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Teachers' Perceptions About Their Preparedness to Teach and Include Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Regular Classroom

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master Of Educational Psychology

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At Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand
Abstract

This research explored five primary school teachers’ perceptions about their preparedness to teach and include students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in a regular classroom. Taking a qualitative approach, these teachers were interviewed individually using semi-structured interviews, whereby the research methodology followed an appreciative inquiry framework. The use of this framework allowed for the positive aspects of their practices to be revealed. The research discovered that through a combination of prior knowledge and teaching experience, these teachers were able to develop and practice an inclusive pedagogy with strategies that could be utilised, not just for those with a disability, but for all children in their classrooms. While there were some areas where the teachers felt they could do with more support, these were taken on as challenges. The teachers involved demonstrated that inclusion of students with ASD in the regular classroom is possible and that this can be a positive experience that benefits the student with ASD, other students, the teachers themselves, the school, and the wider community.
Acknowledgements

Two roads diverged in a wood and I, I took the one less travelled by,
and that has made all the difference
- Robert Frost.

This study has been an epic journey, one which I am truly grateful to have embarked on. I have grown so much, but this is not without help so I would like to thank the many, many people that helped make this journey, so I hope I do not miss anyone.

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Next, I would like to thank the teachers, who not only volunteered to participate in this research, but who gave me hope that inclusion is possible, and that it can be done in such a positive and accepting manner. Without you this research could not happen and we would not be able to see the positive impacts of understanding and accepting children with ASD into the regular classroom. Your students are very lucky to have you.

Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.
- Dr Theodor Seuss Geisel

Next, I would like to thank the all students who have embarked on this journey alongside me, especially Steph, Megan and Angela. You have been there at every step encouraging and supporting me and I am sure we will always soar with those eagle powers – Arohanui

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 15/55. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Mr Jeremy Hubbard, Acting Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 04 801 5799 x 63487, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz.
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