

**THE ROLES OF TEACHER ASSISTANTS
IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION SETTINGS**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Education**

in

The School of Education

at

Lakehead University

by

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B.A., B.Ed.**

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ISBN 0-315-78959-X

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ABSTRACT

While the occupation of teacher assistant has become rooted in the Ontario School System no research exists concerning the roles these teacher assistants perform in Ontario. There is also a paucity of research which examines teacher assistant roles from the point of view of teacher assistants themselves.

This research investigated the roles of teacher assistants in two elementary school special education classrooms in Ontario. Qualitative methods were used to gain an insider's view of what teacher assistants do in the classroom. These methods included interviews with teacher assistants, teachers, principals and a superintendent as well as observations of teacher assistants and teachers working together in the classroom and document analysis of the Site School Board Teacher Assistant job description and relevant Ontario Teachers' Federation documents.

Based on the data a conceptual model of the roles of the teacher assistant was developed. This model consisted of two categories of roles. Category I was called *Working with Children* and consisted of five roles: instructor, behaviour manager, observer, caregiver and team player. Category II was called *Non-Contact with Children* and consisted of two roles: technician and clerk.

Implications of this research include the development of curriculum for

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preservice and inservice programs for teacher assistants as well as augmenting curriculum in teacher preservice special education training in order to address how to fully utilize the teacher assistants in the classroom. Further research is recommended to investigate the caregiver role in greater depth and to examine the relationship between the roles of the teacher and the teacher assistant.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Dr. Rita Irwin who chaired my thesis committee and whose qualitative research course motivated me to pursue a qualitative research thesis. Her advice, guidance and patience are greatly appreciated. Thanks also to committee members Dr. Larry Korteweg whose inquisitive questions I always found stimulating and to Marta Blenkarn for her assistance on the committee.

My thanks are also extended to the people who were the participants in this study. They shared their beliefs and their professional lives with me allowing me an insider's view of the world of a teacher assistant. Their dedication and commitment to the effective education of children is reflected in this study.

Thank you to Jane Breckenridge who typed the thesis and the several drafts preceding the final version. Fortunately she had a good sense of humour which helped us both get through the production process.

I also wish to express my appreciation to Rosemary Timothy who took up the laborious task of critiquing the entire thesis from the point of view of a novice reader. She was quite helpful in making sure the text is clear and readable.

If this thesis is *Digna Quae Legantur* (worthy of being read), it is certainly due to the assistance of the aforementioned people.

Chapter I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction to the Problem

As we enter the nineties, the position of teacher assistant, a relatively new position in the education systems of North America, has become established in Ontario. Teacher assistants are employed primarily in special education settings at the elementary school level (grades one to eight). They are also utilized in junior and senior kindergarten classes where enrolment levels are high (usually above 18 students per class) and in secondary school special education classes and resource rooms.

While there has been tremendous growth in the use of teacher assistants (Pickett, 1984) the research on the roles of the occupation are historically scarce (Woolf & Bassett, 1988). In recent years, educational researchers have advocated and conducted studies of teacher assistants (McKenzie & Houk, 1986b; Pickett, 1984, 1986b; Steckelberg & Vasa, 1986; Vasa & Steckelberg 1984). A review of the literature reveals that a number of issues are being raised such as: the qualifications and training of teacher assistants (Frith & Lindsey, 1980, 1982; Learn, 1988; Pickett, 1986b; Vasa & Steckelberg, 1984), the certification of teacher assistants (Frith & Lindsey 1982; Pickett, 1984, 1986a), the effectiveness of teacher assistants (Blessing, 1967; Case & Johnson, 1986; Fafard, 1977; Johnson, 1987; Manning, 1979; Shortinghuis & Froman, 1974; Walter, 1983), the training of teachers in effectively using

teacher assistants (Boomer, 1980; Heller & Pickett, 1983; Lacattiva, 1985; McKenzie & Houk, 1986a; Steckelberg & Vasa, 1988) and the roles of the teacher assistant and the teacher in the classroom, (Boomer, 1982; Esbensen, 1966; Escudero & Sears, 1982; Frith & Lindsey, 1980; McKenzie & Houk, 1986a, 1986b; Steckelberg & Vasa, 1986).

Although all of these studies have contributed to our understanding of teacher assistants, the latter studies dealing with the roles of teacher assistants are particularly important to the study being reported here. They suggest that the teacher assistant be involved in delivering instructional and behavioural management activities to varying degrees under the direction and supervision of the teacher. However, what these studies neglect to describe are the insider's point of view. In other words, how do teacher assistants perceive their roles? This study seeks to resolve this research problem through the use of qualitative research methodology.

Personal Ground

As a college teacher responsible for the pre-service training of teacher assistants and in particular the supervision of their field practicum I am especially interested in investigating the roles of the teacher assistant. I am also involved with the teacher assistant in-service program at a local board which has further heightened my interest in the roles of both the teacher assistant and the teacher. I also had worked as a special education teacher in the late seventies and was the first teacher in my school board to be assigned a teacher assistant. When I was searching for a research topic I began to think back on that time period. For the first time, I realized my shortcomings

concerning how I used my teacher assistant. Although time has clouded my memory of that setting, I recall essentially using the assistant in a clerical/technical capacity. My training in special education at the time prepared me to work with the students, but excluded any mention of teacher assistants. I think my teacher assistant, who had a university degree, would probably say the same thing that the assistants in the Woolf and Bassett (1988) study said – she was underutilized. This reflection on where I am in my professional life as well as where I was helped foreshadow the research problem I eventually decided to pursue. I felt that an exploration into how teacher assistants view their roles would not only help me in my current teaching position, but would also make a contribution towards helping teachers and Faculties of Education to think about the many roles teacher assistants fulfill. Most teachers are not fully cognizant of the many ways teacher assistants can be utilized in the classroom to help children learn. During my field practicum supervision visits some teachers will ask about suggestions on how to use their teacher assistant. As well many experienced teacher assistants and student-teacher assistants have expressed disappointment with being underutilized.

Background and Significance of the Investigation

The first study of the use of teacher assistants was by Cruickshank & Haring (1957) in a special education project at Syracuse University, New York. They recommended increased use of teacher assistants as an effective means of allowing the teacher more contact time with students. Initially teacher assistants were used for clerical type duties such as typing, filing and

classroom housekeeping chores. However, by the late 1960s, teacher assistants were working directly with children under the direction of the classroom teacher (Blessing, 1967; Reid & Reid, 1974). During the 1970s, (Fafard, 1977; Frith & Lindsey, 1980) and through the 1980s, (Pickett, 1986b; Vasa & Steckelberg, 1987) teacher assistants' roles related to working with children in the classroom continued to expand.

Along with the support for teacher assistants to spend most of their time working directly with the children (Boomer, 1982; Esbensen, 1966; Woolf & Bassett, 1988) there are many calls for formal training and certification of teacher assistants (Frith & Lindsey, 1982; Pickett 1986a). A report commissioned by the Texas Education Agency notes that eleven states have compulsory certification programs (Identified Competencies for Special Education Aides, 1984). Certification would contribute to both educators and parents feelings of confidence about the competencies of teacher assistants. In addition, certification would help teacher assistants themselves feel they were "true paraprofessionals" with a recognized standing in the educational system (S. Grigg, T. Harpe, F. Hawdon, personal communication, October 1989).¹

Related to the certification issue are the calls for formal training (both pre-service and in-service) for teacher assistants. University professors (Frith & Lindsey, 1980, 1982; McKenzie & Houk, 1986a, 1986b; Pickett 1986a, 1986b; and Steckelberg & Vasa, 1986, 1988) strongly recommend training for teacher assistants. They also want to see teacher training programs include instruction on how to fully utilize a teacher assistant in the classroom. McKenzie and Houk (1986b) point out that the United States National Education Association has called on teacher-training institutions to more fully prepare teachers in the

effective use of teacher assistants in the classroom. While the increase in the roles of the teacher assistant and the calls for training and certification are significant, the most visible indication of the expanding use of teacher assistants is the dramatic increase in their numbers. Pickett (1984), through a longitudinal series of surveys of state education agencies, reports that the number of special education paraprofessionals had increased from 27,000 in 1972 to 150,000 in 1983. Both Pickett (1984) and Frith and Lindsey (1982) have projected increasing growth in the numbers of teacher assistants that will be utilized in the future. Their projections proved valid as the United States Department of Education (1987) reported more than 300,000 teacher assistants working in American school systems in 1987. Although no system-wide growth statistics are available in Ontario (C. Searle, personal communication, October 5, 1989)² information available from the Sault Ste. Marie Boards of Education indicates similar growth trends as those reported in the United States. In Sault Ste. Marie the Public School Board employ over 50 teacher assistants and have experienced "a substantial increase in the number of teacher aides over the past 10 years" (C. Healy, personal communication February 12, 1990).³ The Separate School Board employ over 25 teacher assistants and also have experienced an increase in the number teacher assistants over the past decade (C. Somme, personal communication, June 6, 1990).⁴ Other Northern Ontario Boards such as Kenora and Dryden report employing 15 to 16 teacher aides (Confederation College, personal communication, May 1988).⁵

The Ontario Teachers' Federation (O.T.F.) has recognized the increasing incidence of teacher assistants in Ontario classrooms and has produced two

documents within the last three years which addresses the use of teacher assistants. The O.T.F. state the use of teacher assistants is increasing due to the growing list of demands made on teachers to meet the needs of children in today's complex society as well as a broadening of curriculum that emphasizes the development of positive attitudes, life skills and mastery of basic academic skills. The O.T.F. use the term "auxiliary personnel" in their publications, We The Teachers of Ontario and Auxiliary Personnel in the Schools of Ontario. Under auxiliary personnel the terms "assistant" and "aide" are used in the O.T.F. documents. While both documents outline duties and responsibilities of the auxiliary personnel there has been no research to determine if the policies for utilizing teacher assistants are in congruence with the practice of teachers in the classroom.

The significant increase in teacher assistants is due primarily to the passage of special education legislation such as P.L. 94-142 (The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) in the United States (Boomer, 1980; Lacattiva, 1985). Similar legislation such as Bill 82, Ontario's Education Amendment Act 1980, has been passed in most Canadian provinces (Winzer, 1990). These acts, which guarantee education services for all children regardless of their mental and/or physical abilities, have fueled the mainstreaming movement. Consequently schools have opened their doors to children with disabilities who were not previously able to access the regular school system. According to D. Marshall, Superintendent of Special Services, Sault Ste. Marie Public School Board, school administrators have hired teacher assistants to help teachers meet the needs of these children who require much more individualized attention.

With the growing numbers of teacher assistants in the field, their expanding roles in education, and the calls for formal training of teacher assistants, more research into what a teacher assistant actually does in the classroom and what they should do is required. In addition, this research would also contribute to the training of teachers on the effective use of teacher assistants. McKenzie and Houk (1986b), two professors at the College of Education, Western Kentucky University recommend identifying "exemplary models of paraprofessional management" (p.45) and "outstanding aides" (p. 45) and then using these to conduct "descriptive research concerning the specific tasks performed by paraprofessionals at a variety of grade and program-type levels ..." (p. 45). From the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Steckelberg and Vasa (1986) found differences between teachers and teacher aides in how they view their role relationships. For instance, many of the teachers viewed themselves to be more democratic in the role relationships than did the teacher assistant with whom they worked. The study concluded with a recommendation for further study of the roles.

More studies on the roles of teacher assistants would also contribute to development and/or modification of curriculum in related training programs. Within the last four years two Ontario Community Colleges (Sault and Confederation) have begun two year diploma programs for the training of teacher assistants. As well community colleges in Alberta also offer teacher assistant diploma programs. There are several junior college level teacher assistant training programs in the United States. For any training program to be effective it must be sensitive to the roles of the occupation for which it is preparing the student to enter. It must also be aware and responsive to the

roles of others with whom the student will come in regular contact once they enter the occupation. In addition, the policies of the employer and the employee association or union as well as any legal acts or government regulations, must be considered. The Ontario Ministry of Education has done no research on teacher assistants. (C. Searle, personal communication, October 5, 1989). By conducting more research on the roles of the teacher assistant from the teacher assistant's perspective and comparing that perspective to the views of teachers, administrators and the Ontario Teacher's Federation information will be gained which may help enhance the effectiveness of teacher assistant training programs. Faculties of Education may also find the information valuable should they decide to incorporate training on the use of teacher assistant in their pre-service teacher programs. In addition, the Ministry of Education should begin to develop an information bank on how teacher assistants are used in Ontario. This study will contribute to that bank.

Research Questions

While research exists on the roles of the teacher assistant there are no studies which examine the roles from the teacher assistant's point of view.

The purpose of this study is to examine the roles of two teacher assistants in two Ontario elementary school classrooms from the perspectives of teacher assistants and the perspectives of those who work directly with them or who influence the way they may be utilized.

The following research questions are addressed:

1. What are the roles (ie. the duties, responsibilities and perceptions) of teacher assistants in an Ontario elementary school?
 - a) How do the teacher assistants define their roles?
 - b) How do the supervising classroom teachers define the teacher assistant's roles?
 - c) How do the administrators define the roles of the teacher assistant?
 - d) How does the Ontario Teachers' Federation define the roles of teacher assistants?
2. How do the views of the teacher assistant compare with the views of the teacher?
3. How do the views of others related to but not in direct daily contact with the teacher assistant compare with the views of the teacher assistant and the teacher?

Conceptual Framework

This study used a qualitative approach in an effort to develop a complete picture of the teacher assistant's roles in the classroom and the factors which influence those roles. By using this approach I attempted to get insider viewpoints which offered a deeper understanding of, and new insights into the subject of the study than other methods of research (Borg & Gall, 1983). Observing and interviewing the research subjects in their own natural work setting provides data which allows a more intimate understanding of their situation since the data is obtained directly from the subjects and also considers their immediate environment (Bogdan & Biklen 1982). Other researchers who have investigated teacher assistants' roles from a quantitative approach recognize that more in-depth studies are needed and recommend that descriptive research be done (McKenzie & Houk, 1986b).

Job descriptions, policy papers, journal articles and text books exist which

state or suggest the roles the teacher assistant should perform. This information is usually written by people who have not worked in the job nor worked with a teacher assistant. Often the closest they have come to the position is reading responses to a set of survey questions or asking teachers or administrators what they think the roles should be. While the opinions of teachers and administrators are definitely important, the perspective of the teacher assistants themselves is also important. Yet, the latter has received extremely little coverage in the literature. Through a qualitative approach, the duties stated in a job description or guidelines written in a policy paper can be examined to determine how they translate into daily activities, procedures and interactions and what influences the translation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

The data analysis from this study will be useful in the development and/or modifications of job descriptions and policy documents related to the use of teacher assistants. It will also contribute to the curriculum of training programs. In addition it will either confirm the roles suggested by others and/or will provide new alternatives for educational researchers to consider. With qualitative research the theory is grounded, that is, it is not formulated before beginning the research but evolves as a result of the data that is gathered (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Therefore this study will generate new questions to be answered about the roles of a teacher assistant as well as providing a more informed understanding of the teacher assistant roles and the factors which influence them.

Method

This qualitative research was a multiple-case study to allow some generalizability of the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Two sites were selected. The sites have a teacher assistant and a teacher who have worked together and who have had the same principal for a minimum of three years. By utilizing experienced personnel who have worked together for a significant length of time, the observation of the day-to-day interactions between the teacher assistant and her supervisors yielded an accurate representation of the roles. Internal sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) was done with the assistance of the Superintendent of the anonymous board. This person identified sites which met the above criteria and which represented a "typical" teacher-teacher assistant situation.

The study involved observations, interviews and document review of job descriptions and related policy memos. Two observations, for each of the two teacher-teacher assistant sites, along with individual interviews with the two teachers and teacher assistants involving a series of open-ended questions were included. Each participant was interviewed twice, with the first interview occurring after the first observation and the second interview occurring approximately six weeks after the first observation. Before the second interview, a document analysis occurred regarding the teacher assistant job description, related Board policy memos and Ontario Teacher Federation policy memos to compare what is stated in those documents with the data from the first set of interviews and observations. During this six week time interval, interviews were also held with the principal at each site and the superintendent responsible for the teacher assistants.

The second set of interviews was used to clarify any issues or concerns identified as a result of the analysis through coding and triangulation of the data obtained through the first set of interviews, observations and document reviews. The purpose of the second set of observations was to confirm data from earlier observations or interviews and to see if any other factors appeared that were overlooked in the first round of data gathering. Final analysis of all data was then conducted with conclusions and recommendations as well as an attempt to ground the work to the suggestions and findings found in the literature by Boomer (1980, 1982); McKenzie & Houk (1986a, 1986b); Pickett (1984, 1986a); and Steckelberg & Vasa (1986).

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study and require clarification to ensure a mutual understanding between the reader and the author.

Roles. Review of the relevant literature (Reid & Reid 1974; Boomer 1980; Steckelberg & Vasa 1986) indicates that roles related to the position refer to the duties and responsibilities, the beliefs held by those employed in the position, and the beliefs held by those who interact with the incumbents of the position.

Teacher Assistant. "...an individual who serves under the direction of a classroom teacher as an assistant in the educational process" (Vasa & Steckelberg 1984 p. 1). In the literature, as well as in the field, the terms "teacher aide", "instructional aide", "classroom aide", and "paraprofessional", and are often used interchangeably with the term "teacher assistant."

Paraprofessionals. Since the term paraprofessional is the most popular alternative term, the following definition by Fimian, Fafard and Howell (1984) (cited in Marozas & May, 1988 p. 50) is offered.

... directly assist special education teachers in the delivery of instruction, are credited for their assistance through title and are employed by the school. Usually, paraprofessionals have pursued additional training for their position or are seeking a career in special education. Depending on state requirements paraprofessionals may or may not be certified. They frequently have designated responsibilities in the classroom and are expected to have more numerous and diverse skills in a variety of subject areas in comparison to volunteers and peer tutors. Paraprofessionals often include teacher associates, technicians, assistants and teacher aides.

While the paraprofessional definition makes specific reference to special education teachers, teacher assistants in Ontario are also utilized in Junior and Senior Kindergarten classes (D. Marshall, personal communication, December 12, 1989).⁶

Administration. For the purposes of this study this term refers to principals and superintendents.

Summary

In this chapter the research problem was introduced, that is, the lack of research examining the roles of teacher assistants from the insider's point of view. The purpose of this research was to examine through qualitative research methods how teacher assistants perceived themselves. Information was also provided on my own background and reasons for pursuing this research problem. The background and significance of this research as well as a conceptual framework was also discussed. By examining and comparing the

roles from the vantage points of experienced teacher assistants and teachers as well as administrators and the teachers' federation information was produced which helped clarify the roles of the teacher assistant and the teacher. The findings of this study could be used as well to address other issues expressed in the literature such as developing and/or improving curriculum in teacher assistant and teacher training programs; designing accurate job descriptions; and determining necessary qualifications for teacher assistants.

In the background and significance section of this chapter some references were made to the literature. An extensive review of the literature related to the occupation of teacher assistant will be provided in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to develop a better understanding of what teacher assistants' roles are in the classroom. To help contribute to this understanding, the review of the literature provides the background information concerning the history of the occupation, the main findings of the literature to date and the concerns and recommendations for further research. This review establishes the need for more exploration into the use of teacher assistants and, in particular, what roles they are playing and/or should be playing in the school system today.

Most of the literature examined was published during the 1980s. Previous to 1980, relatively little information was found, although this would be consistent with the relatively small numbers of teacher assistants employed prior to 1980. There appeared to be a direct correlation between the increasing numbers of teacher assistants in the late 1970s and 1980s (Pickett, 1984) and the increased volume of literature published on teacher assistants since that time.

With the passing of special education legislation in the United States in 1975 (Boomer, 1980; Lacattiva, 1985) and in Canada during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Winzer, 1990) the number of teacher assistants grew tremendously and educational researchers began to focus more intently on this occupation.

Despite the increase in the literature there is a recognition that information on the roles of the teacher assistants is scarce (Woolf & Bassett, 1988). From this body of literature emerged a battery of questions with incomplete answers and calls for further research (McKenzie & Houk, 1986b; Pickett, 1984, 1986b; Steckelberg and Vasa, 1986; Vasa & Steckelberg, 1984).

This chapter reviews the literature by organizing the literature into four sections: history of the occupation, the qualifications, training, and certification of teacher assistants, roles of the teacher and teacher assistant, and the effectiveness of teacher assistants. In each section the findings, concerns, and recommendations, are presented and the relevance of the literature to this research is stated. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature.

History and Evolution of the Occupation

The first documented use of teacher assistants was in a pilot study at Syracuse University in 1957. Cruickshank & Haring (1957) reported on the use and effectiveness of teacher assistants in special education classrooms. The teacher assistant roles called for the performance of clerical duties such as typing and filing and general duties such as housekeeping duties or playground supervision. No professional training was required of the teacher assistant. Cruickshank & Haring reported that the use of teacher assistants gave the teacher more time with individual students because the teachers were freed from non-teaching duties. The researchers advocated the increased use of teacher assistants.

Pickett (1986a) reported that during the 1950s some American school boards began to use teacher assistants for clerical and administrative duties

normally handled by teachers. The rationale for this was a shortage of teachers. Similar to the Syracuse University project the board administrators reasoned that teachers could spend more time instructing students if teacher assistants performed some of the teachers' non-instructional duties.

By the mid 1960s the roles of teacher assistants changed significantly as they began to become involved in some instructional duties. Blessing (1967) recommended that teacher assistants perform some instructional duties such as listening to children's drill work or reading to them. Esbensen (1966) emphasized the important role of teacher assistants in the actual delivery of instruction and suggested that their clerical duties were a lesser priority than helping the teacher deliver learning activities. The trend towards instructional types of activities continued into the 1970s. In a study examining roles of teacher assistants, Reid & Reid (1974, p.9) stated that most teacher assistants "participated in the areas of language arts, mathematics and reading on a daily basis." Fafard (1977) reported growing support for teacher assistants performing instructional delivery activities designed and supervised by teachers.

The use of teacher assistants increased dramatically during the late 1970s and this pattern continued throughout the 1980s. Frith & Lindsey (1982) report a 42% increase in the use of paraprofessionals in the United States school systems between 1976 and 1982. The United States Department of Education in 1984 reported that 288,301 instructional aides were employed with American school boards which was a 7.4% increase over 1983 (Staff in Public Elementary Schools, 1987. p.5). Three years later 331,197 teacher assistants were employed (Public School Student Membership and Staff, 1987. p.6). These significant increases were attributed primarily to the passage of special

education legislation which required school boards to provide greatly expanded programs and services to children who were identified as requiring special education intervention (Boomer, 1980; Frith & Lindsey, 1980; Lacattiva, 1985). Similar special education legislation was passed in Canada during the 1980s (Winzer 1990).

In addition to their increasing numbers, teacher assistants were being called on to take more active instructional roles under the supervision of the teacher. Frith & Lindsey (1980, 1982) called for teacher assistants to be more involved in assisting teachers with diagnostic planning and individual student program implementation. Other researchers (Lacattiva, 1986; Learn, 1988; McKenzie & Houk, 1986a, 1986b; Vasa & Steckelberg, 1984) echoed this call all strongly suggesting the most effective use of the teacher assistant was to help the teacher plan and deliver education programs and activities for children.

The topic of this research explored the teacher assistant's roles in an elementary school in Ontario. Comparisons of the findings were made to the literature to determine if the roles have evolved similarly to the pattern found in the literature.

Qualifications, Training and Certification

The literature reviewed in this section identified concerns raised by researchers about teacher assistants having the proper qualifications and training to enable them to meet their expanding roles. Linked closely to the qualifications and training issue were calls for certification of teacher assistants in order to ensure a minimum level of quality instruction in the classroom.

Calvin (1975) noted that there were misunderstandings and frustrations

expressed by all educational staff concerning how teacher assistants were employed in the school system.

If these frustrations and misunderstandings are to cease, an increased amount of preservice and inservice has to take place. Teacher aides, as members of the paraprofession, must be given the skills and training necessary to effectively assist in facilitating learning. The rapid expansion and development of the teacher aide paraprofession has increasingly influenced the roles of instruction in our educational system. (p.2)

Calvin (1975) suggested that in order for training to be effective the teacher assistant roles must be defined clearly and agreed to by teacher assistants, teachers, and administrators. He also suggested that all three levels of staff should have input into both preservice and inservice training and that teachers and administrators participate in seminars and workshops concerning the proper use of teacher assistants.

While training programs may vary according to their location Calvin (1975) recommended the following common components: duties and responsibilities based on grade levels, subjects and student population; theories and practices related to the teaching-learning process; and the development of interpersonal skill related to communicating effectively with students, teachers and administrators.

Frith & Lindsey (1980, p.18) noted that for teacher assistants to cope with the wide variety of needs that students have, "quality preservice preparation programs of a multidimensional and comprehensive nature should be developed and offered." They suggested that the training programs include courses which address the learning and behavioural characteristics of children, the school curriculum of the home state, special education strategies, and characteristics of exceptional children. Also included in the preservice program

should be a field practicum. In conjunction with the preservice training Frith and Lindsey also called for inservice training for currently employed teacher assistants. As well, this inservice training could be used to maintain and enhance the skills of recently graduated teacher assistants. "Qualitative and structured inservice training must be provided for the paraprofessional to maintain and refine acceptable competency levels" (p.20).

McKenzie and Houk (1986b, p.44) recommended that "systematic preservice training" be developed and offered to teacher assistants. Their recommendation was based on a study of 23 resource teachers who worked with teacher assistants in their classrooms. The teachers were surveyed using a questionnaire which asked them to respond to a series of statements concerning how teacher assistants are used and how they should be used in the classroom. Based on the results, McKenzie and Houk suggested that a teacher assistant training program should "focus upon the acquisition of specific skills necessary for working with handicapped students, including behaviour management, observing and recording behaviour, modifying materials and conducting informal assessments" (p.44). They also noted "concern for the manner" (p.41) in which teacher assistants are prepared to work in the classroom (as expressed in the literature) and that there is "lack of awareness among teachers on how to incorporate them into their instructional programs" (p.42). Thus, they also advocated that teacher-training institutions create courses that train teachers on effective utilization of teacher assistants.

Steckelberg and Vasa (1988) developed a preservice and inservice program for teachers on how to use teacher assistants productively. As well as supporting teacher assistant training at both the preservice and inservice levels

(Vasa, Steckelberg, & Ronning, 1982; Vasa & Steckelberg, 1984) they advocated that the teacher play an active role in the teacher assistant's selection and in-service training. Steckelberg and Vasa (1988, p.5) called for teachers to receive training which would enable them to develop and document "on-the-job training" for teacher assistants and to provide "corrective feedback to paraprofessionals." They suggested that the teacher give the teacher assistant training on instructional delivery, the monitoring of student progress, and communication skills.

Learn (1988) felt that in order for teacher assistants to be effective in special needs classrooms they must have in-service training. This training should include topics such as role expectations, characteristics of exceptional children, behaviour management techniques, observation techniques, tutoring techniques and first aid. Learn suggested that the inservice training be delivered by principals, teachers, and counsellors and that the training include observation of a variety of special needs settings.

As well as supporting calls for formal training of teacher assistants, Pickett (1986a, 1986b) recommended certification of all teacher assistants. She developed a list of recommendations based on a national survey of 52 special education directors in the United States (Pickett, 1986b). The survey provided information on numbers of employed teacher assistants, salary scale certification policies, preservice and inservice training opportunities, and professional needs,. Based on the survey results, Pickett's recommendations included the development and implementation of preservice and inservice training programs, easier access to post-secondary education and state certification policies for teacher assistants.

Pickett (1986a) felt that accessible formal training programs for teacher assistants along with certification would result in significant improvement in educational services. She stated that training and certification are essential given the expanding role of the teacher assistant in the instructional process.

They observe and record data about student performance, follow lesson plans developed by the teacher, work with small groups of students, or tutor individual children. They implement behaviour maintenance and management programs designed by the teacher and assist in designing and producing instructional materials. In short they are becoming technicians and specialists who are directed and guided by the teacher. (p.33)

The certification system for teacher assistants advocated by Pickett (1986a, p.34) should set "criteria for employment, prescribe education and experience requirements for career advancement, and develop guidelines for their roles and responsibilities." Coupled with training and certification programs, Pickett also called for a differentiated staffing system for teacher assistants which would allow for growth and advancement. She cited the example of the Kansas certification system which has three levels based on training and experience. Level I requires a minimum of 20 hours of inservice before practising as a teacher assistant, while Level III requires a two year associate degree and 3 years work experience.

The issue of training and certification is related to the topic of this research. In order to determine training needs and curriculum for training programs the roles of the position must be determined and consensus reached by the educational staff involved. Conversely the training teacher assistants have, would greatly influence the role they can assume. By exploring the roles this research contributed information which may be used to determine training curriculum. It also contributed information concerning the level of consensus

among teacher assistants, teachers and administrators.

Effectiveness of Teacher Assistants

The largest volume of literature written on teacher assistants appeared to be on their effectiveness in the classroom. The studies selected for this particular review covered the past 33 years and were considered by the researcher to be representative of the available literature. The general conclusions were that teacher assistants were found to be effective in facilitating learning given proper training and supervision.

The first body of literature (Cruickshank & Haring, 1957; Blessing, 1967; Manning, 1979; Shortinghuis & Froman, 1974;) found that teacher assistants contributed positively to children's learning. Blessing (1967, p.112) concluded that, given that the teacher determines the actual instructional processes and evaluation strategies, "the use of teacher aides to assist in the teaching function is felt to be both feasible and appropriate." Shortinghuis and Froman (1974) found that teacher assistants enhanced the learning of children enrolled in early childhood education programs and recommended increased use of teacher assistants. Manning (1979) examined the effectiveness of teacher assistants in remedial reading and mathematics programs. The teacher assistants involved in this study were given proper training in appropriate intervention strategies and were delivering programs designed and supervised by qualified remedial teachers. Manning found the teacher assistants to be effective in improving children's performances in math and reading, given proper training and teacher supervision.

Studies done in the 1980s produced similar findings to those done earlier

and the findings of one study illustrated the importance of training and supervision. Walter (1983) found that teacher assistants were not effective when employed without receiving proper training and supervision. His findings indicated that the use of untrained teacher assistants resulted in more teacher time spent on supervision and that the supervision given was ineffective. He also found that quality of instruction as well as student time on task did not increase. However, he felt that teacher assistants could make a positive contribution if properly trained and supervised.

Wallace (1984) evaluated a variety of educational programs in the Fort Worth School District, Texas including those that used teacher assistants. Her findings indicated that children benefited from the use of teacher assistants and that the children learned material at a quicker rate. Saterfield and Handley (1983) in a five year study of teacher assistants used in the primary grades found that children who received extra assistance significantly improved their reading scores. As a result, the legislature of the state of Mississippi where the project took place passed a law requiring the placement of reading aides in all Mississippi public schools.

In a follow-up study Handley (1986) surveyed 323 supervisors, 1623 teacher assistants and 1815 teachers using a questionnaire which examined inservice training; tasks performed by teacher assistants and their characteristics; teachers' interprofessional relationships and student achievement. The teachers and their assistants were all working in grades one to three. He reported that 68% of the teacher assistants had either completed or partially completed college and that 89% found their inservice training effective. Most importantly, "90% of the teachers were satisfied with the

performance of assistants" (p.7) and felt that teacher assistants should also be used in the kindergarten grades. Handley also suggested that, despite the positive results, the effectiveness of teacher assistants could be improved even further if teachers are provided with "more training in the utilization of assistant teachers with regard to instruction of students specifically related to the assistants becoming more routinely involved in using teaching techniques for reinforcement of concepts and skills" (p.44).

Two other large studies evaluating teacher assistant effectiveness also produced similar findings to Handley. Case and Johnson (1986) evaluated 75 special education teacher assistants by interviewing teachers, teacher assistants and administrators and by reviewing school records. They reported that administrators and teachers both felt that teacher assistants contributed to the overall effectiveness of student programming. Children's improved academic achievement was attributed to more individualized instruction as well as more preparation and planning time for teachers because of the use of assistants. Interestingly, teachers in this study asked for more training on better utilization of their assistants.

Johnson (1987) evaluated a teacher assistant program which provided educational support to underachieving students in kindergarten and grade one. Her study ran one school year, and involved 46 schools, 158 teacher assistants and 224 teachers. Pretesting and post-testing of students was done using nationally standardized comprehension tests of basic skills. Surveys were also given to classroom teachers to obtain teachers' perceptions of the effect of the assistants on students' reading skills and how well they thought the assistants functioned generally. Johnson concluded that teacher assistants contributed to

student achievement on the standardized tests. In the kindergarten component with a student sample size of 39 she found that 94.9% of students improved their performance beyond normal expectations. In the grade one component with a sample size of 1378, 52.9% of students improved their performance beyond normal expectations. She also found that "89.8% of the teachers attributed pupil progress to the instructional aide ..." (p.19). It is important to note that the assistants in this study were given twelve full days of inservice training with eight of the training days occurring in September. Johnson stated clearly that if teacher assistants are to be effective then their training "should be both intensive and extensive, with inservice training sessions provided early in the school year to strengthen instructional and motivational skills" (p.27).

While the topic of this research does not examine the effectiveness of teacher assistants, the knowledge gained from this research may contribute to future effectiveness studies. For example, information on how teacher assistants see their roles may be used to determine how effective teacher assistants are in their self-identified roles. As well, factors could be identified which contribute to role effectiveness or which inhibit role effectiveness. The focus of such studies should be primarily from the teacher assistant perspective and therefore the self-identification of roles is necessary.

In addition, the effectiveness of the teacher assistant must be considered when studying roles. The roles that teacher assistants are allowed to assume by teachers and administrators is most likely influenced by the teachers' and administrators' perceived effectiveness of the assistant. Data produced from the research will be examined to see if perceived teacher assistant effectiveness

was a factor.

Roles of Teacher and Teacher Assistants

This section which was most directly related to the research topic examined the literature concerning the roles of both teacher and teacher assistants and their inter-relationships. Generally, the literature called for increased involvement by teacher assistants in the instructional process and for the teacher to assume a more managerial role. Most of the recommendations of the studies reviewed called for further investigations into teacher assistant roles.

Almost 25 years ago Esbensen (1966) suggested changing roles for both teachers and teacher assistants. He saw and supported the teacher assistant becoming more involved in instructional delivery and the teacher becoming more involved in the diagnosis and planning aspects of education. He felt teachers should not feel threatened by others being involved in instructional delivery because "... the distinguishing characteristic of the qualified teacher is his/her ability to analyze the instructional needs of students and to prescribe the elements of formal schooling that will best meet those needs" (p.237).

Boomer (1980) developed a new concept of the teacher's role by suggesting the teacher must become "the program manager of the instructional team" (p. 146).

The teacher is responsible for identifying specific skills to be learned, designing appropriate strategies and assessing the effectiveness of those strategies. The teacher is also responsible for coordinating the efforts of the paraprofessional, parents and other professionals in meeting identified goals. (Boomer, 1982, p.196)

This idea of the teacher as a program manager is also supported by

Escudero and Sears (1982) who see the teacher delegating responsibility to the assistant in the areas of instructional delivery, management of adaptive aids and behavioural management interventions.

The member of the instructional team, with whom the teacher will have daily on-going contact, is the teacher assistant. The teacher assistant's primary role is to work directly with the children following the lesson plans written by the teacher (Boomer 1982). As the program manager, the teacher should also be involved in the selection and inservice training of the teacher assistant as well as supervising and evaluating the assistant (Boomer, 1980). Lacattiva (1985) identified similar roles for teachers who work with teacher assistants. Boomer also stated that the teacher must serve as a role model for the assistants for the purposes of communication skills, behavioural management skills, and good work habits.

White (1984, p.45) further developed the concept of teachers as program managers who "administer and direct the contribution of paraprofessionals, interns, volunteers and other helpers to meet the needs of students." White recognized that teachers still have the prime responsibility for the instruction of students. "While direct student instruction remains the predominant role of teachers, it is not the only role" (p.45). He stated that while the roles of the teacher assistant vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction the question of "Should paraprofessionals be instructors?" (p.46), has changed to "To what degree should paraprofessionals be instructors?" (p.46). White listed several advantages of the concept of the teacher as a program manager and the teacher assistant more involved in instructional delivery. These include more individualized attention for students; teacher assistants' strengths and talents

being utilized in the classroom; teacher assistants' feedback to the teacher results in better student assessment; and the provision of a mutual emotional support system in the classroom.

Frith and Lindsey (1980) discussed the roles of teacher assistants in working with mainstreamed multihandicapped students. They saw the roles as being "multidimensional as well as comprehensive" (p.18), because of the complexity and range of learning and behavioural characteristics of the children the teacher assistants work with. Eight roles were suggested as follows:

administering screening tests and informal diagnostic instruments, ... planning learning activities, ... securing special materials and equipment, ... modifying curricula, materials and equipment, ... supporting team teaching endeavors, ... providing one-to-one instruction, ... assisting students to move through the building, ... coordinating home-school programming. (p.18-19)

Frith and Lindsey (1980) stated these roles are carried out under the direction of the teacher and that the roles may vary according to the work site. Some roles may be dropped and others added depending on the needs of the children, teacher, and school system.

McKenzie & Houk (1986b) conducted a field study of 23 teachers to investigate the roles of teacher assistants. The teachers indicated they wanted to see an expansion of the teacher assistant role and better training for teacher assistants in order to meet the new roles. In essence teachers wanted to see assistants more involved in observation of children's behaviour, provision of feedback to teachers, and provision of assistance in modifying written materials. Recommendations included developing a "systematic method of identifying the competencies of each paraprofessional in relation to the needs of

the teacher" (p.44) and developing quality preservice training programs for teacher assistants which address the needs in the field.

Vasa and Steckelberg (1984) noted that teacher assistants should spend most of their time instructing children and while teachers also have a similar role, their responsibilities are far greater and much wider in scope. Responsibilities unique to the teacher include planning instruction, implementing objectives, and evaluating and reporting student progress.

Similar to Boomer (1980, 1982) they also saw the teacher as manager of activities and resources.

The teacher's primary role is one of managing the teaching and learning environment which may include a teacher aide. Actual delivery of instruction to the student may be carried out by the aide under the direct supervision of the instructor. (Vasa & Steckelberg, 1984, p.8)

Teacher assistant roles suggested by Vasa & Steckelberg (1984) are very similar to those offered by other researchers. The roles suggested include an instructional role, child supervision role, behaviour management role, instructional material preparation role, a clerical role, and housekeeping role. Vasa and Steckelberg also outlined roles the teacher assistant should not assume such as sole classroom supervision, preparation of lesson plans, assignment of grades and formal diagnostic assessments.

The topic of this research directly examined the roles of teacher assistants as perceived by teacher assistants. The findings of this research were compared to the literature to determine areas of concurrence and/or discrepancy. It would appear from the literature that the involvement of the teacher assistant in the instructional role may have the most influence on what is occurring in the field. However, the literature findings were American based

and the roles may take a different focus in Canadian schools and in particular in the Ontario School System. For example, different laws, school philosophies and teacher federation policies could limit the extent of the instructional role in Ontario. This research helped determine if such limitations exist and to what extent they exist.

Summary

Representative samples of literature related to the roles of teacher assistants have been examined. A short history of the occupation of teacher assistant was provided. Literature calling for more training of teacher assistants and teachers both at the preservice and inservice level was reviewed. Studies concerning the effectiveness of teacher assistants in the classrooms were examined. Generally, it was found that teacher assistants were effective in helping children learn as long as they had the proper training and supervision. Finally, the literature directly addressing the roles of the teacher and teacher assistant was discussed. A variety of roles was identified for the teacher assistant with a variety of instructional roles predominating. The concept of the teacher as a program manager and the resulting relationship to the teacher assistant was also offered.

The design and methodology used in this research will be discussed in Chapter III.

Chapter III

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research and its appropriateness for this study will be discussed. Next, a description of the methods selected to gather and analyse the data along with their theoretical base will be provided. During the discussion of the site selection a description of the participants and their work sites will be given in order to provide a more informed and humanistic view of the participants and their working environments.

Theoretical Underpinnings

There are three major approaches to educational or social science research: positivism, interpretive social science and critical social science (Neuman, 1991). Positivism, the oldest and most often used is the foundation of quantitative research. It is usually associated with the natural sciences but is also widely used in the social sciences. Unlike qualitative researchers, quantitative researchers following the positivist approach takes a deductive route. The researcher starts "with a general causal relationship that has been logically derived from a causal law in general theory" and then "logically links abstract ideas in laws to precise measurements of the social world" (Neuman, 1991, p.49). This approach calls for the researcher to remain neutral and detached from the subjects and the environment being studied. This

detachment may inhibit a deeper understanding of the subjects being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Neuman, 1991; Pyke & Agnew, 1991) as well as limit the generalizability of the results to the real world (Borg & Gall, 1983; Neuman, 1991; Pyke & Agnew, 1991).

The second major approach, interpretive social science, along with the third approach, critical social science provide the foundation for qualitative research (Neuman, 1991). There are "several varieties of interpretive social science" (p.50) with phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnography being the most commonly known.

Phenomenology is concerned with how people construct their own reality based on their interpretations of their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Phenomenologists believe that it is our interpretations of our interactions with others that gives meaning to our experiences and that to truly understand people and their experiences we must seek their point of view. Phenomenologists make no assumptions about how people will assign meaning to their experiences. Rather, they seek to develop an empathetic understanding of the meaning and how it is developed. Regardless of their particular theoretical orientation "all qualitative researchers in some way reflects a phenomenological perspective" (Bogdan & Biklen, p.31).

Symbolic interactionism, which may be considered a branch of phenomenology, is also concerned with how human experience is given meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). It is based on symbolic communication that occurs when people socially interact. Perceptions of each other, and the settings in which the interactions occur are produced. These perceptions govern how we see ourselves and others while we also give meaning to objects and events that

enter our world. Based on our continuing experiences certain meanings stay the same while others are revised. Symbolic interactionists recognize there are norms, rules, and biological drives that influence a person's behaviour but they argue that that influence is governed by the meaning and use that person assigns to the norms, rules, and drives. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggest the process in which this meaning is assigned and the resultant behaviours can only be truly understood by entering the person's world using methods such as participant-observation.

Ethnography also has phenomenological roots and originated in the discipline of anthropology. "Ethno" means people or folk while "graphy" means to describe something. "Thus ethnography means describing a culture and understanding another way of life from the native point of view" (Neuman, 1991, p.340). Ethnographers believe that people's behaviours, as displayed through their speech and actions, give researchers clues to how people think and to what they believe. The researcher must infer the meaning from the displays of behaviour. The more displays of a selected culture's behaviour the researcher can observe and interpret, the deeper will be the knowledge and understanding of that culture. Ethnographers use methods such as participant-observation, document analysis, and interviewing of participants. Ethnographers seek "to share in the meanings that the cultural participants take for granted and then to depict the new understanding for the reader and for outsiders" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.36).

Regardless of the theoretical orientation applied to it, the goal of interpretive social science is to learn what is meaningful to people and how people experience their every day lives (Neuman, 1991). To do this, the

researcher "must share the feelings and interpretations of the subjects being studied" (p.50). This is done through methods such as participant-observation, analysis of interview transcripts, analysis of videotaped behaviours, and analysis of notes, memos, and documents. While a positivist researcher precisely measures details about large samples of people and relies heavily on statistical analysis, the interpretive researcher concentrates on a small sample of people seeking to achieve a deeper and more wholistic understanding of their lives. An interpretive research report is "more like a novel or biography than like a mathematical proof" (p.53). The descriptions are detailed and rich and are rooted in the text which refers to conversations, written words, pictures, or observations of the people being studied. Characteristic of qualitative research is an inductive approach which means the generalizations develop from the data; the theory is grounded in the specifics of the lives or events being observed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Neuman, 1991; Smith, 1991).

Like the interpretive approach, the critical social science approach criticizes positivism for not dealing with the meanings behind the thoughts and feelings of real people and for not accounting for the social contexts in which people experience their lives (Neuman, 1991). Both the interpretive and critical researchers see positivism as lacking a humanist perspective. But the critical researcher sees the interpretive approach as too subjective and passive. Similar to interpretive researchers, critical researchers seek deeper understandings of people's actions but they want to use this understanding to "empower the people" (p.56) they study in order that the people can change their lives and their world if so desired. Critical researchers are usually social activists; they ask embarrassing questions, expose hypocrisy, identify deep-rooted societal

problems in order to create dramatic social change. Critical researchers use the same methods as interpretive researchers. However, they may also use positivists' methods but only in combination with interpretive methods so that the humanistic perspectives is not lost. Critical researchers differ from interpretive researchers less in the methods used than in the purpose for doing research, that is, to create societal change.

Built on the concepts of interpretive and critical social science, qualitative research takes a non-positivist approach. Qualitative data are represented by words, sentences, paragraphs, and images rather than by statistics found in the quantitative data. Qualitative researchers focus on subjective meanings, definitions, symbols and detailed descriptions of people and events. They conduct their research in the field, that is, in the natural settings of people and events being studied. The interpretation of the data involves the researcher giving it meaning, making meaning understandable (Neuman, 1991). But the meaning the researcher gives to the data always begins with the point-of-view of the people being studied.

Qualitative researchers are also concerned that their research is an accurate reflection of what is happening in the case under study. They advocate triangulation as a means of improving validity and reliability of their findings (Neuman, 1991; Pyke & Agnew, 1991). Triangulation is "the use of a variety of methods, techniques, tools, and theories to arrive at a closer approximation of the truth" (Smith, 1991, p.697). Each research method has inherent strengths and weaknesses. By using a combination of methods, a counterbalance is provided for the weaknesses in each method. Triangulation has two forms: within methods and between methods (Smith, 1991). Within

methods involves checking for similarities and differences in the data across different sources of data which were gathered using the same methods.

Between methods refers to checking on data collected using different methods, for example, how do interview data concerning the way people say they behave in a certain situation correspond with the observation data of the same people in the situation.

In my research, observations, interviews, document analysis and the selection of two different sites were the methods used. By triangulating the data, that is looking for similarities and differences in the data, I was able "to strengthen the confirmability and generalizability of the results" (Smith, 1991, p.697).

Since the primary purpose of this research was to describe and understand more fully the roles of the teacher assistant, a qualitative approach was selected. It has been suggested in the literature (Pyke & Agnew, 1991) that qualitative methods may be the most appropriate means for achieving such a purpose. Other researchers (McKenzie & Houk, 1986b; Steckelberg & Vasa, 1986) who specifically studied teacher assistants have called for more descriptive studies of the roles. Use of qualitative methods will allow for the development of a more complete picture of the roles a teacher assistant actually performs and the factors which influence those roles.

Site Selection

A multi-case study was chosen in order to allow some generalizability of the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Two sites were chosen where a teacher assistant and teacher had worked together for a minimum of three years.

Another prerequisite for the site was that the teacher assistant and teacher also had worked with the same principal for a minimum of three years. By utilizing experienced personnel who had worked together for a significant length of time, the data obtained from the interviews and observations of these subjects would produce a unified and consistent representation of the roles as perceived by the assistants. Internal sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) was done with the assistance of the superintendent of the board who had responsibility for the teacher assistants. The superintendent identified possible sites which met the above criteria and which represented a typical teacher-teacher assistant working situation. Two sites were selected from the suggestions made by the superintendent, contacted the subjects involved and received their initial acceptance to be involved in the study.

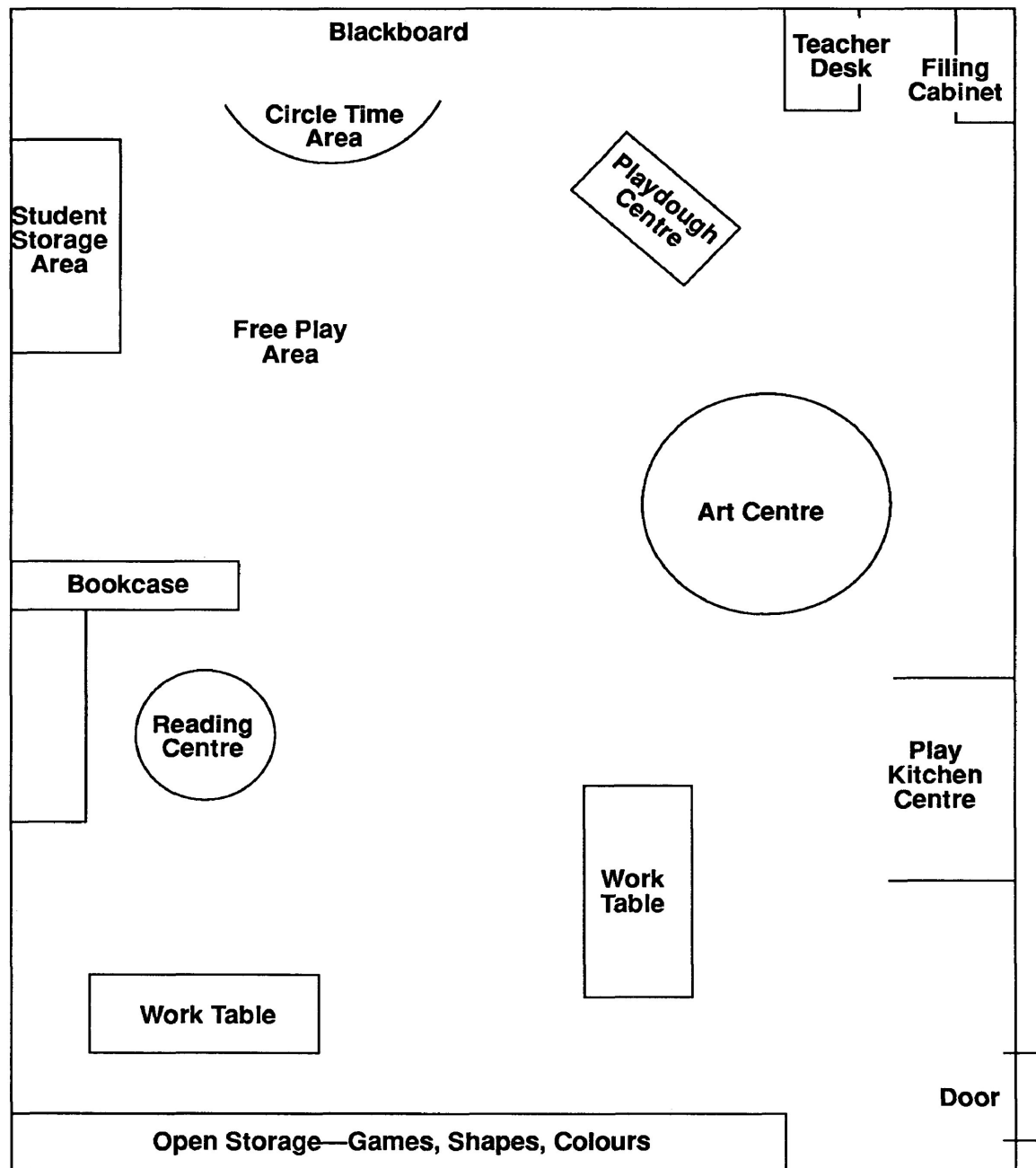
A meeting was held with each subject where the purpose and scope of the research was explained and the contents of an ethics information package (see Appendix One) was reviewed. Informed consent forms were signed by each participating subject and dates for future meetings to begin data gathering were arranged.

Description of the Sites

Site I was an elementary school special education classroom which was established to serve hearing impaired children ages three to seven. A diagram of the room is provided in Figure 1. The classroom was about 35 feet by 25 feet. The walls were painted very light purple with light purple trim. The floor was covered with wall to wall carpet light beige in colour. There was a

Figure 1.

Diagram of Site I



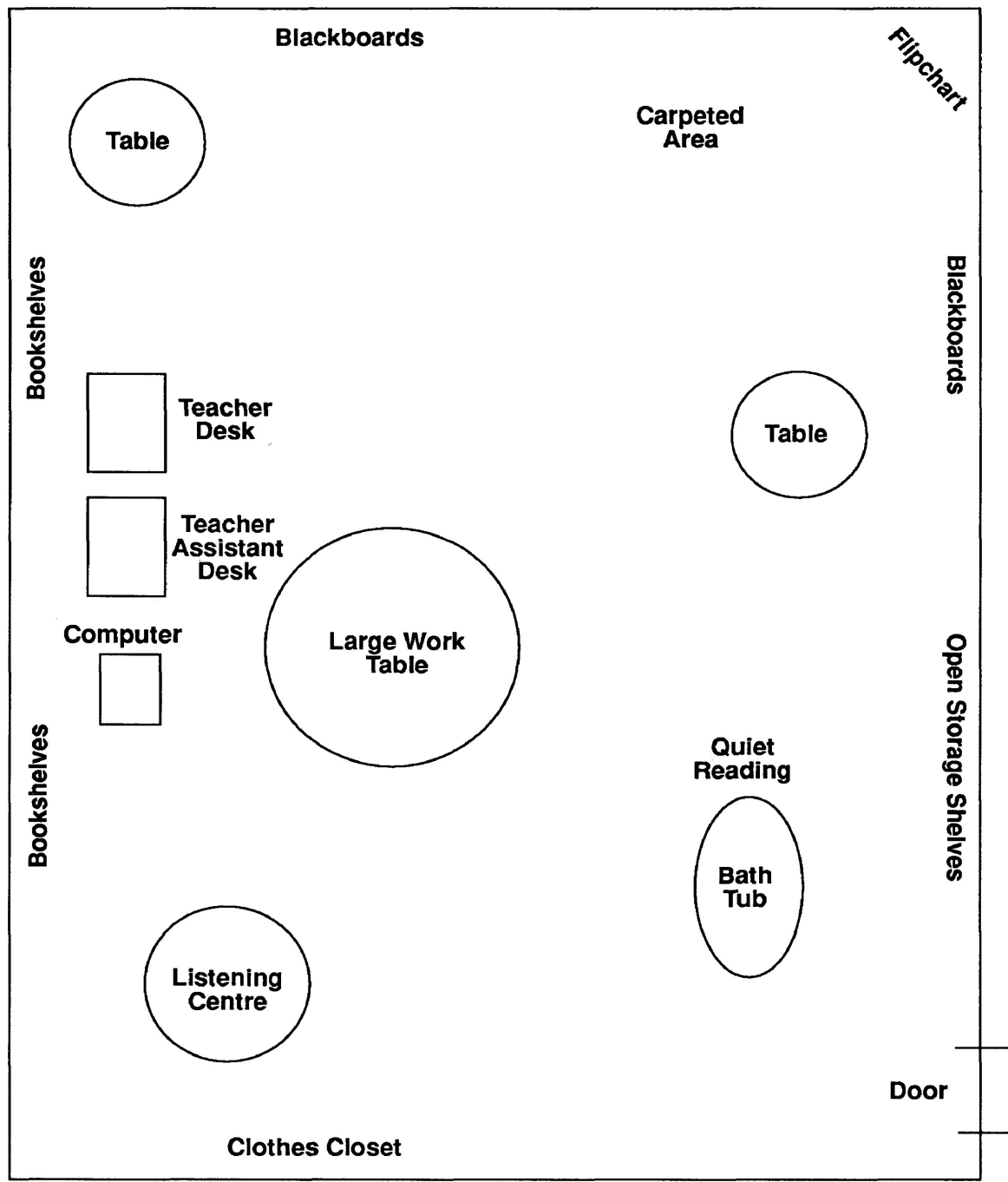
hanging multicolored mobile hanging at the front of the room. There were many pictures, charts and cut-outs on the walls. Many examples of the children's art work were also displayed on the wall. All toys, books and games were neatly placed on shelves and/or in baskets but were easily accessible to the children. Two big book readers were at the front of the room in a circle time area. Learning centres and activity tables were placed around the perimeter of the classroom but with enough space between tables and walls for the children to access wall shelving and storage cupboards.

The room was located in a middle-class neighborhood school which had an enrolment of approximately two hundred and forty students. The school provides regular programming for junior kindergarten to grade eight as well as containing three special education rooms. One of these rooms was Site I while the other two provided programming for learning disabled children at the junior and intermediate level. A staff of twelve teachers, two teacher assistants, a principal, a secretary, and a custodian worked in the school. The school has had the same principal for the past seven years.

The staff in Site I consisted of a teacher and teacher assistant. These two people had worked together in the same room and the same program for thirteen years. Additional assistance was provided by grade eight students at recess times. There were six children in the room, three female and three male. Their hearing impairments ranged from profound to mild and each was on an individualized program. Their programs also involved several group activities.

Site II was an elementary special education room which provided programming for language-delayed students ages six to eight. A diagram of

Figure 2.
Diagram of Site II



the room is provided in Figure 2. The room was approximately 40 feet by 30 feet. The walls were painted light green. The floor was covered with a gray-white tile except for a carpeted area at the front of the room. The carpet was 9 feet by 9 feet and was dark brown in colour. There were many commercially prepared educational displays on the walls such as the alphabet chart cards just above the blackboards going along two walls and phonic sounds and parts of sentence displays on the bulletin boards. On the back wall were pictures of each student along with a student written autobiography. Books, puzzles, games, magazines and art materials were on the open shelving. Some shelves were neat while others appear disheveled. There was a teacher desk and teacher assistant desk located side by side against west wall where the windows were. Directly beside these desks was a computer. Various learning activity centres were located around the room.

The school, with an enrolment of 218 students, was located in a neighborhood consisting of housing ranging from lower to upper middle class. The school provided regular programming for junior kindergarten to grade eight as well as housing four special education classrooms. One of these rooms was Site II while the other three provided programming for children with learning disabilities and/or behavioural problems.

A staff of thirteen teachers, three teacher assistants, a principal, a secretary and a custodian were employed in the school. The principal had worked at this school the past five years.

The staff in Site II consisted of a teacher and a teacher assistant. These two people had worked together three years and when interviewed were in their fourth year as a team. The teacher assistant had worked in the Site II

classroom for five years and the teacher had been there three years. There were eight children in the room, three females and five males. Their programming involved both individual and group activities and each had an individual educational plan.

Description of the Participants

Participant P1, is the elementary school principal of Site I. He has ten years experience as a classroom teacher, three years experience as a vice-principal and seven years experience as a principal. He has had involvement with teacher assistants for the past ten years as principal or as vice-principal.

Participant P2, is the elementary school principal at Site II. He has twelve years experience as a classroom teacher, five years as vice-principal and thirteen years as a principal. He has had involvement with teacher assistants for the past five years.

Participant T1, is the teacher in Site I. She has fifteen years teaching experience and has worked with the teacher assistant for thirteen years. In addition to B.A. and B.Ed. degrees she holds a M.Ed. degree and a Specialist Certificate in Special Education as well as additional qualifications for working with the hearing impaired. Between graduating with a B.A. and returning to school to get her B.Ed. she worked one year as a teacher assistant.

Participant T2, is the teacher in Site II. She has been teaching for sixteen years, the past four as a special education teacher. She has a B.A. and B.Ed. as well as Specialist Certificate in Special Education. She has three and a half years experience working directly with the teacher assistant.

Participant TA1, is the teacher assistant in Site I. She has fourteen years experience as teacher assistant. While employed full-time she has worked with the Site I teacher half time for the past thirteen years and half time with three other teachers during the past fourteen years. During the past five years her mornings were spent in Site I and her afternoons in a Special Education Junior Level classroom for learning disabilities. Previous to that she worked as a teacher assistant half-time in a kindergarten room and then a grade one room. She is a grade 13 high school graduate who has completed five post-secondary courses related to working in the education field.

Participant TA2, is the teacher assistant in Site II. She has five years experience as a teacher assistant, of which the past three years have been with the Site II teacher. She is a grade 12 graduate who has previous work experience as a secretary and has completed four courses at a post secondary level related to the education field.

Participant S1, is the superintendent who has responsibility for the teacher assistants employed with the Board of Education. She is one of five superintendents employed with the Board and has responsibility for one program coordinator, four program consultants, fifty two special education teachers and thirty five teacher assistants. She has over thirty years experience as a teacher and special education consultant with the past seven years as a superintendent. Her education includes B.A. and M.Ed. degrees along with Supervisory courses.

Data Collection

The study involved observations, interviews and document analysis. Each

of these methods are reviewed below.

Observation. There is a wide range of roles a researcher can assume when doing field observations. This range involves the degree of detachment or involvement a researcher chooses to have with the participants. The range runs from the outsider-end which involves roles such as the complete covert observer to the insider-end which involves roles such as the completely immersed participant (Neuman, 1991). Neuman suggests there are advantages and disadvantages to each level of observer participation. Outsider roles reduce the time needed to gain acceptance, can sometimes help participants open up, and reduce the risk of "going native". However, they may inhibit the researcher's ability to get an insider's viewpoint. Insider roles tend to enable the researcher to have deeper empathy for the participant by sharing more in the participant's experience. However, the more of an insider one becomes the greater the chance of researcher bias affecting the collection and analysis of the data.

Using the system suggested by Junker (cited in Neuman, 1991), I chose the observer-as-participant role which is located towards the middle of the range closer to the outsider end. In this role, I was a known, overt observer. The participants knew who I was and the purpose of my research. During my observations I limited my contact with the participants and did not participate in the activities. I chose this observer role for three reasons. First, I felt by limiting my involvement during the observations I would keep my influence on the observed events to a minimum. Second, this role enabled me to concentrate more fully on the tasks of observing the participants and their behaviour and recording the data. Third, my research also involved interviews

with the participants which should help gain more of an insider's viewpoint than is normally afforded by observer-as-participant observations alone.

By limiting my influence on the participants and by concentrating on the observational tasks I was also addressing concerns about the validity and reliability of the observations. Field observations can be reliable and valid if the observer is properly trained regarding observational techniques and recognizing their own biases (Smith, 1991; Pyke & Agnew, 1991). I have received formal training in observational techniques and teach courses on observational techniques at the community college level. I was also quite aware of how my beliefs could distort my observations and made conscious efforts to record in a descriptive, detailed, non-judgemental fashion. Returning to the site more than once and writing detailed notes on each visit (Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991; Neuman, 1991) also helped increase the validity and reliability of the observations. Neuman also states that the fact the participants can have access to your research report also provides a check on the accuracy of the results. In the participant consent form (Appendix I) I have stated in writing that I am willing to share the findings of this research with the participants.

Two sets of observations were conducted at each of the two teacher-teacher assistant sites. The first set of observations which were approximately three hours in length were held before the participants were interviewed. This was done to avoid any influence the participants' views may have had on my observations of their behaviours. The second set of observations occurred approximately six weeks after the subjects were interviewed. The purpose of the second set of observations was to confirm

data from earlier observations and/or interviews as well as to see if any other factors appeared that were overlooked in the first round of data gathering.

Field observation notes consist of two forms: descriptive and reflective (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Descriptive field notes consist of objectively recorded details of what happened in the field. Even though the descriptions are objectively written there is some subjectivity in any observational notes in that the researcher has to decide what to record since it is impossible to capture all that is happening in any given setting at any one time. The researcher's goal is to record as much of what is happening as possible and to do so in a descriptive rather than a summative or evaluative way. Informal field observation notes consisting of words, phrases or drawings, and formal field observation notes consisting of a detailed description of what I heard and saw written in concrete, specific terms were used for descriptive purposes.

Reflective field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) are more subjective and personal. Based on the observations the researcher speculates, asks questions for further investigation, notes personal feelings, and notes ideas for further thought. This helps the researcher remain "extremely self-conscious about his or her own relationship to the setting and about the evolution of the design and analysis" (p.87). Analytic memos which are notes that elaborate on or tie together ideas and feelings in the fieldworker's ethnographic accounts (Smith, 1991) and notations in the formal and informal field observation notes were used to help me fulfill the reflective obligations of fieldwork.

The first set of observations were each three hours long. Informal field observation notes were recorded for the first twenty minutes of the three hours followed by twenty minutes of formal observation notes. I continued this

pattern of twenty minutes of informal observation notes followed by twenty minutes of formal observation notes throughout each of the three hour long observation sessions. The second set of observations were approximately an hour and forty minutes long. The same method and pattern of recording established for the first set of observations was also employed for the second set. During the evening of each observation day the first analytical review of the formal observation notes was conducted and analytic memos (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) were written. The purpose of these memos was to give initial meaning and inferences to events that were observed.

Field interviews. Interviewing participants in the field helps the researcher learn about the participants and settings under study. The interview involves asking questions, listening, showing interest and recording exactly what was said. Participants are active individuals in the interview process whose insights, feelings, and actions contribute to the researcher's knowledge and understanding of a person or setting being studied (Neuman, 1991). The role of the researcher is that of a guide who builds trust and encourages the participants to communicate their beliefs. Neuman suggests this can be accomplished by the researcher being completely open and honest about the intent of the interview and by the researcher building a rapport through sharing some of his/her relevant background with the participants.

A focused interview format was chosen since this format helps reveal more of a participant's thoughts and feelings about the topic being discussed (Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991). The main function of the focused interview is to focus attention on the participant's experiences and the effects of those experiences. The researcher knows in advance what topics he/she wants to

explore and the list of questions is based on the analysis the researcher conducted in formulating the research problem. While a list of questions – generally open-ended – is drawn up in advance, the researcher if he/she deems it necessary has the discretion to ask other questions to probe a participant's responses further. Judd et al. (1991) suggest that the validity of the responses can be tested by comparing it to other data that measure the actions of the participants which are related to the interview questions. As part of my analysis the interview data was compared to the observational data and the job description.

Interviews took place with each of the subjects involving six open-ended questions. The following are the general set of questions which were used in the interview. The phrasing of questions 1–3 were changed slightly to reflect who was being interviewed: a teacher assistant, teacher or an administrator. Supplementary questions for the purposes of clarification were asked depending on the participant's response.

1. a) What do you feel are the roles of a teacher assistant?
b) Of the roles you mentioned, which, in your opinion, are most important and which are least important?
Please give the reasons for your choices.
2. How does your view of the roles compare with that of the job description; the teacher you work with?
3. In what ways have the roles changed since you began working and what caused the changes?

4. a) How would you like the roles of the teacher assistant to change in the future?
b) What needs to happen in order for these changes to occur?
5. What training or education background should a teacher assistant have and why?
6. Describe a typical work day for a teacher assistant.

The first set of interviews ranged from 50 to 85 minutes in length and were all conducted in the subjects' school or office at a time convenient to them.

A second set of interviews were held with each teacher and teacher assistant subject approximately six to eight weeks after the first observation and interview. This second set of interviews was used to clarify any issues or concerns identified as a result of the analysis of the data obtained through the first set of interviews, observations and document reviews. These interviews ranged in length from 5 to 10 minutes. Second interviews were not held with the administrators as it was determined that no further information was required for the purposes of this research.

All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed for the purposes of analysis. The subjects' names were not noted in the transcripts and each subject was assigned a letter/number code and a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Each transcript had both the pages and lines numbered for ease of reference and analysis.

Policy documents related to roles of the teacher assistant were also reviewed. These documents were job descriptions (see Appendix II) from the Board where the subjects were employed, Ontario Teachers' Federation documents "We the Teachers of Ontario" (1989) and "Auxiliary Personnel in the Schools of Ontario" (1989). The purpose of reviewing these documents was to discover how closely the statements related to the position of teacher assistant in these documents reflected the reality in the field where the observations and interviews took place.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves organizing the data into categories on the basis of themes, concepts or similar features so that new concepts, definitions or clarifications, and relationships can unfold or be enunciated (Neuman, 1991). While the bulk of the analysis took place at the conclusion of the data collection phase some analysis of data (eg. analytic memos) took place while the data were being gathered. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggest that some analysis should occur as data are collected in order to ensure proper direction in the data gathering, to help manage the overall analysis process, and to begin conceptualization of ideas, themes or theories.

The formal analysis of the data involved a coding process which was influenced by the initial research questions. A coding process developed by Strauss (1987) was employed which involved at least 3 reviews of each piece of data. In each review the coding system is more clearly defined allowing a better articulation of patterns in the data and relationships among the patterns.

In the first review known as open-coding (Strauss, 1987) the data were

searched for critical terms, events or themes which relate to the research questions posed. Key words, phrases and actions found in the data were marked using a yellow highlighter. Sensitizers, words, or phrases that stand out and show a pattern of occurrence were underlined in blue ink. Other words or phrases that did not necessarily relate directly to the original research questions but considered significant for further exploration were circled and notes to self were made. Initial codes (based on the research questions and the sensitizers) were assigned by writing labelling words on the data sheets beside the appropriate words, phrases or actions.

In the second review known as axial coding (Strauss, 1987), my focus was more on the initial set of codes and conceptual ideas that were developed during open-coding. I began to make connections among the various codes and to organize the codes into common clusters. The purpose here is to form an "axis" of key concepts on which to build answers to the research questions along with the supporting evidence (Strauss, 1987). This process involved triangulation (Smith, 1991) where data from a variety of sources is collated for the purposes of addressing the research questions, determining consistency among the data, and generating other questions for investigation. Data from the interviews of teacher assistants, teachers, and administrators were examined for similarities and differences on views of the roles of a teacher assistant. I then compared these findings to the data from the field observations, my own analytic memos and the policy documents looking for consistencies and inconsistencies among the data sources. This triangulation process contributes to enhanced validity of the research findings (Neuman, 1991; Pyke & Agnew, 1991; Smith, 1991).

A variation of "the file card system" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) was used. All pages of transcripts, field observation notes, memos, and documents were numbered. Separate file pages were established for each cluster of codes. A word or phrase identifying each code was written at the top of the file page. I then went through the data recording on the file pages where (ie. type of data by page and line number) the data information was found relevant to the code. For example, the phrase "listening to reading" was recorded on the file page coded "Roles". Behind the phrase was written I1, p1, L28 meaning the information came from Interview transcript number one, page 1, line 28. A three ring binder with index divider pages corresponding to the coding system was used to house the file pages. File pages were also numbered, for example, the code "Changes" had pages numbered one to four.

The third review of the data called selective coding involved a complete review of all data coding and initial concept and theme development. At this stage I examined the data and my notes more "selectively" for information that would address the research questions and continued to build on themes and concepts which emerged in the first two reviews. A more in-depth analysis which involved comparing and contrasting the findings from the various sources of data occurred. This third review actually involved several perusals of the data where patterns, similarities, differences, and new areas to be explored became more sharply focused with each successive perusal and continued triangulation. The roles file data was further clustered to define more clearly what the teacher assistant roles were. Seven roles were identified and these were divided into two categories. A conceptual model for the roles of a teacher assistant was developed.

Summary

Qualitative methods have been demonstrated to be most appropriate for this type of study. My purpose was to identify and understand the roles of a teacher assistant based on the beliefs and actions of teacher assistants and those who work them. Qualitative data collection methods such as the interviewing and observation of participants in their natural settings enabled me to get an insider's viewpoint while the qualitative analysis process enabled me to develop a conceptual model which responds to the research questions. Answers to the initial research questions based on the conceptual model were formulated, new questions were generated, comparisons to the literature made, and recommendations were developed.

Chapter IV will present the findings and Chapter V will discuss my interpretations of the findings. In Chapter VI the implications of my research and personal reflections will be presented.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The teacher assistants' perceptions of their roles based on their experiences as well as the perceptions of others who have interaction with or an interest in what teacher assistants do will be reported. The data collected addressed the three research questions concerning the roles of a teacher assistant:

1. What are the roles (ie. the duties, responsibilities and perceptions) of teacher assistants in an Ontario elementary school?
 - a) how do teacher assistants define their roles?
 - b) how do supervising classroom teachers define the teacher assistant's roles?
 - c) how do administrators define the roles of the teacher assistant?
 - d) how does the Ontario Teachers' Federation define the roles of teacher assistants?
2. How do the views of the teacher assistant compare with the views of the teacher?
3. How do the views of others related to but not in direct daily contact with the teacher assistant compare with the views of the teacher assistant and the teacher?

Information will be presented identifying the teacher assistant roles as well as showing the similarities and differences among the sources of data.

There was a surprising amount of agreement among all the interviewees concerning the roles of the teacher assistant. I had expected more

discrepancies among the perceptions of the teacher assistants, the teachers and administrators. However, there were some definite differences between the statements in the O.T.F. documents and the findings derived from the interviews and observations.

First, I will briefly discuss how two categories of roles were identified. Then the roles will be presented followed by a section examining differences found between the O.T.F. documents and the findings in the field sites. A summary of the findings will conclude the chapter.

In Chapter V, the interpretation of findings will be discussed and a conceptual model of the teacher assistant roles based on the findings will be presented. The limitations of the research will also be discussed in Chapter V.

Categories of Roles

The umbrella primary role which dominated other roles appeared to be "working with children". However, this role was too broad in scope and required further clarification. The primary role actually consisted of several more distinct roles, all concerning "working with children" by giving them more individualized attention. In addition other roles were identified that were of lesser importance because they involved little or no involvement in working with children. As a result I decided to classify all the roles by placing each of them in one of two categories. What I had originally identified as the primary role became Category I Working with Children which consists of five roles: instructor, behaviour manager, observer, caregiver and team player. The second category is called Non-Contact with Children and consists of two roles: technician and clerk.

The first data to be presented concern the Category I roles since these roles appeared to be viewed by the participants as most important. This data describe the Category I roles in a more general nature. More specificity is provided when each of the Category I roles is presented immediately following this section.

Each participant was asked what they thought were the roles of the teacher assistant and to state in their opinion what was the most important role and the least important role. There was universal agreement on the primary or most important category of roles which was to work with the children.

I think the T.A. is there mostly to work with the children. The non-instructional tasks are mediocre compared to working with children.

(TA1 Interview 1, p.1)

My major role is to lessen the teacher/student ratio ... Certainly there's a little bit of typing and a little bit of running off of dittos and stuff, arranging the room, but they're not as important as to sit with the kids. You know what I'm saying. Sitting with them, doing their number facts or their sounds with them.

(TA2 Interview 1, p.1)

The most important to me would be the assisting and teaching. I feel that I cannot do it all even with only 8 children. With two of us that means its 2 to 4 instead of 1 to 8. I'll work 1 to 6 or 1 to 2. And therefore the children are getting the individualized attention that they need badly.

(T1 Interview 1, p. 1)

Well I believe the major and most important role is in the reduction of child to adult ratio in the classroom ... That means more individual attention for the children in the classroom.

(T2 Interview 1, p. 1)

There appeared to be a consensus among the teacher assistants, teachers and administrators concerning the most important category of roles.

Well roles vary according to the area they are servicing and the exceptionality they are dealing with, but I think the biggest, no matter where they are placed, is to assist the teacher in having the child adjust to that program ... I'm thinking of the L.D. programs, T.A.'s there, that once the programming has been explained, they can sit down and work one on one, seeing the child is using the right strategy and working through the strategy with them and helping. (S1, Interview 1, p.1)

Most important, I think that the Teacher Assistant has to be seen by the students as a team with the regular classroom teacher in dealing with the academic work. Working with the students, listening to the students, discussing with the students, helping the students out in time of need. Working with the students in the classroom, that is the number one strength as far as I'm concerned and I think that's the way it should be. (P1 Interview 1, p.1)

While the Site School Board job description (Appendix II) does not state the most important role, an analysis of the "working procedures" found in the document does support the concept that the primary roles involve working with the children. "Working procedures" is the term this Board uses to refer to each statement of duty and I will reference as (WP). At least seven of the ten listed working procedures involve direct contact with the student. Two examples are provided.

Works with students in daily note taking and individual work. (Job Description)

Assists small groups of students. (Job Description)

Of the other three working procedures only one (WP 7) which involved setting up and dismantling equipment and displays might be interpreted as not working with the student. The remaining two (WP 9,10) which concern performing "other routine duties" and assisting "in the Individual Program Planning" may involve some work directly with the student. For example, assisting with the individual program planning may entail a

participant-observation time with the student. This interpretation is further supported by both the teacher assistants and teachers.

Sometimes I'll mention well such and such a child knows their alphabet really well and I think it's time maybe they stepped up and did something else to do with the alphabet ...
(TA1 Interview 1, p.4)

Because my assistant spends most of her time working with the children she can give me important feedback concerning their progress. I rely on her ability to make good observations.
(T2, Interview 2, p.1)

The observation notes and analytic memos further supported the concept that "working with the children" roles were the most important. During all 4 observation times the teacher assistants were almost always present in the classroom and most of the time they were interacting with the children in either a one-to-one situation or small group setting. There were only three times I saw the teacher assistants leave the room and that was to escort a child to another room.

In Site I the teacher assistant was always working with at least one child even during circle time.

9:23 A.M. Five children go to circle time and T1 works with this group on calendar and weather activity. TA1 takes 2 1/2 year child to work table area beside reading centre and begins work on concept activity - uses stacking baskets ...
(Observation Notes I, Site I, p.4)

Teacher Assistant in this room was always interacting with children - during the three hour observation she was working with one or more children all of the time except for last 20 minutes of a.m. when children leave for lunch. How will this compare to Site B? Check to see if same pattern occurs in second observation. Triangulate with interviews. (Analytic Memo Site I, Obs I)

During the first observation (3 hours) at Site II there were two small blocks of time lasting approximately fifteen minutes each when the teacher

assistant had little or no interaction with the student. The first was during a teacher-led activity for the whole class and the second was during the viewing of a twelve minute tape on reading skills. During both these blocks of time the teacher set up the materials required for the next student-based activities. But even during these non-interaction times there were moments of contact among the teacher assistant, teacher, and the children.

T2 sits on chair and children sit on carpet around her. Story is Frosty the Snowman. Occasionally included TA2 in conversation.
 TA2: "A long time ago when Mrs. T was little they used coal for heat."
 T2: "That's right, when I was little there were dinosaurs."
 T2 continues with lesson - reads a page and asks children questions.
 (Observation Notes 2 Site II, p.1)

This data just presented provided support for the concept of two categories of roles with the category concerning working with children being considered more important based on the comments of the participants, my field observation notes, and analysis of the School Board job description. The findings related to each of the roles will now be presented beginning with the instructor role.

Instructor Role. Duties and responsibilities listed under this role include any activities that were academic and instructional in nature and that involved working directly with the children. While there was general agreement among most of the sources of data there were some cautionary notes sounded by both teachers and by two of the administrators and there appear to be some potential conflicts with the data reviewed from the Ontario Teachers' Federation documents. These areas of concern will be further explored later in this chapter as well as in Chapter V.

All the participants interviewed expressed similar beliefs about the duties and responsibilities in this role.

You can go and sit with (students) and talk with them. They can point at different objects and show me the cow and the horse and you know they are aware of what animals are what. And then we go into another lesson with them. It varies from day to day.
(TA1, Interview 1, p.11)

Then we start in with our phonics and reading work and the phonics in this room is all done together as a group. The teacher teaches the formal lesson and then they disperse through the room and work in their workbooks and that's when I come along and say 'This isn't how you make this letter, rub it out and we'll try it again.' or 'This one's backwards' or 'You've done a wonderful job' ... And then we have math which we spell our groups off. She'll take one group one day and I'll take it the next so that they get the idea that we are both here and we both help.
(TA2, Interview 1, p.7)

... we would break into groups and the assistant would work with one group in the area of language arts ... then we go into some math activities and my assistant works with a small group of children on her own.
(T2, Interview 1, p.8,9)

... carrying out the lesson that had been discussed the previous day or just before school. Moving from that lesson to a series of other lessons throughout the morning that had been planned previously ... Being able to take the initiative, Well the teacher said I am to do this row in math. Well these kids can't do this, so let's do something else and come back to it! And be able to understand what their (students') levels are.
(T1, Interview 1, p.11)

In that area it might be reading to the children, or recording children's stories, as a listening station so to speak, talk to them, do projects with them or help them, answer any questions they might have and supervise them in the teacher's absence.
(P2, Interview 1, p.2)

There are so many jobs (pause) I don't know if I could list them, I guess things that just come up spontaneously with the teacher aide; reading a story to them, having the students read the story, student has a story but can't write, so we write it for them or type it for them. I'd like to see a T.A. in every classroom but it's just not feasible.
(P2, Interview 1, p.3)

I think with all our exceptionalities so often after there's been a lesson taught, there needs to be someone with that student to follow through because they just don't have the techniques to go through the work independently on their own.
(S1, Interview 1, p. 1)

Four of the ten working procedures in the Site Board's job description (Appendix II) directly relate to the instructor role. These working procedures are:

3. Works with students in daily note taking and individual student work.
 4. Assists more groups of students.
 5. Provides support functions during tests and examinations or during class; such as reading directions, explaining questions, writing responses.
- and
8. Uses various methods, teaching aides, in assisting students as directed by the teacher.

The Ontario Teachers' Federation documents (1989a, 1989b) did contain some statements which support the concept of an instructor role. However, these documents also had some statements which contradicted this role. These contradictory statements will be explored in greater depth later in this chapter as well as in Chapter V but at this point the supporting statements will be presented.

The O.T.F. refer to teacher assistants as auxiliary personnel that are "those persons other than teachers as defined in the Teaching Profession Act who function in a supportive role to principals and teachers in the school" (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989b, p.35).

The following statements from the O.T.F. documents appear to be in agreement with the concept of the teacher assistant's instructor role.

The following are examples of duties that could be carried out by auxiliary personnel under the supervision of the appropriate teachers:

- . providing assistance in the presentation of a meaningful program through involvement in the classroom, playground, or in other activities;
- . providing individual or group assistance to students with program needs, special needs, or personal needs;
- . administering remedial procedures that are prescribed by the teacher and that the auxiliary has been trained to administer (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989a, p.7).

During each of the observation periods several activities which fell under the instructor role category were noted.

After approximately 5 minutes, TA2 begins to prepare another activity – places long strips of paper with words on activity table – child asks for help and she stops what she's doing and goes over (about 3 ft.), sits beside child and begins to help him. Says "Good for you, You've got it." Stays with child for about 1 more minute and then moves to another child.
(Site II, Observation Note 1, p.3)

TA2 works with one girl and one boy on sounds using flashcards. They are at N.W. corner table. Corrects gently – "No, almost, look at the sound ending, try again" makes eye contact with student, has child watch her mouth as she says words and sounds.
(Site II, Observation Note 1, p.4)

TA1 begins to work with 2 girls at a table with shapes on it. T1 is discussing what she did last night with another child. "Last night at the Mall, I saw Owen, do you remember him?" This conversation continues and then she moves to two other children. TA1 continues to talk with the children at the shapes table. She repeats the colors and the shapes to the children.
(Site I, Observation Note 2, p.1)

T1 says "O.K. It's time for another lesson, go to the table with your name on." Children search out their names and begin activities. T1 goes to table with matching cards where two children are and TA1 goes to table with sequencing cards where two children are. One child to the back of the room working on matching activity. One child at front working on a peg board. TA1 is interacting with 2 boys – asking questions – she smiles often, repeats phrases they say – nods – says "Good for you" when they get correct answer – Pats their arms and smiles.
T1 says "Megan, Janice needs some help." TA1 says "O.K. I'll be right there." Gives boys direction and then she moves over to Janice and gives her assistance. Janice starts the activity and TA2 moves back to the boys and checks their progress.
(Site I, Observation Note 1, p.7)

Regardless of the source of the data the instructor role received strong support. The focus of this role was to give the children more individualized attention in order to help them learn better. The role is performed by the teacher assistant under the direction of the teacher. The role involved working with the children in a variety of subjects such as math, phonics, reading and creative writing usually in a remedial or reinforcement fashion.

Behaviour Manager Role. From the amount of times behaviour management was mentioned in the interviews and the emphasis the subjects gave it when discussing it, the behaviour manager role appeared second in importance only to the instructor role. Not only was there a common set of beliefs among the subjects concerning teacher assistants' involvement in behaviour management, there was also concurring evidence found in the observation notes as well as both the Board job description and the Ontario Teachers' Federation policy paper. This role involved delivering behaviour management programs designed by the teacher, correctly handling incidental inappropriate student behaviour and maintaining pre-determined school and classroom standards of discipline.

The teacher assistants and teachers interviewed held similar and strong beliefs about the importance of the teacher assistant managing student behaviour on a regular on-going basis.

Another responsibility or duty is the discipline. It has to be consistent between her and I and I know in lot of rooms it's not. In this one it is. If I say you've lost your recess for the day, they've lost it and she (teacher) never contradicts. So you have to be able to use good judgement. You can't say to the kids, you lose it for a month, or something like that. But I think that that is an important duty especially with the younger kids to keep them in line and on track.

(TA2, Interview 1, p.1)

I basically sit with them to keep them on task. Listen while someone else is answering. It's not your turn. Don't play with the board. When the teacher is giving the lesson I kinda just circle with them.

(TA2, Interview 1, p.7)

The behaviour problems disappear, all because they're able to get more one on one assistance from a caring adult.

(T2, Interview 2, p.1)

... Melissa would be on the perimeter of the group, physically, so she can direct someone who is wandering either with a tap on the shoulder or a word. And she helps keep the group focussed.

(T2, Interview 1, p.1)

Behaviour. There are always behaviours. I find lately in the classrooms behaviours are worse than they used to be. It's how to deal with these behaviours without getting angry. How to use psychology. I guess to get around these behaviours.

(TA1, Interview 1, p.8)

Methods in discipline are terribly, terribly, terribly important. Probably A#1 over anything else now because of the type of kid we are getting.

(T1, Interview 1, p.8)

Instructional assistance and behaviour management are both extremely important. But I think that if I had to choose one over the other it would be instructional assistance (pause) but behaviour management would be a close second.

(T1, Interview 2, p.2)

The following excerpts from the field observation notes appear to correlate strongly with the statements made by the teacher assistants and teachers.

TA2 gently touches one boy on the shoulder who is beginning to fidget and he stops - looks at T2 who is pointing to sounds on board. TA2 moves to back of the circle and continues to observe children while T2 questions children on sounds.

(Site II, Observation Notes 1, p.2)

TA2 sees one boy has moved to bathtub area - is beginning to remove pillows. TA2 moves to him, bends over to make eye contact and touches his right arm, "Adam, what are you supposed to be doing right now?" He responds "My subtracting." TA2 leads him to activity table while saying "Well, let's get started on that arithmetic."

They both sit down at table and TA2 watches as boy begins to work.

(Site II, Observation Notes II, p.4)

TA1 and male student come back in room. The student goes to join a teacher-led group at front of the room. TA1 notices one child towards back of room is not working on her assigned activity. T1 has not noticed – she is working with 3 children at front. TA1 goes over to child and takes by hand saying "Let's go do something you'll like." The child leads TA1 to activity table with matching cards.

TA1 "O.K. you want to do that? Let's do it." TA1 and child begin to work on activity.

(Site 1, Observation Notes I, p.6,7)

The principals and the superintendents felt strongly that one of the major reasons for having teacher assistants in the classroom was to help the teacher manage students' behaviours. The administrators, teachers and teacher assistants appeared to agree with each other concerning the importance of the teacher assistant in managing student behaviour.

Practising good classroom management strategies is important. T.A.'s have to work with the teacher in maintaining discipline in the classroom. The two have to be in sync., work together.

(P1, Interview 1, p.2)

We expect teacher aides to apply the same rules as the teacher would. I mean we have school rules for all the students and we expect the aide to maintain the enforcement of that. We don't expect her to take it all into her hands but just to be aware that there are situations that she can do something to prevent a problem or something from happening. (pause) Support the teacher in maintaining the management in the class, hall and schoolyard.

(P2, Interview 1, p.2)

But if I'm taking a look at behaviour, and when you need a lot of students on behaviour with one on one and having students attend to the task at hand and directing them, to spend their time more wisely and on topic, and quite often they need a teacher aide with them to sit down with them and to be there one on one. Sometimes you need a teacher aide in the same type of setting to remove that child and go to another place so that they'll have a quiet time, so that they can settle down and the teacher can't do that if she is responsible for the rest of the class. You can't just send them away and say go down the hall when you're finished acting out then come back, because sometimes then you're putting other kids at jeopardy or maybe putting that child at jeopardy. So you need someone to be

with them and work that through. Fortunately with some of our T.A.'s that have had really good methodologies they can work very carefully with these kids putting some behaviour management strategies into place.
(S1, Interview I, p.1)

The School Board job description and the Ontario Teachers' Federation policy documents also appear to be in agreement with the concept that the behaviour manager role was an important and necessary part of what a teacher assistant does. Working procedure 7 of the job description (Appendix II) states that the teacher assistant "assists in maintaining a level of behaviour as determined by the teacher." This statement clearly indicates that the teacher assistant is to be involved in managing students' behaviours. The O.T.F. also made reference to teacher assistant duties that involve behaviour management.

- . assisting the teacher to develop behaviour management programs;
 - . carrying out behaviour management programs established by the teacher.
- (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989a, p.5)

Observer Role. As with the instructor and behaviour manager roles the observer role was seen by all subjects to be relevant to the duties and responsibilities of a teacher assistant. Each subject expressed a belief that the teacher assistant's observations of a child were an important source of information for the teacher to use in planning the child's program and/or evaluating the child's achievements. References found in the job description and O.T.F. documents also appear to support the teacher assistant's involvement in the observation process for the purposes of planning and evaluation of student's programs. As well notations were found in the site observation notes which indicated teacher assistants carry out observation activities.

The observer role performed by teacher assistants involved both participant and non-participant observations. In participant-observations the teacher assistant would observe the child's behaviours and levels of performance while interacting with the child in an activity. The activity could be instructional or non-instructional in nature.

TA1 changes to new activity – Picks up tambourine and faces child away from her. TA1 hits tambourine lightly and child responds by putting a block she is holding against her right cheek into a basket. TA1 and child repeats this sequence 5 times and with each successive time TA1 strikes tambourine with a lighter force. Each time child responds correctly. TA says 'Hooray, good girl, you were listening'. TA1 gives girl a hug. 'O.K. go play.' TA1 then walks by T1.

TA1: "Is she ever listening well, now"

T1: "Yes and to such soft sounds, yesterday I was just touching the rim and she responded."

TA1: "I'll try the same thing tomorrow and let you know if she continues to do well."

T1: "Okay, if so, I'll have to work out some new activities."

(Site I, Observation Note I, p.5)

As students finish reading the story to TA2 she lets them go work independently at cut-and-paste table letting them know they have about 5 minutes before recess. TA2 has one remaining student who is reading the story for the second time. T2 speaks from front of room.

T2: "Can Racquel read that whole book?"

TA2: "Yes, she can. We were just practising again to make sure but she did perfect the first time round."

T2: "Good! Bring it over and let me see."

Racquel goes to T2 and begins to read.

(Site II, Observation Note I, p.5)

The teacher assistant would also observe the children from a vantage point within the classroom without interacting with the children.

In the morning during our centre time my assistant and I circulate and share observation skills. We don't actively get involved with the children in their centre time and we make comments such as, They're playing better together or This is the first time so and so has picked the paint table and things like that.

(T2, Interview I, p.9)

TA1 is re-arranging sequence cards on table – no children at the

table. She is watching 2 boys sitting on floor about 6–8 feet away. Boys are playing on a large mat which has streets imprinted on surface—stop signs, direction signs, stores, etc. Boys are using small toy cars and pretending to drive them down the street. TA1 completes card set-up. She then walks toward front of room where T1 is working with one child.

TA1: Rosemary, remind me to tell you about Andrew's and Michael's play at lunch time.

T1: It's improving?

TA1: Much!

TA1 moves to a child working at shapes table and begins to work with her.

(Site I, Observation Note II, p.6)

Children are watching a reading program on T.V. – TA2 and T2 are discussing a student.

TA2: "I noticed Jeff has been much happier this week. He's getting along better with the others and is easier to work with."

T2: "Good, I haven't been able to really watch him much the past couple of days. I guess things are better at home. I'll try to watch him for a while later."

TA2: "Okay, I'll keep you posted as well."

(Site II, Observation Note II, p.3)

The teacher assistants and teachers held similar views about the necessity of observation for the purposes of feedback to the teacher. This information is then used both for evaluating student progress and program effectiveness as well as planning programming activities for the child. Each recognizes the value of another experienced observer in the classroom.

... Sometimes I see things that Rosemary doesn't see and she sees things that I don't see. So we interact and discuss what we think is going on with each child ... when report card time comes she does say what do you think about this or that.

(TA1, Interview 1, p.4)

... Say, oh this child hasn't been able to do this skill, how about if I work on that tomorrow. Fine. Or I'm going to do that today. So we work on these types of things. Therefore there's long range planning, weekly planning that Megan would be involved in and that comes from good observational skills on her part.

(T1, Interview 1, p.1)

The teacher I work with now values my opinions of the students. She asks me about their behaviours, how they're doing in phonics, math, socializing, you know, those kinds of things. So it's important

that I watch the kids carefully and remember what I saw.
(TA2, Interview 2, p.2)

I want to be able to bounce my observations off them. Are you seeing what I'm seeing? I want them to give me feedback and I want them to say, No, I don't see that at all but I did see this! I get to make the final decision, but I want them to be able to be aware of the growth strands that children go through so that they can connect what they are seeing in the classroom to what we use as an evaluation.
(T2, Interview 1, p.7)

The administrators also made reference to teacher assistants playing an observer role in the classroom. The administrator's beliefs appear to focus on the teaching assistants making a contribution to the evaluation process through their observations of the children in the classroom. The teacher assistant is an important source of information and the administrators feel that the teacher should consult with the teacher assistant when she is doing student evaluation activities.

The actual evaluation is by a qualified teacher. But they can use all the resources that they need for the evaluation and the evaluation is how does the student operate in their room, go to a T.A. and say how is that student operating in that room. More so in the present day education because our system evaluation is changing rapidly, especially from J.K. to Grade 6. The stress on evaluation, what we call observational evaluation, we use acute powers of observation in all areas of development of a child and then use that to find the strengths, weaknesses, improvements ... I would expect the teacher should ask the T.A. in certain areas to help her do on-going evaluation.
(P1, Interview 1, p.9)

Nowadays we've got active learning, process writing, whole language, that's fantastic. We've been making great strides and it's reflected in the kids, how they feel, the attitude is even more positive. But the load on the teacher is much heavier so they have to read up on it. The evaluation is the biggest problem, and record keeping and this is where I can see a T.A. in every classroom. She can watch, observe the kids and help the teacher keep track of what everybody is doing in the classroom. This way the teacher's evaluations are more accurate.
(P2, Interview 1, p.3)

I think that in Special Education rooms another set of eyes and hands is important. And the teacher aide gives us that. She does things for the teacher but she also reports what she sees happening with the children to the teacher. The teacher can use this information for evaluative purposes or for new programming. So I think our aides have to be skilled in observation techniques. (S1, Interview 1, p.7)

The Site School Board job description does not specifically mention observation skills. However, working procedure 3 "Works with students in daily note taking and individual student work" and working procedure 10 "Assists in the Individual Program Planning (I.P.P.'s)" appeared to require some observational skill. One would expect that if the teacher assigned the teacher assistant to work with the student that the teacher would want feedback from the assistant concerning the student's performance. As well, in order to make a constructive contribution to individual program planning the teacher assistant would need baseline data gained from direct observation of the child.

The Ontario Teachers' Federation recognize that the teacher assistant should make contributions to the evaluation of students as well as to the student's program planning. These contributions are based on the teacher assistant experiences in working with the children.

One person cannot have command of all knowledge. To try to know everything is to set oneself up for failure. Therefore, the effective utilization of professional support personnel and of auxiliary personnel is increasingly necessary. (Ontario Teachers', 1989a, p.2)

Teamwork is essential. Students must view the authority of teacher and auxiliary as equal. They must understand that both teacher and auxiliary respect each other's observations, points of view, suggestions and authority. (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989a, p.4)

The Federation also stated quite clearly that the teacher had "the exclusive responsibility" for each child's evaluation even though the teacher can

seek input from other sources.

That teaching functions which involve decisions regarding diagnosis of student difficulties, prescription of learning experiences, and evaluation of student programs are the exclusive responsibility of teaching staff. Teachers are, however expected to consult with auxiliary personnel where the auxiliary's expertise may be critical to such decisions. (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989a, p.5)

This belief appeared to be in concurrence with the statements made by administrators, teachers and teacher assistants. There was a recognition by all participants that the teacher does the evaluation and the teacher assistant contributes to the evaluation process through her observations of the children.

The observer role also occurred simultaneously on a regular basis with the instructor and behaviour manager roles and to a lesser extent with the mother role which will be discussed next. The overlapping among the roles will be examined in more depth in Chapter V.

Caregiver Role. The caregiver role was defined as activities that the teacher assistant performed that involved some provision of care and nurturing that was not considered instructional in nature. Some examples include helping a child zip up a coat, showing pleasure and interest when a child tells about her new pet kitten, and reminding a child to go to the washroom. I had originally used the term "mother" to label these types of activities but decided to change to the term "caregiver" to reflect a more gender neutral term while at the same time capturing the essence of the role as indicated in the data. A more thorough discussion of the development and relevance of the caregiver role will occur in Chapter V.

Data supporting the caregiver role was found in the observation notes,

the interview transcripts of the teacher assistants and teachers as well as in the job description. No data supporting this role was found in the administrator's interview transcripts or the O.T.F. documents.

The most direct information came from the teacher assistants' interviews and the observation notes.

When the children come in, I try to be in the classroom so that they know to put their stuff down and go right outside otherwise they will dilly and dally around ... Sometimes some of the kids will have started with a bad morning at home and you kinda have to help them through that and let them know that just because their morning was bad at home that the day can still be good here ...
(TA2, Interview 1, p.6)

A lot of days when they came in they just need someone to listen to them ramble, and I do. We have one little boy in particular that I could listen to him all day, just sit here and listen to him. I take on the role of the mother hen in the classroom. If their zipper is stuck they come to me, if they have a cut finger they come to me, when they want to talk about the latest toys on the market they come to me.
(TA2, Interview 2, p.2)

It's helping them get dressed and we like to let them do as much on their own as they can but sometimes no one has shown them how to tuck their boots up inside their ski pants and put their mitts on or sometimes they go inside their lunch pail for a snack and everything is kinda falling apart so we put it back together. Monitor their snacks in the morning because if they have chocolate or sugar they come in reaching for the ceiling. So basically it's looking out for them, caring for them, you know.
(TA2, Interview 1, p.3)

... Of course then we have a washroom break, if they make it that long. That's an experience because you have to say to them go to the bathroom, make sure you flush, make sure you wash your hands, tuck your shirt back in. That's where the old mother hen role comes in.
(TA2, Interview 1, p.7)

You play with them, you tickle them, and clap when they do a good job and that type of thing.
(TA1, Interview 1, p.3)

In special ed. classrooms you have a group for three years. You get

to know the child, the home life and what is happening there. I do make phone calls to parents. Talk to parents on the phone. Find out why a child doesn't have a lunch today. I've had to give my lunch to a child because they haven't had anything to eat. It's a role of a mother, T.A., a nurse, everything. You have a multi role I think after you've been in a classroom for length of time.
(TA1, Interview 1, p.7)

Although the teachers did not use the term "mother" or "caregiver" they did indicate some qualities they thought teacher assistants should have that would be closely aligned with the caregiver role.

Where they (teacher assistants) pick up this course I don't know, but it's called compassion, understanding and patience because if you don't have that you can't be effective in a classroom.
(T1, Interview 1, p.9)

... Greeting the children with your happy face no matter how sad you are and helping them feel really good about themselves as they walk in the door. Helping them if need be in physical situations or any young children getting undressed and ready into the classroom and talking to them a lot.
(T1, Interview 1, p.10)

... If it's preparing turkey dinner, then you help prepare the turkey dinner. If it's going on a field trip to the farm, then it's driving children or being in the car with the children to help provide the language that they need and the discipline or the monitoring, whatever's happening.
(T1, Interview 1, p.11)

Participant T2 also indicated specific qualities for a teacher assistant that were characteristic of the caregiver role. When asked the clarifying question, "So the one on one assistance doesn't just centre around teaching the child academics"? T2 offered the following explanation.

No. It involves caring and it involves from worrying about what they have for a snack in the morning and to commenting on a new toy or something that's happened in their life or just taking a really honest interest in these little guys and their lives.
(T2, Interview 1, p.2)

The caregiver role was also reflected in the observation notes for both

sites.

8:57 A.M. TA2 is here. Teacher not here yet. Six children come in from outside – lots of talking –

Child: "Mrs. Melissa guess what happened to me?"

TA2: "What?"

Child: "I got beat up by two boys."

TA2: "Oh!"

Other children interrupt, talking about Xmas. Children continue to hang up coats etc. TA2 talks to each child and assists some with coat zippers and reaching coat hangers.

(Site II, Observation Note 1, p.1)

T1: "Did you go pee in your pants?"
(Child has apparently wet his pants)

T1 gets up and heads to back of room. TA1 notices and asks what's the matter? T1 explains child wet his pants and she is going to take him to washroom.

TA1: "I'll take him."

T1: "No, it's O.K."

TA1 follows T1 to back of room where T1 gets spare pair of pants. TA1 takes pants from T1 and says "Rosemary, it's O.K. Let me take him." Smiles.

T1: "O.K. but give him a talking to."

TA1: "Right."

T1 returns to front of room and calls children around her to start new lesson.

(Site II, Observation Note 1, p.6)

The Site Board job description's first two working procedures appear to reflect activities that a teacher assistant would perform when fulfilling the caregiver role.

1. To provide each student, as required, with the physical assistance in preparation for daily routine; ie., off/on loading the buses, dressing/undressing outerwear clothing.
2. To provide each student, as required, with assistance in such things as feeding, mobility, toileting, personal hygiene.
(Appendix II)

Evidence for the caregiver role was found predominantly in the field sites. The role was identified by the subjects who were teacher assistants and supporting information was found in the teacher interview transcripts, the field

site observation notes, and the job description. The overlapping and interaction of the caregiver role with other class 1 roles will be explored in Chapter V.

The Team-Player Role. The word, "team", was first identified as a sensitizer during the open-coding phase (Strauss, 1987) of the data analysis process. I observed that several of the subjects used terms such as "team relationship" and "part of the team" when discussing the roles of the teacher assistant. No direct reference was found in the School Board job description but the word "team" was found throughout Ontario (Ontario Teachers' Federation (1989a)). I also used the term "teamwork" in analytic memos written during the initial analysis of the site observation notes.

The team player role for the teacher assistant involved working cooperatively primarily with the teacher. But this role also involved a cooperative working relationship with other members of an education team such as the principal or a special education consultant. As well as listening effectively in order to take direction, being a team player also meant taking initiative and demonstrating support for the teacher and other members of the education team. It was evident from the transcripts that this role interacted with the other roles and that the team player role required good communication skills.

The teacher assistants and teachers discussed the importance of communication in the team-player role. It appeared from their statements that this role must be closely intertwined with the observer and instructor roles.

Now she (teacher) does a lot of planning, sometimes I'll have an input in it depending on what it is. She asks a lot of my advice on

what I think about this or that type of thing. She and I work as a team I'd say. We work as a team.
(TA1, Interview 1, p.1)

Sometimes I'll mention well such and such a child knows their alphabet really well and I think it's time maybe they stepped up and did something else to do with the alphabet, maybe phonics, integrate some words that begin with 'A' and start that type of thing.
(TA1, Interview 1, p.3,4)

... I feel we both share a team relationship and so we should both be doing those types of things but these include preparing bulletin boards, preparing art lessons ...
(T1, Interview 1, p.1)

... communicating all the time with what you're doing and why you're doing it, so that you understand what is happening. Not holding it all back until Friday and saying 'Gee, I didn't like what you did on Monday' or 'Why did you make me do that on Tuesday?' Immediately having some kind of interaction time when the children are not there to go through the why's and the what's of what you did. And asking questions constantly so that you understand. That's basically how we work. The team (pause). And we are very equal and that doesn't happen everywhere else.
(T1, Interview 1, p.11)

Some of the things that are listed on the job description fit, you know, assist the teacher in the classroom with routine duties, well we do that, we work together as a team.
(TA2, Interview 1, p.2)

... I think we both have the same view, the same understanding, the same expectations. At the same time, if I'm not doing something the way she (teacher) wants, she's free to say, 'No, don't do it like that, this is how I'd like you to do it'. And I try to model what she does with the children so that they're not getting (pause) she's doing it this way and you're doing it totally different. And I try to keep on the same lines.
(TA2, Interview 1, p.3)

Teamwork? Let's see (pause). It's critical, a good example was when (TA2) was on maternity leave and I had a few different assistants. The one I finally settled on for the long term was the one who would listen to your expectations and who was eager to become part of the team in planning and in organizing. I hadn't thought about it before, but when I think of who came in that's the quality that she brought to the job that made her time here very successful.
(T2, Interview 2, p.1)

Well, if we're to work as a team, they (teacher assistants) need observation training. I need to hear what they're seeing. I need to share what I see with them. We have to communicate very well together.
(T2, Interview 2, p.2)

The administrator's comments related to the team player role, echoed the views of the teacher assistant and teachers although the principals' views were expressed more in terms of the teacher assistant being a member of the "school team".

If the T.A. is made to feel compatible and part of the school team (pause) like simple things such as staff meetings. When they are allowed to attend staff meetings, with regards to program planning, with regards to objectives and goals of the school, they feel part of the team and therefore they feel part of the whole educational process in that school and therefore it makes that role much more important to them.
(P1, Interview 1, p.6)

If we have teas or bazaars, I like the teacher aides to be involved in that, meet the parents. The parents should be aware who is working in the classroom with their children. I try to encourage that. Anytime we have a social activity especially during school hours, we hope the teachers and aides help by putting out the tea and socializing with the parents.
(P2, Interview 1, p.6)

Previously referenced quotes by the principals concerning the observer role and behavior manager role support the concept of the teacher assistant being a team player in the classroom. Two examples are (P1, Interview 1, p.2; P2, I2, p.3). The principal spoke about the teacher and teacher assistant working together in meeting the behavioural and instructional needs of the children.

The superintendent appeared to be a strong advocate of the team-player role. She used the term "teams" several times in her interview and spoke about the ability to work as part of a team as a criterion which influenced the effectiveness of a teacher assistant in the classroom.

... To be there as a second hand and in working right along with the

teacher. A lot of teachers and teacher aides work very closely as teams. They are teams and they respect each other for what they bring to the classroom. And hopefully that would work much better in settings where they consider why they're there. It's a team effort and they're there for the benefit of the child. And through the two of them working together they are going to be much more successful with that child.

(S1, Interview 1, p.2)

Well, I think there is a much greater awareness of the benefit of having a teacher aide in place. Not only as just another adult in the room but how they can really help children grow in their programs. By sitting down and being teams and taking a look at the programming and developing programming as a team and the teacher sitting down and the two of them working out the concepts and how they are going to be put in place ... and by doing this team effort building on how they are going to interact as a team to help that student ... It has to be a team effort, the ones that are successful are doing it as a team.

(S1, Interview 1, p.5)

... I'm not saying all our teachers use teacher aides effectively, but the ones that do see the great benefit of having a T.A. in place. And also see there's a benefit of working as a team. And realizing what T.A.'s can bring to the program because if they are aware of the components within the T.A. training ... these people bring a lot of skills to the classroom, lots of skills. And if teachers are aware of that, then they should be utilizing those skills to the utmost. And if they do, it's just going to make their classroom that much more productive.

(S1, Interview 1, p.6)

References to the concept of the teacher assistant being a team-player were also found in one of the Ontario Teachers' Federation documents. The O.T.F. recognized the value of the skills and knowledge that a teacher assistant can contribute to a team relationship in the school.

One result of the development of the inter-disciplinary team approach has been the continual development of training programs at the college level. Specialized graduates are being trained in such skills as programming for young children, interpersonal skills, advocacy, health care, behaviour change programming ... These graduates represent a highly trained pool of resource personnel whose skills can be effectively utilized in the school system in non-teaching positions. (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989a, p.2).

The O.T.F. also stated how teamwork contributes to self-esteem of the teacher assistant. The following quote is from a section in Auxiliary Personnel in the Schools of Ontario dealing with teacher guidelines for working with a teacher assistant.

Teamwork is important for the atmosphere and for the self-esteem of the auxiliary personnel. The following points should be considered as the team is developed:

1. Encourage the development of a team relationship. Avoid competition ...

In general treat the auxiliary as an integral part of staff, have realistic expectations, don't demand work outside of the job description, and be receptive to suggestions and comments by the auxiliary (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989a, p.4)

The aspect of the team-player role which dealt with planning and programming also appeared to be supported by the O.T.F. "Auxiliaries have the training and experiences to make valid contribution to case conferences while learning more about special programs for students" (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989a, p.7)

There were no direct references to the term "team" in the observation notes but the researcher did use the term "teamwork" when analyzing the observation notes. During the observation notes analysis by the researcher several interactions between the teacher assistant and teacher were labelled as teamwork activities. Three examples are provided to illustrate how the teacher assistant and teacher work as a team.

T1 is working with one boy on a writing activity. TA1 is walking by and stops to observe. T1 notices TA1 watching.

T1: "Emergence writing is what Andrew is doing. I read about it in this new language development article."

TA1: "Emergence?"

T1: "Emergence writer, it is the beginning of writing. I'll give you the article to read if you want."

TA1: "Okay, sounds like something that would be helpful."

TA1 moves across the room to two children at play centre.

(Site 1, Observation 1, p.2)

TA1 and T1 are standing at reading centre talking and watching children who are all working at various activity centres. One boy gets a toy fire truck and walks by TA1 and T1.

T1 looks at fire truck.

T1: "Do they take fire station tours anytime, Megan?"

TA1: "Yes, we just have to call."

T1: "Okay, I'll do that today."

TA1: "Yes, Mike told me last night they'll be glad to see us."

T1: "Good. I also looked in Consumer's Catalogue for those tape recorders but now the Board has put restrictions on our spending.

TA1: I wonder why. They're always doing these things without telling us.

T1: "I try to talk to Sean (P1) about it."

TA1 nods and then attention back to children.

(Site 1, Observation 1, p.5)

After dictation T2 calls students to her on carpet area and begins another lesson - "B" sounds - shows pictures with objects starting with "B". TA2 sits on table beside children and watches. T2 continues showing pictures and asking children questions. TA2 offers words of praise "good" "right" and smiles often. After about 5 minutes. T2 concludes lesson by explaining to children they are going to an assignment. While T2 giving explanation TA2 goes to desk and picks a small stack of paper. Walks back to children and when T2 finishes explanation hands a paper to each child. The paper has pictures on it and the children must label. T2 says "Thank-you" to TA2. Both begin to circulate around the room as children have dispersed to various areas to complete the assignment. Both T2 and TA2 are checking with children to make sure they understand the task.

(Site II, Observation 2, p.4)

The team-player role involved performing activities that closely intertwined with other roles in the Category I but since the team-player requires providing support it also interacts with the two roles in the Category II, the technician role and the clerical role which are discussed next.

Technician Role. The technician role involved performing duties which generally supported the presentation of an instructional activity. Examples included setting up audio-visual equipment, preparing a bulletin display and

setting up a learning activity centre. This role was placed in Category II, Non-Contact with Children since it appeared that the teacher assistant had minimal or no contact with the students while performing this role. More discussion of Category II will occur in Chapter V. Evidence for this role was found mostly in the interview transcripts, job description and one of the Ontario Teachers' Federation documents.

Both the teacher assistants and the teachers speak about duties that would be part of the technician role while at the same time ranking this role below the roles that involve more contact with the children.

The non-instructional tasks are mediocre compared to working with the children.
(TA1, Interview 1, p.1)

To me non-instructional tasks are clerical type things like filing and typing, booking appointments and other things (pause) like doing bulletin boards, getting the V.C.R. going, that type of thing. I do most of that before or after class when the children are gone.
(TA1, Interview 2, p.1)

Megan arrives 45 minutes to an hour before the children come. There are obviously some non-instructional tasks that can be done as in setting up centres, photocopying lessons for the day, finishing off a bulletin board, whatever, those types of things to do.
(T1, Interview 1, p.10)

Certainly there's a little bit of typing and a little bit of running off of dittos and stuff, arranging the room, but they're not quite as important as, (pause) it's easy to step out and run off 8 copies, so it's not as important to get that done as it is to sit with the kids.
(TA2, Interview 1, p.1)

Before the kids get here in the morning? (pause) Sometimes I used to do bulletin boards, or set up activities, depends what the teacher wants. Sometimes there's nothing to do and I'll have a coffee.
(TA2, Interview 2, p.2)

They do clerical or (mmm) technical things such as preparing paints, replenishing supplies, running of dittos but it's never done when the children are in class. You don't have teacher assistants to clean out the paint cupboard, you don't have them to do typing, you have them to help you with the children, that's first.

(T2, Interview 2, p.1)

The administrators agreed that the teacher assistants did have a technical role to play but not at the expense of working with the children.

The least important that I would think in a T.A. is the stress on the physical aspects. The physical aspects are important with regards to bulletin boards and xeroxing, but that's the least. I do not like to see the T.A. in the xerox room all the time running stuff off or always doing bulletin boards or cutting paper, that's the least important part of their job.

(P1, Interview 1, p.3)

There are non-instructional tasks in the job description such as helping with the bulletin boards, getting the A.V. ready and so on. But I think that's secondary to working with the children, to helping the teacher deliver the learning activities to the children. I think the aide's skills are to be used first and foremost to work with the children.

(S1, Interview 1, p.8)

Direct references to duties relating to a technician role were also found in one of the Ontario Teachers' Federation documents (1989a) as well as the Site Board job description. Under duties of auxiliary personnel the O.T.F. stated the auxiliary could assist "with the organization of the classroom for the daily program by preparing teaching aids, bulletin boards and arranging books and equipment" (p.5). In the Board job description working procedure 7. "assists in setting up the classroom; i.e., setting up and dismantling A/V equipment, changing bulletin boards, special programs" was considered as data which supported the concept of a technician role.

Some minor occurrences of the teacher assistant performing technician role were found in the observation notes. As previously stated the great majority of teacher assistants' time appeared to be involved in working with the children. I realized from the observations that bulletin boards were done, learning activity centers were set-up, audio-visual equipment was in the room

and set-up. In the second interview the teachers and teacher assistants were asked who performed these activities and when were they performed. Their responses were quoted earlier in this section when providing supporting evidence for the technician role.

As can be seen from the data presented, the technician role appeared to be closely linked to the clerical roles. The subjects often spoke about clerical duties at the same time they were discussing the technician duties.

Clerk Role. The clerk role involved duties such as typing, filing and photocopying as well as other types of clerical duties, for example, booking appointments or marking of objective type tests such as multiple-choice or true/false. Similar to the technician role, the clerk role was placed in Category II, Non-Contact with Children, because the role appeared to involve no direct interaction with the children. There was an overlapping between the two roles and some of the subjects used the term "Non-instructional" to refer to duties and responsibilities that would be considered part of these roles. I felt a distinction could be made among the lists of duties and responsibilities considered to be non-instructional.

Initially a cluster of activities was developed which was labelled secretarial/clerical while another cluster was labelled non-clerical-non-instructional. I then selected the terms, clerk and technician to describe two related but distinct roles. Activities such as typing and photocopying were placed in the clerical role while activities such as setting-up bulletin board displays and audio-visual equipment were considered more "technical" in nature and hence placed in the technician role. The term

"clerical/technical" was found in the Board Job Description. The term was used to refer to the department in which the teacher assistants were classified. I feel that the clerk role and technician role were developed based on analysis of the interview transcripts and that the observation of the "clerical/technical" reference in the job description did not influence the decision concerning the labelling of these two roles.

Previously referenced statements by the participants concerning activities that supported the technician role also contained data which supported the clerk role.

To me non-instructional tasks are clerical type things like filing and typing, booking appointments ...
(TA1, Interview 2, p.2)

Certainly there's a little bit of typing and a little bit of running off of dittos and stuff ...
(TA2, Interview 2, p.2)

The subjects also referred specifically to clerical duties and responsibilities when discussing the duties and responsibilities.

Clerical might be typing up an exercise or to some degree it might be a job of marking – if it's objective rather than subjective – if it is an objective type of exercise.
(P2, Interview 1, p.1).

You have to be able to run off materials, do a little bit of typing.
(TA1, Interview 1, p.2)

Clerical duties are left to when children aren't here, before and after class. That's when I photocopy or when I book the parent teacher interviews.
(TA2, Interview 2, p.2)

One area that is not instructional, is the duplication of materials in the xerox room, maybe do some typing.
(P1, Interview 1, p.1)

The School Board job description contained references which may be

interpreted as requiring the teacher assistant to perform some clerical duties. The description listed the typewriter, the duplicating machine, the telephone and the mini-computer as equipment that the teacher assistant was expected to use. Working procedure nine in the job description refers to performing "other routine duties as assigned." When the teacher assistants and teachers were asked in the second interview what they thought this statement meant they all stated it meant typing, photocopying and making phone-calls and as TA2 stated "using common sense to help out, you know, if something needs to be typed, type it, you need 8 copies, I'll copy them."

The observation notes contained no data which indicated that the teacher assistants performed clerical duties during the observation periods. This may be expected for two reasons. The subjects stated in the interviews that clerical duties were considered low in priority compared to working with the children. Secondly, the general expectation by administrators and teachers as well as the teacher assistants was that the clerk role be performed before and after the scheduled hours that the children are in the classroom.

Data supporting the clerk role did appear to be less than for the other roles, however, the data were substantial enough to merit the development of a separate and distinct role. The relationship of the clerk role to the other teacher assistant roles as well as other issues raised during the reporting of the findings will be examined in the discussion section of Chapter V.

Differences Among the Sources of Data

There were several similar views expressed concerning the roles of the teacher assistant but there was one area of difference which involved the

instructor role. This area of difference did not represent a large volume of the overall findings. Although the amount of difference appeared small it was considered to be significant due to the influence of the sources of the data where the differences were found. Differences in views of what roles the teacher assistant should play were found primarily in the Ontario Teachers' Federation documents and to a much lesser degree in the interview transcripts of the two principals. The teacher participants also made reference to concerns about how the O.T.F. viewed the teacher assistant delivering instructional activities.

The area of contention between the views expressed by participants in the field and the Ontario Teachers' Federation was the instructor role. The O.T.F. state very clearly that only teachers are allowed to teach. The following quote is from the "Policy Resolutions of the Ontario Teachers' Federation, Section IX, B. Admissions and Certification."

1. That every person who is employed to fulfill an instructional role (as authorized by the Acts and Regulations) in the public and separate school system be qualified as a teacher and under contract as a teacher. (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989b, p.31).

This belief was expanded upon in the second O.T.F. document that was examined.

Notwithstanding the utilization of community resources and the variety of auxiliary personnel, the teacher assumes total responsibility for four major areas of education: diagnosis of pupil's learning needs, prescription for those needs, implementation of education programs and evaluation of pupil, programs and self. (Ontario Teachers', 1989a, p.2)

That auxiliary personnel not be included in the calculation of student-teacher ratio. (1989a, p.5)

These references appeared to be in conflict with the instructor role

advocated by the teacher assistants, teachers and administrators. The two principals also were cognizant of this possible conflict as were both the teachers.

We have to be very careful that they are not actually teaching but helping the student in their learning strategies.
(P1, Interview 1, p.2)

What I mean by fear (pause) the fear of having people working more closely with the students and the fear of the conflict of roles, professionalism with regards to qualifications, teaching certificates, federations and what have you. That type of fear. Wondering if an individual teacher was allowed to let a T.A. go in and work with students.
(P1, Interview 1, p.6)

Teacher aides need to take pedagogy. How students learn. How to work with students and how to deal with their problems. Here again we have to be careful of the situation and the job description, and are they doing the teacher's job, that's where the Federation comes in. We have to be careful.
(P2, Interview 1, p.7)

I also think that there are cases where there are some wonderful T.A.'s who have a lot of talent who are being utilized by their teachers as being a second teacher in the class and are made to do an awful lot more than they should be doing but that is because that T.A. is so talented. And so we are getting some real discrepancies. And I have also seen an intervention by our Federations. If you have a T.A. do this job then we don't need to have a teacher. Therefore you have teachers a little nervous of how they are using their Aides and kind of closeting it behind doors.
(T1, Interview 1, p.3)

The area of concern politically for me is I know, the reality of it is Megan is doing some teaching and politically that is a hot spot as far as the Federations are concerned and I know with when I have had replacement assistants they don't do as much teaching ... And so she is able to use teaching techniques which technically she is not supposed to do but the reality is when you are working with one or two or three children you're teaching them. And so that is a politically really fine line that I don't know how it is going to be clarified. They are not to do any teaching, while I can plan the lesson verbatim, say this and then do this, say this and then do this and when she does that then she is teaching.
(T2, Interview 1, p.3)

It would appear that some teacher assistants may be doing some teaching or at least performing some of the duties that the teacher normally does. The whole area of what teaching is, is not black and white but rather colored with shades of grey. With the exception of the superintendent, all the participants indicated that teacher assistants performed some instructional activities which could be considered as teaching. In the second set of interviews the researcher asked the teacher assistants and teachers the following question, "Given that the teacher assistant, does some teaching does that teaching differ from what the teacher does and if so in what ways?"

Rosemary has much more responsibility. She does all the planning and she does the report cards. I don't have that responsibility. She asks my input but she's responsible and she has the final say. She usually teaches all the first lessons and I do the review lessons.
(TA1, Interview 2, p.1)

Yes, definitely. I do the diagnosing, planning, delivery, and evaluation aspects of teaching. I get input from the teacher assistant when planning and evaluating but I'm the one who makes the decisions. We're both probably very similar in the delivery aspect because we've been together so long but here I'm the one who does the initial lessons with the children and she does the review.
(T1, Interview 1, p.1)

I think there's a difference. Well her lessons are far more structured and mine are, (pause) I reinforce what she has already taught. She gives the initial lesson and I take them aside and we go over it and reinforce it. She also does all the planning and the kids' report cards and that's one job I'm glad not to have.
(TA2, Interview 2, p.1)

I would say we are different. I plan all the lessons. Melissa helps me deliver them. She does more one to one work with students after I teach the original lesson. I'm also responsible for designing the individual programs and for evaluation. She doesn't have any of that responsibility although I certainly seek her input. So I think it comes down to I do all the duties that a teacher does and she does small parts mainly helping the child with instructional activities."
(T2, Interview 2, p.1)

The teacher assistants and teachers recognize that the teacher assistants

do some activities considered a part of teaching. They also recognize that the teacher has far more responsibilities in the areas of planning, delivery, and evaluation and that while the teacher assistant does do some teaching she in no way performs all the duties and responsibilities expected of a teacher. The teacher assistant instructional activity is limited to reinforcement or reviews of materials or concepts previously selected and taught by the teacher. It also appeared that neither teacher assistant wanted any further responsibility related to teaching especially when it came to the evaluation of the child.

While the superintendent did not actually state that teacher assistants were performing teaching duties she did speak about them working one on one with students and ensuring that the student is using the right learning strategy. This type of activity could be considered to be teaching duties. The superintendent also indicated where she saw a difference in the teacher and teacher assistant roles when she was discussing the roles the teacher assistant.

The teacher is responsible for the master lesson designing it, revising it, on-going evaluation and the teacher aide helps carry out the lessons with the children.
(S1, Interview 1, p.6)

There were also references in one of the O.T.F. documents which appeared to recognize that perhaps a precise definition of teaching is not possible and that it may be permissible to have teacher assistants perform some teaching duties as long as the teacher retains responsibility for those duties and consents to the use of a teacher assistant in the classroom.

An emerging category, educational assistants can assist the teacher in creating and implementing behaviour change programs and programs which serve to add or augment skills....The teacher may consult with professionals such as psychologists or speech therapists. However, the teacher designs the program. The auxiliary may help implement it. In school, auxiliary personnel will perform their duties under the supervision and direction of a member of the teaching staff. (Ontario

Teachers', 1989a, p.3)

That any teacher has the right to decline auxiliary personnel services.
(p.5)

Under the title "Duties of Auxiliary Personnel" (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989a, p.5) the O.T.F. suggested the following which appeared to involve some teaching duties.

- providing assistance in the presentation of a meaningful program through involvement in the classroom, playground, or in other activities
- providing individual or group assistance to students with program needs, special needs, or personal needs
- carrying out behaviour management programs established by the teacher
- administering remedial procedures that are prescribed by the teacher and that the auxiliary has been trained to administer

These areas of possible disagreement will be further explored in Chapter V and suggestions made by the researcher concerning the actual magnitude of the differing views.

Summary

Findings were presented based on interviews of teacher assistants, teachers and administrators, observations of two separate teacher-teacher assistant classroom sites and review of documents from the Site Board and the Ontario Teachers' Federation. Two categories of roles were suggested. Category I - Working with Children consisted of five roles which were the instructor role, the behaviour manager role, the observer role, the caregiver role, and the team player role. Category II - Non-Contact with Children consisted

of two roles which were the technician role and the clerk role. The last section of the findings addressed the differences of views among the data. The one area of possible contention was the instructor contact role.

The interpretation of the findings, their relationship to the literature, and the limitations of this research will be discussed in Chapter V.

Chapter V

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This research sought to identify and understand the roles of a teacher assistant by studying the views and behaviours of teacher assistants and teachers in two elementary school classrooms in Ontario. In addition, the views of the administrators who supervise the participant teacher assistants and teachers were obtained and analyzed as well as the related policies of the Ontario Teachers' Federation. Qualitative methods were selected for this study because I wanted to collect insider views in order to gain a true understanding of how teacher assistants perceive their roles in the classroom. "Qualitative methodologists assume that, to fully understand the issue under investigation, they must participate at some level in the meaning world of their participants" (Pyke & Agnew, 1991, p.137).

The initial research questions asked how teacher assistants saw their roles and how their views compared to the views on the roles stated by others who have a working relationship with teacher assistants. This chapter will discuss my interpretations of the findings which addressed the research questions. A conceptual model representing the roles of the teacher assistant will be offered. This model will explain the roles and the inter-relationships of roles to each other. During the presentation of the model and discussion of each role linkages to the literature will be provided. The chapter will conclude with a

discussion of the limitations of the research. Chapter Six will discuss the implications of this research related to theory, practice and future research as well as personal reflections on the process.

Conceptual Model of Teacher Assistant Roles

The development of the teacher assistant conceptual model based on the findings enabled me to respond to the central question of this research: What are the perceived roles of the teacher assistant? As I analyzed the data and began to identify possible roles two factors became apparent. First, there was universal agreement among all the participants that teacher assistants should spend most of their time working with children. Secondly, based on the participants' beliefs about the roles and the data in my observation notes, roles that had considered to involve working with children were a much higher priority than roles which required little or no contact. Consequently, I began sketching diagrams to represent the idea of two distinct categories of roles with one category being more important than the other. After several drafts involving models employing rectangular shapes and solid lines, a model was developed using circular shapes and dotted lines. I decided to use the circular model because it better represented the interactive nature of the roles and appeared to me to be less rigid than the rectangular model.

The model consists of two categories of roles. The first category is called Working with Children and is composed of five roles: instructor, behaviour manager, observer, caregiver and team player. I called the second category Non-Contact with Children because there is minimal or no contact with children when the roles are being performed. This category is composed



of two roles: technician and clerk role. Each of these roles was explained and illustrated with supporting data in Chapter IV.

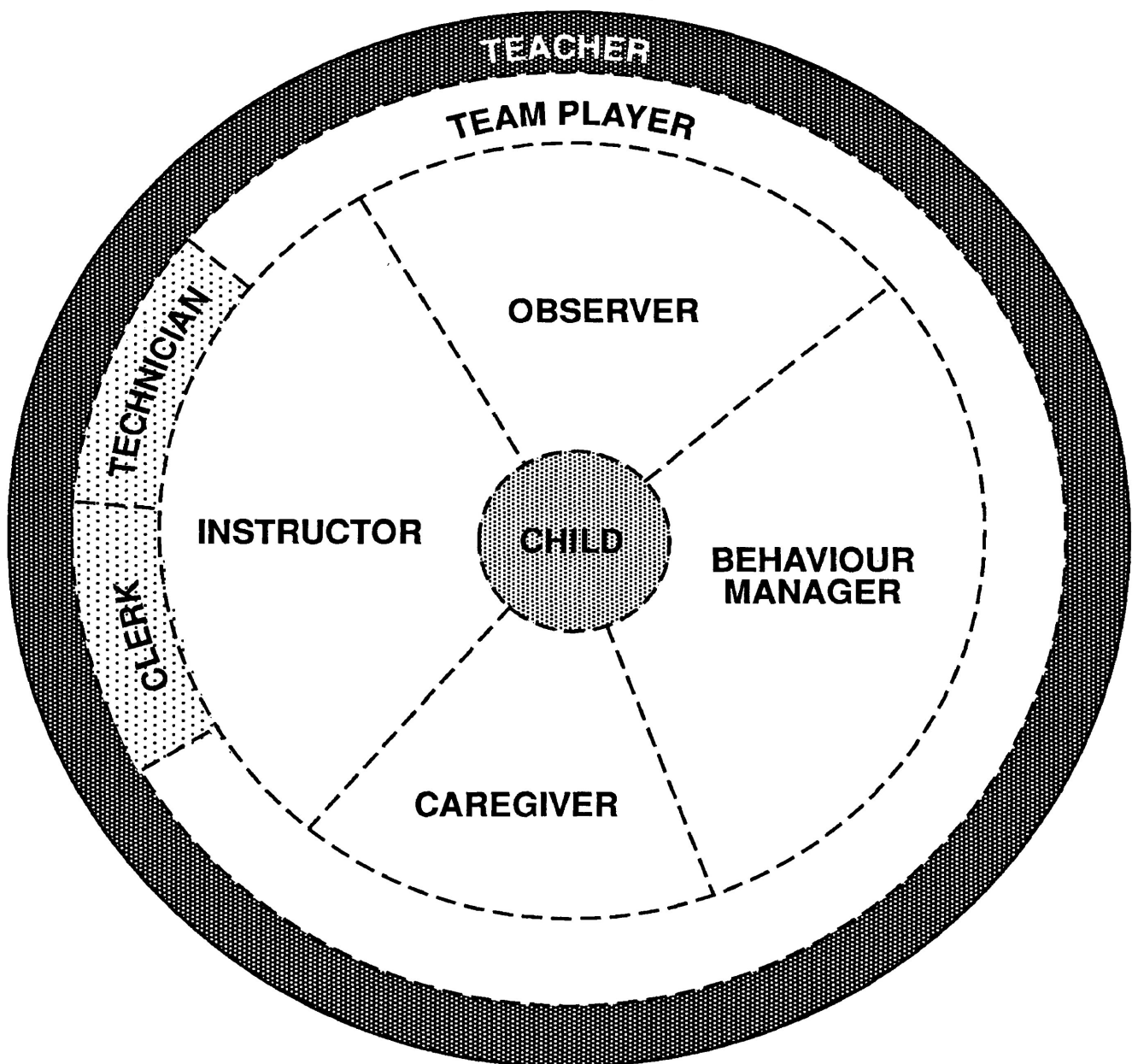
A visual representation of the model is provided in Figure 3. The two categories have been arranged to reflect the views and priorities expressed by the participants. Category I, Working with Children role sections are larger in size and located closer to the child than Category II, Non-Contact with Children to illustrate the importance all participants placed on the roles in Category I. Some roles within Category I are drawn larger, for example the role of instructor is larger relative to other Category I roles to further emphasize how participants felt about the individual roles.

The centre of the model is a small circle representing the child. The teacher assistant roles are represented by sections completely surrounding the child. A large circle representing the teacher completely surrounds the teacher assistant sections. I did this because the teacher assistants' main roles concern interacting with the child but only through the direction and supervision of the teacher. All the data in this research clearly indicated it is the teacher who is responsible for the planning, implementing and evaluation of the children's learning activities as well as deciding who the teacher assistant will work with and what she will do. The literature (Boomer, 1982; Esbensen, 1966; Escudero & Sears, 1982; Frith & Lindsey, 1980; McKenzie & Houk, 1986b) also supported the belief that the teacher designs the learning activities and assigns the teacher assistant to carry out these activities with the children.

Category II is shown outside of and adjacent to the Category I instructor role and next to the teacher. All the participants indicated that Category II roles were necessary but of much less importance than the Category I roles

Figure 3.
Conceptual Model of Teacher Assistant Roles

-  **Teacher Assistant Category I Roles**
 — Working with Children
-  **Teacher Assistant Category II Roles**
 — Non-Contact with Children



and many of the duties performed in Category II roles were usually related to preparing for the instructor role or helping the teacher prepare for her instructional duties. A third reason for placing Category II outside and away from the child was because the teacher assistants and teachers indicated in the first set of interviews that these roles were to be performed primarily when the children were not in the classroom.

Dotted lines were used in between the elements in the model to represent the fluid interactive nature of the roles. It is important to note the roles interact with each other and with the other people. For example, when a teacher assistant is delivering a learning activity on phonic sounds to a child who is really interested in watching another group of children working on a project, she is actually performing three roles – observer, behaviour manager, and instructor – at the same time. She has to observe that the child may be inattentive, correct the inappropriate behaviour, and deliver the phonic activity. Afterwards she will be expected to report to the teacher on the child's level of performance. The roles have been separated for the purposes of reporting and discussing the findings but in reality they are blended together and in constant motion.

Each of the roles identified through my research will now be discussed and related to the relevant literature. With the exception of the caregiver role, each of the roles I identified had strong support in the literature.

Category I – Working with Children

In this section the five roles in Category I will be discussed relating the research findings to the literature where appropriate.

The first role to emerge during my analysis was the instructor role. All participants indicated that teacher assistants were in the classroom to help children learn. This means teacher assistants give instructional help by directly interacting with children, either in small group or in one-to-one situations. Some examples cited by the participants included giving remedial instruction (S1, Interview 1, p.1; P2, Interview 1, p.3); reading a story to children and asking them questions (TA 2, Interview 1, p.7; P1, Interview 1, p.2); carrying out lessons planned by the teacher (T1, Interview 1, p.11); listening to children read (P2, Interview 1, p.3; P1, Interview 1, p.2); and reviewing and reinforcing work previously taught by the teacher (TA 1, Interview 1, p.1; TA 2, Interview 1, p.1; T1, Interview 1, p.11). These types of activities were observed during my field observations and were reflected in the School Board job description (Appendix II). The literature supports an instructor role being performed by the teacher assistant (Boomer, 1982; Esbensen, 1966; Frith & Lindsey 1990; McKenzie & Houk, 1986a, 1986b; Vasa and Steckelberg, 1984) and in terms of demonstrating the teacher assistant's effectiveness in an instructional role (Blessing, 1967; Handley 1986; Manning, 1979; Saterfield & Handley 1983; Shortinghuis & Froman, 1974; Wallace, 1984).

In the diagram of the conceptual model the instructor role is the largest because of the strong support and emphasis found in the research data and the literature concerning the duties, responsibilities and beliefs that fit this role. The statement by the teacher in Site II is representative of how all participants felt about this role. "The major and most important role is the reduction of child to adult ratio in the classroom....that means more individual attention in the classroom" (T2, Interview 1, p.1).

While the instructor garnered a great deal of support, it also provided the only area of possible controversy in this research data. Concerns were expressed by the teachers (T1, Interview 1, p.3; T2, Interview 1, p.3) and the principals (P1, Interview 1, p.2,6; P2, Interview 1, p.7) about how the Ontario Teachers' Federation viewed the involvement of the teacher assistant in instruction. The O.T.F. appear to be adamant that only a teacher will perform teaching duties (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989a, p.37; 1989b, p.31). However, further analysis and interpretation of the data reduced the initial chasm I initially felt existed between the O.T.F. and the participants in the field. References previously cited in Chapter IV appear to indicate that the O.T.F. would condone the teacher assistant performing some instructional activities provided that the teacher has planned those activities, directs the assistant to deliver them, and supervises the assistant's instructional delivery (1989a, p.3,5).

Definitions of teaching are multidimensional and go beyond simply delivering instructional activities. Teaching involves assessment and diagnosis of student needs; selecting appropriate teaching strategies; planning and implementing learning activities; evaluating student learning and teaching strategies used; and revising learning activities as required based on the student's needs and successes (Cooper, 1986). Similarly, the O.T.F. state that teachers are responsible for four major areas of education: diagnosis of student needs, planning for identified needs, implementation of program plans and evaluation of students and learning programs (1989a, p.2). By issuing policy guidelines which permit teacher assistants to do some instructional delivery duties (1989a, p.5), the O.T.F. appear to recognize the viewpoint that

a teacher's roles consist of many aspects and there is room for the assistant to help the teacher with the instructional aspect. The concept of the teacher as program manager (Boomer, 1980; White, 1984) where the teacher plans and directs instructional activities as well as personnel such as teacher assistants also provides support for this view.

The O.T.F. guidelines are necessary. As noted by the participants, the O.T.F. and cited in the literature pertaining to the teacher as planner, implementor and evaluator; the assistant helps with implementation and is a source of important feedback for the teacher. The presence of the O.T.F. guidelines helps ensure that the teacher's assistant instructional role does not go beyond helping with the delivery of learning activities to children and providing feedback to the teacher concerning the success of activities in helping the child learn.

The second role to emerge was the behaviour manager role. This role involves activities ranging from ensuring students' adherence to school and classroom roles of conduct, to keeping students on task during instructional activities; to delivering pre-planned individualized student behaviour management programs.

The behaviour manager role appeared to be a close second to the instructor role in terms of overall importance. I asked participants in the second set of interviews to clarify for me which role, in their opinion, was the most important. All the participants felt both roles were extremely important and needed to be there but if they had to rank one over the other, the instructor role would be first (TA1, Interview 2, p.1; TA2, Interview 2, p.1; T1, Interview 2, p.2; T2, Interview 2, p.1). The difficulty in deciding which role is

most important is understandable when one considers that in order for effective learning to occur the child must be attending to the instruction. Many times, the teacher or the assistant must spend time on correcting the child's behaviour to get the child to attend before instruction can occur. Again, it is important to note that roles are often actually happening simultaneously (Site 1, Observation Notes 1, p.6,7; Site II, Observation Notes II, p.4). The interactiveness of this role with the instructor role was best represented in the following statement by the teacher assistant in Site II.

Both are important. You know. I kinda do both together. I'm always attending to their behavior while I'm teaching them. I know somedays it seems like all I do is correct bad behaviour but overall I think I spend most of the time on instructional things. (TA2, Interview 2, p.1)

The administrators (P1, Interview 1, p.2; P2, Interview 1, p.2; S1, Interview 1, p.1) and the O.T.F. (1989a, p.5) also felt that helping to manage children was an important role for the teacher assistant.

I detected no areas of discrepancy concerning the views of the teacher assistants, teachers, administrators, and the O.T.F. in the data related to the behaviour manager role.

Given the emphasis by all the participants; the occurrences of behaviour management activities by the teacher assistants in my observation notes; the related O.T.F. Auxiliary Personnel statements supporting the behaviour role, I represented the behaviour manager role in a similar manner as the instructor role section. Both the behaviour manager and instructor role sections are equal in size and located on either side of the observer role section. The observer role will be examined immediately following the behaviour manager discussion. While all the roles interact, the instructor, behaviour manager and the observer

roles would appear to have the most interaction with each other.

Frith and Lindsey (1980); Learn (1988); McKenzie & Houk (1986b); and Vasa & Steckelberg (1984) all recommend that specific training on behaviour management, as well as observational skills, be included in any teacher assistant preservice or inservice training program. The belief in interactiveness of the instructor, behaviour manager, and the observer roles was evident in the literature. In a preservice training program offered by San Antonio College in Texas, one of the identified competencies for teacher assistants is demonstrating "Individual and group management of student behaviours" by "presenting a group lesson while monitoring student behaviours" (Identified Competencies, 1984, p.3).

The third role in Category I is the observer role. As I analyzed the data, this role developed to support the instructor and behaviour manager roles. An important part of instruction is to observe the students for cues that they are understanding the material as it is presented. Similarly, in the behaviour manager role, the teacher assistant must be watching and listening for instances when the children are not behaving appropriately and then respond with the corrective action. Observation skills are also required for feedback to the teacher on how children are performing relative to the student's instructional and/or behavioural programs.

All participants stated the teacher assistant needs to be skillful in observation. The teacher assistants and teachers felt observation skills were necessary for both planning and evaluation purposes (TA1, Interview 1, p.4; TA2, Interview 2, p.2; T1, Interview 1, p.1; T2, Interview 1, p.7). The administrators seemed to stress the necessity of good skills due to their belief

that the teacher assistant provides feedback to the teacher concerning each child's progress in school (P1, Interview 1, p.9; P2, Interview 1, p.3; S1, Interview 1, p.7). They saw the teacher assistant's input as a means of contributing to the accuracy of each student's evaluation. The O.T.F. also recognizes the need for the teacher assistant to play an observation role in the evaluation process (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989a).

The literature was supportive of the observer role (Boomer, 1982; Learn, 1988; McKenzie & Houk, 1985b; Vasa & Steckelberg, 1984; Woolf & Bassett, 1988). The teacher assistant "contributes to the overall picture of the child by assisting the teacher through formal and informal observations ..." (Boomer, 1982, p.195). Similar to my findings, Woolf and Bassett (1988) reported that teacher assistants thought that "their opinions about the children were valued by the teacher" (p.62).

In the role model, the location of the observer role hinged on its relationship to the instructional contact and the behaviour manager roles. The positioning represents the close interaction with the instructor and the behaviour manager roles and how the observer role supports and bridges together these two roles. The observer role also interacts with the team player and mother role. I felt these interactions were important but to a lesser degree than the larger roles of instructor and behaviour manager. Therefore, I chose to locate the observation role in between the instructional contact and behaviour management roles.

The fourth role which involves working directly with the children, I called the caregiver role. This role reflects the care and nurturing that teacher assistants give to the children. The types of activities in this role include

being attentive when a child tells about something personal, and expressing empathy when a child is hurt or sad as well as attending to physical needs such as assisting with dressing the child.

The concept of the caregiver role began during the open coding phase (Strauss, 1987) of the analysis process when the words "mother hen" and "mother" were identified as sensitizers in the interview transcripts of both teacher assistants. While the identification of each of the teacher assistant roles was a complex process, they all developed in a relatively straight forward path except for the caregiver role. The evolution of the caregiver role was more subtle. I initially labelled this role "mother" since both teacher assistants used the term when discussing activities related to the role. But after reviewing other data and consulting with my thesis advisors I began to have some reservations about using "mother". The term "mother" is not normally associated with schools and educational programming. The term is also not stated in job descriptions or policy documents and is not a word used by the administrators. "Mother" is also not gender neutral and does not reflect the fact that males are also employed as teacher assistants. Therefore, I decided to use the term "caregiver" which encompasses the care and nurturing activities described by the teacher assistants (TA1, Interview 1, p.3,7; TA2, Interview 1, p.6,7; Interview 2, p.2,3) and teachers (T1, Interview 1, p.9,10,11; T2, Interview 1, p.2). These descriptions clustered with other data in the observation notes and school board job description which supported a caregiver role that could be performed by either a female or male teacher assistant.

The role of caregiver is particularly important for two reasons. First, each teacher assistant described caring and nurturing activities when discussing

what they try to do in the classroom. Second, the word caregiver implies a long-term caring and nurturing relationship which has a lasting, influential and beneficial effect on a child. The data indicate to me that the teacher assistant relationship with the child has similar characteristics to that of a mother-child or father-child relationship. Recent research in child development suggests that the most important things a mother or father can give a young child is "emotional support, nurturance and caring" (Harris & Liebert, 1987, p.38). While there are differences between the care and nurturance given by mothers compared to that of fathers (Cole & Cole, 1989; Harris & Liebert, 1987) current research reports fathers have become more involved and more competent in the caring of their children in today's society (Lefrancois, 1989; Mussen, Conger, Kagan & Huston, 1990). Hence, one might expect that a male teacher assistant could perform the caregiver role though perhaps in different ways compared to that of the female assistant. My own experience as a college instructor of teacher assistants leads me to believe that male teacher assistants do perform the caregiver role but do not demonstrate the same levels of compassion and empathy related to caregiving as demonstrated by female teacher assistants. The presence and magnitude of such differences were not the focus of this research and will require investigation through future research related to teacher assistant roles. A recommendation for such research is stated in Chapter VI.

The literature related to teacher assistants provided little direct support for the concept of the caregiver role. Welty & Welty (1976) discussed the importance of the assistant helping provide for the child's needs beyond just instructional and physical needs. They suggest the assistant has a role to play

in meeting the child's needs for encouragement, acceptance, respect, and understanding. There may also be indirect support when one considers what is advocated in teacher assistant preservice training. Calvin (1975) suggests teacher assistant training programs include a component on the development of interpersonal skills while Steckelberg & Vasa (1988) recommend the teacher assistant receive training in communication skills. While training in interpersonal skills certainly does not mean a teacher assistant is to take on a caregiver role it does increase the possibility since any comprehensive coverage of interpersonal skills should include the development of skills characteristic of good caregivers such as the use of empathy. By demonstrating good interpersonal skills along with care and nurturing, the teacher assistant may assume the caregiver role.

Support for the concept of a caregiver role is also found in the literature related to preservice training for teachers. Noddings (1986) suggests that there be an ethic of caring in teaching with a focus on fidelity. Noddings defines fidelity as "a means of relating to students that supposes affection and steadfastly promotes both the welfare of the other and that of the relation" (p.497). Fidelity is established by the teacher demonstrating acts of caring for the students. Logically if teachers are being called on to establish more caring relationships with their students, teacher assistants should also be expected to contribute to a caring environment in the classroom. The data in this research show that teacher assistants perform many acts of caring and they see these acts as an integral part of their role in the classroom.

Related to the scarcity of literature concerning the caregiver role concept is the nature of this research design. This study is qualitative in design and

involved interviewing teacher assistants using open-ended questions. It was in the responses to such questions that the concept of the caregiver role began. This is exactly what should occur; the theory or concepts from the research develop inductively or are grounded in the data (Bogdan & Bilkin, 1982; Neuman, 1991).

In qualitative research, the researcher's interpretation of the data "begins with the point of view of the people being studied ... finding out how the people being studied see the world, how they define the situation, or what it means for them" (Neuman, 1991, p.329). My research sought the views of the teacher assistants in an open, flexible manner while the extremely limited amount of research directly seeking teacher assistants' responses (Steckelberg & Vasa, 1986; Woolf & Basset, 1988) used survey questionnaires. Since these questionnaires have pre-determined statements which allow a limited range of responses, a true understanding of the participant's belief may not emerge. Therefore, unless the researchers had used statements concerning a caregiver type of role, no such data would be produced. In my research, the participants were given the opportunity to state their beliefs openly and to expand on them. This approach allowed data to be produced which led to the development of the caregiver role. The emergence of this role is significant since it comes directly from the teacher assistants. The data appear to have validity since I was able to triangulate (Neuman, 1991; Smith, 1991) across different sources. Both teacher assistants and teachers discussed activities related to the caregiver role. I also observed several teacher assistant behaviours which could be classified as caregiving and nurturing behaviours.

The effects of the sex and background of the teacher assistant in this

study must also be considered when discussing the caregiver role. Both teacher assistants were mothers and acknowledged their mothering experience influenced the way they performed their roles in the classroom.

They kinda look to me as the mother figure and that's probably because I have two kids of my own. I'm kinda more casual with them. (pause) Maybe it's because I talk to them about my kids and things at home and stuff like that.
(TA2, Interview 2, p.2)

I started as T.A. when I was 33 years old and I have three children of my own, so I know how to interact with children. I think maybe a younger T.A. (pause) it takes them longer to get the feel of working with the children. I know one young girl with no children who started as T.A. She said they (the children) scared her. She wasn't used to having a whole room of all little munchkins running around. It took her a while to relax to work with the children.
(TA1, Interview 1, p.4)

The teacher in Site I also made reference to the influence of a teacher's assistant's previous experience as a mother.

Having formal training is important for teacher assistants especially today but it certainly helps if they are mature, have children of their own, have been mommy volunteers or parent volunteers at the school. They seem to know how to act with the children, how to show caring, they just catch on quicker.
(T1, Interview 1, p.4).

The previous experience of the teacher assistants as mothers may have influenced the emergence of the caregiver role in this study. However, regardless of whether or not the teacher assistant is female or male, a parent or not, the caregiver role seems a worthy role for any teacher assistant to assume. While the nature of the caregiver role may vary depending on the background of the teacher assistant, the age of the children, and the type of classroom, the provision of care and nurturing appropriate to the age level of the child helps meet the developmental needs of children and is congruent with the school philosophies, such as Ontario's which address the development of

the whole child.

The caregiver role was represented in the Teacher Assistant Role (Fig. 1) as a smaller section relative to other Category I roles. I did this because the role certainly involves direct contact with children but it did not appear as frequently in the participant data (transcripts and observation notes) as did the other Category I roles. As well, the literature has yet to provide strong support for such a role.

The caregiver role is new and hence requires further exploration to further determine its validity as well as its generalizability to other teacher assistants. Such exploration will be part of the recommendations in Chapter VI.

The fifth role which I called the team player role involves working cooperatively with other members of the educational team – the teacher, principal, special education consultants, and other professionals such as speech therapists. As well as taking directions effectively, the role also involves showing initiative, providing constructive feedback and demonstrating support for other education team members. This role was the last to emerge in my analysis but it is still significant because of its interplay with the other roles and its prevalence in the data and the literature.

All the participants from the teacher assistants to the superintendent discussed, in their interviews, how being a team player was important. Some of the participant's comments (TA1, Interview 1, p.3,4; T2, Interview 2, p.2; P2, Interview 1, p.3; S1, Interview 1, p.2) suggest strong linkages to the observation role as the teacher assistant contributes valuable input concerning a child's progress and behaviour to the teacher and other members of the educational team. Other participants' comments centre on the teacher

assistant being a team member who participates in the planning process and works cooperatively and proactively with the teacher in the classroom (TA1, Interview 1, p.1; T1, Interview 1, p.1,11; TA2, Interview 1, p.3; T2, Interview 2, p.3; P1, Interview 1, p.6; S1, Interview 1, p.2,5,6).

The team player role has strong support from the O.T.F. (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 1989a, p.4,7) and in the literature. Boomer (1982) feels the teacher assistant and teacher are an instructional team and "like any good team the members perform well-defined but different duties which also have different levels of responsibility" (p.194). Lacattiva (1985) sees the teacher assistant as a valuable member of "the teaching team" (p.1) whose "training, talents and skills" (p.2) the teacher should fully utilize, keeping in mind relevant professional boundaries.

The team-player role, by its very nature requires interaction, not only with other people, but also with other teacher assistant roles. The interaction occurs with both Category I and II roles. I decided to place the team player role in Category I since the participant data suggested this role involved mostly activities directly involving children; for example, reporting a child's progress to the teacher to help determine future programming for the child.

The team-player role has added significance for me, as I see it as the glue which holds the other roles together and facilitates the interaction among all the roles as well as with other people, primarily the teacher. By performing this role well, the teacher assistant increases the effectiveness and the credibility of her roles. Hence, in the Teacher Assistant Role Model, I represented the team player-role as a semi-circular shape surrounding the other Category I roles (Fig. 3). The Category II roles, which are discussed next, are

located next to the team-player representing how the interaction between Category I and II roles as well their interaction with the teacher occurs through the team-player role.

Category II – Non-Contact with Children

Category II was created because my analysis of the data indicated that the participants believed some duties and responsibilities of a teacher assistant were to be performed primarily when children were not available for instruction. These duties and responsibilities were secondary in importance compared to duties that required contact with the children (TA1, Interview 1, p.1; TA2, Interview 1, p.1; T2, Interview 2, p.1; P1, Interview 1, p.3; S1, Interview 1, p.8). From analysis of the data, I developed two teacher assistant roles, the technician and the clerk, which required minimal or no contact with children when they are being performed. Since these two roles were different from the other roles in that they required no contact with children, I created a second category of roles which I called Non-Contact with Children.

The technician role involved activities such as setting up audio-visual equipment or preparing materials for a lesson, such as tempera paint for an art lesson. The clerk role involved more secretarial types of duties, such as typing, filing and photocopying. Both roles were reflected in the School Board job description (Appendix II).

Clerical and technical duties for teacher assistants are suggested in the literature (Cruickshank & Haring, 1957; Fafard, 1977; Pickett, 1984). Vasa & Steckelberg (1984) suggest no more than 10 % of a teacher assistant's time should be spent on clerical or technical duties. This appears to correlate with

other researchers (Blessing, 1967; Frith & Lindsey, 1982; Learn, 1988; MacKenzie & Houk, 1986a; Pickett, 1986b) who want to see clerical and technician activities performed by teacher assistants included in their duties but significantly reduced to enable a much greater emphasis on doing instructional activities with children.

The literature and the participants in this research appear to be in agreement. Clerk and technician roles are necessary but play minor roles relative to roles which involve working with the children. Given these findings, I represented the clerk and technician roles as two small semicircular sections next to the instructor role. This represents the roles lack of contact with the children while recognizing the roles are necessary, especially in doing preparation for work for either the teacher or teacher assistant instructional activities.

Limitations of the Research

This research dealt with a very small segment of the total teacher-assistant population in Ontario. Similarly, the number of teachers and administrators interviewed was also extremely small compared to their total populations. The two sites in my research are only partially representative of the settings in which teacher assistants work. While language delayed special education classrooms are one of the more common special education settings, hearing impaired classrooms are relatively small in numbers (Winger, 1990). Teacher assistants also work in resource rooms, behavioural adjustment rooms, learning-disabled classrooms and with the physically and/or mentally disabled. The roles in these other settings may be similar to those found in this research

especially given the findings in the literature. Other teacher-assistants reading this account will determine if what is illustrated here is representative of their beliefs. However, I also expect in-depth field research in these settings may provide new information which will either add new roles or modify roles I have presented.

By nature of its qualitative design, much of the data are subjective, obtained primarily from the viewpoints of the participants. But, it is also the examination of these viewpoints which contributes to a richness and depth of understanding of teacher assistant roles which is not available through quantitative methods.

As the researcher, I may also be a source of subjectivity. I conducted the interviews and the observations. Efforts were made to control my bias. I was cognizant of the possibility of being biased and I constantly questioned my analysis; triangulation which contributes to the validity of research findings (Neuman, 1991; Pyke & Agnew, 1991; Smith, 1991) was used extensively during data analysis; questions were phrased in an open-ended manner; two sets of observations were done in each site and formal detailed observation periods were alternated with informal observation periods every 20 minutes to help combat observer fatigue. Another factor which may lessen the effects of my subjectivity is that the large amount of agreement among the participants was not what I expected before starting the research. I had expected differences among the views of the teacher assistants, teachers, and administrators. I also expected a large discrepancy between the O.T.F. viewpoint and the teacher assistants' beliefs. However, the findings of this research did not support my initial expectations and I have acknowledged this

fact.

Despite the number of commonalities concerning teacher assistant roles found within and among the different participant groups; the general agreements of the findings with the literature; the checks for validity and reliability placed in my research methods, I recognize the generalizability of the findings must be viewed with caution. Further research of a larger sample size using qualitative and/or quantitative methods will confirm or refute the generalizability of these findings to the teacher assistant population.

Summary

The research question, "What are the roles of a teacher assistant?" was answered through the presentation of a conceptual model of teacher assistant roles. The model involves two categories, one dealing with working with children in an instructional or related capacity while the second category deals with clerical and technical types of duties that involve little or no contact with children. All of the roles developed had strong support in the literature except for the caregiver role which I consider to be a new and important role for teacher assistants that was discovered due to the qualitative design of this research. Limitations of the research were also discussed.

Chapter VI will illustrate the significance of the findings by discussing the implications of this research to theory, practice and future research.

Chapter VI

IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The paraprofession of teacher assistant is relatively young, having only been in existence about 30 years in the United States and even less than that in Ontario and the rest of Canada. Consequently, the amount of research on teacher assistants in general is scant. In addition, there is a real paucity of descriptive research directly involving teacher assistants as participants. My research attempts to describe the roles of teacher assistants as seen through their own eyes and the eyes of those who work with them. The data obtained are empirically based and helps paint a picture of what a teacher assistant does and is expected to do. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of a teacher assistant and have implications for theory, practice and future research.

On the basis of the literature review it has been advocated that teacher assistants spend most of their time doing instructional and behaviour management types of activities. The findings of this research demonstrate the teacher assistant participants do spend most of their time carrying out these types of activities. Also of significance is that the beliefs of the participants in this study, namely teacher assistants, teachers and administrators defined the teacher assistant's primary function as helping children learn by working with them in an instructional capacity. The need for the assistant to be involved in behaviour management, to have input into the planning and evaluation processes, and to have well-developed observational skills were also stated by

all participants and supported by the O.T.F. These findings agree with the theoretical beliefs stated in the literature concerning the teacher assistant's roles and with the few empirically based research studies available. This research certainly supports researchers such as (Boomer, 1980, 1982; Frith & Lindsey, 1980) who theorize the instructional role should dominate all other teacher assistant roles and researchers such as McKenzie and Houk (1986b), Steckelberg and Vasa, (1986) whose findings indicate that teacher assistants are involved in instructional, behavioural and observational roles.

Data supporting the team player role are also significant. All participants and especially the superintendent stress the importance of good teamwork in order for the teacher and teacher assistant to work together effectively. Boomer (1982), discussed the importance of the teacher and assistant working as a teaching team while Lacattiva (1985) and Reetz (1987) add to this discussion by calling on teachers and administrators to accept lead roles in ensuring the right atmosphere is in place for productive teamwork to occur. The two sites in this research appear to have such an atmosphere and the findings related to teamwork concur with the theoretical beliefs stated in the literature. However, as with other areas of inquiry concerning teacher assistants more research specifically addressing questions concerning teacher-teacher assistant teamwork is required. McKenzie and Houk (1986b) state "further research is needed to locate exemplary models of paraprofessional management at several levels" (p.45) to create standards addressing how teacher assistants are trained, recruited and employed in the schools. These standards could then be used by other school boards. Perhaps the sites in this research are such models. More research would have to be

done concerning the effectiveness of the teacher assistants in my study, but given the strong beliefs regarding teamwork from the assistant level through to the superintendent level and a shared philosophy on the use of teacher assistants, these may be the "exemplary models" McKenzie and Houk had in mind.

The caregiver role suggested by this research may result in revisions to theoretical beliefs about the use of teacher assistants. As noted in Chapter V, this role emerged because of the qualitative nature of this research. The more human sides of the teacher assistants were allowed to emerge in this naturalistic study whereas previous quantitatively based research may have inhibited the emergence of the human point of view. Theorists now need to address whether the caregiver role is appropriate for the teacher assistant and, if so, what weight it should be given relative to other roles. Further research into this role is required to ascertain its prevalence and to further describe the role in more detail. Some issues which should be addressed in future research include the effects of gender, experience as a parent, age of the students, and type of classroom on the performance of the caregiver role by teacher assistants. For example, in this research female teacher assistants used the word "mother" when describing activities related to the caregiver role. Would male teacher assistants use the word "father" when discussing their roles and what relevance would they give to being a father as an influence in performing their job? Without such research theoretical discussions would have limited application in the field.

Research must also be done exploring the close relationship between the teacher roles and teacher assistant roles. Questions addressing the similarities

and differences between teacher assistant and teacher roles need to be further investigated. For example, does the teacher also perform a caregiver role and if so, how might her caregiver role differ from the teacher assistant's?

Teacher assistant roles such as behaviour manager and observer parallel similar teacher roles. More research needs to be done on how these parallel types of roles interface and where the distinctions are between them.

There are implications for practice at post-secondary institutions involved in the training of education professionals. Teachers who intend to work in special education or primary level classrooms will probably have to work with teacher assistants. Faculties of Education need to examine the roles of teacher assistants and design and deliver curriculum in their preservice teacher training programs related to the effective utilization of teacher assistants by teachers. As well, universities or colleges which become involved in preservice training for new teacher assistants or inservice training for currently employed teacher assistants need to ensure that their curriculum encompasses the various roles of the assistant. Most importantly, their curriculum needs to reflect the priorities given to the instructional, behavioural and observational roles suggested in this research and in the literature. The teamwork and caregiver roles should be addressed through courses on human relations or interpersonal communications.

This research suggests the roles of the teacher assistant are both broad in scope and complex. For a person to perform all the roles to their full potential requires formal training at a post-secondary level. Several recommendations are necessary. As well as the training being available, school boards should define minimum educational standards for hiring of new teacher

assistants and the upgrading of working teacher assistants. School boards should also provide inservice for teacher assistants in view of upgrading of permanent teacher assistants. The Ministry of Education should consider a teacher assistant certification process. Certification is advocated in the literature (Pickett 1986a; Vasa, Steckelberg, & Ronning, 1982) and, given the increasing expectations being placed on teacher assistants, appears to be a necessary protection for all involved.

The School Board job description in this research did reflect most of the roles identified through the participant data. However, it did not reflect the emphasis given to particular roles, such as the instructional role, nor did it provide sufficient detail of what teacher assistants are expected to do. School Boards need to develop and regularly update teacher assistant job descriptions to ensure the descriptions accurately state all that the teacher assistant does while prioritizing the most important roles as suggested in current research.

Reflections on the Research Process

This research involved slightly over a year of time while I also carried out full-time employment responsibilities. I think the most rewarding part of doing this research was identifying the caregiver role, which I consider to be a new role not previously acknowledged in the literature and the development of a conceptual model which illustrates the fluid interaction of the teacher assistant roles. The creation of new concepts for others to consider and critique was exciting and fulfilling. This made the time and energy invested in the research process worthwhile and made the whole experience quite satisfying.

I also felt fortunate to meet and be allowed into the professional lives of

such a dedicated group of people involved in educating young children. When I first approached the School Board studied in this research, I had little knowledge about the beliefs held by the School Board and the staff about teacher assistants. During my research, I encountered a superintendent and two principals who saw a need for teacher assistants to help special education children learn. They wanted to actively help create an environment where teacher assistants were fully utilized. I also met and shared in the teaching experiences of two very dedicated teachers and two very dedicated teacher assistants. Their willingness to share their beliefs and to let me observe them in action gave me an inside look at the world of the teacher assistant that I had not encountered in any literature. I know from supervising the field practicum of my students that all teacher-teacher assistant teams do not work as well as the two teams I studied nor do they always have the support of their principals or superintendents. I had expected significant differences among the participants, especially between the teaching level and the administrative level, however, it was a pleasant surprise when these differences did not materialize. I felt fortunate and privileged to have been able to enter the working lives of all the participants who have a strong commitment to children's education and to the way in which they saw teacher assistants being able to help improve the learning environment.

I think the findings of this research will help contribute to the better utilization of teacher assistants by not only providing a better understanding of the roles, but by describing two real life settings where the teacher assistants performed a variety of roles centred on helping the child while being supported by their teachers, principals and administrators.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 The people mentioned in this citation are teacher assistants employed in the elementary school panel of the Sault Ste. Marie Public School Board.
- 2 C. Searle is an Education Officer, Sudbury Office, Ontario Ministry of Education.
- 3 C. Healy is the Human Resources Officer, Sault Ste. Marie Public School Board.
- 4 C. Somme is the Superintendent, Special Services, Sault Ste. Marie Roman Catholic School Board.
- 5 Information contained in Confederation College's application to the Ministry of Colleges & Universities for approval of Teacher Aide Program 1986.
- 6 D. Marshall is the Superintendent, Special Services, Sault Ste. Marie Public School Board.

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Appendix A

Ethics Information Package

Purpose of Research

This research will investigate the roles of teacher assistants in elementary school special education settings. Teacher Assistant roles will be examined and compared from the vantage points of experienced teacher assistants, teachers and administrators as well as the teachers' federation. The information obtained from this study may be used to further develop the curriculum of existing teacher assistant and teacher training programs as well as contribute to a better understanding of how teacher assistants can be utilized in the Ontario education system.

Process for Obtaining Informed Consent

The Superintendent directly responsible for the teachers and teacher assistants involved in this study will be contacted. The nature and purpose of the research will be discussed and a request for approval in writing will be made.

All participants involved will receive a research consent form (see attachments A & B) which explains the nature and purpose of the research, steps to ensure confidentiality, and the sharing of the findings. This letter will also request their signature to statements indicating their willingness to participate in the study.

Research Instruments

This research will be conducted using qualitative methods. The study will involve observation, interviews and review of job descriptions and related policy memos. Observations will be recorded in a field note diary. The

observations will enable me to see and record the typical daily activities and interactions of teacher assistants for the purposes of comparing these to written job descriptions for teacher assistants and the stated views of the various participants in the study.

Interviews will be taped and later transcribed for the purpose of analysis. All policy memos to be used are considered to be in the public domain.

The following are a general set of questions which will be used in the interviews. The phrasing of questions 1–3 will be changed slightly to reflect who is being interviewed (eg.) a teacher assistant, teacher or a principal. Supplementary questions for the purposes of clarification may be asked depending on the participant's responses.

1.
 - a) What do you feel are your roles as teacher assistant?
 - b) Of the roles you mentioned, which in your opinion, are most important and which are least important? Please give the reasons for your choices.
2. How does your view of your roles compare with that of the job description; of the teacher you work with?
3.
 - a) Have your roles changed since you first began working as a teacher assistant?
 - b) In what ways have the roles changed and what caused the changes?
4.
 - a) How would you like the roles of the teacher assistant to change in the future?
 - b) What needs to happen in order for these changes to occur?
5.
 - a) What training or educational background should a teacher assistant

have?

b) Why do they need this training?

6. Describe a typical day, typical week for a teacher assistant.

Procedure for Insuring Confidentiality

No names of participants, their schools or the Board will be used in the written report. Where necessary or appropriate pseudonyms will be used. Each participant's views will be kept confidential from other participants as well as the Board administration. Interviews will be conducted at the participant's convenience in a private, secure area. All transcripts, field notes and audio tapes will be destroyed upon final approval of the research.

Means of Discussing Risks/Benefits

Given the confidentiality safeguards the risks are almost non-existent. Benefits are noted in the research consent form and will further be discussed with the participant when he/she reviews the form. Benefits include self-reflection on roles of the teacher assistant and a contribution to clarifying how teacher assistants can and should be used.

Process for Dissemination of Research Results to Participants

A copy of the Findings and Conclusions section of the research report will be sent to each participant if requested. Upon request I will also meet with any participant who is interested in discussing the findings.

Attachment "A"

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM - TEACHERS AND TEACHER ASSISTANTS

Please read the following information and if you are willing to proceed as a participant in this research indicate your willingness by signing the consent statement at the end of this form.

The intent of this study is to examine the roles of the teacher assistant from the perspectives of teacher assistants, teachers, principals and administrators. Your participation will involve being interviewed twice and observed twice in your workplace setting. The interviews are about 30 minutes to one hour in length and will occur in a private area at times convenient for you. The observations will be approximately 2 hours in length and will be arranged at times suitable for you.

Regarding the confidentiality of this research, all of the data collected will either refer to anonymous sources or use pseudonyms. Your school and Board will be characterized but not named. The three members of the research thesis committee at Lakehead University will have access to all the data but no one else other than you and T. Hanlon will have access to the data you provide. Once the research is complete and the report on the findings has received final approval from Lakehead University all data will be destroyed. If requested the researcher will share the findings with you both in writing and in person.

Please feel free to contact Tony Hanlon at anytime before or during the research regarding any questions or concerns you have by calling 759-6774 ext. 492 (work) or 949-5361 (residence).

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time without jeopardy.

This research will give you an opportunity to reflect on your beliefs about the roles teacher assistants play in our education system. It also provides you with opportunity to have those beliefs heard and perhaps help change the way the roles are viewed by those in authority resulting in better training and/or work situations for teacher assistants.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, given the above information please indicate your willingness by signing the following statement.

I, _____, agree to participate in the research study entitled *The Roles of a Teacher Assistant: Two Case Studies*. I understand and agree to the stated data collection techniques and to the amount of time involved. I also realize that I may contact the researcher at any time in order to clarify my involvement or the data collection procedures used in the research. I am assured that my identity will be kept confidential and that I may withdraw at any time without jeopardy.

Participant Signature

Date

Attachment "B"

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM – PRINCIPALS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Please read the following information and if you are willing to proceed as a participant in this research indicate your willingness by signing the consent statement at the end of this form.

The intent of this study is to examine the roles of the teacher assistant from the perspectives of teacher assistants, teachers, principals and administrators. Your participation will involve being interviewed once in your workplace setting. The interviews will take about one hour and will occur in a private area at a time convenient for you.

Regarding the confidentiality of this research, all of the data collected will either refer to anonymous sources or use pseudonyms. Your school and Board will be characterized but not named. The three members of the research thesis committee at Lakehead University will have access to all the data but no one else other than you and T. Hanlon will have access to the data you provide. Once the research is complete and the report on the findings has received final approval from Lakehead University all data will be destroyed. If requested the researcher will share the findings with you both in writing and in person.

Please feel free to contact Tony Hanlon at anytime before or during the research regarding any questions or concerns you have by calling 759-6774 ext. 492 (work) or 949-5361 (residence).

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If you are interested in participating in this research study, given the above information please indicate your willingness by signing the following statement.

I, _____, agree to participate in the research study entitled *The Roles of a Teacher Assistant: Two Case Studies*. I understand and agree to the stated data collection techniques and to the amount of time involved. I also realize that I may contact the researcher at any time in order to clarify my involvement or the data collection procedures used in the research. I am assured that my identity will be kept confidential and that I may withdraw at any time without jeopardy.

Participant Signature

Date

APPENDIX B
Site Board Job Description

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Site Board Job Description

BOARD OF EDUCATION
JOB DESCRIPTION

STD. CODE: TA-1

DEPARTMENT	Clerical/Technical	STANDARD TITLE	Teacher Aide 1
SUB DIVISION	Elementary School	POSITION	Teacher Aide 1
DATE	1987 04 13		

PRIMARY FUNCTION:

To assist the Special Education Classroom teacher.

MACHINERY & EQUIPMENT:

Typewriter, adding machine, telephone, copying and duplicating machines, tape recorder, phonic ear F.M. equipment, mini computers, and other related equipment.

SUPERVISION:

Teacher.

DIRECTION EXERCISED:

None.

WORKING PROCEDURE:

1. To provide each student, as required, with physical assistance in preparation for daily routine; ie., off/on loading the buses, dressing/undressing outer wear clothing.
2. To provide each student, as required, with assistance in such things as feeding, mobility, toileting, personal hygiene.
3. Works with students in daily note taking and individual student work.
4. Assists small groups of students.
5. Provides support functions during tests and examinations or during class; such as reading directions, explaining questions, writing responses.
6. Assists in maintaining a level of behaviour as determined by the teacher.
7. Assists in setting up the classroom; ie., setting up and dismantling A/V equipment, changing bulletin boards, special programs.
8. Uses various methods, teaching aides, in assisting students as directed by the teacher.
9. Performs other routine duties as assigned.
10. Assists in the Individual Program Planning (IPP's).

Board: _____

Union: _____

The above statement reflects the general details considered necessary to describe the principal functions of the job identified, and shall not be construed as a detailed description of all of the work requirements that may be inherent in the job or any other duties of a minor nature that may be assigned by the Supervisor.