the 14 teachers involved the C/A in planning.

Results of Pre-interview Short Questionnaire – Assessors (appendix 11)

Assessors' experience of assessing C/As ranged from four to 12 years, all were currently assessing them and all felt that teachers regarded C/As as *'invaluable'*. All felt that C/As should be involved in planning, assessment and observation and half felt that they should be given the opportunity for teacher training, although this should not be foisted on them.

Summary

1) Pertaining competence

Expectations of the role of C/As were very varied. In special MLD units, special schools and primary schools, C/As gained confidence and competence through involvement with planning, input to IEPs and knowledge of the curriculum. Although many C/As in secondary education worked diligently with one pupil, they often did this without any guidance regarding IEPs,

access to lesson plans or knowledge of the curriculum – entering lessons ‘blind’. Whenever their ‘charge’ was absent or sitting exams, the C/As time was not managed well and they felt redundant. The issue of appraisal proved delicate and raised many questions, such as, who would do this additional task and of what value was it if not matched to a financial incentive.

2) Role in the Interdisciplinary team in the school

Lack of time dedicated to planning was a real problem for all sectors. Attendance at training and meetings was also problematic due to contractual restrictions of C/As, whose timetable was often strictly for direct contact with pupils. A lack of clear job parameters meant that neither the C/A nor the teacher knew how to deal with each other when the routine was broken (e.g. when the ‘charge’ was absent). C/As specialist knowledge of individual children was valued and utilised.

3) Perceived contribution to the school

All 14 teacher interviewees regarded the contribution to both the classroom activities and the whole school activities as ‘substantial’. Although coverage for teachers did take place, there was a general and genuine concern that it was unfair, as the C/As were given neither the training nor the financial reward for this task. There was a general perception that C/As had the ability for providing cover, sometimes more so than substitute staff. This was particularly true for special needs classes and in the special school.

4) Impact upon pupil in formal and informal (hidden) curriculum

Great value was placed on the relationship between C/As and all pupils. All interviewees considered the relationships as very special, not only with a particular ‘charge’ but with the whole class. Loyalty, trust and affection were the trademarks of the relationships. An occasional over-indulgence on behalf of the C/A was apparent in the special school where pupils’ tasks were done by the C/A, but generally C/As seem to be expert at judging the boundaries.

5) *Historicity of experience and reflective potential*

C/As made good use of their historicity of experience, often becoming an ‘expert’ for a specific special need. All interviewees considered that their experience was well utilised. This worked especially well in Secondary School where the C/A knew and could pass on ‘inside information’ such as, the mood of the class or any internal class problems, like bullying.

6) *Need for distinct and complementary in-service support*

Training opportunities were very varied. In the special school, although C/As attended all staff training, the need for extra and specific training was also apparent. Again the question of the payment for the extra hours required arose, as generally training took place during the times when the C/As were not contractually employed. The option of teacher training for C/As ‘on-the-job’ was generally regarded as a dilution of standards and a method of getting ‘half-baked’ teachers. Many felt that the capability for teaching was there, but the traditional route was the preferred one, although a heightened emphasis on practical training was desirable for all trainee teacher.

CHAPTER 5

Introduction

‘Classroom Assistants put in staples’. This remark regarding the role of C/As was quoted by one teacher in the teacher interviews. She suggested that it typified what she described as the *‘offensive arrogance and ignorance’* of some teachers towards C/As. C/As have also been described as *‘spare parts’*, *‘invisible’*, and *‘servants’*, (GMB, 2003 p.2), *‘pig ignorant peasants’* (DeGruchy cited in Smith, 2001) and *‘a “mum’s army” who will inevitably dilute professional standards’* (O’Kane cited in Bunting, 2002). This seemingly amorphous role has now been extended to a substantial role of prominence within the classroom. In 2004, a school in England is *‘replacing two teachers with three C/As who can “deliver” lessons prepared by teachers’*.

(Woodhead, 2004). Is this the natural progression and evolution for the role of C/A? The hypothesis of this study is that **C/As are under-valued and under-utilised**. This study is not investigating a tendency for replacing teachers with C/As or promoting their role to teacher status. It is concerned with the C/A operating within the role of his/her job title: an ‘assistant’,

‘making an important contribution to pupils’ learning by providing high quality support (my emphasis) to teachers and schools’. (TTA, 2003a)

There are plenty of directives, such as NASEN (2002), Stansfield (2002), Marston (2000) and BELB (2002), to promote good practice in the management and support that schools should offer to C/As, but some others that have emerged through this study are described below. For clarity, these conclusions have been matched as far as possible to the six themes.

13) Pertaining competence

14) Role in the interdisciplinary team in the school

15) Perceived contribution to the school

16) Impact upon the pupils in respect of formal and informal (hidden) curriculum

17) Historicity of experience and reflective potential

18) Need for distinct and complementary in-service support

1) Pertaining competence

C/As were deemed to be generally highly competent, not only by themselves, but also by teachers and assessors. However, confidence to operate to full potential was impacted by unclear role definitions and the absence of line managers, appraisals and opportunities for personal development. Only through clearly defined job descriptions and expectations, made known to both parties – C/As and teachers – can the relationship operate as a partnership. This would facilitate an atmosphere within which communication is open, honest and respectful. For example, the teachers would feel less reluctant to request that mundane tasks are done and the C/As would have the confidence to suggest changes to classroom practice. To assist with

reducing their workload (Greene et al, 2002), teachers should distinguish which tasks can be delegated (appendix 3) and feel free to do so, in the knowledge that those tasks will be carried out efficiently and effectively.

2) Role in the interdisciplinary team in the school

The NASEN proposal that

'LSAs (Learning Support Assistants) should be seen as, and see themselves as, part of the multi-disciplinary team...valued members of a whole school approach to meeting special educational needs' (NASEN, 2002 p.1)

highlights the ideal and exposes the shortcomings that this study has found. C/As' willingness and ability to work with support services was evident throughout. The fact that more than half of all C/A respondents had never attended a meeting of any kind (including a meeting with the class teacher) demonstrates that this willingness and ability was not fully utilised. Where C/As were incorporated into interdisciplinary teams (Chapter 4 p.52), this proved effective and satisfying, not only to the C/A and the teacher, but more importantly, to the pupils. However, the impact that a C/A has in any classroom is fundamentally diminished without the planning stage between teacher and C/A taking place. This knowledge of planning empowers the C/A, enabling him/her to work at his/her full potential, creating optimum learning opportunities for all the pupils. Evidence in this study supports the Inspectorate findings that:

'The most effective practice seen occurred where the assistants were involved with the teachers in the planning of work.' (ETI, 1998)

To ignore this is not only a disservice to the C/A, but also an injustice to the pupils. As C/As are not paid for this extra time, this can be problematic. The OFSTED report on the National Literacy Strategy stated that

'a significant proportion of schools find it difficult to arrange training for T/As (C/As) at times which do not disrupt the teaching day or require them to stay voluntarily after school' (OFSTED, 2000)

This is particularly problematic in Secondary Schools where so many different subject teachers are involved. Often because of the academic level of the work and their lack of subject

expertise, C/As feel inadequate and 'useless'. According to assessors' field-notes, most Secondary C/As wished to be observed for assessment during a Home Economics lesson, where they felt they could be seen doing something practical. This feeling of inadequacy is often reinforced by the teachers' reaction to them (see Chapter 4 p.60). In a Secondary School instructions given to C/As need to be specific and meaningful, giving them access to the learning process he/she is there to support.

3) Perceived contribution to the school

When facilitated, C/As can and do make immense contributions, not only to individual pupils but also to the whole class and to the entire school practice. Their range and level of involvement in classroom and outside classroom activities was extensive (Chapter 3 pp33, 34). Although this research indicated that C/As felt they were less valued than they actually were (Chapter 3 pp.32, 33), results clearly demonstrated that they were highly valued by teachers and Principals (assessors' field-notes and chapter 4 results). Endorsing the OFSTED (2002b) report into the evaluation of the quality and impact of the work of C/As in the primary school, teacher interviewees (N=14) unanimously rated their contribution to both classroom activities and to whole school activities as '*substantial*'. The proposed changes for tackling teachers' workloads have not yet been fully implemented in Northern Ireland and, as '*support staff are at the heart of the proposals for reform*' (DfES, 2003b), this heightened level of involvement should increase this 'substantial' contribution.

4) Impact upon the pupils in formal and informal (hidden) curriculum

This study was lacking in fully accessing this information, as time and resource limitations made it impossible to access one of the main gatekeepers of this data - the pupils. What was achieved was the perception of this impact as seen by C/As, teachers and assessors. In this respect the perceived impact was considerable, with explicit examples demonstrating immense

benefits to individual pupils. Loyalty, trust, respect and affection were the trademarks of these relationships.

5) Historicity of experience and reflective potential

Through historicity and reflections of practice, C/As have gained very specific knowledge of individual children, differing modes of delivery of knowledge and differing teaching approaches and strategies. If remaining with a class over a period of years, they have also acquired a clear insight into the internal class dynamics and politics. Knowledge of and involvement in routines over a number of years has provided C/As with an in-depth appreciation of school procedures. If remaining with a special child over a period of years they have often acquired an intimate knowledge of the child's life, including family and medical history. Some C/As make home visits and are often involved in programmes, such as, DELTA, CRISP (see acronyms), breakfast clubs, and after-school clubs. They often live in the communities where they work and know the pupils' language and culture and are in possession of 'street credibility'. Their own children often attend the school in which they work and they can appreciate and empathise with the parents. They do not represent a 'figure of authority' and are often more approachable and more frequently approached than other school staff (see Chapter 3 p.35). An open non-threatening relationship can be developed between parents and an 'allocated' C/A and where this happened (Chapter 4 p.52, 57, 58) benefits for all concerned were evident. But often, this valuable conduit with the community was under-utilised.

6) Need for distinct and complementary in-service support

C/As are very open to learning and relish the opportunities for further training (Chapter 3 p.43). Often an interest in a particular special need has led to a C/A becoming an 'expert'. Although C/As often demonstrate a high level of professionalism by working with speech therapists, educational psychologists or other specialist medical staff, opportunities for in-service training are sporadic and inadequate.

Other considerations –

Training. The training available to C/As is not always relevant to the job they do. With proper training and direction the ‘substantial’ role (see chapter 4 p.53 - 55.) they currently provide could be dramatically increased. As a deliverer of the new ‘Teaching/Classroom’ NVQ qualification it is apparent that, as with other NVQs, the emphasis is on gathering evidence, as opposed to actual acquisition of knowledge. The Standards would be better linked to specific training programmes that would ensure that the skills learnt are relevant, current and job specific. The agenda seems to be to produce a ‘Jill of all Trades’ (Moyle and Sushitsky, 1997) and a master of none - providing the very ‘dabs of knowledge’ deemed by a teacher as ‘not useful’ (Chapter 4 p.61). Those who know the training that is required for C/As are too removed from the process to deliver it. The Induction Programme for TAs in England (DfES, 2001) does go some way in redressing this incongruity and it could, and should, be adapted for use in Northern Ireland.

Specialisation. Training for those C/As working with pupils aged over 8 years old only became available in 2002. This could explain Smith’s (2001) assertion that:

‘60% (of C/As) have little or no experience or knowledge of the complexities of working with children’

Even with this consideration, secondary school practice in utilising C/As is inconsistent at best and destructive at worst. At present the usual procedure is that they follow around an individual pupil throughout the school day, often learning as they (C/As) go, but sometimes only at the same rate as the pupil. A possible way forward could be the C/A being associated with one subject teacher, becoming familiar with the syllabus, seeing the progression through it and thus being able to offer valuable constructive support to the pupils. Research undertaken in a High School suggested that:

‘LSAs improved the quality of learning for students with learning difficulties by ensuring those students understood and made sense of the subject. In order to do this effectively they (LSAs) needed to build up their own knowledge base with a

subject area. Facility based assistants could allow them (LSAs) to develop subject expertise' Lund (1999)

This would also tackle another problem, particularly evident in Secondary Schools, that the allocation to one pupil can lead to a reinforcement of the child's difference, can lead to dependency and can lead to an inability for the child to take responsibility for his/her own learning. Alternatively, C/As could be trained to assist with specific special needs, such as, visual impairments, speech and language difficulties, various physical disabilities or severe behavioural problems. They could become 'expert' in their own field and use their expertise throughout the school or within a group of schools. As it is, the specialised support required is often beyond their capabilities

'Some schools may be unaware that some pupils of lower ability or with special educational needs spend too much time with teaching assistants and do not receive enough skilled teaching from a qualified teacher.' (OFSTED, 2002b)

Special schools have also been hampered by the lack of training for the C/A working with pupils aged over 8 years old. From the research undertaken in special schools settings it was evident that there was a certain frustration about the lack of specialised skills in C/As (Chapter 4 p.59). Working with children with severe problems requires specialist training. The work is exceedingly skilled and it is important that all the interactions with the children are informed and targeted to their very special needs. It is only natural that in such a setting the shortcomings will become highlighted and it is, therefore, imperative that time is given to allow meaningful discussion, planning and training. Unfortunately, this is the very setting where time is set at a premium due to large numbers of support staff. From September 2004, some children may be deemed an allocation of 'access to a C/A' and in this event careful handling would be required. Such a scheme could facilitate the training of C/As to operate in a highly specialised role (as suggested above), or the role could decline into literally a 'baseless' C/A carrying out disjointed, superficial support across a wide spectrum of learning. Without clear directives as to

implementation of the scheme it is likely to be carried out on an ad hoc basis. It was found that where C/As (TAs) were employed across the whole school:

'While this provided them with variety, they were not part of the planning process. Their role had to be explained to them at the beginning of each session and time was taken up providing feedback to teachers at the end. This proved to be a very inefficient use of the time of both the teacher and the teaching assistant.'

(OFSTED, 2003d p.16)

Utilising Teachers. Simon Fraser University in B.C., Canada offers teachers a tuition fee waiver to work as School Associates (SFU, 2003) supporting and mentoring student teachers. This scheme matches interested teachers (School Associates) with student pre-service teachers, providing great benefits for both parties and is oversubscribed. A similar scheme here could raise the level of contribution made to school practice by the C/As. Unfortunately, in most schools, the lack of a line manager means that the role of C/A is not only, not clearly defined, but also there is no one who has the responsibility to rectify this situation. The results of this study show that many teachers have a genuine interest and respect for the role of C/A. Their willingness and professional interest could be channelled into direct involvement in the training and development of C/As. Teachers would benefit from this increased involvement as their management and training skills would be developed. This need for training was noted by OFSTED:

'teachers did not always have the knowledge or skills required to make the most effective use of the non-teaching staff who provided them with classroom and administrative support' (OFSTED, 2003d p.4)

Key Conclusions

The hypothesis of this study is that **C/As are under-valued and under-utilised**. Findings are:

In the main, C/As were not under-valued

In the main, C/As were under-utilised.

The key conclusions are:

1. The role of the C/A has changed dramatically over recent years and continues to change. Increased status and responsibilities have not been recognised by all teachers.
2. C/As are talented, energetic, enthusiastic, keen to train and flexible learners who love and are dedicated to their jobs. Utilisation of their special skills, commitment and willingness to learn will help fulfil their potential. A line manager, yearly appraisal and a personal development plan would all improve the current situation
3. They dislike having nothing to do, feeling ‘nondescript’, and being under-utilised which often happens, with neither the teacher nor the C/A knowing how to tackle these problems.
4. When facilitated C/As can and do make immense contributions, not only to the individual pupils, but also to the class and to the entire school practice and are thus highly valued. This is not reflected in their conditions of work where they are not treated as recognised members of the school professional staff.
5. Temporary (many C/A contracts are yearly) ‘non-teaching’ staff with unclear job descriptions employed during term-time only, produces a workforce with insecurity of tenure, low morale, low self-esteem and who feel an inferior part of the school team.
6. Planning time is essential but also problematic due to the restrictive contractual arrangements which do not incorporate time for this.
7. Opportunities for in-service training are sporadic and inadequate. C/As should be involved in meetings, whole school issues and all relevant in-service training.
8. In order to support teachers within the classroom or with delegated tasks (appendix 3), there is a need for clear job descriptions with specific roles and responsibilities. Training for these roles and responsibilities should be provided.

9. Training offered for qualified C/A status in Northern Ireland should be examined and reassessed in order to utilise what is available in England and elsewhere.
10. In order to support and train C/As, teachers' skills, experience and interest should be utilised. Targeted training is required to ensure that selected teachers are enabled to do this with confidence and competence, enhancing teachers' management skills and personal development.
11. Options for C/As to train as subject support specialists or special needs specialists should be investigated. An opportunity to develop the current role could provide immense benefits to the education system in Northern Ireland.
12. It was found in this research that '*when creatively and effectively managed*' (DfEE, 2000 p3) the potential of utilisation of C/As was realised.
13. Focussed and targeted training needs costs (for C/As) could be recouped in a short time by providing a more efficient and effective support system. This could be imaginatively implemented either cross-class, cross-year groups and even cross-school.

The Future

Special needs children rely on the skills and energies of many different people, apart from the class teacher: the SENCO, therapists, outside support staff and, of course, the allocated C/As. The current and increasing culture of inclusion finds the class teacher having to lead and manage a 'team'. C/As bring to the classroom their experiences, knowledge and understanding of school practices, local language and culture, a parental insight, the child's perspective, a confidante's empathy and sometimes a teacher's qualifications (Chapter 3 p.30). Although further research is warranted to provide a higher sample, the findings of this study demonstrate that a more imaginative approach must be made to make full use of the potential of these

enthusiastic and committed staff members. Teachers should not feel threatened by this opportunity.

‘Making the most of such abilities should certainly not threaten the professionalism of teachers; rather it should be encouraged and developed to the full’ (OFSTED, 2002b para. 65)

To ‘make the most of such abilities’ could allow for ‘*knowledge and understanding in a specialist area*’ as suggested in the new standards for HLTAs (TTA, 2003b). It is this idea of an ‘*extended role*’ (TTA, 2003a) that prompted Doug McAvoy’s analogy of ‘*asking the theatre sister to take over the brain surgery*’. (McAvoy cited in Braid, 2002). Naturally teachers are going to defend their position and not readily accept another subject expert into their classroom, especially when the supervision required ‘*need not always mean direct supervision exercised through being present in the classroom*’ (DfES, 2003b). However, a faculty-based assistant, trained by the teacher him/herself, would surely be a welcome addition to any learning environment. Alternatively ‘*knowledge and understanding in a specialist area*’ could mean a special needs expert, experienced and trained in dealing with specific problems, such as dyslexia or a sensory impairment. This type of support would be welcomed, not only in individual classes, but also as a shared resource. This could be imaginatively implemented into the proposed collegiate schooling plan for Northern Ireland.

The socio-cultural, pedagogic, humanitarian, ethical and experiential rationales for classroom assistants should be recognized and underpin all national and local policies. In applauding and celebrating the contributions made by classroom assistants, this study also acknowledges and highlights the shortcomings and inadequacies that exist in the training and management of classroom assistants.

‘The principal value of scientific research in education is that it will enable educators to develop the kind of sound knowledge base that characterizes other professions and disciplines; and one that will ensure education a maturity and sense of progression it at present lacks’ (Cohen et al, 2000 p.45)

It is humbly hoped that this *'maturity and sense of progression'* will inform the future of the role of C/A.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BELB	Belfast Education & Library Board
BPS	British Psychological Society
BTEC	Business & Technology Education Council
CACHE	Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education
CCETSW	Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work
CRISP	Coping Realistically in School Programme
DELTA	Developing Early Listening and Thinking Abilities
DE	Department of Education
DENI	Department of Education for Northern Ireland
DES	Department of Skills
DfEE	Department of Education and Employment
DfES	Department of Education and Skills
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Services
ELB	Education & Library Board

ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
GMB	Registered name of Britain's General Union
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching Assistant
IEP	Individual Education Plan
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
MLD	Moderate Learning Difficulties
NASEN	The National Association for Special Educational Needs
NASUWT	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualifications
NEC	National Extension College
N.I.	Northern Ireland
NLS	National Literacy Strategy
NNS	National Numeracy Strategy
NNEB	National Nursery Examination Board
NTO	National Training Organisation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
SCAA	School Curriculum and Assessment Authority
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SFU	Simon Fraser University

STAC	Specialist Teaching Assistant Course
T & EA	Training and Employment Agency
TA	Teaching Assistant
TEACCH	Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children
TTA	Teacher Training Agency

LIST OF APPENDICES

- 1 Accepted Qualification List for Classroom Assistants
- 2 National Qualifications Framework
- 3 25 Tasks identified as appropriate for delegation
- 4 Pilot Questionnaire for Classroom Assistants
- 5 Final Questionnaire for Classroom Assistants
- 6 Letter to Placement
- 7 Semi-Structured Interview with Teachers
- 8 Sample of Performance Criteria required of Classroom Assistants
- 9 Semi-Structured Interview with Assessors
- 10 Pre-interview Questionnaire for Teachers
- 11 Pre-interview Questionnaire for Assessors

APPENDIX 1 **Qualifications Required for Classroom Assistants Post**

The two main courses covered in this research project are emboldened and underlined.

1. Recognised Status:-

NVQ 11 Child Care and Education now NVQ 11 in Early Years Care & Education
NNEB Preliminary Diploma In Nursery Nursing now NNEB Certificate in Child Care and Education
NVQ 11 Teaching/Classroom Assistant

2. Qualified Status

NVQ 111 in Child Care and Education now NVQ 111 in Early Years Care and Education
NNEB Diploma/Certificate in Nursery Nursing now Diploma in Child Care and Education

NNEB Diploma in Post Qualifying Studies *now* Advanced Diploma in Child Care and Education

BTEC Nursery Nursing Certificate/Diploma BTEC National Certificate Caring Services (Nursery Nursing), BTEC National Certificate/Diploma in Childhood Studies (Nursery Nursing) *now* BTEC National Certificate/Diploma in Early Years.

BTEC Higher National Certificate/Diploma in Early Childhood Studies

Teaching qualification in a Nursery, Special, Primary or Post-Primary school approved by the Teacher Training Institution, formerly DENI

BA Early Childhood Studies

NVQ 111/SVQ 111 Teaching/Classroom Assistants

(North Eastern Education and Library Board – January 2003)

APPENDIX 2

National Qualifications Framework

(Available from <http://www.qca.org.uk>)

<i>Level of Qualification</i>	<i>General</i>	<i>Vocationally related</i>	<i>Occupational</i>
5	Higher Level Qualifications		Level 5 NVQ
4			Level 4 NVQ
3 advanced	A levels and AVCE	Vocational Qualifications	Level 3 NVQ
2 intermediate	GCSE grades A* - C		Level 2 NVQ
1 foundation	GCSE grades D - G		Level 1 NVQ
Entry level	Certificate of achievement		

APPENDIX 3

25 NON-TEACHING TASKS

Tasks that classroom teachers should not routinely do

The list from DfES circular 2/98 now ratified by STRB

- Collecting money
- Chasing absences
- Bulk photocopying
- Copy typing
- Producing standard letters
- Producing class lists
- Record keeping and filing
- Classroom display
- Analysing attendance figures
- Processing exam results
- Collating pupil reports
- Administering work experience
- Administering examinations
- Invigilating examinations
- Administering teacher cover
- ICT trouble shooting and minor repairs
- Commissioning new ICT equipment
- Ordering supplies and equipment
- Stocktaking
- Cataloguing, preparing, issuing and maintaining equipment and materials
- Minuting meetings
- Co-ordinating and submitting bids
- Seeking and giving personnel advice
- Managing pupil data
- Inputting pupil data

APPENDIX 4

*Thank you for filling in this questionnaire. It will be used as part of a research project that I am undertaking with regard to Classroom Assistants. To assist you and make this as 'painless' as possible any instructions or information notes are in Italics. C/A is used throughout as an abbreviation for Classroom Assistant. As C/A you may be voluntary, employed, part-time, short-term or with different classes doing different jobs. This does not matter – just provide the answer that you think matches best to your general experience or recollection. Most questions require you to circle the most appropriate answer. Read all the options before selecting. Some have lines for you to write your own answer. These sections give you the opportunity to describe exactly how you feel. Don't forget that everything that you write is in **STRICT CONFIDENCE** and will only be used for the research. All information is confidential and there will be no means of identifying persons or settings.*

Background information

Are you in paid employment as a C/A?	Yes	No
Are you in paid employment as support staff other than C/A?	Yes	No
Please specify. _____		

How many hours a week do you work as a C/A?
(either voluntary or employed)? _____

(If this varies just give an average)

How long have you been working as a C/A?

(either voluntary or employed)? _____

What type of school are you working in?

(either voluntary or employed)?

Primary

Secondary

Please specify

Special

Integrated

Voluntary

Maintained

Please state the age range that you fall into

21-32

33-42

43-52

52-60

Please state your sex

Male

Female

Section 1 Pertaining competence

What is your highest held qualification?

GCSE
Other(specify) _____

A levels

Degree

If you are currently doing an NVQ please state what year you are in?

Year 1

Year 2

Do you feel sufficiently qualified to carry out your role as C/A?

Yes

No

Not sure

Do you feel that when you have completed your current course you will be sufficiently qualified

for the job of C/A?

Yes

No

Not sure

Do you have an allocated line manager?

Yes

No

Not sure

Have you ever had a personal appraisal?

Yes

No

Not sure

Do or did you ever have a personal development plan? Yes

No

Not sure

Section 2 Role in the interdisciplinary team in the school

'Meetings' covers both formal meetings e.g. notice given, minutes taken, and informal meetings e.g. no set time, no minutes kept. Questions in this section look at present and past experiences.

Do/did you attend any staff meetings?

Nearly always

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Do/did you attend meetings with any members of the staff?

Nearly always

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Do/did you attend meetings with other support staff?

Nearly always

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Do C/As take their break with the teachers?

Nearly always

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Do you feel welcome in the staffroom?

	Nearly always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Do you feel confident in the staffroom?	Nearly always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never

Do/did you ever meet any of the following:

speech therapist?	Yes	No
educational psychologist?	Yes	No
inspector?	Yes	No
support staff from the Education & Library Board?	Yes	No

Do/did you have any meetings with your own class teacher?

	Nearly always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Would you say that you found meetings you attended helpful?	Almost all	Some	Few	None attended

Section 3 Perceived contribution to the school

Do you feel a valued member of the school?

	Nearly always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
What sort of contribution do you feel you make in your classroom?	Substantial	Quite substantial	Moderate	Modest	Insignificant

How do you feel the teacher would rate your contribution in the classroom?	Substantial	Quite substantial	Moderate	Modest	Insignificant
--	-------------	-------------------	----------	--------	---------------

What sort of contribution do you make to the school as a whole?	Substantial	Quite substantial	Moderate	Modest	Insignificant
---	-------------	-------------------	----------	--------	---------------

How do you feel the principal would rate your contribution to the school as a whole?	Substantial	Quite substantial	Moderate	Modest	Insignificant
--	-------------	-------------------	----------	--------	---------------

Are you involved with duties outside of the classroom such as:

Photocopying?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Trips?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Collection of monies?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Bus Duty?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never

<i>Break Duty?</i>	<i>Regularly</i>	<i>Occasionally</i>	<i>Never</i>
Lunch Duty?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never

Please specify any other duties outside of the classroom that you are involved in.

Are you involved with duties inside the classroom such as:

Hearing reading?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Record keeping?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Marking children's work?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Filing children's work in folders?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Assisting with literacy activities?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Assisting with numeracy activities?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Assessment of children?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Planning activities?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Working on IEPs?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Writing a report?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never

Please specify any other duties inside the classroom that you are involved in?

Have you ever been left on your own with a class?

Regularly	Occasionally	Never
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What is the longest period of time that you have been left alone with a class?

All day	Half a day	approx.1 hour	approx ½ hour
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Section4 Impact upon pupil in formal and informal (hidden) curriculum

Do the pupils call you by your Christian name Surname

Do you supervise the children at Break? Yes No Sometimes

Do you supervise the children at Lunch? Yes No Sometimes

Do you ever play with the children at these leisure times?
Yes No Sometimes

How would you describe your relationship with the children in your class?

Mainly Educator	Mainly Friend	Other (please specify)
-----------------	---------------	------------------------

Would you deal with inappropriate behaviour yourself or report the child to the teacher?

Generally report to teacher	Generally myself	Rarely myself	Rarely report
-----------------------------	------------------	---------------	---------------

Do you feel that the children give you respect?
Same as the teacher Less than the teacher More than the teacher

If the children had a personal problem do you feel that they would go to
me first teacher first either

Do you feel that you know the children as people
less than the teacher more than the teacher about the same as the teacher

Do you feel that you know the children's academic strengths/weaknesses
less than the teacher more than the teacher about the same as the teacher

Section5 Historicity of experience and reflective potential

Are you or have you ever been allocated to 1 pupil? Yes No Don't know

If yes please continue, if no go to question XXX

How many years have you been with/known that pupil?
From year _____ to year _____ (e.g. year 3 to year 5)

Can you recall any comment made by that child or other children regarding you or your role?

How do you regard your relationship with your pupil?

Did your care involve any toileting assistance for the child? Yes No

Did your care involve any other type of personal assistance for the child? Yes No

Were you involved in giving the child medication? Yes No

Did you have to keep records on the assistance/medication given? Yes No

Do you feel that you are the most knowledgeable person in the school regarding this child as a person (not academic strengths/weaknesses)?

Yes No Don't know

XXX

Do you feel that you have a special relationship with any child? Yes No Don't know

If so can you explain why you feel this is so?

Do you fulfil a special role for the children in your class? Yes No Don't know
If so can you explain why you feel this is so?

Section6 Need for distinct and complementary in-service support

What qualities do you feel makes a good C/A?

What special qualities do you bring to your role?

Would you like to become a teacher? Yes No Don't know

Do you feel that teachers are suitably paid? Underpaid Overpaid about right

Do you feel that C/As are suitably paid? Underpaid Overpaid about right

What do you feel are the main differences between the role of the Teacher and that of the C/A?

Have you ever received any in-service training? Yes No

Would you like extra training? Yes No Don't know

If training was available and free would you attend training from
Speech Therapist? Yes No Don't know

Behavioural Expert? Yes No Don't know

ADHD Expert? Yes No Don't know

Physical Disability Expert? Yes No Don't know

Mental Disability Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know
Time Management?	Yes	No	Don't know
Administrative Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know
Assessment of Children Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know
Child Abuse Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know
Curriculum Planning Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know

Other training you would like (please specify)

Please add any other comments that you feel would be relevant for my study

Please continue on the back of this sheet if you wish.

Thank you again for all your help.

APPENDIX 5

*Thank you for filling in this questionnaire. It will be used as part of a research project that I am undertaking with regard to Classroom Assistants. To assist you and make this as 'painless' as possible any instructions or information notes are in Italics. C/A is used throughout as an abbreviation for Classroom Assistant. As C/A you may be voluntary, employed, part-time, short-term or with different classes doing different jobs. This does not matter – just provide the answer that you think matches best to your general experience or recollection. Most questions require you to circle the most appropriate answer. Read all the options before selecting. Some have lines for you to write your own answer. These sections give you the opportunity to describe exactly how you feel. Don't forget that everything that you write is in **STRICT CONFIDENCE** and will only be used for the research. All information is confidential and there will be no means of identifying persons or settings.*

Background information

Are you in paid employment as a C/A? Yes No

Are you in paid employment as support staff other than C/A? Yes No

Please specify. _____

How many hours a week do you work as a C/A?
(either voluntary or employed)? _____
(If this varies just give an average)

How long have you been working as a C/A?
(either voluntary or employed)? _____

What type of school are you working in?
(either voluntary or employed)? Nursery Primary Secondary

Please specify Special Integrated Voluntary Maintained

Please state the age range that you fall into 21-32 33-42 43-52 52-60

Section 1 Pertaining competence

What is your highest held qualification? GCSE A levels Degree
Other (specify) _____

If you are currently doing an NVQ please state what year you are in? Year 1 Year 2

Do you feel sufficiently qualified to carry out your role as C/A?
Yes No Not sure

Do you feel that when you have completed your current course you will be sufficiently qualified
for the job of C/A? Yes No Not sure

Do you have an allocated line manager? Yes No Not sure

Have you ever had a personal appraisal? Yes No Not sure

Do or did you ever have a personal development plan? Yes No Not sure

Section 2 Role in the interdisciplinary team in the school

'Meetings' covers both formal meetings e.g. notice given, minutes taken, and informal meetings e.g. no set time, no minutes kept. Questions in this section look at present and past experiences.

Do/did you attend any staff meetings?	Always/Nearly always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Do/did you attend meetings with any members of the staff?	Always/Nearly always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Do/did you attend meetings with other support staff?	Always/Nearly always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Do/did you have any meetings with your own class teacher?	Always/Nearly always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Would you say that you found meetings you attended helpful?	Almost all	Some	Few	None attended
Do C/As take their break with the teachers?	Always/Nearly always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Do you feel welcome in the staffroom when teachers are present?	Always/Nearly always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Do you feel confident in the staffroom when teachers are present?	Always/Nearly always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Do/did you ever meet any of the following: speech therapist?		Yes		No
educational psychologist?		Yes		No
inspector?		Yes		No
support staff from the Education & Library Board?		Yes		No

Section 3 Perceived contribution to the school

Do you feel a valued member of the school?	Always/Nearly always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
--	----------------------	-----------	--------	-------

What sort of contribution do you feel you make in your classroom?

Substantial Quite substantial Moderate Modest Insignificant

How do you feel the teacher would rate your contribution in the classroom?

Substantial Quite substantial Moderate Modest Insignificant

What sort of contribution do you make to the school as a whole?

Substantial Quite substantial Moderate Modest Insignificant

How do you feel the principal would rate your contribution to the school as a whole?

Substantial Quite substantial Moderate Modest Insignificant

Are you involved with duties outside of the classroom such as:

Photocopying?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Trips?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Collection of monies?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Bus Duty?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Break Duty?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Lunch Duty?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Clearing up?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
First Aid?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never

Please specify any other duties outside of the classroom that you are involved in.

Are you involved with duties inside the classroom such as:

Hearing reading?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Record keeping?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Marking children's work?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Filing children's work in folders?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Assisting with literacy activities?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Assisting with numeracy activities?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Assessment of children?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Planning activities?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Working on IEPs?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never
Writing a report?	Regularly	Occasionally	Never

Please specify any other duties inside the classroom that you are involved in?

Have you ever been left on your own with a class?

Regularly Occasionally Never

What is the longest period of time that you have been left alone with a class?

All day Half a day approx. 1 hour approx. ½ hour

Section4 Impact upon pupil in formal and informal (hidden) curriculum

Do the pupils call you by your Christian name Surname

Do you supervise the children at Break? Yes No Sometimes

Do you supervise the children at Lunch? Yes No Sometimes

Do you ever play with the children at these leisure times? Yes No Sometimes

How would you describe your relationship with the children in your class?
Mainly Educator Mainly Friend Other (please specify)

Would you deal with inappropriate behaviour yourself or report the child to the teacher?
Generally report to teacher Generally myself Rarely myself Rarely report

Do you feel that the children give you respect?
Same as the teacher Less than the teacher More than the teacher

If the children had a personal problem do you feel that they would go to
me first teacher first either

Do you feel that you know the children as people
less than the teacher more than the teacher about the same as the teacher

Do you feel that you know the children's academic strengths/weaknesses
less than the teacher more than the teacher about the same as the teacher

Section5 Historicity of experience and reflective potential

Are you or have you ever been allocated to 1 pupil? Yes No Don't know

If yes please continue, if no go to question XXX

How many years have you been with/known that pupil?
From year _____ to year _____ (e.g. year 3 to year 5)

Can you recall any comment made by that child or other children regarding you or your role?

How do you regard your relationship with your pupil?

Did your care involve any toileting assistance for the child? Yes No

Did your care involve any other type of personal assistance for the child? Yes No

Were you involved in giving the child medication? Yes No

Did you have to keep records on the assistance/medication given? Yes No

Do you feel that you are the most knowledgeable person in the school regarding this child as a person (not academic strengths/weaknesses)?

Yes No Don't know

XXX

Do you feel that you have a special relationship with any child? Yes No Don't know

If so can you explain why you feel this is so?

Do you fulfil a special role for the children in your class? Yes No Don't know

If so can you explain why you feel this is so?

Section6 Need for distinct and complementary in-service support

What qualities do you feel makes a good C/A?

What special qualities do you bring to your role?

Would you like to become a teacher? Yes No Don't know

Do you feel that teachers are suitably paid? Underpaid Overpaid about right

Do you feel that C/As are suitably paid? Underpaid Overpaid about right

What do you feel are the main differences between the role of the Teacher and that of the C/A?

Have you ever received any in-service training	Yes		No
Would you like extra training?	Yes	No	Don't know
If training was available and free would you attend training from Speech Therapist?	Yes	No	Don't know
Behavioural Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know
ADHD Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know
Physical Disability Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know
Mental Disability Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know
Time Management?	Yes	No	Don't know
Administrative Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know
Assessment of Children Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know
Child Abuse Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know
Curriculum Planning Expert?	Yes	No	Don't know
First Aid	Yes	No	Don't know

Other training you would like (please specify)

Please add any other comments that you feel would be relevant for my study

Please continue on the back of this sheet if you wish.

Thank you again for all your help.

APPENDIX 6

Part of the Letter sent to the School Principals of the Placements involved

“We hope that you will permit the candidate to gain experience and confidence working with the children in your setting in order that he/ she may undergo workplace assessment. This will be carried out by a qualified assessor from our team. All dates and times for assessment visits will be planned in advance, to suit your timetable, in order to minimise disruption to your setting.

...In order to provide research material for a Master’s Degree course, I may wish to make use of the records made by assessors. This would be done with total regard for confidentiality and no setting would be distinguishable. If you have any objection to this, please send a note with the returned indemnity form.”

APPENDIX 7

Semi-Structured Interview with Teachers (Personal to interviewer - guidance only)

Section 1: Pertaining competence

How do you feel generally about the C/As confidence in carrying out her duties?

(Do they require too much direction? Do they have and use own initiative?)

How do you feel generally about the C/As competence in carrying out her duties?

(Are they knowledgeable about curriculum and IEPs? Do they adhere to directions closely?)

Do you feel that they improve with training?

Do you feel that they and you would benefit if they had appraisal and pdp (personal development plan)?

Section 2: Role in the interdisciplinary team in the school

Do you feel that C/As have anything to offer with regards to planning, assessment, observation of the children?

Do you feel that C/As could be utilised more with regards to planning, assessment or observation of the children?

Would you like planning time with them?

Are the C/As involved in any functional team decisions? Do they attend meetings?

Do you feel that C/As have any expertise with regards knowledge of the children?

Do they impact class/school behaviour?

Section 3: Perceived contribution to the school

How do you rate the contribution to classroom activities? Consider

Substantial, Quite substantial, Moderate, Modest, Insignificant

How do you rate the contribution to outside classroom activities/whole school?

(Same choices as above). Consider

admin. tasks, as cleaners, general management of behaviour

Are C/As used for covering class? How do you feel about this issue?

Do you feel they are under utilised?

Section 4 Impact upon pupil in formal and informal (hidden) curriculum

How do you think the pupils feel about the C/A?

Do you feel the C/A do too much for the pupils?

Do you feel the C/A are too 'palsy' with the pupils?

Is it sometimes like having another child in the room?

Section 5: Historicity of experience and reflective potential

Do you feel that older C/As are sometimes perceived as a threat to younger teachers?

Do you feel that C/A have a special role in the lives of the children?

Do you feel that C/A would have interesting experiences from working with different teachers?

Is the experience of C/A (eg working with one class over a lengthy period of time) ever utilised in any way?

Section 6: Need for distinct and complementary in-service support

Do you feel there is a need for in-service training for C/As?

Did you ever attend any training with C/As?

Would you like training on how to work with C/As?

What would you like to see the C/As trained in?

If you could change the way in which C/A work what would that entail?

(training from speech therapist, educational psychologist, support staff)

Do you think C/As are sufficiently paid?

Do you think they should have the opportunity to train as teachers?

Is an on-the-job training option a good idea?

APPENDIX 8

Sample NVQ Performance Criteria required by Classroom Assistants

Unit C3

Element C3.2 Develop children's skills of locomotion and balance

Performance Criteria

- 1 Activities and **equipment** planned, selected and used to develop and practice **children's** locomotion and balance skills are appropriate to their developmental levels, physical abilities, safety, needs and expressed parental wishes.
- 2 Activities and **equipment** are appropriately **located** and adapted to enable the participation of all **children** and encourage their independence
- 3 Discussions about developing different locomotion skills in activities and play helps **children** to become aware of the differences between skills
- 4 Activities and **equipment** are structured in ways which promotes co-operation among **children**
- 5 Strategies used to encourage **children** to participate positively avoid stereotyping and promote equality of opportunity
- 6 Help and encouragement given ensures the **children's** safety whilst allowing them sufficient independence to experience a sense of achievement when practising skills and exploring different ways of using **equipment**
- 7 Opportunities arising out of spontaneous play activities are used to enable children to further develop their skills of locomotion and balance

Range

Equipment

large equipment
small equipment
fixed equipment
moveable equipment
without equipment

Children

who have difficulties with locomotion and balance
who do not have difficulties with locomotion and balance

Location

a) indoors
b) outdoors

APPENDIX 9

Semi-Structured Interview with Assessors (Personal to interviewer - guidance only)

Remind assessors that although they are all qualified teachers the short questionnaire and interview answers should be based only on their experience as assessors observing Classroom Assistants.

Section 1: Pertaining competence

Do you feel that the observations are 'staged' with the C/As doing activities that they would not normally be 'allowed' to do?

How much autonomy do you feel the teacher gives the C/A?

Generally do you feel they are confident in the classroom?

Do you feel they improve through training?

Do they have adequate knowledge available to them regarding IEPs, curriculum, lesson plans to become competent?

What percentage would you consider are regarded as partners in the learning process?

How do feel the teachers generally regard and treat the C/A?

Do you feel they should have appraisal and pdp (personal development plan)?

Section 2: Role in the interdisciplinary team in the school

Has any principal asked to speak to you? Why?

Has any teacher sought out information from you regarding the course?

Do you feel the teachers are interested in the training?

When you witness feedback from C/A to teacher (as part of the requirements of the course) do you feel that this is meaningful or regarded by the teacher?

Is it just an exercise for your benefit?

Do you feel that C/As have any expertise with regards knowledge of the children?

Do you feel that C/As could be utilised more with regards to planning, assessment or observation of the children?

Around the school do you feel C/As get respect from the pupils? From the teachers?

Are they involved with anyone other than the teacher? Should they be?

Section 3: Perceived contribution to the school

How do you rate the contribution to classroom activities?
Consider Substantial, Quite substantial, Moderate, Modest, Insignificant
How do you rate the contribution to outside classroom activities/whole school?
(Same choices as above). Consider
admin. tasks, as cleaners, general management of behaviour
Are C/As used for covering class? How do you feel about this issue?
Do you feel they are under utilised?

Section 4 Impact upon pupil in formal and informal (hidden) curriculum

How do you think the pupils feel about the C/A?
Do you feel the C/A do too much for the pupils?
Do you feel the C/A are too 'palsy' with the pupils?
Do you feel that C/As have a special role in the lives of the children?
Do you feel confidentiality is respected by C/As?

Section 5: Historicity of experience and reflective potential

Do you feel that older C/As are sometimes perceived as a threat to younger teachers?
Do you feel that C/A would have interesting experiences from working with different teachers?
Is the experience of C/A (eg working with one class over a lengthy period of time) ever utilised in any way?

Section 6: Need for distinct and complementary in-service support.

Do you feel there is a need for in-service training for C/As?
What would you like to see the C/As trained in?
If you could change the way in which C/A work what would that entail?
(training from speech therapist, educational psychologist, support staff)
Do you think C/A are sufficiently paid?
Do you think they should have the opportunity to train as teachers?
How do feel this would be best done?

APPENDIX 10 Pre-interview Questionnaire for Teachers

Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. This will help with my research project on Classroom Assistants. It would be most useful if you could fill the enclosed short questionnaire by circling the most appropriate answer. All information will be treated with complete confidentiality.

What type of school are you working in?

Secondary

Primary

Special

What year group/class do you work with? _____

How long have you experienced working with a Classroom Assistant?

Is your assistant assigned to one child? **Yes** **No**

Does your assistant work mainly on a one-to-one basis?
Yes No

Are you pleased to have an assistant? Yes No

If you had no child in your class who was in need of an assistant, would you choose to have an assistant?
Yes No

Do you feel that the assistant makes any contribution to your planning?
Yes No

APPENDIX 11

Pre-interview questionnaire for Assessors

Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed. This will help with my research project on Classroom Assistants. It would be most useful if you could fill the enclosed short questionnaire by circling the most appropriate answer. All information will be treated with complete confidentiality. Please base your answers on your observations as an assessor of Classroom Assistants.

What many years have you been assessing? _____

What percentage of your candidates would be employed as C/A?

Do you notice a big difference between those employed as C/As and those volunteering on a long-term basis? YES NO

Generally do you feel that teachers regard C/As as

An added burden A help Invaluable

