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*Making a difference: A comparative study of the roles,  
responsibilities and perspectives of teacher aides in primary  
and secondary schools in New Zealand*

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Educational Psychology  
at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.**

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**2012**

## **ABSTRACT**

Teacher aides are used in the majority of primary and secondary schools in New Zealand to assist teachers in supporting students with many diverse needs. They play a crucial role in the extent to which students with diverse needs are fully included in mainstream schools. The nature of their work has changed over the years, so as to meet the goals of inclusive education. The work of teacher aides is primarily related to the different structures operating within primary and secondary schools.

This study used mixed methods methodology to compare the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of 21 teacher aides working in primary and secondary schools in a single geographical area on the North Island of New Zealand. Questionnaires, job descriptions and semi-structured interviews were used to gain an understanding of the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of teacher aides in both types of schools. The study found that teacher aides generally carried out a diverse range of tasks, provided support at different levels and had high levels of responsibility. The main themes that were identified related to teacher aide training and professional development, relationships, personal and cultural factors, challenges, funding and school systems. The study found that there were more similarities than differences between teacher aides working in primary and secondary schools and that the teacher aides' roles and responsibilities were related to perceived ability to include students with diverse needs.

The study concludes with implications for further research, policy and practice. These focus on primary and secondary teacher aide training and the inclusion of a wider variety of perspectives and factors related to the ability of teacher aides to make a difference for students with diverse needs in New Zealand.

## CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

I certify that this report is the result of my own work except where otherwise acknowledged and has not been submitted, in part or in full, for any other papers or degrees for which credit or qualifications have been granted.

Mignon J Stevenson

2012

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My grateful thanks go to my supervisors, Jean Annan and Roberta Hunter, for their positive encouragement, continued patience and assistance in getting this thesis completed. I especially appreciated the interest they showed in the topic of teacher aides and their affirmation that this thesis will be a useful addition to educational research in New Zealand.

My heartfelt thanks go to the teacher aides who agreed to participate in this study. I am humbled by their willingness to discuss their experiences openly and honestly and their flexibility in accommodating me. They are all wonderful people who care deeply for the wellbeing of our young people and their schools are privileged to have them.

I would also like to thank the principals of the schools for their interest and openness to educational research and for helping me to gain access to their teacher aides. Your support enabled me to get a positive response from the teacher aides, so that this research study could proceed smoothly.

Lastly, thank you to my husband, Murray, my mum, Ada and my children, Kirsty, Robin, Aimée and Kendal. They have always loved and supported me.

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**Appendix A: Informed Consent Forms: Principals and Teacher Aides**

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**Appendix C: Letter of Request: Principals**

**Appendix D: Teacher Aide Questionnaire**

**Appendix E: Interview Schedule**

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