

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.

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

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

Cherie Apers

2016

At Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

Abstract

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

Acknowledgements

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

- Robert Frost.

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

Firstly, I wish to thank my wonderful supervisors Jude MacArthur and Vijaya Dharan. Your passion and abundant knowledge of inclusive education and ASD was motivating to experience, and I want to thank you for sharing this knowledge so generously with me. You have not only challenged me to rethink how I view disability; you have offered me advice on my own child's inclusion along the way. Thank you for your understanding and your compassion. It has been not only educational and inspiring, but it has been a real pleasure to have worked with you both.

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

Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.

- Dr Theodor Seuss Geisel

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

A huge thank you to my family and friends (you all know who you are). You have understood my need to take this journey and still loved me even though I could not step off this path to spend much time with you recently.

A special thank you and a whole lot of love to my wonderful boys Ethan and Dylan for all your understanding over the last 7 years. You have grown into smart, funny and inspirational young men despite the years of deadline inspired dinners you have endured. I am so very proud and love you both so much.

Last, but definitely not the least, special thanks and love to my wonderful husband Mathieu. Thank you for your never ending love and support, for keeping me grounded and sane. For believing in me at every step that this journey has taken. Without your support I could not have done this. Thanks for walking with me on **our** road, I am certain I chose the right one x

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

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Figures	vi
List of Tables	vi
List of Appendices	vi
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Background.....	1
Language Used.....	2
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	4
Introduction	4
Autism Spectrum Disorder/Condition (ASD)	4
Definition.	4
Diagnostic Criteria/ Symptomatology.	4
Inclusive Education	5
Definition.	5
History and Policy.....	6
New Zealand.....	7
Progress towards inclusive education in NZ.....	10
Barriers to Inclusion.....	11
Including students with ASD.....	12
Teachers Perceptions of ASD and Inclusion	13
Teachers' perceptions of inclusion.....	14
Teachers perceptions of ASD.	14
Preparedness to Teach Inclusively.....	15
Conclusion	17
Chapter Three: Methodology	19
Introduction	19
Aim of the Research.....	19
Methodology	20
Qualitative research.....	20
Epistemology- constructivism.	21
Theoretical perspective- interpretivist.....	21
Method.....	22
Participants.....	23

Participant selection criteria.....	23
Data collection.....	24
Interviews.....	24
Ethics.....	25
Ethical considerations.....	25
Informed consent.....	25
Confidentiality and Anonymity.....	25
Transcription.....	25
Data analysis.....	25
Generalisable.....	26
Reflexivity.....	26
Summary.....	26
Chapter 4 – Results.....	27
Development of Teachers’ Knowledge of and Understanding about ASD and Inclusion, Teaching and Learning.....	27
Understanding of ASD.....	27
Understanding of Inclusion.....	30
Development of Knowledge.....	31
Collaboration.....	31
Teacher Education.....	33
Teaching Experience.....	35
Personal Experience.....	36
Summary.....	37
Pedagogy for All.....	37
School Culture.....	37
Strategies.....	38
Visuals.....	39
Transitions.....	40
Digital Technology.....	40
Other Strategies.....	40
High Expectations.....	41
Adaptations.....	41
Supports.....	43
Teacher’s aides.....	43
Individual Education Plans (IEPs).....	44
Summary.....	44
Areas for Additional Support.....	45
Complex needs.....	45

Academic assessments	46
Financial support for inclusion.	47
Summary.....	48
Conclusion	48
Chapter Five: Discussion	49
What Knowledge do Teachers have of ASD and Inclusion?	49
Equity.	50
How have Personal Factors/Prior Knowledge Impacted on Their Understanding? ..	50
Initial Teacher education.....	50
Personal experience.....	51
Prior experience.	51
How have these Teachers' Experiences Shaped their Knowledge?	51
Teaching Experience.....	51
Implementation of the curriculum.....	52
School Culture.....	53
How have Professional Supports Shaped Teachers' Knowledge?	54
Interprofessional Collaboration.	54
Professional development.....	55
Teacher's aide support.	56
IEPs.....	56
Areas for additional support.....	56
Overlap of Knowledge and Experience = Pedagogy for All.....	57
Limitations of this research.....	58
Conclusion	58
References	60
Appendix One: Letter of Request for Assistance (MoE)	72
Appendix Two: Letter of Request for Assistance (Principal/BOT).....	73
Appendix Three: Principal Information Sheet	74
Appendix Four: Teacher Information Sheet.....	76
Appendix Five: Teacher Consent Form.....	78
Appendix Six: Interview Schedule	79
Appendix Seven: Authority for the Release of Transcripts Form	81
Appendix Eight: Example from Interview Analysis.....	82
Appendix Nine: Ethics Confirmation Form (MUHEC)	83

List of Figures

Figure 1. New Zealand Curriculum framework – progress and achievement for all (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2015a).....	10
Figure 2. Research process.....	21
Figure 3. Appreciative Inquiry process.....	23
Figure 4. Venn Diagram demonstrating how a pedagogy for all is developed through the overlapping of previous knowledge and teaching experience.....	57

List of Tables

Table 1: Participant demographics.....	24
--	----

List of Appendices

Appendix One: Letter of Request for Assistance (MoE)
Appendix Two: Letter of Request for Assistance (Principal/BOT)
Appendix Three: Principal Information Sheet
Appendix Four: Teacher Information Sheet
Appendix Five: Teacher Consent Form
Appendix Six: Interview Schedule
Appendix Seven: Authority for the Release of Transcripts Form
Appendix Eight: Example of Interview Analysis
Appendix Nine: Ethics Confirmation Form (MUHEC)