

Classroom Assistants:  
their Impact in Scottish Primary Schools

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## **Abstract**

This research project aimed to explore the impact of paid additional adults in classrooms on pupils and teachers in their day to day lives in primary schools. The project was devised and conducted against the backdrop of the class size discourse and in the context of Scottish primary school education system. In recent years the composition of the workforce in primary schools in Scotland has changed. This research project focused on the introduction of classroom assistants in primary schools in Scotland. There was little in the research literature that focused on pupil/adult ratios in primary school classes. There was a gap in the research and literature on the perceptions and experiences of pupils in this changing school and classroom environment. Data on the tasks and activities of classroom assistants were collected. This project investigated these three themes.

In order to explore the complex real life setting of the primary school classroom the research design chosen allowed the researcher to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The participants in the case study were drawn from three primary schools in the city of Aberdeen. In each of these three schools one middle stages class (primary four or five) its teacher and classroom assistant formed the participants in the case study. The researcher undertook direct observation of teachers and classroom assistants in their work place setting using an observation schedule. The data collected during this phase of the project was enhanced and supported by qualitative data from the participants from semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions. In addition the researcher's in depth knowledge of the primary school class setting, her awareness and understanding of relationships and roles of the participants added strength to the validity of the data collected.

This multiple small-scale multi-method study allowed the researcher to create a detailed description of the impact of classroom assistants on the day to day experiences of teachers and pupils in primary schools. The influence of classroom assistant support was seen in teacher behaviour, workload and the activities they undertook. The researcher also found evidence to support the positive influence of classroom assistants on pupil behaviour.

## PREFACE

Throughout this dissertation the term “classroom assistant” will be used generally to describe a range of paid additional non teaching classroom support staff employed in schools. However, when referring to a more specific or different role and in direct quotations the original nomenclature will be used. This group of staff are known by such titles as classroom auxiliary, learning support assistant, early intervention auxiliary/assistant, nursery nurse, teaching assistant, special needs auxiliary, children’s supervisor and pupil support assistant. Wilson *et al.* (2001:3) discuss the significance of the title given to these additional adults. They found that classroom assistant was *‘the most common title in use’*.

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## CHAPTER ONE DISSERTATION OUTLINE AND AIMS

### Introduction

Classroom assistants have been a feature of primary schools in Scotland since the 1970s. Their introduction, and more recent increase in numbers, has impacted on the lived experiences of pupils and teachers in these schools. The overarching aim of this dissertation was to examine critically the impact that classroom assistants had on teachers and pupils in their day to day school and classroom experiences in a local council area in Scotland. This aim was to be achieved by reviewing the relevant literature and by collecting and analysing qualitative and quantitative data on the behaviours, activities and experiences of teachers, pupils and classroom assistants in three primary schools in Aberdeen City.

The dissertation aimed to address the following research questions:

1. Do the teachers taking part in the project alter how and what they teach when they are supported by a classroom assistant?
2. What are the pupils' perceptions and experience of having a classroom assistant?
3. What tasks and activities do the classroom assistants taking part in the project undertake?

The answers to these questions were arrived at through an examination of the socio-political context, the identification of key themes from the relevant literature, and through the presentation and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. A mixed method study was devised to undertake an investigation into the themes raised by the research questions as they occurred across a small sample of three classes. Employing a mixed methodology allowed the researcher to create a detailed picture of the three classes and to interrogate her findings by combining and comparing complementary data. Three data collection tools were used (1) direct classroom observation undertaken in three classes, (2) semi-structured interviews with the three teachers and three classroom assistants and (3) focus group sessions with pupils from each of the three schools. The researcher's aim in investigating and analysing the data was not to uncover the 'truth' but to build an explanation of the setting being investigated i.e. the impact of classroom assistants in these three primary school classes in Aberdeen City.

The policies and procedures developed in Scotland for the classroom assistants initiative were significantly different from those developed in England. Scotland has historically been responsible for its own education system. The devolution of responsibility for education in Scotland has led to some differences in the practical implementation of government policy between Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom (UK). This has been particularly relevant since the start of twenty first century with the re-establishment of the Scottish government. In the UK successive governments both north and south of the border have continued to fund the classroom assistants' initiative. The dissertation aimed to examine the wider socio-political context and the local Scottish context of this increase numbers of classroom assistants. This key theme is explored and expanded upon in chapter two of this dissertation.

The project was devised and conducted against the backdrop of the class size discourse. Elements in this discourse were pupil/teacher ratio, pupil/adult ratio and class size. These three phrases were often used almost interchangeably in the general discourse on this aspect of school education. Class size, pupil/teacher ratio and pupil/adult ratio are quite distinct and different ways of describing the numbers of pupils and paid staff in schools. Pupil/teacher ratio describes the number of pupils divided by the number of teachers in a school. Class size is the number of pupils in a class and average class size is the total number of pupils divided by the number of classes. Pupil/adult ratio is the number of pupils divided by the number of teachers and non teaching staff.

Pupil/teacher ratio and class size have been research issues for many years. In England researchers, most notably, Peter Blatchford of the Institute of Education, University of London, have conducted research and engaged in the debate surrounding the issue of class size. In Scotland, Valerie Wilson, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Glasgow, has made significant research contributions to this field. The focus of research has been on the effects of class size and pupil/teacher ratios. Wilson *et al.* (2001) have also undertaken research on the introduction of classroom assistants in schools.

Much of the discourse on class size focused narrowly on pupil/teacher ratios. This, in the view of the researcher, has meant that the impact of the change to pupil/adult ratios of classroom assistants has been obscured by this narrower focus on teacher/pupil ratios thread of the discourse on class size. There was little in the research literature that focused specifically on pupil/adult ratios in Scottish primary school classes and the impact of

changed ratios on teachers and teaching or pupils and their learning. This project aimed to investigate these themes.

From the 1960s onwards classroom assistants began to be introduced into primary school classrooms across the developed world. The introduction of classroom assistants had three broad purposes (1) addressing teacher workload, (2) supporting the inclusion of children with additional support needs and (3) improving attainment. The inclusion of children with additional support needs in mainstream primary schools increased the demand for additional non teaching staff to attend to their care and welfare needs. From 1998, through the Early Intervention programme, classroom assistants were allocated to most primary schools in Scotland to improve standards of literacy and numeracy. Most recently as part of workforce reform additional classroom assistants were deployed to undertake a range of non teaching tasks. Moyles and Suschitzky (1998) found a shift in classroom assistants' role from supporting children's social development and undertaking routine tasks to support teachers to include supporting learning. This dissertation aimed to explore the theme of the roles and tasks undertaken by classroom assistants

A key change in the landscape of primary schools and classes in Scotland of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been in the composition of staff in schools. Indeed since the late 1990s primary schools there have undergone a significant change in how they are staffed. In the 1990s, for example, a middle sized primary school (200 – 300 pupils) would have had 10 teachers, a headteacher, a nursery nurse, a children's supervisor (who looked after the children outside in the playground at playtime and lunchtime) and a school secretary. Today the same school would have ten teachers, a headteacher, a depute headteacher, a nursery nurse, a school secretary and up to 12 classroom assistants and special needs auxiliaries. The social dynamic of the primary school as a workplace and the pupils' experiences in the classroom have been changed by the presence and contribution of this new group of school staff.

In order to address the three research questions the researcher focused on three primary school classes, their pupils, teachers and classroom assistants. The researcher aimed to gain an understanding of the impact of classroom assistants on the complex setting of the primary school classroom through the experiences of these three groups of participants in three primary schools in Aberdeen City. In each of these three schools one middle stages class (primary 4 or 5) its teacher and classroom assistant formed the participants in this small-scale multi-method study. Three data collection methods were used, direct classroom

observation using an observation schedule, semi-structured interviews with adult participants and focus group sessions with pupil participants.

Their views and experiences on the role and impact of classroom assistants on teaching and learning and on pupil/adult ratio and class size were collected via semi-structured interviews with the class teachers in the schools taking part in the study. Similar interviews were also undertaken with the three classroom assistants involved in the project. Focus group sessions with three groups of pupils explored similar themes. Data was also gathered on teacher and classroom assistant behaviours through direct classroom observation. The classroom is an inherently complex cultural setting and undertaking observations in such a dynamic milieu is challenging. A classroom observation schedule was developed by the researcher for this stage of the research project.

A key theme in the dissertation was the impact that classroom assistants had on pedagogy as articulated in research question one:

*Do the teachers taking part in the project alter how and what they teach when they are supported by a classroom assistant?*

The changes to the structure of primary school staffing have evolved relatively gradually and schools have responded and reacted to these changes. The discourse has focused on four main themes in terms of impact (1) on the workload of teachers, (2) on pupils in terms of adult attention, (3) on attainment and (4) inclusion of pupils with additional support needs.

There has been little time or opportunity for professional reflection to date by staff in schools on the impact that classroom assistants might have on pedagogy. Calder (2002) suggested that the introduction of additional adults in a classroom should affect pedagogy but that teachers and schools had so far failed to capitalise on the presence of classroom assistants in terms of classroom practices. The researcher aimed to gather data on the types of teacher/pupil interactions at times when additional adults were supporting the class.

Research question one of this dissertation was informed by data collected through classroom observation of three teachers and three classroom assistants over a period of one school term using a classroom observation schedule. This largely quantitative data was enhanced by qualitative data collected via semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions with the participants.

## Research question two

*What are the pupils' perceptions and experience of having a classroom assistant?*

This was addressed through focus group sessions with three groups of pupils drawn from the three classes participating in the project. Recent drives to foster concepts of rights and responsibilities through education for citizenship programmes have impacted in primary schools where pupil councils and other pupil participation groups have been established. In the school setting Ruddock and Flutter (2000) described this type of participation and consultation as 'pupil voice'. One of the four basic principles in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is the child's right to be heard. The convention states:

*... the child who is capable of forming his or her own views [shall be assured of] the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*

(UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)

For this project 'pupil voice' was heard from the three focus groups which allowed the researcher to gather data from the pupils on their impressions and perceptions of the impact of classroom assistants on their day to day experiences in the classroom and school. The focus group sessions facilitated the opportunity to collect information from pupils that reflected the reality of their experiences.

## Research question three

*What tasks and activities do the classroom assistants taking part in the project undertake?*

This involved collecting data from the three groups of participants and from direct observation. The role and range of tasks undertaken by classroom assistants has changed and evolved with changing political and policy contexts. Local authorities in Scotland, as part of workforce reform initiative, have consulted with the range of non-teaching support staff in their schools on the subject of agreeing a generic job description and job title. For this dissertation it is relevant to note that Aberdeen City Council had redefined the role and responsibilities of classroom assistants, special needs auxiliaries, lunchtime auxiliaries and children's supervisors into one new post with the job title of pupil support assistant. In comparing the job description of a pupil support assistant with that of the classroom assistant the significant differences were in providing support for pupils in and out of the classroom and promoting positive behaviour. However, during this project the classroom assistant participants were employed as such and not as pupil support assistants. The

dynamics of classroom interactions are affected by the presence of additional adults. The researcher aimed to gather data on the types of interactions that took place between pupils and classroom assistants.

Equal Opportunities Commission (Scotland) (EOC) (2005) investigated classroom assistants in primary schools. The authors found that classroom assistants were undertaking a range of tasks beyond their job descriptions and specific mention was made of what the authors identified *role stretch*. They found this in particular in the tasks classroom assistants undertook to encourage and support learning:

*Classroom assistants who had additional skills, such as music, foreign languages and ICT were more likely to be engaged in higher level learning activities than those without such skills.*

(EOC, 2005:5)

### **Overview of dissertation**

The dissertation is organised into seven chapters. Chapter two provides an overview of the socio-political and policy context. Chapter three reviews the research literature relevant to the project. Chapter four sets the project in the context of paradigms and describes the project design, research tools and data analysis strategy. In chapter five the positioning of the researcher and ethical considerations are presented. Chapter six presents the findings of the study. Chapter seven explores the limitations of the project and presents reflections, conclusions and implications for practice.

## CHAPTER TWO SOCIO-POLITICAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

### Introduction

In this chapter a brief history of additional adults (volunteers and paid) in primary schools will be described. This description will be set in the relevant socio-political contexts of the 1960s to the present day. Historically Scotland has had responsibility for its education system. This and the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament (now to be known as the Scottish Government) from 1997 meant differences in the implementation of education policies in the United Kingdom (UK) pertinent to the subject of this dissertation evolved. These policy differences will be discussed in this chapter. Classroom assistants as a feature in the class size discourse will also be presented here.

### 2.1 Additional adults in classrooms

Broadly speaking there have been two distinct groups of adults who have supported teachers and pupils in primary schools and classrooms. These are parent volunteers and a range of non teaching support staff. The subject of this dissertation, classroom assistants were from the latter group. However as the presence of parent volunteers affected pupil/adult ratios it is useful to explore the relevant socio-political contextual influences that led to the development of this kind of parental participation in schools and classrooms.

From 1960s three aspects pertinent to the theme of pupil/adult ratios for this dissertation were (1) the drive to address the perception of falling standards of basic literacy and numeracy, (2) the provision of pre-school education and (3) pedagogical changes in primary schools.

The impact in UK of the post war ‘baby boom’ could be seen in housing shortages, unemployment and low standards of achievement in education. In Scotland at times in the late 1960s and early 1970s local authorities were able only to provide part time education for pupils due to a shortage of teachers. For some primary children this meant attending school only 3 days per week for periods. George Younger M.P. (when he was Under Secretary of State for Scotland) in a debate in the House of Commons on Scottish education on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1970 said,

*Glasgow is the greatest problem of all. It has to cope with the brunt of the teacher shortage and the problems of massive redevelopment all over the city, not to mention the fact that many children in the city have today to make do with part-time education.*

(Hansard 1970)



Also there was no formal upper limit to the size of a primary class at that time.

In the United States of America (USA) *Project Head Start*<sup>1</sup> was established in 1965. This was an intervention programme targeted at areas of inner city deprivation and focused on working with young children and their families to improve the acquisition of basic skills. There was a perception that a good pre-school experience laid a sound foundation for more formal school learning. In the UK from 1968 the government of the day gave financial support to the provision of nursery education through the Urban Programme<sup>2</sup>. The Urban Programme was a positive discrimination policy intended to address features of urban deprivation including low academic standards.

During this same period there was an expansion of the playgroup movement. The growth in playgroups was in response to a lack of state funded provision for nursery school age children. Finch (1984:3) suggests that the growth in the playgroup movement was largely a *'middle class response to the lack of nursery places'*. Playgroups allowed parents to organise and run pre-school education sessions for their children. The playgroup movement gave mothers an opportunity to develop skills, confidence and a voice and to be directly involved in teaching and learning.

From the mid 1960s teachers and schools were engaging in significant pedagogical changes. In England the Central Advisory Council for England (1967) published the *Plowden Report* and in Scotland the Scottish Education Department (1965) published *Primary Education in Scotland* otherwise referred to as the Primary Memorandum. These publications were influential in effecting changes in classroom methodology in primary schools in Britain. At that time the norm was for one teacher to have one class and work in one closed classroom. In Scotland, the advice and guidance contained in the Primary Memorandum led to a child-centred philosophy being adopted by many primary teachers. The Plowden Report recommended the recruitment of *teacher aides* to facilitate the implementation of these fundamental changes in pedagogy.

From the 1970's schools and infant class teachers in particular, encouraged direct parental involvement. As their children moved on to statutory education from playgroups parents responded positively to invitations from teachers and schools to become classroom volunteers. Initially parent volunteers were recruited by schools to help out with practical lessons such as art and craft activities and occasionally to accompany classes on school

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<sup>1</sup> For a full history of this major project see Zigler and Valentine (1975).

<sup>2</sup> For a critique of the Urban Programme see McKay and Cox (1978).

trips. Cyster, Clift and Battle (1979) provide a comprehensive account of parental involvement in classrooms during the 1960s and 1970s.

The involvement of parents continues to be promoted by the UK government. Many primary schools have developed good relationships with their parent bodies and have promoted participation and involvement. This approach was enshrined in Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act (2006).

During these decades paid additional non-teaching staff also began to feature in schools. From the 1960s onwards classroom assistants began to be introduced into primary school classrooms across the developed world. In United States of America (USA) their introduction and growth was a result of government policies such as Project Head Start and the Department of Education's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965). In the USA classroom assistants were supported through federal and state funding. In Scotland in 1972 the Secretary of State for Scotland supported the concept of allocating additional resources in the form of ancillary staff. As Kennedy and Duthie (1975:1) quote from Education in Scotland, a Statement of Policy (1972) *The Government is satisfied that there is scope for a considerable increase in this form of assistance to teachers.*

In the UK the Warnock Report (1978) and in Scotland HMI (1978) report on pupils with learning difficulties and the subsequent Education Act 1981 and the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 advocated the inclusion and integration of children with special needs in mainstream schools. In order for this to be implemented additional staff were required to cater for the care and welfare needs of such children. Thomas (1987) noted the development of the provision of paid non-teaching staff and identified the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools as the most important factor influencing this change in the make up of school staffing. Care and welfare support staff in primary schools had a clear role to ensure that the care and welfare needs of children with special needs were being met. They were rarely deployed at this time in classes to support teachers. Care and welfare was a very specific role for additional staff in schools. There is a body of literature that focuses on additional adults in classes with specific responsibility for supporting pupils with identified additional support needs<sup>3</sup>. However the theme of inclusion is generally outwith the topic of this dissertation. Classroom assistants who were

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<sup>3</sup> Contributors in this field were Fletcher-Campbell (1992), Clayton (1993), Baskind and Thompson (1995), Margerison, (1997), Fox (1998), Lorenz (1998) Balshaw (1999), Jerwood (1999), DFEE (2000), O'Brien and Garner (Eds.) (2001), Lacey (2001) Moran and Abbot (2002), Croll, and Moses, (2003) and Groom and Rose (2005).

employed to meet the raising standards policy and teacher workload issues were the focus of this research topic.

The Plowden Report (1967) and Primary Memorandum (1965) influenced the policy of introducing classroom support staff (for support other than the integration of pupils with additional support needs) in primary schools. Primary teachers were being guided and advised to use group teaching and activity methods. In infant classes teachers were using an 'integrated day'<sup>4</sup> to deliver teaching and learning. This was a move away from the direct, whole class teaching that had been very much the norm in the 1950s and earlier. In infant classes, in particular where the integrated day approach had been adopted, some teachers found it to be beneficial to have an 'extra pair of hands' in the form of a parent volunteer. Typically, the integrated day involved teachers organising a range of learning activities for small groups to access simultaneously. With classes of 30 children, and often more, an additional adult helping to supervise these activities was viewed as very useful in allowing the teacher to concentrate on reading and mathematics teaching. All of this was a pedagogical shift, a move away from teacher dominated whole class teaching.

In Scotland in 1970 555 auxiliaries (ancillaries) were employed by local authorities to work in nursery and primary classes. By 1972 this number had increased to 1160. This group of support staff were introduced to assist teachers by undertaking routine, non-teaching tasks. Their introduction was in part a response to a teacher workload issue. When auxiliaries were first introduced the initiative was subject to debate and discussion within the profession. Kennedy and Duthie (1975) were commissioned by the then Scottish Education Department to undertake a feasibility study of auxiliaries in classrooms. They found that teachers taking part in their study articulated a number of concerns about having a paid adult work alongside them in the classroom. The list of concerns teachers expressed in the 1975 study were similar to those expressed by some teachers when schools were being encouraged to adopt 'open door' policies, to invite parents into their classrooms and to work in partnership with them. These included lack of pre-service and/or in-service training for teachers in how to manage adults in their classrooms; concerns about professional boundaries relationships and roles; training, experience and qualifications; time for planning and discussion; and the purpose of the initiative. Some questioned if it was to reduce teacher workload, improve attainment or more to simply enhance pupil/adult ratios.

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed description of this methodology see Taylor (1983).

The general conclusions of this feasibility study were positive particularly from teachers. The authors recommended a ratio of one auxiliary for every three teachers in primary school classes. However this study did not lead to any immediate impact in schools in terms of the employment of additional support staff.

There was an expansion of classroom assistant provision in the UK in the late 1990s. Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a) in their study of classroom assistants working with five to seven year olds found that many schools recruited their paid teaching assistants from known volunteer parents who were already developing the required skills by helping out in the school in a voluntary capacity. The introduction of classroom assistants/teaching assistants was an integral component of the UK Labour Government's policy to drive up standards in education. Their introduction was designed to free teachers from 'non teaching' tasks and so allow them to target their efforts to teaching. This had been recommended by Scottish Office Education Industry Department (SOEID) (1999b) in *Time for Teaching*.

Funding streams for classroom assistants in both countries were similar. In England the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) in 1994/95 provided around £3.6m for training of Specialist Teacher Assistants with a view to developing their skills in supporting teachers in delivering literacy and numeracy in early years classes. Large amounts of public money being allocated to educational reform led to a number of research studies being undertaken. In a detailed examination of non-teaching staff in schools Mortimore, Mortimore and Thomas (1994) reported on a case study where the main brief of the classroom assistants was support learning by making classroom activities more accessible to children.

In England in 1998/9 the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies were introduced. Classroom assistants were seen as an integral component in assisting teachers to implement these strategies. From 1998 through the Early Intervention programme in Scotland, funding was made available to local authorities to employ classroom assistants in primary schools. In Scotland the expansion of the use of classroom assistants was clearly underpinned by guidance from the Scottish Office (1998a) on their recruitment, selection, roles and duties. In the initial pilot scheme launched in July 1998 many erstwhile parent helpers applied for and were employed in classroom assistants posts.

There were differences in policy and implementation between Scotland and England and these will be explored more fully later in the next section of this chapter.

## **2.2 Scottish Dimension**

The Scottish education system is embedded in the history, culture and governance of Scotland. In Scotland parish schools were first established as part of the Reformation in 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Scottish attitude to education is characterised by a respect for learning and the teaching profession and the concept of universal free access to education.<sup>5</sup> The teaching profession in Scotland has had an influential voice in policy making. The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and the main teaching union, Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS), play key roles in maintaining this voice. Wilson and Davidson (2007) suggested that Scotland's teachers, through their unions:

*have been able to express their collective professional voice to an extent that has not been evident in England.*

(Wilson and Davidson, 2007:176)

Devolution built on an existing local administrative responsibility for education in Scotland. The Scottish Office was established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and had responsibility for school education. The re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the devolution of responsibility for education in Scotland to it, have led to some differences in the practical implementation of government policy between Scotland and other parts of the UK. Ozga (2005) argued that public support for devolution was fuelled by a drive to protect Scottish education against Conservative market-led policies.

During the years of the UK Conservative Government (1979-1997) economics was one of the main policy driving forces. Government policy was very much embedded in the free market field of economics, a form of political economy based on free world/international trade and very much embedded in individualist values and an anti-state control stance. The Conservative ideology was applied to education policy in a number of ways including devolved financial management, the introduction of competition between schools, voucher systems, introduction of fees, contracting out of services, Private Finance Initiatives, schools opting out of local authority control and the introduction of Parent's Charter.

Conservative Government education policy reforms were based on three major strategies:

- central control of curriculum, testing and inspection of schools
- devolved management of schools

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<sup>5</sup> Scotland (1969) describes a number of key characteristics of this public attitude to education.

- introduction of elements of the market system

This policy was reflected in the language of education. It became much more akin to the language of the economic market place and business world, for example parents became stakeholders and/or consumers.

Through the devolved financial management scheme in England headteachers and school governors had full control of staffing budgets. They had the power to appoint and dismiss staff. Significantly for this study the same degree of financial control was not devolved to schools in Scotland. In England many schools employed classroom assistants initially as care and welfare assistants. In Scotland there was no similar school-led employment of support staff.

A key strand in the Conservative Government's reform of education was to give parents a greater say in the running of schools. These reforms advocated having more parents on governing bodies and parents were to have the right to choose schools through introduction of the Parent's Charter. In England school performance and assessment information in the form of league tables was made available and was used by parents to select schools for their children. Teachers became much more accountable to parents. Schools became more aware of the need to compete in this market place. This was particularly relevant in England where a more complete devolvement of school budgets was in place and where the number of pupils enrolled impacted directly on school budgets.

During this period there was a teacher recruitment and retention problem in England<sup>6</sup>. In 1993 the Secretary of State for Education, John Patten, suggested recruiting unqualified but willing volunteers *a mums army* to address the shortage of teachers of children in infant and nursery classes (Cosgrove 2000). The implication being that a teacher was not necessary for these young pupils; a kindly mothering face would suffice. This gave public confirmation of the government's view of the low status of primary teachers. This government attitude seriously undermined teachers' morale and professionalism in England.

In the late 1990's the Clinton administration in the USA and the Blair government in Britain declared a commitment to education with National Education Goals in the USA

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<sup>6</sup> Chevalier *et al.* (2002)

and National Priorities in UK. Both administrations recognised the importance of education in the development of the knowledge economy. In the developed countries economies shifted from supply, distribution and manufacturing of tangible commodities to a reliance on human capital. This human capital is linked in a qualitative sense to the education of the workforce. Peters (2001) suggested:

*education creates human capital, which directly affects knowledge accumulation and thus productivity and growth*

(Peters 2001:22)

In this evolving scene, information, knowledge and education have been identified as having economic value and currency. Education systems have an important role to play in the production of knowledge. Both in the USA and in Britain governments adopted policies aimed at driving up educational attainment. In Scotland these policies included the Early Intervention Programme<sup>7</sup>, the inclusion agenda with initiatives to close the gap in attainment for disadvantaged pupils, the Assessment is for Learning<sup>8</sup> (AifL) programme and Curriculum for Excellence<sup>9</sup>.

Since the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the devolution of education to the Scottish Executive from 1997 (now Scottish Government) there have been significant differences in the implementation of education policies between Scotland and England. These differences were exemplified by the differences between the National Curriculum in England and 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines in Scotland. The key difference was that in England the curriculum was prescribed. This was not the case for Scotland. In England the process of curriculum reform was part of a three pronged approach to the reform of education referred to earlier. In England the National Curriculum was imposed and controlled centrally. The emphasis was on the delivery of content, the accountability of teachers, target setting and it was assessment driven. In England children were tested at age four or five, seven, 11 and 14. In Scotland curriculum reform came in the form of guidelines. National Testing was also introduced in Scotland. However, teachers in Scotland were advised to use tests to confirm their professional judgement about pupil progress. It is important to note the language used in the Scottish context. The choice of words and phrases (e.g. *guidelines, professional judgement*) indicates a difference in application of policy. More specifically for the subject of this dissertation (classroom assistants) the literature has, latterly, reflected these significant differences between the two countries.

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents-w/eip-00.htm>

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/>

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/>

Differences emerged between England and Scotland in the job title<sup>10</sup> given to describe support staff. In England the job title was teaching assistant and in Scotland the title used was classroom assistant. This difference in nomenclature helps illuminate the political policy and practical implementation differences between England and Scotland. In the matter of the title there seems to be a policy, cultural as well as nomenclature difference between in England and Scotland. In their Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) Research Report No 102 Wilson *et al.* (2001:4) found in their survey of the literature on the subject that there was a *considerable lack of clarity surrounding the use of the term and the functions assigned to the post*. This was echoed in work by Lee and Mawson (1998) and Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a).

This type of nomenclature debate is not restricted to the field of education. The Royal College of Surgeons when debating the use of names for paraprofessionals condemned the use of terms that gave the impression that paraprofessionals were medically qualified. In schools, teachers were concerned that the title for associate staff clearly defined their roles and that their professional responsibilities were unambiguous. This concern was echoed by Neill (1998) for National Union of Teachers (NUT) in their report on associate staff in schools. In 2002 this concern resurfaced and once again the analogy between paraprofessionals in medicine and education was made by an NUT member:

*If Tony Blair turned up for open heart surgery and as he was being wheeled into the theatre, the porter started scrubbing up, saying 'I'm not a qualified doctor, but I've seen it done a thousand times' how would he feel?*

This analogy illustrates the concerns felt by many teachers in both England and Scotland about the issues surrounding clarity of roles and responsibilities and almost subliminal message transmitted through the job title.

Barber (1995:81), in his paper calling for a restructuring of the teaching profession to meet the needs of learners for the future, devoted one section out of nine to what he called *paraprofessional contribution*. Interestingly, in their study on parent perspectives of the roles of paraprofessionals, Chopra and French (2004) found that parents valued such paraprofessionals as a link between themselves and the school.

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<sup>10</sup> For a clear and full definition of the various titles, roles and responsibilities of the range of support staff in schools see Doherty (2004).



In the introduction to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (2000) report on teaching assistants in England the authors made reference to the debate on the title and stated:

*The term 'teaching assistant' (TA) is the Government's preferred generic term of reference for all those in paid employment in support of teachers in primary, special and secondary schools. That includes those with a general role and others with specific responsibilities for a child, subject area or age group. The term captures the essential 'active ingredient' of their work; in particular, it acknowledges the contribution which well-trained and well-managed assistants can make to the teaching and learning process and to pupil achievement.*

(DfEE, 2000:4)

In other parts of the United Kingdom clear differences remained regarding the 'title'. In Scotland teaching unions echoed this concern regarding professional boundaries and there the word 'teaching' was not used in either the naming of classroom support staff or in describing their roles and responsibilities. The SOEID (1998a) guidance was clear on the role of classroom assistants:

*assisting with the supervision of pupils and providing support for learning under the direction and supervision of teachers*

(SOEID, 1998a: section 9.1)

In Scotland there has been an acceptance that the teaching unions and professional associations act as gatekeepers for the profession. In both Scotland and Northern Ireland the term classroom assistant was accepted as the most appropriate title to capture the roles and tasks of such staff in schools in these countries. In Northern Ireland one of the main reasons for not using the term teaching assistant is explained by Doherty (2004):

*This is because all teachers in Northern Ireland, apart from headteachers, are referred to as 'assistant teachers'. The similarity of the terms 'teaching assistant' and 'assistant teacher' was thought to be inappropriate.*

(Doherty, 2004:8)

Recent equal pay negotiations, workforce modernisation and changes to local government structures have reopened the debate on the job title in Scotland. For example, Aberdeen City Council began a process of consultation with the range of non-teaching support staff in schools on the subject of agreeing a generic name in 2006. Pupil Support Assistant was accepted in 2007. It is important to note that the role is clearly articulated in the job title and that the term 'teaching' does not appear here.

The Labour Government of the 1990s had a public reputation for 'spin doctoring', that is using the media and the sound bite to their advantage. BBC education correspondent Mike Baker (2001) exposed an attempt by ministers' advisers to gauge public response to a

possible policy shift. The concept of classroom assistants being allowed *to take charge of classes in order to free teachers to get on with lesson planning and other non-teaching duties* was leaked to the press in advance of a planned speech by Estelle Morris, the then Education Secretary. The immediate negative response from teaching unions, classroom assistant unions, and the public, led Estelle Morris, and her advisors to be *far more cautious*. It took another two years before the concept in the form of Higher Level Teaching Assistants became an accepted part of the modernising workforce agenda in England. There has been no similar development of the classroom assistant role in Scotland.

As part of Local Authority workforce modernisation agenda and as a consequence of the Single Status Agreement (1997) in Scotland negotiations took place with the range of support staff in schools. The Single Status Agreement was designed to harmonise pay and conditions of service for local government employees and councils were committed to undertake equal pay reviews. Many local authorities were facing equal pay claims from groups of female staff many of whom worked in schools such as school catering staff, special needs auxiliaries, classroom assistants, school clerical staff and nursery nurses. In 2004 local government pay agreement introduced an obligation on councils to carry out job evaluation whether or not the councils, their unions or their workers wanted it. In response, based on the work carried out in England by the National Joint Council for Local Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) developed a job evaluation scheme. Each local authority then devised its own scheme and presented staff with provisional revised grades. This led to Scotland-wide industrial action in 2006-7. It did allow local authorities to consider restructuring school support staff. Aberdeen City Council, as previously mentioned, has redefined the jobs of classroom assistants, special needs auxiliaries, lunchtime auxiliaries and children's supervisors. The roles and responsibilities of these jobs have been incorporated in a new post with the title Pupil Support Assistant.

The planned expansion of numbers of classroom assistants in Scotland from 1999 to 2002 of 5000 new posts was supported by the development of a nationally recognised qualification for classroom assistants. In 2000 the Professional Development Award: Classroom Assistants was introduced and many local authorities now make the gaining of this award a prerequisite when appointing classroom assistant staff. Once again there are clear differences in practice between England and Scotland. The DfEE (2000:16 and 20) recognised that individual schools were at liberty to develop their own policies for the

employment and deployment of teaching assistants. Individual local authority schools in Scotland do not hold such powers. In Scotland there is national guidance that is applied by local authorities.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) in 2003 and updated in 2006, produced advice for its members on classroom assistants. In 2006 the advice stated that the role of the classroom assistant could be defined as the ways in which he/she:

- *supports the teacher;*
- *supports pupils' learning;*
- *supports pupils involved in practical activities;*
- *supports children with special needs;*
- *supports teachers and pupils in activities outwith the classroom and/or school;*
- *supports the work of the school*

(GTCS, 2006:5)

Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID) White Paper *Targeting Excellence* (1999a) made a clear statement regarding the positive impact of classroom assistants for children:

*improvements in children's learning can be helped by the contribution of assistants*

(SOEID 1999a:8)

This document set out clear advice on roles and responsibilities of classroom assistants that reinforced the safeguarding of the teacher's professional boundaries. In Scotland classroom assistants were employed to reduce teacher workload and to help raise attainment by undertaking a range of non-teaching tasks.

The role and duties of classroom assistants have evolved over time and concerns about professional boundaries are threaded through the literature. Over time these concerns and anxieties have been raised repeatedly. Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a) undertook a research project in response to a lack of research evidence on the contribution that classroom assistants make to children's learning and the need for greater definition of their role. They found that there had been a shift in role from *supporting children's social development .....and supporting the teacher with routine tasks* to supporting children's learning. They concluded that there needed to be more clarity in describing the roles and responsibilities of classroom assistants. This echoed the recommendation made by Clayton (1993) and Kennedy and Duthie (1975).

This advice was supported by research commissioned by Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED). In this study SCRE evaluated the classroom assistant initiative in Scotland. In their preliminary report Wilson *et al.* (2001) commented on issues emerging from the pilot projects being run by a range of Scottish local authorities. These included training for classroom assistants, training for teachers, management and deployment of classroom assistants and their impact on pupils and attainment. The interim report by Schlapp *et al.* (2001) reinforced these early findings and included planning, timetabling and inclusion in whole school development activities as additional areas of concern. In the final report Wilson *et al.* (2002) found that there had been many perceived benefits to the classroom assistant initiative. Teachers felt they had time to teach and that classroom assistants relieved them of some 'non teaching' tasks. Although no direct link to improved attainment could be identified the authors found that classroom assistants made positive contributions to children's' development and learning experiences. Finding time for planning and availability of training opportunities continued to be seen as concerns. In England and Wales the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) (2002) reached many of the same conclusions in its evaluation of teaching assistants. However they included a recommendation to:

*continue to develop a structure of qualifications and career progression for teaching assistants, relating to routes for Qualified Teacher Status*

(OFSTED, 2002:6)

During this time when classroom assistant initiatives were being evaluated and reported upon the government was responding to a changing picture of school education. The context was changing and government policy needed to take a number of key issues into account in determining a strategy for education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These included teacher workload, an ageing profession, retention of newly qualified teachers, teacher shortages in particular subject areas and assessment driven curricula. Government policy was founded on driving up standards and the policies it developed to implement this, have resulted in many changes in schools and classrooms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century throughout the United Kingdom. Many of these come under the umbrella of modernising the teaching profession and more general workforce reform.

In the area of workforce reform there are clear differences in policy and implementation between Scotland and England. The findings of the PricewaterhouseCoopers (2001) study into teacher workload clearly recommended that redefining the roles of support staff should be considered in addressing teacher workload issues. The National Agreement in England and Scottish Executive (2000) report (more commonly referred to as the McCrone

Agreement) for teachers in Scotland have much in common, but on the issue of classroom/teaching assistants, they diverge quite significantly. In England teaching assistants could be deployed to reduce teacher workload by ‘covering’ the class to allow the teacher to undertake planning and preparation tasks during the school day. In Scotland the status of teachers and their unions as gatekeepers meant that such an encroachment into what would be perceived by these groups as breaching teachers professional boundaries would not have been acceptable.

In England in 2002 the Government published *Time for Standards: Reforming the school workforce* (DfES 2002). In this document Estelle Morris, the then Education Secretary, set out her intentions to transform the working practice of teachers in England by removing a range of administrative tasks from their role. She also planned to develop career pathways for teaching assistants and administrators. This one strand to the reform led to intense public debate and discussion and was specific to England. It was based on the PricewaterhouseCoopers (2001) study commissioned by the DfES in 2001 that identified 25 tasks that need not be carried out by teachers and that should be undertaken by school support staff. (See Table 1)

In England, the National Agreement on Workforce Reform (January 2003) clearly stated that Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA) were an integral part of the agreement. The National Union of Teachers, (not a signatory of the National Agreement), was at the forefront in linking the introduction of HLTAs with a cheap means of coping with a teacher recruitment and retention problem in England. Ward (2002) writing in the *Guardian* commented:

*Ministers yesterday rejected accusations that they are seeking to address the teacher recruitment crisis "on the cheap" as they unveiled radical reforms which will see teaching assistants given a much greater role in the classroom.*

(Ward, 2002)

In another article Curtis (2003) articulated the government’s concern about NUT’s refusal to sign up to the agreement and stated that:

*classroom assistants [were] to take on more administrative tasks and in certain circumstances take classes without a teacher present*

(Curtis, 2003)

One of the duties for HLTAs, being suggested, was to supervise a class whilst the teacher was out of the room undertaking planning/preparation. The *Guardian* in December 2002 described this as *one of the most sensitive issues in the government’s proposals for*

*remodelling the teaching profession.* In England the teaching profession historically, has had to fight hard for recognition of its own professional identity. Teachers viewed the creation of HLTAs as a threat to their professional status. The reaction by some of the teacher unions reflected this concern.

Dixon (2003:29) put forward a very clear case against the proposed reforms with concerns focusing on the new roles for teaching assistants. She saw them as *an invitation for teaching to return to a non-graduate, poorly paid job.* Howes (2003:148) when considering the implications of the national agreement suggested that the proposals took a deficit model view of support staff and that the *policy is misaligned with the subtleties of practice that make support staff effective.* Mansaray (2006:178) suggested that any restructuring of professional roles would have *significant pedagogical implications and affect the social relations within primary schools.*

In reviewing the role of teaching assistants in England since Morris' speech in 2001 Kerry (2005) gave some support to this view and stated:

*It could be argued that the descriptor TA goes against the modern educational trend (which is to see learning as central to what happens in schools) in favour of the government trend (which is to see teaching as the core activity).*

(Kerry, 2005:375)

In Scotland the review of the professional conditions of service of the teachers was undertaken through the McCrone Enquiry. This report was subsequently presented by Scottish Executive (2000) in *Teaching Profession for Twenty First Century* (now commonly referred to as the McCrone Agreement). The authors claimed that:

*The areas of agreement and the detail covered have been achieved through a unique process of discussion and dialogue among employers, teacher representatives and the Scottish Executive*

(Scottish Executive, 2000: 1)

This level of discussion and dialogue did not feature in similar negotiations with the teaching profession in England. In Scotland 'workforce reform', whilst responding to many of the same issues as in England, was progressed and developed in a different way. The vehicle here was the McCrone Agreement. The spirit and ethos of this agreement was founded upon consultation and collaboration between the teaching profession, the government and employers.

One of the main concerns addressed by the McCrone Agreement was that of teacher workload. Typically, teachers reported that they were working up to 52 hours per week. Additionally they said that anything up to 50% of their working time was spent on administrative tasks. Although it would be readily agreed that in any job some time on administrative tasks is necessary, teachers felt that they were spending excessive amounts of time on paperwork. Annex E of the McCrone Agreement lists tasks that should not routinely be carried out by teachers. Table 1 below shows these tasks and the 25 tasks identified in the National Agreement in England and clear differences can be seen.

Table 1 *Comparison of McCrone and National Agreement Tasks*

MCCRONE ANNEX E TASKS	NATIONAL AGREEMENT 25 TASKS
The supervision of pupils within the school grounds, in dining and/or recreation areas during school hours but outwith scheduled teacher class contact time;	Collecting money
Administration of the school meals service, including collection of money and issue of tickets;	Chasing invoices
Collection/collation of data for the school meals service;	Bulk photocopying
Documenting and maintaining pupil disciplinary records;	Copy typing
Administrative elements of pupil welfare requirements, including support of guidance staff with routine documentation and information dispersal;	Producing standard letters
Reception and telephonist duties;	Producing staff lists
First aid and administration of drugs;	Record-keeping and filing
Administration and documentation relating to out-of-school visits/work experience/visiting groups etc;	Classroom display
Copy typing/filing/photocopying;	Analysing attendance figures
Administrative detail of register/absence procedures/issue of standard letters;	Processing examination results
Non-professional aspects of school reporting procedures, preparation of envelopes, transfer of information, photocopying, filing etc;	Collating pupil reports
Inputting of assessment data;	Administering work experience
Transmission of recorded data to external bodies;	Administering examinations
Organising and obtaining supply cover;	Invigilating examinations
Administrative aspects of resourcing, stocktaking, ordering, checking and invoice reconciliation;	Administering teacher cover
Property management;	ICT trouble shooting and minor repairs
Repair and maintenance of IT and AV resources;	Commissioning new ICT equipment
Recording of educational broadcasts;	Ordering supplies and equipment
Administration of after-school-care	Stock taking
	Cataloguing, preparing, issuing and maintaining equipment and materials
	Minuting meetings
	Co-ordinating and submitting bids
	Seeking advice and giving personal advice
	Managing pupil data
	Inputting pupil data



The McCrone Agreement Annex E tasks had a mix of administration and classroom support tasks. This list detailed tasks that teachers should no longer routinely undertake. These tasks were to be undertaken by a range of additional school support staff including classroom assistants. In Scotland Wilson *et al.* (2005) found that teachers' perceptions were that additional support staff were there to give them regular support in the classroom and that many were unfamiliar with the details of Annex E. There was little appreciation that funding was being provided to employ support staff other than classroom assistants. In order to implement the recommendations of the McCrone Agreement Scottish local authorities were given significant sums of money in the form of grant aided expenditure (GAE) to employ additional staff to undertake the duties as outlined in Annex E.

In England the 25 National Agreement tasks were predominantly administrative tasks. Classroom support for teachers or pupils do not feature and this reflected the different policy contexts that existed. Workforce remodelling in England involved changes to teachers' conditions of service as well as a review of whole-school staffing structures. The agreement included the creation of a career pathway for Higher Level Teaching Assistants into teaching. This led to concerns being voiced by teachers about the blurring of professional lines between teachers and such support staff. This concern was not a feature of the McCrone agreement.

Wilson *et al.* (2005) made a number of recommendations including career progression, time for planning and liaison, a role for General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), time for training and staff development. It should be noted that the authors acknowledged that the introduction of HLTAs or a Scottish equivalent post was '*likely to be heavily resisted*' (p.11).

The Scottish Secondary Teachers Association (SSTA) released a press report in January 2008 that expressed their members' concerns about some of the issues found by the EOC (2007) report. In particular they were concerned about professional boundaries being crossed. David Eaglesham, General Secretary of SSTA stated:

*It is not acceptable to save money by asking classroom assistants to substitute for teachers in order to lower staffing expenditure*

(SSTA, 2008)

Johnson (2008) of the Daily Mail reported on SSTA's press release and included a quote from COSLA education spokesperson Elizabeth Hutton:

*We value classroom assistants for the job they are employed to do. Only teachers can teach and we are very clear on the roles of a teacher and the role of a classroom assistant. No one has the authority to ask classroom assistants to cover for teachers.*

(Johnson, 2008)

The traditional differences in practice between primary and secondary schools could contribute to these significant differences in practices in deployment of classroom assistants and it could be argued that this is an unintended consequence of the application of policy equitably to each sector. A case of ‘one size may not fit all’.

### **2.3 Class Size Discourse and Classroom Assistants**

In UK the policy debate on class size has focused as Simpson (1998:5) put it, on questions like *How many? How often? Where? And at what cost?* The class size, pupil/adult ratio debate in UK is closely linked to political and economic policy. Class size reduction can be a very costly affair. Smaller classes mean more teachers; in turn this means more teaching resources. There could well be accommodation difficulties especially in popular magnet schools if class sizes were smaller. In England in the 1990s schools were funded according to pupil numbers and this led to larger classes especially in popular schools. Overall reducing class sizes in England and Scotland would mean increased expenditure for local authorities. In this context politicians looked for proof that smaller classes would produce better pupil academic attainment.

A thread in the discourse on additional support staff in primary school classrooms has been their effect on pupil/adult ratios. As outlined in chapter one, class size, pupil/teacher ratio and pupil/adult ratio are quite distinct and different ways of describing the numbers of pupils and staff in schools. This can lead to confusion and difficulties in undertaking analysis and/or comparison. These different ways of describing staffing at school level may be used by politicians and policy makers to their advantage. Ehrenberg *et al.* (2001:3) suggested that class size *is one of the simplest variables for policy makers to manipulate.*

In terms of pupil/adult ratios in Scotland, a theme in the discourse centred on the purpose of the introduction of classroom assistants. Their introduction had three purposes, to reduce teacher workload, to enhance pupil/adult ratios and to drive up attainment. SOEID (1998a) in their guidelines on the introduction of classroom assistant initiative stated:

*The Government's target is to achieve a ratio of no more than 15 pupils to one adult in the primary schools sector by March 2002. Up to 5,000 new classroom assistants will be needed to deliver this objective. It is important*

*that there is no confusion between the adult-pupil ratio and the pupil-teacher ratio.*

(SOEID, 1998a: section 3.1)

Within the thread of class size discourse there are also differences in policy and practice between Scotland and England. In Scotland, teachers in 1980s had been involved in industrial action and one of the outcomes of the pay deal was an agreement on maximum class sizes. Political commitment in Scotland had been given to class size reduction and the introduction of support staff in schools. The expansion in numbers of classroom assistants in Scotland was in part a response to reducing teacher workload as recommended both by SOEID (1999b) and in McCrone Agreement. In Scotland the drive has been to reduce the class size to 30 in single stage primary classes, to 25 in primary one and to 20 for English and Mathematics classes in the first two years of secondary school. The EIS has run a campaign<sup>11</sup> to reduce class sizes to a maximum of 20. It could be argued that this campaign was founded on teacher workload concerns rather than concerns about improving the experiences in classrooms for pupils.

In England by the mid 1990s class sizes and teacher retention were perceived to have reached a crisis point. Blatchford and Mortimore (1994) were asked by the National Commission on Education (NCE) to prepare a report on class size. They reviewed class size literature and found no evidence to support the view that smaller classes could be linked to better educational opportunities. Blatchford and Mortimore (1994) stated:

*One of the biggest puzzles in educational research has been its stubborn inability to verify the common sense assumption ..... that smaller class sizes in schools will lead to educational benefits for pupils*

(Blatchford and Mortimore, 1994:1)

This report and its findings was seized upon by Conservative politicians and allowed the government to justify its lack of action on reducing class sizes.

Class size was an issue that featured in the debates of national general election campaign of 1997 in UK. The Labour Party's pledge to cut class sizes to 30 for under Key Stage 1 pupils (i.e. for 5, 6 and 7 year-olds) featured in their 1997 election manifesto. Following their election in 1997 the Labour Government directed local education authorities in England to implement this pledge by 2002.

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<sup>11</sup> see McBride (2005)

More recently as part of the Scottish Parliament Elections in May 2007 many parties included class size reduction an election promise in their campaign manifestos. The Scottish Conservative Party was the exception of the larger parties. The thrust of their promises featured in giving much more power directly to headteachers. The Scottish Labour Party Manifesto (2007) pledged to cut class sizes to a maximum of 25 in primary one classes and to 20 in the first two years of secondary schools for English and Mathematics classes. The Scottish Liberal Democrat Party (2007) manifesto also pledged to cut class sizes in Primary 1 to 25. The Scottish National Party (SNP) (2007) manifesto gave a key commitment to reduce class sizes in early years classes (Primary 1-Primary 3) to 18. SNP were elected to power but to date the SNP pledge has not been implemented. The EIS campaign and the Scottish political manifestos focused on class size and not pupil/adult ratios.

Smaller classes might mean that teachers would spend less time in preparation of materials, marking, giving feedback to pupils, assessing pupils and preparing reports to parents amongst other tasks. However it could be argued that although they may spend the same amount of time on preparation, assessment and reporting tasks, teachers may feel that they have been more thorough and rigorous in these tasks. In Scotland a classroom assistant would not be routinely involved in many of these tasks as they would be perceived as being in the professional domain of the teacher. Schlapp and Davidson (2001) reported that teachers' perceptions of benefits to themselves centred on being freed from routine preparation tasks. Although the authors found that the amount of time spent by classroom assistants on these types of task was small their contribution left teachers with the impression that they had made a significant impact. The authors suggested that:

*In this area, therefore, a small input – ‘an extra pair of hands’ – appears to make a substantial difference to teachers’ perceptions of their workload.*

(Schlapp and Davidson, 2001: 54)

Kennedy and Duthie (1975) discussed the effect of auxiliary support in classrooms on the pupil/adult ratio. They reported that some teachers welcomed auxiliaries in their classes as their presence afforded them more opportunities to have direct contact with the children.

In England researchers, most notably Blatchford *et al.* (2001, 2002a 2002b, 2003a), have engaged in research and debate on the issue of class size and pupil/teacher ratios. A key longitudinal English study was the Class Size Pupil Adult Ratio (CSPAR) undertaken by Blatchford *et al.* for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commencing in 1996 with the most recent report being published in 2007. This study Blatchford *et al.*

(2007:150) was a longitudinal research project designed to *capture effects of naturally occurring differences in class size and pupil adult ratios*. In their Research Report no. 335 (2002a) the authors reported on their investigation of the work of teaching assistants and other adults in primary school classrooms.

Two of the key aims of their research project were to discover if the presence of additional adults impacted on classroom experiences for teachers and pupils. The authors could not identify a measurable impact of additional adults in classrooms on children's attainment. What they did find, however, was an indirect effect on classroom processes inasmuch as children benefited from more individualised attention. In their conclusions they suggested support for 'quality over quantity' debate. Blatchford *et al.* (2002a:53, 54, 60, 61) found that *more support does not necessarily mean more effective support*. They stated that *personal qualities of adults were a major factor in the effectiveness of their contribution* and finally *some classroom support staff were effective and were used effectively by teachers, but others were not*.

Blatchford *et al.* (2002a) found that that as class sizes increased there was less time for teaching overall. They commented:

*the presence of classroom support did not have a consistent or clear effect on teaching and curriculum time*

(Blatchford *et al.*, 2002a:61)

Hanushek (1998) suggested that a more significant factor in pupil attainment was teacher quality. Harder (1990) and West and Woessmann (2003) supported this view.

A key class size study that included classroom assistants was the Tennessee Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) (1985-1990) research project.<sup>12</sup> This was an experimental randomised control trial and made important contributions to the quality of research evidence concerning the impact of the reduction in class size on pupils. STAR compared three different types of class, (1) small (13-17 pupils), (2) regular (22-25 pupils) and (3) regular (22-25 pupils) with a teacher aide. The STAR results indicated that pupils in smaller classes did better academically when compared with pupils in larger classes. These benefits were limited to pupils in early years classes. They also identified an educational gain for pupils living in deprived social and economic circumstances. The authors found *no significant differences ... between teacher aide and regular classes in any year of the study* (p.98).

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<sup>12</sup> See Word *et al.* (1990).

Finn *et al.* (2000:133) in their follow up study of the STAR research project investigated possible effects of the presence of teacher aides on pupil performance. They found that a more significant factor in pupil achievement was smaller class size. In these classes pupils *outperformed those in teacher aide classes*. This confirmed Nye's *et al.* (1994) findings that smaller class size was more significant than the pupil/adult ratio. Word *et al.* (1990) found there were no differences in children's progress in standard class sizes (around 25) whether or not another adult was present. They indicated that it was class size rather than pupil/adult ratio that was crucial.

There is some evidence relating to the perceptions of teachers, pupils and parents of the benefits of having additional adults in the classroom. Hall and Nuttall (1999) in their survey of English infant teachers found that 75% rated classroom assistants as equal to or as more important than, class size in terms of the quality of teaching and learning.

It has also been argued that teachers with smaller classes or those with additional adult support manage pupil behaviour better. Pupils have fewer opportunities to be off-task as the teacher and classroom assistant more readily intervene and deal with any misbehaviour. Ehernberg *et al.* (2001:69) found that in smaller classes there was more time for *instruction, more individualization, and fewer behavior problems*. This was supported by Molnar *et al.* (1999). Rice (1999), Betts and Shkolnik (1999) and Stasz and Stecher (2000) found that teachers who had smaller classes spent less time managing pupil behaviour and dealing with discipline.

Finding proof for a 'cause and effect' relationship between smaller class sizes or an enhanced pupil/adult ratio and improved attainment has been difficult for researchers to identify. Blatchford *et al.* (2003b) found no statistical correlation or evidence to support the concept of a relationship between the pupil/adult ratios in classrooms and pupils educational progress. Research by Wilson *et al.* (2001) was inconclusive on the subject of the impact of classroom assistants on pupil attainment. OFSTED (2002) suggested that pupil/adult ratios be monitored and referred to evidence from inspections that the impact of a more favourable pupil/adult ratio was beneficial for pupils inasmuch as:

*the presence of a teaching assistant in the classroom improves the quality of teaching. This improvement is most marked when the teaching assistant and teacher work in close partnership*

(OFSTED, 2002:18)

Calder (2002) focused on the need for teachers and others to begin to think about possible changes to pedagogy that the presence and contribution of classroom assistants might facilitate. She recommended that this change in the pupil/adult ratio should fuel discussion on methodology:

*Teachers must view the curriculum differently if they are to make the most effective and efficient use of the extra help available.*

(Calder, 2002)

This chapter explored the policy and contextual influences on the evolution of classroom assistants in the UK. The re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament has strengthened the already existing differences in education policy and practice between Scotland and England. The higher status and stronger voice of the teaching profession in Scotland became particularly evident in the workforce modernisation negotiations and consequent agreements. These socio-political and policy differences were also clearly evident in the development of roles and responsibilities for support staff in both countries.

The class size discourse and the place of classroom assistants within it were also explored in this chapter. The impact of classroom assistants on teachers' perceptions of their workload; on managing pupil behaviour; and on attainment featured in the discourse. The variable of altered pupil/adult ratios caused by the presence of classroom assistants did not featured prominently. This research project aims to contribute to the discourse on class size by focusing on the impact of classroom assistants on adult/pupil ratios for teachers and teaching; to pupils and their learning.

### Introduction

This review of the literature includes scholarly articles, books, research reports, and government reports and *grey literature* (such as conference proceedings) relevant to the general area of class size and the specific topic of classroom assistants. This chapter is organised in four sections. Section one presents key literature on class size. The literature relevant to the three research questions guiding this dissertation will be reviewed in sections two, three and four. The purpose of the following review is to offer an overview of the pertinent work on class size that will set the scene for the work undertaken in this research project and presented in this dissertation.

### 3.1 Class Size

Class size has been the subject of research in education for many years and has featured prominently in the scholarly and policy literature in the last twenty years in particular. The research has predominantly addressed the issue of providing evidence that pupils in smaller classes do better academically than pupils in larger classes. Researchers' methodologies have included observational studies, randomised control trials, longitudinal studies and examination of pupil attainment information. Although non teaching paid additional adults and pupil/adult ratios are threads in this debate, the recent discourse has focused on the specific issue of class size.

In reviewing the class size literature it is important to define the terms class size, pupil/teacher ratio and pupil/adult ratio. These three terms are quite distinct and different ways of describing the numbers of pupils and paid staff in schools. Finn and Achilles (1999) recommended:

*Be precise in specifying class sizes and in differentiating between class size and pupil-teacher ratio. The constructs are not the same. They represent different aspects of resource distribution among schools and should not be used interchangeably.*

(Finn and Achilles, 1999:107)

The following is offered by way of illustration of the possible use and/or confusion arising from these terms. An average sized primary school in Aberdeen City with 225 pupils is organised into nine classes. This example school has an average class size of 25. To calculate the pupil/teacher ratio the number of pupils is divided by the number of full time equivalent teachers (FTE). This school has a headteacher; two depute headteachers; part



time visiting specialist teachers for Art, Physical Education and Music; and a learning support teacher. This would give the school a teaching complement of 13 FTE and pupil/teacher ratio of 17. This is the formula which the Scottish Government often uses to express the average class size. The general public might reasonably believe that class sizes are small in this school. In this example school four classes are of 30, and five classes have 21 pupils. If the additional paid classroom support staff, for this example school, three FTE classroom assistants, is included it would produce a pupil/adult ratio of 14. To date classroom assistants and their impact on pupil/adult ratios have not routinely been included in statistical reports in Scotland. The Class Size Staffing and Resources Working Group (CSWG ) 15 (2006) added this caveat regarding adult/ pupil ratios:

*These ratios may be extremely misleading as they include not only teacher non-contact time but also non-teaching staff such as classroom assistants/teachers' aides.*

(CSWG 15, 2006:48)

The literature on class size is linked closely to the socio-political contexts existing in the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when school improvement and effectiveness was being promoted across the developed world. Educational research took place within a climate where education and schools were required to engage with contemporary social concerns in society at large. There was a particular focus on improving pupils' progress in acquiring basic skills in literacy and numeracy. There was linkage between educational research and the knowledge economy. Terms such as *valued research*, *audit trails*, *scientific validity*, *solving real problems* and *efficiency and effectiveness* peppered the discourse.

Glass and Smith (1979) conducted meta-analysis of the research into class size. This landmark study combined the results of 77 empirical studies pertaining to the relationship between class size and attainment. Overall, they found that the major benefits of reducing class size occurred where the number of pupils in the class was fewer than 20. They also found that the beneficial effects of smaller classes were optimised for the younger pupils in schools. Glass *et al.* (1982:50) contended that *large reductions in school class size promise learning benefits*. These conclusions were supported by Robinson and Wittebols (1986). They reviewed over 100 relevant class size research studies and concluded that smaller classes were of benefit for children in early years classes and for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. These authors suggested that teachers needed to adapt their teaching methods to gain full advantage from smaller classes.

A major experimental research project that made a significant contribution to the discourse on class size was the Tennessee Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) (1985-1990)

research project.<sup>13</sup> This major work in the United States of America was commissioned by the state legislature and made important contributions to the quality of research evidence on the impact of reduction of class sizes. The STAR project was a randomised field experiment and as such its results were viewed to be more reliable than the results from other non-experimental studies. In non-experimental studies conclusions and comparisons can be challenged and results and findings are not viewed as being scientifically robust. The STAR study's scientific research design lent weight to its findings.

The STAR project was a four-year longitudinal study of kindergarten through to third-grade classrooms in Tennessee and began in 1985. This was an interventionist study and randomly assigned pupils to one of three different types of class sizes. The rationale for these three different types of class, small (13-17 pupils), regular (22-25 pupils) and regular with a teacher aide was driven by a belief that smaller class sizes would benefit pupils. The main reason for including the regular sized class with teacher aide as a variable was driven by economics. The state authority anticipated that the results of the study might show that the regular sized class with a full time teacher aide produced was as effective as the small class. In which case employing additional teacher aides rather than reducing class sizes to 13 -17 would cost less than employing the additional teachers required. The STAR results indicated that overall pupils in smaller classes did better when compared with pupils in regular sized classes with or without a teacher aide. These benefits were limited to pupils in early years classes. They also identified an educational gain for pupils living in deprived social and economic circumstances.

Finn and Achilles (1999) reported on the results of the project and summarised the key findings:

*The study yielded an array of benefits of small classes, including improved teaching conditions, improved student performance during and after the experimental years, improved student learning behaviors, fewer classroom disruptions and discipline problems, and fewer student retentions.*

(Finn and Achilles 1999:98)

Achilles *et al.* (1993) looked in detail at teacher aides using and analysing the data collected from the STAR project.

The classroom is an inherently complex cultural setting and undertaking research in such a dynamic milieu is challenging. Every class, every teacher and every pupil is different and the number of variables that can be present is daunting. These include each child's home

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<sup>13</sup> See Word *et al.* (1990).

background, first language, progress in the acquisition of basic skills in literacy and mathematics, the gender balance in the class, teacher skills, qualifications and experience. The STAR project design of randomly assigning pupils and teachers to one of the three different class sizes could be seen as a limitation of the study on the basis that it ignored these variables and attributed differences in results directly to class size.

A key interpretation of the STAR results was that reducing class size had the potential to be more effective than employing additional non-teaching classroom support staff. The reported success of the STAR and later projects, including Wisconsin's Student Achievement Guarantee in Education<sup>14</sup> (SAGE) and California's Class Size Reduction<sup>15</sup> (CSR) projects led the US State Department of Education to make federal funding available to support class size reduction programmes. These studies had produced similar results. These included that smaller classes were of particular benefit for pupils in Kindergarten through to Grade 3 classes and for socially disadvantaged and minority pupils.

These studies had a number of similarities and all were interventionist studies. They had a number of key differences that make direct comparisons difficult. Each project defined the size of classes differently. The STAR project identified a small class as one with 13 -17 pupils. The SAGE project defined a small class as 15 and CSR as one with 20. The Wisconsin SAGE project also included staff development programme and curriculum guidance as part of the intervention programme. CSR programme was implemented at the same time as a number of school improvement strategies were introduced. These included revisions to teacher training programmes, new curriculum materials and new assessments. STAR project did not include any staff training for teachers or support staff and focused on class size with and without support staff. STAR, SAGE and CSR all identified academic progress improvements in pupils who had been in small classes. Nye *et al.* (2001) found that the positive effects of pupils who had participated in the STAR project were maintained over time. Molnar *et al.* (1999) reported similar gains for pupils in the SAGE programme. Fidler (2001) found similar results for pupils from CSR programme.

In USA from the 1990s federal funding was targeted to areas where there were high concentrations of urban poverty with the purpose of reducing class sizes in early grades classes to a national average of 18. In reviewing the evidence on class size, pupil/teacher

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<sup>14</sup> See Molnar *et al.* (1999)

<sup>15</sup> California Class Size Research Consortium (1999)

ratio and attainment, Hanushek (1998) suggested the quality of teaching was a more significant factor than class size or pupil/teacher ratio. He also suggested that a pupil's socio-economic background, family circumstances and a baseline measure were factors to be considered when interpreting statistical information on academic success. Whist arguing that there was inconclusive evidence for linking smaller classes with improved attainment he did concede:

*There are likely to be situations – defined in terms of specific teachers, specific groups of students, and specific subject matters – where small classes could be very beneficial for student achievement.*

(Hanushek, 1998:33)

Normore (2006) investigated class size reduction from a value for money point of view:

*Our findings indicate that CSR [class size reduction] is likely not a cost-effective means of raising student achievement as measured by test scores, at least in the state of Florida. Quality and mix of staffing appears to yield the same results for substantially less cost.*

(Normore 2006:449)

He concluded that investment be targeted at improving facilities and resources particularly for economically disadvantaged and minority group children and in ensuring teacher quality. West and Woessmann (2003) supported the thread in the discourse of the impact of teacher quality being more significant. They found in their study that smaller class sizes had no effect on attainment.

In UK the class size debate continued to look for evidence or proof that smaller class sizes lead to improved attainment in basic skills. Blatchford *et al.* (1994, 1998) investigated class size and attainment and progress. Blatchford *et al.* (2004b:1) studied the impact of class size on attainment on children in years 4-6 and found *no evidence ... that children in smaller classes made more progress in mathematics, English or science.* Finding a link between smaller class size and pupil attainment has been the subject of a large body of research in recent years.

A key longitudinal English study was the Class Size Pupil Adult Ratio (CSPAR) undertaken by Blatchford *et al.* for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commencing in 1996. Their most recent report from this study was published in 2007. Unlike the American studies referred to above this study did not employ an interventionist approach. The researchers collected both qualitative and quantitative data analysed the data set using a multi-method approach. It was a large scale longitudinal study which followed more than 10000 children from starting primary school at the age of four or five to leaving

at age 11. The researchers used a baseline assessment at the commencement of the research to give them robust data against which to measure individual pupil progress. The researchers created case studies; undertook classroom observations; collected teacher reports and information from teachers on pupil behaviours. The research design was created in order to provide comprehensive data on class size and Blatchford (2003) had identified:

*previous research did not have designs strong enough to draw reliable conclusions about the educational effects of class size difference*

(Blatchford 2003:3)

For this major project the researchers described a small class as one with 20 pupils or less and a large class is one with 31 or more. The study design allowed the researchers to investigate the contribution of additional adults to classroom processes. These processes were organised into three groups (1) hearing reading, (2) teaching time and (3) curriculum time. The researchers found no evidence that the numbers of extra staff in any year influenced pupil attainment in core skills. In summary the authors found similar positive results for pupils in small classes in terms of progress but this was limited to those in the first three years of school and for literacy only. They found no long term benefits for pupils' mathematics learning of being in a small class. These results echoed those of the American studies discussed earlier. In following up the pupils to Key Stage 2 the researchers found no evidence of an effect of class size on progress in English, mathematics or science. In year 6 they found some evidence that pupils made more progress in English in bigger classes. The authors suggested their research supported the call for small classes in the early years of primary school and for those whose baseline literacy development was delayed.

A comprehensive description and discussion of the main findings of the study is contained in Blatchford (2003). Additionally a number of separate reports have been published on a range of themes arising from the study. These included exploring the relationships between attainment and class size in Blatchford *et al.* (2002a); on classroom processes Blatchford *et al.* (2003b); on peer relations Blatchford *et al.* (2003c); and on teaching assistants Blatchford *et al.* (2004a).

The data on teaching assistants was collected from statistical information, from the case studies and from teachers in their year end reports. They were asked to comment on the effectiveness of classroom support. The views of classroom assistants were not sought at

this time. Pupils' views were not sought. This major project made significant contributions to the discourse on class size. The fact that this group of staff was not directly observed and the views of assistants and pupils were not collected was a limitation of this study.

The studies discussed above were key studies in the class size discourse and were presented here in order to set the context for the discourse and literature on the pupil/adult thread within it.

### **3.2 Literature review pertinent to research question one**

*Do the teachers taking part in the project alter how and what they teach when they are supported by a classroom assistant?*

The range of teaching methods primary teachers employ develops with experience and they often adopt and adapt their methods according to the needs of their pupils and classes. Prevalent curricular approaches (such as direct interactive teaching) and specific education initiatives (such as early intervention) may influence how and what teachers teach. Teaching methods are also influenced by the teacher's own preferred learning style and by his/her ability to adopt alternative styles to meet the needs of the pupils.

Key pedagogical themes relevant to this question were (1) the child centred approach, (2) individual, group and whole class teaching, (3) direct interactive teaching, (4) co-operative and collaborative learning and (5) play and active learning. The general literature on these themes will be presented and discussed. However in the context of pupil/adult ratio a more detailed review of literature linking teaching methods and classroom assistants will be explored.

Child-centred education is associated with thinkers such as Rousseau, Montessori, Froebel and Dewey. In the 1960s teachers were guided by the Plowden Report in England and Primary Memorandum in Scotland to adopt a child-centred approach that was viewed as an alternative to rote learning. Darling (1993) explored the origins and development of this approach to teaching and learning. His book provides a very clear account of child-centred philosophy. In the immediate post Second World War period primary teachers in the United Kingdom moved away from the whole class lessons and used a child-centred approach to teaching and learning. Fundamental to this approach was the value it placed on childhood and that child's school experiences were not to be viewed as a preparation for work. Proponents believed in the natural curiosity of the child and the child's innate desire

to learn. They also viewed play as the child's mode for learning. Play was viewed as the child's work as it encouraged the development of social, emotional, psychological, physical, cognitive and language skills.

Darling (1993) believed that the influence of the Primary Memorandum could be seen in Scottish primary schools of the 1970s and 1980s where discovery learning and group teaching were embedded practices. He characterised the child-centred philosophy as 'progressive'. Progressive education has many definitions and in terms of child-centred education the focus is on the learner and learning rather than curriculum content or the teacher's pedagogy.

Another influence on teaching methodology was the discourse on brain compatible learning. This has prompted teachers to re-evaluate their teaching styles to meet the range of learning styles they have in their classrooms. Neuroscientific discoveries, advances in molecular neurobiology, brain imaging and genetics have informed our understanding of the range of learning styles, the influence of emotional state on memory and learning, and in general terms, the gender differences in brain function. Jensen (1997), Caine and Caine (1991), Shaw and Hawes (1998) Gardner (1993), Goleman (1996) have made significant contributions to the discourse with a focus on changes in pedagogy. Gardner's work on multiple intelligences has allowed educators to reflect critically on curriculum content, assessment and teaching and learning approaches and styles. Goleman's work on emotional intelligence has influenced educationists working with children and young people who are failing in our schools and in society. These advances and contributors have been instrumental in promoting a more holistic and coherent concept of the child as a learner.

Recent advice in Scotland on curriculum design and active learning through the Curriculum for Excellence<sup>16</sup> initiative resonates with this and the child-centred approach. The schematic guide to the Curriculum for excellence clearly puts the *learner at the centre*. The advice it has presented on curriculum design and pedagogy is that it should *respond to children's different patterns of progress ... through play and activity based learning*. Paterson (2003) when exploring Scottish education in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century suggested that child-centred methods:

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/>

*may describe everything from the benign anarchy of AS Neill through the socialised individualism that characterised the 1965 Primary Memorandum*  
(Paterson 2003:191)

Although the term child-centred might be interpreted as an individualised approach to teaching and learning in practice teachers organised their classes into ability and mixed ability groups. Galton *et al.* (1999) reported on the Project ORACLE<sup>17</sup> study which found that pupils spent 84% of her/his time on her/his own not interacting with classmates or the teacher. The child-centred approach meant that should a child's learning accelerate or decelerate then there was room for movement between these ability groups.

In the 1960s and 1970s mixed ability grouping in classes was viewed as a preferred organisation strategy for teachers to use. In the 1990s differentiation became a key term in describing classroom processes. Teachers were expected to meet the learning needs of a wide range of abilities in their classrooms. There was little research evidence to support mixed ability grouping as an effective strategy in promoting achievement.<sup>18</sup> Eder (1981) was concerned that although the theory suggested flexibility research evidence did not support this. She suggested heterogeneous groupings (mixed ability) should be investigated to determine if benefits for less able children might result from this type of grouping.

McPake *et al.* (1999:18) in their detailed classroom observational study in twelve Scottish primary schools described four different types of classroom organisation (1) whole-class, (2) ability-group, (3) mixed-ability group and (4) individual pair. They found differences in the amount of time pupils spent in these classroom organisation forms varied from school to school and from teacher to teacher. In general they found that primary one pupils spent less time in ability groups than any of the other classes. They also found for mathematics teaching that most pupils were taught in ability groups. The authors recognised the challenges in recording observations of this nature:

*Children might often be working on tasks set previously by the teacher for them as part of the ability group, yet sitting in a mixed ability group*  
(McPake *et al.* 1999:18)

Kutnick *et al.* (2005) have produced a comprehensive review of pupil grouping. This study also investigated the size of classes, the social composition of groups and the interaction and intervention of class teachers with these groups. The authors offer a clear description

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<sup>17</sup> Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation project conducted by Galton *et al.* (1980)

<sup>18</sup> See DfES (1978) and Kerry (1984).



of the difference between grouping pupils for teaching and learning and as a physical organisation of classroom seating.

The Plowden Report and the Primary Memorandum promoted social inclusion and groupwork. From the 1960s primary teachers organised their pupil tables and chairs in groups rather than in rows of individual seats all facing the front of the room. This organisation allowed the teacher to assign group tasks to allow her/him to concentrate on direct teaching for individuals or small groups. Kutnick *et al.* (2005) cautioned that although classes had the appearance of being set out for group work in fact children predominantly were working on individual tasks at these group tables. They found:

*For the largest part of their classroom experience, pupils are seated in small groups (of 4 to 6 children around a table). However, these seating groups are rarely assigned learning (or communication) tasks that require group working*  
(Kutnick *et al.* 2005:8)

The introduction of a National Curriculum in England and 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines in Scotland was in part a response to a perception of falling standards of literacy and numeracy. These shifted the focus for teachers from individualised approaches to learning to meeting targets for attainment and delivering the prescribed curriculum content. In England DfES (1992) report *Curriculum Organization and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools* promoted more subject-based lessons and whole-class teaching. This report was popularly known as the 'Three Wise Men Report'. Galton *et al.* (1999) reporting on the PACE<sup>19</sup> project found that after the introduction of the National Curriculum there was an increase in whole class lessons and a reduction in individual pupil teacher interactions.

In Scotland teachers and schools experienced a pedagogical shift with the launch of the 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines and Bryce and Humes (2003:397) noted a *greater emphasis on whole class teaching and setting by ability* in Scottish schools. Osborn *et al.* (2000) suggested that teachers were being pressurised to adopt more whole class teaching rather than small group interactive teaching approaches in order to meet these changing demands. The whole class teaching approach was promoted in England by DfES (1998) *Framework for Teaching* and in Scotland was promoted by Learning Teaching Scotland (LTS) (2000) in their publication *Direct Interactive Teaching*.

This pedagogical shift was noted by Blatchford *et al.* (2007) in the CSPAR study. They found that class size influenced how teachers interacted with their pupils. In smaller classes

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<sup>19</sup> Primary Assessment Curriculum Experience Project see Pollard *et al.* (1994)

they found more active interaction between pupils and pupils and teachers. The authors also found that in larger classes pupils were less likely to initiate interaction and were more likely to sit and listen.

In the context of smaller class sizes or those being supported by a classroom assistant there was a small body of literature that investigated the contribution classroom assistants made to the dynamics of the classroom in terms of teaching methodologies, on teacher behaviour and class organisation. Key contributors were Wilson *et al.* (2005), Kutnick *et al.* (2005), Schlapp *et al.* (2001) and Blatchford *et al.* (2002a). These researchers found teachers did not necessarily change the way they teach when faced with smaller classes or in classes with a more favourable pupil/adult ratio. Schools and teachers have not had time or opportunity to engage in critical reflection on the impact classroom assistants might have on their pedagogy. This discussion could include recommendations from Blatchford *et al.* (2007) who indicated that teachers might be able to use collaborative learning strategies and *more adventurous and flexible teaching*.

Wilson *et al.* (2005) were commissioned by the Scottish Executive to evaluate the impact of additional staff made available through the McCrone Agreement funding settlement. They found that local authorities had appointed a range of support staff including bursars, technical and administrative support staff as well as classroom support staff. The authors found that although local authorities were satisfied with the impact of these additional staff but that headteachers were not. The authors collected data from headteachers and local authorities on the impact of these additional staff on learning teaching.

The authors found that primary teachers' perceptions were that additional support staff were employed to give them regular support in the classroom and not necessarily to change what or how they teach. This view was echoed by Directors of Education in Scotland who were reported in EOC (2007:5) as holding the view that *classroom assistants are intended to free teachers' time to teach*.

Here again there was a mismatch between local authorities' and school staff perceptions. The respondents indicated that the additional staff had freed up some teachers from some administrative tasks but the authors stated:

*headteachers reported that it was too early to see any impact from additional support staff and that time is needed to encourage staff to work in new ways.*

(Wilson *et al.* 2005:11)

Kutnick *et al.* (2005) suggested that classroom assistants had a key role to play in promoting effective group work. In another study of class groupings Kutnick *et al.* (2002) found that the presence of adults in within class groupings was often used to assist with behaviour management. In their 2005 study the authors found that classroom assistants were most often deployed to support lower ability groups and boys who were working on individual tasks. They suggested that both these sets of pupils might have benefited more from working directly with either the class teacher or in mixed ability groups supported by a classroom assistant.

In an earlier study Schlapp *et al.* (2001) found that although classroom assistants' time in classes was often fragmented their presence and support allowed the teacher to:

*give more attention to teaching individuals and groups while the assistant helps to keep others on task and resolve minor difficulties.*

(Schlapp *et al.*, 2001:85)

In their Research Report no. 335 Blatchford *et al.* (2002a) investigated the work of teaching assistants and other adults in primary school classrooms. They reported that there were gaps in our knowledge around effectiveness, impact and deployment of this group of staff. The authors acknowledged that in previous studies comments had come in the main from teachers. This phase of the study was a multi-method study and included data from classroom assistants gathered using questionnaires and from interviews for those participating in the case study schools. They undertook systematic classroom observations of pupils. An analysis of the data was undertaken to discover if the presence of the teaching assistant affected either pupil or teacher behaviour. The authors found that there was an indirect effect on classroom processes inasmuch as children benefited from more individualised attention from the teacher when the assistant was present. In their report on the deployment of support staff Blatchford *et al.* (2004a) found that teachers felt that the presence of support staff freed them up to teach and in some cases they were able to increase the pace of lessons.

In the literature little had been written that investigated both classroom assistants and pedagogy. Calder (2002) was a relatively lone voice in highlighting the need to investigate this area of school and classroom practice. In this paper she discussed the tensions arising from the influx of classroom assistants into primary school classrooms in the context of inclusion. However her insights and conclusions resonate to the wider primary school context. She contended that some teachers have a view of teaching as a solitary activity.

For these teachers engaging in reflection on teaching approaches to take advantage of the altered teaching environment will be a challenge. She suggested:

*Teachers must view the curriculum differently if they are to make the most effective and efficient use of the extra help available. Methodologies which are difficult for one adult to manage can become easier when a classroom assistant contributes. For example, many teachers have found that group work and individual direct teaching can be more easily achieved when they can delegate some of the work to another adult.*

(Calder 2002)

Calder and Grieve (2004:125) suggested that *change happens slowly in teaching and* contended that experienced teachers need to engage in professional development activities to allow them to take advantage of new working practices occasioned by the presence of classroom assistants in their classes. Alongside this suggestion was a strong recommendation that pre-service training for teachers included a personnel management element. This supports Elliot (2001) who cautioned against a simplistic notion that additional adults in classrooms will result in improved learning. They recommended a need for teachers and classroom assistant to develop working relationships that allowed the teacher to give feedback on performance to the assistants.

### **3.2 Literature review pertinent to research question two**

*What are the pupils' perceptions and experience of having a classroom assistant?*

In the research on classroom assistants little work has been undertaken in gathering the views of pupils. Pupils are participants in schools and have a particular perspective on the contribution that classroom assistants make to their school experiences. The importance of understanding the context when undertaking a classroom research project is articulated by Hamilton (1977):

*to understand fully the significance of a classroom event it is not sufficient merely to observe its enactment, it is also necessary to be aware of its history, to be alert to its possible outcomes, and, above all, to be sensitive to the thoughts and intentions that guide its participants'*

(Hamilton, 1977:239)

By engaging with pupils a more rounded view of the impact of classroom assistants can be taken. They can offer insights into the dynamics of classroom interactions and the view of the *consumer*.

The shape and definition of the child's place in society and in schools has changed over time and as a result of social, cultural, political, economic, philosophical and psychological influences. The history of the place of the child in society has been documented by Aries

(1960), Cunningham (1995) and Jenks (1996). Until the late 1970s pupils' perceptions, ideas and opinions on matters of educational policy or practice were not often sought by researchers and policy makers. Alongside more recent drives to foster concepts of rights and responsibilities through education for citizenship programmes the concept of children and childhood as a time without responsibility has changed.

The concept of pupil voice emerged as a development of citizenship education policies. The promotion of citizenship in education was in response to policy changes that include the Children's Act (1989), the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) and LTS (2002). The result was the introduction of education for citizenship as part of the Scottish school curriculum and compulsory citizenship education as part of the English national curriculum.

Citizenship education has led to the creation of pupil councils and other consultation and participation groups in schools across the UK. Through these groups school managers seek the views of their pupils on a range of topics. Typically these have focused on addressing issues such as reducing litter in the playground and improving attitudes towards healthy eating. A further and more recent development of this aspect of listening to 'pupil voice' has been to involve pupils in school improvement planning. This is a more sophisticated level of consultation and one that allows pupils the opportunity to work with school staff to discuss aspects of school education such as teaching and learning. Whitty and Wisby (2007) in their research into pupil councils suggested that schools (in England) be required to develop policy on pupil voice to ensure that schools are allowed to retain flexibility in determining how their pupil councils function.

A key contributor to the literature on pupil voice was Jean Ruddock. Professor Ruddock was Professor of Education (Emeritus) at the University of Cambridge until 2007. Her main research interest was pupils' consultation and participation in relation to school improvement, with a focus on pupil voice as vehicle for change in schools. As co-ordinator of *Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning Project*<sup>20</sup> she (with others) conducted research and wrote extensively on the subject of pupil voice. The Research Briefing Paper (2003) provides a concise guide to the six major themes of the project. Ruddock (2004) defined pupil voice as:

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.tlrp.org/proj/phase1/phase1dsept.html>

*...the consultative wing of pupil participation. Consultation is about talking with pupils about things that matter in school. It may involve: conversations about teaching and learning; seeking advice from pupils about new initiatives; inviting comment on ways of solving problems that are affecting the teacher's right to teach and the pupil's right to learn; inviting evaluative comment on recent developments in school or classroom policy and practice.*

(Ruddock, 2004:1)

Manefield *et al.* (2007) have produced a comprehensive paper on the history and development of pupil voice. Although the paper cites developments in this field in Australia the authors' historical perspective provides a useful overview of associated developments in the UK. They identify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) as a catalyst for change. One of the fundamental rights is the child's right to be heard. The convention states:

*... the child who is capable of forming his or her own views [shall be assured of] the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*

(UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989)

The research undertaken for the Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning Project (TLRP) has shown benefits for pupils and teachers in developing in school mechanisms for listening to pupil voice. Ruddock believed that listening to pupil voice was only part of the process, acting on what was heard was as important. Whitty and Wisby (2007) supported this view. When action resulted from pupil feedback Ruddock (2004) reported that pupils benefited from improved self esteem, self confidence and attendance.

Whilst there was general support from the teaching profession about engaging pupils in consultation about aspects of school life through groups such as pupil councils and eco-schools committees some members of the profession expressed concern about the risks involved in consulting pupils about professional issues such as teaching and learning. In England the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) reported on receiving a number of concerns from members about pupils having a greater say in school policy matters. The TLRP identified that schools and teachers benefited from listening to pupil voice activities through gaining insights that informed their own professional development and improvements in classroom and school ethos.

Taking pupil voice into the classroom was viewed as risk laden. Teachers voiced concerns about possible abuse of power by children in such situations. Ruddock and Flutter (2000)

also discussed the teachers concerns about the risks and potential dangers in sharing power and control. School ethos and a climate of mutual respect and trust would be essential for such a development's success.

In their small scale study McIntyre, Pedder and Ruddock (2005) gathered the views of pupils about teaching and learning. The authors fed back these views to the teachers then investigated the use the teachers made of the feedback. This study involved six volunteer teachers and their pupils. Teachers in this study found that pupil feedback was constructive and that they generally agreed with what they pupils had said. The study was carried out in schools in England and the teachers reported a tension between the constraints of the National Curriculum and a desire to be more flexible in both how and what they teach.

In Scotland education for citizenship has developed as a cross curricular issue where citizenship is delivered across a range of subjects and through a range of school, and community initiatives. This policy developed from National Priority number four<sup>21</sup>

*Values and Citizenship - To work with parents to teach pupils respect for self and one another and their interdependence with other members of their neighbourhood and society, and to teach them the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society*

(Scottish Statutory Instrument 2000, No. 443)

HMIe (2006) in reviewing opportunities for young people to be involved in education for citizenship highlighted pupil consultation and participation in decision making as positive approaches taken in schools. They suggested:

*The distinctive way in which education for citizenship is taught in Scotland gives pupils the opportunity to experience citizenship first hand.*

(HMIe, 2006:15)

The Curriculum for Excellence initiative promotes the concept that all children and young people should develop as responsible citizens. The vehicle for this development is learning by doing. In other words children and young people in Scotland learn about citizenship by becoming active citizens in their classrooms, schools and the wider community. Maitles and Deuchar (2006) described a Scottish case study that investigated the impact of a teacher using a democratic participatory teaching style with one of her classes. They indicated that the classroom ethos was *relaxed, open and warm*. The authors found:

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<sup>21</sup> For more on National Priorities go to <http://np.mj.sitc.co.uk/>

*87 per cent of pupils agreed they were learning better because the teacher was trying to involve them.*

(Maitles and Deuchar 2006:260)

The authors found that not all teachers in a school had the same degree of commitment to promoting pupil voice either through the pupil council or other consultative committees. The weight given to pupil voice is crucial. Brown *et al.* (2008:7) in their Citizenship and Democracy policy review the authors suggested that in order to promote pupil voice that school managers model democratic and inclusive practices.

There was little in the literature that included both pupil voice and classroom assistants. In their feasibility study on classroom assistants Kennedy and Duthie (1975) sought the opinions of pupils involved in the study. The authors found that the children were able to make contributions to the data for their study. In general they found pupils made positive comments about the additional adults in their classrooms and saw them as a source of help for themselves and their teachers. The authors found:

*84% thought that their teachers were able to give them more attention and 93% said they enjoyed school more.*

(Kennedy and Duthie, 1975:91)

A more recent small-scale study on the perceptions of pupils was undertaken by Eyres *et al.* (2004). In this study the researchers interviewed pupils in pairs using an interview schedule that was designed to be used flexibly. The children who were interviewed were in primary schools. This study gathered data from children on the range of adults they encountered in their classrooms. The authors found that as long as there was some continuity of personnel (especially class teacher or teaching assistant) that the children were accepting of the number of adults working with them. The children in this study provided the researchers with a perspective on teaching methodology. The children recognised that their teachers often organised their groups by ability and assigned an assistant to support a group.

The authors pointed out that their study only gathered information from the children and that:

*Interviews with teachers, assistants and parents would undoubtedly have produced different perspectives. Observational data on actual assistants roles may have supported or contradicted children's perspectives*

(Eyres *et al.*2004:160)



Eyres *et al.* (2004) in their study have added to the discourse on the place of pupil voice in the changing ecology of schools.

Pulley and Jagger (2006) found a gap in perceptions between what the teacher thought was happening in class, and the pupils' experience. These contributions serve to remind the reader that pupils' ideas, opinions and knowledge were often quite different from their own.

A recent evaluation project undertaken in Staffordshire by their Workforce Development Team focussed on gathering information from pupils on the impact of workforce remodelling.<sup>22</sup> The team had previously gathered data from a range of other staff groups and felt that by undertaking pupil consultation they would *gain a full understanding of the impact made on the learning climate*. Members of the project team visited 12 schools and spoke with groups of pupils in these schools. They had a prepared question schedule that explored pupils' understanding of the roles and impact of the different adults in their classrooms. The majority of questions in the schedule were designed to elicit a factual response. Some were more open and asked for opinions; such as *if a Teaching Assistant looks after the class on their own, do you learn any differently?*

The project team claimed that the ethos of the school was a significant factor in how pupils viewed support staff:

*Pupils commented that good behaviour in the classroom was not dependant upon a qualified teacher being present but rather on how skilled the adult taking the class was in controlling the pupil's behaviour.*

(Staffordshire Workforce Development Team, 2006:2)

They suggested that when a school had developed a partnership ethos where teachers and support staff were valued then pupils had equal respect for all staff. Based on the answers to the questions elicited from the small numbers of pupils who took part in the interviews the authors make a number of claims that would worthy of further research thus '*harnessing pupils' insights*' as suggested by Ruddock and Flutter (2000:82)

### **3.3 Literature review pertinent to research question three**

*What tasks and activities do the classroom assistants taking part in the project undertake?*

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<sup>22</sup> [education.staffordshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/98BCB8FD-2E94-4F11-965E-C49FCCB734D7/46129/PupilVoiceFeedback.pdf](http://education.staffordshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/98BCB8FD-2E94-4F11-965E-C49FCCB734D7/46129/PupilVoiceFeedback.pdf) –

There is a large body of literature that explores classroom assistants, their role, impact, and training and development. The themes studied and written about have, generally speaking, run parallel to changing political and policy initiatives. The main policy influences were evaluations investigating the impact such support staff in improving attainment, supporting and managing pupil behaviour and, more recently, the remodelling workforce agenda.

As identified in chapter two there were clear differences between Scotland and England in the way the role of classroom support staff developed. These differences were marked in the different roles and responsibilities for teaching assistants in England and classroom assistants in Scotland. This section will explore in broad terms the literature that illustrates these differences and will include policy documents and academic critique.

The role and duties of classroom assistants have evolved over time and concerns about professional boundaries and their impact on learning and teaching are threaded through the literature. From the late 1990s to the present day government policies and the literature have centred on a number of key themes

- Evaluation of initial expansion of numbers of support staff in schools
- Inclusion and managing behaviour
- Training for classroom assistants and teachers
- Modernisation of the teaching profession

### ***Evaluation studies***

Kennedy and Duthie's (1975) study although undertaken in the Scottish context provided an early evaluation of the impact that additional adults can have in terms of classroom processes. In Scotland in the 1970s the introduction of auxiliary staff was in part a response to a teacher workload issue. Kennedy and Duthie were commissioned by the then Scottish Education Department to undertake a feasibility study of auxiliaries in classrooms. They found that teachers taking part in their study articulated a number of concerns about having a paid adult work alongside them in the classroom. Despite these initial doubts and concerns, teachers in the Kennedy and Duthie study were able to identify benefits for the pupils and themselves. Teachers in the study said that they welcomed the opportunity to share their observations about the children with another adult who was involved in their classroom activities. Kennedy and Duthie (1975:3) found the additional adults *acted as another pair of hands and eyes*. As well as undertaking what might be termed non-teaching duties Kennedy and Duthie (1975) also discussed the effect of auxiliary support in

classrooms on the adult/pupil ratio as a consequence of their presence. This strand in the discourse was discussed more fully in section 3.1 of this chapter. The authors sought the opinions of pupils involved in the study referred to in section 3.3. The general conclusions of this feasibility study were positive particularly from teachers. The authors recommended a ratio of one auxiliary for every three teachers in primary school classes. They also recommended that the role of support staff be clearly stated and suggested that they undertook:

*Supervision duties within class as well as out of class. Housekeeping duties and General School Duties*

(Kennedy and Duthie 1975:108)

Moyles and Suschitzky (1997a) undertook a research project in response to a lack of research evidence on the contribution that classroom assistants make to children's learning and the need for greater definition of their role. This study focused on the employment and deployment of classroom assistants in a sample set of schools in England and Wales. The project, which was funded by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, comprised of a survey questionnaire, observations and interviews for teachers and classroom assistants and interviews with headteachers. The authors found the numbers and roles of classroom assistants varied from school to school. This reflected the relative autonomy of headteachers in England to employ staff. With additional funding they had been awarded for increased class sizes headteachers could opt to employ additional teaching staff or support staff. The authors quote one headteacher:

*We were allowed an additional 02 teacher but chose to employ a CA, which was more value for money.*

(Moyles and Suschitzky, 1997a:2)

The authors also found that headteachers were responsible for recruitment and determining the job descriptions for this group of staff. The study highlighted that additional staff were employed in response to local needs. Some were employed to support children with behavioural difficulties but the majority were employed to work alongside teachers and pupils in the classroom. The authors' findings were supported by OFSTED who undertook an evaluation of the programme to increase the numbers of paid additional adults. They reported their initial findings in 1999. OFSTED (2002:6) found that *most funding was used to provide additional support for teachers in the classroom.*

The authors found there had been a shift in role from supporting children's social development and the teacher with routine tasks, to supporting children's learning. Two

head teachers in the study had suggested that classroom assistants contributed by allowing teachers to provide more variety in learning tasks and more specifically to help children develop their skills in taking turns when playing games.

Moyle and Suschitzky (1997a:8) suggested that in England the *dilemma faced by all head teachers is considering the 'old ancillary role' versus the new 'teaching role'*. The authors concluded that there needed to be more clarity in describing the roles and responsibilities of classroom assistants. This recommendation is located in the English school context and where the role of teaching assistant has taken a different trajectory from that of classroom assistant in Scotland. McGarvey *et al.* (1996) reported there were similar concerns about the role, training and deployment of classroom assistants in Northern Ireland as there had been in other parts of the UK. However the authors' general recommendation echoed that made by Kennedy and Duthie (1975) of employing classroom assistants to work in classes to support teachers and pupils.

Horne (2001:27) in exploring issues on a perceived crisis in teacher recruitment and retention found teachers to be anxious about professional boundaries. In meeting the challenge and reward of working with an assistant they found teachers identified *the need for clear separation of professional responsibilities*. Hancock *et al.* (2002: vi) echoed these concerns and referred to this as the *blurring of boundaries* and suggested that *practice had run ahead of thinking and policy*.

In the DfEE (2000) report on teaching assistants in England the authors focused on the changing and expanding role of teaching assistants and the kind of support they provided to teachers and pupils. The DfEE (2000:16, 20) recognised that individual schools were at liberty to develop their own policies for the employment and deployment of teaching assistants.

OFSTED (2002:3) reported that in England in 2001 the Secretary of State suggested that the role of classroom assistants could be expanded to include *covering for teacher absence* and *supervising classes undertaking work set by the teacher*. These are duties that in Scotland would be perceived as breaching the professional boundary of teachers. A number of studies were conducted that investigated the impact of the introduction of additional adults in primary schools. Evaluations specific to England were DfEE (2000) and OFSTED (2002). In Scotland among the contributors were Calder (2002), Midlothian Council (2003), and Schlapp and Davidson (2001).

The OFSTED (2002) reported on the impact of teaching assistants in delivering the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. The report was based on findings from work undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectors and Assistant Inspectors and included classroom observations of teaching assistants and teachers, discussions with these groups of staff, and discussions with the headteachers or management staff who had responsibility for staff deployment. They found that teaching assistants undertook a range of tasks including supporting children with additional support needs; care and welfare support and playground supervision. The authors reported that the role of teaching assistant had increasingly moved towards providing learning support. They found that the teaching assistant made:

*a planned contribution, for example by joining the teacher in role-play or playing a mathematical game with pupils.*

(OFSTED, 2002:8)

In Scotland clear guidance on roles and duties for classroom assistants was given by the Scottish Office. The Classroom Assistants Implementation Guidance (SOEID) (1998a) articulated the role and working relationship between teachers and classroom assistants. Classroom assistants were to be directed and supervised by the teacher. However the guidance did not explore any possible effect on pedagogy of having classroom assistants working with alongside teachers in the classroom

SEED commissioned Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) to evaluate the classroom assistant initiative in Scotland. In their preliminary report Wilson *et al.* (2001) commented on issues emerging from the pilot projects being run by a range of Scottish local authorities. These included training for classroom assistants, training for teachers, management and deployment of classroom assistants and their impact on pupils and attainment. The interim report by Schlapp *et al.* (2001) reinforced these early findings and included planning, timetabling and inclusion in whole school development activities as additional areas of concern. In the final report Wilson *et al.* (2002) found that there had been many perceived benefits to the classroom assistant initiative. Teachers felt they had time to teach and that classroom assistants relieved them of some non-teaching tasks. Although no direct link to improved attainment could be identified the authors found that classroom assistants made positive contributions to children's' development and learning experiences. Finding time for planning and availability of training opportunities continued to be seen as concerns.

Classroom assistants increasingly have been supporting pupils learning needs that are often complex as well as supporting pupils with challenging behavioural difficulties. There was a small body of literature that focused on the contribution that classroom assistants can have on pupil behaviour management. Discipline Task Group (2001), Wilson *et al.* (2002), OFSTED (2002) and Blatchford *et al.* (2004a) all make positive reference to the impact of classroom assistants on pupil behaviour.

Discipline Task Group (2001) recognised the positive influence of support staff in helping teachers manage pupil behaviour and advised schools to be creative in developing whole school approaches for this. The authors recommended the continuation of funding to support the development of positive discipline strategies:

*We take the view that if staffing resources can be directed at the most challenging situations in all school, this will have a major impact on learning, teaching and discipline.*

(Discipline Task Group 2001:21)

Wilson *et al.* (2002) undertook an evaluation of the classroom assistant pilot projects in Scotland. This study involved the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. A sub-question for the authors centred on investigating changes in pupils' behaviour and attitude that could be attributed to the contribution of classroom assistants. The authors reported teachers had found that when classroom assistants were in the room that the pupils spent more time on task.

Kutnick *et al.* (2002) investigated pupil groupings in classrooms. One theme this study explored was the connections between grouping and the type of adult support offered to the group of pupils. The authors found that boys with behaviour difficulties were more often to be found working with either the teacher or assistant. They suggested that the presence of adults in within class groupings was often used to assist with behaviour management.

Blatchford *et al.* (2004b) explored the theme of pupil attention and behaviour. This was a systematic observation study of children aged 10/11. The study involved investigating the presence of adults in classes. They suggested that a commonly held view would be that in classes where there were more children that there would be opportunities for children to be distracted. In undertaking this study the authors intended:

*to measure in a systematic way whether the presence of TAs had an effect on interactions involving pupils and teachers in the same classrooms, and the extent of classroom engagement and attention to the teacher.*

(Blatchford *et al.*, 2004:12)

They found that in classes when an assistant was present that the pupils were 50% more likely to be focused on their tasks. They also found that in English language lessons that the presence of an assistant positively influenced the on-task interactions between pupils. The presence of an assistant also impacted indirectly on pupils in terms of their increased contact with the teacher. The authors felt their study collected data mainly on pupil/teacher interactions and they suggested further work should be carried out on pupil/assistant and teacher/assistant interactions. Overall they concluded:

*The presence of a TA was also found to significantly increase the occurrence of individual on task behaviour, and significantly decrease off-task behaviour.*

(Blatchford *et al.*, 2004:36)

There is an expectation in schools today that mainstream classes will accommodate pupils with social, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties. In their recent report EOC (2006:5) found that teachers and classroom assistants perceived that a key role they shared was to maintain discipline in the classroom by encouraging pupils to behave and interact appropriately. Classroom assistants reported that they *maintain discipline by encouraging good pupil behaviour and interaction in the classroom*. In addition EOC (2007:13) reported that they were *increasingly working with disruptive pupils who often have very challenging behaviour*.

### ***Training and qualifications***

In England the DfEE introduced a number of courses for training teaching assistants in 1994. These included training for the award of Specialist Teaching Assistant. The training was delivered through further and higher education institutions. Swann and Loxley (1998) undertook an analysis of school-based training in ten local authorities in England. They gathered data using a detailed questionnaire from students who had completed the course. They found that the training of classroom assistants impacted positively on the individuals but questioned the impact at school or classroom level. Any impact was dependent on individual schools and indeed on individual teachers. The authors suggested a key barrier to the effective deployment of trained specialist teaching assistants centred on:

*the issue of the appropriate professional boundaries between teachers and classroom assistants.*

(Swann and Loxley, 1998:158)

A set of UK occupational standards was developed by Local Government National Training Organisation (LGNTO) (2001). These standards were based on level 2 and 3 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ). In England training and qualifications for teaching assistants are perceived as stepping stones to becoming a teacher.

In Scotland in 2000 the *Professional Development Award: Classroom Assistants* was introduced and many local authorities now make the gaining of this award a prerequisite when appointing classroom assistant staff.

Balshaw (1999), O'Brien and Garner (2001) Calder (2002) OFSTED (2002) all identified training as a concern for classroom assistants and teachers working with them. Balshaw (1999) and O'Brien and Garner (2001) discussed the need for whole school training that involved teachers and assistants learning together. OFSTED (2002) in its evaluation of the impact of the use of teaching assistants in delivering the national literacy and numeracy strategies also recommended that newly qualified teachers were trained to work with teaching assistants.

From the late 1990s onwards a number of guides and training manuals designed for classroom assistants, and for schools and teachers working with them, were published. Fox (1998), Balshaw (1999), DfEE (2000), Birkett (2001), Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) (2001) and Watkinson (2003) all provide useful guidance on roles, responsibilities, specific curriculum support initiatives and tasks to promote effective partnerships.

Balshaw (1999) identified a need for whole school training where teachers and support staff worked together. This was echoed by O'Brien and Garner (2001) who made a new contribution to the literature by providing a vehicle for support staff to express their perceptions of their roles. Birkett (2001) and Watkinson (2003) provided practical advice for teaching assistants working in schools, covering topics such as roles and responsibilities, aspects of the curriculum and expectations.

For the research topic of this dissertation SEED (2001) is a significant document. The target audience for the publication was newly qualified teachers in Scotland and it provided them with detailed guidance and training materials to help them work with and manage classroom assistants. This publication was funded by the Scottish Executive



Education Department Staff Development for Effective Teaching Fund. It sent a very clear message to local authorities, headteachers and class teachers about the important role classroom assistants were expected to play in improving Scottish education. Classroom assistants were employed as permanent members of school staff and viewed as a component of a school's core staffing. However a significant gap in training and staff development activities for teachers post qualification was identified.

Calder (2002) suggested that the introduction of additional adults in a classroom should impact on pedagogy. She concluded however that in-service training was needed to help teachers and headteachers develop skills in managing other adults.

*Teachers can begin to operate a model of teaching that allows for the presence of another adult only when they are aware of the complex issues involved.*

(Calder, 2002:2)

### ***Workforce Modernisation***

During this time when classroom assistant initiatives were being evaluated and reported upon, the teaching profession was undergoing a substantial workforce reform. An element of workforce reform in England was the development of the Higher Level Teaching Assistant position. This theme was discussed in chapter two and was not a theme in workforce reform in Scotland.

Scottish Centre for Employment Research (ScER) was asked by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) to undertake a study of the impact of additional support staff who had been appointed as a result of the additional funding to local authorities to meet the demands of the McCrone Agreement. Phase one of the study investigated classroom assistants in primary schools. The study reported its findings in 2005 (EOC 2005). The authors found that local authorities had appointed a range of support staff and overall local authorities and schools reported a positive response to the provision of additional support staff funded by the McCrone Agreement. This was despite what the authors describe as *any initial concerns and continuing lack of clarity about how support staff may best be used*. The additional funding was used by local authorities to employ support staff other than classroom assistants for example bursars, ICT technicians and receptionists.

The authors found that classroom assistants were undertaking a range of tasks and specific mention was made of what the authors identified as *role stretch*. They found this in particular in the tasks classroom assistants undertook under the heading *encouraging and supporting learning*:

*Classroom assistants who had additional skills, such as music, foreign languages and ICT were more likely to be engaged in higher level learning activities than those without such skills.*

(EOC, 2005:5)

The authors suggested that these personal characteristics should be seen as a key factor in *role stretch*. However the authors noted that their sample of classroom assistants was too small to make generalisations.

Wilson and Davidson (2007:189) found that *role stretch* was more of an issue for classroom assistants in secondary schools. They suggested this was due to teachers in this sector having *little or no previous experience of working with classroom assistants*. Overall Wilson and Davidson (2007) raised a number of concerns about the McCrone Agreement and made particular comment about the variation in local authorities' interpretation of the use of the additional funding. Interestingly, they also raised the concern about roles and responsibilities and suggested that many local authorities were still trying to define a role (or roles) for additional support staff.

This may explain, somewhat, the differences in deployment reported in EOC (2007) phase two report. The authors of this report found that, in secondary schools, classroom assistants have been used in the main to work with pupils with additional support needs. The roles and responsibilities would appear to be very similar to those of a Learning Support Assistant as described by Doherty (2004:5). In this role too the authors have identified *role stretch* in terms of meeting increasing care and welfare demands. Classroom assistants increasingly have been supporting pupils' learning needs that are often complex as well as supporting pupils with challenging behavioural difficulties. This report also found that classroom assistants in secondary schools undertook teaching tasks for specific pupils and that some of the classroom assistants involved in the research had commented that they had covered for absent teachers. When this was published the SSTA raised concerns about professional boundaries being crossed as mentioned in chapter two. In the secondary sector individual skills and strengths were suggested as explanations in part of role stretch:

*The findings from the investigation suggest that role stretch is not directly driven by local authority policy. Instead, the reasons for role stretch seem to lie largely in individual school practice and the individual characteristics of classroom assistants.*

(EOC, 2007:24)

## **Summary**

Key themes in the literature around classroom assistants have been evaluations of the initiative to introduce classroom assistants; investigations of their roles and responsibilities; and assessing their impact on teaching and learning more generally. There was a small body of literature that investigated the contribution classroom assistants made to the dynamics of the classroom in terms of teaching methodologies and freeing up time for teachers to teach. There have been a small number of studies focusing on the impact of the presence of classroom assistants on teacher behaviour, methodology and class organisation. Schools and teachers have not had time or opportunity to engage in critical reflection on the impact classroom assistants might have on their pedagogy. There was a small body of literature focussing on teachers' perceptions of working with additional adults in their classrooms. However, little had been written on the perceptions of pupils in this changing classroom environment.

## CHAPTER FOUR PROJECT DESIGN AND TOOLS

### Introduction

Chapter four will provide an overview of the research project within the context of main research paradigms and presents the rationale for the research design. In determining the research design for this project the researcher considered research paradigms, their associated strategies, methodologies and tools. Alongside this, due consideration was given to the aims of the project and the key questions raised by them. Undertaking a research project in the complex setting of primary schools was also given practical consideration. The researcher held the view that educational research challenges taken for granted notions and explores and examines educational practice with a view to illuminating, understanding and enhancing and improving it.

### 4.1 Research paradigms

In determining a design for the project the researcher considered the main research paradigms and their associated methodologies. A paradigm may be best defined as a *worldview*. Creswell (1994:74) suggested that as such it is a *basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide a researcher's inquiry*. Cohen *et al.* (2000) suggested that there were three main paradigms pertaining to research in education, each with its own methodology. These were positivism, interpretivism and critical theory/post modernism. In the context of the main paradigms the researcher has defined her epistemological standpoint as essentially pragmatic and as such has drawn on the positivism and interpretivism paradigms to some degree in the rationale and design of this research project.

Positivism was a dominant paradigm in educational research until the second half of the twentieth century and was founded in the empiric/scientific/objective standpoint. Truth and evidence are fundamental components of positivism. Positivism applied this scientific method to the social sphere. The role of the researcher was expected to be one of detached objectivity.

This positivist model of science dominated social and educational research for the first half of the twentieth century but it began to be criticized and challenged in the 1950s and 1960s at a time of social and political change. The term post-positivism emerged in the discourse. Influential contributors to this challenge were Kuhn, Bronowski and Popper. Kuhn (1962) contended that science was not objective and that knowledge was not neutral. Scientists as

human beings functioned within a context and as such were influenced by its culture and beliefs. Bronowski (1956) and Popper (1959) challenged the basic tenets of positivism, and, in particular, its emphasis on objectivity and measurement. A fundamental assumption of post-positivism was that absolute truth cannot be found. Popper contended that scientific knowledge cannot be 'proved' or shown to be true but can be shown to be wrong. He suggested that scientists approach a problem from the standpoint of fallibilism. Fallibilism is an acceptance of risk taking and of making mistakes to generate and inform knowledge.

The interpretivist standpoint was at odds with positivism. Interpretivist research in the social sciences was not focused only on quantifying what happens in social phenomena it was also concerned with providing an explanation of the phenomena from the experiences of the participants of the event. Understanding and interpreting the context of the research subject for interpretivists was deemed to be more relevant and important than the scientific approach of testing hypotheses and generating scientific laws to explain our world. Interpretivists believed that the social researcher was subjective and that the positivist scientific method could not be applied in research in the social sciences.

Interpretive research attempts to search for patterns and build an understanding of meanings, social phenomena, values and beliefs. As Cohen and Mannion (1996) commented:

*The central endeavour in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience*

(Cohen and Mannion 1996:36)

Interpretivism argued that instead of seeing people's personal perceptions, interpretations, judgements and values as potential forms of contamination in the research, and therefore something to be controlled, this subjectivity should be seen as the starting point for the research. The aim of interpretivism was to understand the values, attitudes and beliefs that influence people's actions (Candy 1989).

By the late 1990s a further paradigm 'shift' took place. The discourse moved on from aligning with either the qualitative or quantitative position of interpretivism or positivism to the development of a more pragmatic<sup>23</sup> 'what fits' approach. Researchers began to advocate employing the methodology that best suited the needs of the individual research project. They suggested that regardless of philosophical, methodological or epistemological perspectives the use of multiple, eclectic or mixed methods and a range of

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<sup>23</sup> For more on pragmatism see Rorty (1999), Patton (1988) and Howe (1988)

sources for data collection used together could offer a more complete knowledge and explanation of practices.

From this ‘what fits’ approach developed, what has become known as, ‘eclectic methodology’ or ‘mixed methodology’. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) and Cresswell *et al.* (2003) suggested using a ‘mixed methodology’ i.e. both quantitative and qualitative research methods and tools in an individual project. This shift was referred to by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003: ix) as *third methodological moment*. This ‘third moment’ suggested that common ground can be found between the two standpoints and that mixed methods or multiple methods can be used effectively in research. Greene (2008) suggested that practitioners in social sciences, such as education and nursing, had been developing the use of mixed methods in response to the practical demands of undertaking research in such contexts. This researcher adopted this essentially pragmatic position and has selected what in her opinion were the best methods and research design to meet the demands of the research project.

#### **4.2 The rationale for the research project design**

The researcher’s pragmatic standpoint influenced her choice of employing a small-scale multi-method study research design. This small-scale study centred on three primary school classes in Aberdeen City, their teachers, classroom assistants and pupils. The methods used were case studies, direct classroom observation, focus group sessions and semi-structured interviews. The focus of the small-scale multi-method study was the impact that paid additional adults have on teachers and pupils in their day to day school and classroom experiences and was designed to investigate the setting of the real world of the primary school. The design of the study allowed the researcher to collect both qualitative and quantitative data and to provide a ‘thick’ description of the three cases making up the project.

For this research project design the researcher has drawn from the paradigms as described above. Project data was collected from the participants in the study in both qualitative and quantitative forms. The positivist paradigm influence can be seen in the collection of quantitative data from direct observation of teachers and classroom assistants using an observation schedule that allowed the researcher to note the frequency of interactions as well as types of behaviour. This data was supported by qualitative data gathered from the three groups of participants in the case study. The participants took part in semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions. The participants contributed their perceptions and

experiences and this data helped the researcher understand and interpret the context more fully. The decision to collect qualitative data was influenced by the interpretivist paradigm.

The researcher was mindful of the need to address the issues of validity and reliability in designing the research project. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that the validity and reliability of the data are primarily a function of the skills of the researcher. They suggested these skills included a familiarity with the setting, the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach and that the researcher possessed good investigation skills.

This project was a practitioner research project and the researcher's positioning within it will be explored more fully in chapter five. Practitioner research where professionals undertake a study of their workplace setting has the potential to increase validity due to the added richness, honesty, fidelity and authenticity of the information acquired.<sup>24</sup> However there are challenges in practitioner research which include not interrogating the taken for granted, limiting project design to confirm assumptions, power relationships and bias. The researcher as a practitioner had tacit knowledge of the context of the study and in order to avoid challenges she was aware of the need to be aware of and question herself on issues of insider knowledge and status. These challenges were balanced with the advantages of being *experience near* as described by Geertz (1983). The researcher's claims that her in depth knowledge of the primary school class setting, her awareness and understanding of relationships and roles of the participants in this study and knowledge and understanding of the primary school as a workplace will add to the richness, honesty, fidelity and authenticity of the data collected in this project.

The researcher had first hand experience of the introduction of classroom assistants both as a class teacher in the period 1974-1992 and as a headteacher from 1992 to the present. As such she has had pertinent experience of working with classroom assistant support staff in the classroom setting and the school setting. Additionally in her role as headteacher she had experience of recruitment and management of classroom assistants. Her 'insider' knowledge of the role and potential impact of classroom assistants has influenced her selection of this field as a topic for research. For this research project the researcher believed that classroom assistants did influence both teacher and pupil behaviour. Additionally the researcher held the view that much of the discourse on class size had focused narrowly on pupil/teacher ratios not on pupil/adult ratios. This, in her view, has

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<sup>24</sup> See Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), McNiff *et al.* (2003) and Lankshear and Knobel (2004)

meant that the impact of the change to pupil/adult ratios of classroom assistants has been obscured by the narrow focus on pupil/teacher ratios thread of the discourse on class size.

The trustworthiness of the inferences drawn from the analysis of data gathered is commonly defined as validity. Historically the question of validity was posed in the context of experimental research. The exact nature of 'validity' is a highly debated topic in both educational and social research. A much cited definition of 'validity' is that of Hammersley (1987):

*An account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena, that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise.*

(Hammersley, 1987:69)

Eisenhart and Howe (1992) suggested five standards for validity in educational research (1) the fit between research questions, (2) data collection procedures and analysis techniques, (3) the effective application of specific data collection and analysis techniques, (4) alertness to and coherence of prior knowledge, and (5) value constraints and comprehensiveness.

The project design and research tools allowed the researcher to collect data and evidence from three distinct sources, the participants in the study - class teachers, pupils and classroom assistants. Triangulation to gather multiple perspectives so as to gain a more complete understanding of phenomena was often used to confirm or validate research findings or to provide a check for reliability. Miles and Huberman (1984:235) suggested that *triangulation is supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, don't contradict it*. Triangulation looked for contradiction or consistency rather than proof<sup>25</sup>. Triangulation for this project was addressed through the range of data collected in the study from the three sets of participants which allowed the researcher to cross-check responses from interviews with the data gathered through direct classroom observations.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) argued that in qualitative research it was not appropriate to attempt to prove validity by demonstrating the link between cause and effect. They suggested the test for validity was met by demonstrating that the researcher's interpretations of findings had credibility for the subjects of the study. This was echoed by Cohen *et al.* (2000:106) who suggested that by making the research process transparent

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<sup>25</sup> see Patton (2002)



and honest readers can construct their own perspectives which *are equally as valid as our own*. In the presentation of the findings the researcher aimed to meet this suggestion as this research project was open to the charge that its findings were local, specific and not generalisable and lack external validity.

### **4.3 Data collection tools**

For the pragmatic researcher all research methodologies have advantages and disadvantages. The selection of a strategy, methodology and tools was based upon what the researcher believed would work best for the research project. The three data collection tools were used to address the research questions and to meet the aims of the project.

The information and data for this small-scale multi-method study was amassed using three different data collection tools. Critical to such a mixed methodological approach was the concept of triangulation. Van Lier (1988:13) described triangulation as *inspection of different kinds of data, different methods and a variety of research tools*. The three data collection tools used were (1) direct classroom observation using an observation schedule (2) semi-structured interviews with adult participants and (3) focus group sessions with pupil participants. The data collected allowed the researcher to analyse the perspective of the ‘actors’<sup>26</sup>. In this case the ‘actors’ were pupils, teachers and classroom assistants.

### ***Case study***

The case study as a research method has been used for many years in many disciplines. Its beginnings are most usually associated with the School of Sociology in the University of Chicago<sup>27</sup>. The case study is a research method that allowed the researcher to examine the rich detail of a setting. The case study as a research method allows the researcher to investigate complex settings with multivariate conditions such as primary school classroom. In electing to pursue a case study approach for this project the researcher’s aim was to explore current situations and to identify trends and patterns.

Case studies describe, illustrate, explore or explain settings and typically are single or multiple-case studies. A multiple-case study is one that uses a number of sites and allows what Yin (2003:46) describes as *significant opportunities for extensive analysis*. Case studies were developed in order to portray, as Cohen *et al.* (2000:182) suggested *the close-up reality and ‘thick description’ of participants’ lived experiences*.

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<sup>26</sup> see Zonabend (1992)

<sup>27</sup> see Hamel *et al.* (1993)

Merriam (1998) suggested that the case study design is relevant and useful specifically when studying educational innovations. The introduction of classroom assistants is one such innovation. For this project the researcher aimed to investigate the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the behaviours of teachers and pupils when a classroom assistant was present in their classrooms. Yin (1994) recommended a case study approach when a research project was addressing “how” and “why” questions and when the researcher believed the contextual conditions were highly relevant to the phenomenon under study. This project’s focus was on the impact of additional support staff in primary school classrooms and as such fitted with Yin’s (2003:1) recommendation that a case study is indicated *when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context*.

The primary school classroom is a complex social setting. The challenge in investigating the primary school class where every school, every class, every teacher and every pupil is different is the number of variables that can be present. These include, the range of pupil ability, pupils’ different home backgrounds, the range of pupil behaviours and attitudes, peer relationships, pupils’ chronological age difference (usually up to 11 months), the gender mix, a range of learning styles, pupils’ previous experiences of education and the number of pupils and adults in the class. There is an equally lengthy list of variables for every school, every teacher and every classroom assistant. This research project was undertaken using three different primary classes in three different primary schools. Each teacher, classroom assistant, class and school in the case studies was different. The data collected reflected these differences.

In selecting and focusing on three primary school classes, their pupils, teachers and classroom assistants the researcher aimed to gain an understanding of this complex setting focusing on the lived experiences of teachers, pupils and classroom assistants in three primary schools in Scotland today. This multiple-case study had the opportunity as Yin (2003:53) claimed *to be more powerful*, inasmuch as comparisons, linkages and interpretation of findings and results could be made between the three classes, their teachers and classroom assistants.

The three case study schools were selected to have a number of key similarities but the researcher also recognised that each would be unique. These similarities and differences would facilitate within case and cross case analysis. The criteria used by the researcher to select schools and classes to participate in the study were (1) the schools should be of a similar size, (2) the schools be located in a range of socio-economic areas, (3) the classes

be drawn from primary school middle stages (primary four and primary five) and (4) the classes had part-time support from a classroom assistant.

In identifying schools to participate in the project the researcher used her local knowledge. The participants in the case study were drawn from three primary schools in Aberdeen City. The three primary schools were members of an Associated Schools Group (ASG) in Aberdeen; that is the three schools were feeder primary schools for the same secondary school. All three primary schools were run by the local authority in Aberdeen City. In each of these three schools one middle stages class (primary 4 or 5) its teacher and classroom assistant formed the participants in the case study. Middle stages classes were chosen as the pupils in these classes would most likely have a range of experiences of classroom assistant support would be able to describe their experiences accurately as well as articulate their ideas and opinions. Similar sized schools and part time support from a classroom assistant was necessary in order for comparisons and interpretations to be made. A range of socio-economic situations provided depth and balance to the project. Detailed vignettes of the three case studies will be presented in chapter six.

### ***Classroom observation***

A key element of this small-scale study was the evidence and data gathered through direct classroom observation. Ethnographic researchers such as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) Denzin (1997) and Cole (1982) have claimed that human behaviours are significantly influenced by the settings in which they take place and generalising findings must take account of these settings. Therefore if one wishes to generalise research findings to schools then the research needs to take place in schools. The ability to generalise findings to wider groups and circumstances was one of the most common tests of 'validity' for quantitative research and yet was considered to be of little, or even no, importance for many qualitative researchers.

Observation as a term in the field of education and educational research is open to a wide range of interpretations, such as 'scrutinising' or 'investigating', to 'looking' or 'watching'. A common definition of observation by researchers is 'watching'.<sup>28</sup> This kind of watching is more than just looking. The difference between the two is similar to the difference between hearing and listening. One is a physiological act (looking/hearing) and the other (watching/listening) is a cognitive process. The kind of 'watching' Sylva *et al.*

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<sup>28</sup> See Sylva *et al.* (1980).

(1980) described is one where there is an expectation of including specific analysis and interpretation of what has been observed<sup>29</sup>. Johnson and Pennypacker (1993) provide a succinct definition of observation in the context of research:

*In social research, observation is generally used to record behaviour. It may be employed as a primary method of data collection to provide an accurate description of a situation; to gather supplementary data which may qualify or help interpret other sources of data; or it may be used in an exploratory way, to gain insights which can be tested by other techniques.*

(Johnson and Pennypacker, 1993:52)

There are many advantages to using observation tools and techniques as research instruments. One advantage is that the observation method allows the researcher to observe behaviours and hear language first hand rather than rely on reports from participants about what they did and said. The observer can also discover things that escape the notice of the participants or indeed things they might have been unwilling or unable to discuss. Additionally observers can also note the absence as well as the presence of behaviours and language.

Cohen *et al.* (2000:315) suggested that *observation methods are powerful tools for gaining insights into situations*. However, observation on its own does not provide any insights into what the participants were thinking or what motivated them. One advantage of using observation as a research tool is that it allows the observer to record actual behaviours. In mixed method research projects such as this, that also use interviews, the data can be compared with what the participants subsequently say.

In any observation study the researcher needs to be aware of the impact of being observed on the behaviour the researched. This can range from wanting to 'look good'; wanting to please the researcher by giving them what they think is being looked for to trying to mislead the researcher. Another criticism of observation as a research method is the impact of the presence of the observer. One effect of observer presence on the behaviour of the subjects has been termed the Hawthorne Effect. This was first demonstrated in a research project undertaken by Elton Mayo(1949) (1927 - 1932) of the Hawthorne Plant of the Western Electric Company in Cicero, Illinois where the research team found that individual behaviours may be altered because they knew they were being studied. The Hawthorne Plant study highlighted the influence of the observer on the subjects in any overt study.

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<sup>29</sup> For more on this see Tilstone, (1998).

In the research project design this researcher aimed to minimise the Hawthorne effect through visiting the classes involved in the project on at least ten separate occasions. On a practical note, one of the more common challenges for observers in primary school classrooms is the response of the pupils. Younger pupils, especially, will engage with ‘visitors’ to their classroom. Researchers need to consider how to ‘deal’ with such interaction in order to maintain the integrity of the research project. The researcher took account of this in her briefing with the class teachers. They in turn briefed the children about the researcher’s activity when observing in class. The participants became used to her presence in their classrooms and from field notes the researcher noted that on her second visit *the pupils and staff were much more relaxed and appeared to forget I was there.*

Classroom observation as a research method has its roots in the schools sector where it became a feature of practice over the past 30 years and involved systematic studies of the interaction between teachers and their pupils. The interaction of teachers and pupils within the social arena of the classroom is a central element in all educational institutions.

A small number of earlier researchers experimented with ways of observing the complexities of classroom interaction (Henry 1960, 1965, Waller 1932 and Isaacs 1930). Most found the prospect daunting mainly as a consequence of the ‘business’ of classroom life. Classrooms are inherently complex cultural settings and undertaking observations in such dynamic milieu is challenging. Wragg (1994) in his seminal work on classroom observation cited Jackson (1968):

*primary teachers engage in as many as 1000 interpersonal interchanges in the classroom each day*

(Jackson, 1968:2)

Systematic observation in classrooms is considered to be one of the most developed forms of quantitative observational research (Croll, 1986). It involves classification of classroom behaviours according to categories in an observation schedule. In their seminal work in the field of observation studies Simon and Boyer’s (1968) *Mirrors of Behaviour* described in detail 79 different observation systems. Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) (1970) is the best known example. Flanders (1970) developed his observation coding system to determine the effectiveness of teacher interactions both indirect and direct on pupils’ behaviours. He was looking for a positive relationship between ‘democratic’ teaching behaviour and pupils’ progress and learning. In the 1970s observational

procedures were further refined, and several large-scale studies were conducted<sup>30</sup>. Since then many researchers have used FIAC as a basis for constructing their own systematic coding schedules. This researcher drew on FIAC in devising the observation schedules for this project. A detailed description and explanation of the categories of these classroom observation schedules will be presented later in this chapter.

Systematic coding systems were designed to meet the typical constraints of time and resources and as such they have to be selective, looking at a small number of activities, phenomena or events that are central to the research project. For this project the researcher was mindful of these tensions when devising the categories for the teacher and classroom assistant observation schedules.

Timing and time intervals were also highlighted as possible problematic issues in classroom observation studies. Timing is critical in direct classroom observation, especially when events are to be observed as they occur. Wrong timing can distort findings. When to visit the class, how long to stay, should subsequent visits be announced or unannounced, and at the same time of day and day of week were some of the key questions addressed by the researcher. For this project the timing of classroom observation visits varied in order to capture a wider range of teacher and classroom assistant activities. The time intervals for data collection were adjusted after field trials suggested that five minute intervals would allow the researcher time to record the activity as well as capture the range of activities. For each observation schedule, observations of interactions were recorded ten times at time intervals of five minutes. Each class taking part in the project was visited 10 times, five when the classroom assistant was present and five times when the classroom assistant was not. Each visit lasted up to one hour. At the close of each classroom observation visit the researcher met with the teacher or classroom assistant to have a short feedback session. During these informal debriefing sessions the researcher was able to raise issues that required clarification. These conversations were noted in the researcher's field notes.

Primary school classrooms can be very busy places and teachers appear to multitask. Teachers use the analogy of comparing what they do in a primary school classroom to the music hall act of spinning plates. In the music hall act the performer is never still as no sooner does he have the last plate balancing nicely than the first one needs attention. The

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<sup>30</sup> For a fuller review of these see McPake *et al.* (1999)

analogy applied to the teacher's job in the primary school classroom means that no sooner has the teacher got all the groups settled to their tasks than a group or individual requires attention. In the trialling of the observation schedules the researcher found that teachers did more than one thing at a time, for example, respond to requests for help, issue resources, make informal assessments and judgements and manage pupil behaviour. In such cases the researcher, in this instance recorded all of these behaviours for the same time interval on the observation schedule.

McPake *et al.* (1999) when discussing the development of a schedule for capturing teacher behaviour found:

*The teacher observation schedule was rather more problematic. Teachers tend to do several things at once and move from one focus to another in rapid succession, as for example, in hearing a child read whilst at the same time 'keeping an eye' on other pupils and giving quick instructions to others in order to keep the range of activities in the classroom going. A list of categories was not a convenient way of recording multiple aspects of teachers' activity.*

(McPake *et al.*, 1999:22)

There have been a number of criticisms and cautions related to the use of structured observation techniques and conducting classroom observation research with these tools. These have focused mainly on the development of the categories for the observation schedules. The argument being that in determining the categories the researcher has predetermined the outcome of the research rather than maintaining an 'open mind' to the issue. In devising the observation schedules the researcher was aware of this as an issue and balanced it with cautions on observer *drift*. Hawkins (1982) suggested that the more complex a system of definitions the more likely that observers using it will *drift* from the original behavioural definitions. Mash and McElwee (1974) reported that observers given a four-category system were significantly more accurate than observers given an eight-category system. The observation schedules devised for this project have limited the number of categories to allow for this.

In the context of these demands the researcher devised and used observation schedules (Figures 1 and 2) that were more likely to meet such demands. Inter-rater reliability was tested during the trialling phase of the project. The schedules were amended based on the feedback from the trials. The field trials were undertaken in the researcher's own school and with four teachers and classroom assistants who had volunteered to participate in the trials. Two teachers agreed to use the schedules as observers and two other teaching colleagues and classroom assistant colleagues agreed to be observed.

The two *observer* teachers were briefed by the researcher on the content and purpose of the schedules. Both colleagues were practised in undertaking classroom observations. The operational definitions and descriptions used in the schedule were explored and explained. These were amended after these discussion and the descriptions reflected a shared understanding of the categories.

The teachers and classroom assistants who had agreed to be observed had experienced classroom observations being undertaken by the researcher and the teacher observer as part of the schools classroom monitoring procedures. They too were briefed on the purpose of the schedules. The researcher and one *observer* teacher simultaneously observed two classes and completed the schedules. Afterwards they compared results and for the most part there was agreement with their observations. Where description of categories was interpreted differently by the researcher and the teacher *observer* they were amended. These amended schedules were then used by the researcher and the second teacher *observer* with another volunteer teacher and classroom assistant. After these observation sessions comparison of results was discussed and minor amendments were made. Appendix 1 provides detail of the operational definitions of the categories and the schedules in Figures 1 and 2 below were the result of this trialling.

Teachers and classroom assistants who had been observed asked for feedback on the experience of being observed. They suggested that debriefing at the end of an observation would be welcome and could be useful for the researcher. The researcher acknowledged this suggestion and built debriefing into her fieldwork procedures.

The schedules devised for this project were created by the researcher and are based on the researcher's professional experience of undertaking classroom observation and her wide reading on the subject. Below (*Figure 1*) is an analysis and description of each of the sections of the schedules.



Figure 1

Classroom Observation Schedule for frequency and type of teacher interaction

Time intervals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Class</b>	<b>School A F K</b>			<b>Date/time</b>			No. adults present		No. children present	
<b>Class/pupil organisation</b> Whole class lesson/teaching Group lesson/teaching One to one teaching Pair working Small group discussion with teacher/classroom assistant Small group discussion without teacher/classroom assistant Individual seat work Active learning/play				<b>Description of Teacher activity</b> Organising/ directing groups to tasks setting up/ putting out resources materials Marking work Active listening observing pupils observing CA or other adults Scan pupils/classroom Circulating						
<b>Description of teacher interaction with pupils</b>										
<b>Responds</b> give support explain praise smile give permission encourage active listening social chatting giving feedback respond to care needs <i>other</i>			<b>Initiates</b> give support explain praise smile give permission encourage check progress with task question to check understanding question to challenge and extend thinking social chatting giving feedback <i>other</i>			<b>Manages behaviour</b> bring back to task physical presence stop work to remind ch re behaviour non verbal command remove from room ask for quiet reprimand deal with interruption intervene <i>other</i>				
<b>Description of teacher interaction with classroom assistant</b>								<b>In</b>	<b>Out</b>	
<b>Responds</b> Give instruction on tasks to be done Guidance/advice on possible problem areas Information on deployment Respond to request for help Discuss pupils progress with task Discuss CA progress with task Discuss what to do next <b>Other</b>			<b>Initiates</b> Inform of plan for lesson Give instruction on tasks to be done Guidance/advice on possible problem areas Information on deployment Share information about pupil management Share observations on pupil behaviour Discuss pupils progress with task Discuss CA progress with task Discuss what to do next			<b>Manages</b> Observe  Monitor  Redirects  Intervenes  <b>other</b>				

Figure 2

Classroom Observation Schedule for frequency and type of classroom assistant interaction

Time intervals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Class</b>	<b>School A F K</b>			<b>Date/time</b>		No. adults present		No. children present		
<b>Class/pupil organisation</b> Whole class lesson/teaching Group lesson/teaching One to one teaching Pair working Small group discussion with teacher/classroom assistant Small group discussion without teacher/classroom assistant Individual seat work Active learning/play				<b>Description of CA activity</b> Supervising individual/group activity Observing individual/group Talking with individual/group Escorting individual/group to work outwith classroom Supporting pupils working on computers or with other ICT equipment Playing with individual/group Referring to teacher's plans Recording observations Housekeeping tasks – tidying, cleaning up spills etc Preparation of resources, materials Displaying work						
<b>Description of classroom assistant interaction with pupils</b>										
<b>Responds</b> give support explain praise smile give permission encourage active listening social chatting giving feedback respond to request for help refer pupil to teacher for help respond to personal care needs			<b>Initiates</b> give support explain praise smile give permission encourage check progress with task question to check understanding question to challenge and extend thinking social chatting giving feedback <b>other</b>			<b>Manages behaviour</b> bring back to task non verbal command intervene ask for quiet reprimand active listening physical presence deal with interruption refer to teacher remove from room <b>other</b>				
<b>Description of classroom assistant activity/interaction with teacher</b>									<b>In</b>	<b>Out</b>
Taking instructions from teacher Referring to teacher for advice, further instructions Share information about pupil management Share observations on pupil behaviour Discuss pupils progress with task Discuss what to do next Observe teacher <b>Other</b>										

In devising the schedules the researcher drew on observational studies of teachers' and pupils' interactions and activities in primary classrooms including Kutnick *et al.* (2002) Galton *et al.* (1980), Croll (1986). In determining the prompts for observation as well as the researcher's own extensive experience as a teacher, headteacher and Associate Assessor for HMIe the researcher drew on the work of Flanders (1970), Wilson *et al.* (2003), Calder (2003), Lee (2002) and SEED (2001).

The first section of the schedule allowed for the collection of informational data including the code name of the school, how many adults and pupils were present. The timed interval boxes were ticked throughout the observation period to allow the observer to keep a running record for each timed interval. Observations were recorded at five minute intervals.

The next section *class/pupil organisation* allowed the observer to collect data about how the class was being organised for teaching and learning. The categories described the range of pupil groupings that teachers regularly use.

During the course of an observation session this *class/pupil organisation* changed and the observer was able to link these changes to the timed intervals by noting the number of the timed interval against the description of the class or pupil organisation.

In the next section *description of teacher/classroom assistant activity* the researcher recorded the type of teacher/classroom assistant activity that was observed and here again this was linked to the timed intervals by noting the number of the timed interval against the description of the teacher/classroom assistant activity.

For the next section *description of teacher/classroom assistant interaction with pupils* the researcher drew on Flanders (1970) work in devising the categories as well as the training in classroom observation she had completed as part of her work as an Associate Assessor with HMIe. Here again the timed interval was linked to the description of the teacher interaction.

Both schedules are broadly similar in construction. The final sections differ slightly. In the teacher observation schedule this final section *description of teacher interaction with classroom assistant* the researcher used similar broad categories of interaction to those found in the previous section. Here the focus was not on pupil/adult interaction but on

teacher/classroom assistant interaction. Teachers have a role in managing classroom assistants and this final section included prompts that allowed the researcher to collect data that might reflect or illuminate the operational relationship between these two adults.

Fieldwork was the first stage in data collection for the project. This involved the researcher in making 10 visits to each of the three classes to observe the teachers and five visits to observe each of the classroom assistants. A classroom observation schedule was completed for each of these visits. This resulted in the completion of 30 classroom observation schedules of teachers and 15 observation schedules of classroom assistants. Each teacher was observed on five visits when the classroom assistant was present and five when the classroom assistant was not. Each of these observations lasted up to one hour. The classroom assistants were also observed on five occasions. The visits were undertaken throughout one school term, from April to June 2007. The pattern of school visits meant that the researcher was in each of the three schools at least once per week and sometimes more frequently during this period. For this project the timing of classroom observation visits varied in order to capture a wider range of teacher and classroom assistant activities. These times were negotiated with the class teachers and classroom assistants.

Before the first data collection visit to each class the researcher was introduced to the pupils by the class teacher who informed the pupils of the task the researcher was undertaking. An informal question and answer session followed this introduction. Each teacher asked for the pupils' co-operation and advised them to try to 'ignore' the researcher when she returned to observe the adults.

For this study classroom observation was used both as a primary method of data collection and to gather supplementary data.

### ***Semi-structured interviews***

The interview is a research tool that is used to gather information on a topic or area of research. Interviews in research can take three general forms, structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Kvale (1996) referred to the interview at its basic level, as a *conversation*. Each type of interview generates different data and requires different analysis strategies. The format of the interview reflects the purpose and type of data to be collected. The usefulness and quality of the data gathered through interviews is dependent on the quality of the questions included in the interview schedule.

Unstructured interviews can be used when the interviewer intends to gather in-depth information about the interviewees understanding or point of view. The interviewer asks few questions and establishes a rapport with the interviewee. This type of interview can produce a mass of data that can be difficult to analyse.

Structured interviews can be used in market research and to gather quantifiable data. The purpose of the structured interview is to collect data of a fact finding nature with questions requiring a clearly defined range of possible answers. The interviewees are asked the same set of questions, in the same order. Such interviews are little more than oral questionnaires. A disadvantage of the structured interview is that by designing a set of questions the researcher can be accused of limiting the data collection to things he/she considered to be important or relevant. The structured interview leaves no room for unexpected or unanticipated information from the interviewee.

The middle ground between these two tools is held by the semi-structured interview. For this research project the researcher opted to use a semi-structured interview format to explore individual similarities and differences between participants' experiences of the classroom assistant initiative. Frey and Oishi (1995:1) described the interview as a *purposeful conversation*. The conversational nature of an interview allows the interviewer to ask follow up questions. Semi-structured interviewing is a flexible form of interviewing and uses a standardised interview schedule with set of questions and/or topics to be explored. The questions tend to be asked in a similar order to assist with the analysis. The role of the interviewer is one of facilitator, listener, to encourage full responses. Kvale (1996) stated that the key task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say.

In this research project semi-structured interviews were used to gather deeper information from the interviewee than could be gained from using a questionnaire or structured interview. The semi-structured interview provided interviewees with the opportunity to express ideas, opinions and their answers were not restricted to pre-categorised choices. The data collected was qualitative.<sup>31</sup> The purpose and aim of this type of interview was not to gather confirmatory 'proof' answers but to explore understandings and experiences. Arskey and Knight (1999) suggested qualitative interviewing was a valuable research method that allowed the researcher to explore:

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<sup>31</sup> For more on this see Arskey and Knight (1999) and Gubrium and Holstein (2001).

*data on understandings, opinions, what people remember doing, attitudes, feelings and the like*

(Arskey and Knight, 1999:2)

The semi-structured interview has a number of challenges and possible weaknesses as a research tool. The interviewer needs to be skilled in listening and responding. As Kvale (1996) said an interview is a conversation and as such is a two way communication. The interviewer needs to be aware of giving out non-verbal cues that might be interpreted by the interviewees as signals to give answers that the interviewer wanted or expected. Interviews can be challenged as being subjective and that the interviewer can be biased. These disadvantages and challenges were acknowledged and taken into account by the researcher in devising the questions and in the running of the semi-structured interviews.

To address the research project questions the three teachers and the three classroom assistants taking part in the project were interviewed using a qualitative semi-structured interview schedule. This research tool allowed the researcher to gather information from the participants on their knowledge and experience of their work in primary schools in general and primary school classes in particular. As such they met the description made by Seale (1998) as *interview-data-as-resource*.

In devising the themes for the semi-structured interviews the researcher took into account the role of the interviewer. The researcher viewed the role of the interviewer as facilitator. Essentially the interviewer's task was to encourage the interviewees to talk, to prompt them to respond to the questions fully and to ensure they understood the purpose of the questions. The interviewer listened carefully and sensitively to the interviewees. Interviewing is a social experience and as such allows the interviewer to connect with the interviewee at a personal level. This connection helped the interviewer realise her aim to gather data about what was, as described by Tuckman (1972), *inside the heads* of the interviewees, their values, attitudes and beliefs.

In conducting the interviews the researcher explored the themes with the interviewees and used the schedule as a prompt to ensure the themes were discussed. From field notes the researcher noted that in the interviews with the three teachers the schedule themes were explored flexibly. Her field notes suggested that the teachers were relaxed and interested in discussing the themes and had readily engaged in professional dialogue during the interviews. She had noted, *although we dotted about during the interview we covered all the themes*. However the interviews with classroom assistants were less flexible and

followed the sequence of themes in the schedule more closely. Also from her field notes the researcher noted she felt the classroom assistants were less at ease than the teachers during the interviews. They had needed more prompting and support to share their opinions. The researcher felt that this could have been attributed to the relationship between the researcher and the classroom assistants being influenced by their knowledge of her as a head teacher. This *power relationship* could have influenced the interviews to make them less of a professional dialogue and more of a researcher led question and answer session.

In opting to use a semi-structured interview the objective was to gain an understanding the interviewee's point of view. The schedule included questions that asked for permission, for facts, were open ended, asked about feelings and pose 'what if?' options. Comparability of data was addressed by using a similar structure and set of questions for each of the three types of interviewees. Tables 2 and 3 below show the broad themes of the semi-structured interviews.

The interview schedules for classroom assistants and teachers were broadly similar in construction. Each had four broad sections with a subset of questions in each section. The questions in section one were devised to set the scene and to put the interviewer at ease. The questions included questions about the interview process, and some background information that was relevant to the project. Section two included questions on the interviewees' perceptions and feelings about their work experiences. Section three focused on gathering factual information about experiences of working in classes of different sizes, with a range of adult/pupil ratios. Professional knowledge and understanding were also explored. Section four questions allowed the interviewee to be creative and reflective and were open ended.

**TABLE 2**      *Teacher Interview Themes and Questions*

<b><i>SECTION 1 Scene setting</i></b>
Do you have any questions about the interview process before we begin?
How long have you been teaching?
<b><i>SECTION 2 Perceptions/feelings</i></b>
What year group/stage do you like best to teach?
What do you like best/ least about your present class?
Do you ever feel stressed in your job?
What do you think are the main causes of these stressful feelings?
<b><i>SECTION 3 Tell me about - Facts</i></b>
Tell me about your experiences, if any, of teaching a small classes – fewer than 20.
Tell me about your experiences, if any of larger classes – 30+.
You have classroom assistant support this year. Tell me about any previous experience you have of working with a classroom assistant.
Take me through the set up of your day when you don't have a classroom assistant?
Do you plan/do anything different for the times when you have classroom assistant support?
Do you think the children benefit when you have classroom assistant support? In what ways
<b><i>SECTION 4 What if ?</i></b>
If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?
If you were to have a class of less than 20 would you change any aspects of your teaching methodology?
What would be the impact for you, and your class if you had a full time classroom assistant?
Which would you rather have and why – a small class – less than 20 pupils with no classroom assistant support or a class of 30 with full time classroom assistant support?
Would the age/stage of the class make any difference to your answer to the question above? If so can you tell me why?



**TABLE 3 Classroom Assistant Interview Themes and Questions**

<b>SECTION 1 Scene setting</b>
Do you have any questions about the interview process before we begin?
How long have you been a classroom assistant?
<b>SECTION 2 Perceptions/feelings</b>
What year group/stage do you prefer to work with?
What do you like best/least about your present classes?
Do you ever feel stressed under pressure in class?
What do you think are the main causes of these stressful feelings?
<b>SECTION 3 Tell me about - Facts</b>
Tell me about your experiences, if any, of being in a small classes – fewer than 20.
Tell me about your experiences, if any of larger classes – 30+.
Tell me about any previous experiences of supporting other classes.
Do the teachers you work with deploy you in different ways? Can you elaborate?
Do you think the children benefit when they have classroom assistant support? In what ways – can you tell me more?
<b>SECTION 4 What if</b>
If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?
Does the age/stage of the class make any difference to your answer to the question above? If so can you tell me why?

Cohen *et al.* (2000) suggested that consideration be given to minimising stress for the interviewee. The researcher in preparing for the interviews arranged for a quiet room to be available in each of the three schools. Refreshments and comfortable seats were provided and before the interview began the researcher and the interviewee talked informally. Once this relaxed climate had been established the interview began. The researcher used a very small and unobtrusive recording device. The operation of this device was demonstrated to the interviewees prior to the interviews. Informed consent to using the device had been given at the commencement of the research project. The interviewer re-checked this consent before starting to record the interview. Recording the interviews ensured that the interviewees own words would be available for analysis. Recording the interview allowed the interviewer to participate more fully in the ‘conversation’ and taking part as Johnson

(2000) described in an *engaged* conversation between two people. At the end of each interview the interviewer and interviewee talked informally in order to close the session sensitively.

### ***Focus Groups***

In the research literature there were a number of descriptions and definitions of what constituted a focus group. Kitzinger (1994) described it as organised discussion. Goss and Leinbach (1996) suggested it was a social event. Powell and Single (1996) defined the focus group as:

*A group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of research.*  
(Powell and Single, 1996:499)

Krueger (1994) suggested that in addition to the above that the focus group session:

*taps into human tendencies. Attitudes and perceptions relating to concepts, products, services or programs are developed in part by interaction with other people.*

(Krueger, 1994:10, 11)

The use of focus groups in research in the social sciences and in particular in educational research is now a recognised research tool. Morgan (1988) suggested focus group research in the social sciences developed from their early use in market research. The use of focus groups as a market research tool for business and industry continued to be popular due to a number of factors including their convenience, economy and, through the involvement of a small group of people, information can be gathered with speed. In comparison with questionnaires focus groups explore a small number of issues in more depth.

In market research focus groups were used to test responses to advertising campaigns and to get consumer feedback. Groups Plus Inc (2000) stated focus groups were an *excellent way to discover the attitude of customers*. However, other commentators have suggested that focus groups in market research were not representative and as such the data collected from them were not robust. Krueger and Casey (2000:6) suggested that the acceptance of focus groups was delayed in academic circles due to *a pre-occupation with quantitative procedures*. This thread in the discourse is associated with the more general debate of the ‘paradigm wars’ where the validity, reliability and generalisability of such qualitative data were challenged.

In the social sciences the development of the use of focus groups was generally attributed to Merton and Kendall (1946). This seminal work suggested that focus group interviewing developed from individual and group interviewing in the social sciences and in psychology in particular. Vaughn *et al.* (1996), Coffield (2000), Field (2000) and Walker and Tedick (2001) found that focus groups were used widely in education studies. In social science research the focus group as a research tool was characterised by an emphasis on interaction of the participants of the group. Asbury (1995:414) suggested that the justification for using focus groups was that they *capitalize(d) on the interaction within a group to elicit rich experiential data.*

Focus groups were used to gather data on the impact of the introduction of classroom assistants on teachers and pupils in their day to day school and classroom experiences. The project aimed to investigate a relatively recent change in educational policy and to evaluate the impact of aspects of that policy. Lederman (1990) saw the use of focus groups in educational research as potentially useful in studies investigating educational effectiveness. Dickson (2000) suggested that focus groups could add to studies evaluating new programmes and procedures.

The multi-method research design of the project was such that data gathered from focus groups would supplement the data gathered from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers and classroom assistants. This justification is in accord with Morgan (1997) who included the use of focus groups as the main data source, as a supplementary data source and in multi-method studies.

The literature suggested that focus groups like all research tools have both advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages Morgan (1988) suggested that focus groups elicited information in a way that allowed researchers to find out why an issue was salient. Lankshear (1993) argued that as a result of using focus groups the researcher gained a better understanding between what people say and what they do. Another advantage of using a focus group session rather than a structured interview or questionnaire is that it is more flexible and allows the researcher to encourage elaboration and clarification of responses from the interviewees. Focus groups are a form of group interviewing and over time researchers have developed a set of suggested guidelines and advice on how to construct and conduct them.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Morgan (1997), Vaughn *et al.* (1996) and Krueger and Casey (2000).

Focus group interaction is guided by set themes and questions however, in any conversation the participants can raise and follow threads of discussion not planned for in advance. Generally speaking focus groups allow the researcher to gather data that reveals the thoughts and feelings of participants as well as on their actual or perceived experiences.

Focus groups allow for contributions from participants with lower levels of literacy who might not be able to complete a questionnaire. Additionally there is a group dynamic at play in focus groups whereby participants can help each other remember past experiences and so elaborate on their contributions to the group. These issues are particularly salient for this project where the focus groups were made up of eight and nine year old children.

A disadvantage of focus groups, as indicated earlier, is that they are small and as such can be challenged on the count of being unrepresentative. However careful selection of participants can allow the researcher to achieve an age, gender and social status balance if appropriate. However the data gathered from focus groups is always qualitative and therefore unlikely to be used for making statistical inferences.

At a superficial level focus groups appear to be a simple straightforward mechanism for gathering information from a group of people with a shared experience. However careful planning and preparation are required in order to get the most from such a group.

The role of the moderator is crucial to the success of a focus group. Merton and Kendall (1946) offered important advice for interviewers and Oates (2000) suggested that there are pros and cons to the researcher moderating the group. The interviewer or moderator needs to be able to encourage all the participants to contribute in a supportive manner. Additionally the moderator needs to ensure that the participants keep on track and remain focused on the topic under discussion. The moderator especially in a focus group involving school age pupils needs to be aware of a number of possible issues and be prepared for these eventualities. These included facilitating the discussion but not dominating it, moving the discussion on if one topic appears to have been exhausted. A key role for the moderator is in keeping the discussion focused and sometimes they will need to interject to steer it back on track. Moderators need to be ready to encourage all members to contribute and to deal with any one participant dominating the discussion. They have to avoid giving too much approval to either any one participant or any particular opinion. Merton and Kendall (1946) cautioned against 'imposing the interviewer's frame of reference' on the group.

*The interviewer is tempted to take the role of educator or propagandist rather than that of sympathetic listener. ....Any such behavior by the interviewer usually introduces a "leader effect", modifying the informant's own expression of feelings'*

(Merton and Kendall, 1946:547)

This was particularly pertinent advice for this research project where the researcher undertook the role of moderator for the focus group interviews and was also known to the pupils to be a headteacher.

Focus groups of pupils were selected in order to collect data from pupil participants in the project. This data supplemented the data gathered using the other two research tools used in the project. The researcher planned to gather data from the focus groups that could not be collected using the observation schedules. The data collected using the classroom observation schedules was dependent upon an unstructured situation. As such the researcher had no control of what was likely to happen during an observation session. Focus groups however allowed the researcher a degree of control inasmuch as the researcher had devised a structure to the subjects, issues and questions she planned to explore with the focus group.

Merton and Kendall's (1946:541) influential article on the focused interview set the parameters for focus group development. They set out key characteristics of focused interviews namely *the persons interviewed are known to have been involved in a particular situation* and the need for analysis of the situation prior to the interviews taking place. They suggested that this content analysis should identify *the major areas of inquiry* and that the interview *is focused on the subjective experiences of the persons exposed to the pre-analyzed situation*.

This advice was taken account of in devising the focus groups for the project. The pupils taking part in the focus group sessions had all had experience of teaching and learning situations both with and without classroom assistant support. Prior to meeting with the focus group the researcher had spent considerable periods of time in the pupils' classrooms observing their teachers and classroom assistants. The classroom observation schedules allowed the researcher to collect quantitative data on interactions and behaviours of these adults. This knowledge of the context and the review of the literature in chapter two are reflected in the set of discussion themes for the focus groups set out in Table 4.

For this project focus group discussion refers to a discussion in a group, led by the researcher on the basis of a set of themes for discussion. Focus group interviewing allowed

the researcher to gather what is termed ‘qualitative’ data. In order to address the research questions the researcher deemed it important to collect data from multiple perspectives, i.e. from all the participants in the project. For this project the researcher decided to form a focus group of pupils from each of the three schools participating in the project. This allowed the researcher to collect a number of perspectives of this same topic. A benefit of these focus group sessions is that they allowed the researcher an opportunity to gain insights into pupils’ shared understandings of the role of classroom assistants. The researcher saw focus groups as group interviews and a way of listening to pupils and learning from them.

During the planning stage and in the conduct of the focus group sessions the researcher paid due attention to the advantages, limitations and possible pitfalls. In planning for focus groups the researcher needed to decide on the number of groups, the composition of each group, the size of each group, the length of time and number of times each group was to meet, where meetings were to take place, methods of recording the data, questions and themes for the group to discuss, how to analyse the data and determining who will chair or moderate the group. The researcher took account of the ethical considerations when selecting pupils for the focus groups. Homan (1991) advised that focus groups are subject to the same ethical considerations as other forms of social research. Considering these and ethical concerns for the participants the researcher decided to moderate the focus group.

For this research project the data collected from focus groups drew upon the perceptions, feelings and reactions of pupils. Pupils’ views on classroom assistants had not been sought by researchers. The classes taking part in the research project were from primary school middle stages year groups. Focus group discussions for the project allowed the pupils an opportunity to discuss their perceptions of classroom assistants. Many of the pupils had extensive experience of working with classroom assistants and were able to debate what worked well and what could be improved. Jackson and Davis (2000) commented:

*Middle grades students are mature enough to engage in thoughtful, sustained analysis and problem solving, especially on matters that clearly affect them*  
(Jackson and Davis, 2000:145)

Morgan and Krueger (1993) suggested that focus groups could be a particularly useful research tool when there are power differences between the participants in the settings being investigated. In this case the participants in the focus group were school age children and the topics under discussion were the adults who are ‘in charge’ of them.

Focus groups can be defined as an informal meeting of a small number of group members and are generally small enough to allow good discussion. Focus groups typically have up to eight participants. Longhurst (2003) suggested six to twelve, Bedford and Burgess (2001) say four to eight and MacIntosh (1981) suggest a norm of six to ten. The focus groups for this project involved up to eight pupils. The meetings for the project lasted for about one hour and were moderated by the researcher.

Pupils taking part in the focus groups were drawn from those who had consented and for whom the researcher also had parental consent. The researcher discussed the composition of each group with the class teachers involved and left the final composition of the group to the class teacher. The researcher asked that the groups had a balance of boys and girls. In each case the class teacher did not select pupils for whom taking part would be a stressful experience. Each teacher drew on her in depth knowledge of her pupils and chose a group of pupils who were willing to take part. During each focus group session the researcher was aware that sensitive information might at any time be disclosed by participants. Indeed in the focus group session in School A the recording was paused when one pupil made potentially sensitive comments. During this pause the researcher spoke with the group and reminded them about their agreement on confidentiality. A brief discussion took place that was not recorded and that allowed the interview to restart.

The table below shows the main themes for discussion with the three focus groups. These themes were selected to help gather data about the pupils' perceptions and their experiences of different sized classes, with and without additional support from a classroom assistant. The themes included questions that ask for permission, for facts, are open ended, ask about feelings and pose 'what if?' options. Comparability of data was ensured by using the same themes for each of the three pupil focus groups and broadly similar themes for the semi-structured interviews with staff.

Table 4 *Pupil focus group themes*

<p><b>Theme 1</b></p>	<p><b>Pupils previous experiences of having classroom assistant support –</b></p> <p><i>Prompts</i> Mrs Y works in your classroom this year – have you had other classroom assistants let’s say when you were in Primary 4 or 3 for example?</p>
<p><b>Theme 2</b></p>	<p><b>Pupils’ perceptions of the job of classroom assistant - their tasks and responsibilities.</b></p> <p><i>Prompts</i> You have classroom assistant in your class this year - what would you say is her job, what does she do, what is she there to do?</p>
<p><b>Theme 3</b></p>	<p><b>Teacher – pupils’ perceptions of their job, tasks and responsibilities.</b></p> <p><i>Prompts</i> Mrs X is your teacher what would you say is her job, what does she do, what is she there to do? Is it the same or different from Mrs Y?</p>
<p><b>Theme 4</b></p>	<p><b>Benefits and drawbacks for pupils</b></p> <p><i>Prompts</i> Do you think the children benefit when you have classroom assistant support or not? In what ways – can you tell me more. Do you think you get more help, more attention? Does she make sure you don’t muck about?</p>
<p><b>Theme 5</b></p>	<p><b>Pupils’ perceptions of different teaching methods, approaches and styles</b></p> <p><i>Prompts</i> Can you think about times in class when you don’t have a classroom assistant? Does your teacher do things differently? Do you do anything differently? Now think about times when there is a classroom assistant. Does your teacher do things differently? Do you do anything differently?</p>
<p><b>Theme 6</b></p>	<p><b>Class size/adult pupil ratios – pupils’ perceptions of benefit and drawbacks of smaller class sizes and/or better adult/pupil ratios.</b></p> <p><i>Prompts</i> Past experiences of large and small classes You are in a big class this year. Have you ever been in a smaller class – 20 or less? Talk about the differences.</p>



#### 4.4 Data analysis strategy

The researcher's aim in collecting, analysing, interpreting and displaying the data was to maintain and present the depth, richness and meaning of the data collected during the fieldwork phase of the project. The researcher adopted an holistic stance in analysing and interpreting the data in order to maximise her in depth knowledge and understanding of the professional, social and cultural aspects of the context of Scottish primary schools. Yin (1994) recommended using the researcher's expert knowledge to further the analysis of data gathered in case study research.

The data collection tools generated both numerical and text data. The 'text data' for this project consisted of what the teachers and classroom assistants said in the semi-structured interviews and the responses from pupils in their focus groups. The semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions generated a mass of words rather than numbers and as such required to be described and summarised. The numerical data was collected using the classroom observation schedules. This too was collated and summarised. The data from the classroom observations were analysed in conjunction with information gathered from the interviews with the teachers, classroom assistants and from the focus group sessions with pupils. Notes were made from the audio files of these interviews and this information was analysed and recorded in tabular form and are available as Appendix 2 (*Teachers*), Appendix 3 (*Classroom Assistants*) and Appendix 4 (*Pupils*). In a multiple-case study project with a small number of cases, (such as the present study with three cases), Yin (2003) recommended the creation of tables to display the data from the individual cases. Huberman and Miles (1998) suggested that data are presented:

*as an organised, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and/or action taking*

(Huberman and Miles, 1998:180)

The researcher used two broad analytic approaches of thematic coding and content analysis to interpret these data. As the data collected were both narrative and numerical content analysis was used to understand meanings and relationships. Krippendorff (1980), Weber (1990) and Huberman and Miles (1998) have written extensively on content analysis. Qualitative content analysis was defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) as:

*a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns*

(Hsieh and Shannon, 2005:1278)

In analyzing case study evidence various analytic strategies can be used by researchers. Yin (2003) suggested that there were five key data analysis strategies to be considered in case study research; these were pattern-matching, explanation-building, time-series analysis, the use of logic models, and cross-case synthesis. Tellis (1997) suggested that analysing case study evidence was the most difficult aspect of case study methodology. The research design chosen allowed the researcher to use pattern matching, explanation building and cross case synthesis.

In using cross-case synthesis as a main strategy the researcher aimed to identify similarities, patterns and to illuminate and build explanations of the impact of classroom assistants on primary schools, their classes, the teachers and pupils across the three case study schools. By identifying similarities, differences and patterns the researcher aimed to provide further insight into the classroom assistant initiative in Scottish schools through the experiences of the participants in the project.

As part of the cross-case analysis the researcher sorted the data by type across all cases investigated. The cross-case search for patterns meant that the researcher looked at the data in a number of different ways. Pattern matching was used as a key strategy to compare the data from the three school contexts to build explanations and address the research questions. For instance in this project the frequency of classroom assistant interactions with teachers was examined at individual classroom level and then compared with the data collected from the classroom assistants in the other two schools. These data were compared and cross referenced with the information from the interviews from all three sets of participants in the project. This cross case data analysis strategy was applied to all the data collected during the fieldwork phase of the project.

Morse (1994) suggested synthesising, comprehending, theorising and recontextualising as key features of good qualitative analysis. The researcher used these strategies to allow comparison, explanation, illumination and theorising about the how and why of the introduction of classroom assistants on teachers and pupils in their day to day school and classroom experiences.

Data from the semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and focus groups were organised into major themes, categories, and case examples to allow the researcher to begin to draw cross case conclusions. Specific techniques used included placing information into grids, creating matrices of categories and creating charts and other

displays that illustrated and compared the types and the frequency of events and behaviours. These grids, matrices and charts are presented later in this chapter. The researcher examined the data collected using the three data collection tools to address the research questions. Yin (2005) recommended that:

*data analysis consists of examining, categorising, tabulating, testing or otherwise recombining both qualitative and quantitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study*

(Yin 2005:109)

The data collected during classroom observations was taken from the schedules and transferred to frequency grids. Ten grids for each teacher and five for each classroom assistant were completed. In all 15 such grids were created, five for each school. Additionally a separate record grid was created from each observation schedule that recorded only the data on teacher and classroom assistant interactions. Three such teacher/classroom assistant interaction grids were completed. Appendix 5 (*Figure 17* Grid 1) is an exemplar of a teacher observation frequency grid. Appendix 6 (*Figure 18* Grid 2) is a worked example. Appendix 7 (*Figure 19* Grid 3) is an exemplar of a classroom assistant observation frequency grid. Appendix 8 (*Figure 20* Grid 4) is a worked example. The ten observations for each teacher and the five for each classroom assistant were recorded in these grids.

The data recorded on these grids was then subjected to data reduction and placed in matrices. Appendix 9 (*Figure 21* Matrix 1) shows the frequency of activities and interactions for teacher A for the five sessions when she was on her own and for the five sessions when she had a classroom assistant working alongside her. Appendix 10 (*Figure 22* Matrix 2) provides a combined matrix showing the data from all three teachers. Appendix 11 (*Figure 23* Matrix 3) is a similar combination of the data sets for all three classroom assistants. Appendix 12 (*Figure 24* Matrix 4) shows teacher/classroom assistant interaction totals for all three schools. These matrices were used by the researcher to identify themes, patterns and linkages and to illuminate the original research questions. This data set was used by the researcher to create charts to illustrate her findings.

Data and methodological triangulation<sup>33</sup> was achieved through the use of the three data collection tools. This allowed for data to be collected from and about the participants in the study with different status positions and with different viewpoints. The use of multiple data

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<sup>33</sup> See Patton 2002

collection methods and analysis techniques in this case study provided the researcher with opportunities to triangulate data which strengthened the research findings and conclusions.

#### **4.5 Summary**

This chapter presented an overview of the research project and the rationale for the project design. The main data collection tools and information on how these were used in the field were also described. This chapter also included the data analysis strategy the researcher used. Burke and Kirton (2006) supported the small-scale mutely-method design of the study and the researcher's knowledge and understanding and suggested:

*methodologies that support knowledge production from an insider perspective and at the localised level are of great value in developing more nuanced and complex understandings of educational experiences, identities, processes, practices and relations*

(Burke and Kirton 2006:2)

## CHAPTER FIVE                      POSITIONING OF RESEARCHER AND ETHICAL    CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter will explore the status and positioning of the researcher and the ethical issues considered in the design and conduct of the project. In undertaking the study, the researcher considered and identified pertinent issues relating to the positioning of the researcher. Much has been written on the ethical dilemmas that research activity can generate. Among the dilemmas raised are issues such as goodwill, truth, duty, trust, power, justice, confidentiality, anonymity, deception, ownership, positioning of the researcher, responsibility and rights; all of which were considered for this research project<sup>34</sup>.

### **5.1 Researcher's positioning**

The term *insider research* is used to describe projects where the researcher has a direct involvement or connection with the research setting<sup>35</sup>. The researcher understood that carrying out research in a familiar environment has both advantages and disadvantages. For this research project the researcher as a headteacher of a primary school for more than fifteen years had valuable knowledge and experience of the research context, that is, of primary schools, their staffing, of pupils as well as learning and teaching.

The researcher was known to the headteachers of the three schools participating in the project in her capacity as headteacher of a neighbouring primary school within the same Associated Schools Group (ASG). For this project pupils and classroom assistants were not previously known to the researcher. She had worked with the headteachers of the schools involved in the project for a number of years and as such had knowledge about each of the schools. The researcher identified with the headteachers and teachers in the project and had inside knowledge and understanding of how teachers and headteachers worked with classroom assistants. In recent years she has been working with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) as an Associate Assessor and had been trained in the use of classroom observation, evaluation and investigation skills. The implications for conducting research in a community where she was known, to a greater or lesser extent by the participants was considered by the researcher. These were balanced with pragmatic considerations of local knowledge and access to the participants.

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<sup>34</sup> For more on these dilemmas see Pring (2004), McNamee and Bridges. (2002) and Alderson (1995).

<sup>35</sup> See Robson (2002).

Such insider researcher can also be called practitioner research. The researcher acknowledged the challenges such status can bring to a research project and explores these in this section. There are some potential disadvantages to such ‘insider’ practitioner research relevant to the context of this project. The researcher considered and addressed any underlying personal bias, pursuing narrow preconceived ideas, and the influence of power relationships. It would be naïve to suggest that any form of research especially research on aspects pupils’ and adults’ behaviour and interactions in the classroom is without bias. The researcher acknowledged that her insider status meant that she could not be completely objective and that she needed to consider the extent and impact of her subjectivity on the project. Her training with HMIE in classroom observation focused on objective evaluation of classroom processes. The researcher drew heavily on this training and her extensive experience as an Associate Assessor when undertaking classroom observations.

In the conduct of the interviews and focus groups the researcher’s insider status facilitated these sessions inasmuch as she shared a common language with the participants and was quickly able to establish a rapport with the participants. This allowed the participants to as McKinney (2007:276) suggested *to understand and respect, if not empathise with, the sentiments and emotions expressed*. The status of the researcher as a headteacher was significant in the eyes of the participants. They too brought their *baggage* to the interviews. This is discussed in the next section and in the data analysis in the next chapter.

The researcher accepted that bias cannot be eliminated and indeed in some situations may be so subtle that the researcher is not aware of it. The researcher held the view that teachers did not alter their teaching methods as a result of a classroom assistant supporting her class. She also believed that this was an aspect of pedagogy that would benefit from investigation and change. From her experience in schools she also believed that classroom assistants were undertaking tasks beyond their remit. The researcher believed that the reader should be made aware of her position can take this *baggage* into account. Pring (2004) suggested:

*observations are ‘filtered’, as it were, through the understandings, preferences and beliefs of the observer.*

(Pring 2004:35)

The researcher agreed with this and with McNamee and Bridges (2002) comments on researchers who noted that each researcher brings to his or her work a set of *baggage* that informs and influences not only the research topic but also the methodologies used.

It is useful to explore the positioning of the researcher in this small-scale multi-method study. In participant observation studies such as this the positioning of the researcher can be on a continuum from participant to non-participant. Gold (1958) sub-divided these into four variations. The first of this is the *complete participant* which is typified by studies where the researcher becomes a covert member of the group being studied. The subjects are not informed of that they are being studied. A key advantage in research projects where the researcher is a *complete participant* is that they produce more natural and accurate information about the workings of the group that would not be possible or available by other means. However the covert nature of the observation raises many ethical issues. In educational research where children are involved it is unlikely that approval would be gained for this variation of participant research.

The second variation of *participant-as-observer* is typified by the researcher having an overt role, and where her/his presence and intentions are known to the group being observed. This method involves the researcher in spending sustained periods of time with the group and establishing a relationship with them without becoming one of them. Classroom observation studies where the observer makes field notes fit this description. This type of study requires time and has the potential to be intrusive.

The third variation of *observer-as-participant* involves the researcher spending a limited amount of time with the group and where they have been informed that they are they subject of study. This method is typified by the researcher conducting interviews and more formal types of observation such as the use of a systematic coding schedule. The weakness of this methodology lies in the possible lack of in-depth awareness and understanding of relationships and roles and data collected are viewed as a 'snapshot'.

The final variation is that of *complete observer*. In this case the researcher is not involved with the subjects being studied, is detached and at a distance. Often this variation is characterised by not informing the group that they are being studied. The researcher records the behaviour of the members of the group. Once again ethical concerns particularly that of 'informed consent' would be raised if such a variation were employed.

There are aspects of the second variation, *participant-as-observer*, that could describe the researcher's positioning for this project. The researcher spent blocks of time in the three classes and the groups were aware they were being observed. During the classroom observation phase of the project the researcher did not interact with the groups during

observation sessions and did not attempt to create a relationship with them. This then was more akin to the description of *complete observer*.

However, for this research project the researcher's positioning can best be described as the third variation *observer-as-participant*. The researcher undertook direct observation of teachers and classroom assistants in their work place setting using an observation schedule. The data collected during this phase of the project was enhanced and supported by qualitative data from the participants from semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions.

## **5.2 Ethical considerations**

The British Education Research Association (2004:5-13) clearly articulates guidelines for its members on their responsibilities to others. The researcher accepted, respected and adhered to these guidelines in the conduct of this research project.

As stated earlier the researcher's standpoint was that of pragmatism. In its ethical aspect, pragmatism holds that knowledge that contributes to human values is real and that the means employed in order to attain an end are valid. From a deontological standpoint the researcher had a duty to respect the passive and active participants in the research project. The researcher had a duty to endeavour to protect their anonymity and to ensure their contributions were treated in confidence. The researcher identified the problem of guaranteeing anonymity within each school and with the local authority and gained the informed consent of participants that included a guarantee of confidentiality and an endeavour to protect anonymity where possible.

The small-scale multi-method study design of the project and the positioning of the researcher within it meant that the researcher engaged in firsthand interaction with the participants. This ethnographic approach required the researcher to consider a number of pertinent ethical issues. The researcher ensured that the participants were made aware of the purpose and rationale of observation of their behaviour. They were also made aware that they could withdraw from the project at any time.

The project involved direct observation in classrooms and creating audio files of interviews with the participants and as such included both written and audio records. The researcher ensured the anonymity of the participants by creating a simple reference system.



Throughout this dissertation to protect confidentiality each school, the staff and pupil participants are not be referred to by name. Instead they are referred to as School A, School B and School C. The teacher participants are referred to as Teacher A, teacher B and Teacher C. Classroom assistants and classes are referred to in the same format. The project involved the recording of individual interviews with the adult participants and focus group sessions with groups of pupils. As audio recordings of these participants are now defined as personal data under the Data Protection Act (1998) the researcher ensured that the participants were giving informed consent to the making of these audio files for the purposes of this research project.

Ethical considerations in research involving human subjects have reflected changes enshrined in law through Data Protection Act (1998) and an increased public awareness of human rights. Specifically influential pieces of legislation for this research project were the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Children Act (1989). These last two pieces of legislation set out clear guidance to safeguard the rights of children.

Before approaching the three schools involved in the project, approval was sought and granted from Aberdeen City Council to approach them. Local Education Authorities have also had to respond to data protection legislation, the Children's Act (1989) and Human Rights legislation and consequently they have developed a range of policies and procedures regarding access to schools for research purposes. These also include policies and procedures for gaining parental permission for children's involvement in such projects. In addition each school has developed local practices and procedures as a result of these policies. All of these guidelines were taken into account by the researcher.

After a lengthy period of time during which the research proposal was scrutinised by the local authority the researcher gained the informed consent from Aberdeen City Council to approach the three schools identified in the project. In gaining such approval the researcher outlined the project's aims, methods and possible time commitments of participants as well as a clear statement on safeguarding anonymity and confidentiality of the schools, the staff and the pupils involved.

Once this had been achieved the researcher contacted the headteachers of the three schools and arranged face to face meetings. At these meetings the researcher outlined the research project, its purpose, aims and methodology. Confidentiality, anonymity, involvement of

pupils, the consent from pupils and parents, time commitment of participants, the researcher's access to classrooms, staff and pupils were discussed and agreed with the headteachers. At these meetings each headteacher was able to identify possible classes, teachers and classroom assistants who could be approached to take part in the project. At the end of each meeting the researcher had secured the approval of each headteacher to approach teachers and classroom assistants in their schools.

The headteachers made initial contact with these teachers and classroom assistants to gauge their interest and possible inclusion in the project. The researcher had created a plain language statement (Appendix 13) for the headteacher to share with teachers and classroom assistants to give some detail of the project. The headteachers having gained initial consent from teachers and classroom assistants then set up meetings with the researcher and these prospective participants. The researcher met with all of the adult participants individually. At these meetings the researcher shared with the prospective participants the rationale of the project, their time commitment, the conduct of the fieldwork, the data collection schedules and safeguards for confidentiality and anonymity. At the end of these meetings all were given time to reflect and decide whether they wanted to participate in the study. At the end of this period each adult participant that had agreed to participate in the project completed an informed consent form (Appendix 14).

The issue of gaining informed consent from pupils to participate in research is a relatively recent development in school based research studies. In the past school-based research took pupil participation for granted. They had often been viewed as a *captive audience*. However the legislative changes referred to above have impacted not only on adult participants but on pupil participants in research projects. Children's rights to consultation were respected by the researcher. Denscombe and Aubrook (1992) cautioned that informed consent for pupils in the school setting is entwined with the existing power relationships within the school and with the ethos of the school. They suggest that often pupils' participation in school-based research projects is viewed by them as part of their accepted schoolwork. Edwards and Alldred (1999) challenged the concept of pupil consent in studies. They suggested that pressure to be *co-operative and helpful to visitors* and possible consequences of not being so were bound up in the power relationships between pupils and teachers. Therefore if their teacher indicated that s/he approved of the research that the pupils would follow her/his lead.

The age at which a child can give informed consent is not clear. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in article 14 suggests that children have a right to express their views in matters concerning them *commensurate with the maturity and age*. Morrow and Richards (1996) made the distinction between chronological age and competence in terms of ability to make informed decisions and choices. The researcher in the design of the project took this into account inasmuch as the classes selected to participate in the project involved children who were nine and ten years of age. The researcher also discussed the understanding of the children with class teachers prior to the start of the project.

For these reasons the teacher made the initial approach to the pupils in each class likely to take part in the project. The researcher then negotiated with each teacher a time for her to come to talk to the class about the research project and to issue them with a plain language statement (Appendix 15) and consent form (Appendix 16). In all three classes there was 100% return from pupils and parents for the classroom observation phase of the data collection. In each school a very small number of parents indicated that they did not consent to their child taking part in the focus group sessions. For schools A and C this was one pupil and for school B there were two pupils.

For pupils the request for consent to participate in the research was articulated to parents/carers along with details of the safeguards the researcher took to ensure for confidentiality and anonymity. The researcher felt parents of pupil participants would need to be assured that their child's welfare and safety would be protected and that s/he would not be exploited. This was communicated to them through a plain language statement (Appendix 17) and parent/carer consent form (Appendix 18). Here again the response rate was 100%.

As a teacher and headteacher the researcher had extensive experience of working with individuals and groups of pupils. Where the adult is not well known to the pupils, as in this case, group sessions were more likely to help each child feel comfortable and contribute to the discussion. Another factor in deciding to use groups of pupils to interview rather than individual pupils the researcher took cognisance of Morrow and Richards (1996) who suggested that school age children taking part in research preferred being with their friends rather than being on their own. In referring to BERA (2004), the researcher accepted her responsibilities to the participants that are clearly set out in section 18:

*Researchers must recognise that participants may experience distress or discomfort in the research process and must take all necessary steps to reduce the sense of intrusion and to put them at ease*

(BERA, 2004:7)

**Summary**

This chapter explored the insider status and positioning of the researcher and the steps taken by her to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

## CHAPTER SIX PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter detailed descriptions of each class, its teacher and classroom assistant will be presented. Within case analysis will be presented of the findings on each of the three cases. This will include teachers' classroom organisation, methodologies and approaches to deploying classroom assistants; pupils' experiences of classroom assistants and data on the tasks and impact of classroom assistant. The final section of this chapter will present cross case analysis of the findings and locate these in the research literature.

### 6.1 The three case studies

The research project design included case studies of three classes in three primary schools in Aberdeen City. The criteria for selection of each of these three schools and the three classes were presented earlier. Although the three schools forming the case study were feeder schools for the same secondary school and were geographically relatively close to each other, they were located in and drew their pupils from quite different communities.

As can be seen from Table 2 all three schools had similar numbers of pupils but in terms of socio-economic status were different. This table shows data on school size, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)<sup>36</sup> and Free Meal Entitlement (FME). These three sets of statistics with national attainment information are generally used as school comparators. School A had no areas of deprivation and a low FME. National attainment figures for this school were high. Schools B and C were broadly similar in terms of SIMD but School B's FME was almost twice that of School C. There was little difference in terms of national attainment figures between School B and C.

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<sup>36</sup>SIMD is a score based on 37 indicators of deprivation across seven categories or domains: current income, employment, health, education, geographic access to services, housing and crime.

*Table 5 School data*

	<b>Pupil population</b>	<b>Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)</b>	<b>Free Meal Entitlement (FME)</b>
School A	Size 340	0 % of school zone is a most deprived area	0.35%
School B	Size 300	11.4% of school zone is a most deprived area	28%
School C	Size 350	9.9 % of school zone is a most deprived area	16%
Scottish Average	Size 185		18%

Table 5 shows three schools in the project in comparison with the Scottish average.

*Table 6 National attainment data*

2006/07	Reading	Writing	Mathematics
<i>School A</i>	99	97	99
<i>School B</i>	75	74	82
<i>School C</i>	78	69	82
<i>Aberdeen City</i>	77	70	80
<i>Scotland</i>	81	74	82

Table 6 shows the national attainment data for the three schools in comparison with the Aberdeen City and Scottish average.

*(Note: The scores show the percentage of the school population achieving the national standards for reading, writing and mathematics in 2006/07)*

This statistical information shows that the schools had some similarities in terms of school size with all three having a school roll of between 300 and 350 pupils. This statistical information does not show the number of classes in each school or the numbers of additional support needs pupils they accommodate. School A was organised into 10 primary classes and four part time nursery classes. There was no additional provision in this school for children with identified additional support needs. School B was organised into 8 primary classes and four part time nursery classes. In this school there were two specialist classes for children with identified additional support needs. School C was organised into 12 primary classes and two part time nursery classes. There was no additional provision in this school for children with identified additional support needs.

Aberdeen City Council's policy on inclusion is based on the concept that children will normally be educated in their local school. In each Associated Schools Group (ASG) where the primary schools are feeder schools for the same secondary school, there is at least one primary school with specialist provision for children with additional support needs. For the schools in this study School B supported children with additional support needs through specialist provision of an Additional Support Needs (ASN) Base. This provision is used as resource for all the schools in the ASG. The ASN Base was staffed with two full time primary teachers and two full time classroom assistants. This team provided a fully inclusive educational environment for up to 14 identified pupils. These pupils had a range of additional support needs. The majority (11) had moderate learning difficulties and the remainder had autistic spectrum disorders. Pupils' needs were met through team teaching, shared time within the mainstream classroom and further intensive support being given daily in timetables sessions in the ASN Base.

Schools A and C had no ASN Base provision. However all three headteachers indicated that they had pupils across the school who experienced challenges to their learning and who required additional support in order to access the curriculum. Some of these pupils had been allocated additional support in the form of additional classroom assistant hours; others received small group support from a specialist support for learning teacher. In School A one pupil had additional classroom support assistant hours and the support for learning teacher allocation was 0.5 FTE. She supported 18 pupils across the school. For School C the additional classroom assistant hours were allocated to three pupils and the school had 1.4 FTE specialist support for learning teachers. These two teachers supported 56 pupils across the school.

In comparing the schools School B had highest FME and SIMD scores but not the lowest national attainment scores. In discussion with the headteacher she suggested that this could be attributed to the non-inclusion of national attainment information for the 14 pupils in the ASN Base. The other two schools included all pupils in their statistical returns on attainment.

In the late 1990's every primary school in Aberdeen was allocated one full time equivalent classroom assistant as part of the Early Intervention Programme. Schools in deprived areas were given an additional allocation that was related to the size of the school roll. In this research project Schools B and C had benefited from this additional allocation, whereas School A had not. As a consequence schools B and C had at least twice the allocation of School A of classroom assistants. From the semi-structured interviews it was apparent that the three teachers were not fully aware of either a school or local authority policy for the allocation of classroom assistant support. None were involved in consultation prior to the start of a school session as to the deployment of classroom assistants in their schools.

In practice School A had the least favourable allocation of classroom assistant support. However, all teachers in School A were able to access classroom assistant support for photocopying and other non-teaching tasks and could submit a request for additional help to the headteacher. In this school teachers relied on parent volunteers to support them in class.

Quality assurance procedures including monitoring classroom practice were well established in the three primary schools. Teachers and other school staff were accustomed to both formal and informal classroom observations being carried out by promoted staff, quality improvement officers and in some instances by their peers. This resulted in the classroom observation visits made by the researcher being relatively unobtrusive and the data collected were more robust as a consequence.

In the next section vignettes of each of the three case studies will be presented. The information presented was taken from classroom observations, field notes, interviews, focus group sessions and the researcher's local knowledge.



### *Case study A*

School A was located in an area typically described as a 'leafy suburb' where the families of the pupils attending the school were predominantly professional middle class. The school's catchment area comprised of semi-detached and detached homes with the majority of pupils coming from owner occupier dwellings. There were no local authority houses in the area. The school had ten classes and school roll of 340 including 80 pupils in its nursery classes. Children with additional support needs attending this school were placed in mainstream classes. This school had 0.35% FME and in the SIMD this school has no significant pockets of deprivation.

School A had the least favourable allocation of classroom assistant support. Of the three teachers in the study Teacher A had the least time allocation of classroom assistant support. Class A was the smallest class and the only composite class in the project. The headteacher in School A deployed her classroom assistant allocation flexibly. Class A in school A was a composite primary 4/5 class of twenty five pupils. Fourteen pupils were primary four and eleven were primary five. One pupil in this class had identified additional support needs and the school had received an additional allocation of classroom assistant hours to support him. He was in the primary five section of this class. His needs were identified by the school's educational psychologist as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This pupil spent most of his time in class and was withdrawn for short periods of time to work with the school's support for learning teacher or as a time out strategy used by the class teacher and the classroom assistant.

The pupils in this class were seated at primary stage and mixed ability group tables. The teacher described this arrangement as social grouping. The classroom was large enough to accommodate five group-work tables; a gathering area and an area set aside for art and craft activities. In general the atmosphere in this classroom was welcoming and the pupils were polite and well-mannered.

The teacher in this class had twenty seven years experience as a class teacher and the last four years of which had been spent in School A. She had broad experience as a teacher having taught classes at all primary stages in her teaching career. Her experience of working with classroom assistants had most often been on a part-time support basis. She had very limited experience of having full time classroom support.

Teacher A had established a purposeful working atmosphere in her classroom. There was a brisk pace to lessons observed. Pupils were aware of daily routines and timetables. The teacher encouraged and expected the pupils to take responsibility and become independent in their learning. She indicated that this approach to managing the class had been a conscious decision she had made at the outset of the year and was based on previous experience of working with composite classes.

In the semi-structured interviews teachers were asked if they planned or did anything different for the times when they had support from a classroom assistant. One of the themes for discussion with the focus groups of pupils concerned their perceptions of teaching approaches their teachers used when they did and did not have support from a classroom assistant. In analysing this data with reference to teaching methods and teaching approaches the researcher noted the following from the data sets.

Teacher A organised her teaching and her pupils' learning predominantly through ability group teaching sessions. She deployed the classroom assistant to supervise the groups she was not directly working with.

*My methodology would be the same with or without a classroom assistant. In a straight class I would use her for helping with the more and the less able children. In a composite class the classroom assistant is used to manage group work*

(Teacher A)

When she did not have classroom assistant support Teacher A planned tasks and activities for the pupils that did not always require first hand adult support. She provided group activities and computer games that supported their learning and that they could undertake without the direct involvement of an adult. When asked about this teaching strategy she indicated that as part of recent school based staff development work on Curriculum for Excellence she was trying to provide more opportunities for the pupils to be actively involved in their learning. The games and activities she provided were chosen to motivate and engage the group of children when no adult support was available. This level of engagement by the pupils freed the teacher to focus her teaching on the other groups.

Teacher A welcomed the contribution of Classroom Assistant A and said that her presence was a great source of help especially in managing the learning for the composite class. This view was supported by Classroom Assistant A:

*In the P4/5 class the teacher does a lot of group work so if she is teaching one group then I can support the other groups. I can make sure that they are kept going.*

(Classroom Assistant A)

Teacher A did not feel that the presence of a classroom assistant would make her change how she organised this composite class. This response was based on her experience of classroom assistant support in this school. School A had the least favourable allocation of the three case study schools. The practice in School A was to use classroom assistant support staff flexibly and in response to need. Teacher A found that this impacted on her to the extent that she could not depend totally on the classroom assistant arriving in class at the expected time. When discussing changing and adapting teaching methodology to make best use of classroom assistant support Teacher A commented:

*I have done - planned different activities - but have almost given up doing this due to the lack of dependency of classroom assistants turning up. One had not been able to work with child with ADHD. I managed 3 different classroom assistants over a short period. I plan for not having a CA as sometimes she does not turn up – if the Office needs them then they have first call. They often arrive late. For example I should have had classroom assistant support first thing on Monday for a child with ADHD. The classroom assistant didn't arrive until nearly 10. Given the nature of the child's difficulties it would have been better if she had been in at 9 and sat with him. This meant that his week got off to a bad start.*

(Teacher A)

Classroom assistant A in school A had eleven years experience originally as an auxiliary and latterly as a classroom assistant. All of this time had been spent in School A. She had worked in a range of classes and with individual pupils with identified additional support needs. The headteacher had deployed her on a part time basis to support Class A and in particular to help the class teacher manage the learning and behaviour of the pupil with additional support needs. Classroom Assistant A and Teacher A had not previously worked together. Classroom Assistant A also supported children in the playground at morning breaks and lunchtimes. Undertaking these duties meant that time in class with pupils is less as either before or after these times she had her breaks. She also supported other classes in the school.

*I spend my time in a range of classes during the week. I work with at least 3 classes – I work in the Art room with lots of different teachers. I also have to do general photocopying. So I am not based in one class for a day or week*

(Classroom Assistant A)

Classroom Assistant A was able to give the class patchy support and often arrived in class after the teaching sessions had started. This was attributable to her undertaking playground supervision, working in another classroom and/or carrying out administration tasks. She

often missed the teaching input from the class teacher or did not have time at the end of the session for feedback. To cope with this she and Teacher A had developed their own system for communication.

*I have a jotter where I note down any specific tasks etc – photocopying - Specific groups to supervise. They can look at this at any time but also when I am at Assembly that is a good time for them to be checking.*

(Teacher A)

The classroom assistant could refer to the teacher's day plans and often had to refer to the teacher for information. The data from the observation schedules showed that Classroom Assistant A and Teacher A interacted more often during observation schedules than either of the other teachers or classroom assistants in the project. At the end of observation sessions the researcher talked briefly to the teacher or classroom assistant. On this subject in one of these debriefing sessions the classroom assistant said that it was normal for them to discuss matters during class time due to pressure on her time. She also commented that *if I am not sure I just go and ask the teacher.* She felt that letting her know how well or otherwise the children had coped with a task was important to the teacher. In discussing this with Teacher A in the interview she concurred and also said that:

*Feedback from/to classroom assistants and communication with them is very much done on the hoof. Classroom Assistant A is very good at reporting back on how children performed in maths tasks. If you have a CA who has been in the class/worked with you for a while they are more able to backup the teaching points.*

(Teacher A)

Teacher A deployed her to work with and supervise the groups she was not working with. She indicated that she relied on feedback from the classroom assistant to inform her planning. Finding time for this type of exchange was identified as a problem area and they often used some class time to exchange information.

The pupils in Class A were asked about teaching methods and whether their teacher did things differently when their classroom assistant was present. They interpreted this by discussing her workload and how this would be easier when the classroom assistant was present.

They were aware of how the teacher organised her class and brought them to the teaching area for group teaching. They also said that they benefited when the classroom assistant was there inasmuch as if they needed help they could get it readily and did not have to interrupt the teacher when she was teaching a group:

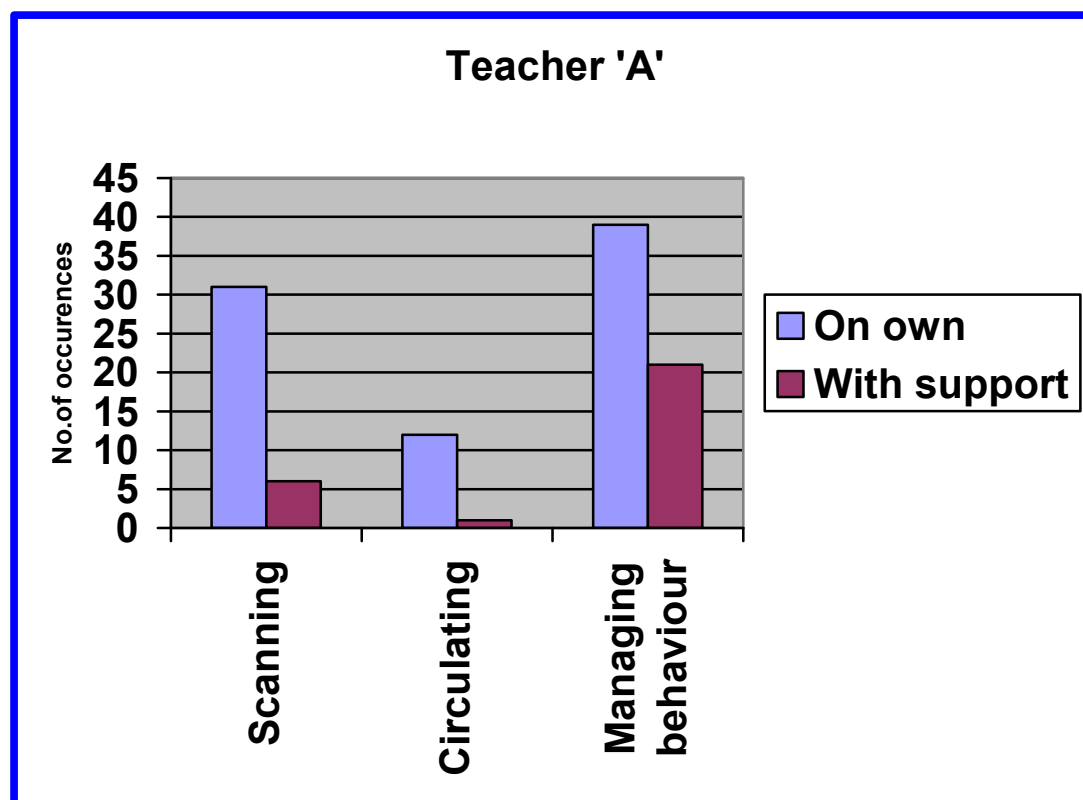
*classroom assistant could give you help when the teacher is marking the work.  
Kids get more attention and the teacher would find it easier.*

(Focus Group A)

The observation schedules allowed the researcher to collect data on types of teacher activity. *Figure 3* Chart 1 illustrates how often Teacher A engaged in scanning, circulating and managing behaviour both when she was on her own and when she had support.

*Figure 3*

Chart 1 Teacher Activity – Teacher A



When she did not have support from a classroom assistant Teacher A was observed engaging more frequently in non-teaching activities such setting out resources. She was observed only once undertaking such tasks when she did have support. Another aspect of teacher activity observed was that of circulating. This involved her in moving around the groups checking that children were on task and making progress with it. Teacher A circulated only when she was on her own. Teacher A had the least amount of support time and her group teaching methodology for the composite class meant that she focused her attention on the group she was directly involved with when the classroom assistant was present. Circulating to support the other groups was delegated to the classroom assistant. She also used the presence of the additional adult as an opportunity for her to observe individual pupils. Teacher A observed pupils more frequently when she did not have classroom assistant support. In debriefing sessions the researcher asked the teacher to talk

about the times when she was observing pupils. She indicated that she used this as an assessment strategy most often linked to checking on a pupil's ability to persevere at a task. Teacher A referred to the classroom assistant as being an *extra pair of eyes*.

When the class teachers had no support the most striking difference in teacher activity was observed when they were scanning. Scanning occurred when the teacher, whilst working with another group or individual, looked up and visually swept the room to check on the rest of the class. Teacher A scanned five times more frequently when she was on her own. The pupils were aware of the impact of not having a classroom assistant on their teacher:

*She doesn't have to be watching the other half of the class when she is teaching one group. She can get a rest.*

(Focus Group A)

In accord with Aberdeen City Council's policy on inclusion there was an expectation that all classes accommodate pupils with social, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties. Class A had one pupil with ADHD. Section four of the observation schedules allowed for the collection of data on how teachers and classroom assistants managed pupil behaviour. In discussions with all participants the issue of behaviour management was explored. Classroom Assistant A had received some training on how to support the pupil with ADHD. She said:

*I know where he feels under stress – like drama so I just take him out of the lesson*

(Classroom Assistant A)

The pupils in Focus Group A had a lot to say about roles and responsibilities of classroom assistants in relation to behaviour management. The pupils had a clear sense of a school hierarchy of responsibility for behaviour management.

*It's not really her job. The classroom assistant is really just there to help they are not really in charge. But they can give us into trouble. The classroom assistant would deal with misbehaviour. But she would tell the teacher. The teacher is in charge. If it was a serious thing then the headteacher would need to be involved.*

(Focus Group A)

Teacher A was observed undertaking twice as many behaviour management interactions with the class when the classroom assistant was not present. She was aware that Classroom Assistant A often took the burden of managing pupils' behaviour when she was teaching a group.

In exploring the range of tasks that a classroom assistant might undertake all School A participants shared a common understanding. They were aware of the range of tasks that classroom assistants were expected to undertake including general administration tasks,

helping the pupils with their learning, helping to manage pupil behaviour and looking after pupils outwith the classroom. Classroom Assistant A clearly identified her role and responsibilities.

*Teacher A uses me for a range of tasks - mainly working with groups – hearing reading, helping with maths, making sure that anybody who might be struggling with their task is managing.*

(Classroom Assistant A)

She was equally clear in identifying aspects of the role she preferred. She preferred working on mathematics tasks as *there was always a right or wrong answer!* She also identified playing mathematics games and in general preferred tasks where she worked directly with pupils.

Pupils viewed the classroom assistant's role as helper and in School A the term 'helper' was used by pupils when referring to classroom assistants in general. On helping the teacher they said:

*They help us, cut paper, copy things. She sets stuff up for the teacher with anything, displays stuff on the wall. Just basically helps the teacher with anything.*

(Focus Group A)

They also identified classroom assistant's role in helping pupils. They saw their support in class as positive and liked the additional attention that they could get. Here again the group's perceptions on the different roles and responsibilities of staff was interesting.

*The teacher has more responsibility, she's higher up, is more important. She has to explain the work. The classroom assistant helps you if you are stuck. The teacher is responsible for planning what you are to learn and the classroom assistant helps you learn it.*

(Focus Group A)

### ***Case study B***

School B was located in a deprived suburban area with a high level of social deprivation concentrated in areas of the school's zone, with many lone parent families. The SIMD score for this school was 11.4% meaning that 11.4% of the school's population lived in one of the most deprived areas in Aberdeen. The school zone included a mix of owner occupier semi-detached and detached houses and a local authority housing scheme with low rise flats. This school had an FME of 28%. School B had eight classes and a school roll 300 and 80 pupils in its nursery classes.

Teacher B organised the layout of the tables differently according to the planned learning tasks. For example on one observation the tables were arranged in three large groups. The planned lesson was a practical art lesson and the teacher had arranged the tables in this way to allow them to share the resources. On most observation occasions the tables were arranged to accommodate six to eight pupils in ability groups. The teacher described this arrangement as means of helping her manage differentiated learning tasks. Teacher B predominantly delivered her teaching as whole class lessons and followed up the teaching input by supporting groups at their tables. This was a lively class and in general the atmosphere in this classroom was welcoming.

Class B in school B was a class of 31 primary five pupils. Three pupils in this class had additional support needs and spent, on average, one third of their time in the ASN Base and the remaining time in this, their mainstream class with support from a classroom assistant. One of these pupils had an autistic spectrum disorder and the other two had moderate learning difficulties. In addition there was a group of six pupils who were supported by a specialist support for learning teacher. She withdrew the group for sessions of language and mathematics support. Teacher B also informed the researcher of three pupils who had regularly exhibited challenging behaviour and who were supported by the classroom assistant.

The data collected from the semi-structured interview with Teacher B and from Focus Group B on teaching methods and teaching approaches was analysed and the researcher noted the following from the data sets.

Teacher B had been teaching for four years and had spent all of this in School B. Her teaching experience had been focused on classes in primary four to primary six range. This teacher had always worked with substantial support from a classroom assistant. Teacher B



had had large classes each year and every class had children with additional support needs. She had a relatively short teaching experience and throughout that experience had always had classroom assistant support.

Teacher B delivered her teaching as whole class lessons both when she was on her own and when she had support. This impacted on the classroom assistant's activities inasmuch as she was often observed watching lessons and using her physical presence to promote active listening by pupils. Once the lesson content had been delivered children were more often engaged in individual work at their table when the classroom assistant was supporting the class. This was explained by the teacher deploying the assistant to target and support individual children step by step through the task set. Class B was a large class with a number of pupils with behaviour support needs and the teacher relied on the interventions of the classroom assistant to manage pupil behaviour and to ensure pupils remained focused on tasks.

*They (the pupils) can keep on track/ stay focussed. She makes sure they have the resources and materials they need. They often chat to her and share concerns with her that they might not otherwise share.*

(Teacher B)

Teacher B was not observed using a range of teaching approaches. In debriefing sessions at the end of observations the researcher asked if Teacher B used other teaching strategies. She said that she used whole class lessons to manage her teaching and the behaviour of this large class. She felt that a more open or *loose* class organisation would lead to children being off task and disruptive. Teacher B had identified that the times when her lessons were less effective occurred when she did not have support.

*I do a lot of whole class lessons because I have a lot of support from classroom assistants. There are some problem areas like P.E. when I don't have support. But that's just how it is.*

(Teacher B)

Teacher B's responses and those of Focus Group B were in agreement when discussing any changes she employed to her methodology when she was supported by a classroom assistant. This concurred with the data collected from classroom observations. Pupils in Focus Group B were aware of their teacher's usual teaching approach and that this did not change when the classroom assistant supported the class.

*No not really, she just does all the same things even when a classroom assistant isn't there*

(Focus group B)

Classroom Assistant B had three years experience as a classroom assistant and had worked in school B for one year. Classroom assistant B and Teacher B had not previously worked together. Over the course of the academic year they had begun to develop a working relationship and systems for communication. Teacher B identified that it had taken time for her to know where Classroom Assistant B's strengths lay. At the start of the school year she had had to spend time explaining and modelling for the classroom assistant but that eventually she was able to trust her to support the pupils rather than doing things for them.

Classroom Assistant B supported this class for 75% of her time. She also undertook playground supervision at lunchtimes and morning breaks. She supported one other class during the week for brief periods of time. In that class she worked on maths tasks with small groups of pupils. She was aware that Teacher B used whole class lessons as a main teaching strategy. She indicated that in Class B she undertook a wider range of *more varied* tasks. In describing how she and Teacher B communicated she said:

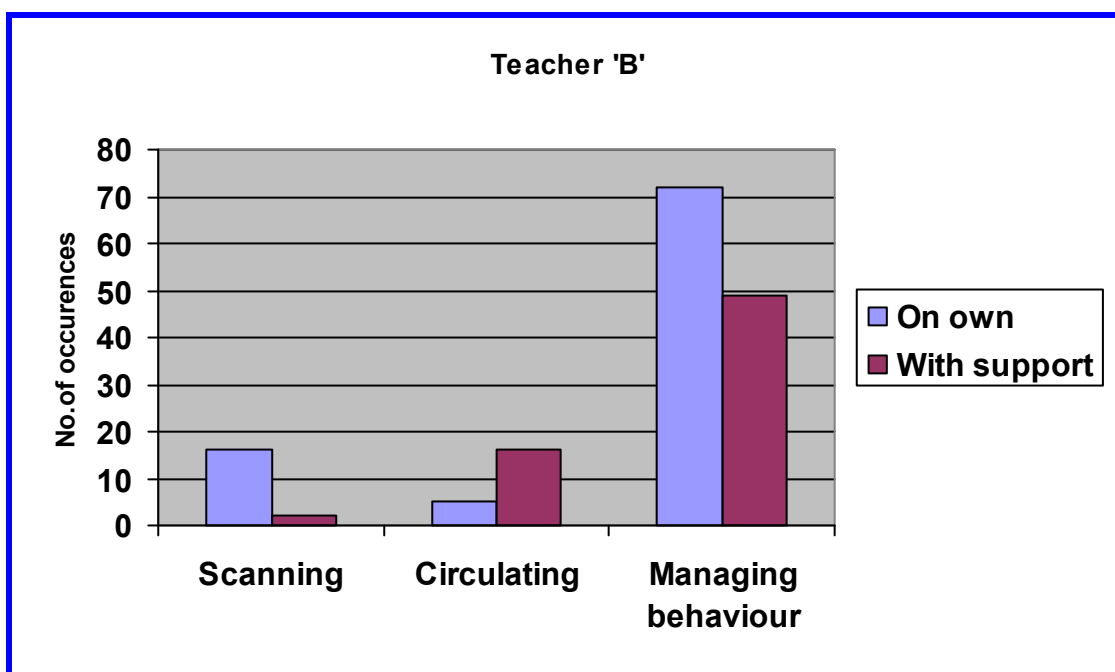
*I have been with Teacher B all year and I know her routines and what she needs me to do. I check her daily task board especially if I come into class after breaks when she has already started lessons. She often leaves me a wee note of photocopying or display work she needs me to do. Also when its art or something with a lot of resources needed she catches me and we have a quick chat.*

(Classroom Assistant B)

The data collected using the observation schedules allowed the researcher to compare the activities the teachers engaged in when they had support and when they were on their own. The schedules allowed for data to be collected on activities such as setting out materials, circulating, scanning, and managing behaviour. *Figure 4 Chart 2* presents this data.

Figure 4

Chart 2 Teacher Activity – Teacher B



When she had support from a classroom assistant Teacher B was observed only once in engaging in non-teaching activities such setting out resources. The high level of support allocated to Teacher B meant that she could depend on Classroom Assistant B to undertake these tasks. The pupils commented on this.

*She also makes sure we have all the equipment we need for art and we don't waste time getting stuff out.*

(Focus Group B)

When she had support Teacher B circulated twice as frequently as when she was on her own. Teachers B circulated to support individual pupils when engaged in tasks at their desks. When discussing this during a debriefing session Teacher B said that having the classroom assistant there *freed her up* to check on how the pupils were managing the work. In scanning the room Teacher B was observed to do this eight times more often when she was on her own than when she had support. She referred to this as *teacher radar*.

Helping to manage pupil behaviour was seen by all participants as a key role for classroom assistants. This was particularly relevant for this class where, as indicated above, there was a relatively high number of pupils who required support. Time spent managing pupil behaviour was time taken from teaching and often involved interruptions to teaching interactions. The researcher from her field notes observed that with this class the majority of lessons she watched were subject to frequent interruptions. These were more frequent during lessons where the teacher had no support. A strategy used by Classroom Assistant B

to help manage pupil behaviour and minimise disruption was that of using her ‘physical presence’. She moved to where she could tell pupils were becoming restless or showing early signs of off-task behaviour. By moving closer to these pupils the classroom assistant had a positive influence on their behaviour. Her physical presence was sufficient for them to refocus on the task they had been set or to listen to the teacher. Classroom Assistant B identified her role in behaviour management.

*I also know what has been happening at lunchtimes and playtimes – who has been getting on or not – what games they have been playing. Some of the children with behaviour problems I can help keep them on track.*

(Classroom Assistant B)

The pupils commented on the role of the classroom assistant in managing behaviour.

*The teacher sometimes does more stopping and starting when she is on her own. So maybe there is some time wasting. We need to wait for help for longer and sometimes when she is busy with a group and you are waiting you chat and muck about a bit. The classroom assistant makes sure you are listening when the teacher is talking*

(Focus Group B)

In exploring the range of tasks and responsibilities of classroom assistants the pupils, teacher and classroom assistant shared a similar understanding that was in accord with the job description for a classroom assistant. This was summed up by Teacher B.

*Well she is there to help the children with their learning. She supports them when they are stuck. She is also a help to the class teacher. She’s an extra pair of hands and eyes. She does photocopying and displays the children’s work. She also works with the children outside at lunchtimes and playtimes and looks after their physical needs.*

(Teacher B)

### *Case Study C*

School C drew from traditional working class area with a number of pockets of stark deprivation. The housing in the school's zone was local authority housing scheme with mainly terraced two storey houses and some low and high rise flats. Its FME stood at 16%. The SIMD score for this school was 9.9% indicating that 9.9% of the school's population lived in one of the most deprived areas in Aberdeen. School C had twelve classes and a roll 350 of which 40 children were in its nursery classes.

Class C in school C was a class of thirty two primary five pupils. One pupil in this class had additional support needs and spent most of his time in the class. He had been diagnosed as having an autistic spectrum disorder. The school had been allocated additional support for him in the form of classroom assistant hours. In addition there was a group of seven pupils who were supported by a specialist support for learning teacher. She withdrew the group for sessions of language and mathematics support. Teacher C also informed the researcher of two pupils who had regularly exhibited challenging behaviour and who were supported by the classroom assistant. This was a hard-working class with a calm purposeful classroom atmosphere. The pupils were friendly and helpful.

The teacher had set up the room with three large group tables and in most of the lessons observed the children sat in ability groups. The room was quite small and the teacher had opted for this arrangement to allow her and the classroom assistant teacher easy access when supporting children at their tasks. Teacher C used the areas outside her classroom to good effect especially when the class was supported by Classroom Assistant C or when the specialist support for learning teacher worked with groups of pupils. Occasionally the pupil with additional support needs used this space as a time out area. In all this had the effect of maintaining a focused purposeful atmosphere in the classroom.

Teacher C had been teaching for ten years and all ten years had been spent in school C. She had taught classes from primary four to primary seven. During that time she had had part-time classroom assistant support for some of those classes. The amount of support varied according to the needs of the class and more often to the needs of individual pupils with identified additional support needs. For the class taking part in this project and for this school session the teacher in School C had part-time support from a classroom assistant. The times of this support were negotiated and agreed with the headteacher and were flexible and responsive to need.

Classroom assistant C in school C had six years experience as a classroom assistant. All of this time had been spent in school C. Teacher C had been working with Classroom Assistant C for two years and they had developed a partnership approach to working together. Teacher C and Classroom Assistant C had developed a strong professional relationship that did not conform to the more commonly found hierarchical relationship between these two groups of staff.

Throughout the observation sessions Teacher C engaged more frequently in whole class lessons than group teaching. However both she and the focus group commented that her main teaching approach was group lessons.

*I start a lesson at a general level then pull out groups for differentiated work*  
(Teacher C)

*She works with groups when there are two adults*  
(Focus Group C)

This difference in the perceptions of the participants and the data from the observations could be explained by the participants having a different understanding of the terms whole class lesson and group teaching from that of the researcher. In discussing this with the class teacher she stated that when she was working with groups that was *group teaching*. Teachers often arrange the seating in their classrooms in social or ability groups and confuse this seating arrangement with group teaching as a methodology. Group teaching occurs when pupils interact effectively as a group often on a group task. Defining and describing group teaching was discussed by Galton *et al.* (1980) and Kutnick *et al.* (2002). Kutnick *et al.* (2002) found:

*For the largest part of their classroom experience, pupils are seated in small groups (of 4 to 6 children around a table). However, these seating groups are rarely assigned learning (or communication) tasks that require group working*

(Kutnick *et al.* 2002:8)

The researcher shared this information and the data collected using the observation schedule with Teacher C. She agreed that during observation sessions that the data was an accurate reflection of her classroom organisation. However she indicated that for other curricular areas such as science and information technology she did use a group teaching approach. The researcher did not have the opportunity to observe lessons in these curricular areas.

Although she was not observed altering how she taught when she was supported by a classroom assistant Teacher C made specific judgements about lesson content for these times.

*I have 2 afternoons and 2 mornings of support. I organise my timetable around the times when I have support.*

(Teacher C)

In practice this meant that she taught mathematics lessons when she knew she would have support. This curricular area was selected as Teacher C perceived that Classroom Assistant C was skilled in helping her to deliver this aspect of the curriculum.

Teacher C and Classroom Assistant C had been working together longer than the other participants in this project and had developed a partnership approach to their work. Each was able to contribute to the running of the classroom as well as to the management of pupils and their learning. This teamwork approach to working together influenced their interactions. They had developed effective communication systems.

*Teacher C catches me at the end of the day so that I know what is on for the next day. But I have worked with Teacher C for 2 years now and we have a really good working relationship – we just know what the other needs – it's almost a bit psychic!*

(Classroom Assistant C)

Classroom assistants were employed to reduce teacher workload by undertaking a range of non-teaching tasks. Throughout the fieldwork sessions Teacher C was not observed undertaking this type of task when she had classroom assistant support. However when she was on her own she was observed doing so more frequently than the other two teachers involved in the project. It was also noted that when she was on her own that Teacher C circulated three times more frequently than when she had support. Teacher C scanned four times as often than when she had support. She said her classroom assistant was not only an 'extra pair of hands' but an extra pair of eyes as well.

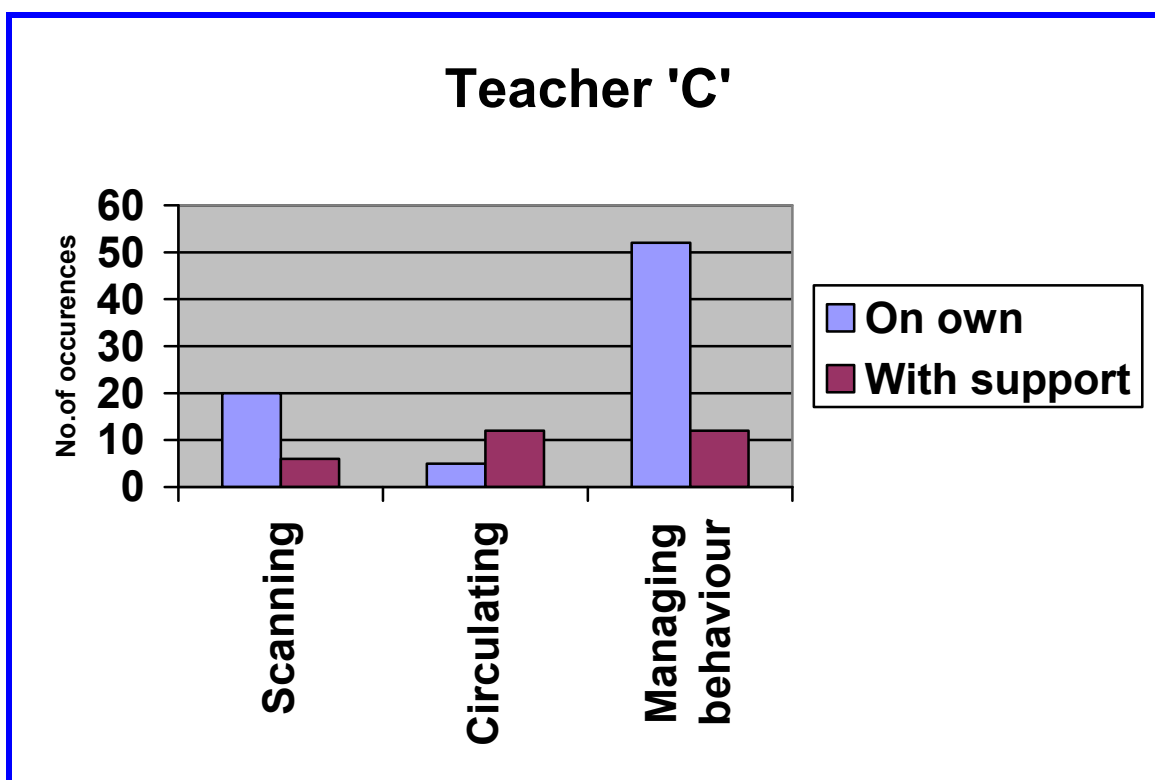
*Even when I am with a group my eyes and ears are on the rest of the class.*

(Teacher C)

Figure 5 Chart 3 illustrates the findings from classroom observations of teacher activity.

Figure 5

Chart 3 Teacher Activity – Teacher C



The presence and support from Classroom Assistant C allowed Teacher C to focus her attention on the individuals and groups she was working with. She said that she was less in demand and consequently more relaxed and felt less pressured when she had such support. In debriefing sessions Teacher C discussed the physical demands of the job of teaching. She felt that when she was on her own that she was in constant demand. As with the other two teachers in this project Teacher C saw a key role for Classroom Assistant C in helping her to manage pupil behaviour. From classroom observation data when she was on her own Teacher C engaged in managing behaviour interactions five times more frequently. In the interview she commented on the benefit to the teacher of having classroom support.

*In a big class having support helps with stamina levels*

(Teacher C)

Classroom Assistant C also saw that she had a role to play in behaviour management and in sharing the burden of the work for the class.

*I think being in the classroom it takes some pressure off the teacher. Classroom assistant can help the children rather than let them become distracted and behaviour might deteriorate. Also we see the children outside at playtimes and lunchtimes. We can forewarn the teacher of any flashpoints that might have happened. We can also pick up on wee behavioural issues when the teacher is focused on her teaching. We don't see everything –though we tell the children we can!*

(Classroom Assistant C)



As with the participants in the other two schools there was general consensus of opinion on the role and responsibilities of a classroom assistant. The pupils gave a succinct description.

*Classroom assistants work outside the classroom in the playground and in the lunch room. They spot trouble makers. She comes on trips. She prepares walls for the new session and puts up notices. She is good at helping you if you are stuck. Classroom Assistant C gives warnings – and uses the same rules and rewards as the class teacher. The teacher does a different job than the classroom assistant but teacher can do all the jobs the classroom assistant can do.*

(Focus Group C)

## **6.2 Analysis of findings**

This section presents the findings of the data gathered from the data collection tools used in the project. The researcher used the quantitative data to corroborate, challenge, support and/or illuminate the qualitative data and vice versa. In addition all the data collected was examined to explore, to describe and find patterns and linkages between the policy of providing classroom assistants to primary schools and lived experiences of the participants in the project. These findings will be located in the research literature.

### **Analysis of all data sets with reference to the first research question**

*Do the teachers taking part in the project alter how and what they teach when they are supported by a classroom assistant?*

One of the aims of this project was to investigate the impact of additional adults on pedagogy. Research question one focused on the teachers taking part in the project and investigated their teaching approaches and classroom methodologies. The project investigated whether teachers altered their teaching methodologies and class organisation when they were supported by a classroom assistant. The data from the classroom observations was analysed in conjunction with information gathered from semi-structured interviews with the teachers, classroom assistants and from the focus group sessions with pupils.

Section two of the teacher observation schedule allowed the researcher to collect data on how teachers organised their classes for learning. In analysing the data with reference to teaching methods and teaching approaches the researcher looked for similarities and differences. The results for each teacher were presented earlier in this chapter. Cross-case analysis on the three teachers' methodologies will be presented in this section.

Each of the three teachers involved in the project had different lengths of teaching experience. This ranged from four years for Teacher B to 27 years for Teacher A. All had different lengths of experience of working with classroom assistants. Teacher C had extensive experience of part time support from classroom assistants. Teacher B had always had such support and Teacher A had the least experience of working with a classroom assistant and in addition any support she had had been irregular.

None had received any formal training in managing a classroom assistant. The classroom assistant initiative was not accompanied by staff development for teachers. This lack of staff development and training has meant that the management and deployment of

classroom assistants has been left to individual headteachers and class teachers to determine using the classroom assistant job description as guidance. The concern about the need for training for teachers in working with other adults in their classrooms is not new and was identified by Kennedy and Duthie (1975), Schlapp and Davidson (2001) and EOC (2007) among others.

Each teacher indicated in the semi-structured interview that the presence of the classroom assistant did not influence her choice of teaching method. They commented that influential factors on deploying classroom assistants and selecting teaching approaches were curriculum subject area, expertise of the classroom assistant, meeting the needs of individual pupils or groups and the make up of the class. Typically the two teachers with single stage large classes used a whole class teaching approach. This teaching method was promoted by DfES (1998) *Framework for Teaching* and in Scotland was promoted by Learning Teaching Scotland (LTS) (2000) in their publication *Direct Interactive Teaching*. The evidence from this project supports the findings of Wilson *et al.* (2005). They found that teachers' perceptions were that additional support staff were there to give them regular support in the classroom and not necessarily to change what or how they teach.

One of the themes for discussion with the focus groups of pupils concerned their perceptions of teaching approaches their teachers used when they did and did not have support from a classroom assistant. It was interesting to note that these young people were aware of how their teachers organised their teaching sessions and were able to empathise with their teachers. They were able to identify the impact of the presence of the classroom assistant on their teachers.

*She (the teacher) works with groups when there are two adults. The classroom assistant takes a lot of weight off the teacher's shoulders*

(Focus Group C)

*Figures 6, 7 and 8* illustrate the breakdown of class organisation for each teacher and show this for periods when they had support and when they had not. The charts show whole class teaching, group teaching and the 'other' category captures individual seat working, one to one teaching and pair working.

Figure 6

Chart 4 Teaching Methodology – Teacher A

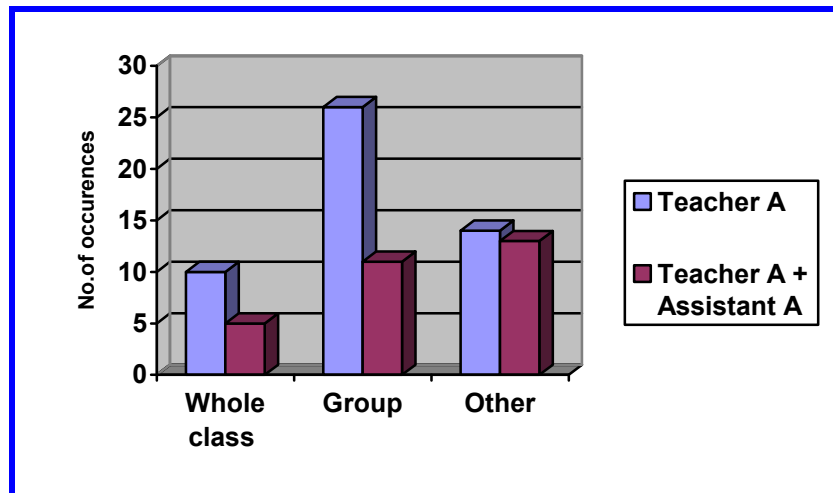


Figure 7

Chart 5 Teaching Methodology – Teacher B

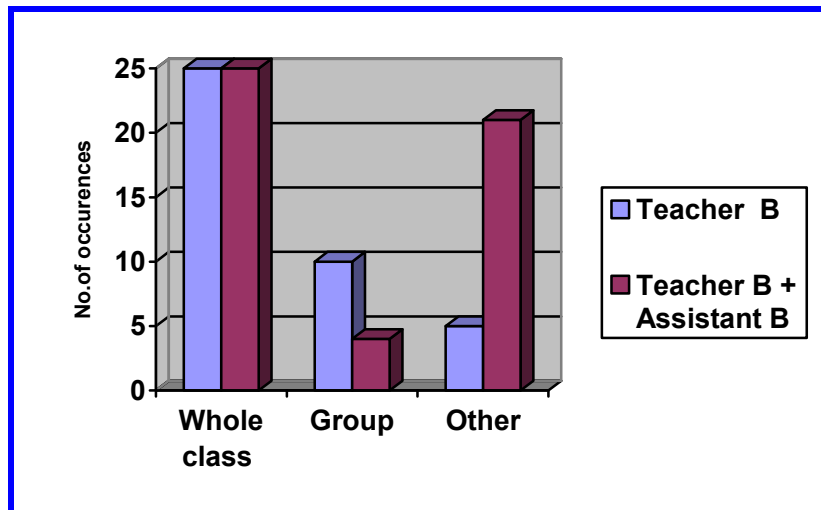
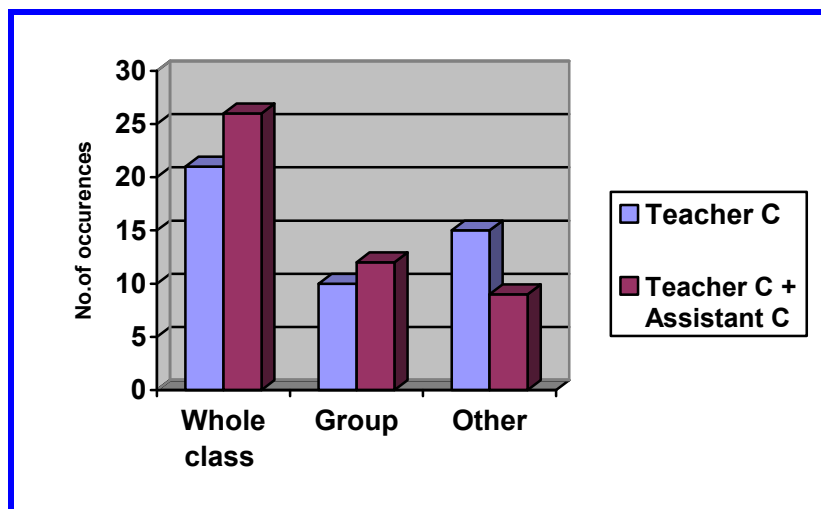


Figure 8

Chart 6 Teaching Methodology – Teacher C



Teacher A used a group teaching approach to manage the teaching and learning activities for this class. This decision was driven by the make up of the class which was a composite (2 year group) class. Wilson *et al.* (2003:6) found that *teachers of mixed year classes were most likely to want more CA time*. In addition to managing a composite class Teacher A had the least amount of classroom assistant support time compared to the other two teachers in the study. This combination influenced her decision to use play/active learning opportunities with her class. As previously discussed this organisation for learning allowed the teacher to focus her teaching on the groups she engaged in direct teaching.

Teacher B delivered her teaching as whole class lessons both when she was on her own and when she had support. Teacher B was the most recently qualified of the three teachers and had been accustomed to having a high level of classroom assistant support in all her classes. Her teaching experience up to this point had been classes of 30 or more and each of these had children with ASN. In addition during these early years of her career guidance from LTS promoted whole class lessons. Her classroom practice reflected what Galton *et al.* (1996) had found:

*an increase in the traditional secondary style of teaching ...teachers talk and pupils sit and listen*

(Galton *et al.*, 1996:34)

In the semi-structured interviews all three teachers indicated that their choice of methods of organising for teaching and learning were not altered or influenced by the presence of a classroom assistant. However two of the teachers did take the presence of a classroom assistant into account when making timetabling decisions about which curricular areas to teach. Teacher C used the skills of the classroom assistant in supporting mathematics. Teacher B planned tasks and activities for the pupils that did not always require first hand adult support. EOC (2007) recognised the personal characteristics and skills of classroom assistants and how these are used by schools:

*The biggest difference was in relation to additional skills. Using music and language as proxies, classroom assistants who had these additional skills were more likely to be engaged in higher level learning activities than those without such skills*

(EOC 2007: 10)

From the data collected in this project it would appear that there was no consistent relationship between the presence of a classroom assistant and the three teachers altering and/or using different teaching approaches and methods. Calder (2002) suggested that the introduction of additional adults in a classroom should affect pedagogy. She identified

joint planning as an essential way forward in developing any effective change in classroom methodology. The three teachers and classroom assistants raised the issue of the lack of time for joint planning and consultation as a concern. These differences between the three teachers in terms of teaching methodology and class organisation reflect the different school and class contexts as well as the differences between the participants. The evidence from this project would suggest any use of a wider range of approaches by teachers was dependent upon a number of variables including the experience of the teacher, the composition of the class, and both the reliability and amount of classroom assistant support allocated to them.

The presence and contribution of classroom assistants influenced other aspects of teacher activity including managing pupil behaviour. The classroom observation schedules allowed the researcher to collect detailed data about the tasks and activities teachers undertook both when they were in class by themselves and when they had support. The impact of classroom assistants' presence on pupils' behaviour and teachers' management of this as well as data on teachers undertaking non-teaching tasks was presented earlier in this chapter. Time spent managing pupil behaviour was time taken from teaching and often involved interruptions to teaching interactions. The teachers in the project all engaged more frequently in managing behaviour when they had no classroom support. When they did have support, teachers reported that they were able to share in the behaviour management of pupils and so focus on teaching. Pupils in the focus groups commented that when their classes were being supported by a classroom assistant that they were less likely to *mess about*, could get help when they needed it and were likely to learn more.

The data collected indicated that the presence or otherwise of classroom assistants impacted on other aspects of teacher activity. The data collected from sections four of the observation schedules were analysed and interpreted together. These sections allowed the researcher to collect data on two aspects of teacher interaction; initiating interaction with and responding to pupils. McPake *et al.* (1999), Delamont (1976) and Jackson (1968) commented that collecting data on teachers' classroom interactions can pose challenges for the researcher due to the dynamic and complex social context of the classroom. Section four of the schedule took these challenges into account and focused on collecting data on a limited range of teacher behaviours. This section allowed the researcher to collect data on teacher interactions with pupils where the teacher either responded to pupils or initiated interaction with them in the course of teaching. This data set does not include the interactions that fell into the category of 'managing behaviour'.

Chart 7 (Figure 9) shows that all three teachers interacted more with the pupils when they were on their own. The data for Teacher C showed she had more interactions than either of the other two teachers. From her field notes the researcher had discussed her observations about the number of these interactions with Teacher C. She had indicated that she was aware that she was much more active during sessions when she had no support. She felt her teaching style was *very hands on*.

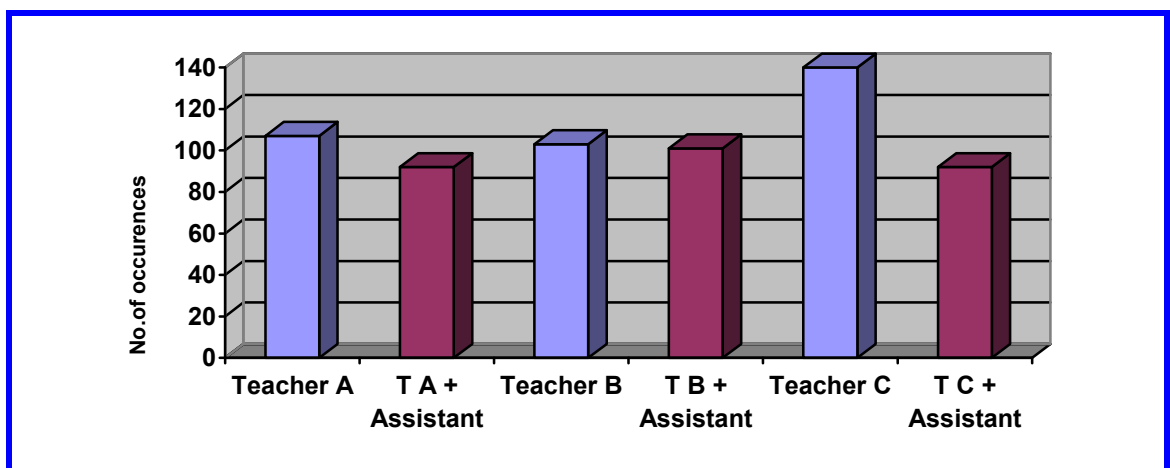
Pupils in this class also commented on the impact of the presence of the classroom assistant on their teacher.

*She has to do everything if there is no classroom assistant.*

(Focus Group C)

Figure 9

Chart 7 Teacher interaction with pupils



The data collected allowed the researcher to drill down and investigate further these interactions. As stated the data was collected on teacher interactions with pupils where the teacher either responded to pupils or initiated the interaction. The researcher had anticipated that teachers when in class on their own would have been observed responding more often to pupils as they did not have another adult to give them the attention they might need. The researcher had anticipated that when the teacher did not have support that she would be more likely be reactive than proactive in her interactions with pupils. The data for each teacher are presented below in charts 8, 9 and 10.

Figure 10 Chart 8 Breakdown of teacher interaction by type for Teacher A

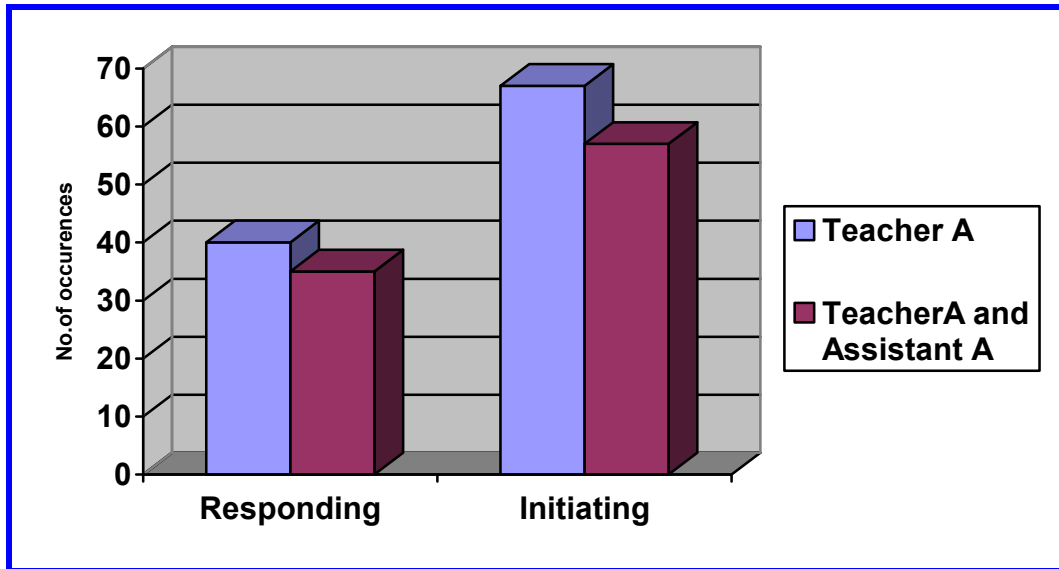


Figure 11 Chart 9 Breakdown of teacher interaction by type for Teacher B

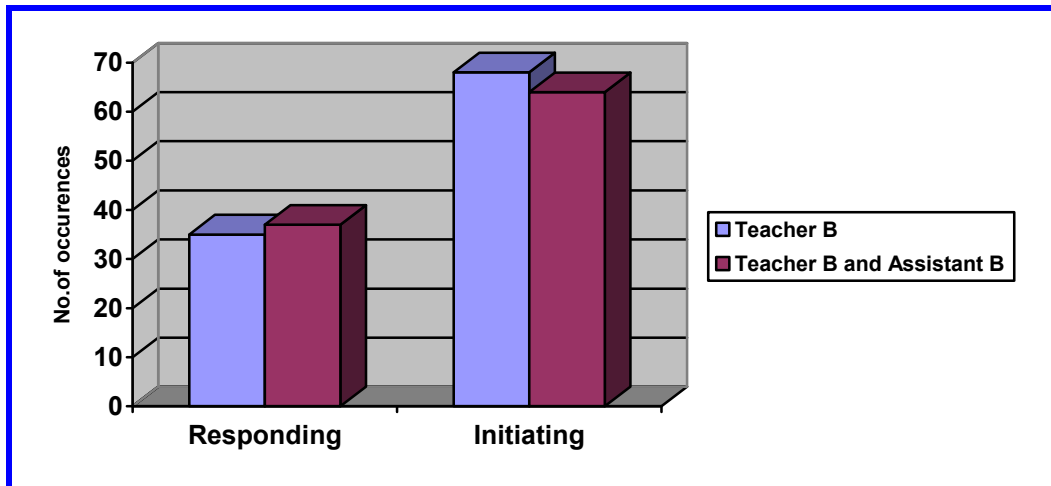
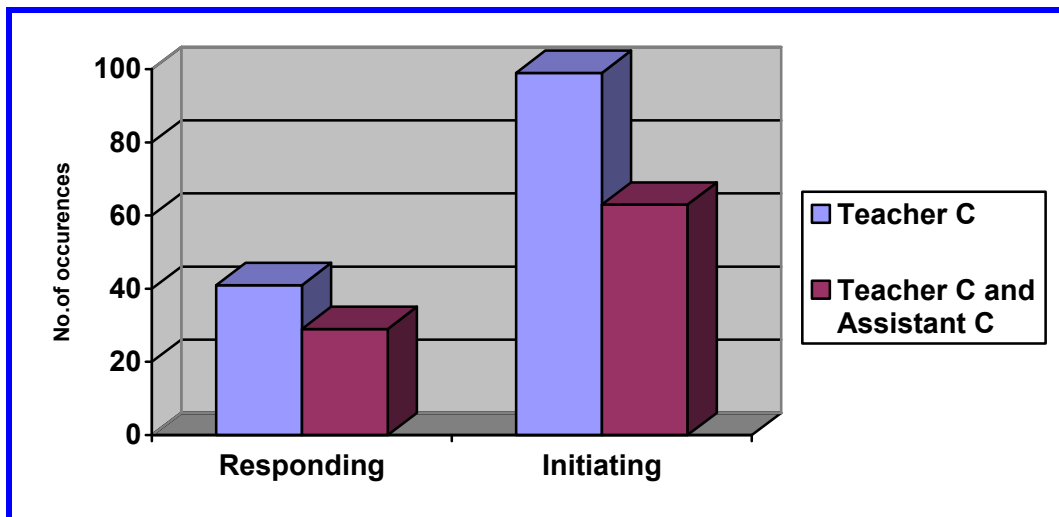


Figure 12 Chart 10 Breakdown of teacher interaction by type for Teacher C





The data gathered in this project showed that teachers were more frequently observed initiating interaction with pupils than responding to them. When they had support from a classroom assistant teachers also initiated interaction more often than they responded. The researcher found that there were differences between the three teachers in terms of the number of interactions as well as the balance between initiating and responding that each was observed undertaking. As shown above Teacher C interacted more frequently with her pupils than the other two teachers. When she had no classroom assistant support the number of initiated interactions was almost twice those of Teacher B and a third more than Teacher A. For Teachers A and B there was little difference in the number of initiating or responding interactions when they had classroom assistant support. Both Teachers A and C initiated and responded less frequently when they had classroom assistant support. Teacher B in contrast initiated fewer interactions with pupils and responded slightly more frequently when she had classroom assistant support. The small-scale nature of this project means that generalisations from these data cannot be made. The author suggests that the different class contexts including teaching styles, perceived strengths of classroom assistants and working relationships were influences in these differences between the three teachers.

### **Analysis of all data sets with reference to the research question two**

*What are the pupils' perceptions and experience of having a classroom assistant?*

Research question two focused on gathering data from pupils on their experiences and perceptions of having classroom assistants in their schools and classrooms and provided an opportunity for 'pupil voice' to be heard. Mitra and Frick (2004), Pulley and Jagger (2006) and Ruddock (2004) suggested that pupils can add a unique dimension to research studies in school education. For this project 'pupil voice' was heard from the three focus groups of pupils, one from each of the three schools participating in the project. Each focus group was made up of pupils in primary five and each group had a rough balance of girls and boys. Focus Group A had eight pupils, four boys and four girls. Focus group B had seven pupils, three girls and four boys. Focus group C had eight pupils, four girls and four boys.

The themes for focus group discussions included pupils' previous experiences of large and small classes, experiences of classroom assistant support, perceptions of roles of classroom assistants and teachers, and perceptions of teaching methods and styles. The data collected from the focus groups was analysed in conjunction with the other data collected from the project. This cross case analysis helped the researcher, as suggested by Ruddock and Flutter (2000), to capitalise on pupils' insights on teaching and learning.

Each of the three schools had different allocations of classroom assistant support this was reflected in the range of experiences the pupils had had. Schools B and C had almost twice the allocation of School A. Pupils in School A with least allocation of classroom assistant support, had experience of classes when they had not had classroom assistant support. The other two groups knew that classroom assistants generally supported their classes on a part time basis.

All three groups were aware of the range of tasks that classroom assistants were expected to undertake. When asked to describe the job of a classroom assistant the three focus groups gave similar responses. All three groups saw the classroom assistant's tasks fall into four main areas. These were helping the teacher with general administration tasks, helping the pupils with their learning, helping to manage pupil behaviour and looking after pupils outwith the classroom.

On helping the teacher they said:

*They help us, cut paper, copy things. She sets stuff up for the teacher, displays stuff on the wall. Just basically helps the teacher with anything.*

(Focus Group A)

*Do all the filing for the teacher. She prepares walls for the new session. Puts up notices. The classroom assistant takes a lot of weight off the teacher's shoulders.*

(Focus Group C)

The pupils knew the difference between a classroom assistant's role and tasks and those of a teacher. Group A saw that the teacher had more responsibility and as a consequence was seen as more important. Focus Groups B and C knew that the roles were different and said

*The teacher is different from the classroom assistant. She does the teaching and the marking. The classroom assistant has to check with the teacher how to help us.*

(Focus Group B)

When discussing what classroom assistants do when working with pupils all three groups gave similar responses including helping with practical activities and supporting them with mathematics and writing tasks. All groups saw the availability of a classroom assistant as a source of help when they were struggling with a piece of work. All made reference to getting help when they were stuck and were aware that when there was no classroom

assistant available that they had to wait longer for help from the teacher. The pupils welcomed the support from classroom assistants on the whole.

*It's good to have a classroom assistant. We have a big class and we can get quicker help when we have a classroom assistant. You don't have to feel like you are stuck because you can get help. She also makes sure we have all the equipment we need for art and we don't waste time getting stuff out.*

(Focus Group B)

The theme of adult attention was explored with the focus groups. When classroom assistants were supporting their classes the pupils commented on getting more adult attention and getting this more readily. It has been suggested that the presence of classroom assistants by impacting on the adult/pupil ratio would allow pupils to have more attention (see Kennedy and Duthie 1975 and Blatchford *et al.* 2002a). Pupils in the focus groups commented on how much attention they can get.

*It was harder (to get help) with the teacher on her own because she was always busy*

(Focus Group B)

*It's like having a second teacher. You would get more attention.*

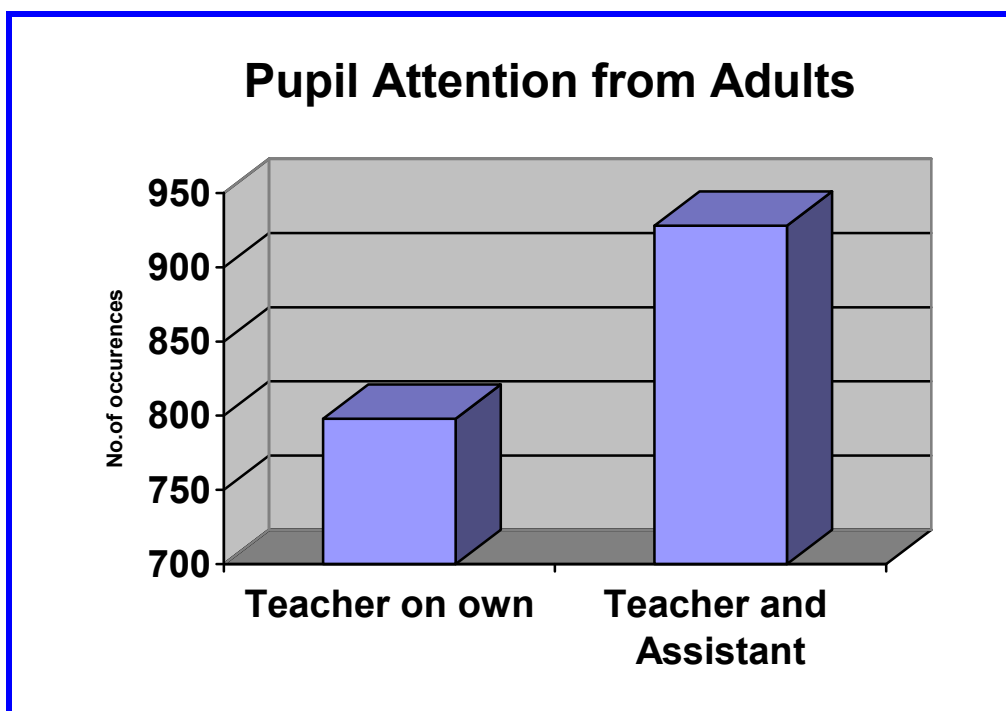
(Focus Group A)

The pupils identified their care and welfare role, support for the class teacher in terms of displaying work and organising resources, and helping manage pupil behaviour. Their perceptions and understanding of the classroom assistant duties were supported by the other data collected in the project. The pupils' responses in terms of roles and responsibilities matched those stated in Implementation Guidance from SOEID (1998a), Wilson *et al.* (2002) and EOC (2007).

All felt that in a smaller class they would get more attention from the teacher and also would have more chances to make friends. They also felt a smaller class would be better for their teachers.

Ehrenberg *et al.* (2001), Molnar *et al.* (1999) and Blatchford *et al.* (2002a) found that pupils benefited from more individualised attention when a classroom assistant supported classes. The data collected from classroom observations of teachers and classroom assistants would indicate support for this view. The chart below shows the number of interactions between pupils and adults and includes those described as managing behaviour.

Figure 13 Chart 11 Pupil Attention from Adults



In chapter two the place of classroom assistants was discussed in the class size context. Through the pupil focus groups the researcher aimed to listen to ‘pupil voice’ on this thread in the debate. The final topic discussed in the focus groups was class size and pupil/adult ratios. There was a range of experience of different sized classes across the three focus groups. In Focus Group A none of the pupils had been in a class with thirty or more pupils and only one had been in a class with less than twenty. Focus Group A had only ever experienced part time support from classroom assistants. Pupils in Focus Group B had mostly been in classes of thirty or more with classroom assistant support. One pupil in this group had been in a class of twenty two with a full time classroom assistant in another school. In Focus Group C there was a broad range of experience of class size and classroom assistant support but not all of this had been in School C. One pupil had been in a class of just thirteen and another had been in a class of seventeen in other schools. The others generally had been in classes of twenty four or more with part time classroom assistant support.

In exploring the theme of class size and adult/pupil ratios the pupils made some very interesting comments.

*I think small class would be better because you might learn more because there is less people and you could get more attention and more help. You would have more space. There would be less noise.*

*You could have noisy people in a small class and quiet people in a big class. I think a big class – so you can ask a partner if you are stuck. Also, if you are doing something wrong you won't get spotted.*

(Focus Group A)

*I think a smaller class would be better for the teacher because it would be quieter and she would have fewer children to control*

(Focus Group B)

Focus Group C felt that a smaller class would mean they would make more progress with their learning.

*In a small class you get a lot more work done, make more progress. More children means fewer jobs done – because you have to wait longer when you are stuck in a bigger class. You'd get more chances to learn more things and have more fun at more things.*

(Focus Group C)

Each focus group session ended with a discussion about whether they would prefer a small class without a classroom assistant or a large class with one. Here again there was a range of opinion

*Small class – sounds better. The teacher would be happier. She would be able to go round everyone. It's to do with how much the teacher can handle. P7 would be better with a smaller class and no classroom assistant. They are older and less likely to need a classroom assistant. P1s need help. They can't write, or tie their shoelaces and getting changed for gym. Classroom assistants would do a different job in P1 than in P7.*

*I think a big class with a classroom assistant– it would be like half and half attention. Ratio of 1:15 but in a small class it would be 1:20. In a big class some would be at a higher level and some would be lower and the classroom assistant could help with them. In a big class you get to socialise with more people.*

(Focus Group A)

In their responses to these questions the pupils displayed an understanding of the role and tasks of classroom assistants, their impact on pupils and teachers. The pupils were eager to discuss these issues.

There was a common perception from all three focus groups on the benefits for pupils in having the support from a classroom assistant. However one pupil gave one of the few negative comments about classroom assistants

*Sometimes that's a good thing and sometimes it's bad. Sometimes it's just an interruption –she asks you how you are getting on and you're just thinking.*

(Focus Group A)

In exploring the theme of class size and adult/pupil ratios the pupils made some very interesting comments. They enjoyed the help and support from a classroom assistant but felt that for older primary school pupils they would prefer to be taught in smaller classes. The pupils identified getting more attention from the teacher as a benefit of having a smaller class. Their view was supported by Blatchford *et al.* (2007:149) who found that *there was consistent evidence that in small classes children were more likely to interact with their teachers*. However the pupils did suggest that younger pupils would be more likely benefit from classroom assistant support as their self help skills were less well developed. Wilson *et al.* (2001) discussed the benefits for younger pupils to have quality contact with an adult during class time.

Some of the pupils suggested that smaller classes would mean they would make more and speedier progress with their learning. This thread of attainment and progress is fundamental to the class size discourse. The difficulty has been in finding evidence to link class size and attainment. Blatchford and Mortimore (1994) and Blatchford *et al.* (2004b) found no link between class size and attainment. The STAR Project was one of the few research projects to identify that pupils in smaller classes (.i.e. fewer than 18) did better when compared with pupils in larger classes. Wilson *et al.* (2002) discussed the impact of classroom assistants on attainment and suggested:

*classroom assistants have had an indirect impact on pupils' attainment by allowing teachers to devote more of their own time to teaching.*

Wilson *et al.* (2002: vi)

The focus groups also felt smaller classes would be better for their teachers in terms of workload as well as job satisfaction. Wilson (2002) and Scottish Executive (2006) reported that smaller class size was a feature in teacher stress and workload. Johnson (1990) suggested that smaller classes impacted positively on teachers' morale and feelings of satisfaction. This finding was supported by Mueller *et al.* (1988), Harder (1990) and Glass *et al.* (1982). Lee (2002), DfES (2002), Blatchford *et al.* (2004a) and Butt and Lance (2005) found that teachers reported that classroom assistants had a positive effect on workload and job satisfaction.

In one of the few reports to include pupil voice on the topic of classroom support staff the Staffordshire Workforce Development Team (2007) suggested that school ethos influenced pupils' perceptions of support staff. They suggested that:

*Where there appears to be a hierarchical staffing structure within the school, which makes a clear distinction between the role of the teacher and the role of*

*the support member of staff, children seem to be less confident in the ability of the support staff.*

(Staffordshire Workforce Development Team 2007:1)

Their suggestion was not supported by the data collected from the focus groups of pupils in this project. The pupils in the classrooms and the focus groups demonstrated no lack of respect or confidence in their classroom assistants.

The enhanced role for teaching assistants in England through the creation of HLTAs was viewed by the teaching profession as a threat to their professional status. This researcher suggests the Scottish contextual differences may account for this and that claim by the Staffordshire Workforce Development Team may be of relevance in English schools. Doherty (2004:15) in discussing hierarchical power relationships between classroom assistants and teachers suggested that *Scotland would appear to be the exception*. This theme is explored in the next section.

### **Analysis of all data sets with reference to research question three**

*What tasks and activities do the classroom assistants taking part in the project undertake?*

As referred to earlier many local authorities in Scotland as part of workforce reform had started a process of consultation with the range of non-teaching support staff in schools on the subject of agreeing a revised job description that would include a revised job title. Aberdeen City Council redefined the jobs of classroom assistants, special needs auxiliaries, lunchtime auxiliaries and children's supervisors. The roles and responsibilities of these jobs had been incorporated in one new post with the job title of Pupil Support Assistant. The major tasks of this post were (1) care, welfare, health and safety of pupils, (2) promotion of positive behaviour, (3) support for pupils out of the classroom and (4) assistance with the preparation, organisation and use of resources. The significant changes were in *promotion of positive behaviour* and *support for pupils out of the classroom*. The new job description came into effect for these groups of staff in the Aberdeen City in August 2007. During the fieldwork phase of this project the classroom assistant participants were employed as such and not as Pupil Support Assistants.

Question three investigated the tasks and activities classroom assistants undertook and data was collected from direct observation of classroom assistants using the classroom assistant observation schedules. In addition qualitative data was collected from pupils in the three focus groups and from semi-structured interviews with the class teachers. All three groups of participants had a shared understanding of a classroom assistant's role and the tasks that

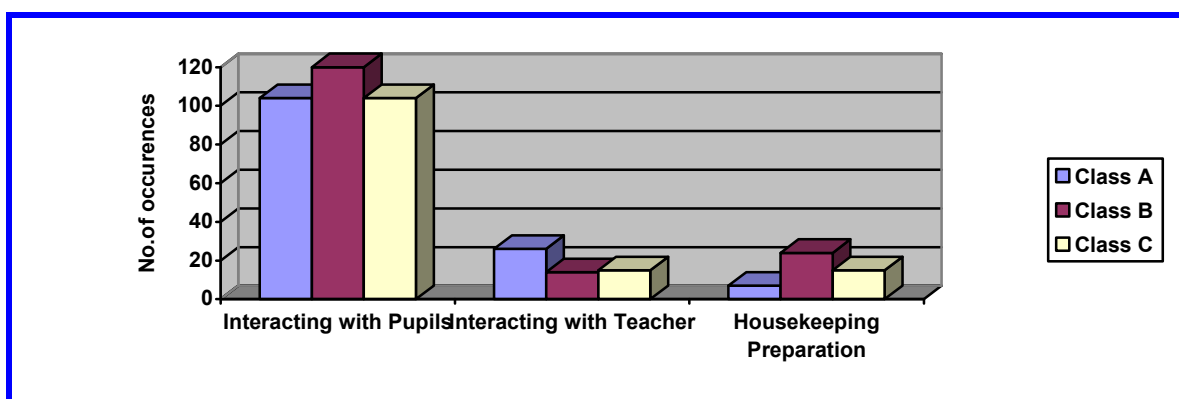
they could reasonably be expected to undertake. The participants were asked to describe the roles and tasks of classroom assistants both in general and in particular in their own experiences.

Classroom assistants' impact in managing pupil behaviour for the three case study classes was described earlier. There were no differences of note between the three sets of participants. Supporting the promotion of positive behaviour has been included in the new job description for Pupil Support Assistants as previously mentioned. Hancock *et al.* (2002: vi) suggested of practice often ran ahead of policy. Perhaps this is an occasion when policy has caught up with practice.

The observation schedules for classroom assistants were designed to capture the range of activities that classroom assistants participating in the project undertook in classrooms. These schedules were broadly organised into similar areas of activity as per the job description for a classroom assistant. These were interacting with pupils, interacting with the teacher and housekeeping and preparation tasks.

Figure 14

Chart 12 Classroom Assistant Activity



There were clear differences between the three classroom assistants in terms of how often each engaged in the three broad categories of activity. These could be attributed to the different contexts and circumstances each was working in. These differences were influenced by teacher deployment decisions which were based on the amount and reliability of classroom support each had been allocated. Class A was the smallest class and the only composite class in the project. The headteacher in School A deployed her classroom assistant allocation flexibly which meant that Teacher A could not always depend on Classroom Assistant joining the class at the expected times. Teacher A in the



interview commented on the lack of dependency and reliability of her allocation of classroom assistant support time. Classroom Assistant A supported Class A for the least amount of time yet more of that time was spent directly with pupils. This was a consequence of a deployment decision made by Teacher A.

*In a composite class a classroom assistant is very useful. I spend time withdrawing groups for teaching sessions and it is useful to have a classroom assistant to help supervise the rest and to keep them on task/going.*

(Teacher A)

*In the P4/5 class the teacher does a lot of group work so if she is teaching one group then I can support the other groups. I can make sure that they are kept going.*

(Classroom Assistant A)

All three spent varying amounts of time housekeeping tasks. These differences for each Teachers B and C generally used whole class lessons. During these times both classroom assistants were observed to undertake housekeeping tasks. Teacher A predominantly used group teaching to organise learning. Class A was the only composite class and had the least amount of support time. She deployed Classroom Assistant to support the remaining groups when she was teaching one of the groups.

Classroom Assistant C was seen to spend more time than the other two in observing the teacher. In a debriefing session she said she found it *really useful* to listen and observe lessons. *It helps me support the children better.* In the three schools classroom assistants Teacher C suggested that classroom assistants were important in giving the teacher feedback on her teaching.

Teacher C and Classroom Assistant C had developed a strong professional relationship that did not conform to the more commonly found hierarchical relationship between these two groups of staff. This collegial relationship had the potential to influence pedagogy and would be worthy of further investigation. Lee (2002) identified in her review of research the beneficial effects of this type of collaborative working for all participants. Calder and Grieve (2004) discussed this type of collaborative working and recommended more support and training for this when they suggested:

*The class teacher should consult, liaise and plan with other adults who have a responsibility to support pupils. This collaborative working does not always take place.*

(Calder and Grieve, 2004:122)

This relationship between Teacher C and Classroom Assistant C meant that the classroom was viewed by both as a shared space and that they had a shared responsibility for the

pupils in it. The classroom assistant was skilled in helping pupils who struggled to understand mathematics concepts. The teacher had recognised these skills and strengths of the classroom assistant and made deployment decisions based on this information. The children who worked on mathematics tasks with the classroom assistant made very positive comments about their experiences. Schlapp *et al.* (2001), Blatchford *et al.* (2004a) and ScER (2006) supported teachers' perceptions of classroom assistants' positive impact on their workload. Schlapp *et al.* (2001) found:

*a small input – ‘an extra pair of hands’ – has the potential to alter teachers’ perceptions of their workload.*

(Schlapp *et al.* 2001:54)

In referring to the English school context Lee (2002) found that classroom assistants were widely regarded as valuable members of staff in schools and stated:

*Teachers are increasingly accepting and valuing the presence of teaching assistants in their classes to provide support to a wide range of pupils and to the teacher him/herself*

(Lee 2002:14)

All three teachers indicated that classroom assistants had a positive effect in reducing their non teaching duties and on their workload as a consequence. The three teachers in the project commented on ‘feelgood’ factor impact of the presence of classroom assistants. This perception of impact on workload was found throughout the research literature. Schlapp and Davidson (2001) found that the short periods of time classroom assistants spent on resource preparation left teachers with the perception that they had made a significant contribution to reducing their workload. Wilson *et al.* (2003) commented on teachers making decisions about deploying classroom assistants and said:

*teachers were constantly weighing up the benefits of using classroom assistants for administrative tasks that relieved the teacher’s load against those derived from extra reinforcement of learning with pupils.*

(Wilson *et al.*, 2003:194)

In this project each classroom assistant spent different amounts of time working directly with pupils but all three were observed to spend the majority of their time engaged in this category of activity. Classroom assistants in the semi-structured interviews said they preferred working directly with pupils and also raised the issue of lack of time for consultation and planning.

*I don’t like copying, laminating - I want to spend time working with the children. Or if we had more hours after school then the photocopying filing etc could be done then*

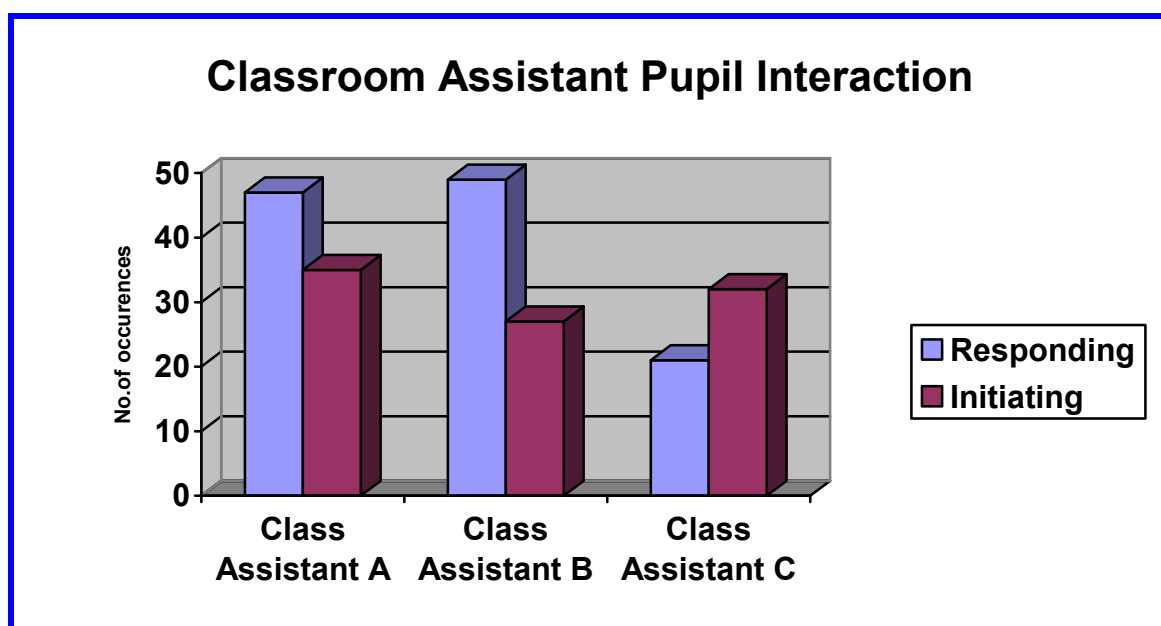
(Classroom Assistant C)

The classroom assistant observation schedule allowed the researcher to collect data on classroom assistant interactions with pupils. As with the teacher observations the

researcher was able to drill down the data to investigate specific aspects of the role of classroom assistants. The researcher examined the data on pupil and classroom assistant interactions and Chart 13 (Figure 15) displays the occurrences of initiating and responding for each of three classroom assistants.

Figure 15

Chart 13 Classroom Assistant and Pupil Interaction



In comparing the data on interaction with pupils for each of the three classroom assistants a number of differences were identified. The data collected from observations of Classroom Assistants A and B showed that they were more likely to respond than initiate. Classroom Assistant C was observed marginally more frequently initiating than responding. This could be explained by a difference in approach by Teacher C in how she deployed her and in her partnership approach to working with this particular classroom assistant. In the interview Teacher C commented very positively about Classroom Assistant C and about their effective working relationship. She indicated that she often deployed her to work with a group especially in mathematics lessons. She stated:

*We have been working together for two years so she knows the way I work, how I mark. She knows if I have filing etc. Systems are well established. It's important to use the strengths of your classroom assistant to best advantage. (She's) someone to give me early feedback on my teaching, someone to share the admin tasks of the class. She is fantastic at taking a group away for additional support.*

(Teacher C)

This should be compared with comments from Teacher A about classroom assistants she had worked with in the past. Her comments illuminated her approach to working with classroom assistants and the barriers and difficulties she had encountered.

*With a classroom assistant you have to take time to explain and sometimes you have to stop what you are doing and explain again. I recognise that different classroom assistants have different strengths. Sometimes I have to redo things because they haven't been done the way I wanted them to be.*

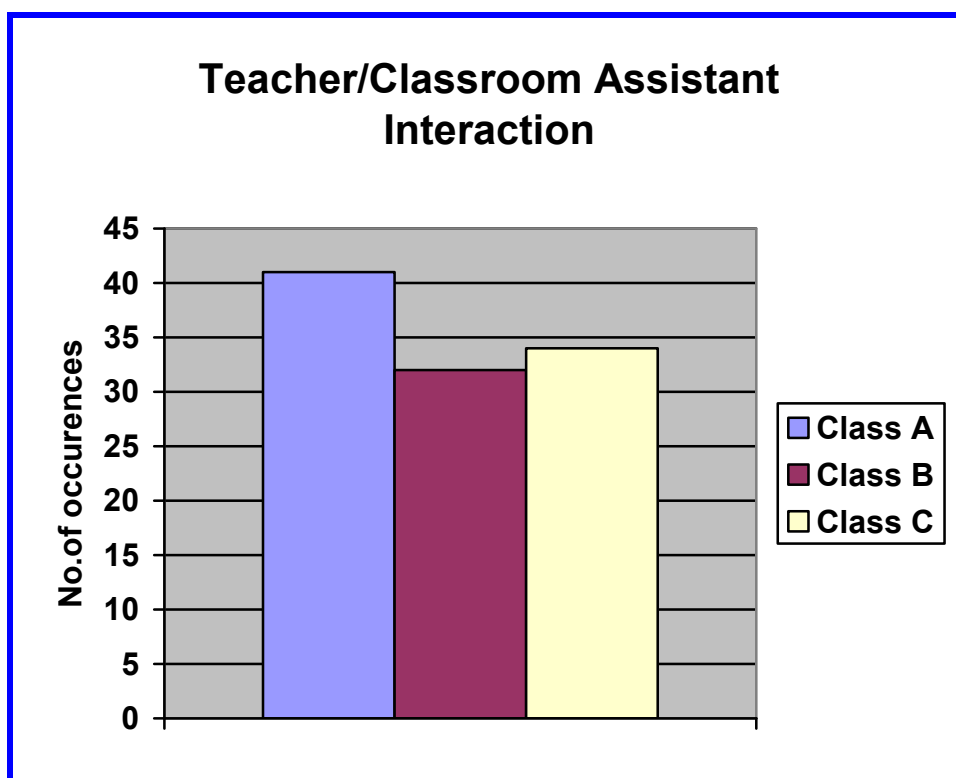
(Teacher A)

The three teachers and classroom assistants had developed their own working relationships and ways of working. These relationships were influenced by the amount of time they spent working together, the development of efficient communication systems and where the skills of classroom assistant were recognised and used.

The classroom observation schedule allowed the researcher to collect data when observing the teachers on their interactions with classroom assistants. *Figure 16* Chart 14 shows the number of interactions for each pair.

*Figure 16*

Chart 14 Teacher and Classroom Assistant Interaction



Teacher A and Classroom Assistant A interacted more often than either of the other two pairs and had the least amount of time together. The times allocated for Classroom Assistant A often meant that she joined the class after the teacher had taught the class or

group and meant she had to refer to the teacher's plans and often to the teacher for information. Another explanation of this higher frequency of interaction with the teacher could be attributed to how Teacher A deployed her. Teacher A's predominant organisation for teaching was in groups. When she had support from a classroom assistant Teacher A deployed her to work with and supervise the groups not directly working with her. She indicated that she relied on feedback from the classroom assistant to inform her planning. Finding time for this type of exchange was identified as a problem area and Teacher A and Classroom Assistant A typically used some class time to exchange information.

All three classes participating in the project had part time support from a classroom assistant. Full time support would have been welcomed and may have led to different results in terms of influencing their choices in teaching methodology. The different contextual influences were the amount of classroom support time allocated to the school and class teacher, headteacher/school policy for allocation and deployment of classroom assistants, the reliability of that allocation, the composition of the class, individual pupils behavioural or learning needs, class teacher experience of working with classroom assistant, timetabling and the skills and abilities of classroom assistants.

Headteachers took a number of issues into consideration including, class size, challenging pupils and attainment in allocating classroom assistants to classes. These differences influenced how the headteachers and then teachers deployed their classroom assistants. Wilson *et al.* (2003) found that these were commonly used criteria for classroom assistant deployment by headteachers:

*Over half the headteachers indicated that impact on attainment was important, as was help with early stages classes. In addition, almost half considered it very important to allocate classroom assistants where they would have an influence on school ethos and behaviour.*

(Wilson *et al.*, 2003:194)

### **6.3 Summary**

The role and duties of classroom assistants have evolved over time. From the analysis of the data collected from direct classroom observation and supported by data from focus groups and semi-structured interviews the researcher found that the classroom assistants' presence helped teachers focus on teaching, supported teachers by undertaking a range of non teaching tasks, helped to manage pupils' behaviour and impacted on pupils by allowing them to have more adult attention.

The data presented and analysed in this chapter examined and illuminated the behaviours and experiences of teachers, pupils and classroom assistants in three primary schools in Aberdeen City. The focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews with teachers and classroom assistant and the data collected using the classroom observation schedules provided the researcher with a richly detailed picture of the school and classroom experiences of the pupils, classroom assistants and teachers participating in the project. This richly detailed picture was analysed, presented and interpreted in this chapter.

In response to research question one the data presented would suggest that the presence or contribution of classroom assistants did not influence the three teachers' choice of teaching method. The three teachers taking part in this project made little or no change to their teaching methodology to take account of classroom assistant presence in their classrooms. All the participants had part time support from a classroom assistant and consequently the teachers' timetabling decisions took the timing of support into account. However each teacher appeared to have developed a preferred style of teaching that suited the composition of their classes. The presence of classroom assistants did have an influence on teachers in terms of the range of activities they undertook. Pupils benefited from more attention and fewer interruptions to teaching when the classroom assistant supported their classes.

'Pupil voice' was recorded in response to research question two on pupils' perceptions and experiences of classroom assistants. The three focus groups had a clear understanding of the roles and tasks of classroom assistants and were able to articulate how their presence affected them. Their thoughts ideas, perceptions and opinions of the influence classroom assistants had on their classroom experiences were interesting. Of particular interest was their understanding of school hierarchies, class size and adult/pupil ratios, and their perception of the impact of not having a classroom assistant for both themselves and for their teachers.

Question three aimed to discover the range of tasks and activities the classroom assistants taking part in the project undertook. Headteachers and teachers made deployment decisions that were specific to the three different school contexts. One common theme emerging was that all three classroom assistants spent the majority of their time in classes working directly with pupils. The three classroom assistants were observed undertaking all the roles of a classroom assistant. An aspect of 'role stretch' was noted inasmuch as they were also observed undertaking the behaviour management and support tasks of Pupil Support

Assistants. In School C the teamwork ethos between the classroom assistant and teacher was worthy of note and further investigation. Cremin *et al.* (2005) investigated aspects of teamwork involving classroom assistants and teachers. They found that:

*An effect of this greater parity between the teachers and assistants using this planning process is that the assistants had increased feelings of empowerment and felt more able to contribute their skills and insights*

(Cremin *et al.*, 2005:160)

The classroom assistants and teachers participating in the project identified a need for consultation, planning and collaboration. These issues were threaded through the literature and featured regularly in recommendations in research reports. Kennedy and Duthie (1975), Schlapp *et al.* (2001) and EOC (2007) recommended that time needed to be made for planning and consultation. Wilson *et al.* (2003) also found concerns being expressed by classroom assistants on this topic:

*Most reported that they had little time to plan and liaise with teachers, and a quarter (25%) indicated that they spent no time on this activity*

(Wilson *et al.* 2003:197)

## CHAPTER SEVEN      REFLECTIONS   CONCLUSIONS   IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This research project focused on the introduction of classroom assistants to the workforce in primary schools in Scotland. The aim of the project was to investigate the impact of classroom assistants on teachers and pupils in their day to day school and classroom experiences. To that end a small-scale multi-method research design was developed. Three middle stages primary school classes, their teachers and classroom assistants made up the participants of the project. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected using classroom observation schedules, semi-structured interviews with teachers and classroom assistants and focus group sessions with three focus groups of pupils drawn from the classes taking part in the project.

The project addressed three key aspects of primary school life, (1) teachers' methodology, (2) pupils' perceptions and experience of classroom assistants and (3) the tasks and activities undertaken by classroom assistants. In the three schools making up the case study the classroom assistants made valuable contributions to the classes they supported.

The researcher noted the welcome contribution of data from pupils to the richness of the detail of this study. In Scotland advice on listening to and acting upon 'pupil voice' has been made available to teachers and schools through the Curriculum for Excellence initiative. ESRC *Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning Project*<sup>37</sup> found that when pupils were consulted that classroom practice could be improved.

### **7.1 Limitations and challenges**

A key thread in the research literature focussed on attempting to identify a causal link between classroom assistants and improvements in pupil attainment. Few studies investigated their impact on classroom climate and ethos, on teaching approaches, pupils' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities or on teachers' and pupils' day to day school and classroom experiences. This, in the researcher's view, meant that the impact of the change to adult/pupil ratios of classroom assistants had been obscured by the narrow focus on teacher/pupil ratios and the attainment thread of the discourse on class size.

Teachers welcomed their contribution to their day to day experiences and relied on their support. They suggested more support would allow them to be more effective in their

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.consultingpupils.co.uk>



teaching. They also highlighted the positive impact a classroom assistant can have on teacher workload.

A small-scale multi-method research design using a mixed or eclectic methodology was developed for this project as the researcher believed one source for evidence would not fully address the three research questions. The project design allowed the researcher to study a limited number of contexts in great depth and to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher examined the data from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions to identify patterns and to check for reliability. Within-case and cross-case analysis were used as key data analysis strategies. The three case studies allowed the researcher to create a detailed description of the impact of classroom assistants on the day to day experiences of teachers and pupils in these primary schools. This ‘thick’ description helped facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject of the research project.

There were a number of limitations and challenges encountered by the researcher in using this research design. The first was in devising the classroom observation schedules. At a pragmatic level the researcher wanted to ensure that the data could be collected and would address the research project questions. The primary school classroom is a busy and dynamic milieu and collecting quantitative data in such a busy setting meant that the researcher had to further develop her classroom observation, evaluation and investigation skills.

The range and number of variables that could be recorded when observing also presented a challenge to the researcher. To make data recording manageable the researcher drew on her in depth knowledge and understanding of the setting and context. The categories included in the schedule were created to allow the researcher to collect data to meet the aims of the project. Field trials of the schedules were of great value to the researcher. The schedules were amended as a result of this process. The use of schedules helped to standardize the observation process.

Managing the rich and large amounts of data collected during the fieldwork stage provided the second main challenge of the project. To meet this challenge the researcher devised a simple reference system and organised the qualitative data into files and folders.

Statistical analysis can add substance to data. Another limitation of this study was that the quantitative data collected using the classroom observation schedules were not subjected to

analytic statistics. The inferences drawn and the correlations made in chapter five using the data set were not subjected to inferential statistical analysis. This was a small scale study and the subjects for data collection were not intended to be a statistical sample. This meant that no statistical significance can be attached to the results. Generalisations could not be made from the data set. Every class is unique and the three classes had differences and many similarities. They were typical of urban primary school middle stages classes though not a statistical sample. The researcher has identified this as a limitation of the study.

The limited number of settings, three primary school classes, meant that the quantitative data could be challenged on the basis that the findings were local, specific and not generalisable. To address this limitation of the study classroom observation was only one of three tools used to collect data.

In reflecting on the challenges and limitations of the study the researcher has identified a number of things that she might have been done differently. If it had been manageable she would have used the classroom observation schedules with a much larger group of classes. This would have allowed her to collect more robust data that could then have been subjected to statistical analysis. She would have conducted more focus group sessions with the pupils. The pupils proved to be a rich and interesting data source. More sessions would have allowed her to gather more information from the pupils' perspective and this would have contributed to the study.

## **7.2 Impact on the researcher and implications for practice**

This section explores the impact of the project on the researcher in terms of changed or transformed perspectives, practices and professional commitments. It also explores implications for the use of classroom assistants in the wider Scottish context.

Using Wenger's (1998) 'community of practice concept' with its three stages *participation, reification, constellation*, the researcher identified herself as a *participant* in a number of communities of practice (*constellations*) - teacher, head teacher, HMIE Associate Assessor, and researcher. As a researcher she was bound by the rules Glasgow University which provided guidance to its staff and students engaging in research with human subjects (*reification*). She shared a common purpose with colleagues in each of these communities. In her role as a researcher she identified their common purpose as the deepening of knowledge and understanding of educational theory, practice and research. The researcher's identity as an educational researcher was bound up in her pragmatic

epistemological and ethical standpoints. For her becoming and being an educational researcher was founded upon, to paraphrase Descartes, challenging the *taken for granted*, *doubting all things and becoming a seeker after truth*.

During the course of the research project the researcher engaged in critical reflection, self-examination and evaluation to improve her professional practice and to strengthen the quality her work. A reflective practitioner is one who considers her own experiences when applying knowledge to practice (Schon, 1983). This kind of critical reflection helped the researcher to take informed actions as described by Brookfield (1995). The researcher had developed as Moon (1999:63) described to the *maturing stage ....typified... as self acceptance, deep knowledge of subject matter and an openness and willingness to share ideas*.

The researcher had through reflection learned much from the experience of undertaking this research project. As a result of this reflection the researcher identified two key areas that have impacted on her professional practice. These were the use of classroom observation as a tool for data collection and the valuable contribution of ‘pupil voice’ to research and school improvement.

In her roles as head teacher and as Associate Assessor with HMIE, developing classroom observation skills were fundamental to her effectiveness in these roles. This project has allowed the researcher to deepen her understanding of observation as a tool for research. The project also allowed the researcher to practice and further develop her skills as an observer. These will allow her to promote and justify the use of observation as an effective tool in gathering both qualitative and quantitative data to her colleagues.

In her work with primary school age children the researcher had developed a deep knowledge and understanding of their learning and development. As head teacher of a primary school the researcher had promoted and developed a range of pupil groups that allowed children to express their ideas and opinions. For example in her present school she had created a pupil council, an eco committee and a health committee. These groups represented the views of their classmates and were used as consultation and school improvement vehicles. The range of themes and depth of consultation she had promoted to date had been limited to issues that teachers had identified as being appropriate for pupils to be consulted upon. For example the pupil council had been consulted about enhancing the playground and the eco-committee had promoted paper recycling.

The work with focus groups undertaken for this research project has made her reflect critically on the type of consultation that pupils could be involved in. The researcher was impressed by the quality of pupil insight into matters not usually viewed as appropriate for pupil consultation. In this project many of the pupils had extensive experience of working with classroom assistants and were able to debate what worked well and what could be improved. Ruddock (2004) and Mitra and Frick (2004) have undertaken work on consulting pupils on more sophisticated matters such school improvement and teaching and learning and recommended that teachers make time to listen to pupil voice. The researcher has, since completing the fieldwork stage of this project, begun the process of consulting pupils in her own school on aspects of school improvement planning.

Scientific and technological advances in the past 20 years have impacted on our lives on every level. In this rapidly changing context the concept of the child and her/his place in the social, political and economic world are also changing. Piaget's work on cognitive development was a cornerstone that underpinned curriculum design and delivery in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Curriculum for Excellence initiative is challenging these developmental, age and stage arrangements. The development of education for citizenship has the potential of empowering children to be active agents in their learning environment. The debate on roles, position, place and power is one, the researcher feels, the education system should engage with. In developing personalisation and choice as elements of the work the Curriculum for Excellence in her school the researcher now recognises the advantages of hearing pupil voice as an important component of school improvement planning.

The researcher has identified a number of more general implications for practice on the use of classroom assistants in Scotland. This study supported previous research<sup>38</sup> that suggested classroom assistants have become an important part of Scottish primary school classrooms. They make significant contributions to the day to day experiences of teachers and pupils. In order to maintain and indeed maximise on the positive impact that classroom assistants have, schools and local authorities should include time in the classroom assistant's contract for planning and collaboration. The earlier research referred to also highlighted this as an area to be addressed.

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<sup>38</sup> See Calder (2002), Wilson *et al.* (2003), Calder and Grieve (2004) SEED (2001), Schlapp and Davidson (2001) and EOC (2007)

Effective adult/pupil interaction influences pupils' motivation to learn and achieve. A more favourable adult/pupil ratio can be achieved by employing classroom assistants and deploying them to classrooms. This in turn allows pupils to have more attention and more opportunities to interact with an adult in a learning situation. Feedback is a key element of this interaction. Classroom assistants can give pupils feedback on their progress with a task and offer help and support. This research project demonstrated that pupils benefited from more attention when a classroom assistant was supporting the class.

The Curriculum for Excellence initiative is promoting pedagogical changes to include greater opportunities for pupils to experience personalisation and choice. In this study one teacher was observed using active learning tasks for small groups. Where the adult/pupil ratios are improved this type of pedagogical change may be more readily adopted.

This study found that classroom assistants have a clear impact on helping manage pupil behaviour. Local authority and schools policies for allocating and deploying classroom assistants are variable and so do not always ensure equity of provision across classes and schools. Promoting better behaviour would be facilitated by policies that recognised the impact the classroom assistants can have on pupil behaviour.

### **7.3 Conclusions and implications for practice**

#### **Conclusion 1**

*Pupils felt they had more support with their learning tasks when classroom assistants were present.*

Much of the discourse on class size focused narrowly on teacher/pupil ratios. The presence of classroom assistants altered the adult/pupil ratio in classes. There was little research that considered the impact on pupils of these altered ratios. The pupils in the three classes making up this project enjoyed the additional attention they were able to get both from the classroom assistant and the teacher. When the teacher had support they felt that they got more adult attention and that this was beneficial to their learning. They felt they did more and achieved more. The pupils were aware that classroom assistants undertook housekeeping tasks and by doing so relieved their teacher from these duties. They also identified their impact on helping manage pupil behaviour and on maintaining the working atmosphere in their classes. They were aware that when the teacher was not supported that there were more interruptions to their learning.

In the research on classroom assistants little work to date had been undertaken in gathering the views of pupils. ‘Pupil voice’ contributed significantly to the richness and detail of the data collected during this project. The focus groups made valuable contributions to the project in terms of the quality of their responses and ideas and the provision of evidence from their perspective. School staff have developed opportunities to listen and act upon pupil voice but the topics typically have not explored key areas such as teaching and learning or school improvement planning.

### **Implications for practice**

- A. Local authorities, schools and school staff consider how to capitalise on the more favourable adult/pupil ratios that exists when classroom assistants support classes.
- B. Local authorities, schools and school staff consider listening to ‘pupil voice’ on issues to do with school improvement.

### **Conclusion 2**

*The presence of classroom assistants did not influence the choices teachers made in terms of which teaching method they used*

This conclusion was supported by the evidence from the data collected during the project. The researcher found that two of the teachers took the presence and skills of the classroom assistant into account when making timetabling decisions. The third teacher had the least teaching experience and the most classroom support. However none of the three teachers changed their teaching methodologies to take account of the presence of a classroom assistant.

The influence of classroom assistant support was clearly seen in teacher behaviour and the activities they undertook. The make-up of Scottish primary school staff has changed significantly since the start of 21<sup>st</sup> century; however there appears to have been little consequent change to pedagogy. Teachers spent more time on non-teaching activities and more time managing pupils’ behaviour. When no support was present teaching sessions were interrupted more frequently. School and classroom practice would benefit from teachers and other school staff engaging in critical reflection that focused on pedagogical changes and/or improvements that the presence and contribution of classroom assistants might facilitate. This is particularly relevant in Scottish schools as staff engage with curriculum review through the Curriculum for Excellence initiative.

### **Implication for practice**

- C. Teachers and head teachers should engage in critical reflection on pedagogy in the context of the changing staffing structures in primary schools

### **Conclusion 3**

*One aspect of classroom assistant 'role stretch' was identified otherwise they were observed undertaking all the duties as detailed in their job descriptions.*

All three groups of participants' understanding and perception of a classroom assistant's role and duties matched the three key roles as described in the classroom assistant's job description. The three classes in the project had part time support from a classroom assistant. Each teacher made deployment decisions that resulted in the three classroom assistants spending different proportions of their time on the three areas of their remits. The data collected showed that classroom assistants spent the majority of their time in class in direct contact with pupils. The three classroom assistants preferred working directly with pupils to any of their other tasks.

The participants indicated that full time support would have been welcomed and if they had experienced this level of support the data and results of the project could have been quite different. They suggested these differences would have included teachers' choices of organisation for learning activities, the proportion of time classroom assistants spent on housekeeping tasks and school staff finding time for consultation and planning.

The researcher identified one area of activity where classroom assistants were observed undertaking duties beyond their job descriptions. This aspect of 'role stretch' was evident when classroom assistants contributed to managing pupil behaviour. Time spent managing pupil behaviour was time taken from teaching and teachers engaged more frequently in managing behaviour interactions when they had no support. The teachers were aware when they were teaching a group that classroom assistants often took the burden of managing the behaviour of the other pupils.

The data from classroom observations as well as from the participants in this project would indicate support for increasing the level of classroom support to promote better behaviour and better learning opportunities in classes. Joint training and time for consultation would facilitate the development of a shared approach to behaviour management. Time for consultation, planning and collaboration were generally identified as areas for development.

## **Implications for practice**

- D. Local authorities should review their job descriptions for classroom assistants to include behaviour management tasks
- E. Local authorities should consider increasing the level of classroom assistant support to help schools manage pupil behaviour more effectively
- F. Local authorities should consider how to develop opportunities for teachers and classroom assistants to have time for consultation and joint training.

## **Conclusion 4**

*Using the classroom observation schedule allowed the researcher to collect robust data on teacher and classroom assistant behaviour and activity.*

The three data collection tools used together allowed the researcher to collect a rich and ‘thick’ data set. The project design and data collection tools allowed the researcher to study a limited number of contexts in great depth and to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Direct observation allowed the researcher to record actual behaviour, language and to note things that might have escaped the notice of the participants. The classroom observation data when analysed with the qualitative data supported many of the perceptions of the participants on the impact of classroom assistants in classes.

Classroom observation allowed the researcher to collect evidence to inform classroom practice. During the project the researcher collected robust data on teaching approaches and methodologies employed by the three teachers. Observation data showed that the presence or absence of classroom assistants impacted on aspects of the tasks teachers undertook and on the behaviour of the pupils. Classroom assistants were observed spending small amounts of their class time on ‘housekeeping’ activities. When they had classroom assistant support teachers identified being ‘freed up’ to teach as one of the positive outcomes. The classroom observation data collected in the project supported this perception.

The schedules also allowed for the collection of data on the interactions between classroom assistants and teachers. The classes in the project had part time support from classroom assistants and they typically arrived in class after the start of a teaching session. The majority of interactions between teachers and classroom assistants concerned conveying information on deployment and instructions on tasks to be undertaken. This was time taken



from teaching and support for pupils. All participants identified the need for time outwith class time for consultation. The data collected would indicate support for this position.

The researcher identified that developing classroom observation skills were fundamental to her effectiveness in her role as headteacher and would be particularly important in undertaking quality assurance tasks.

### **Implications for practice**

- G. Local authorities and schools should consider the allocation of sufficient, regular and reliable classroom assistant support.
- H. Headteachers should promote the use of observation as an effective tool in gathering both qualitative and quantitative data on classroom practices to inform school improvements.

### **Conclusion 5**

*The creation of a collaborative working relationship between teacher and classroom assistant had the potential to influence pedagogy*

This was an unexpected outcome of the study. One teacher and classroom assistant had developed a strong professional relationship that did not conform to the more commonly found hierarchical relationship between these two groups of staff. This relationship meant that the classroom was viewed by both as a ‘shared’ space and that they had ‘shared’ responsibility for the pupils in it.

The three teachers had not been trained in managing classroom assistants and had developed their own working relationships. Teachers A and B viewed a key role of classroom assistants as backup to their teaching. Teacher C suggested that classroom assistants were important in giving the teacher feedback on her teaching. Headteachers were responsible for the management and deployment of classroom assistants and took a number of issues into consideration when making these decisions. These included class size, age of pupils, challenging pupils and attainment. From the semi-structured interviews it was apparent that the three teachers were not aware of either a school or local authority policy for the allocation or deployment of classroom assistant support.

Teacher C interacted more frequently with pupils when she was on her own. There was little observable difference in the frequency of interaction for teachers A and B both with

and without classroom support. The data collected from observations of interactions with pupils showed that Classroom Assistants A and B responded more frequently than they initiated. This responding role reflected their status in the classroom. Classroom Assistant C was observed more frequently initiating interactions with pupils than responding to them. The classroom assistant felt more confident in making this type of contribution to the pupils' learning. This difference could be explained by the collegial approach to working together that existed between these two adults.

### **Implications for practice**

- I. Local authorities and schools should consider training for headteachers, teachers and classroom assistants in developing collaborative collegial working practices.

### **7.4 End piece**

The Curriculum for Excellence initiative encourages teachers to reflect on pedagogy and to offer learning methods which best suit the learning needs of 'digital kids'. Miglietti and Strange (1998) examined learning and teaching styles and classroom environment variables, and found that learner-centred instruction positively impacted on students' learning. In pursuing a learner-centred approach to education, common sense would indicate that this is more likely to be effective and achievable when there is a more favourable adult/pupil ratio through the deployment of classroom assistants to classes. As one pupil commented:

*Teacher has to do EVERYTHING if there is no classroom assistant!*

(Focus Group C)

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## APPENDIX 1

### Operational definitions of classroom observation categories

Category	Definition description
Whole class lesson/teaching	This involves the whole class (all pupils present) and where teacher interaction is characterised by explanation, demonstration, transmitting knowledge and pupils listening, watching and passive for the most part
Group lesson/teaching	This involves a group of pupils ( more than one and not whole class) and where teacher interaction is characterised by explanation, demonstration, transmitting knowledge and pupils listen, watch, take notes, read, respond to questions
One to one teaching	Teacher and one pupil interaction where teacher interaction is characterised by explanation, demonstration, transmitting knowledge and pupil listens, watches, reads, responds to and asks questions
Pair working	Pupils across the class working with a partner characterised by talking, discussing. Teacher behaviour is characterised by circulating, listening and asking questions
Small group discussion with teacher/classroom assistant	Group of more than one and up to eight pupils engaging in discussion, talking with teacher/classroom assistant and each other on a specific topic
Small group discussion without teacher/classroom assistant	Group of more than one and up to eight pupils engaging in discussion, talking with each other on a specific topic
Individual seat work	Pupils at desks reading, writing, recording usually on paper, in jotters on worksheets
Active learning/play	Pupils engaging in activities that promote learning by doing - board games, role play, experimenting, discovering, problem tackling
<b>Teacher/classroom assistant activity</b>	
Organising/directing groups to tasks	Teacher instructing pupils often after teaching input as to what to do next
Setting up/putting out resources materials	Putting out jotters, paints, science equipment
Marking	Correcting recorded or written work
Active listening	listening to information, ideas, responses to questions from pupils
Observing pupils	Watching pupils at tasks sometimes making notes on observations
Observing classroom assistant	Watching CA at tasks sometimes making notes on observations
Scanning pupils/classroom	whilst working with another group or individual,

	looks up and visually sweeps the room to check on the rest of the class.
Circulating	moving around the groups checking that children were on task and making progress
Supervising individual/group activity	Being with a group to help them undertake a task – completing a graph, playing a board game
Observing individual/group	Watching a group carry out a task
Talking with individual/group	Engaging in conversation
Escorting individual/group to work outside classroom	Taking a child out of the room - going to ASN Base, working in activity area outwith the room
Supporting individual/group on computer or other IT equipment	Being with a group or individual using the computer, digital camera
Playing with individual/group	Taking part in role play , board game
<b>Responding</b>	Where the interaction between CA or teacher is in response to a pupil
Give support	Helping with a task
Explain	Offering an explanation
Praise	Saying well done, good work etc.
Smile	Smiling - for encouragement, support, praise, in response to something amusing
Give permission	Allow child to go on to next activity, leave the room etc.
Encourage	Coach, help child to persevere at task
Social chatting	General talking about non task related things
Giving feedback	Having looked at how pupil was coping/undertaking the task offering advice, encouragement or support, sometimes a comment in the jotter
Respond to request for help	Moving to pupil who had put up a hand for help with a task or activity
Refer pupil to teacher for help	Telling the pupil to seek further advice from teacher
Respond to personal care needs	Dealing with pupil not feeling well, helping tie shoe laces etc.
<b>Initiating</b>	Where the interaction between CA or teacher is one where the adults open the interaction and take the lead
Give support	Helping with a task
Explain	Offering an explanation
Praise	Saying well done, good work etc.
Smile	Smiling - for encouragement, support, praise, in response to something amusing
Give permission	Allow child to go on to next activity, leave the room etc.
Encourage	Coach, help child to persevere at task
Check progress with task	Look to see how individuals and groups are getting on with the task
Question to check understanding	Usually confirmation that pupil has understood the teaching/instruction and/or knows what to do and how to do it
Question to challenge and extend thinking	Usually open ended e.g. What would happen if?
Social chatting	General talking about non task related items

Giving feedback	Having looked at how pupil was coping/undertaking the task offering advice, encouragement or support, sometimes a comment in the jotter
<b>Managing pupil behaviour</b>	
Bring back to task	Remind pupils to re-focus on the task
Non-verbal command	A cough, a look
Intervene	When pupil is not doing the task as set, is off task, or engaged in interactions with their peers that could lead to friction the teacher/classroom assistant speaks to them to refocus, or to deal with any squabbles, disharmony
Ask for quiet	Ask pupils to lower the noise level
Reprimand	Give pupil(s) a row for misbehaviour
Physical presence	Moving to pupils who were becoming restless or showing early signs of off task behaviour.
Deal with interruption	Seeing to requests from visitors to the classroom
Refer to teacher	Sending pupil to teacher for misbehaviour
Stop work to remind children about behaviour	Halting the work of the class/group to reinforce acceptable behaviour
<b>Teacher/classroom assistant interaction</b>	
Give/take instruction on tasks to be done	Teacher giving CA specific instructions on the tasks she wanted her to undertake
Guidance/advice on possible problem areas	Teacher telling CA what the pupils might find challenging and how to support them with this
Information on deployment	Giving an overview of the tasks, pupils and resources the teacher required
Respond to/ask for help	Answering queries from the CA when she needs further advice, instructions with a task
Discuss pupils progress with task	Exchange information about how well pupils were coping and how far through the tasks they were
Discuss CA progress with task	Teacher asking CA how well she was coping and how far through the task she was
Share information about pupil management	CA and teacher discussing behaviour management strategies for individuals and groups of pupils
Share observations on pupil behaviour	CA and teacher discussing behaviour of individuals
Observe teacher	CA observing teacher demonstrating/modelling
Discuss what to do next	Exchange ideas about next steps both for pupils and CAs
<b>Managing CA</b>	
Observe/ Monitor	Teacher observing how CA interacts with pupils, performs a specific task
intervene	Asks CA to leave the task set - usually due to the task
redirect	Teacher asking CA to set task and work with a different group or individual often to help manage behaviour
other	Any behaviour activity not covered in the schedules

## APPENDIX 2

## Interview questions teacher analysis grid

<i>Question</i>	A	B	C
<i>How long have you been a teacher?</i>	27 years – 10 years full time	4 years	Job sharing since 1997 – about 10 years and supplied for about 3 years
<i>How long in this school?</i>	4 years	4 years	10 years
<i>What year group/stage have you taught?</i>	Every stage taught in my time – some as a supply teacher more recently in middle stages	Mainly P5 and P6	Mainly P4- P7
<i>Best/least</i>	I like the way they work together now as a class Worst bit has been the behaviour of some and the impact that this has had on the ethos of the class	I find that hard to answer. I like working with them – good mix. They are keen and eager. The hardest bit is managing their behaviour from time to time.	I like the way they work together, they are supportive of each other, thoughtful – well behaved. They are willing to have a go. What I don't like is the sheer size of the class and the management of such a big class – you always feel that you are never getting round every child
<i>Do you think the children benefit when you have classroom assistant support? In what ways?</i>	Children do benefit as they can have extra attention. But sometimes they can become dependent. I plan for not having a CA as sometimes she does not turn up – school often has first call.	Yes - they can get help when they need it or nearly. They can keep on track/ stay focussed. She makes sure they have the resources and materials they need. They often chat to her and share concerns with her that they might not otherwise share.	Definitely – when I have the class at the beginning of a topic – she is an extra pair of eyes and ears. She can give me quality feedback on anyone who might not have grasped what I have been teaching. She is fantastic at taking a group away for additional support or supervise the rest of the class whilst I take the smaller group for support work. The children benefit from the attention of working with an adult in either a supervisory or direct teaching situation.
<i>Do you think you benefit from having classroom assistant support – please elaborate</i>	I teach a lot of group work – extra pair of eyes especially as it is a composite class. Having someone on hand to help collect resources that had been forgotten. Also having someone to work/supervise a group and give them some extra attention	I do too – she helps prepare resources for practical classes, helps with tasks like photocopying, She's someone to bounce ideas around with. But I like having another adult especially with such a big class to help with the behaviour.	Uninterrupted lessons! Someone to give early feedback on my teaching - especially useful if she is able to pick up on children who seem to be struggling with new concepts etc. Someone to share to admin tasks of the class with – filing, copying etc. In a big class having support

			helps with stamina levels etc.
<i>Do you ever feel stressed under pressure in class?</i>			
<i>What do you think are the main causes of these stressful feelings?</i>			
<i>Tell me about your experiences, if any, of supporting in a small class – fewer than 20.</i>	Yes I had 2 very small P7 classes but there was a very wide range of ability – A-WTE. I had no CA. It is very, very nice in a small class. It is much easier. I liked working in a small class as I had time to spend with individual children, time to talk with them. In a composite class a CA is very useful. I spend time withdrawing groups for teaching sessions and it is useful to have a CA to help supervise the rest and to keep them on task/going.	No I have always had big classes – except in placements etc. But even here the classes were more than 26.	I have had a smaller class – composite – but brings with it its own challenges. I had never had a small class
<i>Tell me about your experiences, if any of larger classes – 30+.</i>	I had big classes of over 30 but with no CA. However I did benefit from having a Sfl teacher who came in and spent time working alongside me in class. Again there was a wide range of ability in the class and it was really helpful having the additional adult support in the room. She knew what she was doing whereas with a CA you have to take time to explain and sometimes you have to stop what you are doing and explain again. There is no time available for doing this other than during class time.	All the classes I have had have been 30+. I have been lucky that I have always had CA support. I rely on CA support especially to help with preparation of resources, using CA to support groups when they are working on tasks and to help with practical lessons like art.	Most of teaching has been with classes of 30 + I have had to use different techniques with some of these larger classes when I did not have CA support. The children worked in pairs/groups. It was often children who needed more direct supervision who were left. If you set up a practical activity in the classroom for one group to do whilst the rest were working on something else your attention was needed in both places and you felt frustrated as you were not able to give your full attention to either group. Not the best quality teaching situation.
<i>You have classroom assistant support this year. Tell me about any previous experience you have of working with a classroom assistant.</i>	Never had regular CA support. This year I had support to help with a child with ADHD	I have worked with CAs in all my classes. In previous years the support was less frequent. But with inclusion of children from our Base I have had a range of CA's helping out in class.	I have 2 afternoons and 2 mornings of CA support. I organise my timetable around the times when I have support.

<p><i>Are you aware of any school policy/rationale for the allocation of such support? If so can you elaborate please?</i></p>	<p>What the school would like is that CAs are in classes full time. However if the Office needs them then they have first call. They often arrive late. For example I should have had CA support first thing on Monday for child with ADHD. CA didn't arrive until nearly 10. Given the nature of his difficulties it would have been better if she had been in at 9 and sat with him. This meant that his week got off to a bad start. 'is allocation of CA needs driven?' No. The school plan would be to have CAs in class but it rarely works out like that. They also supervise outside at playtime/lunchtime and this means that 'class time' is eaten into to allow them to have their breaks. I had to ask for CA support to help with individual child.</p>	<p>No not really – we seem to have a pretty generous allocation of support. Most classes have support most of the time I think – its just the norm.</p>	<p>No the only thing I am involved with is a discussion at the end of term with the receiving teacher and we would discuss their needs. If a new child with behavioural needs was to be admitted to the class a risk assessment would be undertaken and any necessary support identified and provided prior to them coming into the class.</p>
<p><i>How would you describe the classroom assistant's job – tasks, role, responsibilities etc</i></p>	<p>I know what is on the remit – backup to my teaching. I would like CA to see my teaching – this rarely happens. However, if you have a CA who has been in the class/worked with you for a while they are more able to backup the teaching points. However, if not I then have to spend time explaining to them what I need them to do. This then eats into your time with the children. I have had a number of CAs.</p>	<p>Well she is there to help the children with their learning. She supports them when they are stuck. She is also a help to the class teacher. She's an extra pair of hands and eyes. She does photocopying and displays the children's work. She also works with the children outside at lunchtimes and playtimes and looks after their physical needs.</p>	<p>They assist the teacher – the assist the delivery of lessons. Assessment, display and supervising the children and supporting the less able children. They also undertake work away from the children - filing photocopying etc.</p>
<p><i>Classroom assistants need to be managed – deployed/ guided/informed of lesson content/ brought up to speed/date with the work of the class/group or individual - how does this happen in the classes you work?</i></p>	<p>One had not been able to work with child with ADHD. I managed 3 different CAs over the course of the year. I recognise that CAs have different strengths – eg Isobel is good at art but the Art specialist takes my class and I have NCC so I don't benefit from deploying her during art lessons. I have a jotter where I</p>	<p>Its hard to work out now because we have been working closely together for a year. But in the beginning I had to direct her more, explain in more detail what I wanted her to do. I had to make sure she helped them with their tasks rather than did it for them. I have shown her what I need doing - demonstrating/modelling with the children and she has picked up what I mean. We</p>	<p>Each teacher is told how much time they have been allocated and it is up to them to decide on what tasks they want them to undertake. We do not have time – for sharing info etc – 'A real sore point' – 'Snatched moments' . I try to find time towards the end of the lesson when the</p>



	<p>note down any specific tasks etc – photocopying</p> <p>- Specific groups to supervise. They can look at this at any time but also when I am at Assembly that is a good time for them to be checking. Feedback from/to CAs and communication with them is very much done on the hoof. Isobel is very good at reporting back on how children performed in maths tasks.</p>	<p>have a chat at the start of the day or sometimes when she rejoins the class after a break etc. She knows to check the board (daily programme) and my planner. She often stays back at the end of the day to chat about individuals or groups and how they have coped. But we work very much as a team. I keep an eye on what she is doing. Her real strength is in maths and here I now know that she will support the children well here.</p>	<p>children are on task to have a discussion – feedback on what had happened with the group and we talk about what will be happening next day. We have been working together for 2 years so she knows they way I work, how I mark. She knows if I have filing etc. She'll leave work in a special tray with a wee note - these are the ones you must see etc. Systems are well established. We knew even at the beginning of the 2 years. We discussed how to make communication better. It is important to use the strengths of CA to best advantage.</p>
<p><i>Do you plan/do anything different for the times when you have classroom assistant support as to when you don't?</i></p>	<p>I have done - but have almost given up doing this due to the lack of dependency of CAs turning up.</p> <p>In a straight class I would use CA for helping the children either end of the spectrum – more and less able.</p> <p>My methodology would be the same with/without CA. The new reading and spelling schemes the school has introduced place a big emphasis on whole class lessons.</p> <p>In a composite class CA is used manage group work – there is a quick turn around in a composite class.</p>	<p>No not really. I do a lot of whole class lessons and because I have a lot of support from CAs my teaching is the same. There are some problem areas –like P.E. when I don't have any support – but that's just how it is.</p>	<p>I work much more in groups/ pairs. It means I have to constantly change my pairs. I start a lesson at a general level ten pull out groups for differentiated work. CA can withdraw a group to work on an aspect already agreed and identified. But when I have the class on my own it means that I have to work through each group and even when I am with a group my eyes and ears are on the rest of the class.</p>
<p><i>If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?</i></p>			
<p><i>If you were to have a class of less than 20 would you change any aspects of your teaching methodology?</i></p>	<p>I would use a lot more discussion – more technology – using the CA for these practical class. More activity based work for the children. I see big advantages to having a CA in this scenario</p>	<p>I would be able to spend more time with individuals and groups. I would probably feel less tired as I would have less preparation and marking!</p>	
<p><i>What would be the impact for you, and</i></p>	<p>There are times when I would like the class just</p>	<p>It would be really good to have someone all the time -</p>	<p>Never had this - I would always want</p>

<i>your class if you had a full time classroom assistant?</i>	by myself.	behaviour could improve. There would be less time spent on organising/ stopping and starting etc.	someone to help even with the administration tasks
<i>Which would you rather have and why – a small class – less than 20 pupils with no classroom assistant support or a class of 30 with full time classroom assistant support? Please elaborate</i>	Small class – because I spend a lot of time explaining to CA what I want them to do. Sometimes I have to redo things because they haven't been done the way I wanted them to be. So definitely the small class without CA support	I think it would be the small class. Although I do like having another adult with me.	I would like a class of 25 with full time CA support!
<i>Does the age/stage of the class make any difference to your answer to the question above? If so can you tell me why?</i>	I would think P1 and P2 would benefit from CA – personal care issues. But P3 up no I still think a small class with CA support would be better than a big class.	Probably early stages classes need a CA no matter how big or small the class is	I have not really had experience of working with infants. P7s would benefit from being able to do practical activities.
<i>ANY OTHER COMMENTS</i>	Just let me know when the writing up is finished!	No thanks.	

### APPENDIX 3 Interview questions classroom assistant analysis grid

<i>Question</i>	A	B	C
<i>How long have you been a classroom assistant?</i>	11 / 12 years	About 3 years	6 years
<i>How long in this school?</i>	11 / 12 years	1 year	6 years
<i>What year group/stage do you prefer to work with?</i>	I have no real preference – each year you have different scenarios and different problems to solve. You get more banter with older ones and to the younger ones you are more like a mum	All stages - no preference	Enjoying working with middle and upper stages. I worked for a while with younger children and at first it was a challenge because I had to break down tasks to small steps – right to simplest of things. This helped me though when I went back up the school to help children who were struggling a bit
<i>What do you like best/least about your present classes?</i>	The composite class means that I often have time with a small group of P4 or P5s. There's nothing I don't like- Language –I like working on maths because I know there is always a right or wrong answer!	I like working directly with the children I know I have to do admin but it is not my favourite – also language tasks	I love working in maths The least good thing is the size of the class.
<i>Do you ever feel stressed under pressure in class?</i>	No	No not really	I just get on with it – Occasionally I feel that I have maybe overstepped the mark – should I have done that etc. But I have worked with Mrs L for 2 years now and we have a really good working relationship – we just know what the other needs – its almost a bit psychic. We have clicked really well. Sometimes I know that time is short to complete tasks. I sometimes feel that I spend too long getting the basis of something established with the children and I feel that maybe we should have been further through the task – especially if I have been working with the group out of the class. I work a lot with children who need additional support
<i>What do you think are the main causes of these stressful feelings?</i>			

<i>Tell me about your experiences, if any, of supporting in a small class – fewer than 20.</i>	Never – I have always been in mid range sized classes	I have only ever been in bigger classes	No – only if half the class are off sick smallest has been 24
<i>Tell me about your experiences, if any of larger classes – 30+.</i>	I have worked with classes of 29 ish. I spend my time in a range of classes during the week. I work with at least 3 classes – I work in the Art room with lots of different teachers. I also have to do general photocopying. So I am not based in one class for a day or week.	I have supported big classes generally – never really been in classes with less than about 28	Most of the classes are big. The composite class is different you tend to be working with the separate year groups – but each class is different. Some smaller classes can be more work than bigger classes – just depends on the mix. Every day in every class is different.
<i>Are you aware of any school policy/rationale for the allocation of such support? If so can you elaborate please?</i>	No – we read lots of information etc . HT likes to make sure that wherever there are specific needs that support is in place.	No – not really. I think here every class has CA support. I know we have to balance our time so we are working outside at playtimes and lunchtimes	I know that if you have children with specific needs then you might go to that class. Our contracts are such that we don't know which class or classes we will be working with until we come back after the summer holidays. This is a real frustration – even not knowing what hours we might be working. I have an annual appraisal. I didn't say a specific age groups. I like working with children with ASN and also would like to work with the art specialist – not English
<i>Classroom assistants need to be managed – deployed/ guided/informed of lesson content/ brought up to speed/date with the work of the class/group or individual - how does this happen in the classes you work?</i>	She always tells me in the morning. She has it written up on the board what the class is doing. For photocopying a teacher might say she had left photocopying beside the machine.	I have been with Mrs R all year and I know her routines and what she needs me to do. I check her daily task board especially if I come into class after breaks when she has already started lessons. She often leaves me a wee note of photocopying or display work she needs me to do. Also when its art or something with a lot of resources needed she catches me and we have a quick chat	Mrs L catches me at the end of the day so that I know what is on for the next day. Sometimes if its been a particularly busy day and we miss each other she sees me the next morning to bring me up to speed. I also check the whiteboard. If when I come in I don't know what to do I do some filing if she is teaching and when she has a minute then I check in with her. I seem to be able to go in and sense that she doesn't have time to speak to me. We have worked well and have a really good relationship.
<i>Do the teachers you work with deploy you in different ways? Can you elaborate?</i>	Yes – Mrs H she uses me for a range of tasks - mainly working with groups – hearing	Yes – I work in 2 classes – but mainly in this one. In the other class I work only on maths with	Both teachers use me to support maths – group based activities

	<p>reading, helping with maths, making sure that anybody who might be struggling with their task is managing. In the P5 class I help out with art – 27 children in the class – more ‘dirty sort of work. Practical work. It’s the same with the P6 class – I take groups up to work on clay modroc.</p>	<p>small groups of children. In here I do a lot more varied tasks</p>	
<p><i>Do you think the children benefit when they have classroom assistant support? In what ways – can you tell me more?</i></p>	<p>Most definitely – In the 4/5 class the teacher does a lot of group work so if she is teaching one group then I can support the other groups. I know I am not a teacher but they sort of see me as like one. I can make sure that they are kept going. My biggest fear is that if I try to explain something it is the wrong way - teaching has changed such a lot since my days at school. If I am not sure I just go and ask the teacher. I am never stuck. I feel its good for the children to know that I don’t always have the answer</p>	<p>Yes – they can get help sooner if they are stuck with something. I can give them a lot more attention. I think they like to talk to me on a different level – they’ll confide in me when they might not with their teacher. I also know what has been happening at lunchtimes and playtimes – who has been getting on or not – what games they have been playing. Some of the children with behaviour problems I can help keep them on track.</p>	<p>Yes –definitely – especially when they are working in groups. CA can help them rather than let them become distracted and behaviour might deteriorated</p>
<p><i>Do you think the teachers benefit when they have classroom assistant support? In what ways – can you tell me more?</i></p>	<p>Yes – for doing extra tasks – playing games with smaller groups – fraction games etc. Filing, photocopying. Displaying children’s work. I try to do this on the afternoons when I am not in class</p>	<p>Yes – I help with sorting resources, materials, displaying children’s work. I can also take individuals or small groups out to the HT for praise – recognising achievements. I help with general classroom organisation, photocopying. Also when the teacher is teaching I can make sure that certain children do not interrupt – I can see to their needs</p>	<p>I think it takes some pressure off them. They can leave the CA to work with a group and she can then focus on the children she is working with. I also think we know the children better than the teachers as we see them outside at playtimes and lunchtimes. We can forewarn the teacher of any flashpoints that might have happened. We can also pick up on wee behavioural issues when the teacher is focused on her teaching. We don’t see everything –though we tell the children we can!</p>
<p><i>If you could change one thing about your job, what would it be?</i></p>	<p>I like my job – I am in early – I don’t have to be but this means I can get up to speed with what’s needed doing. I didn’t like being in 4 classes in a day. I prefer to work all morning or all</p>	<p>I would like a permanent job rather than as it is just now I am employed term to term.</p>	<p>I wouldn’t do any filing, copying, laminating - I want to spend time working with the children. Or if we had more hours after school then the photocopying filing etc could be done</p>

	afternoon with a class.		then
<i>Does the age/stage of the class make any difference to your answer to the question above? If so can you tell me why?</i>	n/a	no	n/a
<i>ANY OTHER COMMENTS</i>	In the playground I let the children let off steam but in the classroom I am much more strict. I have had some training to help working with the child with ADHD but its not easy. I know where he feels under stressed – like drama so I just take him out of the lesson and we go and do something else. But it’s not easy.		

## APPENDIX 4 Focus Group – Pupils analysis grid

Question	A	B	C
<p><i>Theme 1 Pupils previous experiences of having classroom assistant support - Mrs Y works in your classroom this year – have you had other classroom assistants lets say when you were in Primary 4 or 3 for example?</i></p>	<p>In P1 and P2 we didn't have any CLASSROOM ASSISTANT. But they were around and helped with people who had been hurt in the playground. They popped in and helped out if they had nothing else to do. In P1 and P2 they had parent volunteer helpers who came in and put pictures on the wall. I didn't have a classroom assistant in P1, 2, 3, 4.</p>	<p>We had CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS in most of our classes. Were they classroom assistants or students. I think we had mums as well. They couldn't clearly remember a time when they didn't. Though some said that they didn't have just one CLASSROOM ASSISTANT and some years they only had some CLASSROOM ASSISTANT support</p>	<p>Yes they had had CLASSROOM ASSISTANT support in previous years. Some remembered that in P1, P2 and some in P3 did not have. All agreed that they had had CLASSROOM ASSISTANT support most years. I think we didn't have in P1.</p>
<p><i>Theme 2 Pupils' perceptions of the job of classroom assistant - their tasks and responsibilities. You have classroom assistant in your class this year - what would you say is her job, what does she do, what is she there to do?</i></p>	<p>Help us, cut paper, copy things, sets stuff up for the teacher with anything, displays stuff on the wall. Just basically helps the teacher with anything. Helps the children. They give advice, Like strategies for problem tackling. If the teacher has a group then the CLASSROOM ASSISTANT has the other group. Help you when you are stuck, They can give ideas when you are doing your writing. CLASSROOM ASSISTANT is not responsible for your behaviour. – Started a brief discussion on personal responsibility for own behaviour. Teacher, CLASSROOM ASSISTANT and self – all responsible. But 'your behaviour has to go through you first'. We are responsible for our own behaviour. Who manages behaviour? – The teacher or headteacher is responsible for dealing with misbehaviour. CLASSROOM ASSISTANT would deal with misbehaviour. But she would tell the</p>	<p>Help the teacher, help the children. Look after us in the playground. Take us for Star Writer to the Headteacher. They put out paints, paper and tidy up afterwards. They also put pictures up on the wall. They help us when we are stuck and make sure we behave in the corridors.</p>	<p>Do all the filing for the teacher. helping you if you are stuck. She can take a group away for maths. Taking you out for maths group work. Decoration and display. She comes on trips. She prepares walls for the new session. Puts up notices. In the classroom and outside the classroom. Spotting trouble makers. They work outside the classroom in the playground and in the lunch room.</p>

	<p>teacher. The classroom assistant would take the child out of the room. No she can't do that. It's not really her job. The classroom assistant is really just there to help they are not really in charge. But they can give us into trouble .. Not the CLASSROOM Assistant's job to 'give us into trouble' CLASSROOM ASSISTANT not really in charge. The teacher is. If it was a serious thing then the teacher would need to be involved.</p>		
<p><i>Theme 3 – Teacher – pupils' perceptions of their job, tasks and responsibilities. Mrs X is your teacher what would you say is her job, what does she do, what is she there to do? Is it the same or different from Mrs Y?</i></p>	<p>A CLASSROOM ASSISTANT works in lots of different classes. A teacher only works in one. (brief discussion about Visiting Spec and Secondary teachers). The helpers - CLASSROOM Assistants help outside in the playground and in the lunchroom. (children here referred to CLASSROOM Assistants as 'helpers') The teacher has more responsibility, she's higher up, is more important. She has to explain the work. The CLASSROOM ASSISTANT helps you if you are stuck. The teacher is responsible for planning what you are to learn and the CLASSROOM ASSISTANT helps you learn it.</p>	<p>Teacher teaches and CLASSROOM ASSISTANT watches what she does so she can help us when we are doing our work. Teacher is in charge. She tells us and the CLASSROOM ASSISTANT what to do. Teacher is different from CLASSROOM ASSISTANT she does the teaching and marking. CLASSROOM ASSISTANT helps us when we are stuck and so does the teacher but the CLASSROOM ASSISTANT has to check with the teacher how to help us.</p>	<p>Teaches, relies on CLASSROOM ASSISTANT, helps children, Teacher has to do everything if there is no CLASSROOM ASSISTANT. Teacher is in charge of the behaviour. Mostly the teacher. CLASSROOM ASSISTANT does it outside. CLASSROOM ASSISTANT does it if you are working in groups. CLASSROOM ASSISTANT gives warnings – and uses the same rules and rewards as the class teacher. Sometimes the teacher takes children out of the room and when that happens the CLASSROOM ASSISTANT is in charge of the class. Teacher does a different job than the CLASSROOM ASSISTANT but teacher can do all the jobs the CLASSROOM ASSISTANT can do.</p>
<p><i>Theme 4 Benefits and drawbacks for pupils Do you think the children benefit when you have classroom assistant support or not? In what ways – can you tell me more. Do you think you get more help, more attention? Does she make sure you don't</i></p>	<p>There's always someone else to talk to. There is always an adult to help you if you are stuck. Fewer interruptions. It's like having a 2<sup>nd</sup> teacher. You would get more attention. Sometimes that's a good thing and sometimes it's bad. Sometimes it's just an</p>	<p>It's good to have a CLASSROOM ASSISTANT. We have a big class and we can get quicker help when we have a CLASSROOM ASSISTANT. You don't have to feel like you are stuck because you can get help. She also makes</p>	<p>The teacher doesn't have to do lots of stuff. The teacher can focus on her teaching – you don't have to wait if you are stuck. The CLASSROOM ASSISTANT can watch us if the teacher has a meeting and she can give us warning etc.</p>



<p><i>muck about?</i></p>	<p>interruption –she asks you how you are getting on. You get caught easier. It’s bad for me! Its good for the CLASSROOM ASSISTANT she would get the credit for it. It would be better for the teacher.</p>	<p>sure we have all the equipment we need for art and we don’t waste time getting stuff out. She does lots of tidying up as well. She makes sure you are listening when the teacher is talking</p>	<p>You can’t get away with anything when the classroom assistant is there as well. Helps us with our behaviour.</p>
<p><i>Theme 5 Teacher – pupils’ perceptions of different teaching methods, approaches and styles Can you think about times in class when you don’t have a classroom assistant? Does your teacher do things differently? Do you do anything differently? Now think about times when there is a classroom assistant. Does your teacher do things differently? Do you do anything differently?</i></p>	<p>She doesn’t have to be watching the other half of the class when she is teaching one group. She can get a rest. She doesn’t have to go out and leave the class alone. The classroom assistants can fetch resources. There was a brief discussion of school hierarchy – HT in charge of the Teachers, they in turn are in charge of CLASSROOM Assistants but CLASSROOM Assistants are not in charge of the pupils. After a discussion they agreed that all the above were in charge of the pupils.</p>	<p>No not really. The teacher just does all the same things even when a CLASSROOM ASSISTANT isn’t there. She sometimes does more stopping and starting when she is on her own. So maybe there is some time wasting. We need to wait for help for longer and sometimes when she is busy with a group and you are waiting you chat and muck about a bit. It was easier to check with a CLASSROOM ASSISTANT if you were stuck because it was their job to help you when you were. It was harder with the teacher because she was always busy.</p>	<p>She works with groups when there are 2 adults. The teacher can tell the CLASSROOM ASSISTANT to look after a group but if she’s on her own you sometimes need to wait for help. The teacher tells the classroom assistant to do things so it’s a lot quicker and easier for her. CLASSROOM ASSISTANT takes a lot of weight off the teacher’s shoulders. If there’s not a classroom assistant we sometimes have to leave things not finished and we leave it for another time like for science activities we need a CLASSROOM ASSISTANT. When we go out on trips we always need a CLASSROOM ASSISTANT with us because we have a big class.</p>
<p><i>Theme 6 Class size/adult pupil ratios - – pupils’ perceptions of benefit and drawbacks of smaller class sizes and/or better adult/pupil ratios. Past experiences of large and small classes You are in a big class this year. Have you ever been in a smaller class – 20 or less? Talk about the differences.</i></p>	<p>None had been in large classes – over 30. One had been in a class of fewer and 20. We will be next year. I’ve been in one of 30 before. In P1 and 2 we always had 22. I had one class with 19. Small class would be better because you might learn more because there is less people and you could get more attention and more help. You would have more space. Less noise. But you could have noisy people in a small class and quiet people in a big class. Teacher can get round to help quicker and more</p>	<p>Most of the children had been in big classes. A few had been in a smaller class but they had a CLASSROOM ASSISTANT. On the whole they felt that a smaller class would be better for the teacher because it would be quieter and she would have fewer children to control. It would be easier in the ICT suite as they would get more time on the computers etc. A small class might mean that you would have fewer friends. You could get more time with the teacher in a smaller class.</p>	<p>One child was in a small class of 13 in P1. It was too small for a CLASSROOM ASSISTANT. It was much easier for everybody the teacher, the children. You get help and attention really quickly. Another had been in a class of 17 with a CLASSROOM ASSISTANT. It was both good and bad. You got a lot of attention but sometimes it was bad because you couldn’t chat to your friends. Class of 24 – it was about the same as being in a bigger class. Not much different. In a</p>

	<p>often.</p> <p>Big class – so you can ask a partner if you are stuck. If you are doing something wrong you won't get spotted. Cause there are so many people. You meet more people in a bigger class. There was a brief discussion of the drawbacks of composite class.</p>		<p>small class you get a lot more work done, make more progress, more jobs done in a smaller class. More children means fewer jobs done – because you have to wait longer when you are stuck in a bigger class.</p> <p>One suggested that if you worked in pairs that you could work faster because if one got stuck the other could help.</p> <p>Another suggested that trips would be better because you would get longer at activities because there would be fewer groups.</p> <p>More chances to learn more things and have more fun at more things.</p> <p>In practical classes like science you'd get more experiments done and you'd not need as much equipment. Smaller classes mean less equipment. Smaller classes would mean schools would need more classrooms. There might be a waiting list for new people coming into the area.</p> <p>It easier to have friends in a bigger class. You have more people to choose from. Sports and team games would be better in the bigger class.</p>
<p><i>What would you rather have - a) a big class with a CLASSROOM ASSISTANT</i>  <i>b) a small class with no CLASSROOM ASSISTANT</i></p>	<p>Small class – sounds better. The teacher would be happier. She would be able to go round everyone.</p> <p>Big class with a classroom assistant– it would be like half and half attention. Ratio 1-15 but in a small class it would be 1-20.</p> <p>P7 would be better with a smaller class and no CLASSROOM ASSISTANT. They are older and less likely to need a CLASSROOM ASSISTANT.</p> <p>It's to do with how much the teacher can</p>	<p>They felt a smaller class would be best but didn't want it to be too small because they liked having lots of friends to choose from. Big classes meant that the classroom was crowded and often noisier. A small class would mean the teacher could get round everyone.</p>	<p>A) 3 BIG CLASS WITH CLASSROOM ASSISTANT</p> <p>B) 5 SMALL CLASS WITHOUT CLASSROOM ASSISTANT</p> <p>Small class for learning  Big class for social experience  But friends can help you learn.</p> <p>Discussion on using out of class times for making friendships.  Your friends can distract you when you are learning.  Small classes would be better for trips.</p>

	<p>handle. P7s would probably want a small class without a classroom assistant. Their behaviour should but not always be better than P1s. P7's can think of more strategies. P1s need help. They can't write, or tie their shoelaces and getting changed for gym. You get to socialise with more people. In a big class some would be at a higher level and some would be lower and the classroom assistant could help with them.</p> <p><b>CLASSROOM ASSISTANT</b></p> <p>Assistants would do a different job in P1 than in P7.</p> <p>Discussion of range of ability in classes and how the <b>CLASSROOM ASSISTANT</b> can help.</p> <p>Best case scenario would be a small class with a <b>CLASSROOM ASSISTANT</b>. Classroom assistant could give you help when the teacher is marking the work. Kids get more attention and the teacher would find it easier. You'd get more attention.</p> <p>Easier for the teacher cause there is less children to handle. Only one child wanted the bigger class so that he could 'hide' in the class.</p> <p>In a composite class you meet kids from other year groups.</p>		<p>Small classes can help you learn better and more.</p>
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Grid 1 EXEMPLAR OF A TEACHER OBSERVATION FREQUENCY GRID

Data Analysis Frequency	Teacher without classroom assistant										
	Timed Intervals										
Theme	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	total
Whole class lesson/teaching											
Group lesson/teaching											
One to one teaching											
Pair working											
Small group discussion with T/CA											
Small group discussion without T/CA											
Individual seat work											
Active learning/play											
<b>Teacher activity</b>											
Organising/ directing groups to tasks											
setting up/ out resources materials											
Marking work											
Active listening											
observing pupils											
observing CA or other adults											
Scan pupils/classroom											
Circulating											
<b>Responds</b>											
Give support											
explain											
praise											
Smile											
give permission											
encourage											
Intervene											
active listening											
social chatting											
giving feedback											
respond to care needs											
<b>Initiates</b>											
give support											
explain											
praise											
Smile											
give permission											
encourage											
check progress with task											
Question to check understanding											
Question to challenge and extend thinking											
social chatting											
giving feedback											
<b>Manages behaviour</b>											
bring back to task											
physical presence											
stop work to remind ch re behaviour											
non verbal command											
remove from room											
ask for quiet											
reprimand											
deal with interruption											
Intervene											
<b>teacher interaction with classroom assistant</b>											
<b>Responds</b>											
Give instruction on tasks to be done											
Guidance/advice on possible problem areas											
Information on deployment											
Respond to request for help											
Discuss pupils progress with task											
Discuss CA progress with task											
Discuss what to do next											
<b>Initiates</b>											
Inform of plan for lesson											
Give instruction on tasks to be done											
Guidance/advice on possible problem areas											
Information on deployment											
Share information about pupil management											
Share observations on pupil behaviour											
Discuss pupils progress with task											
Discuss CA progress with task											
Discuss what to do next											
<b>Manages</b>											
Observe											
Monitor											
Redirects											
Intervenes											

Grid 2 TEACHER OBSERVATION FREQUENCY GRID- WORKED EXAMPLE

Data Analysis Frequency	Teacher A											
	No. 1 without classroom assistant											total
Theme	Timed intervals											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Whole class lesson/teaching								√				1
Group lesson/teaching	√	√	√	√	√	√	√					7
One to one teaching												
Pair working												
Small group discussion with T/CA												
Small group discussion without T/CA												
Individual seat work									√	√		2
Active learning/play												
<b>Teacher activity</b>												
Organising/ directing groups to tasks												
setting up/ out resources materials												
Marking work												
Active listening												
observing pupils									√			1
observing CA or other adults												
Scan pupils/classroom	√	√	√		√	√			√	√		7
Circulating									√	√		2
<b>Responds</b>												
Give support			√	√								2
Explain		√										1
praise		√						√				2
Smile												
give permission					√		√					2
encourage	√				√							2
Intervene												
active listening	√									√		2
social chatting												
giving feedback												
respond to care needs												
<b>Initiates</b>												
give support			√	√								2
explain	√√											2
praise												
Smile			√	√								2
give permission	√	√										2
encourage												
check progress with task									√	√		2
Question to check understanding	√			√	√							3
Question to challenge and extend thinking	√			√		√				√		4
social chatting												
giving feedback												
<b>Manages behaviour</b>												
bring back to task		√						√√				3
physical presence												
stop work to remind ch re behaviour												
non verbal command		√			√√							3
remove from room												
ask for quiet			√						√			2
reprimand												
deal with interruption												
Intervene												
<b>teacher interaction with classroom assistant</b>	N/A											
<b>Responds</b>												
Give instruction on tasks to be done												
Guidance/advice on possible problem areas												
Information on deployment												
Respond to request for help												
Discuss pupils progress with task												
Discuss CA progress with task												
Discuss what to do next												
<b>Initiates</b>												
Inform of plan for lesson												
Give instruction on tasks to be done												
Guidance/advice on possible problem areas												
Information on deployment												
Share information about pupil management												
Share observations on pupil behaviour												
Discuss pupils progress with task												
Discuss CA progress with task												
Discuss what to do next												
<b>Manages</b>												
Observe												
Monitor												
Redirects												
Intervenes												

Grid 3 EXEMPLAR OF A CA OBSERVATION FREQUENCY GRID

Data Analysis Frequency	Classroom assistant										
	Timed Intervals										Total
Theme	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Whole class lesson/teaching											
Group lesson/teaching											
One to one teaching											
Pair working											
Small group discussion with T/CA											
Small group discussion without T/CA											
Individual seat work											
Active learning/play											
<b>CA activity</b>											
Supervising individual/group activity											
Observing individual/group											
Talking with individual/group											
Escorting individual/group to work out of room											
supporting pupils on ICT tasks											
Playing with individual/group											
Observing teaching											
<b>Responds</b>											
Give support											
Explain											
praise											
Smile											
give permission											
encourage											
intervene											
active listening											
social chatting											
giving feedback											
Respond to care needs											
Respond to request for help											
Refer pupil to teacher											
<b>Initiates</b>											
give support											
explain											
praise											
Smile											
give permission											
encourage											
check progress with task											
Question to check understanding											
Question to challenge and extend thinking											
social chatting											
giving feedback											
<b>Manages behaviour</b>											
bring back to task											
Non verbal command											
Intervene											
ask for quiet											
reprimand											
Active listening											
Physical presence											
Deal with interruption											
Refer to teacher											
Remove from room											
<b>Teacher interaction with classroom assistant</b>											
Taking instructions from the teacher											
Referring to teacher for advice, further instructions											
Referring to teachers plans											
Recording observations											
Housekeeping tasks – tidying, cleaning up spills											
Preparation of resources materials											
Share information on pupil management											
Share observations on pupil behaviour											
Discuss pupils progress with task											
Discuss what to do next											
Observe teacher											

## Grid 4 EXEMPLAR OF A CA OBSERVATION FREQUENCY GRID – WORKED EXAMPLE

Data Analysis Frequency	Classroom assistant										
	Timed Intervals										
Theme	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Whole class lesson/teaching	√	√	√								3
Group lesson/teaching											
One to one teaching											
Pair working											
Small group discussion with T/CA											
Small group discussion without T/CA											
Individual seat work				√	√	√	√	√	√	√	7
Active learning/play											
<b>CA activity</b>											
Supervising individual/group activity											
Observing individual/group	√	√			√						3
Talking with individual/group	√			√		√	√	√			5
Escorting individual/group to work out of room											
supporting pupils on ICT tasks											
Playing with individual/group											
Observing teaching											
<b>Responds</b>											
Give support	√		√	√				√		√	5
Explain		√		√		√		√	√	√	6
praise											
Smile		√		√		√					3
give permission											
encourage											
intervene											
active listening											
social chatting											
giving feedback											
Respond to care needs											
Respond to request for help											
Refer pupil to teacher											
<b>Initiates</b>											
give support	√		√								2
explain						√	√	√	√		4
praise											
Smile											
give permission											
encourage	√		√					√	√	√	5
check progress with task	√	√				√	√		√		5
Question to check understanding											
Question to challenge and extend thinking											
social chatting											
giving feedback											
<b>Manages behaviour</b>											
bring back to task		√									1
Non verbal command											
Intervene											
ask for quiet											
reprimand											
Active listening											
Physical presence											
Deal with interruption											
Refer to teacher											
Remove from room											
<b>Teacher interaction with classroom assistant</b>											
Taking instructions from the teacher	√	√									2
Referring to teacher for advice, further instructions											
Referring to teachers plans											
Recording observations											
Housekeeping tasks – tidying, cleaning up spills											
Preparation of resources materials											
Share information on pupil management											
Share observations on pupil behaviour											
Discuss pupils progress with task											
Discuss what to do next										√	1
Observe teacher											

Matrix 1 TEACHER A WITH AND WITHOUT CA SUPPORT

<b>Data Analysis Frequency</b>		
<b>Teacher A Combined</b>		
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Teacher alone</b>	<b>Teacher with Classroom Assistant</b>
Whole class lesson/teaching	10	5
Group lesson/teaching	26	11
One to one teaching	0	0
Pair working	0	0
Small group discussion with T/CA	0	3
Small group discussion without T/CA	0	0
Individual seat work	10	13
Active learning/play	4	0
<b>Teacher activity</b>		
Organising/ directing groups to tasks	6	7
Setting up/ out resources materials	6	1
Marking work	2	0
Active listening	0	0
observing pupils	5	0
observing CA or other adults	0	0
Scan pupils/classroom	31	6
Circulating	12	0
<b>Responds</b>		
Give support	6	8
explain	9	10
praise	5	5
Smile	0	0
give permission	8	1
encourage	2	0
intervene	1	1
Active listening	7	3
social chatting	0	3
Giving feedback	2	2
respond to care needs	0	3
<b>Initiates</b>		
give support	10	10
explain	11	11
praise	2	2
Smile	2	0
give permission	3	0
encourage	0	4
check progress with task	11	1
question to check understanding	7	9
question to challenge and extend thinking	14	11
social chatting	0	3
Giving feedback	7	6
<b>Manages behaviour</b>		
bring back to task	15	10
physical presence	0	0
stop work to remind ch re behaviour	4	4
non verbal command	4	0
remove from room	0	0
ask for quiet	12	7
reprimand	3	0
deal with interruption	1	0
intervene	0	0



Matrix 2 ALL TEACHERS WITH AND WITHOUT CA SUPPORT

Data Analysis Frequency All Schools								
teacher on own (minus - )	teacher with classroom assistant (plus + )							
Theme	A-	A+	B-	B+	C-	C+	Total -	Total +
Whole class lesson/teaching	10	5	25	25	21	26	56	56
Group lesson/teaching	26	11	10	4	10	12	46	27
One to one teaching	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pair working	0	0	3	0	4	0	7	0
Small group discussion with T/CA	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Small group discussion without T/CA	0	0	5	0	0	0	5	0
Individual seat work	10	13	5	21	15	9	30	43
Active learning/play	4	0	2	0	0	0	6	0
<b>Teacher activity</b>								
Organising/ directing groups to tasks	6	7	7	4	6	4	19	15
Setting up/ out resources materials	6	1	7	1	11	0	24	2
Marking work	2	0	0	1	9	4	11	5
Active listening	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
observing pupils	5	0	3	1	0	0	8	1
observing CA or other adults	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Scan pupils/classroom	31	6	16	2	20	6	57	14
Circulating	12	0	5	16	5	12	22	28
<b>Responds</b>								
Give support	6	8	8	7	16	10	30	25
explain	9	10	6	9	4	5	19	24
praise	5	5	0	9	5	5	10	19
Smile	0	0	3	0	2	3	5	2
give permission	8	1	3	1	6	1	17	3
encourage	2	0	1	3	0	2	3	5
intervene	1	1	10	2	4	2	15	5
Active listening	7	3	0	2	0	0	7	5
social chatting	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	4
Giving feedback	2	2	3	4	6	0	11	6
respond to care needs	0	3	1	0	0	0	1	3
<b>Initiates</b>								
give support	10	10	5	10	16	7	31	27
explain	11	11	23	17	17	12	51	40
praise	2	2	6	3	12	4	20	9
Smile	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
give permission	3	0	0	0	2	0	5	0
encourage	0	4	3	0	0	0	3	4
check progress with task	11	1	11	7	8	8	30	16
question to check understanding	7	9	8	9	17	7	32	25
question to challenge and extend thinking	14	11	1	6	11	17	36	34
social chatting	0	3	0	2	4	0	4	5
Giving feedback	7	6	0	10	12	8	19	24
<b>Manages behaviour</b>								
bring back to task	15	10	16	19	25	5	56	34
physical presence	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
stop work to remind ch re behaviour	4	4	20	11	2	0	26	15
non verbal command	4	0	0	2	7	1	11	3
remove from room	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ask for quiet	12	7	16	10	12	2	40	19
reprimand	3	0	13	7	2	1	18	8
deal with interruption	1	0	7	0	4	2	12	2
Intervene	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

## Matrix 3 ACITIVITIES - ALL CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS

<b>Data Analysis Frequency</b>	<b>Classroom assistant</b>	<b>combined A B and C</b>		
<b>Theme</b>		<b>Total A</b>	<b>Total B</b>	<b>Total C</b>
Whole class lesson/teaching		23	34	22
Group lesson/teaching		29		13
One to one teaching				
Pair working				
Small group discussion with T/CA			1	
Small group discussion without T/CA				
Individual seat work			15	15
Active learning/play				
<b>Total</b>		<b>52</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>CA activity</b>				
Supervising individual/group activity		27		16
Observing individual/group			14	3
Talking with individual/group		1	5	1
Escorting individual/group to work out of room		9	2	
supporting pupils on ICT tasks		1		
Playing with individual/group		4		
Observing teaching		5	2	13
<b>Total</b>		<b>47</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Responds</b>				
Give support		9	14	6
Explain		12	13	7
praise		6	3	
Smile			10	
give permission		2	2	2
encourage		4	1	2
intervene		5	3	4
active listening			2	
social chatting		3	1	
giving feedback				
Respond to care needs		5		
Respond to request for help				
Refer pupil to teacher		1		
<b>Total</b>		<b>47</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Initiates</b>				
give support		3	4	6
explain		1	6	4
praise			1	4
Smile		2		
give permission				
encourage		6	5	6
Active listening		4		5
check progress with task		12	9	1
Question to check understanding		4		3
Question to challenge and extend thinking				
social chatting		3	2	
giving feedback				4
<b>Total</b>		<b>35</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Manages behaviour</b>				
bring back to task		6	8	8
Non verbal command		3	2	2
Intervene		3		
ask for quiet		3	1	
Reprimand				2
Physical presence			9	16
Deal with interruption			1	
Refer to teacher				
Remove from room				
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Teacher interaction with classroom assistant</b>				
Taking instructions from the teacher		9	6	5
Referring to teacher for advice, further instructions		6		1
Referring to teachers plans		1	1	2
Recording observations				
Housekeeping tasks – tidying, cleaning up spills		5	16	3
Preparation of resources materials		2	8	12
Share information on pupil management		1	1	
Share observations on pupil behaviour		4	1	3
Discuss pupils progress with task		2	2	2
Discuss what to do next		5	1	
Observe teacher		6	6	6
<b>Total</b>		<b>41</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>34</b>

Matrix 4 ALL TEACHERS AND CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS INTERACTION

<b>Data Analysis –teacher classroom assistant interaction</b>			<b>all schools totals</b>	
Schools	A	B	C	Total
<b>Responds</b>				
Give instruction on tasks to be done	2	0	0	2
Guidance/advice on possible problem areas	0	0	0	0
Information on deployment	4	0	0	4
Respond to request for help	0	0	1	1
Discuss pupils progress with task	2	0	0	2
Discuss CA progress with task	1	0	0	1
Discuss what to do next	1	0	1	2
<b>Initiates</b>				
Inform of plan for lesson	4	4	3	11
Give instruction on tasks to be done	6	2	6	14
Guidance/advice on possible problem areas	1	3	1	5
Information on deployment	3	7	4	14
Share information about pupil management	2	0	0	2
Share observations on pupil behaviour	1	1	1	3
Discuss pupils progress with task	3	2	3	8
Discuss CA progress with task	0	3	0	3
Discuss what to do next	2	0	2	4
<b>Manages</b>				
Observe	4	1	0	5
Monitor	0	0	0	0
Redirects	0	0	0	0
Intervenes	0	0	0	0

## APPENDIX 13 PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT FOR HEADTEACHER



UNIVERSITY  
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GLASGOW

June Stewart  
Headteacher  
Hazlehead School  
Provost Graham Avenue  
Aberdeen  
AB15 8HB

**14/08/2006**

**Name of Researcher:** June Stewart

**Course Title:** EdD, Faculty of Education

**Title of Project:** Classroom Assistants and their impact in primary schools teaching approaches and learning experiences, and adult/pupil ratios,

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Dear

I am entering my 4<sup>th</sup> year of the above course and am now required to undertake a research project. My field of interest is the impact on teaching strategies and learning experiences of presence and contribution of the classroom assistant in primary school classes. This is to be viewed in the context of the class size/adult/pupil ratio debate. In my role as an educational researcher my aim is to extend knowledge and understanding in this area of educational activity from the perspective of the learners, educators and policy makers.

My research project plan is to undertake a number of classroom observations in one and perhaps two classes in each of the primary schools in Hazlehead ASG. I have devised observation data collection schedules which will help me gather data on adult and pupil interaction and behaviour. These observations will be followed up by one to one interviews with the teachers and classroom assistants being observed. And finally I intend to establish a small focus group of pupils from the classes observed in each school in order to gain the child' perspective of classroom experience with and without classroom assistant support.

My research project is underpinned by an ethical commitment to respect for the person. I therefore have responsibility to carry out my research project with respect to those taking part. I will safeguard their anonymity and the confidentiality of any data gathered. I will obtain the informed consent of all taking part in the project and in the case of the children involved this will include their parental consent.

I am formally seeking your approval to undertake this research project in your school. I have also written to Head of Service seeking his permission.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

June Stewart



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**Faculty of Education**

***CONSENT FORM***

**Title of Project:** *Classroom Assistants and their pedagogical impact in primary school classes*

**Name of Researcher:** *June Stewart*

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I consent to interviews being audio taped. I will be referred to by pseudonym and will not be identified by name in any publication arising from the research.
4. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

<b>Name of Participant</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>

<b>Name of Person giving consent</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>

(if different from participant, e.g. Parent)

<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>



**UNIVERSITY**  
*of*  
**GLASGOW**

**Name of Researcher:** June Stewart

**Course Title:** EdD, Faculty of Education

**Title of Project:** Classroom Assistants and their influence on the lived experiences of pupils and teachers.

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My name is Mrs Stewart. I am a part time student at Glasgow University and I am doing a project on Classroom Assistants. I am trying to find out what happens in classrooms where a classroom assistant is in the class with a teacher.

The purpose of me writing to you is to ask for your help with my project. If you would like to take part, I will need you and your teacher to let me visit your classroom and watch what happens. I will take notes about what the teacher and classroom assistants do as well as what the children in the class do.

I am really interested in what young people think about what happens in classrooms so I will also want to listen to a small group of pupils from your class in some talk sessions. I will use a recorder to help me remember what is said in these sessions. Your teacher will choose who is to be part of this group.

Only my supervisor and I will hear our discussions and see the notes I take when I visit your class. The tapes and my notes will be locked away safely. Neither your name nor your school's name will appear in my final report.

If you have any questions about this project you should talk to your teacher who can contact me or my supervisor or the Research Office at Glasgow University for you.

If you would like to take part in my project and your parent or guardian agrees please sign your name and get your parent/guardian to sign it too.

Thank You



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**Faculty of Education**

***CONSENT FORM***

**Title of Project:** *Classroom Assistants and their pedagogical impact in primary school classes*

**Name of Researcher:** *June Stewart*

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I consent to interviews being audio taped. I will be referred to by pseudonym and will not be identified by name in any publications arising from the research.
4. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Participant**

**Date**

**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Person giving consent**

**Date**

**Signature**

(if different from participant, e.g. Parent)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher**

**Date**

**Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_



**UNIVERSITY  
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**Name of Researcher:** June Stewart

**Course Title:** EdD, Faculty of Education

**Title of Project:** Classroom assistants – their pedagogical impact in primary school classes

**Supervisor:** Professor J. Eric Wilkinson

*'You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.'*

---

My name is June Stewart and I am a part time student at Glasgow University. I am entering 4<sup>th</sup> year of the above course and am now required to undertake a research project. My field of interest is the impact of the classroom assistant in primary school classes on teaching strategies and learning experiences. In my role as an educational researcher my aim is to extend knowledge and understanding in this area of educational activity from the perspectives of the learners, educators and policy makers.

My research project plan is to gather data by observation of and, interviews with, pupils, teachers and classroom assistants from one middle stages class in each of the four primary schools in Hazlehead ASG. I have discussed my research project with your headteacher and have gained her permission to approach you.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

My project plan will involve me visiting your class on a number of occasions to observe and record what the pupils, teachers and classroom assistants do. These visits are planned to take place between January and June 2007. I have devised observation data collection schedules which will help me gather data on adult and pupil interaction and behaviour. These observations will be followed up by one to one interviews with the teachers and classroom assistants being observed. These interviews would last up to one hour and I will use an audio recording device. And finally I intend to establish a small focus group of pupils from the classes observed in each school in order to gain the child's perspective of classroom experience with and without classroom assistant support.



All information, which is collected, about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will be identified by an ID number and any information about you will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

The results of my research project will be written up as a Dissertation by June 2008. A copy of this can be made available to you and will also be available from Glasgow University Library. You will not be identified in this document.

The project has been reviewed by the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee at Glasgow University.

If you have any questions about this project you can contact me or my supervisor or the Research Office at Glasgow University.

If you would like to take part in my project please complete the consent form.

Thank you for reading this.

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GLASGOW

**Faculty of Education**

***PARENTAL CONSENT FORM***

**Title of Project:** *Classroom Assistants and their pedagogical impact in primary school classes*

**Name of Researcher:** *June Stewart*

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw her/him at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I consent to interviews being audio taped. My child will be referred to by pseudonym and will not be identified by name in any publications arising from the research.
4. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to my child taking part in the above study.

<b>Name of Participant</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>

<b>Name of Person giving consent</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>

(if different from participant, e.g. Parent)

<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>