Education systems worldwide will only successfully serve the needs of people with disability when we inclusively examine and address disabling issues that currently exist at school level education as well as further and higher education and beyond. The chapters contributing to this edited volume are presented to assist readers with a critical examination of contemporary practice and offer a concerted response to improving inclusive education. The chapters address a range of important topics related to the field of critical disability studies in education and include sections dedicated to Schools, Higher Education, Family and Community and Theorising. The contributors entered into discussions during the 2014 AERA Special Interest Group annual meeting hosted by Victoria University in Australia. The perspectives offered here include academic, practitioner, student and parent with contributions from Australia, New Zealand, Nigeria, the UK and the US, providing transnational interest. This book will appeal to readers who are interested in innovative theoretical approaches, practical applications and personal narratives. The book is accessible for scholars and students in disciplines including education, sociology, psychology, social work, youth studies, as well as public and allied health. The Introduction by Professor Roger Slee (The Victoria Institute, Victoria University, Australia) and Afterword by Professor David Connor (City University of New York) provide insightful and important commentary.
Disability Studies
INNOVATIONS AND CONTROVERSIES: INTERROGATING EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

Volume 3

Series Editor:

Roger Slee, *The Victoria Institute, Victoria University, Australia*

Editorial Board:

Michael Apple, *University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA*
Andrew Azzopardi, *University of Malta, Malta*
Cheri Chan, *University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong SAR, China*
David Gillborn, *University of Birmingham, United Kingdom*
Diane Mayer, *The University of Sydney, Australia*

Scope:

Education is a dynamic and contested area of public policy and professional practices. This book series identifies and critically engages with current responses to worldwide changes impacting education. It is a forum for scholars to examine controversies and innovations that emerge from patterns of inequality and social injustice in increasingly globalised contexts. This series is particularly interested in interrogating education through notions of social change, inequality, the movement and displacement of ideas and people, gender and sexuality, community, disability and health issues. Forthcoming books in this series will explore controversies and innovations (including but not limited to):

- education and social theories/frameworks
- changing approaches to, patterns of and policies for education research
- politics and policy
- economics of education
- curriculum, pedagogies and assessment
- technology and new media
- interdisciplinary research.
Disability Studies

_Educating for Inclusion_

Edited by

**Tim Corcoran**
*The Victoria Institute, Victoria University, Australia*

**Julie White**
*The Victoria Institute, Victoria University, Australia*

and

**Ben Whitburn**
*Deakin University, Australia*

SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM/BOSTON/TAIPEI
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Disability Studies in Education as an Applied Project  
*Roger Slee*  
vi

## Part 1: Education – Schools

1. Not Just for the Fun of It: Children’s Constructions of Disability and Inclusive Play through Spatiality in a Playspace  
   *Jenene Burke*  
   3

2. Teachers’ Aides’ Perceptions of Their Training Needs in Relation to Their Roles in State Secondary Schools in Victoria  
   *Dianne Gibson*  
   23

3. Celebrating the Voices of Students with Hearing Impairments in New Zealand Secondary Schools  
   *Kate Holland*  
   43

4. Inclusive Education in Bangladesh: Stumbling Blocks on the Path from Policy to Practice  
   *Masud Ahmmed*  
   57

5. The Privileging of ‘Place’ within South Australia’s Education Works: A Spatial Study  
   *Peter Walker*  
   75

6. Choosing Time: Supporting the Play of Students with a Dis/ability  
   *Amy Claughton*  
   89

## Part 2: Education – Higher Education

7. Inclusive Education for the Disabled: A Study of Blind Students in Nnami Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria  
   *Bentina Alawari Mathias*  
   105

8. Managing the Barriers in Diversity Education that We Create: An Examination of the Production of University Courses about Diversity  
   *Barbara Garrick, Satine Winter, Mahbuba Sani and Lynn Buxton*  
   117

9. ‘We Put in a Few Ramps in Here and There, That’s about It’: The Need to Ramp Our Minds in Academia  
   *Gill Rutherford, Leigh Hale and Denise Powell*  
   137
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Part 3: Family & Community

10. A Mother Caught in Two Worlds: An Autoethnographic Account of a Mother’s Mindset and Perception When Teaching Her Son with Asperger’s Syndrome to Drive  
   *Ruth Cornell*  
   157

11. Technology Use and Teenagers Diagnosed with High-Functioning Autism: In and across Differentiated Spaces  
   *Lye Ee Ng, Stefan Schutt and Tim Corcoran*  
   167

12. Signifying Disability and Exclusion: Tales from an ‘Accidental Activist’  
   *Mary A. Burston*  
   181

## Part 4: Theorising

13. A Troubled Identity: Putting Butler to Work on the Comings and Goings of Asperger’s Syndrome  
   *Kim Davies*  
   197

14. Attending to the Potholes of Disability Scholarship  
   *Ben Whitburn*  
   215

15. A Hidden Narrative: Reflections on a Poster about Young People with Health Conditions and Their Education  
   *Julie White*  
   225

16. Thinking about Schooling through Dis/ability: A DisHuman Approach  
   *Dan Goodley and Katherine Runswick-Cole*  
   241

   Afterword: Cultivating a Global Disabilities Studies in Education  
   *David J. Connor*  
   255

Contributors  
273

Index  
277
The establishment of a Special Interest Group (SIG) dedicated to Disability Studies in Education in the American Education Research Association (AERA) in 2001 was a bold declaration of an alternative view, or more precisely, a radically different paradigm for understanding disability and disablement in education. It also signalled the determination of the founding members to rule a line under the business as usual approach to researching disability and education. Dissenters from the traditional special education, and axiomatically the regular education paradigm, shuffled between disciplinary groups and SIGs to present their work at AERA Annual Meetings. The absence of a Disability Studies in Education or Inclusive Education SIG was silencing critique. Typically presentations on disability studies and inclusive education were considered to be special needs papers. This of course was not the case. Too frequently reviewers schooled in traditional special education rated them lowly. The epistemological impasse needed to be called and structural accommodations were made. Formalising our union made good sense. Evidence of this good sense could be measured (for measure we must) through a number of indicators. The growth of interest, the quality of our publications and research projects, and the continuing commitment of people to bring scholars, educators and activists together to work collaboratively to take our work to broader audiences count in the calculus of research quality.

Not surprisingly, in the early days, the nucleus of the seminar, symposia and roundtable participants were the usual suspects. This has changed over the years. Scholars from various disciplines are confronted by the intersection of disability and their research interests – be it gender, psychology, identity and body research, post-structuralism, critical race studies, poverty and educational underachievement and so the list goes on. The Disability Studies in Education SIG ultimately provides a platform for the assemblage of broad interests. This conference is indicative as is evidenced in the reach of the presentations and the chapters in this collection. Disability Studies in Education (DSE) is certainly an intersectional research endeavour. It draws from across a range of critical research traditions, disciplinary interests and research methodologies in the quest to advance the rights of people with disability to access and participate and succeed in education. Not all of these theoretical perspectives and research paradigms stand comfortably together on our
platform. This is to be welcomed. Tensions that spill into debates that force people to embrace doubt as a healthy part of developing knowledge are our friends. Quietly nodding uncritical agreement with each other (or nodding off) in our sessions is unhelpful. Orthodoxy, as Edward Said reminded us in his essay *Travelling Theory Revisited*, serves to domesticate that insurrectionary zeal that was the incubus for DSE.

DSE is an international research movement and this text reflects the global reach of the SIG. The awards for outstanding scholars reflect our international character. The Senior Scholar Award was conferred on Professor Athina Sideri, an eminent scholar from The University of Athens in Greece. Professor Sideri has been at the centre of disability awareness training for graduate students in education. Professor Sideri’s research centre at The University of Athens brought the social model of disability to special education courses and transformed the paradigm. It is important to remind ourselves that we have much to learn from countries and languages that have not dominated this research space. Similarly Ben Whitburn, the recipient of the Junior Scholar Award, draws deeply from his research in Spain and Australia to challenge the emerging orthodoxies in our SIG. His is a timely call to broaden the theoretical mix to meet the challenge of retaining our critical sensibilities, which deal not only with changing external exigencies, but challenges ourselves. This is what our colleague Julie Allan may have had in mind when she counselled us to see inclusive education as a project on self.

If I am honest my memories of the Disability Studies in Education SIG in its early days was frustrating. It seemed more like a support group or a religious meeting than a congregation of researchers to challenge and extend the research. The meetings generated affirmations rather than debate. This appeared to this observer very different from the Disability Studies colloquia that were organised by Len Barton that culminated in the Disability Studies Conference entitled *Disability Studies: Past, Present & Future*, in Ashford in Kent in 1996. This conference was the site of a major division in disability studies when Tom Shakespeare, Jenny Corbett, Mairian Corker and Carol Thomas issued important challenges to the social model of disability. While there have been some unfortunate effects such as the personalising of the debates and some fracturing of the movement, the challenge has been essential to building a contingent and dynamic field of scholarship. The Disability Studies in Education SIG is now epistemologically more lively and poly-cultural. So now, as I think on the Melbourne gathering I feel sanguine. My only concern is what I will miss as I shuffle aside for the next and better cohort of Disability Studies in Education researchers.

*Roger Slee*
*The Victoria Institute*
*Victoria University*
PART 1

EDUCATION – SCHOOLS
1. NOT JUST FOR THE FUN OF IT

Children’s Constructions of Disability and Inclusive Play through Spatiality in a Playspace

INTRODUCTION

In Australia, the notion of providing opportunities for children with impairments to access play in purpose-built spaces, and have fun alongside their peers and siblings, has gained momentum, translating into the development of some new and exciting ‘inclusive playspaces’. Previously, very little attention or importance was given to the idea that playspaces might exclude some children and carers with impairments from shared play in community spaces. Recently, in paper titled ‘Just for the fun of it’ (Burke, 2013), I advanced an argument supporting the concept of playspaces that are inclusive of all children and that provide access to the experience of shared play. This paper highlighted the vagaries that apply to various attempts to ensure accessibility and inclusion in purpose-built playspaces. I concluded that inclusion in play environments should be considered an important political objective to facilitate healthy, vibrant, fair and connected communities. The reasons why children with impairments should have access to peer play in community and school spaces, however, are much more complex than merely providing access to fun and entertainment for children with impairments and their family members. When examined through a Disability Studies lens, how children construct disability and form views of those with impairments through their experiences of using in a playspace becomes an issue that requires close attention. In this chapter I explore the concept of spatial exclusion in playgrounds, from a disability studies perspective, by drawing on ideas from Armstrong (1999, 2012), Relph (1975) and Imrie and Kumar (1998) to help explain how space can be used in a playground to convey implicit messages about impairment that highlight difference, particularly, of children who use wheelchairs for mobility.

Playspaces, because of the way they are configured, spatially and physically, are likely to contribute to the creation and production of social constructions of disability and of disabled people. Armstrong (1999) insists that social groups of children can be defined by how children separately and collectively read meaning into the spatial organisation of their environments. Catling (2005) agrees, and claims that school playgrounds provide an ‘explicit statement about the relative status [emphasis in original] of children’ (p. 28). It is likely then, that a similar process of
social reproduction often applies in playspaces, with regard to how social roles and relationships are defined and understood by children and I interrogate this idea in this chapter, providing evidence from my research. In this chapter, the term 'playspaces', as defined by Woolley and Lowe (2012), refers to ‘outdoor environments that have been specifically designed and designated as a place in which children can play’ (p. 2). Such playspaces are recognized as being broadly accessible to the public at large and are typically found in public parks, schools, preschools and some fast food outlets.

The qualitative study reported in this chapter is drawn from a nationally funded Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project (ID: LP0349365) that examines playgrounds as spaces that potentially offer all children opportunities to be included in peer play. The author was the PhD. candidate who completed the research. The ethnographic study took place from 2004 to 2009 in regional Victoria, Australia.

SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

Disability Studies, which was described by Barnes in 2004 as ‘a new interdisciplinary area of enquiry’ (p. 28) that is concerned with scholarly exploration emerging from the social model of disability (Barnes, 2004; Gabel, 2006; Thomas, 1999). More explicitly, the term, ‘Disability Studies’, according to Thomas (1999), is used to refer to those who, in studying disability ‘explicitly align themselves with the social movement for the advancement of the social and political rights of disabled people’ (Thomas, 1999, p. 8). Siebers (2008), moreover, agrees with Thomas and emphasises the primary political objective that is inherent within a Disability Studies perspective is ‘to make disability an object of general knowledge and thereby to awaken political consciousness to the distasteful practice called “disablism”’ (p. 81).

Within a social model, disability is understood as a socially constructed phenomenon due to the fact that people with impairments are put in a position of disadvantage because they must overcome barriers that are not impediments to people without impairments. They are disabled by these impediments, not by their own individual attributes (Finkelstein, 2004). A clear distinction is made between the concept of ‘disability’ and the concept of ‘impairment’. Impairment is regarded as an individual’s functional limitation. Disability, in contrast, is defined as something that has been socially created because of limitations imposed on people with impairments by features of the environment, ie, the ‘disability’ arises from the ‘impairment’. The World Health Organisation (2002) explains that disability is viewed as a political rather than an individual issue within the social model:

On the social model, disability demands a political response, since the problem is created by an unaccommodating physical environment brought about by attitudes and other features of the social environment. (WHO, 2002, p. 9)

Finkelstein (2001) strongly asserts that disability results from the ‘nature and workings of society’ that oppress people with impairments. As he explains, ‘it is
society which disables physically impaired people' (p. 1). Priestley (1998) isolates theoretical and political elements of the social model that distinguish it from the medical model. The theoretical element is concerned with the study of disability barriers, policies and practices rather than with specific physical, cognitive or sensory impairments. Politically, this model draws on a discourse of disability rights, inclusion and citizenship (Priestley, 1998).

Inclusion of Children in Play Contexts

Inclusion is a fundamental principle within any accessible environment and should underpin the notion of shared play and access to environments in general (Jeanes & Magee, 2012; Nind & Seale, 2009). Inclusion is seen as the major benefit and the desired outcome of accessible community playspaces, particularly for children with impairments (Dunn, Moore, & Murray, 2003; John & Wheway, 2004; Webb, 2003; Yuill, Strieth, Roake, Aspden, & Todd, 2007) however, the principle of inclusion extends to all, not just those with impairments (Beckman & Hanson, 2002). ‘Inclusive playspace’ has come to describe built playspaces where ‘everyone belongs’; that are purpose-designed to include all members of the community (irrespective of age, ability or any other perceivable difference) in the experience of play (Burke, 2013). Inclusive playspaces aim to provide opportunities for children to play together and have fun. As this chapter will explore, such play experiences are spatially enabled by the built environment and the feelings that are engendered by those who choose to occupy it.

Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2010) caution against practices that support separate play arrangements for children according to their abilities. These authors state that:

Play allows educational professionals to separate able and disabled children and … should be viewed critically and with suspicion…. Play is pivotal to practices that centre the normal and push disabled children to the periphery. (p. 500)

This argument highlights the oppressive nature of dominant discourses of play for disabled children where the instrumental value of play that concerned with learning and development, is privileged over the intrinsic value of play (that concerned with entertainment and enjoyment), and is not disputed in this chapter. A rarely considered and scantly researched aspect of play is how children might construct messages from their shared experiences in children’s environments. Conventional playspaces are likely to exacerbate hegemonic views about impairment particularly as they cater only for those who are able to gain access.

There is some evidence that allowing children to play together in inclusive environments ensures acceptance of children with impairments by their non-impaired peers over time. Children without impairments seem to develop empathy and acceptance of difference (Stalker & Connors, 2003; Widdows, 1997). Children
in inclusive kindergarten settings in Greece and the United States were found to be more accepting of children with impairments than children in non-inclusive settings (Nikolaraizi, Kumar, Favazza, Sideridis, Koulousiou, & Riall, 2005). Marginalisation of children with impairments in conventional playspaces is well documented in the literature (Dunn, Moore, & Murray, 2003; John & Wheway, 2004; Yantzi, Young, & McKeever, 2010; Widdows, 1997; Webb, 2003).

Corkery (2004) refers to the powerful educational effects of playspaces in influencing children’s attitudes and values:

The built and social environment in which children develop will in turn influence their attitudes and values about many things…. Play environments, including playgrounds, are in the public domain and are gathering places where children are likely to have some of their initial interactions with other children who are unknown to them. Therefore these are the places where children have the opportunity to be socialised with the idea of community life, outside the more familiar domains of home and school. (p. 111)

While Corkery’s comments highlight the potential of playspaces to facilitate children’s social and community interactions, she does not address the impact of space on ensuring who can socialise (and who can’t), neither does she attempt to consider how children might make sense of the world accordingly.

Identification with place is a socially constructed notion that is culturally defined (Armstrong, 2012; Ferri & Connor, 2006; Lupton, 2007). Ferri and Connor (2006) explain how space can be reproductive of inequality. Children construct social norms and their understanding of social positioning from their observation and knowledge of cultural practices. This includes their reading of the environment to learn and construct messages about impairment. Ferri and Connor use a school setting to explain that practices adopted by adults to manage students with impairments can contribute to children’s perceptions of difference. The classroom is described as a constructed space that reflects society and which is largely formed by the ‘constant struggle over who is included and who is excluded’ (p. 127). The authors elaborate:

As a microcosm of society, classrooms and schools represent the degree to which knowledge and individuals are valued… thus embedded in their very structure schools and classrooms teach explicit and implicit lessons about normalcy. For example each time a child with a perceived difference is removed from the classroom for special instruction, or isolated from his or her peers within the classroom, the student and all of his or her classmates learn an important lesson about the educational, social and cultural responses to difference… consequently, all children come to learn about norms and their own positioning, particularly in relation to others. Thus, classroom walls and more subtle divisions within the classroom act as literal and symbolic borders, assigning students to designated spaces that correspond to their perceived value in society. (Ferri & Connor, 2006, p. 127–128)
According to this explanation, children (with or without impairments) construct understandings about the social positioning and ‘value’ of their peers from distinctions they observe in how the school responds to difference. I emphasise, however, that it is not simply a reproductive process. It is important to note that children with impairments are active in the process of constructing their own social positioning and that of others who do not have impairments and vice-versa.

The spatial elements of a playground seem to play an important role in social production. That playspaces do not support play by some people with impairments may be reflective of deeper hegemonic socio-political positioning of people with impairments. Lefebvre (1991) suggests that perceptions of space and the way it is used are inherently socially and politically imposed. Armstrong extends this argument:

Space is political and ideological because it is a social product, derived from power relations in society and political struggle. The repartition of space into areas, social arenas, and sites is not ‘innocent’, nor neutral, but reflects these social relations and political struggles. (Armstrong, 1999, p. 79)

Understandings of disability can be spatially produced and reproduced by children from their reading of the environment. According to Lupton (2009), the meaning of space is produced by the ‘social relations of people within and outside it, through the ways that they use it and imagine it’ (p. 112). Armstrong (2012) draws on Soja’s (2010) concept of ‘spatial justice’ as a new means to explore ‘processes of inclusion and exclusion’ (p. 612), pointing out that ‘questions of “justice” always have a “spatial dimension”’ (p. 112). Spatial justice therefore, according to Armstrong’s (2012) interpretation of Soja’s work, systematically overlooks disability in discussions about discrimination and can be viewed as both an outcome and a process.

Two interrelated ideas, with reference to place, can be used to interpret children’s experiences; that of ‘existential space’ and that of ‘spatial signifiers of difference’. Lived space can be understood through existential space (Relph, 1976). The concept of existential space in this chapter is concerned with how children as members of a cultural group come to identify with playspace places and to develop shared cultural identities with place. Relph (1976) describes existential space as lived space that is experienced collectively by people as members of a cultural group. Relph tells us that ‘however we feel or know or explain space, there is nearly always some associated sense or concept of place’ (p. 8). He explains:

Place, in association with space, also has a multiplicity of interrelated meanings. Place is not a simple undifferentiated phenomenon of experience that is constant in all situations, but instead has a range of subtleties and significances as great as the range of human experiences and intentions. (Relph, 1976, p. 26)

I interrogate these ideas, providing evidence from my research into children’s perceptions of playspace in the following pages.
Research with Children

In 2007, Connors and Stalker put forward a conceptual lens through which to examine disabled childhoods that they called ‘the social model of childhood disability’. These authors positioned this theoretical perspective at the nexus of two theoretical approaches in particular, derived from seminal words in these two fields; the social relational interpretation of disability (Thomas, 1999) and the ‘new’ Sociology of childhood (Prout & James, 1997). The social model of childhood disability provides a social constructionist lens through which to attempt to understand the complexities of disabled childhoods and the potentially socially oppressive nature of barriers to participation. In this perspective, passive stereotypes often associated with disabled children are rejected, as is the construction of disability as tragedy, suffering or deficit. Disabled children are viewed as a social group who are marginalised in contemporary society due to their age and perceived lack of ability and the homogenisation of children with impairments into impairment categories is avoided. This perspective steers clear of comparisons of children with impairments with ‘normal’ non-impaired children and seeks to demonstrate ways in which children with impairments can be consulted and active participants in research methodologies and be seen to act within children’s cultures as creative agents actively constructing their playworlds (Burke, 2012). More recently several others have taken a similar theoretical stance to examine children’s experiences of disablement such as Watson (2012), Tisdall (2012), Mallett and Runswick-Cole (2014) and Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2010, 2015).

The notion of interpretive reproduction can be used to explain a child’s ‘evolving membership in their culture’ (Corsaro, 2005, p. 24). Corsaro explains:

Children’s production of peer cultures is neither a matter of simple imitation nor direct appropriation of the adult world. Children creatively appropriate… information from the adult world to produce their own unique peer cultures. Such appropriation …extends or elaborates peer culture; children transform information from the social world in order to meet the concerns from their social world… to create and participate in a peer culture at specific moments in time. (Corsaro, 2005, pp. 41–42)

Through interpretive reproduction, children actively engage with and participate in the interpretation of their worlds and cultures rather than merely imitating or internalising from encountering cultural situations. Children, like all humans, can be positioned as social agents who act independently of imposed social structure (Prout & James, 1997).

RESEARCH METHODS

In my study, data were collected from children, who compiled personal photographic scrapbooks and were observed at play in playgrounds. Of the 72 child research
participants, aged six to ten years, from four selected primary schools (three mainstream schools and one special education school), 34 children were identified as having an impairment and 38 as having no impairment. All children and schools have been referred to by pseudonyms in an attempt to conceal their identities. To gain insight into the lived experience of playspace users, data were also obtained from a series of focus group discussions with parents of children with impairments and adults with impairments, and from my field notes of observations as a participant observer in school playgrounds and other sites. Ethics approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Ballarat and the Department of Education and Training, Victoria, Australia. This study draws on a small sample of research participants, and while these participants cannot be considered representative of all children and adults (both impaired and non-impaired) who use playgrounds, it attempts to provide some understanding of the life experiences of specific child playground users with respect to their playworlds. The participants are not representative of all children and therefore the insights conveyed through this study need to be interpreted cautiously.

The social model of childhood disability perspective endorses the utilisation of personal (micro) accounts of experiences as a way of enabling the researcher to construct and illustrate macro-level analysis (Connors & Stalker, 2003). The methodology adopted in this study provides the scope to seek insight into children’s lived experiences in playgrounds. The decision to draw on the perspectives of children with impairments creates a new set of research considerations that takes into account the unique circumstances of working with children. The research, therefore, needs to engage child participants and be age and developmentally appropriate for children with a variety of participation, communication and learning capabilities. The research methods aim to elicit responses from children so that their views, feelings and ideas can be communicated, and to satisfy ethical requirements for research with participants considered potentially vulnerable both as children and as people who have impairments.

All participant children completed a photographic scrapbook project, where they were asked to take photographs of playground locations and equipment in a local community playground in response to each of 12 guiding statements (Figure 1. ‘My view of the playground’: Guiding statements). They later compiled their photographs into a scrapbook (some with a great deal of adult assistance) and provided written explanations for their choices. Each page in the scrapbook contained one of the guiding statements, a space for the corresponding photograph and three sentence stems that children were asked to complete: 1. This place makes me feel like this… because…; 2. I chose to take this photo because…; 3. I can [insert appropriate guiding statement] here because… . In follow-up interviews I discussed with each child their photo choices and their responses to the sentence stems in more detail. I also observed the children with impairments at play, both during a field trip to a community playground and in their own school playground settings. The children also indicated their feelings about their choice of the playground location pictured
in each of their photographs by adding one of three personally selected self-inking ‘feelings’ stamps; a smiling face ☀, a sad face ☪ and a grimacing face ☵.

Greenfield’s (2003) study utilises the technique of ‘photo elicitation’ that has been described by C. Burke (2005) as the ‘coupling of words and images allowing for interaction between the two’ (p. 32). Using photo elicitation can provide the scope to stimulate responses from children, to facilitate communication with children, to triangulate with data from other sources, and as a tool to assist children to contribute their perspectives of playgrounds to the research. Photo elicitation is described by some authors as a useful way to facilitate communication with children, including very young children (Clark, 2004; Greenfield, 2003) who use limited spoken language or who have limited literacy skills; furthermore, the adoption of visual methods, in research involving the participation of children, can provide ways of engaging effectively with the children (Clark, 2004; Greenfield, 2003; Moss, Deppeler, Astley, & Pattison, 2007) by mediating and facilitating the communication between the researcher and the children (Christensen & James, 2000).

For this chapter, my field notes, children’s photographic scrapbooks and focus group discussion transcripts, I reflected on the data in to try to discover structures of meaning. This process is described by van Manen (1990, p. 30) as one of six ‘methodological themes’ to ‘animate inventiveness and stimulate insight’ into phenomenological structure. Van Manen sees, ‘reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon’ (p. 30) as part of the process of phenomenological research. The themes that emerged through analysis of the scrapbook data at times converged with themes drawn from my research journal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am looking for somewhere in the playground...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) …I like to play most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) …I don’t like to play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) …I feel safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) …I don’t feel safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) …that is the best place to play with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) …to be by myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) …that is difficult for me to get to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) …where I have never played but would like to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) …where I want to try hard to do something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) …that is fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) …where I can work hard (huff and puff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) …I can pretend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Burke, 2012, p. 969, adapted from Greenfield 2003; 2004).

*Figure 1. ‘My view of the playground’: guiding statements*
and from the focus group discussion transcripts. In these instances I combined the data under the identified theme and then attempted to describe the phenomenon through ‘the art of writing and rewriting’ (van Manen, 1990, p. 30). For this chapter, I grouped pieces of text with attention to issues of access for children with physical impairments including that concerned with a particular playspace item, known as a ‘Liberty Swing’. In the playspace this was the only piece of equipment where any children mentioned physical impairment even though there was also an accessible sand pit, wheelchair accessible seating and a variety of swings for a range of children in the playspace.

The playground places that children photographed and their accompanying written statements and comments provide insights into how children read and spatially construct their environment with respect to disability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I present some illustrative examples of data in two parts. First, I provide three vignettes drawn from a focus group with parents of children with an impairment from my study followed by a discussion linking the concept of existential space. Second, I offer data from the children’s scrapbooks and some of my own photographs, followed by discussion about places in the particular play site that act as spatial signifiers of difference. Two of the research participants in this study are Dominic and George, both six years old and both use wheelchairs for mobility. When they visit conventional playspaces, both boys are compelled to sit and watch non-disabled children play because the equipment is inaccessible to wheelchairs. George’s mother, Anita, and Dominic’s mother Lisa, as participants in the research study, explain the situation in Vignettes 1, 2 and 3.

Vignette 1: George.

Kids [without impairments] can run riot. George can’t access Hungry Jack’s playground at all. He goes to parties there and he sits in a party room and watches other kids. (Anita, mother of George)

Vignette 2: Dominic.

I’ve got twins and my son [Dominic] sits there and watches his [twin] sister and you can see his little face and sometimes I’ve said to him, “What’s wrong, mate?” and he’s said, “Stupid cerebral palsy”. He can’t express himself but he’s angry because he can’t do what she’s doing. She’s running around. She’s on the swing, she’s on the slide. He just wants to be normal like everyone else. (Lisa, mother of Dominic)

Vignette 3: George.

George visited an accessible playspace and found a musical play element that was accessible from his wheelchair. Anita, his mother, describes the scene:
They’ve got the bell things… and they’re great. They’re big. So all my son has to do is push it and it makes a noise and he spent at least five, ten minutes just pushing these bells, pushing, pushing, hearing the different noises and he thought that it was fantastic. They were at his level for his wheelchair and other kids were playing next to him. And he had a couple [of bells] he was playing, and other kids were playing [other bells]. And he just thought it was the best thing ever. He’d never been to a playground before that had something other than just walk around it or have to get out of his wheelchair to go down a slide.

(Anita, mother of George)

Aside from cultural differences between children and adults, children with impairments and children without impairments can be polarized into separate cultural groups by spatial arrangements. I use Vignette 1 and Vignette 2 to help explain this point with respect to separate play arrangements for children with impairments and the different places that they inhabit compared with their peers without impairments. George and Dominic, in the examples provided in Vignettes 1 and 2, are spatially positioned outside (or on the periphery) of the cultural play landscape of their peers. Their membership of the cultural group, ‘children’, is limited by their overlapping membership of the group, ‘disabled children’. Consequently they are denied spatial justice (Armstrong, 2012) because of the exclusive configuration of the playspace. When children with impairments are segregated from children without impairments by physical barriers or adult-imposed practices then they may experience difficulty sharing collective identity with place. I refer to Relph (1976) who asserts that cultural groups have been socialised ‘according to a common set of experiences, signs and symbols’ (p. 12).

Spatial separation denies shared cultural experiences and can lead to playground users experiencing place through either insideness or outsideness (Relph, 1976). As such, it is difficult for children without impairments to experience the place identity of the impairment-influenced culture, despite all belonging to the larger cultural group, children. For children with impairments, being able to experience place collectively as part of the broader children’s social group is likely to assist in building shared cultural understanding between all children. Consequently, a strong argument for the importance of inclusion for children can be derived from such reasoning. An example of inclusion is provided by George’s mother, Anita, in Vignette 3. Unlike the spatial arrangements described in Vignettes 1 and 2, in Vignette 3 George is permitted to occupy this social space and engage in a more conventional experience. A shared cultural experience is possible here because of the configuration of the built environment of the playspace. Anita further explained that the experience she describes in Vignette 3 was derived from the only example she was aware of where George, up until he was six years old, had been able to visit a playspace and actively participate in play, without watching others from the sidelines or be carried around a playspace by a carer.
The second idea associated with the lived space of the playground, is that of the role of spatial signifiers in cultural reproduction. Spatial signifiers are signs and symbols that are read from and into places by individuals within the cultural structure of society (Titman, 1994). Imrie and Kumar (1998) maintain that places can act as ‘spatial signifiers of difference’ (p. 385) in which exclusionary practices signal, highlight, extend, reinforce and legitimate differences between those who are impaired and those who are not. Spatial markers, when associated with certain social groups, signify difference between those who use particular spaces and those who do not (Imrie, 1996). For many disabled people, ‘access to specific places is a constitutive part of how they come to be defined and recognised’ (Imrie & Kumar, 1998, p. 357–358) by others. Spatial demarcations or ‘spatial markers’ thus produce and reproduce social exclusions.

The complexities of the built environment, and the consequent ways in which it affects disabled people’s lives, are difficult to ascertain. Imrie and Kumar (1998) state that ‘the configuration of the built environment is implicated, in quite complex ways, in the material circumstances, identities and daily lived experiences of disabled people’ (p. 358). Imrie and Kumar (1998) draw on social constructionist theory to explain how space acts as a medium for conveying messages about impairment, asserting that social relations are ‘constituted in and by space’ (Imrie, 1996, p. 12–13).

A Liberty Swing as a Spatial Signifier of Difference

In this study, a Liberty Swing, pictured in Photograph 1 by one of the research participants, Riley, provides an example of a spatial signifier of difference. A Liberty Swing...
Swing is a swing that was purpose-designed to allow a person to swing whilst seated in a wheelchair. It was designed in Australia and is frequently installed in large public playgrounds and special education schools. The comments provided by the children in their scrapbooks that accompanied their pictures of the Liberty Swing have been aggregated below. Of the 15 children who chose to photograph the Liberty Swing in their photographic project, they selected it under the following guiding statement categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somewhere in the playground where…</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have never played but would like to</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t feel safe</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t like to play</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to try hard to do something</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most children who photographed the Liberty Swing indicated they were excluded from using it. Examples of children’s comments where they express that they were excluded are:

It looks like fun. … I wish I could go there. I don’t know why I can’t.

This place makes me feel like this ☹️ because “nobody lets me go on it. Nobody lets anyone go in without a wheelchair. I’d like to swing on it but I can’t. I would like to swing on it because it’s cool. I’d swing high on it”.

This place makes me feel like this ☹️ because “I’m not allowed to get in there. I’m not allowed to play in there. I would like to play on this”.

This place makes me feel like this ☹️ because “I never went there. I have never been in here before”. (This child admitted that she didn’t know what the swing was for).

“It looks like fun”. This place makes me feel like this ☹️ because “I can’t play there”.

I love it. I can’t get on it and I wish I could.

This place makes me feel like this ☹️ because “I can’t do what I want to do”.
One child expressed curiosity about disability: “I’d like to know what it’s like in wheelchair”.

One child associated the swing with being a safe place: This place makes me feel like this 😊 because “you can’t fall off”.

These comments raise the question of why many of the children who say they would like to play on this swing are unable to do so. I have attempted to answer this question in the discussion that follows. Moreover, some of the children expressed negative views of disability and an awareness of the potential danger to them or getting into trouble in using the swing:

It’s a swing. It’s big. It’s too high and I can slip out.

I don’t like the wheelchair swing because it’s for wheelchair people. It’s not a good place for children. I don’t feel safe here because it’s dangerous. It could just start up and hit me.

…It’s a dangerous swing…

“I’d get into trouble if I played on it”. This place makes me feel like this 😊 because “I’m just dying to get on it but I can’t because I might get into trouble. I want to have a swing on it. I’d like to play here because it might be really fun”.

“Wheelchairs have to play on it. It’s their swing”. This place makes me feel ‘yucky’ because “I don’t like it and it makes me feel sick. It’s not nice because you have to go in it if you have an accident. I don’t like to play here because it’s for wheelchairs and crutches”.

Of 15 children who included the Liberty Swing in their photographic project, 12 children associated it with sad feelings, 😞 and three chose the ‘happy feeling’ stamp 😊 (Burke, 2006).
The children’s comments about the Liberty Swing suggest that some research participants perceive the structural space occupied by the Liberty Swing as a place that is restricted to those who are different because they use wheelchairs. The size and physical presence of the swing (Photograph 4), the thick palings on the tall fence dividing the swing from the rest of the playground (Photograph 4), the signage restricting the area around the swing to ‘users and carers’ (Photograph 3), the childproof gate and lock (Photograph 5) and the swing’s location on the periphery of the playground (Photograph 4), are likely to convey spatial messages to young playground users. Some of the children in this study explained that they felt excluded from this space and that only people who used wheelchairs could use this space. Thus, the children have noticed that the space is demarcated for disability and only certain types of disability. Interestingly, the swing has a fold-down seat, that enables a child to use the swing without being seated in a wheelchair, meaning that it is actually a more inclusive piece of play equipment than a conventional swing, but this is use is not promoted and no children in this study seemed to be aware of it.

From the evidence of this study, a few examples of which are provided in this chapter, it would seem that children partly construct their own and others’ value and social positioning according to whether they are included in or excluded from certain playground spaces. The social value and capabilities of some children with physical impairments are conveyed through space by implicit messages about impairment in play spaces. The absence of children with impairments from mainstream play activities, and their presence in others, communicates messages to their peers from which contribute to their socially constructed notions of disability.

Another example of a spatial signifier of difference is conventional play equipment that does not cater for other than ‘normal’ children. The playspaces featured in Vignette 1 fit this description. Within such environments, as explained previously, the differences between those who can play and those who can’t become
blatantly apparent. Alternatively, children with impairments often avoid accessing such spaces. Lack of contact in play environments of non-impaired children with their peers with impairments, according to Davis, Priestley and Watson (2004), can result in culturally deprived situations in which non-impaired children are prevented from learning about the ‘true diversity’ of their peer group. Furthermore, hegemonic practices that exclude people because of their impairment are normalized. Davis and his colleagues explain:

In forming social networks and personal relationships within a disabling environment, non-disabled children learn that their social world functions without disabled people and learn not to question the exclusion of disabled people from the adult world. (Davis et al., 2004, p. 20)

Some children in this study demonstrated their understandings of disability through their comments about the Liberty Swing. These comments provide strong evidence of the social messages that children read spatially from the environment. Consider George as described by his mother playing in the ‘accessible’ playground that contains certain sensory equipment in Vignette 3. George plays alongside other children ringing the bells. By being permitted to occupy this social space and engage in a regular play experience alongside ‘normal’ children, his capabilities and his behaviour are likely to be normalised by his playmates and he is seen as being capable, and likely sees himself as capable, of participating in play alongside his peers. The playground becomes his environment too, and a shared cultural identity with place is possible for all the children included in the immediate environment. In comparison, in Vignette 2, Dominic is compelled to sit on the sidelines, unable to access the play space being utilised by other children, watching his sisters playing together. His physical presence as a spectator of play is normalised as one of absence from the play experience. He is cast (seemingly in his own eyes) as an incompetent player who is incapable of participating in peer play. The limitations of his impairment are highlighted to himself (as reported by Lisa, his mother) and, most likely, to his sisters who are engaged in the act of playing. Barriers that are often imposed on such children seem to limit their opportunities to exert their own free choice and act as creative, autonomous agents in their play.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A playspace is a site of the processes of social construction that occur also in the broader world beyond the playground. Central to this argument, drawing on the social model of childhood disability (Connors & Stalker, 2007), is the recognition that children with impairments have the capacity and opportunity to act as agents in their play in the playspace. Such processes can contribute to the inclusion, or alternatively to the oppression, of disabled people. In this chapter I have provided evidence of children with impaired mobility and children without impaired mobility divided into separate cultural groups by spatial arrangements. Spatial separation thus
denies spatial justice and prevents shared cultural play experiences in designated playspaces. For children with impaired mobility, being able to experience place collectively as part of the broader children's social group is likely to assist in building shared cultural understanding between all children. To redress this spatial injustice, a focus on finding ways for all children to gain access to inclusive play and opportunities for social interaction with peers must be accorded central importance over adult choices and institutional priorities imposed on children that deny them access to play.

I have drawn attention to the fact that some children in this study demonstrated their understandings of disability through their comments about the Liberty Swing. The Liberty Swing provides strong evidence of the social messages that children read spatially from the environment and can be described as a spatial signifier of difference. This is likely because of the way the swing is positioned and promoted in the playspace, rather than the actual capabilities of the swing. Exclusionary practices, therefore, signal, highlight, extend, reinforce and legitimate differences between some of those who are impaired and some of those who are not.

Considering the examples presented in this chapter, I urge the reader to consider how children without impairments might construct impairment, and how children with impairments might consequently view themselves in relation to their non-impaired peers from their reading of the way the built environment is configured. Wendell (1996) asserts that insider knowledge, if acknowledged and accepted by people who are not disabled, can contribute beneficially to the social fabric, enriching our thinking and consequently changing the way we understand each other. We may become able to embrace and understand a broad array of ways of doing and being that are not solely confined to the dominant ‘ableist’ adult view, but which draw on rich and varied discourses. Such a priority is vital for all children, not just those with impairments. Being denied opportunities to learn about and experience the true diversity of their peer group can thus result in play deprivation for non-impaired children. Importantly, from a disability studies perspective, some children with impaired mobility are unable to access spatial justice. Furthermore, within a play environment bereft of children with impairments, the subsequent social messages that non-impaired children receive may lead them to accept social segregation for people with impairments as a ‘normal’ part of life and the consequent devaluing of disabled people.

Play, as a major social institution, influences the shaping of society. By gathering in playspace environments, children who do not necessarily know each other learn about others, social values and the communities in which they live. This cultural learning is an important by-product of a child’s play experience and emphasises that inclusive play is not just about children experiencing fun and pleasure from such activities. It is important that practices are adopted that enable children with impairments to be independent, welcomed and included as equals in children’s environments such as playspaces.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was conducted in the School of Education at the University of Ballarat, with funding provided by an Australian Research Council. The Chief Investigators were Professor Lawrence Angus and Dr. Janette Ryan. I acknowledge and thank Industry partners, the Central Highlands Area Consultative Committee (VicCHACC) and the Lions Club of Ballarat.

REFERENCES


Jenene Burke  
*Faculty of Education & Arts*  
*Federation University*
2. TEACHERS’ AIDES’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR TRAINING NEEDS IN RELATION TO THEIR ROLES IN STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN VICTORIA

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive educational policies have led to an increase in employment of teachers’ aides (TAs) to support students with disabilities in schools. Research that has investigated the roles of TAs in schools has reported that TAs are often employed with little or no training. This study used an online questionnaire to examine TAs perceived training and professional learning needs for performing their roles in state secondary schools in Victoria. One hundred and sixty-three TAs completed the anonymous on-line questionnaire. The study examined a range of issues related to TAs knowledge and skill levels, and training and professional learning. The results from the study showed that the majority of TAs in state secondary schools in Victoria (1) consider they have substantial knowledge regarding work related items; (2) have had training or have no need for training in work related items; (3) consider they are well prepared to effectively perform student related tasks; and (4) have had training or have no need for training in student related activities.

BACKGROUND

Inclusive education provides for the rights of individuals and refers to the placement of students with disabilities into regular schools (Bourke & Carrington, 2007; Oliver & Barnes, 2010; Rioux & Pinto, 2010; UNICEF & UNESCO, 2007). Inclusive education has led to a rapid increase in the number of TAs employed to assist with the placement of students with disabilities into regular classrooms alongside their peers (Carrington & Holm, 2005; M. Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Subban & Sharma, 2006; Takala, 2007). However, while TAs are the preferred option for supporting students with disabilities in the classroom, researchers have questioned the use of untrained or underskilled TAs in supporting students with the most need in schools (Angelides, Constantinou, & Leigh, 2009; M. Giangreco & Broer, 2005; M. Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Inclusive Education Network, 2006; Webster et al., 2010). Furthermore, while researchers question the use of undertrained TAs, it may be constructive to posit a further question, what are the perspectives of the TAs themselves regarding their
preparedness to perform their roles? The purpose of the study outlined in this chapter is to develop an understanding of the preparedness and training of TAs from the TAs’ perspective. There is growing research literature that suggests that TAs are unprepared for their role in supporting students with disabilities through a lack of training or a lack of clarity in their role (e.g., Angelides et al., 2009; Mansaray, 2006; Webster et al., 2011). However to date, there is a dearth of information regarding the TAs perceptions of their role and the training they have performed to address the array of work related items and student related tasks inherent in their role. By researching the TAs perceptions the study gives agency and relevance to the TAs own voices and experiences. The study endeavours to provide an understanding of, and direction for, better-informed utilization of TAs as support personnel for students with disabilities within the secondary school environment.

Work Related Items

The evolution of inclusive education has created issues for mainstream schools (M. Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; McNally, Cole, & Waugh, 2001). As a result, TAs may become central to the process of implementing the policies and practices of inclusive education in schools. Inclusive of their role in supporting students in the school setting TAs need to know about the guiding principles that impact their working environment, for example, school and department safety policies and legal obligations (Dymond, Renzaglia, Gilson, & Slagor, 2007; Etscheidt, 2005; Pearce & Forlin, 2005; The Senate, 2002). Riggs (2005) held a workshop with 35 TAs to discuss what teachers should know when working with TAs. From the study Riggs (2005) noted that while TAs may have experience with students with disabilities in the community, TAs who attended the workshop had no experience in the classroom prior to working in the role. This infers that the TAs required an understanding of working within the culture of a school. Hudson et al. (2010) undertook a small-scale study in Queensland, Australia, to explore practices and strategies for mentoring potential teacher aides (PTAs). The study results indicated that PTAs require knowledge of school culture and infrastructure that would aid the PTA’s work practices. Researchers have also noted the need for TAs to be trained in communication and management skills for working with other adults in learning situations, particularly in secondary schools where TAs work with a range of teachers who may have varying experiences in working with and monitoring TAs (Angelides et al., 2009; Etscheidt, 2005; M. Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005; Howard & Ford, 2007; Logan, 2006; Norwich & Lewis, 2007; Wilson & Bedford, 2008). However, it may be inferred that TAs who have little or no training, and are not supported by a mentoring type program may not be aware of or understand the rules inherent to working in a school community. While a number of studies have addressed issues related to the role of TAs in supporting students with disabilities in secondary school settings there are a limited number of studies that examine the TAs perspective. Further research is needed to give the TAs
agency and recognition when examining the knowledge TAs possess when working in schools with students with disabilities.

*Student Related Tasks*

In working with students with disabilities TAs can be responsible for physical, educational, and emotional support of students with disabilities. Their roles are diverse requiring a level of competency across a multi-faceted range of student-related tasks (Angelides et al., 2009; Carroll, 2001; Dymond et al., 2007; Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; M. Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Griffin-Shirley & Matlock, 2004; Inclusive Education Network, 2006; Logan, 2006; Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities, 2005; Pearce & Forlin, 2005). Researchers suggest that TAs can make valuable contributions in promoting participation and social awareness among students with disabilities (French, 2003; Henley, 2010). Conversely, the presence of a TA can result in limited use of the student’s strengths and may possibly create unnecessary or unhealthy ‘dependency and learned helplessness’ (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Griffin-Shirley & Matlock, 2004, p. 129; Logan, 2006). For example, Whitburn (2013) in reporting the outcome of his small-scale study of 5 secondary school vision impaired students in Queensland, noted the students spoke of ‘the embarrassment that they (the student with a disability) often experienced because of their supposed dependence on the support personnel’ (p. 155). Whitburn suggests that TAs be encouraged to provide facilitative (light) services and avoiding inhibitive (heavy) services to accommodate the student’s inclusion into the school. Other research studies suggest that TAs need the knowledge and skills to be able to differentiate between support and overreliance (Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown, & Martin, 2007; Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; M. Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Mansaray, 2006; Takala, 2007). However, less is known about the frequency in which TAs perform these tasks, their knowledge and skills, and the training TAs may have undertaken to perform the tasks effectively.

*Training*

In Victoria, Australia, TAs do not require a qualification to be employed. The Victorian Auditor General’s Report (2012) stated that TAs were selected for employment ‘firstly on ‘personality fit’ and then experience’ implying that training assumed a lesser level of importance when employing TAs (p. 29). The Australian Senate (2002) reported that as TAs are often employed with little or no training the quality of program delivery may be compromised. Similarly, a number of Australian studies have reported the need for training for TAs (Howard & Ford, 2007; Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities, 2005; The Senate, 2002; Wilson & Bedford, 2008). Wilson and Bedford (2008) state that there appears to be significant confusion in terms of the skills required, knowledge attained, potential levels of responsibility, and the role of TAs in the school
structure, which ultimately impacts on the training requirement of TAs. In Australia the range of needs of the students, the expected role the TA and the expectations of the stakeholders could all impact the knowledge and skill required for a TA in supporting a student with disabilities. However, the number of studies based on the Australian school system is limited. Furthermore, there is a dearth of studies that explore the TAs perspectives of their training and professional learning experiences. By using a quantitative questionnaire to explore the TAs perspective of their training and professional learning needs a broader understanding of the TAs knowledge may emerge.

This chapter reports key findings of a recent quantitative study conducted with TAs working in mainstream state secondary schools across Victoria, Australia. This purpose of the study that informs this paper was to explore TAs’ perceptions of their knowledge and preparedness for supporting students with disabilities across a number of common work related items and student related tasks in state secondary schools in Victoria. The study also examined TAs training needs related to these tasks. Specifically, this study sought to investigate the following four aims: (1) the TAs level of knowledge of the listed work related items, (2) the level of training needed to understand these work related items, (3) the level of preparedness of TAs to perform the listed student related tasks, and (4) the level of training needed to perform the student related tasks.

This chapter draws on some of the results of this study to argue that it is relevant to explore TAs perceptions of their preparedness and training to perform work related and student related tasks to provide a better understanding of the role TAs perform in supporting students with disabilities in the mainstream secondary school environment. The results of this study show that in general TAs perceive they have the knowledge and skills to understand and perform their role in supporting students with disabilities in mainstream schools in Victoria. The TAs in this study considered that they had training that enabled them to work within the guidelines of an inclusive school environment, and to perform the listed student related tasks to support students with disabilities in the secondary school environment. Knowing more about how TAs perceive their knowledge and understanding of their role may enable schools to be better positioned to make informed decisions about the policies and deployment of TAs in supporting students in the inclusive secondary school. Furthermore, schools may use this knowledge to plan and support training regimes to better prepare TAs for their role within the school environment.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data for this research was collected using an anonymous on-line questionnaire. The questionnaire sought to investigate TAs’ educational background, knowledge and skills related to specific tasks undertaken as part of their role, and the TAs’ training related to these tasks.
Data Generation

Questionnaire. Having received ethics approval from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), 374 principals from 299 secondary school (Years 7–12) campuses in the state of Victoria, Australia were invited to approach their TAs to participate in the study. Principals were asked to forward an invitational email to the TAs in their school who supported secondary students with disabilities. There were no criteria that excluded any TAs from participating in this research.

The research instrument was a questionnaire aimed to collect data about TAs’ knowledge and training from a TAs’ perspective. The questionnaire was distributed on-line to enable information to be gathered from many individuals from a large sample population across the state of Victoria. This method of quantitative research enabled the collected data to be measured and trends assessed to provide a clear picture of TAs’ perceptions of related tasks and training within their role. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of a review of the literature. In particular, the work of Giangreco (2002) and Carter (2010) informed the development of many of the items included in the questionnaire relating to TAs’ knowledge and skills, the specific tasks that TAs are often reported to perform daily, and specific needs for further professional learning in supporting students with disabilities. The anonymous questionnaire consisted of 28 items that included tick-the-box, nominal, and open-ended questions. This chapter presents the items relevant to TAs work related skills and student related tasks. Seven items gathered demographic data about the participants, For example, age, length of service and number of schools worked in (see Table 1). Participants were also asked to indicate their educational level. Items 15 to 18 sought to explore TAs weekly work schedules including the school setting they work in, the number of students with disabilities, the number of teachers that they work with, and the number of subjects they assist students in (see Table 1). Participants were also asked to indicate the settings in which they supported students. Items 23 to 26 investigated teacher aides’ level of knowledge and skill in carrying out many of the tasks related to working as a TA. For example, in item 24 participants were asked to rate their level of preparedness to perform 18 listed student related tasks on a Likert scale of very prepared, moderately prepared, little prepared and unprepared.

The anonymous on-line questionnaire responses were collected using Survey Monkey across a six week period. The overall return number of responses was 163. Statistical analysis and descriptive analysis were used to summarise the participants’ demographic data. The demographic data included gender, age, years of experience, number of schools worked at, classroom support data and the participants’ level of education. Statistical analysis and descriptive analysis were also used to summarise the teachers’ aides’ item-level responses across the three themes of work related items, student related tasks and training.
Participants. Participants were asked to provide basic demographic data. Table 1 shows the results of these items.

Table 1. Participant demographics and weekly work schedules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant results</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority results</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>94.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Percentages are based on the number of participants who provided information for each item.

Participants were also asked to provide information on their level of education. Results showed that 83.9% of participants had completed year 12. There were 67.5% of participants that had completed post school training at Certificate, Diploma, Undergraduate or Postgraduate level. A number of participants (33.1%) had completed Certificate level education that included nursing, hairdressing, typesetting, horticulture and art. Nine of the participants responded that they were currently studying either a Certificate or undergraduate degree. Five of these participants noted that their studies were in Education. Eighteen of the participants (11%) indicated they had worked as a teacher. The average time as a teacher was 12 years but the majority of responses were in the range of 14 years or less.

Participants were asked to indicate the settings in which they worked with students with disabilities. The results showed that the majority of TAs typically work with students with disabilities in or mostly in general classroom settings (68.0%). The majority of participants worked evenly between working in groups or one-to-one with the students they support (93.1%).

RESULTS

Work Related Items

Level of knowledge. The questionnaire included two items related to the work related items. The first item asked participants to rate their level of knowledge across 13 work related items. The results were grouped and tallied into substantial/moderate knowledge, and some/no knowledge. The results show that the majority of participants indicated that they consider their level of knowledge to be in the substantial/moderate range (89%). This indicates that TAs consider that they have
an understanding of the work related items that impact their role in working as a TA supporting students with disabilities. Table 2 shows the results for this item.

*Training and professional learning.* Item 26 asked the participants to indicate whether they had received training or had no need for training across the listed 13 work related items. In responding ‘no need’ for training teachers’ aides may have been indicating that they had received adequate training in the selected item or they may have been indicating that the selected item was not relevant to their current role. Participants were also asked to rate their need for additional training in these areas. The results were grouped and tallied into two categories: ‘had training or no need’ for training; and ‘need for training.’ Table 2 presents the responses from the participants to this item.

Table 2. Overall ratings of work related items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work related items</th>
<th>Level of knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Substantial/Moderate knowledge (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>96.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your role as a teachers’ aide</td>
<td>96.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical practices relating to confidentiality</td>
<td>94.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic educational terminology</td>
<td>92.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects a disability can have on a student’s life</td>
<td>91.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ rights and responsibilities</td>
<td>90.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands of various learning environments</td>
<td>90.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic instructional and remedial strategies</td>
<td>88.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and procedural safeguards related to students’ behaviour</td>
<td>87.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of programs for students with disabilities</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families’ rights and responsibilities</td>
<td>86.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your legal rights and responsibilities</td>
<td>84.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your role in implementing an IEP</td>
<td>74.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants (69%) indicated they had received training or acquired the knowledge and skills to perform the 13 work related tasks. This implies that the majority of TAs considered that their training or experience gave them the knowledge and skills to understand their role as a TA in supporting students with a disability in a state secondary school in Victoria. In 9 of the listed knowledge standards the difference in results indicated that the ‘no need’ for training is substantially higher than the ‘need for training’ (35.3%) (see Table 2). There were three work related items where the difference in the training results were around 10% (9.9%) where TAs indicated that the ‘need for training’ was similar to the ‘no need for training’ (see Table 2). The work related item ‘your role in implementing an IEP’ is the only item that shows the ‘need for training’ to be higher than the ‘no need’ across the 13 items (~3.4%). This indicates that there are work related items relevant to the role of the TA in which the TAs may have less than adequate knowledge in or understanding of; thereby indicating that training could be beneficial for these work related items.

A number of participants indicated they had participated in training but also indicated they would like more training in some of the listed items. The overall participants’ response for needing training in the work related items was 42%. This result may indicate that the participants consider they have adequate knowledge of the work related item but would like more knowledge. For example, participants responded 59.1% to ‘had training or no need’ to the item ‘basic instructional and remedial strategies’ and also responded 51.7% for ‘need for training’. This indicates that a number of the TAs working in the secondary state school system in Victoria consider they need additional training in these work related areas. Similarly, it may indicate that the training available to TAs does not address these items or that training for these items is not available.

**Student Related Tasks**

The questionnaire included three items related to the student related tasks. The first item asked participants to rate the frequency of performing student related tasks. The second item asked participants to rate their preparedness to perform 18 student related tasks when working with students with disabilities. The third item asked participants about their training related to the 18 student related tasks.

**Frequency of performing student related tasks.** Item 23 invited participants to indicate how often they carried out particular activities in their work as TA. Tasks that participants chose as NA may not be applicable to their understanding of the role they perform, for example ‘write lesson plans’; or they may not be applicable to the students they are currently supporting at the school, for example ‘provide health care assistance.’ NA may also mean that TAs may have, or could, perform these tasks depending on the needs of the students. Similarly, the participants may
have responded ‘never’ because the activity has not currently been allocated to them or because of the different expectations of the schools they currently work. Table 3 presents the majority responses from the participants to this item. The figures in the frequency section of Table 3 represent the sum of the responses to the NA and ‘never’ tasks.

The majority of participants indicated that five of the activities listed were undertaken on a daily basis. Three activities were performed on a weekly or termly basis. In total there were 6 tasks that the majority of participants indicated NA/never because they are not currently performing these tasks with the students they support or because they consider these are tasks that are not applicable to their role in working as a TA supporting students with disabilities in mainstream secondary schools. Three items were not included in the questionnaire frequency item. In retrospect the information that may have been provided could have added depth to the understanding of the role of the TA in supporting students with disabilities in mainstream secondary schools in Victoria.

Preparedness to perform student related tasks. Item 24 of the questionnaire related to TAs’ preparedness to work with students with disabilities. The responses were grouped and tallied into three categories: very prepared; moderate/little/unprepared; and NA. Table 3 presents the participants responses to this item.

The majority of participants indicated that they were very prepared (45.7%) to support students with disabilities across the 18 listed student related tasks. In particular participants indicated they were very prepared (62%) in 10 of the student related tasks they considered applicable to their role in supporting students with disabilities in mainstream secondary schools. This implies that TAs consider they have the knowledge and skills to undertake these student related tasks. One task ‘provide health care assistance’ was also rated in the very prepared category (35.3%) despite it being a task that the majority of TAs (53.3%) considered was NA/never part of their role. This implies that the TAs in this study were not participating in this support role at the time of completing the questionnaire or have never performed this task. However, it may be inferred that a number of TAs considered that if they were required to provide health care assistance to particular students they have the knowledge and skills to perform the task.

There were three tasks that the majority of participants indicated were moderate/little or unprepared for (41.3%). These tasks included ‘implement behaviour management programs’, ‘working with students who have refuge backgrounds’ and ‘working with students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds’. The results indicated that a number of participants (24%) considered these roles to be NA/never. The participants may have responded NA/never to the two tasks regarding the students’ backgrounds because the students they are supporting do not fall into these categories or the schools they work in have a limited number of students from different ethnic or religious backgrounds. Similarly, the behavioural
### Table 3. Overall ratings of student related tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Frequency of task performance</th>
<th>Level of preparedness</th>
<th>Training or professional learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assist single students in class</td>
<td>87.1 Daily</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaise with teachers</td>
<td>80.8 Daily</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with multiple students in a class</td>
<td>72.4 Daily</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate social relationships amongst students</td>
<td>47.7 Daily</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify a student’s work program</td>
<td>46.8 Daily</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare instructional materials</td>
<td>28.5 Weekly</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaise with parents</td>
<td>25.4 Weekly /Termly</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend PSG meetings</td>
<td>64.7 Termly</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write lesson plans</td>
<td>77.1 NA/never</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide therapy assistance</td>
<td>75.5 NA/never</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write reports</td>
<td>70.0 NA/never</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administer student assessments</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide health care assistance</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete administrative paperwork</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement behaviour management programs</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using appropriate technology to assist student learning</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with students who have refuge backgrounds</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ND: No Data        NA: Not Applicable
management role may not have been allocated to the TA, or their student does not fall into this category. The TAs may have indicated NA/never because of the different expectations of the schools they currently work in.

Participants indicated that there were 4 of the listed tasks that were NA/never to their current role (46%) (see Table 3). Despite the NA/never rating to these 4 tasks by the majority of the participants, some participants (20.4%) rated their preparedness to perform these tasks as very prepared.

**Training and Professional Learning**

Item 26 asked the participants to indicate whether they had received training or had no need for training across the listed 18 student related tasks. In responding ‘no need’ for training TAs may have been indicating that they had received adequate training in the selected task or they may have been indicating that the selected task was not relevant to their current role. Participants were also asked to rate their need for additional training in these tasks. The results were grouped and tallied into two categories: ‘had training or no need’ for training; and ‘need for training.’ Table 3 presents the responses from the participants to this item.

Overall the results show that the majority of participants (67.2%) indicated that they had ‘had training or no need’ for training across the 18 listed student related tasks. Participants responded that for 15 of the student related tasks the ‘had training or no need’ for training rating (71%) was higher than the ‘need for training’ category (40.1%). In these 15 tasks TAs considered that they had sufficient knowledge and skills to be able to perform the tasks allocated to them. The result implies that through training or experience TAs have broad levels of understanding of student related tasks that may be assigned to them in secondary schools in Victoria. Some of the tasks had a lower indicator score in the ‘had training or no need’ tally. This may be because the TAs did not need the training or professional development to address this issue at the time of completing the questionnaire or task the may not be relevant to the students they have, or are currently supporting, for example, ‘provide therapy assistance.’ Whether through training, professional learning or experience TAs indicated that they felt they were prepared to perform the listed student related tasks with understanding.

As shown in Table 3 the there were only three tasks that TAs indicated that their ‘training needs’ were higher than the ‘had training or no need’ for training. The three tasks were ‘using appropriate technology to assist student learning’, ‘working with students who have refuge backgrounds’ and ‘implement behaviour management programs’. As previously discussed, the responses from the TAs regarding student backgrounds may have impacted this result. Similarly, it could be inferred that TAs would like training in these areas but they may have limited access to such training or training courses to address these tasks may not be available. Moreover, as the role of TAs is dynamic the TAs may not have had training in the listed task as it was not in their job description or they did not consider it was part of their role, however the
TEACHERS' AIDES' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR TRAINING NEEDS

TAs could now consider it would be appropriate to have training in these tasks. For example, the need for training response to ‘using appropriate technology to assist student learning’ may be a result of the increase in the use of technology in schools. Likewise, the need for training in the item ‘implementing behavioural management programs’, may be a reaction to an increase in the potential for TAs to be allocated this task.

DISCUSSION

Examining the perspectives of the TAs is important as it provides a basis for understanding their perceived ability to perform their role in supporting students with disabilities in an inclusive educational setting. Similarly, by examining TAs’ perceptions of their role the results may be used to inform decisions regarding the deployment of TAs within the inclusive support structure of the school. This study addresses the gap in the literature by exploring the TAs’ perspective of their knowledge and training in supporting students with disabilities in mainstream secondary schools.

Work Related Items

This section of the study explored the TAs’ perceptions of their knowledge of work related items. Work related items refer to the guiding principles of working within the school setting. The findings of this study showed that TAs considered they had considerable knowledge of work related items relevant to supporting students with disabilities within an inclusive school setting. The result is that TAs, by being assigned to support students with disabilities in mainstream schools, can be pivotal in interpreting and performing inclusive practice. Their daily work entails enacting inclusive strategies and programs through putting ‘the theory into practice’. However, despite the knowledge and understanding TAs consider they have of the needs of individual students they support; TAs may not receive support within the school to uphold their responsibilities in performing their roles. This may be especially so within the political climate and culture of the school where TAs consider that members of the school often think TAs are not skilled and lack a level of education, which can often be reflected in their lower standing in the school hierarchy.

Student Related Tasks

This section of the study explored the TAs’ perceptions of their knowledge and skills of student related tasks. Student related tasks refer to the tasks involved in supporting students with disabilities within the inclusive school setting. In this study TAs considered they were very prepared to perform daily tasks that were related to supporting students in the classroom. This implies that the majority of TAs consider they are sufficiently prepared to perform the tasks they frequently perform.
Similar to Carter et al. (2009) the results did not specify whether this was because TAs were assigned to tasks they were more prepared to perform or whether they were competent in tasks they regularly performed. However, consideration should be given to the findings that participants had been working as TAs for an average of 9.9 years therefore it could be inferred that on-the-job experience provided the knowledge and skills to enable TAs to rate themselves as more than adequate in performing these tasks. Additionally, although small in number, eighteen of the participants (11%) indicated they had also worked as a qualified teacher, implying they have a high level of preparedness to perform their role.

The findings of this study show that TAs consider they have the knowledge and skills to assist the students they support to achieve their individual educational goals. This implies that TAs have gained skills or knowledge related to these tasks through experience, training and/or professional learning. However, while TAs see themselves as very prepared to perform this role, external evaluators question the TAs pedagogical competence in performing these tasks (e.g., M. Giangreco, 2003; Webster et al., 2010). For example, as reported by Webster et al. (2010) from the outcome from the DISS project in the UK, students receiving most TA support made less academic progress than similar students who received little or no TA support. This finding implies that the allocation of a pedagogical role to TAs supporting students with disabilities has a negative impact on students’ academic outcomes. Such findings further question the allocated roles and training of the TAs within the mainstream school setting.

The study indicated there were some student related tasks that some TAs considered they were less than prepared to perform. This implies that these TAs may need to gain knowledge and skills through training or professional learning in some areas related to their roles as TAs. It may also indicate that training or professional learning is not available, for example, there is no training/courses that address these issues; or is not accessible to these participants. Also funding, time release or distance may inhibit the TAs accessibility to any relevant training. Similarly, TAs may have indicated they are less than prepared to perform these tasks as they are not supporting students with these needs at the time of completing the questionnaire, for example ‘provide therapy assistance’; or the participants may not consider the task is applicable to their role as a TA, for example ‘write reports’.

Training

This section of the study investigated TAs’ perceptions of their relevant training and training needs regarding the listed work related items and student related tasks. The study also examined the TAs educational levels. The results of this study indicated that the majority of TAs (67.5%) have had post school training. Despite TAs having post school training it may be inferred, as Riggs (2005) found, that they had no experience of working in the school setting prior to working as TAs. Teachers’ aides who had no preservice training or formal training may have learnt about their allocated
tasks through mentoring programs or through trial and error. However, while Salas-Velasco (2007) reports that adequately educated workers require a shorter period of job training than do under-educated graduates, Carroll (2001) contends that the quality of the instructional services provided to TAs is directly related to the training they receive. This implies that TAs who have post school training are quicker to learn the skills required in performing their role, however the type of learning could create concern for some TAs. For example, not only does on-the-job training take time, the type and quality of training the TA receives is dependent on the knowledge and skills of the supervising personnel (Carroll, 2001; Carter et al., 2009; Devlin, 2008; Ghere & York-Barr, 2007). The outcome may be that TAs are working with limited knowledge of the guiding principles relevant to being employed in schools; or they may be supporting students with disabilities with inadequate knowledge of the individual needs of the students they are assigned to.

The findings of this study showed that the majority of TAs had received training or had no need for training in the listed work related items and student related tasks. The results imply that TAs have accessed training or have gained knowledge through experience to perform their role. However, despite the TAs perception of their training levels, a number of researchers question the validity of some of the roles being allocated to TAs (Angelides et al., 2009; M. Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Gibson, Paatsch, & Toe, 2014; Inclusive Education Network, 2006; Webster et al., 2010). The findings of the current study showed that there was as a divergence in the tasks allocated to TAs across different schools. This may indicate that there are different expectations within different schools or it may also be interpreted that TAs are being given tasks that should fall within the responsibility of certified teachers and the school administration. It could also imply that the tasks allocated to TAs may be reactive in addressing the needs of the students with disabilities in the classroom. It may be interpreted that schools could manipulate TAs roles to address different issues that arise in supporting these students, rather than allocating these responsibilities to fully qualified teachers or specialist staff. The outcome of allocating these tasks to TAs could have legal implications for the school (Etscheidt, 2005). Moreover, it should also raise questions as to the allocation of these tasks to undertrained TAs. This may be resolved by TAs participating in a regime of formal training that could provide them with the knowledge to clearly understand their role and responsibilities in supporting students with disabilities in an inclusive school setting. For example, a preservice training course, formal induction training, or mentoring programs could enable TAs to access the knowledge recommended as they start their careers. Furthermore, formal training could establish unambiguous role definitions for TAs. By formalising the TAs’ role definition all members of the school community would be able to work towards accessing and understanding the explicit roles of the TA and the potential for misuse or overuse of TAs in the school may be avoided.

Although the pragmatic reasons for employing TAs are predictable, the effects of the presence of a TA on student independence, social interactions, behaviour, and
academic achievement are still challenges for many within the school community (French, 2003). Despite concerns by researchers, this study found that TAs consider they have the work related and student related knowledge and skills to support students with disabilities in the mainstream state secondary school. However, the implicit confidence of TAs to address the issues that impact students with disabilities in the regular classroom may adversely affect the students they are there to support.

LIMITATIONS

The findings from this present study represent a sample of TAs who: (1) were forwarded the questionnaire by their Principal; and (2) were willing to participate in the questionnaire. The sample was drawn from a single state in Australia and therefore the results may not be reflective of the views of TAs in other states or regions that employ TAs. This study relied on the perceptions of the participants, with no verification of their experiences through observation, nor through the perceptions of other stakeholders such as schools staff including teachers, parents, and students. Despite the limitations of the current study, the information gained offers insight into the perceptions of TAs regarding their knowledge and skills in supporting students with disabilities in the mainstream secondary school system.

CONCLUSION

The Australian Senate (2002) recommended that all TAs working with students with disabilities should be qualified in special education from an accredited TA training course. The type of training TAs undertake can impact their learning. For example, whether the TAs’ training course has been designed to give a broad overview of the knowledge and skills that may be relevant to their roles in the schools they are employed by; or whether the courses are directed to the needs of practicing TAs involving more comprehensive training focussing on areas including behaviour, learning styles and needs, and communication. Similarly, whether one course can provide sufficient knowledge to TAs to perform a myriad of tasks across a myriad of schools may be debatable. However, by giving TAs understanding and confidence regarding their role in supporting students with disabilities they are more likely to seek out professional learning to understand and provide support to address the differing needs particular to each individual student. Furthermore, understanding the particular needs of each student may encourage TAs to provide, as Whitburn (2013) describes, facilitative (light) services and avoid inhibitive (heavy) services to accommodate the student’s inclusion into the school. Formal training for TAs could establish unambiguous role definitions and avoid what Giangreco et al. (2006, p. 216) call the ‘training trap’ where teachers and special educators relinquish even more instructional responsibilities to TAs based on the notion that ‘now they are trained’. TAs should not be expected to be the expert in all fields of curriculum
but should be capable of providing the physical, social and educational support to students with disabilities to facilitate learning and be an active member of the school community. A clear definition of the role and its boundaries would support TAs and schools to maximise the benefits of TAs support for students with disabilities.

REFERENCES


Giangreco, M. (2002). Project EVOLVE.


Gibson, D., Paatsch, L., & Toe, D. (2014). An analysis of the role of teachers’ aides in a state secondary school, as perceived by the teaching staff and the teachers’ aides. Australasian Journal of Special Education. [In print]


_Dianne Gibson_

_Visiting Teacher_