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**An appreciative inquiry into teacher aides' perspectives
on best practice for inclusion**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Educational Psychology
at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand.

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ABSTRACT

This project utilised interviews and a focus group within an appreciative inquiry framework to gain an understanding of the perspectives of four teacher aides on the ‘best of what is’ in teacher aiding practice, and the components that contributed to moments of best practice. Interview and focus group data were inductively analysed and several themes emerged that closely reflect the extant literature on teacher aiding and inclusive practices. These themes included making a difference, collaborative practices, access to relevant expertise and the ability and willingness of educators to be flexible and responsive in accordance with student needs. A number of barriers to inclusive teacher aide practice were also identified and were consistent with existing research findings. The researcher proposes that teacher aides’ roles are implicitly or explicitly defined and constrained by wider school structures and policies concerning how students with significant learning needs are educated. Thus, efforts to improve how teacher aides are deployed and utilised need to be approached within the context of whole-school development towards improving educators’ capacity to effectively respond to student diversity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None of us got where we are solely by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. We got here because somebody – a parent, a teacher, an Ivy League crony or a few nuns – bent down and helped us pick up our boots. -Thurgood Marshall

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Lastly, I would like to thank my partner, Ross, the person who has helped me ‘pick up my boots’ more often than any other over the course of my study.

Wait out for someone who won't let life escape you, who'll challenge you and drive you towards your dreams. Someone spontaneous you can get lost in the world with. A relationship with the right person is a release, not a restriction.

- Beau Taplin

In you, I have found that someone.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application number 15_033. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Andrew Chrystall, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x 43317, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

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