

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

*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.**

Mignon Josette Stevenson

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	
ABSTRACT	ii
CANDIDATE’S STATEMENT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF APPENDICES	ix
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Background and Justification for this Study	1
1.2. Overview	3
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	4
2.1. Introduction	4
2.2. Teacher Aide Roles and Responsibilities	6
2.3. High Levels of Responsibility	8
2.4. Training and Professional Development	9
2.5. Paraprofessional Proximity	9
2.6. Respect and Recognition	10
2.7. Personal Attributes and Approaches Towards Inclusion	11
2.8. Conclusion	12
3. METHOD	13
3.1. Methodology	13
3.1.1. Theoretical Background	14
3.2. Research Design	14
3.2.1. Research Questions	14
3.2.2. Participant Selection and Recruitment	15
3.2.3. Consent	15
3.2.4. Data Collection	16

3.2.4.1. Quantitative Data	16
3.2.4.2. Qualitative Data	17
3.2.5. Data Analysis	18
3.2.5.1. Quantitative Data	18
3.2.5.2. Qualitative Data	19
3.2.5.3. Comparative Analysis	19
3.3. Limitations	20
3.4. Ethical Considerations	20
4. RESULTS	22
4.1. Participant Demographics	22
4.2. Teacher Aide Roles and Responsibilities	23
4.2.1. Introduction	23
4.2.2. Primary School Teacher Aide Roles and Responsibilities	23
4.2.2.1. Levels of Support	24
4.2.2.2. Diversity of Roles and Responsibilities	25
4.2.2.3. High Levels of Responsibility	28
4.2.3. Secondary School Teacher Aide Roles and Responsibilities	30
4.2.3.1. Levels of Support	31
4.2.3.2. Diversity of Roles and Responsibilities	31
4.2.3.3. High Levels of Responsibility	35
4.3. Teacher Aide Perceptions: Job Satisfaction, Self-Efficacy and Extent of Ability to Make a Positive Difference for Students with Diverse Needs	37
4.3.1. Primary School Teacher Aides	37
4.3.2. Secondary School Teacher Aides	38
4.4. Teacher Aide Perceptions: Factors which Contribute to Making a Positive Difference for Students with Diverse Needs	40
4.4.1. Primary School Teacher Aides	40
4.4.1.1. Training and Professional Development	40
4.4.1.2. Relationships	40
4.4.1.3. Personal Factors	42
4.4.1.4. Challenges	43
4.4.1.5. Cultural Factors	44
4.4.1.6. Funding	44

4.4.1.7. School Systems	45
4.4.2. Secondary School Teacher Aides	45
4.4.2.1. Training and Professional Development	45
4.4.2.2. Relationships	46
4.4.2.3. Personal Factors	47
4.4.2.4. Challenges	48
4.4.2.5. Cultural Factors	49
4.4.2.6. Funding	50
4.4.2.7. School Systems	50
4.5. Summary	51
5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS	52
5.1. Similarities	52
5.1.1. Roles and Responsibilities	52
5.1.2. Teacher Aide Perceptions: Job Satisfaction, Self-Efficacy and Extent of Ability to Make a Positive Difference for Students with Diverse Needs	53
5.1.3. Teacher Aide Perceptions: Factors which Contribute to Making a Positive Difference for Students with Diverse Needs	53
5.2. Differences	54
5.2.1. Roles and Responsibilities	54
5.2.2. Teacher Aide Perceptions: Job Satisfaction, Self-Efficacy and Extent of Ability to Make a Positive Difference for Students with Diverse Needs	56
5.2.3. Teacher Aide Perceptions: Factors which Contribute to Making a Positive Difference for Students with Diverse Needs	57
5.3. Summary	58
6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	59
6.1. Discussion of Research Findings	59
6.1.1. Levels of Support	59
6.1.2. Social and Emotional Support for Students	60
6.1.3. Working with Others	60
6.1.4. Respect and Recognition	61

6.1.5. Clarity of Roles and Responsibilities	61
6.1.6. Paraprofessional Proximity	62
6.1.7. Training and Professional Development	62
6.1.8. Personal Factors	63
6.2. Implications for Further Research, Policy and Practice	64
6.3. Limitations of the Study	64
6.4. Closing Thoughts	64
7. REFERENCES	66
8. APPENDICES	73

Appendix A: Informed Consent Forms: Principals and Teacher Aides

Appendix B: Information Sheets: Principals and Teacher Aides

Appendix C: Letter of Request: Principals

Appendix D: Teacher Aide Questionnaire

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

Appendix F: Tables

Appendix G: Figures

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

In New Zealand, the term “teacher aide” is used in primary and secondary schools to describe paraprofessionals who work under the supervision of qualified teachers, so as to support students’ learning and other needs (Rutherford, 2002). Teacher aides are required to undertake various tasks in both primary and secondary school contexts, to promote the inclusion of students with diverse needs. There is an increasing tendency to employ teacher aides in New Zealand schools, with teachers, principals and teacher aides perceiving that teacher aides were essential for the provision of inclusive education for students with disabilities (Kearney, 2009). In New Zealand, most students with disabilities (75%) were enrolled in primary or intermediate schools in 2006 (Statistics New Zealand, 2008), implying that a higher proportion of teacher aides are employed in primary schools than in secondary schools. Overall, as many as 25% of children with disabilities between the ages of five and fourteen required teacher aide support (Statistics New Zealand). The extent to which students with disabilities are included in mainstream schools depends on the perceptions and practices of principals, teachers and teacher aides (Kearney). Teacher aide perceptions of factors which they believe contribute to including students with diverse needs may differ, depending on the ways in which teacher aides are used in both primary and secondary schools. This study considers the roles, responsibilities and perceptions of teacher aides in these two settings.

1.1. Background and Justification for this Study

My interest in this topic originated from a suggestion that teacher aides could be agents of exclusion, rather than inclusion (Kearney, 2009). This prompted further exploration into issues surrounding teacher aide support for students with diverse needs in inclusive schools and the effectiveness of this support. Further research on teacher aides in inclusive schools in general has been delineated as being of particular importance in New Zealand (Kearney; Rutherford, 2008). Research with teacher aides and teachers working in primary and secondary schools is also warranted to advance understanding about the impact of working in different contexts on adults’ work (Rutherford). I chose to focus on the use of teacher aides in primary and secondary schools to consider if the ways in which teacher aides were used in both types of schools impacted upon their ability to make a positive difference for students. The suggestion that secondary school contexts, in which teacher aides and students have to cope with multiple classrooms and teachers, may be very different to that of primary school contexts (Tutty & Hocking, 2004), was evident in the distinct differences between the ways that teacher aides were used in primary and secondary schools (Wilson & Bedford, 2008).

These differences could be linked to the characteristics of teachers themselves; namely, that teachers possessed varying degrees of awareness with regard to catering for students with diverse needs (Rutherford, 2008). For example, secondary school teachers tended to overlook English language learners (ELLs), so that bilingual paraprofessionals became the “hidden teachers” (Wenger et al., 2004, p. 105). Secondary school teachers also appeared to be less able to adapt the curriculum for students with special needs than primary school teachers, which teacher aides believed was due to lack of time and inadequate secondary school teacher training (Rutherford). These findings, together with concern from secondary school

teachers that their work was being devalued by teacher aides who were developing higher levels of expertise than themselves (Wilson & Bedford, 2008) suggested that secondary school teacher aides had high levels of responsibility and the skills to include students with diverse needs.

Another factor that could be linked to the different ways that primary and secondary school teacher aides were used was the nature of the teacher-teacher aide relationship. For example, the suggestion that primary school teacher aides had closer relationships with teachers than secondary school teacher aides (Rutherford, 2008; Wilson & Bedford, 2008) implied that primary school teacher aides were more likely to include students with diverse needs. Alternatively, the issue of paraprofessional proximity, as highlighted by some researchers (e.g. Angelides, Constantinou & Leigh, 2009; Bourke, 2008; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006), could be a concern in both types of schools when it influences the extent to which students are able to engage with the teacher and with their peers. In order to promote inclusion, teacher aides should be used in specific ways (Angelides et al.), but the nature of the teacher aide-student relationship should also be considered when examining the roles and responsibilities of primary and secondary school teacher aides and how they impact upon their ability to include students with diverse needs. This appeared to be particularly relevant for secondary school students, in that they were more likely to feel stigmatised when attached to a teacher aide (Rutherford).

Differences in the ways that teacher aides are used in primary and secondary schools could also relate to the added challenges that adolescents might encounter when adapting to the secondary school environment (West, Sweeting & Young, 2010), particularly for students with learning and behavioural difficulties (Nash & Henderson, 2010). Teacher aides may play a crucial role in supporting students with special needs to adjust successfully to secondary school, in particular. Besides differences between primary and secondary school contexts, it is also feasible that many of the issues experienced by teacher aides in both secondary and primary schools will match those which have already been identified in previous studies.

The perceptions of teacher aides in both types of schools, with regard to whether they believed they were making a difference to students with special needs and whether these perceptions were in any way connected to their roles and responsibilities, were of particular interest. Paraprofessionals in both elementary and high schools believed that they were respected more when they were entrusted with important responsibilities (Giangreco, Edelman & Broer, 2001b) and that, when respected, they worked more efficiently (Chopra et al., 2004), implying that they were better equipped to include students with diverse needs. Shared responsibility for students' behaviour and educational attainment of teacher aides was also linked to higher levels of respect and recognition for teacher aides from others, in both primary and secondary schools (Rutherford, 2008). Paraprofessionals from a range of schools who expressed concern that inclusion was not being fully implemented, also believed that lack of appreciation was a major issue for them (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012). With regard to promoting self-determination among students with severe disabilities, both primary and secondary school teacher aides were found to have similar perceptions, although secondary school teacher aides believed that setting and attaining goals were more important factors in

making a difference to these students (Carter, Sisco & Lane, 2011). In this case, teacher aides' perceptions appeared to be linked to their role of supporting students with high needs, in particular.

Overall, it appeared that the tasks that teacher aides were asked to undertake played a key role with regard to the extent to which students with diverse needs were fully included in the school system. It is useful to compare and contrast across cases and examine a range of experiences (Chadderton & Torrance, 2011), therefore issues which are important to teacher aides and factors that may influence teacher aide perceptions of whether they can make a difference to students with diverse needs, in both types of schools, should be explored and compared. This study will assist in developing a greater awareness of issues experienced by teacher aides in both primary and secondary school systems, with regard to their ability to support students with diverse needs.

1.2. Overview

Chapter two reviews the literature in the field and provides the background context within which the study findings are to be viewed and interpreted. Main themes related to teacher aides are discussed, with reference to both New Zealand and overseas studies.

In chapter three the methodology for the study is described. The theoretical background, research setting and sample, consent procedure, data collection and analysis, possible limitations and ethical considerations are discussed.

Chapter four provides the results of the study. Quantitative and qualitative data related to teacher aide roles, responsibilities and perspectives are integrated and reported.

Chapter five presents a comparative analysis of the research findings. Similarities and differences between primary and secondary school teacher aides with regard to their roles, responsibilities and perspectives are identified and discussed.

In chapter six the results are discussed against the background of literature in the field. The implications and limitations of this study are discussed and recommendations are made for future research. The thesis concludes with some reflective thoughts.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

A survey of relevant literature revealed that the vast majority of studies on issues surrounding the use of teacher aides emanated from the United States, with a few based in the United Kingdom, Australia and other countries. Some studies focused on issues related to teacher aides in primary and secondary schools in New Zealand (Cameron, Sinclair, Waiti & Wylie, 2004; Harvey, Richards & Stacey, 2008; McIntosh, 2003; Rutherford, 2008; 2011; Ward, 2008; 2011). Besides “teacher aide,” the term “education support worker” is also used in New Zealand in preschool settings and “kaiāwhina” in Kura Kaupapa Māori schools. (Rutherford, 2002). The literature showed that there were many other terms similar in meaning to that of “teacher aide”; for example, paraprofessional (e.g. Broer, Doyle & Giangreco, 2005), classroom assistant (e.g. Woolfson & Truswell, 2005), educational technician (e.g. Breton, 2010), teaching assistant (e.g. Wilson & Bedford, 2008), paraeducator (e.g. Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006), instructional aide (e.g. Lewis, 2005), para-teacher (e.g. Pandey, 2006), special needs’ assistant (e.g. Logan, 2006) and learning support assistant (e.g. Gray, McCloy & Dunbar, 2007). Some of these terms depended on country of origin and some were related to the specific roles and responsibilities carried out by teacher aides.

Most of the studies reviewed involved qualitative or mixed methods methodology, with the majority of studies focusing on teacher aides working in mainstream primary/elementary schools. Two programme evaluations referred to teacher aides in both primary and secondary schools. One reported on the degree of inclusion of students with special needs in elementary and secondary schools and the use of teacher aides in special education service delivery (Idol, 2006) and one evaluated a professional development programme for teacher aides in New Zealand (Cameron et al., 2004). A few studies reported on the use of teacher aides in both primary and secondary school settings (e.g. Carter et al., 2011; Rutherford, 2008), while a few addressed issues exclusively related to teacher aides in secondary schools (e.g. Howard & Ford, 2007; Wenger et al., 2004). In many cases, the voices of the teacher aides were clearly evident (e.g. Angelides et al., 2009; Chopra, et al., 2004; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Howard & Ford; Lewis, 2005; Wenger et al.). These studies gave teacher aides the opportunity to be the focus of conversations and their ideas were valued as possibly being able to contribute to the development of formal theory and guidelines regarding their experiences in schools. Their collective narratives therefore added new information with regard to teacher aide training, roles and responsibilities, their status in schools and the extent to which they promoted inclusive education. Two studies focused exclusively on the perspectives of students (Broer et al., 2005; Tews & Lupart, 2008). Some studies focused on teacher perspectives (e.g. Warren Cooper & Baturo, 2004), some on parents’ perspectives (e.g. Werts, Harris, Tillery & Roark, 2004) and many studies used a range of participants, (e.g. Chopra & French, 2004; Kearney, 2009; McIntosh, 2003; Rutherford, 2008; 2011; Ward, 2008). These studies complemented one another and allowed the perspectives of significant others to be presented, particularly with regard to the appropriate use of teacher aides.

A variety of theoretical perspectives on the topic of teacher aides was identified in the literature reviewed. These included, for example; teacher aides as culture brokers (e.g. Chopra et al., 2004), Vygotskian principles of the construction of meaning (e.g. Rueda, Monzo & Higareda, 2004; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006), the socio-cultural model of culturally responsive teaching (e.g. Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Warren et al., 2004; Wenger et al., 2004), cultural anthropology (Lenski, 2007), social justice (Rutherford, 2008), a phenomenological psychological approach (Bourke, 2008) and the epistemology of “teacher as knower,” in that, although teacher aides use their practical knowledge and personal experience, there is no theory at the centre of educational research that draws on this knowledge and experience (Lewis, 2005, p. 136).

Many recurring themes emerged from the literature. A major theme was that of teacher aide roles and responsibilities (e.g. Chopra et al., 2004; Giangreco et al., 2001b; Howard & Ford, 2007; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Rueda et al., 2004; Rutherford, 2008; Wilson & Bedford, 2008). These studies focused on the wide variety of tasks carried out by teacher aides who were not always prepared to carry them out adequately, particularly when working with students with high levels of need. This theme emphasises the inconsistencies between what teachers and teacher aides perceived were the roles and responsibilities of teacher aides and what their roles and responsibilities actually entailed. Most importantly is the link between teacher aides’ roles and responsibilities and the extent to which they are able to be agents of inclusion.

Teacher aide training and professional development was the focus of several studies (e.g. Giangreco, Edelman & Broer, 2003; Griffin-Shirley & Matlock, 2004; Lewis, 2005; Moran & Abbot, 2002; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Wilson & Bedford, 2008). This theme is linked to the anomaly of the least qualified people supporting students with the most complex needs and raises questions about the adequacy and appropriateness of teacher aide training. These studies highlighted the importance of teacher aide training and professional development as a factor in teacher aides’ feelings of self worth and confidence in their ability to make a difference.

The theme of paraprofessional proximity has been widely reported in the literature (e.g. Broer et al., 2005; Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005; Chopra & French, 2004; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006; Ward, 2008; 2011; Werts, Zigmond & Leeper, 2001). Paraprofessional proximity refers to the physical distance maintained between teacher aide and student. It illuminates the nature of the relationship that develops between teacher aides and students when teacher aides are used in particular ways. The majority of these studies suggested that the quality of students’ relationships and their education are compromised when they become over dependent on teacher aides.

Respect and recognition is an important theme in several studies related to teacher aides (e.g. Chopra et al., 2004; Giangreco et al., 2001b; Fisher & Pleasants, 2011; Lewis, 2005). It refers to teacher aides being acknowledged and valued for the role that they play in supporting students with diverse needs. It also pertains to acknowledging the training and professional development needs of teacher aides and using teacher aides appropriately in

schools. These studies indicated that lack of respect and recognition can negatively affect the ability of teacher aides to connect students to the curriculum and to experience job satisfaction.

Attitudes of teacher aides towards their work and their beliefs about approaches and personal attributes necessary to foster inclusive education are prevalent in several studies (e.g. Chopra et al., 2004; Groom & Rose, 2005; Howard & Ford, 2007; Rutherford, 2008; Wilson & Bedford, 2008). Having a positive approach towards their work and believing that certain strategies and personal characteristics are necessary components for success are fundamental issues in teacher aide research.

These themes are inextricably linked as each one impacts upon the other in a cycle of reciprocal causation. For example, when well trained teacher aides, who possess the personal attributes necessary to work with students, are given appropriate responsibilities and clear roles, they are likely to work more effectively with students and gain respect from others. In turn, being recognised and appreciated fosters confidence and self-esteem and a belief in their own self-efficacy, positively impacting upon the extent to which teacher aides are able to support the inclusion of students with social, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties, as well as culturally diverse students and students with physical disabilities.

2.2. Teacher Aide Roles and Responsibilities

Published accounts of teacher aide practice have shown that they work with students in one-on-one, group and in whole class arrangements, providing various types of support for students with diverse needs. Some studies compared the efficacy of one-on-one support, group support and whole class support for students with diverse needs (Rutherford, 2008; Woolfson & Truswell, 2005) with individual and group work being a particular strength of classroom assistants (Woolfson & Truswell). In contrast, Rutherford found that teacher aides were more useful when used to support teachers and students in general, rather than being assigned to one student. The implication of this study was that whole class support was more socially acceptable and inclusive than one-on-one support, as it safeguarded the student with special needs from being singled out. This could be particularly relevant in secondary schools where adolescents may be more likely to be pressured to conform to the values and expectations of their peer group (Rutherford), developing a sense of identity and belonging to the peer group being viewed as an important task at this stage of the lifespan (Feigenberg, King, Barr & Selman, 2008; Meeus, Van De Schoot & Keijsers, 2010).

Teacher aides carried out a wide variety of tasks. The multitasking nature of teacher aides' task roles was clearly evident in many studies (e.g. Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco & Pelsue 2009; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Moran & Abbott, 2002) and included such diverse tasks as supervising lunch, doing bus duty, translating (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger), facilitating peer interactions, employing behaviour management programmes, doing clerical work (Carter et al.) and supporting students to transition (Rutherford, 2008). Instructional support was direct or indirect (Howard & Ford, 2007), with overall agreement from teacher aides and other stakeholders, that academic and instructional support for students was a main function of

teacher aides (Carter et al., Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Broer et al., 2005; Logan, 2006; Werts et al., 2004). Interestingly, Takala (2007) found that classroom assistants spend more time assisting individual students, but, as students got older, they spend more time assisting teachers.

Several studies found that relationships with others, particularly culturally diverse students, were an important component of the teacher aide role in inclusive environments. Most studies which focused on the teacher aide role of supporting culturally diverse students were based overseas (e.g. Warren et al., 2004), with one New Zealand study focused on teacher aides working with ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students (Harvey et al., 2008). The teacher aide role as connector, particularly for culturally diverse students, was a common theme in many overseas studies (e.g. Chopra et al., 2004; Wenger et al., 2004) and was linked to the ability of elementary and secondary school teacher aides to establish close relationships with students and their families, so that they could connect to teachers, their peers and to the curriculum. This role also encompassed having a professional relationship with parents, rather than solely a communicative relationship, which was seen as beneficial for students' education (Chopra & French, 2004). The connector role also included that of mediator, but elementary school teacher aides observed that this was not necessarily linked to students' learning (Rueda et al., 2004). In general, primary school teachers believed that teacher aides promoted inclusion by facilitating positive relationships (Angelides et al., 2009). Similarly, secondary school teacher aides perceived that relationships with teachers and students influenced how they felt about their work and helped them to be committed to students (Howard & Ford, 2007). Understanding differences between the ways in which relationships are formed between teacher aides and students in primary and secondary schools could promote the inclusion of students with diverse needs.

Some studies found that teacher aide roles were not always clearly defined in inclusive educational contexts. One concern expressed in a few studies was that of the changing role of the teacher aide (Groom & Rose, 2005; Lewis, 2005; Wilson & Bedford, 2008), due to more students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties being included in schools (Groom & Rose). The confusing and contradictory nature of teacher aide roles were highlighted in a number of studies, one of which particularly emphasised the dual role of teacher aides as being that of social worker and educator (Angelides et al., 2009). It is disquieting that this same study suggested that, although teacher aides played a positive role in inclusive education, they also reduced inclusion, partially due to the confusing nature of their roles. Role confusion could be partly linked to inadequate understanding, on the teacher's part, of the role of the teacher aide (Rutherford, 2008). Indeed, role confusion and the manner in which the roles of the teacher aide and teacher overlapped, to the extent that teacher aides were regarded as essentially student aides because they monitored behaviour, acted as social connectors and helped students ineligible for assistance to access the curriculum, were significant concerns in one New Zealand study (Rutherford, 2011). The ambiguous nature of the teacher aide role also had a negative effect on student motivation and achievement, as was found in Rutherford's study, which worked within a framework of social justice to emphasise the dichotomy of students being trapped on the fringes of education and, together with their

teacher aides, feeling inferior. This was particularly evident in situations where teachers did not provide for the diverse needs of all students and when teacher aides could not cope with the demands of the secondary school curriculum (Rutherford, 2011).

2.3. High Levels of Responsibility

The variety of tasks carried out by teacher aides in all types of schools often involved high levels of skill and responsibility for tasks which required accountability, training and knowledge of the diverse needs of students and the ability to apply appropriate interventions. High levels of responsibility included the following: adapting curricula (Howard & Ford, 2007; Wenger et al., 2004), being involved in behaviour management (Breton, 2010; Howard & Ford; Rutherford, 2008, 2011), identifying students with difficulties, making home visits, teaching content area subjects and teaching students in pull out situations (Wenger et al.). A number of overseas studies described the use of teacher aides as support for students with more complex difficulties, such as social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (e.g. Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006; Wilson & Bedford, 2008), while one New Zealand study focused on the role of teacher aides working with children with traumatic brain injury (McIntosh, 2003). Another study reported that teacher aides spend more time with low incidence disabilities when working one-one-one and less time with high incidence difficulties when working with a group (Giangreco & Broer, 2005), implying high levels of accountability for individual students. Teacher aides, working in the special education field, were mainly concerned about coping with students with emotional, social and/or behavioural challenges (Breton), although these concerns were also raised by teacher aides working within mainstream contexts (Rutherford, 2008).

An important issue expressed in the literature reviewed was that of teacher aides being given high levels of responsibility without the necessary qualifications and experience and without adequate supervision. These concerns were raised by many overseas researchers (e.g. Breton, 2010; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Howard & Ford, 2007), as well as New Zealand researchers (Cameron et al., 2004; Rutherford, 2011; Ward, 2008; 2011). Some studies specifically emphasised the irony of the least qualified instructing those with the most complex needs (Giangreco & Broer., Lewis, 2005; Logan, 2006; Moran & Abbott, 2002; Rutherford, 2011; Suter & Giangreco, 2009), while receiving very little instruction from teachers or special educators (Suter & Giangreco). Overall, the possible negative effects on students (e.g. over reliance and “learned helplessness”) of this anomaly were also clearly evident in the literature (e.g. Giangreco & Broer; Logan, 2006). However, teacher aides in two New Zealand studies perceived that mainstream teachers, themselves, could not cope with students with disabilities (Kearney, 2009; Rutherford, 2008) due to lack of training (Rutherford, 2008). These findings concurred with the overseas study which reported that teachers perceived that teacher aides were becoming more skilled in certain areas than teachers themselves (Wilson & Bedford, 2008). Teacher aides also suggested that students with disabilities were better off in special education units, implying that inclusion could not work for these students (Kearney). It could be debated whether qualified mainstream teachers have enough knowledge about the needs of students with complex needs, to fully include them in their classes.

2.4. Training and Professional Development

The extent to which teacher aides were capable and effective practitioners partly depended on the training and professional development they had received. Elementary and secondary school teacher aides perceived that their training and professional development was inadequate (Breton, 2010; Howard & Ford, 2007; Lewis, 2005; Riggs, 2001) and often inaccessible, due to teachers not being prepared or qualified to support them (Lewis; Riggs), or to supervise them effectively (Breton). Several studies, most of them quantitative, reported the beneficial effects of teacher aide training in specific areas; for example, peer interactions (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005; Malmgren, Causton-Theoharis & Trezek, 2005), phonics (Lane, Fletcher, Carter, Dejud and DeLorenzo, 2007), functional behaviour analysis (Bessette & Wills, 2007), sight recognition (Downer, 2007), social stories and social skills for students with autism (Licciardello, Harchik & Luiselli, 2008; Quilty, 2007) and augmentative and alternative communication (Bingham, Spooner & Browder, 2007). Only the latter study included secondary school teacher aides. Some of these studies showed that teacher aides could be trained fairly quickly to implement these strategies; for example, teacher aides were able to facilitate student interactions after only four hours of training (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren). Despite limitations of these studies, such as small sample size (e.g. Downer) and lack of follow up data (e.g. Lane et al.), they indicated that, with adequate training, teacher aides were likely to be utilised more appropriately when working with students with diverse needs. More specialised training was also identified as an important factor in improving the role of teacher aides working with students with brain injury (McIntosh, 2003) and those working with students with visual impairments (McKenzie & Lewis, 2008). In New Zealand, teacher aides believed that it was important to differentiate training, according to whether teacher aides worked in primary or secondary school contexts (Rutherford, 2008). Lack of funding, however, could be an inhibitor to change (Wilson & Bedford, 2008). This could make it difficult for primary and secondary school teacher aides to access the differentiated training required to support students in both types of schools, particularly with regard to students with more complex needs.

2.5. Paraprofessional Proximity

The amount of time that teacher aides spend in close proximity to students has implications for students and teacher aides. Several studies reported that when teacher aides were in close proximity to students for extended periods of time, opportunities for students to interact appropriately with their peers were reduced (Angelides et al., 2009; Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 2001a; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006; Rutherford, 2008; Ward, 2008). Paraprofessional proximity was therefore regarded as a factor in reducing inclusion, in that it could lead to isolation of students from their peers (Rutherford; Ward), teacher disengagement with students (Giangreco et al; Ward) and the harassment of secondary school students by other students on account of them being accompanied by teacher aides (Rutherford; Ward). Merely being associated with a teacher aide could also be embarrassing for students with disabilities who did not wish to be singled out as being different (Giangreco et al.). The perspectives of students towards paraprofessional proximity were specifically

highlighted in some studies (Broer et al., 2005; Tews & Lupart, 2008; Ward). This was particularly evident in the case of secondary school students with disabilities who perceived that the constant presence of a teacher aide interfered with their friendships and prevented them from becoming independent (Broer et al., Ward). The teacher aide role of mother, friend, protector from bullying and primary teacher, was also frustrating for these students, as they felt that they did not deserve the teacher's time (Broer et al.). In contrast, students of various ages believed that teacher aides facilitated social interaction (Tews & Lupart). Certainly, when teacher aides were trained to facilitate peer interactions for their target students, they were freed up to support other students in the class (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005). Mixed findings were reported with regard to paraprofessional proximity and academic achievement. Some studies found scant evidence that the presence of a teacher aide was beneficial for student achievement (Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown & Martin; 2007; Gerber, Finn, Achilles & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001), with one of these studies suggesting that students in smaller classes without teacher aides surpassed those in larger classes with teacher aides (Gerber et al.). In contrast, one study reported that paraprofessional proximity could increase academic engagement in primary school students (Werts et al., 2001). Overall, it appeared that being too dependent on teacher aides could reduce inclusion for students with special needs by hampering their ability to foster positive peer relationships. Findings related to the link between paraprofessional proximity and student achievement appeared to be less conclusive.

2.6. Respect and Recognition

Respect and recognition were crucial factors in research related to teacher aides. Issues surrounding disrespect for teacher aides were reported in a number of studies, some less recent than others (e.g. Chopra et al., 2004; Giangreco et al., 2001b; Howard & Ford, 2007; Lewis, 2005; Rutherford, 2008), suggesting that respect and recognition is an ongoing issue in teacher aide research. Role confusion was a factor in the origin of disrespect for teacher aides in these studies; for example, when teacher aides got too close to students, they experienced resentment from teachers who feared that confidential information would be divulged (Chopra et al.). Ironically, teacher aides who supported students with low incidence disabilities were more likely than teachers to contact parents (Werts et al., 2004) and, when these relationships were kept professional, respect between teacher aides and parents was cultivated (Chopra & French, 2004). On the other hand, teacher aides who were assigned students with more severe disabilities also experienced less support from teachers, with lack of support being an indicator of disrespect (Giangreco et al.). Lack of respect also emanated from inadequate teacher aide training, poor support from school management, low wages and the perception of teachers that teacher aides were not part of the staff (Giangreco, et al., Howard & Ford; Lewis). One study suggested that disrespect could be seen as a barrier by teacher aides and lead to exclusion, rather than inclusion (Moran & Abbott, 2002), implying that, when respected and recognised, teacher aides were more likely to be effective agents of inclusion and their students were more likely to be respected as well. Indeed, the negative attitudes of some secondary school students towards teacher aides was also conveyed towards students supported by teacher aides, so that both teacher aides and their students became

powerless in the school system (Rutherford). An important distinction between primary and secondary schools was particularly reported by Rutherford who suggested that lack of contact between secondary school teachers and teacher aides partly explained the lack of respect for teacher aides in secondary school contexts. The implication is that primary schools might provide safer and more inclusive environments for teacher aides and for students with diverse needs, than secondary schools.

2.7. Personal Attributes and Approaches towards Inclusion

Teacher aides' attitudes towards inclusion and their perceptions about the personal attributes and approaches necessary to include students with diverse needs were important factors related to making a positive difference for students. These factors were regarded as being even more important than teacher aide training (Groom & Rose, 2005). Personal attributes of secondary school teacher aides, in particular, included the following: patience, empathy, flexibility, being a team worker, being organised and experienced, being a nurturer and being willing to gain knowledge while on the job (Howard & Ford, 2007). Secondary school students reported that having kind teacher aides had helped them to progress, while both primary and secondary school students believed that having a good work ethic was an essential teacher aide attribute (Rutherford, 2008). Having a positive attitude and simply believing that students could learn and had the right to learn were perceived by teacher aides from primary, intermediate and secondary schools as key factors in making a difference to students' learning (Rutherford, 2011). One study suggested that the mere presence of the teacher aide increased teacher and student engagement (Gerber et al., 2007). However, it was evident that teacher aides also experienced many barriers, which negatively affected their ability to feel positive about their work. Many of these barriers related specifically to secondary school teacher aides and included the following factors: the more difficult curriculum in the secondary school caused teacher aides to be less confident about their ability to support students with special needs (Cameron et al., 2004) and being allocated students as a matter of convenience to suit the timetable (Rutherford, 2008). It is interesting to note that, despite reported poor continuity of learning in secondary schools, teacher aides were nevertheless able to work successfully with ESOL students (Harvey et al., 2008). It appeared that, overall, secondary school teacher aides might experience more challenges than primary school students, with regard to being able to make a difference to students with diverse needs.

2.8. Conclusion

In summary, the reports of research reviewed in the present study suggested that the following factors were important in enhancing inclusion for students with diverse needs: positive relationships and the ability to make connections, supervision from qualified teachers, teacher aide training and professional development relevant to their work, the facilitation of peer interactions to reduce over reliance on teacher aides, respect and recognition, positive attitudes, particular personal attributes and approaches of teacher aides and well defined teacher aide roles and responsibilities,

As clarity of roles had been observed to support teacher aides' ability to make a positive difference for students, it is clear that there is a relationship between the ways in which teacher aides are used in inclusive schools and what teacher aides themselves believe are important aspects for including students with diverse needs. This study will investigate the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of teacher aides working in a group of New Zealand primary and secondary schools.

CHAPTER THREE METHOD

3.1. Methodology

This chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical background to this study and the rationale for the choice of methodology. The research design is then examined and the following areas covered: research questions, participant selection and recruitment, consent, data collection and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the possible limitations of this study and ethical considerations.

3.1.1. Theoretical Background

This study used a case study methodology with a mixed methods design to examine the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of New Zealand teacher aides. Qualitative data was dominant over quantitative data. The case study approach and a mixed methods' design promote the use of multiple sources of data, which can provide a fuller picture of a situation (Denscombe, 2007). Case study goes well with small scale research which concentrates on a few sites (Denscombe). Case study aims to look at interactions between participants and their environments (Denscombe) and examine the meanings that people convey within specific educational and social contexts (Chadderton & Torrance, 2011); for example, this study examined and compared interactions between primary and secondary school teacher aides' roles and responsibilities, the extent to which they believed they made a positive difference for students and factors which they considered contribute to making a positive difference. Cases for this study were chosen on the basis of being typical and also convenient for the researcher with regard to geographical location. Typical cases are more likely to be generalisable to the whole class of cases (Denscombe) in similar geographical areas.

Mixed methods involve the use of two or more types of data gathering within one study (Greene, Kreider & Mayer, 2011). This study used questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and teacher aide job descriptions as data collecting tools, so as to complement one another. Mixed methods design appears to be most suitable for research which does not involve extensive analysis of qualitative data or multivariate analysis of quantitative data (Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib & Rupert, 2007). The practice of mixed methods allows for a component design, in which connections between the data sources are sought, in contrast to full integration (Green et al.). Questionnaires were designed to answer specific research questions, which might not have been directly obtainable from participants in interviews. Questionnaires allowed for direct comparisons to be made between primary and secondary school teacher aides' perceptions about their ability to make a positive difference. Questionnaires also allowed for the extent to which teacher aides in both types of schools carried out a number of tasks to be directly compared.

Semi-structured interviews provided more in depth explanations regarding roles and responsibilities and factors which teacher aides believed made a positive difference. Semi-structured interviews also encourage respondents to speak more freely about issues, without being encumbered by the rigidity of a more formal situation, although the researcher still has

set questions to be answered (Denscombe, 2007; Scott & Usher, 1999). Semi-structured interviews have other key advantages; for example, they are flexible and allow the researcher to probe deeper and to check the accuracy of responses (Denscombe). Semi-structured interviews also enable data collection to be modified to fit responses (Hittleman & Simon, 2006). Available teacher aide job descriptions provided more information and helped to substantiate some of the interview and questionnaire data. The main advantages of documents are that they are generally easily accessible, permanent and cost effective (Denscombe).

3.2. Research Design

The aim of the present study is to compare the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of teacher aides towards the inclusion of students with diverse needs in primary and secondary school contexts in New Zealand.

3.2.1. Research Questions

The overarching question is the following:

What is the relationship between primary and secondary school teacher aides' roles and responsibilities and these practitioners' perceived ability to include students with diverse needs?

The following questions will guide the data gathering process:

1. What are the roles and responsibilities of the primary and secondary school teacher aides?
2. What are the perspectives of the primary and secondary school teacher aides with regard to making a positive difference to students with diverse needs?
 - a.) *To what extent do the teacher aides in primary and secondary schools believe they can make a positive difference in their work settings?*
 - b.) *What factors do they consider contribute to making a positive difference for students with diverse needs?*
3. What are the commonalities and differences between the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of the primary and secondary school teacher aides?
 - a.) *What commonalities are reflected in the teacher aide roles and responsibilities?*
 - b.) *In what ways do the roles and responsibilities of the teacher aides differ?*
 - c.) *What similarities and differences are reflected with regard to perceived ability to make a positive difference?*
 - d.) *What similarities and differences are reflected with regard to perceptions of factors which contribute to making a positive difference?*

3.2.2. Participant Selection and Recruitment

There are 42 schools in the North Island research region. Twenty schools are full primary (years 0-8), eleven schools are contributing schools (years 0-6) and six schools are secondary schools (years 9-13). The remaining schools are composite (years 1-15) and intermediate (years 7-8), with one special school catering for students with very high needs (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2012b). The majority of schools (82%) are state schools and the same number were classified as decile 1-6 at the time that this study was undertaken, as indicated in the New Zealand Schools' Directory (MOE, 2012a). Most schools are co-educational with student populations from a wide variety of cultures (MOE, 2012a).

Schools were purposively selected on the basis that they were likely to be typical instances of schools within the region and therefore more likely to produce data relevant to the region. Therefore schools were selected on the following bases: decile one to six, co-educational, public or integrated primary and secondary schools on the North Island of New Zealand, with school rolls of 60 or more students from various ethnic groups. Each school had to employ at least one teacher aide. Information from the New Zealand Schools Directory (MOE, 2012a) showed that 18 schools matched these criteria. Ten schools were primary schools (years 1-6); five schools were contributing primary schools (years 1-8) and three schools were secondary schools (years 9-13).

Access to the schools and teacher aides was obtained by telephoning the principal of each school. Gaining permission to approach an individual or individuals via an intermediary is an important requirement that should precede any research activity, as the intermediary could affect the extent to which participants are likely to cooperate (Crano & Brewer, 2002). The project was explained briefly and principals were asked for a verbal agreement in principle to assist the researcher to gain access to teacher aides in their school. The number of teacher aides in each school was also ascertained. Explaining a project to the person in control in a straightforward way, without pressure, is a sound strategy, as their approval legitimises the research (Crano & Brewer). Some principals requested that the information also be emailed to them, so that they could consider the request further. Positive responses were received from nine principals. There were 45 teacher aides working in the 9 schools.

3.2.3. Consent

Once approval to conduct the project was received from the Massey University Human Ethics' Committee, a meeting was arranged with the principals. Informed consent was obtained from each principal (Appendix A) and information sheets for principals and teacher aides were issued (Appendix B). An official letter of request to access the school was also delivered to each principal (Appendix C). Principals issued the information sheets to their teacher aides and invited them to participate in the study. Teacher aides who wished to participate in the project expressed their interest by filling in the slip on the information sheet with their name, school and contact details. The majority of the slips were collected from the schools at prearranged times, with one school emailing their slips to the researcher. Twenty six teacher aides initially expressed an interest in participating.

Teacher aides who had left their contact details were telephoned by the researcher and demographic information regarding, gender, ability to speak English, type of school and teacher aide experience was obtained. Further information was offered to the teacher aides and they were given the opportunity to ask questions. Brief, informal discussions took place with most of the teacher aides at the same time and verbal consent to participate in the project was obtained from them. Consent forms (Appendix A), questionnaires (Appendix D) and prepaid self-addressed envelopes were delivered to the schools for distribution to teacher aides by principals. Each teacher aide also received a brief covering note, giving the due date for return of the forms, an approximate time frame for the interviews and a request to either post the consent forms and questionnaires to the researcher, or leave them at the school office for collection by the researcher. Twenty two teacher aides from eight schools gave written consent. This represented a response rate of 48.8%.

3.2.4. Data Collection

3.2.4.1. Quantitative data

The questionnaire (Appendix D) consisted of two sections: a teacher aide scale and an evaluation of roles and responsibilities. The teacher aide scale was in the form of a six point Likert scale of eight sets of attitude items, requiring respondents to choose one of six alternatives that indicated the extent to which they agreed with each statement. This type of scale is more cost effective with regard to resources and time and generally has high reliability (Crano & Brewer, 2002). Another advantage of using a Likert type scale in this study is that a measure of variation in attitudes between primary and secondary school teacher aides assisted in providing comparative data between the two cohorts. Response options ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores indicating more favourable attitudes towards the suggestions. Overall beliefs about the extent to which teacher aides made a difference were shown by the sum of their responses over all the items on the scale.

A bank of positively worded statements related to teacher aides was built up. These were compiled from personal experience in the education profession and from reading and reviewing literature related to teacher aides for a previous study (Stevenson, 2010). This section aimed to find out the extent to which teacher aides themselves, believed they were effective practitioners, in contrast to studies which reported on teacher aide efficacy in more indirect ways (e.g. Gerber et al., 2001; Gray et al., 2007). Initially 65 potential items were identified, but most were discarded due to the following reasons: they were ambiguous, they were repetitive and they did not represent the main areas presumed to be important in students' lives with regard to making a positive difference; namely, the social, emotional, behavioural and academic aspects, as well as motivation, independence, working to full potential and peer interactions.

The section on roles and responsibilities consisted of 27 items, which were also developed from personal knowledge and examination of the literature. Respondents had to indicate the extent to which they carried out a number of tasks along a four point continuum, from

“never” to “very often.” Opportunity was provided at the end to insert any tasks not mentioned on the questionnaire. The advantage of this scale is that it assisted in obtaining information about the extent to which primary and secondary school teacher aides engaged in various tasks. This information could then be collated and similarities and differences between teacher aide tasks in both types of school could be identified. The assumption was that positive attitudes and beliefs in their own efficacy are inextricably linked to the ways in which teacher aides are used in schools and the extent to which various tasks are carried out.

All of the teacher aides who gave written consent also returned their completed questionnaires. Most questionnaires were posted to the researcher and a few were collected by the researcher from the schools. As consent forms and questionnaires were returned, teacher aides were contacted by telephone, and arrangements made for interviews to be conducted at suitable times and venues. One set of quantitative data was discarded, due to attrition, therefore 21 teacher aides from the 8 schools participated in the whole study. This represented a final response rate of 46.6%. Eleven participants were primary school teacher aides who worked with students from new entrant to year 8. Ten participants were secondary school teacher aides who worked with students from year 9 to year 13.

3.2.4.2. Qualitative data

Potential interview questions were developed, based on the researcher’s professional knowledge and literature related to the topic. These were refined into an interview schedule (Appendix E), which served as a guide for the researcher. The interview was organized into four sections; namely, background information, roles and responsibilities, relationships and general questions. An open-ended question at the end invited teacher aides to discuss anything else about their work. This technique is recognised as more challenging for the researcher to transcribe (Crano & Brewer, 2002), although coding and transcribing interview data is, in any event, a challenge (Denscombe, 2007). Teacher aide job descriptions were collected from some schools, while some teacher aides brought their job description to the interview.

Semi-structured interviews of approximately three quarters of an hour to one hour were conducted with teacher aides over a four week period. Eleven interviewees were primary school teacher aides and ten were secondary school teacher aides. Most interviews were held at school, all of them outside the teacher aides’ normal working hours, with a few being held at the teacher aides’ homes and one at the researcher’s home. Further demographic data was obtained on teacher aide background and experience, hours worked per week, numbers of students supported and levels of need. This was tabulated together with previous demographic data obtained. Specific area(s) of responsibility and teacher aide training and professional development were also explored, as well as issues related to job descriptions, teachers’ roles and relationships with others. Factors which teacher aides believed were important in making a difference for students with diverse needs were investigated, as well as any other areas that teacher aides wished to discuss. Teacher aide responses were handwritten by the researcher who used participants’ actual words wherever possible. With regard to this, respondent validation has recently moved from being a methodological tool which represents

participants' perspectives to one which conveys participants' beliefs in their own words (Chadderton & Torrance, 2011). In a few cases, the interviews also gave the researcher an opportunity to clarify responses to the questionnaires.

Interview transcripts were typed up as soon as possible after each interview. Teacher aides were given their interview transcripts to check for accuracy and amend as needed. Allowing participants to check interview transcripts showed respect for their input into the study and increased the reliability of the findings. Teacher aides were also invited to add to their responses. The majority of teacher aides emailed their verified transcripts to the researcher, while some of them were collected from the schools by the researcher. Most transcripts required no changes, with only a few requiring minor amendments. Data collection continued alongside data analysis, as advocated by Denscombe (2007).

3.2.5. Data Analysis

3.2.5.1. Quantitative data

Items on the teacher aide scale were scored on a 1-6 basis; 6 for strongly agree and 1 for strongly disagree. The scores were summed over each participant, creating a total score for each person (Crano & Brewer, 2002). Three tables were compiled, one for primary school respondents, one for secondary school respondents and one for both groups of respondents. Items were listed and participants' initials were entered next to each item to show the strength of their responses. This ensured greater accuracy of input, as data could be checked and rechecked against individual questionnaires. These were added up and the number of participants whose responses matched each score was entered. Means were calculated and the results were graphed, so as to illustrate and compare the extent to which teacher aides in both types of schools believed they were able to make a positive difference for students.

Items related to the extent to which teacher aides engaged in various tasks were scored on a 1-4 basis; 1 for never and 4 for very often, according to how frequently teacher aides believed they carried out a number of tasks. Three tables were also compiled, one for primary school respondents, one for secondary school respondents and one for both groups of respondents. As with the attitude scale, items were listed and participants' initials were first used to keep track of the data, before entering the total numbers of participants whose responses matched each score. Means were calculated and the data graphed, so as to illustrate and compare the extent to which primary and secondary teacher aides carried out various tasks. Tables illustrated the most frequently occurring tasks for both groups of teacher aides. These were arranged in rank order for easier analysis. Higher level tasks, which required some initiative and accountability and which could be construed as tasks which qualified teachers might also carry out, were coded as responsibilities. It must be acknowledged that this coding tended to be arbitrary, as there was much overlap between roles and responsibilities.

3.2.5.2. Qualitative data

Coding was used on individual interview transcripts to identify the roles and responsibilities of primary and secondary school teacher aides. The results were collated by grouping

individual teacher aide responses under headings and subheadings related to the interview questions. Each piece of information was identified by the teacher aide's initial to ensure that all of the responses were included. Similar responses were grouped together, to identify trends. Available job descriptions were read and roles and responsibilities were categorised according to themes identified from interview data. Roles and responsibilities of primary and secondary school teacher aides, obtained from semi-structured interviews and job descriptions were integrated with quantitative data related to teacher aide roles and responsibilities. This was done by quantifying data from interviews and job descriptions. It involved counting the number of times a code appeared on the job descriptions and the number of participants who referred to a certain code during the interviews, as enumerated by Driscoll et al. (2007).

Information about factors which teacher aides perceived contribute to making a difference for students with diverse needs was obtained from questions related to training and professional development, relationships with others, cultural considerations and general factors related to making a positive difference; for example, the main support/challenge for each teacher aide. The transcripts were read and reread until themes emerged. Main themes were identified and categorised, using coding. Individual teacher aide responses, with identifying initials, were grouped under each theme, with similar responses being grouped together. Specific factors which teacher aides perceived contribute to making a difference for students with diverse needs and attitudes towards their work were typed up separately for primary and secondary school teacher aides under theme headings. General interview data related to teacher aide perceptions of their job and the extent to which they believed they were efficacious was examined to determine whether it reflected overall teacher aide attitude towards making a positive difference for students, as represented in the teacher aide scale. Throughout the analysis, pertinent comments made by teacher aides in their own words were selected for reporting in the results. All results were reported separately for primary and secondary school teacher aides.

3.2.5.3. Comparative analysis

The typed up analyses of primary and secondary school teacher aide roles, responsibilities, factors and attitudes/beliefs about the extent to which they were efficacious were studied. Coding was used to identify similarities and differences in all of these areas, which were then tabulated. Information was grouped under the following headings: similarities (primary and secondary school teacher aide roles, responsibilities, factors and attitudes/beliefs about the extent to which they made a difference) and differences (primary school teacher aide roles and responsibilities, secondary school teacher aide roles and responsibilities, primary school teacher aide factors and secondary school teacher aide factors, primary school teacher aide attitudes/beliefs about the extent to which they made a difference and secondary school teacher aide attitudes/beliefs about the extent to which they made a difference). This task involved constant reading, analysis, referral to the original collated results and reduction of information. The results were then reported under the appropriate headings.

3.3. Limitations

Many of the limitations of mixed methods' research also apply to qualitative and quantitative research; namely: small sample size (Gray et al., 2007; McIntosh, 2003; Takala, 2007), inability to be generalised to other schools, teacher aides or situations (Logan, 2006; McIntosh; Takala), bias (Gray et al.), relying only on the perceptions of those who choose to participate (Logan) or who work with particular disabilities (McIntosh) and the practicalities of including teacher aide perspectives with limited funding (Wilson & Bedford, 2008). Other disadvantages of mixed methods research include the increased cost and time involved in implementing it and the possibility that findings may not support one another (Denscombe, 2007). A significant disadvantage of case study relates to its inability to generalise from one or a small number of cases to the wider population (Chadderton & Torrance, 2011; Denscombe). Many of the limitations of case study methodology and mixed methods research are likely to be applicable to this study.

There are some potential issues to consider when using semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and documents as data collection tools. With regards to semi-structured interviews, teacher aides could respond differently depending on the extent to which they feel comfortable with the researcher's personal identity, which could compromise the reliability and validity of the data (Denscombe, 2007). Taking notes by hand could be somewhat intrusive, as it does not allow the researcher to be fully focused on the participants who might also become overly conscious of the formality of the experience (Scott & Usher, 1999). Time constraints could be an issue (Scott & Usher), particularly in the case of on- site interviews, where teacher aides are bound by the timetable. With regard to the use of questionnaires, respondents could find pre-coded questions restrictive and the researcher could have difficulty establishing whether they have put sufficient thought into answering them. (Denscombe). As only some job descriptions were available, the researcher would be compelled to make assumptions with regard to the extent to which they are typical instances of teacher aide job descriptions.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were covered in accordance with the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants (Massey University, 2010). Although deemed low risk, there was a potential for conflict of interest while conducting this study, as the researcher had previously had dealings with some of the schools (3:14 *Avoidance of Conflict of Interest*). Therefore an application was made to the Massey University Human Ethic' Committee for approval to conduct this study. The project was reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC); Northern, application number 12/033.

Principals and teacher aides were fully informed about the project, verbally and by means of information sheets (Appendix B). Informed and voluntary consent was obtained (3: 11 *Informed and Voluntary Consent*). Information sheets reassured participants that they were not obliged to participate and could withdraw at any time up to the stage at which the data

was analysed (3:9 *Respect for Persons*; 3:11 *Informed and Voluntary Consent*). Participants were reassured that this study was not a judgement of individual school or teacher aide performance, but rather an overall comparison of the work done by primary and secondary school teacher aides and their perspectives on working in these different contexts. Participants were informed that they had the right to ask any questions at any time and they could decline to answer any question. They were advised that all information would be kept strictly confidential, pseudonyms would be used throughout and no school, individual or event would be identifiable (3:12 *Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality*). Teacher aides were asked not to mention any student by name during the interviews (3:12 *Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality*). Teacher aides were informed that transcripts of the interviews would be provided to them for editing (3:10.1 *Risk of Harm to Participants*). They were notified that all information would be locked away securely and destroyed at the culmination of the study (3:12 *Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality*) and that they had the right to receive a summary of the findings (4: 26 *Formulation and Publication of Results*). Participants were informed that this study was likely to create greater awareness of the relationship between teacher aide roles and responsibilities and their beliefs about their ability to make a difference for students with special needs in New Zealand schools and that, ultimately, this knowledge was likely to be of benefit to students with diverse needs (3:16 *Justice*).

The following chapter provides an integrated summary of the results of this study. It answers research questions related to teacher aide roles and responsibilities. Questions related to teacher aides perceptions about their ability to make a positive difference to students with diverse needs and the factors they consider support positive change are also answered.

CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS

This chapter presents the research findings for this study. Demographic information is first reported, so as to provide an overview of the population of primary and secondary school teacher aides who participated in this study. The results of the quantitative and qualitative data are then reported, following the order of the first two research questions outlined in the previous chapter. The roles and responsibilities of the teacher aides, the extent to which they believe they can make a difference and the factors which they consider contribute to making a positive difference to students with diverse needs are reported separately for the primary and secondary school teacher aides.

4.1. Participant Demographics

Demographic information provided by teacher aide participants regarding teacher aide experience, training, hours worked per week and perceived levels of need of students supported is displayed in Table 1:

Table 1 Participant Demographics

	Primary (N= 11)	Secondary (N=10)
<i>Experience as a teacher aide</i>	2-17 years (M= 7.9)	4 ½ -19 years (M= 12)
<i>Hours per week</i>	7 ½ -28 hrs (M= 20.8)	14-33 hrs (M= 24.4)
<i>Teacher aide training/other</i>	No formal qualification: 3 Teacher Aide Certificate: 6 Incomplete qualification: 1 Postgraduate study: 1	No formal qualification: 7 Teacher Aide Certificate: 2 Incomplete qualification: 1
<i>Perceived levels of student need</i>	Moderate-very high	Low-very high

Experience as a teacher aide varied from 2-17 years (M= 7.9 years), for the eleven primary school teacher aides and 4 ½ -19 years for the ten secondary school teacher aides (M= 12 years). Number of hours worked per week varied from 7 ½ hours to 28 hours per week for primary school teacher aides and from 14 hours to 33 hours per week for secondary school teacher aides. Six primary school teacher aides (54.5%) and two secondary school teacher aides (20%) had a formal qualification in teacher aiding; namely, a Teacher Aide Certificate. Levels of need of students, as reported by teacher aides, varied from moderate to very high for primary school teacher aides and from low to very high for secondary school teacher aides. Overall, over half of the primary and secondary school teacher aides (52%) reported that they initially did volunteer work, usually as parent helpers, before becoming teacher aides.

Teacher aides cited several reasons for choosing to do this type of work:

- Liking children
- Concerns about children with educational and behavioural difficulties
- Their own children had experienced difficulties at school
- Interested in working in the educational field
- Passion for special needs.

The following factors were also mentioned by individual teacher aides as playing a role in their decision to do this work:

- Wanting to work in education, but not wishing to become a teacher
- Having a disability themselves
- Previous experience with troubled young people
- Personal experience of a family member who needed extra support
- Previous study which linked well to working with students with difficulties
- Needing a job

4.2. Teacher Aide Roles and Responsibilities

4.2.1. Introduction

Roles refer to particular positions held by teacher aides in schools and the expected tasks carried out by teacher aides in their various capacities. Each role comes with varying degrees of responsibility, which may be dependent on a number of factors, such as teacher aide experience, teacher aide training and professional development, school culture and the levels of need of students. Responsibilities extend beyond roles and relate to specific tasks carried out by teacher aides, which require some degree of accountability and purpose. Responsibilities may also reflect the extent to which teacher aides have control over the work that they do. Data on primary and secondary school teacher aide roles and responsibilities was obtained from questionnaires and interviews with teacher aides, as well as from job descriptions. Primary and secondary school teacher aides identified several tasks they carried out, which reflected varying degrees of responsibility. Figures 1 and 2 (Appendix G) show the extent to which primary and secondary school teacher aides carried out these tasks. Figure 3 (Appendix G) provides a comparison between primary and secondary school teacher aide roles and responsibilities. These results, in rank order, can be seen in Tables 2 and 3 (Appendix F). Data from questionnaires, interviews and job descriptions was integrated in the reporting of the results.

4.2.2. Primary School Teacher Aide Roles and Responsibilities

The supportive and assistive role of primary school teacher aides was clearly evident, with all of the teacher aides reporting that they viewed their role as one which involved supporting students and teachers. Less than half of the primary school teacher aides believed that their job descriptions reflected their roles and responsibilities, while some teacher aides stated that they believed that they did more than what was on their job descriptions. The flexible nature of their job descriptions and the fact that they had to adapt to a changing clientele was emphasised by some teacher aides. As one participant stated:

Things can be added to the job description if there are any gaps. It's fine if it's written on paper, but often different in practice.

In light of these findings, teacher aide self report was the prime focus of the following discussion. Main themes which emerged related to primary school teacher aide roles and responsibilities focused on levels of support, diversity of roles and responsibilities and high levels of responsibility

4.2.2.1. Levels of Support

Primary school teacher aides reported that their role included providing various types of support for students, which was often related to levels of student need. Levels of support included small group support, one-on-one support and whole class support, all within mainstream classrooms. The majority of primary school teacher aides (73%) reported that they worked with students in small groups very often. Over half reported that they also provided one-on-one support for students very often, with whole class support for teachers occurring less frequently. One-on-one support was more likely to be provided for students with high levels of need. This type of support also generated close relationships between teacher aide and student, evident in reports from two teacher aides, one of whom highlighted her connectedness to a student. Alternatively, the same number of teacher aides also propounded the benefits of working with small groups of students within the classroom, as opposed to one-on-one support, which, they believed, was tiring for them and restrictive for the students.

Although whole class support appeared to be a less prevalent part of the primary school teacher aide role, most teacher aides (91%) stated that their work required them to assist teachers to manage whole classes where necessary, whether they were assigned to individual students or not. Some teacher aides reported that whole class support generally required them to rove the classroom and assist teachers and students on a less formal basis than that of one-on-one or small group support. Overall, just over half of the teacher aides spent most of their time supporting both small groups and whole classes, with a small number of teacher aides reporting that they regularly covered all levels of support for students.

4.2.2.2. Diversity of Roles and Responsibilities

Primary school teacher aides held a diverse range of roles and responsibilities. Not all teacher aides worked as teacher aides at all times. Four participants stated that their role was also that of school librarian, which was specifically entitled “Teacher aide/Librarian” and “Teacher aide/Librarian/Resources” in some job descriptions. Other roles included that of pastoral caregiver, caretaking duties and assisting with school trips and sports tours. A small number of teacher aides reported that they attended general staff meetings and Individual Education Planning (IEP) meetings at time, but the majority of their roles and responsibilities were related to academic, social, emotional and physical support for students. Teacher aides’ roles and responsibilities also included working with others to achieve the best outcomes for students with diverse needs.

Primary school teacher aides disclosed that curriculum support for students included the following tasks:

- Assisting and supporting students with reading, writing and mathematics
- Keeping students focused in class
- Teaching/instructing students
- Reading questions for students
- Using computer technology to support students
- Adapting the curriculum for students

Some primary school teacher aides also reported that they carried out the following tasks, but to a lesser extent:

- Administering formal assessments
- Recording test data
- Monitoring programmes aimed at supporting learning and behaviour

The main area of curriculum support was in reading, with 82% of primary school teacher aides reporting that they assisted students with reading often or very often. The same number reported that they helped students with writing, but far fewer reported that they carried out the reader-writer role to any significant extent.

Five primary school teacher aides discussed their role in delivering more specific programmes to support students academically. These included a speech programme, tape assisted reading, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), phonics (for example, Toe by Toe) and the Early Words programme. A smaller number reported that they provided numeracy support for students on a more independent level, with support delivered outside the classroom as small group work or one-on-one instruction. One participant took art and music groups.

Specific social and emotional support for students, as revealed by some teacher aides included pastoral care and involvement in a social skills’ programme for students. Support for students with social behaviour difficulties included helping students to sit at a table to eat

and promoting good table manners. One teacher aide's role included sharing breakfast with students, which she appreciated, as this gave her time to develop positive relationships with students. Teacher aides also carried out many other roles, which supported students socially and emotionally. More than half of the teacher aides stated that they acted as a liaison between students and teachers, assisting students' voices to be heard. Indeed a key task was that of maintaining a child-centred focus in their work, which involved advocating for students. This went beyond the connector role and was shown in specific ways; for example, teacher aides helped teachers to become more aware of students' feelings and abilities and they also approached teachers directly when they noticed that students were unhappy.

The majority (90%) reported that they facilitated student interaction with their peers often or very often. Several teacher aides reported that they often or very often helped students to transition successfully, with one participant remarking:

We prepare the students for the next step, so they will be okay in the intermediate school.

Primary school teacher aides provided various types of physical support for students. Most teacher aides (72%) reported that they assisted students with personal care often or very often. Physical support also included helping students to develop motor skills, participate in sport and play safely. Two teacher aides referred to their involvement in a lunchtime exercise programme, aimed at improving co-ordination for students with fine motor skills problems and generally assisting those who did not actively participate in sport. The importance of this programme and the way in which it also promoted the social and emotional wellbeing of students through teamwork was particularly enunciated by one teacher aide. Some teacher aides agreed that they spent varying amounts of time ensuring that students were safe and engaged on the playground.

All of the primary school teacher aides reported that their role included communicating with and working alongside teachers in a general assistance role and helping with curriculum delivery. As one participant commented:

I act as the extension arm for the teachers.

Most teacher aides stated that their role entailed being guided by teachers, including Resource Teachers for Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), and carrying out their instructions. They reported that they carried out several tasks which supported teachers. These tasks were (in order of frequency) the following:

- Recording student progress
- Developing resources
- Assisting with classroom organisation
- Collecting data on student conduct
- Administering formal assessments

General support for teachers also included the following:

- Photocopying

- Putting up wall displays
- Tidying resources
- Publishing the work of other students
- Changing students' home readers
- Researching resources

Although not an official part of her job designation, one teacher aide remarked that she was sometimes called upon by teachers to proofread their work. The majority of teacher aides (91%) also reported that they spent time speaking to teachers about students often or very often. Additional data found that students' strengths and weaknesses were sometimes the subject of these communications.

Most primary school teacher aides agreed that their role also required them to support the teacher with behaviour management and they reported that they helped with student discipline often or very often. As one participant stated:

Often our role is to bring kids back, as the teacher is too busy.

However, six teacher aides did not believe that their role was that of disciplinarian. This was supported in some job descriptions, which only specified that they should encourage students to follow the school rules and liaise with teachers about implementing behaviour intervention programmes for students when necessary. Nevertheless, assisting with behaviour management in a "tricky class" was a particular challenge for one teacher aide, who accepted some responsibility for trying to identify the reasons for student misbehaviour and decide on an appropriate intervention.

Overall, primary school teacher aides were aware of the distinction between their roles and responsibilities and those of the teachers. One teacher aide, for example, specifically indicated that her role did not allow her to criticise teachers directly. More than half of the teacher aides stated that the teacher's role was to do the planning and to discipline students, while their job was to reinforce what the teacher had taught. Some teacher aides also agreed that it was the teacher's responsibility to work out each student's level and allocate students to them for assistance. Besides working with teachers, a small number of teacher aides also independently sought the assistance of outside agencies and parents in order to support students with diverse needs; for example, one teacher aide stated that he had meetings with parents about reading at home with their children.

4.2.2.3. High Levels of Responsibility

Some of the tasks which primary school teacher aides carried out involved high levels of responsibility. The following tasks were categorised as high levels of responsibility, as it was considered that they were higher order tasks:

- Teaching and instructing students
- Working with students with more complex needs
- Planning and adapting the curriculum
- Carrying out specialised roles
- Having organisational responsibilities

However, it is inevitable that teacher aide roles and responsibilities will overlap and that much may depend on the extent to which these tasks were carried out, the complexity of students' difficulties and also the level of training of teacher aides.

Primary school teacher aide roles required them to teach/instruct students. All primary school teacher aides reported that they provided instructional support for students often or very often. In most cases, the aides accepted that instructing students was fundamental to their work, with the perception being that one of the goals of teacher aide training was to teach them how to teach. Some professional development was akin to that of qualified teachers; such as training in the use of the AVAILL (Audio Visual Achievement in Literacy, Language and Learning) reading programme. Follow up data determined that levels of instructional responsibility varied greatly and depended on the extent to which teacher aides worked autonomously and took personal responsibility for student achievement. For example, one teacher aide reported having taken a class when no reliever was available and had also learnt the new numeracy standards in order to teach mathematics to small groups of students in withdrawal situations. Indeed, she regarded this as her specialised area of responsibility, the main challenge being “trying to make things stick (and) finding different ways to make it (numeracy) interesting and fun for students.”

It is clear that instructing students in numeracy required adequate knowledge of the mathematics curriculum and confidence in delivering the programme, which could be a challenge for teacher aides. High levels of responsibility were therefore relative to levels of individual teacher aide expertise, with one teacher aide, for example, remarking that she still found mathematics a “bit difficult” to deliver to students and was more comfortable instructing students in reading and writing. This implied that, for her, instructing students in mathematics was a reasonably high level of responsibility. More specific programmes, such as a speech programme and social skills' programmes, also required certain amounts of specialised knowledge. Some teacher aides discussed how they were entrusted with delivering the curriculum to students in withdrawal situations, implying high levels of responsibility due to the autonomy that this gave them. A small number of teacher aides remarked that students allocated to them were usually those who were achieving below the national standards or who were struggling to understand concepts that the teacher had taught them. This suggested that teacher aides were responsible for giving further instruction to

students, to help them to improve their understanding of concepts and ideas. Academic support for students also included the recording of student progress by teacher aides, which was reported by almost all of the teacher aides as occurring often or very often.

Some primary school teacher aides were responsible for students who had complex needs, such as autism, severe speech difficulties, high health needs and severe behavioural and emotional issues. Some teacher aides had received professional development in dealing with these issues, but generally not to a significant extent. A particular challenge was that of ensuring that students with high needs were learning and achieving goals, with one teacher aide, for example, discussing the initial difficulties she faced, as an inexperienced teacher aide, who had to support students with complex needs. She regarded the students who were assigned to her as being her specific area of responsibility, making the following observation:

I have more of an input into my student's actual work (than the teacher has) and probably understand him better.

Three teacher aides reported that they felt obliged to help students with high needs to access the curriculum and be accepted by teachers in mainstream classes, regardless of whether there was enough funding for them or not. One concern was that, if not supported, these students could become problematic. Accompanying and supervising groups of special needs' students on educational outings was also expected, as evident in one job description. Overall, it appeared that high levels of student needs corresponded with high levels of teacher aide responsibility.

More than half of the primary school teacher aides reported that they adapted the curriculum for students with special needs often or very often. However, it appeared that curriculum adaptation was ideally done in consultation with the classroom teacher. Some teacher aides also stated that they helped teachers to plan lessons, with some of them being responsible for adding to and facilitating small group work, as well as planning Physical Education activities for classes. Almost 73% of the teacher aides indicated that they developed resources often or very often as part of planning for lessons. Nonetheless, all of them believed that it was the teacher's job to plan and teach the curriculum, while their role was to assist in the delivery of the curriculum.

Some primary school teacher aides carried out specialised tasks, which required management and organisational skills. Those who also worked as school librarians discussed the additional responsibilities they had. For example:

- Being in charge of registering new resources
- Attending National Library meetings
- Creating a library blog
- Mentoring student librarians
- Marketing books to students
- Devising a programme for the National Library
- Organising the computer cataloguing of school resources
- Maintaining library resources

- Updating computer information on books
- Assisting with the development of the library as a learning centre

With regard to the library, one participant stated:

(it) has been my baby for years and I am the only one who knows how everything runs.

The teacher aide role of pastoral caregiver carried with it high levels of responsibility for three teacher aides, in particular, as it involved working with students with very high needs and with behavioural issues. It included collecting data on student behaviour, deciding whether a student should be removed from class, being responsible for the student while out of class and deciding when the student could return to class. This role also involved conducting interviews with students for the Check and Connect programme and deciding who would participate in the programme and who could be released from the programme. Other responsibilities discussed by teacher aides and which required some degree of initiative and planning on their part were as follows:

- Managing the Scholastic Lexile Reading Programme
- Maintaining the school website
- Promoting sport in the school, with the aim of keeping students active and engaged and to reduce disruptive behaviours
- Organising and assisting with sports tours and trips

The latter responsibility carried with it high levels of responsibility for the teacher aide concerned who mentioned that teacher aides, rather than teachers, were generally asked to accompany students and parents on these trips. Two teacher aides also reported that they carried out office administration duties for the school from time to time.

4.2.3. Secondary School Teacher Aide Roles and Responsibilities

Secondary school teacher aides carried out a vast array of tasks, all of which were linked to various levels of responsibility. As in the case of the primary school teacher aides, secondary school teacher aides' roles and responsibilities were firmly focused on supporting students and teachers. Professional development appeared to be an important factor in some teacher aides' ability to deliver this support. Some of them believed that they did far more than what was reflected in their job descriptions, with four of them stating that they just did what needed to be done at the right time. As one participant stated:

Some of us older teacher aides do more than what we should-we get used to it.

Some teacher aides were uncertain about the contents of their job descriptions, particularly with regard to the extent that they matched their roles and responsibilities and reflected specific responsibilities towards individual students. Some job descriptions (40%) included more personal responsibilities, such as being punctual, clean and tidy and appropriately attired. No teacher aides mentioned these aspects as being integral to their ability to do their job well. Therefore results reported below were primarily based on self-report, rather than on

the content of teacher aide job descriptions. Secondary school teacher aide roles and responsibilities will be discussed under the following headings: levels of support, diversity of roles and responsibilities and high levels of responsibility

4.2.3.1. Levels of Support

All of the secondary school teacher aides agreed that their main role was to provide different levels of support for students with a variety of diverse needs. This included dyslexia, autism, hearing and visual impairments and behavioural needs. The types of support varied according to individual need; that is, students with the most severe difficulties were more likely to be accorded one-on-one teacher aide support, in contrast to small group support or whole class teacher aide support. Some teacher aides reported that small group and one-on-one support for students created close relationships between them and their students, to the extent that students could get resentful of the time spent by their teacher aides with others students. On the other hand, a small number of participants believed that being able to work in a more personal way with students made a positive difference for students and was also less stressful and involved than whole class contexts. All secondary school teacher aides reported that they provided one-on-one support and worked with students in small groups often or very often, with fewer participants providing whole class support to teachers often or very often. However, most stated that, even when they were assigned to specific students, they also supported other students in whole class situations. Interestingly, one teacher aide viewed one-on-one support as also occurring in small group situations, where she was able to alternate from one student to the other within the group.

4.2.3.2. Diversity of Roles and Responsibilities

Secondary school teacher aides discussed how they carried out a wide range of roles and responsibilities. Diversity of location was linked to levels of student need and the type of support they required. For example, some students with very high needs were supported one-on-one in the mainstream, while those with other complex difficulties received more specialised support entirely within a satellite unit. Overall, most teacher aides worked in the mainstream and Learning Support Centres (LSCs), so as to support students academically. Some teacher aides carried out duties which did not exemplify the usual teacher aide job description; for example, being in charge of a subject area, carrying out administrative duties and supervising others. Most (90%) stated that the tasks they carried out were generally constrained by the requirements of the secondary school timetable, although they still had to be flexible. For example, one teacher aide stated that what she did was dependent on the time of the year and which students needed reader –writers for their examinations. Teacher aides also had to be flexible with regard to adjusting to different student needs; for example, the diverse nature of one teacher aide’s timetable required her to work in seven different classes, supporting approximately thirteen individual students overall with differing needs, as well as any others who requested her assistance. Two participants summed up the multifaceted nature of their teacher aide work in the following ways:

I do so many things in the classroom- you just do these things.

Sometimes I can't explain what I do, I just do it.

Some general roles and responsibilities of secondary school teacher aides, in order of reported frequency, included the following:

- Recording student progress
- Developing resources
- Assisting with classroom organisation
- Administering formal assessments
- Collecting data on student behaviour
- Attending IEP meetings
- Attending general staff meetings
- Acting as a career advisor
- Transporting students to work placements
- Participating in professional development

Overall, secondary school teacher aides' roles and responsibilities were primarily focused on academic, social, emotional and physical support for students. Teacher aides' roles and responsibilities also varied according to their working relationships with teachers, parents and outside agencies.

Secondary school teacher aide support for academic achievement ranged from assisting students with complex needs to assisting those who needed to gain a few extra credits for the National Certificate for Educational Achievement (NCEA). The type of support offered varied from school to school. Two teacher aides from the same school reported that Learning Centre support was generally directed at English and Mathematics for students with more complex needs. These students received teacher aide support in the mainstream for most of their other subjects, except for senior students who also received support for Science within the LSC. Teacher aides from a different school mentioned that they supported senior and junior students in mainstream classes for all of the curriculum areas. Some teacher aides working in mainstream classrooms were required to supervise students with disabilities constantly to ensure that they kept on task. Maintaining a policy of mainstreaming was a key task for a small number of teacher aides, involving the facilitation of learning programmes within the normal classroom. All teacher aides reported and discussed a variety of ways in which they supported students academically:

- Acting as reader-writer
- Teaching/instructing students
- Learning Braille so as to be able to support a student with visual difficulties
- Using computer technology to support students
- Adapting the curriculum for students
- Administering formal assessments
- Organising notes
- Helping students to write and typing up notes for students
- Giving students direct instructions

- Helping students to understand concepts
- Transmitting information to students
- Keeping students on task
- Providing specialised programmes, such as Tac Pac, computer and music, for students with very high needs, within a satellite unit

Data with regard to support for students with literacy difficulties was varied; that is, all of the secondary school teacher aides reported that they helped students with their reading often or very often and most of them (90%) reported that they acted as reader-writers often or very often, yet these tasks were infrequently discussed by teacher aides at the interviews.

Secondary school teacher aides provided social and emotional support for students. All of them expressed commitment to their students and believed that it was their responsibility to ensure students' safety and happiness and get them accepted by their peers. Social support included the following:

- Communicating with others about students
- Acting as a mediator for students,
- Predicting students' needs so as to intervene early and prevent the onset of emotional difficulties
- Role modelling
- Helping students to interact appropriately with teachers and their peers through effective behaviour management.
- Supporting students doing work experience by transporting them to work placements and encouraging them to be independent

Most teacher aides reported that they liaised between students and teachers often or very often and also facilitated student interaction with peers often or very often. One teacher aide explicitly discussed her role of liaising between teachers and students. As this participant stated:

If there's an issue, I will bring the teacher in with the students.

Some teacher aides reported that they did not believe that behaviour management for students with social behavioural difficulties should be part of the teacher aide role, with one teacher aide remarking that she only focused on student behaviour in certain circumstances; for example, if it was personal or it involved the student being supported.

Secondary school teacher aides played an important role in the emotional wellbeing of students, with some teacher aides remarking on the crucial role they played in supporting students on a psychological level, particularly during adolescence. For example, when asked what she thought the differences might be between the work done by primary and secondary school teacher aides, one participant stated:

The differences are huge. There are far larger emotional issues at secondary school level. They're not adults, but they're close, so students are more difficult to deal with than young children.

Half of the teacher aides reported that they helped students to transition successfully very often, although only one teacher aide mentioned this aspect of the teacher aide role in subsequent data, stating that she also accompanied students when they had to transition to another school. Emotional support also included supporting students who had anxiety problems and taking on board the responsibility of keeping students happy. As one participant stated:

The challenge is keeping the kids happy and on task- because of their difficulties they do feel inadequate sometimes.

Teacher aides who were tagged to individual students took particular responsibility for their students' emotional wellbeing. As one participant remarked:

My core responsibility is my number one student. I have more of a relationship with the student and know what's going on in their life and how it affects them. The teacher glosses over the student.

Some secondary school teacher aides' roles and responsibilities included having to cater for the physical needs of their students. This included toileting and feeding students with disabilities, taking them to the pool, giving lunch and clothing to students and making sure that students with very high needs behaved in a safe manner in class. Half of the teacher aides reported that they supported students with personal cares often or very often. The expected outcome of this type of support was for teacher aides to encourage students to be independent

Secondary school teacher aides carried out diverse roles and responsibilities in conjunction with various other people, so as to ensure the best outcomes for their students. Planning lessons and teaching were generally regarded by teacher aides as the teacher's responsibility while their responsibility was to assist students, but always with the backing of teachers. All of the teacher aides reported that they spoke to teachers about students often or very often and this was supported by follow up data. The mediator role was particularly important for one teacher aide as a way of transmitting information from teacher to students. Although the topic of student discipline was infrequently discussed by secondary school teacher aides, 70% of them reported that they helped teachers with student discipline often or very often. However, there was some disagreement with regard to the extent to which teacher aides intervened in disciplinary matters. This ranged from avoiding confrontation and letting teachers intervene when students misbehaved, to intervening directly in disciplinary issues.

All of the participants recognised that their roles differed from that of the teacher and that there were boundaries between these roles. As one participant stated:

I have an idea of what they (students) require, but because I'm the teacher aide, I can't say anything.

Half of the teacher aides stated that differences between the teacher and teacher aide role were on account of the teacher's subject knowledge and extensive training, as well as having to take on more responsibility for disciplining students. Overall, teacher aides believed that

the teacher in charge was the “boss” and that they should not criticise the teacher in front of students. Their job was to support teachers who had the last word in all decisions.

Some teacher aides reported that their role also included speaking to parents about students. This was supported by survey data which suggested that teacher aides carried out this task often or very often. Several teacher aides stated that they communicated with outside agencies about students, with a small number of them carrying out this role on a regular basis.

4.2.3.3. High Levels of Responsibility

Secondary school teacher aide roles went further than only carrying out expected tasks. These roles were accompanied by different levels of responsibility and most teacher aides carried out tasks which required various degrees of accountability. Some tasks were assigned to the teacher aides and some of them took on board responsibilities which required them to use their initiative. The following main themes related to high levels of responsibility for secondary school teacher aides emerged: responsible for students’ academic achievement, planning and adapting the curriculum, specialised roles and organisational responsibilities and decision making and independence.

All of the secondary school teacher aides believed that they were responsible for students’ academic achievement. Levels of responsibility were high in this area, in that it involved administering formal assessments and managing students’ learning by monitoring their progress. Indeed, half of the teacher aides reported that they instructed students and recorded student progress very often, while the same number of teacher aides reported that they administered formal assessments often or very often. Assisting students to gain credits for a National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) subject could be regarded as a particularly high level of responsibility, considering how important these credits might be for some students’ futures. Some teacher aides stated that they found the higher academic level a challenge because their knowledge had to be above that of the students to be able to help them. For example, one participant reported that she felt obliged to get the work for mathematics and study it at home, indicating that she took personal responsibility for keeping up with the academic demands of the secondary school curriculum. The extent to which secondary school teacher aides had high levels of responsibility for student achievement was particularly illustrated by one participant who supported a student in extension classes. As this participant stated:

(You) have to deal with things more strategically and must be able to follow what’s happening in classes.

Some secondary school teacher aides accepted responsibilities related to planning and adapting the curriculum, with one teacher aide being allocated extra time for planning and adapting for a specialised subject area. As this participant stated:

It’s a key role-devising a plan...and mainstreaming for it.

She also remarked that, at times, teachers sought reassurance from her regarding the delivery of the programme. Job descriptions for 70% of secondary school teacher aides indicated that

teacher aides were required to modify the curriculum for specially assigned students and students with disabilities, where appropriate. More than half of the teacher aides reported that they adapted the curriculum for students with special needs often or very often. Most of the teacher aides (60%) reported that they developed resources, as an element of lesson planning and adaptations, for students with diverse needs.

One secondary school teacher aide reported that she had high levels of organisational responsibilities. Her role was distinctive and, therefore, worthy of being accounted for in this discussion. As this participant stated:

My job is quite different to the other teacher aides-I now do half the work that used to be done by the teacher.

Her responsibilities included the following:

- Dealing with students' uniform issues
- Organising and co-ordinating reader-writers
- Organisation of the teacher aide timetable
- Learning Centre administration.

These responsibilities sometimes entailed having to stay late after school when organising reader-writers. At times, she took work home.

Half of the secondary school teacher aides reported that they sometimes had to make independent decisions and use their initiative. One issue focused on the difficulties they faced when they did not know what to expect when they went into each class and had to use their initiative. As one participant stated:

I look like I know what I'm doing, so have free rein to do what needs to be done. I am trusted to make the right decisions and sort out things with the teacher in charge.

Teacher aides reported that they used their initiative and worked independently. This involved two main areas of responsibility; namely, communication and support.

- Communication: Teacher aides independently communicated with outside agencies if they were in the school and also with parents, so as to get information about students. They also contacted outside agencies to express an interest in professional development.
- Support: Support was for individuals and school systems. Teacher aides encouraged and advised teacher aides new to the job, they worked out strategies to help students with dyslexia, they ran classes when the teacher was absent and they facilitated the mainstreaming of students with special needs by going into mainstream classrooms, speaking to students and explaining the needs of their students

As one participant noted:

If there are things I need to know, I find it out myself. We get to know the students and, in some instances, if there are severe issues with a student, we report back to other teacher aides. So we handle some things according to how well we know students and with the support of others.

4.3. Teacher Aide Perceptions: Job Satisfaction, Self-Efficacy and Extent of Ability to Make a Difference for Students with Diverse Needs

Primary and secondary school teacher aides expressed their opinions about their work and whether they believed they did their jobs well enough to make a positive difference for students with diverse needs. Teacher aides also reported on the extent to which they perceived they made a positive difference in specific areas of students' lives. Data from interviews and the teacher aide scale will be included in the following discussion.

4.3.1. Primary School Teacher Aides.

All of the primary school teacher aides expressed overwhelming satisfaction with their work in the following ways:

I love my job and don't feel like I'm coming to school.

This job is intellectually stimulating

We get the best part of the kids. We get to see their progress and achievement.

I definitely enjoy my job. It is never boring.

The greatest reward is always when a child achieves.

Positive comments about their work implied that most of them felt respected and recognised. In turn, they experienced high levels of work satisfaction, and were therefore more likely to believe that they made a positive difference for students with diverse needs.

Almost all of them expressed confidence in their ability as a teacher aide for numerous reasons. One teacher aide believed that her experience as a mother helped her to cope with some situations better than teachers with less experience. As she stated:

At times, though, I feel I could do the job equally as well as, or better than, the teacher.

Some pointedly agreed that teacher aides made a difference for students and that, if it was not for their support, students would become problematic, with one teacher aide remarking that teacher aides might not have all of the answers, but they could assist one another to understand students' individual needs. Believing in one's own ability to do the work well was particularly evident in the comments made by several teacher aides; for example:

Even when not successful with some children, I can still help others.

If you feel good about yourself, it reinforces that am the right type of person to do the job.

It's a good feeling when I release a student from a programme.

Children feel more comfortable with me and come to me for directions.

We support children in ways that teachers can't.

One of my greatest achievements was teaching a child to write his name.

Some teacher aides believed that they acted as positive role models for students and that teachers were grateful for their assistance in supporting students with behavioural needs and other issues. Several teacher aides made similar comments related to teachers being unable to cope without teacher aide support, with one expressing a wish for more teacher aides in schools.

The teacher aide scale aimed at finding out the extent to which teacher aides believed they contributed to including students with diverse needs. For the primary school teacher aide validity scales (IRP), all of the 11 questionnaires were returned. Table 4 (Appendix F) shows the number of teacher aide responses per item. Figure 4 shows the average teacher aide responses per item (Appendix G). The mode is 5.09. Table 4 (Appendix F) shows that all of the primary school teacher aides agreed or strongly agreed that they help students to obtain greater independence. This item also achieved the highest average response. Nine teacher aides (82%) agreed or strongly agreed that they have a positive effect on students' emotional wellbeing. Although all of the teacher aides agreed that they help students to foster positive peer interactions, this item, together with perceived ability to help students to sustain positive behavioural change appear to be areas in which primary school teacher aides were less likely to believe that they are able to make a difference for students with diverse needs. These two items yielded the lowest average response (5.0). Ten teacher aides (91%) agreed or strongly agreed that improvements in students' social skills and increased levels of student motivation could be attributed to them and that they could get the best out of the students with whom they work. The scores were not widely dispersed, with all of the teacher aides agreeing with each statement to some degree or another.

4.3.2. Secondary School Teacher Aides

Secondary school teacher aides also conveyed extremely positive attitudes towards their work with all of them expressing a love for their work. For example:

I am passionate about what I do and love my job.

Positive attitudes towards their work inferred that the majority of them felt respected and recognised. In turn, they found their work fulfilling, experienced high levels of job satisfaction and believed that they made a positive difference for students with diverse needs.

All of the secondary school teacher aides believed that they were good at their jobs. Indeed, one participant saw teacher aides as being almost equal to teachers, as they sometimes had to run classes. Personal experience was mentioned by some of them as playing a role in helping them to make a difference for students with diverse needs. Examples of this included the

following: growing up with a disability, which the teacher aide believed had given her a “natural understanding of where the students are coming from” and personal emotional trauma. Life experience, in general, was cited by some teacher aides as being invaluable for helping to prepare them for their work. For example:

We've got to go with our gut feeling. A huge amount is owed to personal life experience. I can talk to kids and I love being with them and helping them through.

I am a mother...., so having empathy with the students has prepared me for this work.

Experience as a teacher aide, in particular, was also reported as being helpful in doing their current work. As two participants remarked:

I know the tricks of the trade.

I have a peaceful, calm way of working with those who struggle-this comes with experience.

The teacher aide scale aimed at finding out the extent to which teacher aides believed they contributed to including students with diverse needs. For the secondary school teacher aide validity scales (IRP), all of the 10 questionnaires were returned. Table 4 (Appendix F) shows the number of teacher aide responses per item. Figure 4 (Appendix G) shows the average teacher aide responses per item. The mode is 5.3. Table 4 (Appendix F) indicates that all of the teacher aides agreed or strongly agreed that they have a positive effect on students' emotional wellbeing and that they help students to foster positive peer interactions. These two items also scored the highest average responses (5.6). Their ability to motivate students yielded the least favourable response from teacher aides (5.0). Ability to sustain behavioural change, get the best out of students and ability to help students achieve greater independence were equal with regard to response rate (5.3). As with the primary school teacher aides, the scores were not widely dispersed, with all of the teacher aides agreeing with each statement to some degree or another.

Overall, having a positive attitude and enjoying what they did appeared to be important factors in primary and secondary school teacher aides' ability to include students with diverse needs. These positive perceptions were reflected in the teacher aides' comments and in the teacher aide scale.

4.4. Teacher Aide Perceptions: Factors which Contribute to Making a Positive Difference for Students with Diverse Needs

4.4.1. Primary School Teacher Aides

The factors that primary school teacher aides considered contribute to making a positive difference for students with diverse needs were many and varied. The following themes were identified: training/professional development, relationships, personal factors, challenges, cultural factors, funding and school systems.

4.4.1.1. Training/Professional Development.

Most of the primary school teacher aides reported that training and professional development had helped them in their work. Some teacher aides specifically referred to the usefulness of their teacher aide training, as well as studies in psychology and literacy, as giving them insight into behaviour, autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), multi-cultural issues and the use of language to make connections with students. As one participant stated:

It's given me different ideas on how to deal with children.

Professional development opportunities in the following fields were appreciated by several teacher aides: reading, writing, numeracy and restorative justice. Opinions were mixed as to the usefulness of professional development, ranging from the notion that professional development teaches teacher aides how to teach, to the belief that professional development was not of practical value. The unsuitability of some professional development was illustrated by one participant who believed that “the maths session was like learning to speak a foreign language.” Alternatively, simply gaining practical experience as a teacher aide also confirmed competency to do the work, regardless of training and professional development.

4.4.1.2. Relationships

Primary school teacher aides referred to the quality of their professional relationships with others as being a vital factor in their ability to succeed in their job. As one participant stated:

You've got to have a good relationship with everybody, otherwise it falls apart.

A relationship of respect and trust between teacher aides and students was evident and expressed in many different ways by the teacher aides. For example:

The children are able to love you.....we are the ones that they confide in and trust.

The kids support us-the kids are awesome.

He comes to me when he has a problem- he's cool.

The students are bright and happy. I like them greeting me

Students themselves were regarded by two teacher aides as being their main support for the following reasons: they encouraged teacher aides to do their jobs well by showing respect for them and they were confident about the ability of teacher aides to make a positive difference

for them. Several teacher aides referred to their relationships with students as being different to their relationship with teachers. For example, some teacher aides believed that students were more relaxed with them because they knew that they did not have the same degree of authority as teachers and that, at times, students respected them, even more than they respected the teachers. There were opposing views about the teacher aide-student boundary, varying from the belief that they should not be the student's friend to the belief that they were not there to be disciplinarians, but rather someone with whom students could talk to in the same way they would speak to their parents and friends.

More than half of the primary school teacher aides reported that they enjoyed the quality time that they got to spend with individual students. This appeared to be an important factor in their ability to establish positive relationships with students. As some participants stated:

We support children in ways that teachers can't, as we have the time.

We get the best part of the kids. We get to see their progress and achievement.

Teacher aide's views differed with regard to opportunities to observe student behaviour. This ranged from the belief that they were in a privileged position to be able to observe students closely, to frustration at not having the time to study in more detail the reasons for student behaviour, so as to put in an intervention.

Relationships with teachers appeared to be almost as important to primary school teacher aides as relationships with students. As one participant stated:

The teachers are so good and have showed me where my weaknesses lie and are always willing to share their knowledge.

Being able to confide in teachers was important for some teacher aides, two of whom commented that they felt duty bound to let the teacher know of signs that things might not be quite right with a student or when they observed something untoward happening in another teacher's class. Indeed, keeping the lines of communication open with teachers with regard to being informed about anything that might affect them was important for some teacher aides, one of whom stated:

If not told (about IEP results), it can be very difficult.

Other teacher aides and school staff in general were regarded by several teacher aides as being their main support with regard to making a positive difference for students. In the words of one participant:

We talk about the children, compare and come up with strategies and share with one another.

Some teacher aides appreciated the role played by their school principals in supporting themselves and students. This included the following: setting boundaries for teachers and teacher aides with regard to responsibility for student discipline, sending teacher aides on courses if they thought they would be of benefit and meeting regularly with teacher aides to discuss problems. Some teacher aides believed that respect and recognition from teachers

were important factors related to making a positive difference for students. Perceptions ranged from concerns about being made to feel unwelcome and unsupported in class by the teacher and believing that teacher aides were generally undervalued and unappreciated, to believing that teachers really valued their teacher aides because they understood how difficult their job was.

Primary school teacher aides also considered that parental support was an important factor in making a positive difference. As one participant stated:

We must have support from the parents, otherwise we can't make a difference.

Positive relationships with parents, which included communicating with them about their children's progress, were coupled with an awareness of the boundaries between school and home and that teacher aides should not interfere with "negative stuff at home." A strong school structure and high levels of parent participation in parent teacher meetings was emphasised by one participant as being a positive factor in students' lives.

4.4.1.3. Personal Factors

Personal factors encompassed primary school teacher aides' personal attributes and approaches that they believed were helpful in making a positive difference to students with diverse needs.

Personal attributes were individual characteristics that formed each teacher aide's sense of identity. Specific personality traits which teacher aides believed contributed to being able to make a positive difference for students were the following:

- Empathy and understanding
- Patience
- Fairness
- Perseverance
- Creativity
- Flexibility
- Confidence
- Positive self-esteem

More specifically, being committed to helping students required them to respect and accept students. This was demonstrated by listening and communicating appropriately with students, so as to establish a rapport with them.

Some teacher aides exemplified commitment to students by stating that they believed that student welfare was paramount, over and above their role of supporting teachers. The needs of assigned students, in particular, took priority over assistance for other students in the class. Even when funds had not been allocated for a student, teacher aides sometimes felt obliged to provide support. As one participant noted:

We just do what we do, just for the love of it.

Personal approaches were specific strategies used by teacher aides to support students with diverse needs. Some personal approaches advocated by teacher aides were strongly based on teacher aides' knowledge of students' backgrounds which helped them to communicate appropriately with students with diverse needs. As one participant remarked:

Teachers and the principal tell me about the background of students, so I understand different ways of talking to students.

Teacher aides discussed the techniques they used when working with students with diverse needs, all of which were aimed at helping students to feel, happy, comfortable and safe. These included the following:

- Allowing students to “talk about something to get it off their chest so they can start their day’s school work.”
- Not asking students about their personal environments
- Greeting students to help them to feel included
- Focusing on a small group of students, rather than one student
- Praising students
- Providing positive affirmation for students
- Catching students being good and celebrating their successes
- Standing up for children’s rights, sometimes by mediating between student and teacher
- Checking with the teacher if a noticeable change was observed in a student (based on prior knowledge of the student’s family)
- Supporting students out of class

These approaches were based on teacher aides’ personal philosophies; namely that every child should be regarded as a unique individual and that their relationships with others should be kept professional.

4.4.1.4. Challenges

All primary school teacher aides discussed the challenges they faced when striving to make a positive difference to students; namely:

- Keeping students on task and focused,
- Helping them to learn and achieve goals,
- Helping students to realise that mainstream was not only about academics, but also about learning to socialise,
- Trying to make numeracy interesting and fun for students
- Keeping ahead of students by discussing their strengths and weaknesses with teachers.

One concern was that that some children were unsettled in class, as their physical needs were not being met. The implication was that, if these barriers could be overcome, teacher aides’ ability to make a positive difference to students could be more easily facilitated.

4.4.1.5. Cultural Factors

The majority of primary school teacher aides believed that recognition of students' cultures was an important factor in their ability to include students. The term "culture" had different connotations for them. Some believed that it referred to ethnicity alone and some gave it a wider meaning by interpreting culture as the ways in which individual families lived, depending on their histories, home language and the needs of students. Respecting cultural differences were important factors for these teacher aides, some of whom particularly emphasised the importance of getting to know each student well by becoming aware of their backgrounds. They believed that this knowledge helped them to be more understanding and tolerant of students' behaviours and helped them to cater to individual needs. This was particularly evident in the case of teacher aides who had been at their schools a long time and were aware of individual family backgrounds. One advantage was being able to identify noticeable changes in a student, which could be passed on to the teacher. In addition teacher aides believed that recognising students from other countries and those with special needs helped them to adjust how they communicated with students and their families. This also prevented students from being prejudged, which, for one teacher aide was a particular concern, especially in the case of students with special needs whom, she believed, might be regarded as a "hopeless case" and not "given a chance."

Having knowledge of Maori protocol and language, in particular, was important for some teacher aides. As one participant stated:

When writing, children talk about their koko, whanau, marae.

A school culture which celebrated biculturalism was an important factor in student support for another teacher aide:

It (biculturalism) is part of the fabric of our school.....the mana values rule the school.

In contrast, a small number of teacher aides also believed that all students should be treated the same and be made to feel that they were equal in the school system, rather than focusing on differences as such.

4.4.1.6. Funding

Funding shortages as a factor in helping them to make a positive difference for students with diverse needs were concerns for almost half of the primary school teacher aides. As some of them remarked:

I'm not using all of my skills because of budget constraints. I feel that I know I could do so much more.

It's a shame that the funding has stopped as there are always at least two to three children in a class that need help."

Other comments were directed at the low pay scale for teacher aides who often did extra work, without being paid, and the extra demands placed on funding the New Zealand

inclusion system, in comparison to some European countries where students with complex needs are educated separately from the mainstream.

4.4.1.7. School Systems

Primary school teacher aides discussed factors related to whole school culture which they believed impacted upon their ability to do their job well. One concern over safety in secondary schools implied that primary schools may provide a safer environment for teachers and students. Several teacher aides mentioned what they perceived were the positive aspects of working in their particular primary schools. For example:

- A culture of no bullying because “we are one big family”
- Teaching staff who speak “the same language” and follow the “same philosophy”
- Programmes that were supported by the principal
- Having a specific job description, as “much depends on the clientele”
- A strong school structure, which focuses on the positive; for example, being able to give students house points, which they can talk about to their families

As one participant stated:

This school is encouraging and uplifting. Things are rewarded. There are lots of ways children are encouraged to thrive here.

4.4.2. Secondary School Teacher Aide Factors

Secondary school teacher aides discussed many factors related to perceived ability to make a difference to students with diverse needs. The following themes will be examined: training/professional development, relationships, personal factors, challenges, cultural factors, funding and school systems.

4.4.2.1. Training/Professional Development

The majority of secondary school teacher aides agreed that training and professional development had helped to prepare them for their current work. Some reported that professional development had given them better insight into conditions such as visual impairment, epilepsy and autism, as well as an understanding of what students with complex needs experience. Other participants stated:

The professional development helps me to touch down and confirm that I'm going the right way.

It has been brilliant, especially when focused on a particular learning difficulty.

Some teacher aides were less positive that training and professional development had been beneficial for the following reasons: there was not enough professional development offered, therefore some of them had to source their own or find out things themselves and teacher aide training did not cater adequately for working with disabled special needs' students and secondary school students. There was also some confusion amongst some teacher aides as to whether formal qualifications were necessary for them to be able to keep their jobs, with

some believing that they had been misled in this respect by the institutions which offered such training.

4.4.2.2. Relationships

Secondary school teacher aides discussed the nature of their professional relationships with students, teachers and other people and considered the extent to which this impacted on perceived ability to support students with diverse needs.

All of the secondary school teacher aides generally had positive relationships with students and viewed this as being important for facilitating inclusion. Positive teacher aide-student relationships were voiced by one participant as follows:

I get students to the stage of feeling comfortable with me, sharing things and having fun.

Another teacher aide described her popularity with students, to the extent that “the students hound me to go back into their class” (when the teacher aide changed classes). Alternatively, some teacher aides indicated that their relationships with students were not always positive, which could be a barrier to inclusion. Their comments focused on the following concerns: working too long with one student, which may have compromised the student-teacher aide relationship, jealousy from assigned students when the teacher aide interacted with other students and rude and disrespectful behaviour from students, making it difficult to “keep cool.” Disrespect from students was also linked to teacher aides’ perceived powerlessness to discipline students.

The majority of teacher aides believed that they had good relationships with teachers and that this impacted positively on their ability to support students. Some participants specifically reported that teachers were the main support for them with regard to making a positive difference to students and emphasised the relationship of trust that existed between themselves and teachers. Teacher aides gave examples of their positive relationships with teachers:

- Teachers (“even the hierarchy”) keeping the teacher aide informed about students
- Being willing to accept responsibility (“one of the things that teachers like about me in the mainstream.”)
- Being willing to give and get feedback at the end of lessons, which strengthened relationships with teachers
- Teachers sometimes looking to teacher aides for reassurance

As some participants stated:

Teachers are rapt with what I do.

When I was away, the teachers wanted to clone me.

Some teacher aides were not entirely positive about their relationships with teachers, particularly when they perceived the teacher as being unsupportive and not keeping them

informed as to what they should be doing with their students in class. One participant, for example, reported that she found this frustrating and led her to feel that she was babysitting the students.

Students' relationships with teachers also contributed to making a positive difference for students. As reported by one teacher aide, it was all about attitude, and, when teachers did not have preconceived ideas about students, students had the opportunity to redeem themselves.

Most teacher aides reported positive relationships with parents, with one participant stating that she believed that her role was to anticipate the needs of the students and of the parents. She made an effort to contact parents, even to the extent of going outside the school to do so, as "parents are more likely to open up to me and not to the school." Some teacher aides reported positive involvement with outside agencies, with one teacher aide remarking that she felt disappointed at not being invited to attend Individual Educational Planning (IEP) meetings when they involved students with whom she was working. As this participant stated:

I invited myself once, but felt I wasn't being listened to.

4.4.2.3. Personal Factors

Personal factors included secondary school teacher aides' personal attributes and approaches that they believed were helpful in making a positive difference to students with diverse needs.

Secondary school teacher aides considered personal characteristics which they believed helped them to make positive difference for students. These included the following:

- Understanding and empathy
- Patience
- Adaptability
- Fairness
- Consistency

Respect for students and unconditional acceptance of them was shown by listening to them, anticipating their needs and being committed to helping them, even between classes, without receiving any extra pay. Some teacher aides believed that simply being there for the students was necessary for students' wellbeing, particularly in light of the observation that, if a teacher aide was not available, students sometimes did not go to the mainstream classrooms.

Secondary school teacher aides discussed specific approaches that they believed were helpful for including students with diverse needs. These comprised the following:

- Talking to students (not at them)
- Acknowledging students and greeting them
- Smiling and giving compliments
- Encouraging student to interact with teachers

- Letting students finish their sentences

On a more general note, teacher aides believed that it was important to be able to recognise when students needed help and what level of help was needed. They were also conscious that students needed to be independent, but they also had to have guidelines and boundaries. Most importantly was the necessity of getting to know the students in order to be able to make a difference to them.

These approaches were aimed at helping students to feel good and safe at school. Some teacher aides mentioned the different styles of teacher aiding, including the “helicopter” teacher aide, which was regarded as having a negative impact on the inclusion of students. Overall, teacher aides were aware of their different roles, with one stating that they knew when it was appropriate to “back off” from students. Having insight into students’ needs was also a factor in helping teacher aides to include students. As one participant stated:

It’s all about the student. We can see what’s making them unhappy and then use distraction to help them.

A small number of teacher aides expressed opposing views with regard to using labels to describe students. This ranged from the belief that labelling students did not encourage inclusion, to the belief that labels were necessary, as they helped to explain students’ difficulties.

4.4.2.4. Challenges

Other factors which secondary school teacher aides believed contributed to making a positive difference to students were also regarded as challenges. Some challenges were related to students’ social and emotional wellbeing; namely:

- Getting students accepted by their peers
- Keeping them happy.

Other challenges were associated with students’ academic achievement and included the following:

- Keeping students on task
- Supporting students in the extension classes
- Not making assumptions about students’ academic abilities
- Obtaining sufficient knowledge of the curriculum

Issues surrounding respect and time were pertinent concerns. Gaining the respect of students, especially when teacher aides perceived that students had more respect for teachers than teacher aides was a challenge. As one participant noted:

A lot of students see us as nothing.

Finding enough time to do things was regarded as a challenge with several teacher aides discussing how they worked during breaks and after school to complete their work. They also did not have time to attend some IEP meetings because they were held during school time. More specifically, having enough patience to cope with students who needed more time to access the curriculum was a particular challenge expressed by one teacher aide:

It takes longer to make a difference with these students and speed is part of the problem.

In addition, learning to adjust to each student as an individual was a challenge which impacted upon the extent to which teacher aides were able to cater for students' individual needs. Overall, looking at the bigger picture and trying to understanding students in context appeared to be the main challenge for most teacher aides, as aptly illustrated by one participant's comment:

Sometimes it's more about what's happening outside of school, rather than in school. You have to get around this to make a difference in their learning.

4.4.2.5. Cultural Factors

Most secondary school teacher aides were aware that culture had a broad meaning and expanded it to include the culture of the family, the culture of teenagers and the culture of students from other countries. When asked how they believed recognition of culture affected support for students, some emphasised the importance of knowing about the background of students for various reasons; students were more likely to ask for help, the teacher aide would be more aware of their needs, it influenced how teacher aides behaved with students and "the environment in which students live connects to the emotional side of things." Cultural awareness was linked to respect by some teacher aides, one of whom stated:

No matter what the nationality is, we should work to their cultural level. If we use culture, students work better.

Some teacher aides reported that all students deserved the same degree of support, regardless of culture. There was also some concern that certain groups of students might be favoured more than others, which impacted upon their ability to be fully included. One example cited was that of students with behavioural difficulties who received merit awards in class, "while good students who participate are not targeted." There were conflicting opinions from teacher aides with regard to support for Maori students and students of other ethnicities, ranging from a belief that that less structured support was provided for behavioural issues for non-Maori students to the perception that Maori students were not being cared for sufficiently within the school system.

4.4.2.6. Funding

Some secondary school teacher aides expressed concern about lack of funding, which they believed affected the extent to which they were able to make a difference for students. As two participants stated:

I'm aware of the frustration for other students and know they need help, but there's little funding for them.

If a student loses funding, the school takes an hour off teacher aide support for the student.

Specific concerns related to funding included the following:

- Fluctuating work hours due to funding constraints
- Lack of funding linked to lack of time “to give the kids what they need”
- The low pay of teacher aides, in comparison to teachers
- Teacher aides not being paid in the holidays, but only for the hours that they were in the classroom
- Working more hours than what they were paid for

4.4.2.7. School Systems

Several secondary school teacher aides believed that systems within the school played a part in supporting them to include students with diverse needs. According to them, supportive school systems had the following characteristics:

- Clear structure with regard to behavioural issues and who was responsible
- Top down leadership
- Teamwork
- Support from administration, the teacher in charge and other teacher aides
- Regular teacher aide meetings
- Having a Learning Support Centre and a Dean's House available for behavioural, academic and emotional support for students
- Regular appraisals by educators who have insight into the work of teacher aides

Alternative approaches that schools could consider in order to meet students' diverse needs were proposed, as follows:

- Include special needs' students in higher level mainstream classes with students who can cope and are more confident, rather than in mainstream classes where the majority of students struggle.
- Put more emphasis on supporting students in the middle bracket as “these are the ones who are close to achieving and they need support more so than the lower ones and the students at the top.”

4.5. Summary

Teacher aides from a range of primary and secondary schools and with varying years of experience provided quantitative and qualitative data related to their roles, responsibilities and perceptions of factors which they believed contribute to making a positive difference to students with diverse needs. They also indicated the extent to which they believed they were successful practitioners, which was linked to job satisfaction. The research findings suggested that it was important to view the teacher aides' perceptions within context, as environmental factors, such as individual school policies and practices, most likely interacted with the personal characteristics of the teacher aides, impacting upon their views of several issues related to making a positive difference for students. In light of these findings, the following chapter compares the roles, responsibilities and perceptions of primary and secondary school teacher aides.

CHAPTER FIVE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

This chapter provides a comparison between primary and secondary school teacher aides in response to the third research question, which focuses on the commonalities and differences between the roles, responsibilities and perceived efficacy of the primary and secondary teacher aides. It also compares primary and secondary school teacher aide perceptions of factors which contribute to making a positive difference to students with diverse needs.

5.1. Similarities

5.1.1. Roles and Responsibilities

Primary and secondary school teacher aides provided a variety of levels of support for students with diverse needs. They were assigned to individual students, worked with small groups of students and provided whole class support for teachers. All teacher aides were flexible and adaptable and all of them had to use their initiative in certain situations.

All teacher aides carried out a wide range of roles and responsibilities, providing academic, social, emotional and physical support for students. They provided instructional support for students, with the emphasis being on English and Mathematics. Teacher aides worked hard to get students with high needs included in mainstream classrooms, with some of them expressing concern that students with special needs were not always accepted by classroom teachers. Social support included assisting students to transition successfully and helping the teacher to manage student behaviour, although primary and secondary school teacher aides generally agreed that their role did not encompass that of a being a disciplinarian. Teacher aides who were assigned individual students expressed particular responsibility for them and they took on the burdens of their students and worked hard to ensure that they were happy and secure at school. Assisting students with personal care and ensuring student safety were priorities for some primary and secondary school teacher aides.

In general, teacher aides from both types of schools recognised that their roles differed from that of the teacher and that there were distinct boundaries between the teacher and teacher aide role, although some went beyond the teacher- teacher aide boundary by communicating with parents and outside agencies independently.

Primary and secondary school teacher aides had high levels of responsibility, with teacher aides from both types of schools reporting that on occasion, they had been in charge of whole classes within the mainstream due to teacher absenteeism. Teacher aides from both types of schools supported students who required extra assistance and who were achieving below average results, often taking on those with the most complex and severe difficulties. Teacher aides who were assigned individual students emphasised that their students were their first priority. Teacher aides accepted personal responsibility for the success of their students, with some upskilling themselves in mathematics, so as to be more productive when supporting students in this subject area. This sense of loyalty, commitment to the wellbeing of students

and determination to help them to be included, was patently evident in the case of all of the teacher aides in this study.

5.1.2. Teacher Aide Perceptions: Job Satisfaction, Self-Efficacy and Extent of Ability to Make a Positive Difference for Students with Diverse Needs

All teacher aides enjoyed their work and believed that they did their work well. Teacher aides from both types of schools believed that schools could not function without them and that more teacher aides were needed in schools. Overall, primary and secondary school teacher aides were fairly comparable with regard to the extent to which they believed they had a positive effect on student motivation and independence, as illustrated in Figure 4 (Appendix G).

5.1.3. Teacher Aide Perceptions: Factors which Contribute to Making a Positive Difference for Students with Diverse Needs

Primary and secondary school teacher aides generally believed that training and professional development had helped them to include students. Only some did not entirely believe that training and professional development had all been useful, in that it did not cater for their specific needs.

Relationships with teachers were not always positive for both groups of teacher aides, with some concern from both sides about lack of teacher support and supervision and being made to feel unwanted in the classroom. Respect was an inescapable element of the teacher - teacher aide relationship, with teachers and other teacher aides being the teacher aides' main sources of support. For both groups of teacher aides, teachers looked to the teacher aides for support; for example, proofreading work and making sure they were on the right track when teaching a specialised subject. Teacher aides from each type of school believed that they had close relationships with students and that sometimes they knew individual students better than the teachers did.

All teacher aides firmly focused on the needs of students when discussing personal attributes needed to make a difference for students with diverse needs. All agreed that respect and empathy for students were necessary qualities for teacher aides and that the ability to make students feel safe, happy and accepted, by greeting them, listening to them and understanding their needs, were essential approaches.

All teacher aides agreed that it was important to know about the background of students in order to make a positive difference to them. Most teacher aides were aware of the broader meaning of culture, as not just being ethnicity, but also including people of many nationalities, as well as the culture of those with special needs. Culture and respect were linked and they agreed that all students, regardless of cultural background, deserved the same degree of support. Teacher aides from both types of schools were concerned that students were not always treated fairly by teachers; for example, when teachers stereotyped students with special needs and judged them accordingly and when students with behavioural difficulties were over rewarded by teachers, at the expense of other students in the class.

Teacher aides from both types of schools agreed that keeping students happy and on task was a challenge. They were equally as concerned about their low pay, the fact that they did not get paid in the holidays and lack of funding for students with special needs and they agreed that they did more than what was on their job descriptions. Having enough time to do their job properly and trying to include students with diverse needs was a particular challenge for teacher aides from both types of schools.

5.2. Differences

5.2.1. Roles and Responsibilities

Overall, primary school teacher aide job descriptions were more evenly structured than secondary school teacher aide job descriptions. Some of them included key tasks and performance indicators and were drawn up for specific students, where relevant. The emphasis appeared to be on supporting the student, rather than the teacher. There were vast differences in the quality and content of secondary school teacher aide job descriptions, from those that did not identify specific tasks to those that were very specific and included key tasks, expected outcomes and performance indicators. Overall, secondary school job descriptions appeared to focus more on supporting the teacher.

Primary school teacher aides estimated that levels of need of students with whom they worked ranged from moderate to very high. Secondary school teacher aides deduced that they worked with a wider range of levels of need, ranging from low to very high. They also worked in a greater variety of locations, ranging from mainstream classrooms to Learning Support Centres and satellite units.

Data suggested that primary school teacher aides were more likely to offer whole class support to teachers than secondary teacher aides. More primary school teacher aides (72.73%) than secondary school teacher aides (50%) reported that they worked with small groups of students very often. Secondary school teacher aides also worked within whole class situations, but were more likely to focus on individual students or groups of students within the class. A larger proportion of secondary school teacher aides (70%) reported that they very often worked one-on-one with students, in contrast to 54.55 % of primary school teacher aides reporting that they carried out this task very often. It could be implied that primary school teacher aides were more flexible, but only with regard to levels of support.

Primary school teacher aides appeared to carry out a wider variety of tasks, some of them outside their job descriptions, and were more likely to be used arbitrarily. Secondary school teacher aides generally appeared to be used in more structured ways on account of being bound by the school timetable.

Academic support included instructional responsibilities for all teacher aides. Primary school teacher aides were responsible for supporting students with specific programmes, often under the guidance of teachers, the RTLB and therapists. Secondary school teacher aides generally focused more intensively on academic achievement and meeting the formal requirements of the NCEA, relying on teachers as their primary guide and source of information. Teachers

were more likely to be present in the various locations in which secondary school teacher aides worked. Helped students with reading was reported as occurring very often by 70% of the secondary school teacher aides, in contrast to 63.64% of primary teacher aides who reported carrying out this activity very often. As was to be expected, far more secondary school teacher aides than primary school teacher aides worked as reader writers, with 90% of secondary school teacher aides carrying out this task often or very often in comparison to 45.45% of primary school teacher aides carrying this task often.

Primary school teacher aides provided structured support for students' social and emotional wellbeing from a school wide perspective; such as assisting with lunchtime social skills' programmes and providing a programme focused intensively on students with behavioural difficulties. Support in this respect was sometimes personal and practical; for example, sharing breakfast with students. Some school principals took these programmes on board and supported them directly. Secondary school teacher aides also provided high levels of social and emotional support for their students, with the assistance of teachers in charge of teacher aides and school wide discipline systems. Secondary school teacher aides did not mention specific programmes aimed at improving students' social skills; rather support in this area was generally delivered on an informal basis. Secondary school teacher aides also did not mention support on a more personal level from school principals, but it is presumed that this was because the secondary schools were much larger than the primary schools. Some secondary school teacher aides played a role with regard to removing students with special needs from mainstream classes, on the few occasions when teachers expressed discomfort at having the students in their classrooms. One primary school teacher aide also removed students from classes, at times, but this was for behavioural issues and only on a temporary basis.

Physical support for primary school students generally focused on overall health and wellbeing and included specific exercises to assist with students' development, as well as encouraging students to play sport during lunch breaks. Secondary school students with high needs were supported on a more specialised level, within Learning Support Centres and a satellite unit, which catered for students' personal physical needs, while also providing specific exercises to stimulate the senses. Secondary school teacher aides working mostly in mainstream classrooms did not support students on the playground to the same extent as primary teacher aides.

Primary and secondary school teacher aides carried out diverse tasks, which appeared to be determined by the nature of their relationships with teachers. Primary school teacher aides generally had close relationships with a few teachers, while secondary school teacher aides, who encountered a variety of personalities daily, appeared to form relationships that were less intense. Primary school teacher aides tended to carry out a wider variety of tasks of a more mundane and general nature, such as putting up classroom displays. This could possibly be due to primary teacher aides taking greater ownership of individual classrooms and teachers. Levels of responsibility for teacher aides from both types of schools varied widely and were linked to levels of student need as well as to the culture and expectations of the various schools.

Academic support for students included instructional responsibilities for both primary and secondary teacher aides. Assisting students to achieve NCEA credits was an important responsibility for secondary school teacher aides as they were trusted not too assist students with their responses, which could compromise the validity of assessments. Their knowledge sometimes had to be above that of the students in order to help them. In certain aspects, some primary school teacher aides appeared to have more autonomy than secondary teacher aides with respect to supporting students academically because, at times, they instructed students in withdrawal situations where teachers were not present. The data suggested that secondary school teacher aides had more challenges academically and, despite the more structured timetable, they reported that they did not always know what was going to happen in each lesson and therefore had to adapt to the expectations of each teacher with regard to lesson content and aims. Primary school teacher aides did not express this as a challenge.

Some secondary school teacher aides also acted as career advisors for students; therefore they tended to look at the bigger picture and encouraged students to consider their futures outside school, which could be considered as an important responsibility. With regard to planning and adapting the curriculum, some primary school teacher aides planned for physical education. Secondary school teacher aides did more academic planning than primary school teacher aides, one of whom planned for a specialised curriculum area to a high level.

Some secondary school teacher aides had specialised roles and high levels of organisational responsibility, which generally appeared to be orientated towards systems. Levels of organisational responsibility for primary school teacher aides were generally more evenly spread and appeared to be more individually student orientated.

5.2.2. Teacher Aide Perceptions: Job Satisfaction, Self-Efficacy and Extent of Ability to Make a Positive Difference for Students with Diverse Needs

Figure 4 (Appendix G) compares primary and secondary school teacher aide responses per item on the Teacher Aide Scale. It can be seen that primary school teacher aides were slightly more positive than secondary school teacher aides with regard to their ability to motivate students and help them to achieve greater independence. In all other areas, secondary school teacher aides reported more positive attitudes towards their ability to make a difference, particularly with regard to the following items:

- Supporting students' social skills
- Sustaining behavioural change
- Having a positive effect on students' emotional wellbeing

The most marked difference between primary and secondary school teacher aides overall was in the area of peer interactions, with a response average of 5.36 for secondary school teacher aides and 5.0 for primary school teacher aides. More specifically, it is interesting to note that 50% of secondary school teacher aides strongly agreed that they had a positive effect on students' academic achievement, in contrast to 27.27% of primary school teacher aides who strongly agreed with this statement.

5.2.3. Teacher Aide Perceptions: Factors which Contribute to Making a Positive Difference for Students with Diverse Needs

Primary school teacher aides were generally more positive than secondary school teacher aides that training and professional had helped them in their work. Some secondary school teacher aides believed that more professional development in specific areas was warranted, while no primary teacher aides expressed this wish.

Relationships with teachers and students differed with respect to teacher aides from both types of schools and these were governed by school size and the nature of the student population. Primary school teacher aides were less vocal than secondary school teacher aides in their views about respect from teachers, as a factor in helping them to do their jobs well. On account of smaller pastoral care systems, primary school teacher aides experienced less diversity with regard to relationships with teachers, while secondary school teacher aides had to cope with a much wider variety of personalities, teaching styles, expectations and so on.

Far more primary school teacher aides (55%) than secondary school teacher aides (10%) appreciated the fact that they were able to spend more quality time with students than teachers could. Some secondary school teacher aides expressed concern about lack of time to give students what they need and one of them linked funding to time, implying that they needed more time to make a positive difference. With regard to respect, there was some suggestion that primary school teacher aides were respected more by students.

Several secondary school teacher aides were firmly focused on personal experience as playing a major role in helping them to do their work well. Personal experience was not mentioned as a factor by primary school teacher aides.

Primary school teacher aides spoke positively about Māori protocol and biculturalism as helping to include all students. Almost no secondary school teacher aides highlighted this as an important factor in New Zealand schools, besides a suggestion of inequality of support for Māori and non-Māori students. Some secondary school teacher aides touched on the culture of teenagers, especially those with behavioural difficulties, and emphasised the importance of making connections with young people as a factor in making a difference.

Primary and secondary school teacher aides faced various challenges, as they tried to include students with diverse needs. Some challenges were specific to the age levels and needs of the students. Some primary school teacher aides believed, for example, that it was a challenge to cater to the physical needs of primary school children, while secondary school teacher aides appeared to be more focused on gaining enough knowledge of the curriculum and gaining respect from students. Evidence points towards secondary school teacher aides having greater challenges with regard to student support than primary school teacher aides, in that they supported a wider range of student needs.

Primary school teacher aides were focused on safety and rewards as important factors for making a difference within the primary school system. Secondary school teacher aides believed that a clear school structure with definite hierarchical lines defining responsibility

for behavioural issues, were important factors in making a difference for students with diverse needs.

5.3. Summary

A comparative analysis of primary and secondary school teacher aides revealed commonalities and differences with regard to their roles, responsibilities and perspectives. Variations in the teacher aides' experiences appeared to be primarily linked to the different working environments of the primary and secondary schools, although individual teacher aide characteristics and other interacting factors could not be discounted. The final chapter provides an overall contextual discussion of the research findings and the study will be drawn to a conclusion.

CHAPTER SIX DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The final chapter discusses the findings of this study with reference to research in the field. Implications for future educational research, policy and practice are then discussed and recommendations made for further research on the topic of teacher aides. The limitations of this study are discussed and the chapter ends with some closing thoughts from the researcher.

6.1. Discussion of Research Findings

Results suggested that there was a connection between the work carried out by this group of teacher aides, the levels of responsibility they held within the schools, their own personal characteristics and their perceptions with regard to making a positive difference for the students with whom they worked. Commonalities and differences between primary and secondary school teacher aide roles, responsibilities and perspectives were primarily related to the varying needs of primary and secondary school students, as well as different structures operating within these schools.

6.1.1. Levels of Support

Levels of support offered by teacher aides influenced their perceptions regarding their ability to make a positive difference. The belief that working with small groups within the classroom was more beneficial for themselves and for students than one-on-one support, was in accordance with studies (e.g. Giangreco et al., 2001a; Groom, 2006; Howes, 2003), which found that this style of teacher aiding is more inclusive and engaging for students, particularly as it gives students a greater opportunity to interact with the classroom teacher and their peers (Giangreco et al.). Alternatively, the opportunity to work one-on-one with students was a crucial factor in some primary and secondary school teacher aides' perspectives on their ability to make a positive difference for students with diverse needs. They were appreciative of the quality time they got to spend with students and the opportunities it gave them to connect to their students. The advantages of working one-on-one with students is supported in the literature (e.g. Jameson, McDonnell, Johnson, Riesen & Polychronis, 2007), but generally only where teacher aides worked with students with developmental disabilities and other more complex difficulties. Certainly, the extent to which teacher aides support teachers or students is dependent on levels of student need, with nurturing taking precedence over direct instruction in special education (Takala, 2007). This is also, presumably, the case in primary school contexts, where students are likely to be less dependent than those in secondary schools. Quantitative results from this study, which suggested that secondary school teacher aides generally spend more time working with students one-on-one than primary teacher aides, did not concur with Takala's findings.

6.1.2. Social and Emotional Support for Students

Catering for the emotional wellbeing of students was an inescapable part of the teacher aide role, an issue which was reflected in primary and secondary school teacher aides' perspectives that they played an important role in ensuring that students were safe and happy at school. Supporting adolescents with anxiety as a particular component of one secondary school teacher aide's role reflected distinct differences between primary and secondary school teacher aides' roles. Therefore the nature of the teacher aide's role in supporting students emotionally was sometimes dictated by students' developmental stages; for example, rates of worry and depression were found to increase as children progress to adolescence (Brown, Teufel & Birch, 2006; Costello, Copeland & Angold, 2011). The role of teacher aides from both types of schools in guiding and mentoring students appeared to impact positively on their ability to include students. These findings are similar to previous studies, which highlighted the positive effects of mentoring on social-emotional competence in adolescents (e.g. Komosa-Hawkins, 2012). In addition, developing students' social and behavioural skills at an early age was plainly evident in primary school teacher aides' roles and their beliefs that they were responsible for promoting inclusion, as endorsed by a number of studies on this topic (e.g. Angelides et al., 2009).

6.1.3. Working with Others

Developing positive relationships with others was a vital factor in teacher aides' beliefs about including students with diverse needs. Making connections with students, learning about their backgrounds and accepting students for who they were, were particularly important for teacher aides from both types of schools, with regard to making a positive difference. These findings are not unlike those of previous studies which emphasised the connector role of teacher aides as a means of helping students to engage with the curriculum in both primary and secondary schools (e.g. Chopra et al., 2004; Wenger et al., 2004). Getting students with special needs accepted by other students and by teachers was a particular challenge for teacher aides from both types of schools, as they perceived that this gave their students the opportunity to thrive in the mainstream. These findings are in accordance with Rutherford (2011) who emphasised the connector role of teacher aides as subtly encouraging students and teachers to move past appearances and labels and accept students as they are. The role played by teacher aides in advocating for students went beyond that of the connector role. This was revealed by teacher aides going over and above their expected duties and championing students' rights, as was also found in Rutherford's (2008) investigation within the context of relational social justice in New Zealand.

Several primary and secondary school teacher aides implied that lack of teacher experience and knowledge about students with special needs could be a barrier to inclusion, especially when some students were denied access to the mainstream on those occasions when teacher aides were not available. These findings, as well as some teacher aides' beliefs that, at times, they were more knowledgeable than teachers, are consistent with some of the literature (e.g. Kearney, 2009; Rutherford, 2008). A small number of teacher aides from both primary and secondary schools also believed that they needed supervision and direction from teachers,

with regard to supporting their students, if they were to make a positive difference. This finding is consistent with some studies (e.g. Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Takala, 2007) which highlighted how lack of supervision led to teacher aides making curricular decisions on their own and being wasted as resources for promoting inclusion.

6.1.4. Respect and Recognition

Primary and secondary school teacher aides discussed respect from teachers and students as a factor in their ability to make a positive difference for students, with secondary teacher aides being more concerned about being disrespected by students. This finding appears to refute the survey results which suggested that far more secondary school teacher aides than primary school teacher aides also strongly agreed that they had a positive effect on students' academic achievement. The possibility that secondary school teacher aides believed that helping students to attain academically was an expected outcome for them, regardless of levels of student respect, cannot be discounted. It is also possible that lack of respect originated from students in general and not necessarily those with whom the teacher aides were working, as was evident in Howard and Ford's (2007) study on secondary school teacher aides. Differences between children and adolescents with regard to types and levels of behaviour has been examined in several studies, which found that children and adolescents share some common behaviours, but they also possess unique problem behaviours (e.g. Esbensen, Seltzer, Lam & Bodfish, 2008; Harrison, Vannest, Davis & Reynolds, 2012), which could explain the varying attitudes of some students towards teacher aides. Issues surrounding lack of respect and recognition are implicitly connected to the extent to which teacher aides and their students are valued within inclusive schools. The apparent disparity between teacher aide training and responsibilities, in particular, broaches questions about the extent to which teacher aides and their students are valued by education systems (Howard & Ford, 2007). On the other hand, the important responsibilities that some teacher aides were given suggested that they were respected members of their school communities, which is consistent with some research findings (e.g. Giangreco et al., 2001b). Appreciation for the work of teacher aides, particularly from teachers, has also been linked to higher levels of job satisfaction (Logan, 2006). Therefore, the generally positive levels of job satisfaction expressed by this cohort of teacher aides, suggested that they were indeed respected, which, in turn, enabled them to work more productively.

6.1.5. Clarity of Roles and Responsibilities

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities were important factors in perceived ability to make a positive difference for students with diverse needs. The fact that several teacher aides from both types of schools reported that they took on extra responsibilities and did not always have enough time to do their work, implied that their roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined by job descriptions. These findings are consistent with studies, which suggested that the ambiguous nature of teacher aides' roles and the ways in which they overlapped those of qualified teachers were concerns related to school systems (Bourke, 2009; Howard & Ford, 2007; Logan, 2006; Rutherford, 2011). On the contrary, there is some evidence that parents

place teacher aides on an equal footing to teachers and that direct communication between parents and teacher aides facilitated inclusion for children with low- incidence disabilities, in particular (Werts et al., 2004). It is interesting to note that, despite evidence that some teacher aides in this group did not appear to pay much attention to the content of their job descriptions, the majority of teacher aides from both primary and secondary schools indicated that they were aware of the boundaries between their roles and responsibilities and those of the teachers. However, it could be argued that some teacher aides overstepped the boundaries with regard to their students by doing too much for them, thereby acting as a barrier to inclusion, as was also reflected in earlier studies (e.g. Chopra & French, 2004)

6.1.6. Paraprofessional Proximity

Teacher aides made reference to the importance of knowing when to give students their space, so that they could develop independence and feel included in the school system. The issue of paraprofessional proximity, particularly when teacher aides are assigned to individual students, has been discussed widely in the literature (e.g. Angelides, 2007; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006; Rutherford, 2008; Ward, 2008) and is an important factor in students' ability to interact with their peers and develop independence. Most notable is one study which found that 90% of a student's interactions with peers occurred when the teacher aide was not in the vicinity of the student (Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis). Rutherford also suggested that the negative effect of paraprofessional proximity on students is particularly relevant with respect to secondary school students who, on account of their developmental stage, are more likely to react negatively towards being singled out. Nevertheless, secondary school teacher aides appeared to be well aware of the role they played in fostering peer interactions in their students and were particularly positive about their ability to support students in this regard.

6.1.7. Training and Professional Development

The importance of being sufficiently trained and experienced, in order to cope with the curriculum and students with more complex difficulties, was an issue for some teacher aides who indicated that this was essential in order for them to do their jobs well. In accordance with New Zealand research (Rutherford, 2008), secondary school teacher aides in this study believed that differentiated secondary teacher aide training was warranted in order for them to enrich levels of support for students. The suggestion that teacher aides are being employed with little formal training, despite having to take on board high levels of responsibility (Howard & Ford, 2007) was evident in the case of several teacher aides from both types of schools, who were hired without having any formal teacher aide qualifications. Indeed, the irony of the least experienced and qualified having to support students with the greatest challenges is well documented in the literature (e.g. Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Howard & Ford; Lewis, 2005). However, this cohort of teacher aides included some who had some tertiary training; implying that, in some cases, teacher aides were capable of taking on high levels of responsibility. In addition, Kearney (2009) reported that inadequate teacher knowledge and understanding of students with disabilities was also a factor in the exclusion

of students with disabilities from the mainstream, an issue which was also raised by some teacher aides in this study.

Several teacher aides in this study were glowing in their reports about the benefits of professional development in helping them to make a positive difference for students. This was in accordance with many studies which demonstrated that teacher aides could be trained in a variety of specialised areas to support students who struggled at school (e.g. Downer, 2007; Lane et al., 2007; Mazurik-Charles & Stefanou, 2010). Professional development undertaken by teacher aides working in both types of schools reflected increasing responsibilities for students with a variety of learning, behavioural, physical and emotional difficulties. Some courses were equivalent to those that qualified teachers are often expected to undertake, such as Restorative Justice, the AVAILL reading programme and New Zealand standards for reading, writing and mathematics. It could be speculated that the more positive attitudes of primary school teacher aides towards training and professional development was linked to the fact that more of them were qualified teacher aides and therefore had greater propensity to extend their knowledge. However, the overall greater positive attitudes of secondary school teacher aides with regard to the extent to which they made a difference in various areas, as suggested by the teacher aide scale, implies that life experience and personal characteristics may be more significant factors for teacher aides, with regard to including students with diverse needs.

6.1.8. Personal Factors

Primary and secondary school teacher aides believed that their personal attributes played a role with regard to their ability to support students to participate successfully in mainstream schools. In keeping with Rutherford (2011), teacher aides believed that just being present in the classroom was of benefit to students, although there is some evidence to the contrary, which suggested that neither the presence of teacher aides, nor their personal qualities, had any effect on student achievement (Blatchford et al., 2007). Teacher aides from both types of schools discussed specific approaches they used, which they believed were helpful for enhancing inclusion for students with diverse needs. These findings are consistent with several studies (e.g. Angelides et al., 2009; Downing, Rydak & Clarke, 2000; Groom & Rose, 2005), which found that teacher aides promoted inclusion when they acted in specific ways and when they possessed particular personal qualities necessary for working successfully with students with diverse needs. Indeed, these personal factors were found to be more important for recruiting teacher aides than formal training (Groom & Rose).

6.2. Implications for Further Research, Policy and Practice

This study indicated that further research needs to be conducted to investigate the efficacy of teacher aide training in New Zealand. Suggestions from teacher aides that training should be more specific to their needs and to the needs of the students, is an area that also requires further investigation. In particular, the feasibility of differentiating training for primary and secondary school teacher aides, as well as introducing a specific course for those working with students with disabilities, should also be examined. Expectations surrounding formal

teacher aide qualifications need to be clarified for teacher aides. Although several teacher aides had no formal qualifications, the majority of teacher aides in this study nevertheless appeared to be able to work efficiently within the education system, supporting many students with diverse needs. The implication is that hands on experience and professional development, targeted to the specific needs of students could be as helpful, or more helpful, than formal qualifications. It would thus be interesting to investigate the role played by other factors, such as prior knowledge and life experience, in the ability of teacher aides to include students with diverse needs. It is also recommended that the perspectives of teachers and students be included in further research, as well as observational data to corroborate findings. Additionally, further research on the role played by teacher aides in advocating for students is urged.

6.3. Limitations of the Study

This project relied only on the opinions of teacher aides, therefore no guarantee can be made as to the reliability of some of the findings; for example, when teacher aides were asked how many students they supported and what their levels of need were, some teacher aides were unsure of levels of need and gave estimates based on their experience of the students. No documents were available to back up data related to this. Teacher aide job descriptions were also not all available. The small sample size and the fact that this study was conducted in a small geographical area of New Zealand makes it impossible to generalise to schools in other parts of the country or even to schools in neighbouring areas. There is also a possibility of bias, in that the teacher aides were self-selected and therefore only those who wanted to share their perspectives participated. The eight schools shared one similarity; namely, the principals of these schools were all open to research, which also limited the results. No observations were done to verify teacher aides' comments and the teacher aide scale was limited with regard to number of items. Nevertheless, many issues highlighted in this study were also evident in the overseas literature. This study should provide a small snapshot of the work of teacher aides in general and provoke some discussion as to the reasons for differences in the work and experiences of primary and secondary school teacher aides in New Zealand schools.

6.4. Closing Thoughts

This study focused on comparing the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of primary and secondary school teacher aides in order to determine whether there was any association between the ways in which teacher aides are used in different schools and their perspectives on their ability to make a positive difference for students in a group of schools in New Zealand. It revealed an apparent distinction between levels of organisational responsibility, as a means of supporting whole school systems, and perceived levels of personal responsibility for students on the part of the twenty one teacher aides. Besides the fact that primary and secondary school teacher aides worked with students of different developmental levels, differences in their perceptions could also be linked to differences in school size and structure, which, in turn, determined the nature and extent of teacher aide roles and responsibilities. For example, only the secondary schools had a satellite unit and learning

centres and primary school teacher aides were generally used more arbitrarily than secondary teacher aides. Therefore, it is clear that how teacher aides are actually used in schools does influence their perceptions about their work.

Overall, it appeared that there were more similarities than differences between primary and secondary school teacher aides with regard to their roles, responsibilities and perspectives on their work and their ability to make a positive difference for students with diverse needs. All teacher aides were positive about their work, with the majority expressing confidence in their ability to include students. From a socio-ecological point of view, when knowledgeable and experienced and when working in a supportive school environment with adequate supervision, feedback from others and clear expectations as to their roles and responsibilities, teacher aides with certain desirable personal qualities are more likely to have confidence in their ability to make a positive difference. Feelings of self-efficacy are likely to lead to successful teacher aide practice and added status for teacher aides within their schools. In turn, teacher aides will be respected and recognised and they will be trusted to carry out important responsibilities, which, in turn, will enrich their knowledge and experience and reassure them that they are making a positive difference for students with diverse needs in both primary and secondary mainstream schools.

Teacher aides from both types of schools were prepared to go over and above expectations to support students and teachers in many different areas. Most notable was the enthusiasm that this group of teacher aides had for their work and the commitment that they had for the students; therefore it seems fitting to conclude this study using the words of one of these dedicated people:

“This work is hugely challenging. It can also be intensely rewarding as well.....helping students learn to read or achieve a task when they’ve never dreamt they had the ability to do so. This makes this job special.”

REFERENCES

- Angelides, P., Constantinou, C., & Leigh, J. (2009). The role of paraprofessionals in developing inclusive education in Cyprus. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 24*(1), 75-89.
- Bessette, K., & Wills, H. (2007). An example of an elementary school paraprofessional-implemented functional analysis and intervention. *Behavioral Disorders, 32*(3), 192-210
- Bingham, M., Spooner, F., & Browder, D. (2007). Training paraeducators to promote the use of augmentative and alternative communication by students with significant disabilities. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 42*(3), 339-352.
- Blatchford, P., Russell, A., Bassett, P., Brown, P., & Martin, C. (2007). The role and effects of teaching assistants in English Primary Schools (Years 4 to 6) 2000-2003. Results from the Class Size and Pupil-Adult Ratios (CSPAR) KS2 Project. *British Educational Research Journal, 33*(1), 5-26.
- Bourke, P.E. (2008). *The experiences of teacher aides who support students with disabilities and learning difficulties: A phenomenological study*. A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Faculty of Education. Queensland University of Technology.
- Bourke, P. E. (2009). Professional development and teacher aides in inclusive education contexts: where to from here? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 13*(8), 817-827.
- Breton, W. (2010). Special education paraprofessionals: perceptions of preservice preparation, supervision and ongoing developmental training. *International Journal of Special Education, 25*(1), 34-45.
- Broer, S.M.; Doyle, M. B; & Giangreco, M. F. (2005). Perspectives of students with intellectual disabilities about their experiences with paraprofessional support. *Exceptional Children, 71*(4), 415-429.
- Brown, S. L., Teufel, J. A., & Birch, D, A. (2006). Gender, age and behaviour differences in early adolescent worry. *Journal of School Health, 76*(8), 430-437.
- Cameron, M., Sinclair, L., Waiti, P., & Wylie, C. (2004). *Evaluation of the Introductory Professional Development Programme for Teacher Aides/Kaiawhina: Supporting teachers of students with special education needs*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Carter, E., O'Rourke, L., Sisco, L. G., & Pelsue, D. (2009). Knowledge, responsibilities, and training needs of paraprofessionals in elementary and secondary schools. *Remedial and Special Education, 30*(6), 344-359.
- Carter, E. W., Sisco, L. G., & Lane, K. L. (2011). Paraprofessional perspectives in promoting self-determination among elementary and secondary students with severe disabilities. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 36*(1-2), 1-10.

- Causton-Theoharis, J., & Malmgren, K. (2005). Increasing peer interactions for students with severe disabilities via paraprofessional training. *Council for Exceptional Training*, 71(4), 431-444.
- Chadderton, C., & Torrance, H. (2011). Case study. In B. Somekh & C. Lewin (Eds.). *Theory and methods in social research* (pp. 53-60). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Chopra, R.V.; & French, N. K. (2004). Paraeducator relationships with parents of students with significant disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 25(4), 240-251.
- Chopra R. V., Sandoval-Lucero, E., Aragon, L., Bernal, C., De Balderas, H., & Carroll, D. (2004). The paraprofessional role of connector. *Remedial and Special Education*, 25(4), 219-231.
- Costello, E. J., Copeland, W., & Angold, A. (2011). Trends in psychopathology across the adolescent years: what changes when children become adolescents and when adolescents become adults? *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 52(10), 1015-1025.
- Crano, W. D., & Brewer, M. B. (2002). *Principles and methods of social research* (2nd ed.). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Denscombe, M. (2007). *The good research guide for small scale social research projects* (3rd ed.). New York; Open University Press.
- Downer, A. C. (2007). The National Literacy Strategy Sight Recognition Programme implemented by teaching assistants: A precision teaching approach. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23(2), 129-143.
- Downing, J. E., Ryndak D. L., & Clark D. (2000). Paraeducators in inclusive classrooms - Their own perceptions. *Remedial and Special Education*, 21(3), 171-181.
- Driscoll, D., Appiah-Yeboah, A., Salib, P., & Rupert, D. J. (2007). Merging qualitative and quantitative data in mixed methods research: how to and why not. *Ecological and Environmental Anthropology* 3(1), 18-28.
- Ernst-Slavit, G; & Wenger, K.J. (2006). Teaching in the margins: The multifaceted work and struggles of bilingual paraeducators. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 37(1), 62-81.
- Esbensen, A. J., Seltzer, M. M., & Lam, K. S. L., & Bodfish, J. W. (2008). Age-related differences in restricted repetitive behaviours in autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 39(1), p57-66.
- Feigenberg, L. F., King, M. S., Barr, D. J., & Selman, R.L. (2008). Belonging to and exclusion from the peer group in schools: influences on adolescents' moral choices. *Journal of Moral Education*, 37(2), 165-184.
- Fisher, M., & Pleasants, S. L. (2012). Roles, responsibilities and concerns of paraeducators: Findings from a statewide survey. *Remedial and Special Education*, 33(5), 287-297.
- Gerber, S., Finn, J., Achilles, C., & Boyd-Zaharias, J. (2001). Teacher aides and students' academic achievement. *Educational Evaluation And Policy Analysis*, 23(2), 123-143.

- Giangreco, M. F., & Broer, S. M. (2005). Questionable utilization of paraprofessionals in inclusive schools: Are we addressing symptoms or causes? *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 20(1), 10-26.
- Giangreco, M. F., Broer, S.M., & Edelman, S. (2001a). Teacher engagement with students with disabilities: Differences between paraprofessional service delivery models. *Journal Of The Association For Persons With Severe Handicaps*, 26(2), 75-86.
- Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S.W., & Broer, S.M. (2001b). Respect, appreciation, and acknowledgment of paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 67(4), 485-498.
- Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S., & Broer, S. M. (2003). Schoolwide planning to improve paraeducator supports. *Exceptional Children*, 70(1), 63-79.
- Gray, C., McCloy, S., & Dunbar, C. (2007). Added value or a familiar face?: The impact of learning support assistants on young readers. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 5(3), 285-300.
- Greene, J. C., Kreider, H., & Mayer, E. (2011). Combining qualitative and quantitative methods in social inquiry. In B. Somekh & C. Lewin (Eds.). *Theory and methods in social research* (pp. 259-266). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Griffin-Shirley, N., & Matlock, D. (2004). Paraprofessionals speak out: A survey. *RE:view: Rehabilitation Education for Blindness and Visual Impairment*, 36(3), 127-136.
- Groom, B. (2006). Building relationships for learning: The developing role of the teaching assistant. *Support for Learning*, 21(4), 199-203.
- Groom, B., & Rose, R. (2005). Supporting the inclusion of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in the primary school: the role of teaching assistants. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 5(1), 20-30.
- Harrison, J. R., Vannest, K., Davis, D., & Reynolds, C. (2012). Common problem behaviours of children and adolescents in general education classrooms in the United States. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 20(55), 54-64.
- Harvey, S., Richards, H., & Stacey, K. (2008). *ESOL paraprofessionals and English language learners: Working towards sustainable practices*. Proceedings from AARE: International Education Research Conference. Brisbane, Australia.
- Hittleman, Daniel R. & Simon, Alan J. (2006). *Interpreting educational research: An introduction for consumers of research (4th ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Howard, R., & Ford, J. (2007). The roles and responsibilities of teacher aides supporting students with special needs in secondary school settings. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 31(1), 25-43.

- Howes, A. (2003). Teaching reforms and the impact of paid adult support on participation and learning in mainstream schools. *Support for Learning, 18*(4), 147-153.
- Idol, L. (2006). Towards inclusion of special education students in general education: A programme evaluation of eight schools. *Remedial and Special Education, 27*(2), 77-94.
- Jameson, J. M., McDonnell, J., Johnson, J. W., Riesen, T., & Polychronis, S. (2007). A comparison of one-to-one embedded instruction in general education classes with small group instruction in special education classes. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 41*(2), 125-138.
- Kearney, A. C. (2009). *Barriers to school inclusion: An investigation into the exclusion of disabled students from and within New Zealand schools*. A thesis presented in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.
- Komosa-Hawkins, K. (2012). The impact of school-based mentoring on adolescents' social-emotional health. *Mentoring and Tutoring: partnership in Learning, 20*(3), 393-408.
- Lane, K.L.; Fletcher, T., Carter, E. W., Dejud, C & DeLorenzo, J. (2007). Paraprofessional-led phonological awareness training with youngsters at risk for reading and behavioral concerns. *Remedial and Special Education, 28*(5), 266-276.
- Lenski, S. (2007). Reflections on being biliterate: Lessons from paraprofessionals. *Action in Teacher Education, 28*(3), 104-113.
- Lewis, Karla C. (2005). Seen but Not Heard: ESEA and Instructional Aides in Elementary Education. *Review of Research in Education, 29*, 131-150.
- Licciardello, C., Harchik, A., & Luiselli, J. K. (2008). Social skills intervention for children with autism during interactive play at a public elementary school. *Education and Treatment of Children, 31*(1), 27-37.
- Logan, Anna. (2006). The role of the special needs assistant supporting pupils with special educational needs in Irish mainstream Primary Schools. *Support for Learning, 21*(2), 92-99.
- McIntosh, M. A. (2003). *An examination of the role of teacher aides who work with children with traumatic brain injury*. A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.
- McKenzie, A.R., & Lewis, S. (2008). The role and training of paraprofessionals who work with students who are visually impaired. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness, 102*(8), 459-471.
- Malmgren, K. W., Causton-Theoharis, J. N., & Trezek, B. J. (2005). Increasing peer interactions for students with behavioural disorders via paraprofessional training. *Behaviour disorders, 31*(1), 95-106.

- Malmgren, K.W., & Causton-Theoharis, J. N. (2006). Boy in the bubble: Effects of paraprofessional proximity and other pedagogical decisions on the interactions of a student with behavioural disorders. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 20(4), 301-312.
- Massey University (2010). *Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants*. Palmerston North: Author.
- Mazurik-Charles, R., & Stefanou, C. (2010). Using paraprofessionals to teach social skills to children with autism spectrum disorders in the general education classroom. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 37(2), 161-169.
- Meeus, W., Van De Schoot, R., & Keijsers, L. (2010). On the progression and stability of adolescent identity formation: A five-wave longitudinal study in early- to- middle-to-late adolescence. *Child Development*, 81(5), 1565-1581.
- Ministry of Education (2012a). *Directories*. Wellington, New Zealand: Author. Retrieved March 2, 2012 from <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/directories>
- Ministry of Education (2012b). *Te Kete Ipurangi*. Wellington, New Zealand: Author. Retrieved February 1, 2012 from <http://www.tki.org.nz/>
- Moran, A. & Abbott, L. (2002). Developing inclusive schools: The pivotal role of teaching assistants in promoting inclusion in special and mainstream schools in Northern Ireland. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 17(2), 161-173.
- Nash, P., & Henderson, L. (2010). Work in progress: Facilitating transition for vulnerable learners moving to secondary school. *Psychology of Education Review*, 34(2), 39-42.
- Pandey, S. (2006). Para-teacher scheme and quality education for all in India: Policy, perspectives and challenges for school effectiveness. *Journal of Education for School Effectiveness*, 32(3), 319-334.
- Quilty, K. M. (2007). Teaching paraprofessionals how to write and implement social stories for students with autism spectrum disorders. *Remedial and Special Education*, 28(3), 182-189.
- Riggs, C. G. (2001). Ask the paraprofessionals. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33(3), 78-83.
- Riggs, C. G., & Mueller, P. H. (2001). Employment and utilization of paraeducators in inclusive settings. *Journal of Special Education*, 35(1), 54-62.
- Rueda, R., Monzo, L., & Higareda, I. (2004). Appropriating the sociocultural resources of Latino paraeducators for effective instruction with Latino students: Promise and problems. *Urban Education*, 39(1), 52-90.
- Rutherford, G. (2002). *Getting a fair go? Issues and practices regarding teacher aide support of students with disabilities*. Winston Churchill Fellowship Report, USA study tour October-December 2001. Wellington, New Zealand: Winston Churchill Fellowship: 2001.

- Rutherford, G. (2008). *Different Ways of Knowing? Understanding disabled students' and teacher aides' school experiences within a context of relational social justice*. A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.
- Rutherford, G. (2011). In, out or somewhere in between? Disabled students' and teacher aides' experiences of school. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(8), 757-774.
- Scott, D., & Usher, R. (1999). *Researching education: Data, methods and theory in educational enquiry*. London: Cassell.
- Statistics New Zealand (2008). *Disability and education in New Zealand in 2006*. Wellington, New Zealand: Statistics New Zealand Tatauranga Aotearoa.
- Stevenson, M. J. (2010). *Teacher aides in inclusive schools: A critical review of the literature*. Unpublished education research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Education (Special Education) at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand.
- Suter, J.C., & Giangreco, M. F. (2009). Numbers that count: exploring special education and paraprofessional service delivery in inclusion-oriented schools. *Journal of Special Education*, 43(2), 81-93.
- Takala, M. (2007). The Work of Classroom Assistants in Special and Mainstream Education in Finland. *British Journal of Special Education*, 34(1), 50-57.
- Tews, L., & Lupart, J. (2008). Students with disabilities' perspectives of the role and impact of paraprofessionals in inclusive education settings. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 5(1), 39-46.
- Tutty, C., & Hocking, C. (2004). A shackled heart: Teacher aides' experience of supporting students with high needs in regular classes. *Kairaranga*, 5(2), 3-9.
- Ward, A. R. (2008). *Students with disabilities talk about their friendships: A narrative enquiry*. A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.
- Ward, A. (2011). Let's talk about teacher aides. *Kairaranga*, 12(1), 43-50.
- Warren, E., Cooper, T. J., & Baturu A R. (2004). Indigenous students and mathematics: teachers' perceptions of the role of teacher aides. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 33, 37-46.
- Wenger, K., Lubbes, T., Lazo, M., Azcarraga, I., Sharp, S., & Ernst-Slavit, G. (2004). Hidden teachers, invisible students: Lessons learned from exemplary bilingual paraprofessionals in Secondary Schools. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 31(2), 89-111.
- Werts, M. G., Harris, S., Tillery, C. Y., & Roark, R. (2004). What parents tell us about paraeducators. *Remedial and Special Education*, 25(4), 232-239.

- Werts, M., Zigmond, N., & Leeper, D. (2001). Paraprofessional proximity and academic engagement: Students with disabilities in primary aged classrooms. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 36(4), 424-440.
- West, P., Sweeting, H., & Young, R. (2010). Transition matters: pupils' experiences of the primary-secondary school transition in the West of Scotland and consequences for well-being and attainment. *Research Papers in Education*, 25(1), 21-50.
- Wilson, E., & Bedford, D. (2008). "New partnerships for learning": Teachers and teaching assistants working together in schools-The way forward. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 34(2), 137-150.
- Woolfson, R.C., & Truswell, E. (2005). Do classroom assistants work? *Educational Research*, 47(1), 63-75.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form: Principals

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

CONSENT FORM FOR PRINCIPALS

I have read the information sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree that the researcher may have access to the teacher aide(s) in my school and that the teacher aide(s) may participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Signature: **Date:**

Full name (please print):

Telephone no:

School:

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form: Teacher Aides

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

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER AIDES

I have read the information sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Signature: **Date:**

Full name (please print):

Telephone no:

School:

Appendix B

Information Sheet: Principals

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

Information Sheet for Principals

Researcher: Mignon Stevenson

I am conducting research into the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of teacher aides in primary and secondary schools, as part of a Masters Degree in Educational Psychology at Massey University, under the supervision of Dr Jean Annan. The focus of this study is on the similarities and differences between teacher aide roles and responsibilities in both types of schools and the extent to which they believe that they can make a difference for students with diverse needs. I wish to recruit approximately twelve teacher aides, from both primary and secondary schools, who would be interested in participating in this study. The number of participants is based on the estimated number of teacher aides employed in the schools in the area sampled.

The study involves a short questionnaire followed by an interview of approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ hour. Teacher aide job descriptions may be reviewed, if they are available. For the purposes of confidentiality, I will request that all identifying information be removed from available job descriptions, particularly if they are drawn up for a particular student. Initial contact with teacher aides will be via the school principal. I will deliver information sheets for teacher aides to the school. These will be issued to teacher aides by the principal who will invite teacher aides to participate in the study. Teacher aides who wish to participate may fill out their contact details on a slip at the bottom of their information sheet and leave it at the school office for me to collect. Alternatively, if teacher aides wish to contact me to express their interest in the project or to ask questions, they may do so, using my contact details provided on the information sheet.

Once written consent is obtained from teacher aides, I will deliver questionnaires and self-addressed prepaid envelopes to the school for distribution to teacher aides by the principal. Completed questionnaires may be posted to me, or I will collect them from the school office, whichever is more convenient for teacher aides.

Interviews will be conducted with each teacher aide at the convenience of the school and teacher aide. If interviews are held on site, permission will first be sought from the principal. On site interviews will not interfere with the smooth running of the school and the ability of teacher aides to carry out their duties. Teacher aides will be asked not to mention individual students by name during interviews. Interview notes will be given to teacher aides to check for accuracy and amend, if necessary.

Teacher aides are not obliged to participate. If they decide to participate they have the right to decline to answer any particular question. Teacher aides may also ask any question about the study at any time during participation and they may withdraw from the study up until the point at which the data is analysed. All information will be kept strictly confidential, pseudonyms will be used throughout and no individual teacher aide, school, student or event will be identifiable. All information will be locked away securely and will be destroyed at the culmination of the study. I will contact all participants when the study is concluded to establish who would like a summary of the findings. This will be posted to all interested participants.

Please note that this study is not in any way a judgement of individual teacher aide and school performance, but is rather an overall comparison between the work done by primary and secondary school teacher aides and their perspectives on working in these different contexts. It is expected that this study will assist in creating greater awareness of the relationship between teacher aide roles and responsibilities and their beliefs about their ability to make a difference for students with special needs in New Zealand schools. Ultimately, this knowledge is likely to be of benefit to students with diverse needs.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants; Northern, Application 12/033. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Ralph Bathhurst, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x 9570, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

If you have any questions, I may be contacted on 06 3454007 or by email at springbuck@xtra.co.nz.

Thank you for considering my application for assistance in recruiting participants for this study.

Mignon Stevenson

Appendix B

Information sheet: Teacher Aides

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

Information Sheet for Teacher Aides

Researcher: Mignon Stevenson

I am conducting research into the roles, responsibilities and perspectives of teacher aides in primary and secondary schools, as part of a Masters Degree in Educational Psychology at Massey University, under the supervision of Dr Jean Annan. I wish to recruit approximately twelve teacher aides, from primary and secondary schools, to participate in this study.

As a teacher aide working with a student or students with diverse needs, I would like to ask you whether you are interested in participating in this study. The study focuses on comparing the experiences of teacher aides in primary and secondary schools and the extent to which teacher aides believe they are making a difference to students.

The study involves a short questionnaire and an interview. When you have completed the questionnaire, you may post it to me, using the self-addressed, prepaid envelope provided. You may also prefer to leave your completed questionnaire at the school office for me to collect.

The interview is approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ hour. This will be held at a time and place convenient for you. If conducted at school, I will first obtain the permission of your principal. I will also ensure that the interview does not interfere with your normal duties. For the purposes of confidentiality, I will ask that individual students not be mentioned by name during the interview. You will be given a transcript of the interview to check for accuracy and amend, if necessary. Your job description may also be reviewed, if it is available. I will request that all identifying information be removed from available job descriptions, particularly if they are drawn up for a particular student.

Please note that you are under no obligation to participate. If you decide to participate you have the right to decline to answer any particular question and may ask any question about the study at any time during participation. You also have the right to withdraw from the study up until the point at which the data is analysed. All information will be kept strictly confidential, pseudonyms will be used throughout and no individual teacher aide, school, student or event will be identifiable. All information will be locked away securely and will be destroyed at the culmination of the study.

Please also note that this study is in no way a measure of individual school or teacher aide performance, but is rather an overall comparison between the perspectives and work done by teacher aides in a number of primary and secondary schools. This study aims to highlight

those factors which teacher aides believe contribute to making a positive difference for students with diverse needs. I will contact you when the study is concluded to establish whether you would like a summary of the findings. If you would like a copy, this will be posted to you.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee for Research, Teaching and Evaluations involving Human Participants: Northern, Application 12/033. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Ralph Bathurst, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x 9570, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

If you would like to participate, please fill out the slip below and leave it at the school office for me to collect. Alternatively, you may wish to contact me on 06 3454007 or by email at springbuck@xtra.co.nz to express your interest or if you have any questions.

Thank you for considering your participation in this study.

Mignon Stevenson

Researcher

TEACHER AIDE CONTACT DETAILS

Name:.....

School:

Telephone number (s):.....

When's the best time to contact you?.....

Appendix C

Letter of Request: Principals

(Researcher's home address)

(Date)

The Principal
(School name)
(School address)
(Postal code)

Dear (Principal's name)

Permission to access school for research project

I hereby request permission to access (name of school), in order to carry out a research project with the teacher aide(s) in your school. Interviews that are conducted on site will only be with your permission and at the convenience of teacher aides and the school.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Yours faithfully

Mignon Stevenson

Researcher

Appendix D

Teacher Aide Questionnaire

Name:.....School:.....

Teacher aide scale

The purpose of the teacher aide scale is to determine the extent to which you believe that you are able to make a difference for students with diverse needs. Please circle the number that best describes your agreement or disagreement with each statement.

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Slightly Disagree
- 4 = Slightly Agree
- 5 = Agree
- 6 = Strongly Agree

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Improvements in students' social skills can be attributed to my efforts. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 2. I help students to sustain positive behavioural change. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 3. Increased levels of student motivation can be attributed to me. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 4. I help students to develop greater independence. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 5. I have a positive effect on students' emotional wellbeing. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 6. I am able to get the best out of the students with whom I work. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 7. I help students to foster positive peer interactions. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |
| 8. Improvements in the academic achievement of students with whom I work can be attributed to me. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 |

Roles and responsibilities

This section aims to evaluate the extent to which you engage in various tasks. Please circle the number that *best* matches the extent to which you believe you engage in each task.

(1= very often; 2= often; 3= seldom; 4= never)

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Helping students with their reading | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. Providing whole class support for teachers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. Speaking to parents/caregivers about their children | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. Providing one-on-one support for students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. Helping with student discipline | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. Attending IEP meetings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. Adapting the curriculum for students with special needs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. Helping teachers to plan lessons | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. Doing administrative tasks | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. Collecting data on student behaviour | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. Facilitating student interaction with peers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. Speaking to teachers about students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. Developing resources | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. Recording student progress | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. Speaking to outside agencies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 16. Acting as a reader-writer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. Teaching/instructing students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 18. Supporting students with personal cares | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19. Using computer technology to support students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20. Acting as a liaison between students and teachers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 21. Working with students in small groups | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 22. Assisting second language learners | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 23. Attending general staff meetings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 24. Helping with classroom organisation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 25. Looking out for students on the playground | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 26. Administering formal assessments | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 27. Helping students to transition successfully | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

If you carry out any other tasks, please list them below.

Appendix E

Interview Schedule

Background information

1. Why did you choose to become a teacher aide?
2. At what schools have you worked?

Roles and responsibilities

1. How many hours do you work per day/ week?
2. How many students do you work with at present and would you describe their levels of need as being low, medium, high or very high?
3. What does a typical working day look like for you?
4. What specific or specialised area(s) of responsibility (if any) do you hold in this school?
5. What teacher aide training and professional development have you undertaken?
6. To what extent do you believe that training and/or professional development has helped to prepare you for your current work?
7. To what extent do you believe that your roles and responsibilities reflect your job description?
8. How do you perceive that your job differs from the teacher's job?

Relationships

1. What words would you use to describe your professional relationships with teachers, students, parents and outside agencies?
2. How does recognition of culture affect support for students?

General questions

1. What do you think people do to make a positive difference for students?
2. What do you believe is the main (a) support, (b) challenge for you (in particular) with regard to making a positive difference for students?
3. Are there any differences between primary and secondary school teacher aide work? If so, what are they?
4. Would you like to make any other comments about your teacher aide work?

Appendix F: Tables

Table 2 Roles and Responsibilities: Primary School Teacher Aides (N= 11)

Task	1 Never	2 Seldom	3 Often	4 Very often	Mean
Working with students in small groups			3 (27.27%)	8 (72.73%)	3.73
Speaking to teachers about students		1(9.90%)	3 (27.27%)	7(63.64%)	3.55
Teaching/instructing students			5 (45.45%)	6(54.5%)	3.55
Helping students with their reading		2 (18.18%)	2 (18.18%)	7 (63.64%)	3.45
Providing one-on-one support for students		1 (9.09%)	4 (36.36%)	6 (54.55%)	3.45
Providing whole class support for teachers		2 (18.18%)	5 (45.45%)	4 (36.36%)	3.18
Facilitating student interaction with peers		1(9.09%)	7 (63.64%)	3(27.27%)	3.18
Recording student progress	1(9.90%)		6(54.55%)	4 (36.36%)	3.18
Developing resources	1(9.90%)	2 (18.18%)	3 (27.27%)	5(45.45%)	3.09
Supporting students with personal cares	1(9.09%)	2 (18.18%)	4 (36.36%)	4 (36.36%)	3.00
Acting as a liaison between students and teachers	1(9.09%)	3 (27.27%)	2 (18.18%)	5 (45.45%)	3.00
Helping with student discipline		3 (27.27%)	6(54.55%)	2 (18.18%)	2.91
Helping students to transition successfully	2 (18.18%)	2 (18.18%)	3 (27.27%)	4 (36.36%)	2.82
Using computer technology to support students	1(9.09%)	2 (18.18%)	7(63.64%)	1(9.09%)	2.73
Looking out for students on the playground	3(30%)	3(30%)	1(10%)	3(30%)	2.40
Adapting the curriculum for students with special needs	2 (18.18%)	3 (27.27%)	5(45.45%)	1 (9.09%)	2.45
Doing administrative tasks	1(9.09%)	7 (63.64%)	1(9.09%)	2 (18.18%)	2.36
Helping with classroom organisation	3 (27.27%)	3 (27.27%)	4 (36.36%)	1 (9.09%)	2.27
Acting as a reader-writer	3 (27.27%)	3 (27.27%)	5 (45.45%)		2.18
Speaking to parents/caregivers about their children	2(18.18%)	7 (63.64%)	2 (18.18%)		2.00
Attending general staff meetings	5 (45.45%)	3 (27.27%)	2 (18.18%)	1(9.09%)	1.91
Attending IEP meetings	3 (27.27%)	7 (63.64%)	1 (9.09%)		1.82
Collecting data on student behaviour	4 (36.36%)	5 (45.45%)	2 (18.18%)		1.82
Speaking to outside agencies	5 (45.45%)	5 (45.45%)	1(9.09%)		1.64
Assisting second language learners	4 (36.36%)	7 (63.64%)			1.64
Administering formal assessments	6(54.55%)	4 (36.36%)	1(9.09%)		1.55
Helping teachers to plan lessons	7 (63.64%)	3 (27.27%)	1 (9.09%)		1.45

Table 3 Roles and Responsibilities: Secondary School Teacher Aides (N=10)

Task	1 Never	2 Seldom	3 Often	4 Very often	Mean
Helping students with their reading			3 (30%)	7 (70%)	3.7
Providing one-one-one support			3(30%)	7(70%)	3.7
Speaking to teachers about students			4 (40%)	6 (60%)	3.6
Acting as a reader-writer	1(10%)		2(20%)	7(70%)	3.5
Working with students in small groups			5(50%)	5(50%)	3.5
Teaching/instructing students		2(20%)	3(30%)	5(50%)	3.3
Helping students to transition successfully		2(20%)	3(30%)	5 (50%)	3.3
Recording student progress	1(10%)	1(10%)	3(30%)	5 (50%)	3.2
Acting as a liaison between students and teachers		3(30%)	2(20%)	5(50%)	3.2
Providing whole class support for teachers		2 (20%)	4 (40%)	4(40%)	3.2
Using computer technology to support students	1(10%)	3(30%)	1(10%)	5(50%)	3.0
Helping with student discipline		3(30%)	4(40%)	3 (30%)	3.0
Adapting the curriculum for students with special needs	1(10%)	3(30%)	2(20%)	4(40%)	2.9
Developing resources	1(10%)	3(30%)	2(20%)	4(40%)	2.9
Facilitating student interaction with peers	2(20%)	1(10%)	4(40%)	3(30%)	2.8
Helping with classroom organisation	1(10%)	3(30%)	3(30%)	3(30%)	2.8
Doing administrative tasks	1(10%)	3(30%)	4(40%)	2(20%)	2.7
Looking out for students on the playground;	3(30%)	3(30%)	1(10%)	3(30%)	2.4
Supporting students with personal cares	4(40%)	1(10%)	2(20%)	3(30%)	2.4
Administering formal assessments	3(30%)	2(20%)	4(40%)	1(10%)	2.3
Collecting data on student behaviour	4(40%)	1(10%)	3 (30%)	2(20%)	2.3
Speaking to outside agencies	4(40%)	3(30%)	1(10%)	2(20%)	2.1
Speaking to parents/caregivers about their children	2(20%)	4(40%)	3(30%)	1 (10%)	2.0
Helping teachers to plan lessons	2(20%)	7(70%)		1(10%)	2.0
Attending IEP meetings	4(40%)	5(50%)		1(10%)	1.8
Attending general staff meetings	5 (50%)	2(20%)	3(30%)		1.8
Assisting second language learners	6 (60%)	3(30%)		1(10%)	1.6

Table 4 Number of Teacher Aide Responses per Item: Primary and Secondary School Teacher Aides

Items	Strongly disagree 1		Disagree 2		Slightly disagree 3		Slightly agree 4		Agree 5		Strongly agree 6		Response average	
1. Improvements in students' social skills can be attributed to my efforts.							1 (9.09%)	1 (10%)	8 (72.73 %)	4 (40%)	2 (18.18%)	5 (50%)	5.09	5.4
2. I help students to sustain positive behavioural change.							2 (18.18%)		7 (63.64 %)	7 (70%)	2 (18.18%)	3 (30%)	5	5.3
3. Increased levels of student motivation can be attributed to me.							1 (9.09%)	3 (30%)	8 (72.73 %)	4 (40%)	2 (18.18%)	3 (30%)	5.09	5
4. I help students to develop greater independence.								2 (20%)	7 (63.64 %)	3 (30%)	4 (36.36%)	5 (50%)	5.36	5.3
5. I have a positive effect on students' emotional wellbeing.							2 (18.18%)		5 (45.45 %)	4 (40%)	4 (36.36%)	6 (60%)	5.18	5.6
6. I am able to get the best out of the students with whom I work.							1 (9.09%)	2 (20%)	7 (63.64 %)	3 (30%)	3 (27.27%)	5 (50%)	5.18	5.3
7. I help students to foster positive peer interactions.									11 (100%)	4 (40%)		6 (60%)	5	5.6
8. Improvements in the academic achievement of students with whom I work can be attributed to me.							2 (18.18%)	3 (30%)	6 (54.55 %)	2 (20%)	3 (27.27%)	5 (50%)	5.09	5.2

Primary



Secondary



Appendix G

Figures

Figure 1 Roles and Responsibilities: Primary School Teacher Aides

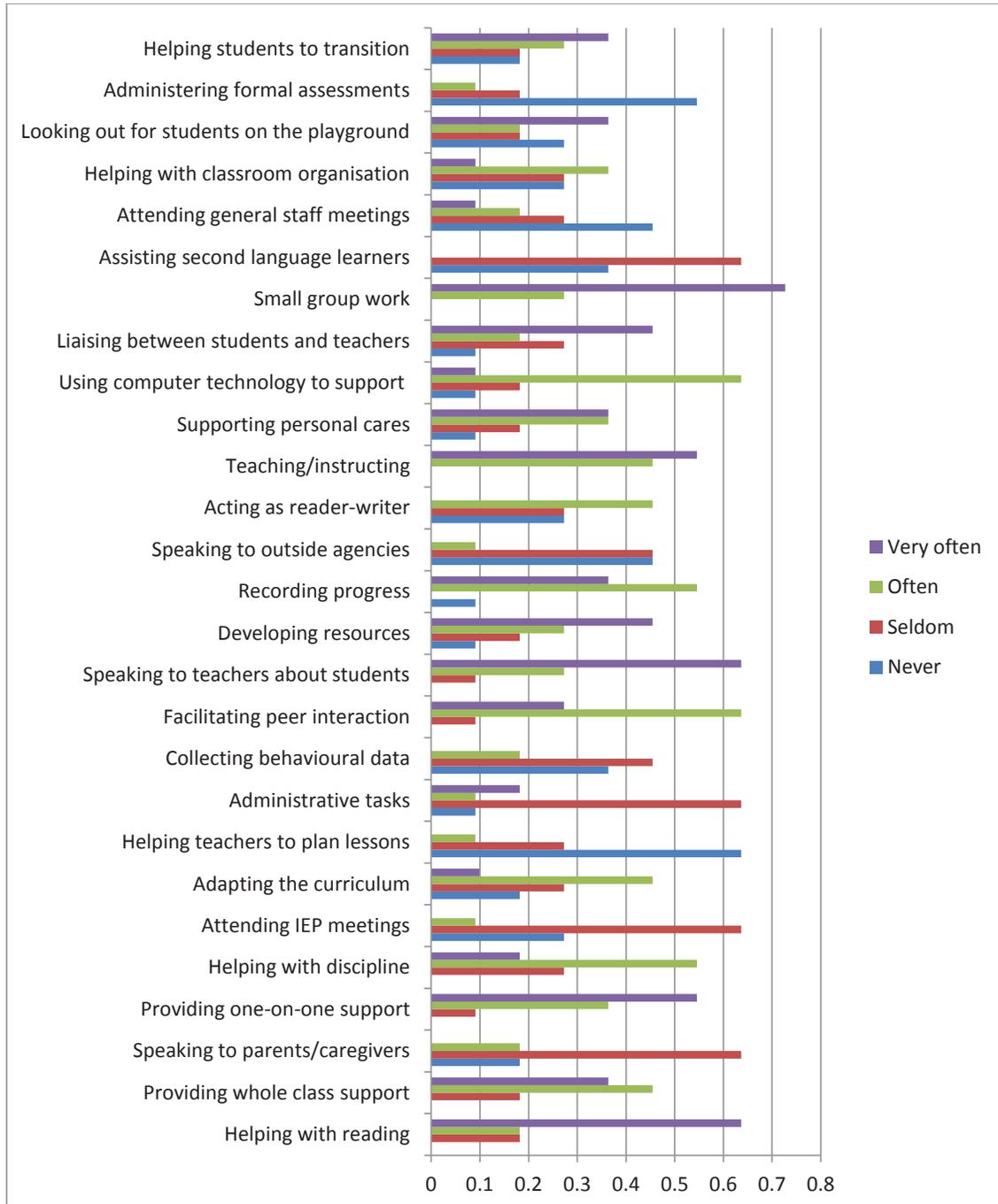


Figure 2 Roles and Responsibilities: Secondary School Teacher Aides

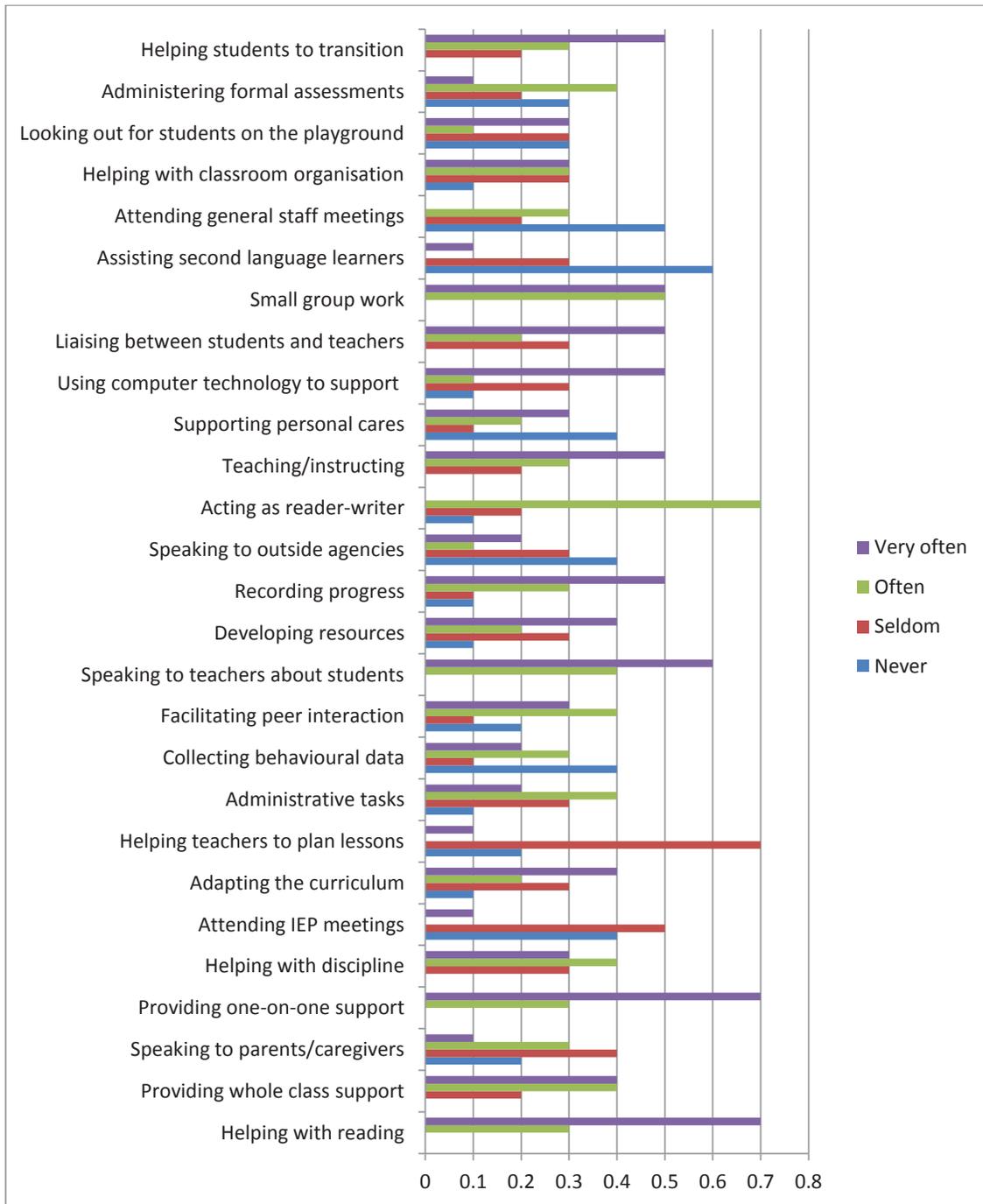
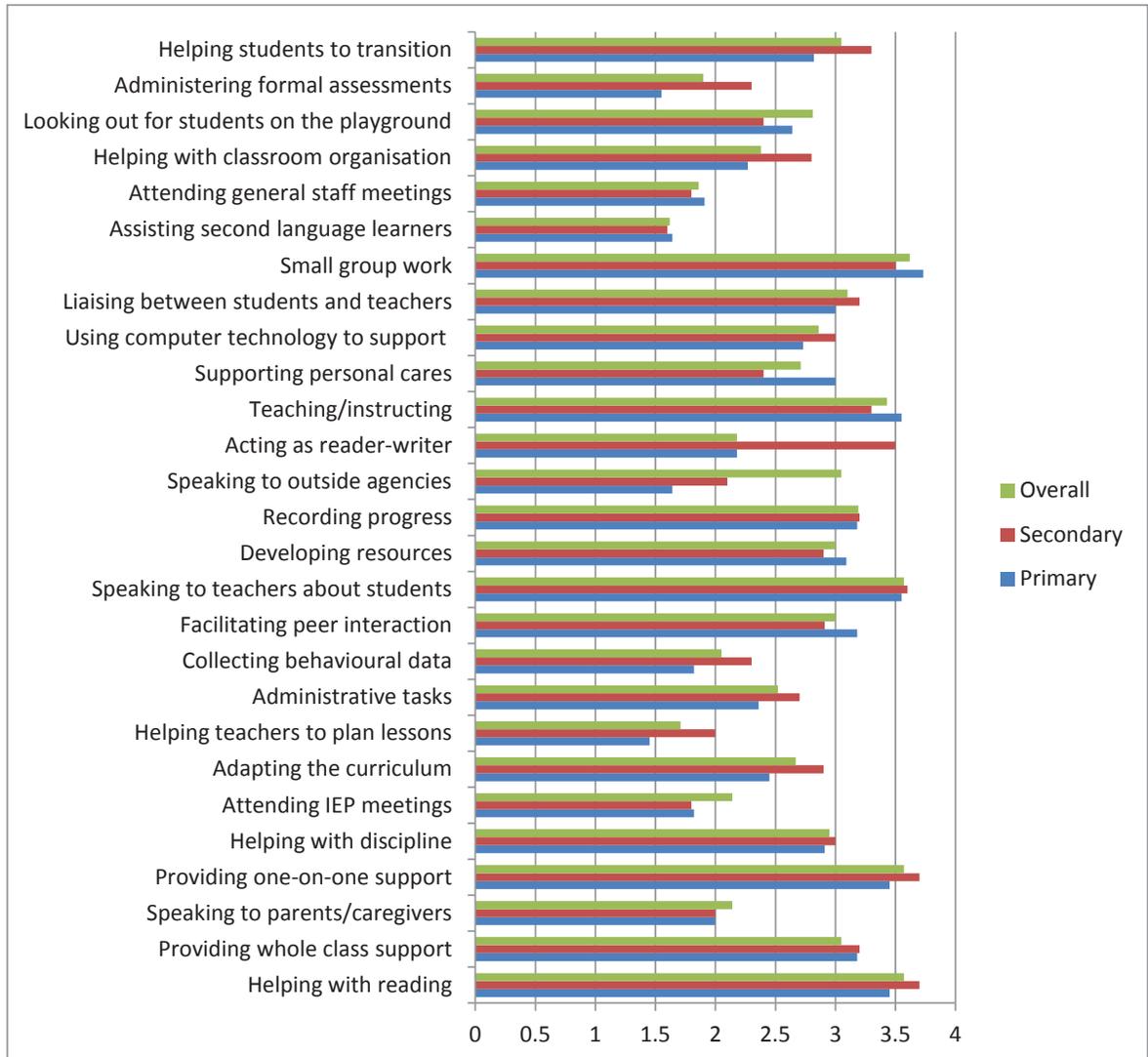
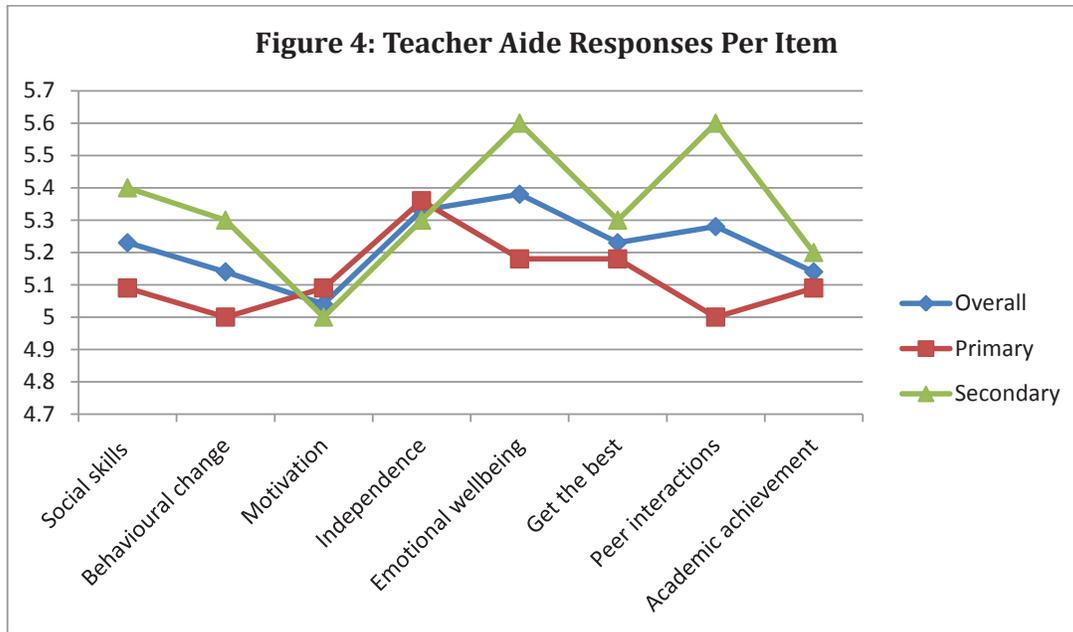


Figure 3 Roles and responsibilities: Primary and Secondary School Teacher Aides





Modes: Overall= 5.23; primary= 5.09; secondary = 5.3