

Chapter One: Beginnings

*Phenomenological themes are...like knots in the webs of our experiences,
around which certain lived experiences are spun.*

(van Manen, 1984, p. 59)

Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the phenomenological study presented in this thesis. The study explores the lived experiences of a small group of teacher aides working in a few Preparatory classes in Catholic schools in Queensland, Australia. I begin by outlining the introduction of the Preparatory Year in Queensland schools, and the effects of this reform process upon the role of teacher aides in these classes. Following this, I explore phenomenology (van Manen, 1984) as an approach to understand what it means to be a teacher aide in a Preparatory class. I discuss my epistemological and ontological beliefs and how they relate to both my research interest as well as van Manen's (1990, p. 154) 'philosophy of action'. I present an overview of myself as researcher, the research questions and goals of the study. Central to this study is the use of ropes and knots as metaphor, employed as a conceptual tool. As such, this chapter offers insight into the use of this metaphor, alongside an exploration of the methodological writing style adopted for this study. Finally, the content and layout of the chapters is presented.

A Preparatory Year of Schooling in Queensland

The introduction of a Preparatory Year in Queensland was a complex, system-wide change. In 2007, the non-universal, part-time state preschool provision for four to five-year-old children was abolished. It was replaced by a non-compulsory, full-time, universally available Preparatory Year. The Preparatory Year was introduced across Queensland schools in 2007 with the enrolment of a half-year cohort (children turning five years of age between January and July 2007). In 2008, the Preparatory Year provision enabled universal access for children turning five years of age from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008. Children enrolled in Preparatory classes are six months older than those who attended the previous state preschool program. The Preparatory Year reform process

is more fully explored in Chapter Two; however, a brief overview of some of the key issues is provided here to offer insight into the major implications of this reform. These are:

- raising the initial school entry age by six months from 2008
- changing human resource management, including employment conditions and professional support of teachers and teacher aides
- developing and implementing a new play-based curriculum (Queensland Studies Authority, 2003, 2006)
- changing physical resource management, including the design and position within the school of Preparatory buildings, playgrounds and toilets
- trialling and subsequent evaluation process of the Preparatory Year.

Drawing upon the metaphor of rope, these implications can be likened to strands of fibre or yarn, twisted together to make rope. A significant strand or aspect of this reform is the teacher aide provision: a human-resource issue. In the first trial, teacher aide hours were set at a maximum of fifteen hours per class each week in the initial trial process in 2003; this was half of the previous state preschool allocation of thirty hours per class each week. Provision was increased to twenty hours during 2004, and schools were permitted to allocate further hours from their own budgets. This revised allocation still fell short of the previous state preschool allocation, which was required to offer full-time responsive support to both children and teachers each day.

The evaluation reports of the Queensland Preparatory Year trials (Thorpe, Tayler & Bridgstock et al., 2004; Thorpe, Tayler & Tennant et al., 2003; Thorpe, Tayler, Tennant & Skoien, 2003) highlighted that limited hours for teacher aide time concerned both teachers and principals. While the reports indicated that teacher aides were surveyed regarding the trial, limited findings were discussed in the publicly released documents (Thorpe, Tayler & Bridgstock et al., 2004; Thorpe, Tayler & Tennant et al., 2003; Thorpe et al., 2003).

Teacher aides in Preparatory classes

Teacher aides have faced changes in their daily routine, with shorter contact hours per group of children. In practical terms, teacher aides may not spend as much time with

parents, children or teaching staff as they used to. I wondered if their professional partnerships with teachers, children and parents alike might have been affected by the significant reduction of contact hours. This may have had potential to affect the teacher aides' role and participation in: constructing and implementing collaborative curriculum; individual child, group and strategic planning; and professional reflective practices (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACEQA), 2011; Dahlberg, Pence & Moss, 1999; Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments (DEEWR), 2009, 2010; Hunter & Sonter, 2012; Schweinhardt & Weikhardt, 1998; Queensland Studies Authority, 2006; Wein, 2008).

Investigating teacher aides' lived experiences

A literature review reveals a shortage of studies regarding teacher aides (Achilles, Nye, Bain, Zaharias & Fulton, 1993; Bourke, 2008; Finn & Pannozzo, 2004; Gerber, Finn, Achilles & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001; Johnson & Faunce, 1973; Lewis, 2005). As an early childhood teacher who has always worked with a teacher aide, I recognised an opportunity to contribute insights to the literature about the role and perceptions of teacher aides, and raise their voices through a study of their lived experiences. I selected phenomenology (van Manen, 1984) as the philosophy and methodology for the study, given the focus on the lived experiences of Preparatory Year teacher aides. Phenomenology seeks to describe a phenomenon as a person experiences it. This study now turns to the exploration of this approach.

Strands of Phenomenology

The literature suggests two central strands of phenomenology are prevalent. Descriptive phenomenology was derived from the philosophy of Husserl, whereas interpretative phenomenology developed from the work of Heidegger (Moran, 2000; Nodkee, 2007; van Manen, 2002a). Definitive explanations of phenomenology may initially prove puzzling, as there is not one unified underpinning philosophy (Finlay, 2009; Spiegelberg, 1960). Spiegelberg (1960) suggests that to understand phenomenology one needs to follow the course of its growth. Yet this is not as simple as it sounds. For example, Husserl is considered the founder of phenomenology (Moran, 2000; Spiegelberg, 1960). He developed his philosophy over such an extended period of time that his earlier work is

often contradicted by later works (Spiegelberg, 1960). Similarly, Heidegger, an assistant of Husserl, refuted many of the labels, such as existential phenomenology, that others gave to his phenomenological work (Spiegelberg, 1960). However, it is perhaps this very complication that is at the essence of phenomenology. The description of the nature of a person's experience can be complex and open to interpretation.

Transcendental phenomenology

Husserl (1931) considered phenomenology to be a philosophy, approach and method (Ray, 1994). By reflexively meditating on the origins of experience, Husserl sought to describe transcendental phenomenology and clarify the essential structure of conscious experiences or essences (Ray, 1994). He believed it was possible to find and examine the core—or essential—meanings and experiences of life by returning all thought and effort to the things themselves (Heidegger, 1962). To enable exposure of pure or fundamental essences, his goal was to reduce the human influence upon these core experiences, focusing thought primarily upon the phenomenon. Husserl's (1931) phenomenological focus was both philosophical and methodological. Situating humans as 'being of the world' (Ray, 1994, p. 120), he sought to describe the world's essence outside human influence (Ray, 1994). Husserl's work proposed inhibiting or suspending 'all belief in existence that accompanies our everyday life and our scientific thinking' (Spiegelberg, 1960, p. 134), to listen to and fully understand the experience. Thus, his search was for truth from the outside world, untainted by human thought or prejudice. His style of phenomenology relied on reducing and refining thoughts through a descriptive and philosophical process, until only the essence of the phenomenon remained. Husserl's work was concerned with finding and describing clear and accurate reports of the phenomenon. It centred on minimising any subjectivity on the researcher's part to 'disclose the pure field of consciousness' (Shutz, 1969, p. 27) and describe the truth. His methodology required researcher detachment from the everyday world. This form of phenomenology is often described in the literature as 'descriptive' or 'transcendental' phenomenology (Moran, 2000; Nodkee, 2007; Ray, 1994).

In his last work, Husserl (1970) developed the idea of the 'lifeworld' (Spiegelberg, 1960). Although Husserl did not fully realise this work in his lifetime, the notion of the lifeworld, and of studying the essence of lived experience has been central to phenomenology ever since (Finlay, 2009; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Natanson, 1969;

Spiegelberg, 1960; van Manen, 1984). Heidegger further developed this concept through his examination of 'being-in-the-world'.

Interpretive phenomenology

Heidegger, an assistant to Husserl, did not agree that existing knowledge or pre-understandings about a phenomenon could or should be set aside. In contrast to Husserl, Heidegger's phenomenological focus was 'being'. Heidegger believed that being was already present in the world (Moran, 2000; Ray, 1994, van Manen, 2002a), and that prior knowledge and suppositions constitute the possibility of meaning (Ray, 1994). This was in contrast to Husserl's belief that consciousness could be set aside or detached by suspending thinking about a particular phenomenon. Heidegger challenged the effect of knowledge upon interpretations. He therefore emphasised the need for a researcher to be reflexive about these personal understandings, without isolating them entirely.

Hermeneutic studies

Heidegger's interpretive form of phenomenological inquiry was enriched by Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic studies. Hermeneutics is concerned with how people come to understand, interpret and articulate essences. Gadamer developed the concept of horizons to explain the perspective from which each individual views and interprets the world. Horizons are shaped from the individual's past and present, and consist of all the influences upon the individual (Gadamer, 1975). Gadamer purported that the individual's cultural, social, historical and political backgrounds and experiences influenced their understandings and interpretations of the world. Gadamer's study into interpretation led him to propose two meanings of interpretation: the first a pointing to something, with the second pointing out something's meaning (Gadamer, 1975). Gadamer believed that understanding and interpreting are bound together and interpretation is always an evolving process. Thus, a definitive interpretation is unlikely ever to be possible (Gadamer, 1975). The notion that interpretation constantly evolves is further explained by Addison (1989), who states that, 'in interpretive research, truth is seen as an ongoing and unfolding process, where each successive interpretation has the possibility of uncovering or opening up new possibilities' (Addison, 1989, p. 56). Thus, interpretation and understanding are seen as cyclic in nature.

Heidegger argued that thinking is not closed or complete, but spirals from pre-understanding to understanding, leading to further pre-understandings for exploration: that is the hermeneutic circle. Heidegger drew upon hermeneutics and proposed circularity to understanding; when we try to understand a phenomenon, we are projected or thrown forward into it. Establishing a point of view is the forward arc of the circle, with evaluation forming the reverse arc (Packer & Addison, 1989). Unless it is a totally foreign concept, we usually have some understanding of the phenomenon. In turn, this may create both an understanding and a misunderstanding. Thus, ‘we inevitably shape the phenomenon to fit a “fore-structure” that has been shaped by expectations and preconceptions, and by our lifestyle, culture and tradition’ (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 33). This concept of the shaping of knowledge supports the description of horizons proposed by Gadamer’s hermeneutic studies and contradicts Husserl’s earlier proposition that we can detach ourselves from reality.

Thus, Heidegger’s work has been instrumental to the development of interpretive phenomenology. Interpretive, or hermeneutic inquiry (Moran, 2000; Nodkee, 2007; Ray, 1994; van Manen, 2002a), inspired scholars such as Ricouer, Satre and Merleau-Ponty, who each developed their own phenomenological philosophies, grounded in existence or the life world as initially proposed by Husserl.

The examination of lifeworld themes led Merleau-Ponty (1962) to argue there are four fundamental existential themes, which encompass the life worlds of all human beings. These are:

- lived space (spatiality)
- lived body (corporeality)
- lived time (temporality)
- lived human relation (relationality or communality).

van Manen

Examination of these life world themes was critical to, and further developed by, scholars following the University of Utrecht tradition. Working across a range of disciplines, these phenomenologically orientated scholars, such as Van den Berg, Beets, Langeveld, Linschoten and Buytendijk, were interested in practical rather than philosophical

phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 2007). Perhaps the best known contemporary scholar writing within this tradition is Max van Manen (1984, 1996, 1990, 2002a, 2002b, 2007). Working now in Canada, he has led phenomenological practice in educational research. In this thesis I have used van Manen's phenomenological framework, which draws upon an interpretive style of phenomenology.

In keeping with his predecessors, van Manen argues that 'phenomenological research is the study of lived experience' (van Manen, 1984, p. 37). Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's (1962) life world themes, his particular focus is hermeneutic phenomenology, which he describes as a human science, beginning in the life world. van Manen situates his research as human science; the study is always about the nature or essence of the lived human world. Underpinning the study of lived experience are questions of what it means to be human. What does the lived world of human experience look like? What constitutes knowledge within this world? What constitutes reality? In terms of my study, I wondered what teacher aides' experiences in Preparatory classes might look like. I wondered what their experiences would reveal about themselves and their workplace.

Epistemological and Ontological Foundations

To understand van Manen's (1984) phenomenological approach, we must ask questions about the nature of reality and knowledge. These questions provide an overall framework for research and should implicitly guide every aspect of a study (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003; Cresswell, 2012; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2013). Questions of ontology concern the nature and basic elements of reality and what can be known about it. Epistemology considers the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and what can be known. As the researcher, it is important for me to clarify my underlying assumptions of knowledge to maintain and demonstrate internal consistency within the research study's conceptual framework. This means exploring my ontological and epistemological beliefs as informed by van Manen's (1984) lived world concepts, and how they pertain to the research world of Preparatory Year teacher aides in Queensland Catholic schools. To understand this is to locate myself as researcher in the lived experience.

Situating the researcher

My interest in exploring the lived experiences of a small group of Queensland Preparatory Year teacher aides working in Catholic schools has developed from my professional background. Throughout my teaching career I have always worked alongside a teacher aide. I began my teaching career working in the state preschool division of North Brisbane, initially teaching children aged from four to eight years, then teaching preschool classes comprising four and five-year-old children. As an early childhood educator and consultant, I have been most interested in the development of the Preparatory Year reform agenda in Queensland. My readings and investigations into the reform process revealed a lack of information regarding teacher aides in research literature. I began to question why there was a shortage of literature about teacher aides. Further, my research into the development and subsequent implementation of the Preparatory Year in Queensland schools also identified that while some teacher aides were surveyed regarding their views of the Preparatory Year process, findings were not available initially. I found myself seeking connections, not statistical results. So, I decided I would collect stories from which I might gain some insight into the lived experiences of these teacher aides. I also began to wonder about opportunities that might enable the telling of local stories from the educational community surrounding my workplace.

My reflections challenged me to consider my own ontological and epistemological beliefs. I found I was seeking an opportunity to build upon my own understandings through listening to multiple perspectives, rather than seeking information to fit a singular truth. I did not assume that a singular truth could be found, or that any findings would be finite. I was also very mindful that what I was looking for were the voices of ‘ordinary’ people working with young children: not just the ‘experts’ or professionals revealed in the literature.

These critical reflections led me to investigate van Manen’s phenomenological approach, which seeks to gain a deeper understanding of everyday experiences (van Manen, 1990). Thus, perceptions, feelings, relationships and actions are fundamental topics for my phenomenological study. Using this phenomenological approach enables me to both hear the stories from a small group of teacher aides, as well as gain insight into the lived experiences in their everyday workplaces. This approach, distinguished by a qualitative

ontology, epistemology and methodology (Sonter, 2009), is congruent with both my personal understandings of knowledge and reality, and the nature of my research interest.

Social construction of truth

The belief that reality is socially constructed, complex and ever-changing is situated within van Manen's approach (Finlay, 2009; Glesne & Peshkin, 1991; Laverty, 2003; Matthews & Ross, 2010; van Manen, 1990). Further, reality can be seen as contextually bound and subjective (Cresswell, 2012; Finlay, 2009; Matthews & Ross, 2010; Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). Pragmatically, this means that rather than searching for a singular truth, individuals learn about their beliefs and build their own theories through interaction with and interpretation of the world around them. This learning takes place both interpersonally and intrapersonally throughout life.

This approach supports the postmodern ontological stance that posits the existence of multiple realities, and fosters the validity of multiple perspectives (Burns, 1994; Cresswell, 2012; Finlay, 2009; Greene, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Realities are not more or less true; rather they are simply more or less informed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2005). Thus, a myriad of perceptions of what constitutes truth or reality may exist, which may then differ from other beliefs held by the individual, as well as others around them. Usher and Edwards (1994, p. 28) concur:

The fact that reality is constructed through social and discursive representations does not make 'reality' any less real. But it does mean that 'reality' can be seen differently and difference can be seen in 'reality'.

Hence, reality is complex and multilayered; a tangled bundle of ropes, rather than a neat coil.

Researcher as interpreter not theoriser

Epistemologically, this qualitative approach asserts that knowledge is found relationally rather than definitely (Cresswell, 2012; Finlay, 2009; Smith, 1991; van Manen, 1996; Wilding & Whiteford, 2005), and recognises the relationship between the knower and the known. Knowledge is constructed by individuals through their interactions with the world around them. Consequently, relationships underpin the acquisition of knowledge. Individuals build upon their knowledge within the context of their social, cultural and

political relationships. The acquisition of knowledge as an ever evolving process can be seen as indefinite and complex. Previously held understandings may be challenged by new assumptions or experiences. Therefore, knowledge does not suggest truth or ultimate reality. van Manen (1996) argues that the epistemology of phenomenology shows meaning rather than develops theory. He reminds us that ‘meaning is multi-dimensional and multi-layered’ (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). Researchers are cautioned that following a phenomenological pathway is similar to attempting the impossible, because ‘lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal’ (van Manen, 1990, p. 18). As researcher, I am reminded that my reflections on the meanings of the lived experiences of teacher aides in Preparatory classes are not definitive. My involvement in this study challenged my assumptions of the role of teacher aides in Preparatory classrooms, as well as my own teaching practice.

Researcher involvement

The nature of my involvement within and influence over this study might be seen as problematic. Importantly, I recognise that I am not a ‘disengaged spectator’ (Kerby, 1991, p. 14), finding and reporting the ‘truth’ (Addison, 1989; van Manen, 1984). Rather, my goal is to present interpretations or plausible insights (van Manen, 1984) through the story of the Preparatory Year teacher aides’ experiences. Phenomenology recognises that truths or beliefs are based in human experience (Finlay, 2009; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 1984, 1990), presenting the problem of how the researcher can see or capture other truths or realities, without prejudicing the work with their own beliefs or truths. Couched within the researcher’s beliefs might be fundamental issues of power, control and values. These may affect which voices or stories are heard, and which others are silenced (Foucault, 1980). Who are the ‘others’? ‘Others’ may be identified by issues or traits including culture, race, gender, social class, age, abilities, values and beliefs. The power inherent in the relationships between groups of people determines the status quo and ‘the other’ (Foucault, 1980). For this reason, I acknowledge an imbalance in gathering and interpreting data.

Recognising researcher bias

I asked myself how I could overcome my footprint on the interpretation of others lived experiences. The literature suggests that reflexive examination of prejudices, agendas and

authenticity is a critical component of interpretive inquiry (Burns, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2005; Finlay, 2009; Reason & Hawkins, 1988; Silverman, 2013; van Manen, 1984). This presents a challenge. Self-reflection takes me out of my comfort zone and challenges me to re-examine my beliefs and understandings. However, the process of critically reflecting upon and examining core beliefs affords opportunities to identify potential gaps or silences in my thinking and assumptions. Exposing these areas of silence helps me explore 'régimes of truth' (Foucault, 1980, p. 131) in the realities I create for myself. Régimes of truth can be exposed by looking to the other to consider the balance of power and knowledge. This enables the exploration of multiple perspectives and allows other voices to be heard. Thus, critical reflection is an active process, allowing me to see whether any of the truths I hold stand in the way of listening to and giving voice to the stories of the Preparatory Year teacher aides' lived experiences.

Researcher action and knowledge

A significant feature of van Manen's work is his call for phenomenology to be critically orientated: in other words, a philosophy of action (van Manen, 1984). Underpinning this philosophy are two key concepts: knowledge and action. He asserts that engaging in hermeneutic phenomenology challenges the researcher to both reflect and think deeply, gaining knowledge of the essence of the experience, then acting upon this knowledge. van Manen (1984) argues that undertaking phenomenological research and writing helps the researcher develop a more thoughtful learning style, which may influence further action. He then presents a challenge for the researcher to take on board political or personal action that may arise from the experience.

Van Manen (1984) emphasises the importance of strengthening the relationship between knowing and acting, to develop pedagogic competence. Defining pedagogy as 'the activity of teaching, parenting, educating, or generally living with children' (van Manen, 1990, p. 2), he refers to this pedagogic competence as 'pedagogic thoughtfulness (or) pedagogic tact' (van Manen, 1990, p. 154). As an early childhood educator, I am challenged and enthused by van Manen's concept of action as a process through which to further understand the lived experiences of a small group of Preparatory Year aides in Queensland Catholic schools. Using van Manen's (1984) phenomenological framework

opened up possibilities for me to hear stories from those who may otherwise be silenced or seen as inexperienced.

The research

The primary purpose of this study is an exploration of the lived experiences of a small group of teacher aides in the Preparatory Year in a few Queensland Catholic schools. The question that began to emerge in 2007 from my initial Masters of Education (Honours) research into the Preparatory Year reform, and my background as an early childhood teacher and consultant, was: *What does it mean to be a teacher aide in a Preparatory class?* The complexity of this question led to the upgrade of this Master of Education (Honours) study to PhD level in 2010. The expansion of this work revealed other questions, which guided my inquiry.

What is the nature of the Preparatory Year aides' role?

- How do Preparatory Year aides' experiences of their role relate to policy?

What is the nature of the Preparatory Year aides' lived space?

- How do Preparatory Year aides' experiences of their lived space affect their role in the workplace?
- How do Preparatory Year aides' experiences of their lived space affect their relationships with the people in their immediate work environment?
- How do Preparatory Year aides' experiences of their lived space affect their sense of participation in, and belonging to, the workplace?

Research goals

My goals for this study are to:

- facilitate discussion and understandings between practitioners undergoing reform process
- build a deeper understanding of perspectives and issues affecting teacher aides
- identify some ways teacher aides experience their role in the Preparatory Year
- contribute to research findings on the Preparatory Year reform process.

A major purpose of this study is to investigate the educational reform process involving the Preparatory Year in Queensland Catholic schools. As an educator, I sought to hear and share local stories from my geographical work area. Consequently, this study draws upon a sample of Catholic primary schools within central North Brisbane; an area in which I work and live. As a teacher in a kindergarten in North West Brisbane, I have a particular interest in these schools; some of the children from my centre move to these schools for their primary education.

I see this research project as an opportunity for practitioners in the field to discuss and develop their understanding of the reform process. Thus, this study aims to give voice to an infrequently heard group within the educational community, and may contribute to the literature regarding teacher aides' experiences of the Preparatory Year process.

Rationale for the study

The exploration of the Preparatory Year reform in Queensland is timely. Preparatory Year classes have been part of the landscape of Queensland schools since 2007. Yet, six years later, surprisingly few research projects about the Preparatory Year in state or private school sites are evident in the literature. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, teacher aide provision is a key issue of this reform. The reduction of aide hours impacts considerably upon teachers, children and parents; consequently, promises of increases to teacher aide hours still form part of political platforms.

Of primary significance to this study is the implication of the Preparatory Year reform upon teacher aides themselves: a subject lacking in-depth research. The absence of teacher aide voices is evident in the literature investigating teacher aides (Sonter, 2009, 2010, 2013), as many authors present only the views of teachers or administrators. Positioning teachers and leaders as experts, their views dominate the literature. Of particular concern to me as an early childhood professional is the dearth of Australian studies revealing the experiences or voices of teacher aides in early childhood settings generally. Basing my study on the lived experiences of a small group of teacher aides in Preparatory classes in Queensland Catholic schools allows the voices of these marginalised and silenced practitioners to be heard. In turn, this study may provide insights to help inform current and future discussions on the place of teacher aides in early childhood education and care.

Currently, global debate continues on the professionalisation of the early childhood field. In Australia, quality reform agendas in non-school based early childhood provision promote a professional identity for educators (teacher aides or assistants) working with young children from birth to five years. Teacher aides in Queensland Preparatory classes work with children in this same age bracket, yet they are not placed within this reform agenda. *Education and Care Services National Law 2010* (Cth) and *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* (Cth) do not apply to schools. Further, the limitation of the Preparatory Year to school sites, discussed further in Chapter Two, prevents early childhood services covered by the quality reform agenda from offering Preparatory classes. While this phenomenological research explores the lived experiences of a small group of teacher aides, their stories may resonate with others in the same field. In turn, their voices might provoke conversation on the pedagogical role of Preparatory Year teacher aides, and their place in the early childhood sector. As a result, this research could enlighten contemporary discussions on the nature of early childhood professionals, and who is included in the early childhood profession.

Underpinning this phenomenological study is the search for meaning. van Manen (1990) reminds us that phenomenology is essentially a writing activity that clarifies meanings embedded in life experiences. Thus, it is helpful to consider the methodological writing style at this point.

Rationale for methodological writing

The act of writing ‘fixes thought on paper’ (van Manen, 1990, p. 125). To explicate the meanings of the lived experiences of teacher aides, the use of anecdotes and metaphor to uncover layered meanings was valuable. The use of anecdote or stories helps retrieve or illuminate unique meanings (van Manen, 1990). I include some anecdotes from the aides in this work to enrich the meaning of their experiences. While writing this study, I found the personal use of writing brief narratives or stories helped shed light on aides’ voices. Therefore, this study also contains a few brief personal anecdotes, offering further insights into particular meanings or complexities that arose during the research. The use of anecdotes does not simply illustrate or “‘butter up” ... a boring text’ (van Manen, 1990, p. 116). Rather, the function of anecdote is pragmatic; it makes notions or ideas, which may be illusive, more available to the reader.

Van Manen (1990, 2007) draws upon the Utrecht School tradition and contends that that phenomenological research is often written evocatively, to ‘stir our pedagogical, psychological or professional sensibilities’ (van Manen, 2007, p. 25). Phenomenology is a writing activity that calls for thick and rich descriptions (van Manen, 1990), and is perhaps:

ultimately successful only to the extent that we, its readers, feel addressed by it—in the totality or unity of our being. The text must reverberate with our ordinary experience of life as well as with our sense of life's meaning (van Manen, 2007, p. 26).

In practical terms, phenomenological writing must make deep, thoughtful connections with its audience. Therefore, literary or artistic devices such as anecdotes, imagery and metaphor are useful to evoke or promote ideas that reverberate with the reader, affecting or transforming the reader’s stance or interpretation. I will now consider metaphor more closely.

Metaphor

Metaphor is often used as a writing tool to embellish or support a line of thought or inquiry. Metaphors can help convey unknown or less familiar concepts. Writers and speakers help an audience further their understandings by using metaphor. Therefore, metaphors afford both the writer and reader with a conceptual tool that frames understandings (Cameron & Low, 1999; Eubanks, 2011; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Logan & Sumsion, 2010; Morgan, 2006; Mullen, Greenlee & Bruner, 2005; Singh, 2010). Metaphor ‘implies a way of thinking and a way of seeing’ (Morgan, 2006, p. 4).

While the intentional use of metaphor enriches writing, seminal work by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Lakoff (1993), contends that using metaphor is often a sub-conscious decision, which is fundamentally conceptual rather than linguistic. This view asserts that using metaphor is not haphazard; on the contrary, it corresponds to neural mappings within the brain. Concepts are processed and understood through metaphor, which assists the linkage of new or unfamiliar knowledge, with what is already known (Cameron & Low, 1999; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Eubanks, 2011; Kabadayi, 2008; Lakoff, 1993;

Morgan, 2006; Nye, Foskey & Edwards, 2013; Sumsion, 2002). Consequently, metaphor is grounded in everyday experience and understanding (Eubanks, 2011; Lakoff, 1993).

Metaphor use is multilayered, with different uses prevalent in the literature (Logan & Sumsion, 2010; Morgan, 2006; St Clair, 2000; Singh, 2010). My experience of metaphor mirrors this multifaceted view. I became conscious of deliberately drawing upon metaphor as a conceptual tool when I began writing drafts to assist with analysis of the first synergetic focus group data. I was struck by van Manen's (1984) use of metaphor, which asserts that the researcher should look for 'knots in the webs' (van Manen, 1984, p. 59). Without intentionally choosing it, this knot metaphor resonated deeply with me. It was at this stage that I began to investigate this metaphor more closely as a means to represent teacher aides' voices.

Ropes, knots and small stuff

While searching for information about knots in books, I became intrigued by the vast amount of knots. Titles of knots held appeal. Names such as 'Granny' knots, 'Figure 8' knots and 'Hangman's noose' provoked images and possibilities for representing themes arising from the aides' experiences. Most knots have a specific use for fishing, hiking, sailing and so forth; others are decorative. While knots are often used to secure ropes together, knots weaken a rope. Tilton (2008, p. 15) cautions that 'a critical aspect of managing rope ... concerns the ends'. The *working end* of the rope is the part actively used when forming knots; the other is the *standing end*. Rope sizes and conditions necessitate different types of knots. Traditionally, cordage over 10mm in diameter is referred to as rope, while thinner cords, strings or twines are referred to collectively as 'small stuff' (Ashley, 1944; Perry, 2011; Tilton, 2008). To prevent ropes from fraying, small stuff (cords, lines, twine or string) is often whipped around the ends of ropes.

Metaphorical use of ropes, knots and small stuff

Ropes are akin to a line and are usually malleable; consequently, they can be seen as a journey metaphor. The use of ropes and small stuff as representational of the aides' lived experiences in my study is borne from this position. I searched literature for phrases or examples of the metaphorical use of ropes or knots to support my writing and thinking, and increase my understanding. Feldman's (2001) writing, using a metaphor of knots to

describe life challenges, offered a pertinent example. She suggests that ‘untangling the knots of complexity found within our thoughts, feelings and perceptions, we learn to untangle the knots of our lives’ (Feldman, 2001, p. 14). The metaphorical use of ropes and knots provided me with a tool for thinking and seeing. It framed my thinking and writing in a concrete way.

The term ‘stuff’ exemplifies this. While discussing their everyday experiences, the aides spoke about their role in terms of ‘stuff’. At times they collaboratively organised ‘stuff’ for children with teachers. Sometimes ‘stuff’ was shared; at other times, the aides were excluded from ‘stuff’. The use of the word ‘stuff’ resonates with the metaphor, and offers an advantage for binding my writing with the aides’ stories and experiences. Significantly, like small stuff to prevent frays in ropes, stuff became an integral organisational tool for thinking and writing. Consequently, the stories from the aides are presented across three chapters in this study, each focusing on particular aspect of ‘stuff’ that affects their lived experiences.

Small stuff is also significant to this study as it positions the aides metaphorically. Teacher aides are marginalised in the research, and often in practice. Figuratively, the aides can be seen as the ‘small stuff’: thin, weaker strength cordage. Conversely, rope can be seen to represent teachers and principals, who are prevalent, often-heard voices in both research literature and school settings.

Breaking strain: Limitations of metaphor

While I found the metaphor of ropes and knots useful to examine or reflect upon some areas of this study, I am mindful of this metaphor’s limitations. I am very aware that my interpretations of knots and ropes may differ to those of others. An image or description of a knot, such as a Granny or Figure 8 knot may be considered as representing belonging; however, knots can be obstructions. While some knots become looser with teasing, many others tighten. Ropes can constrict or bind; subsequently, they may also be about conflict or an impasse.

The literature reveals other limitations. While metaphor is useful to bring an idea or concept into the foreground, it may also obscure other concepts (Morgan, 2006; Singh, 2010). This may lead to particular viewpoints being privileged or unchallenged. Some

elements of a concept may not be uncovered by one metaphor, and may be better considered through the use of a different metaphor (Morgan, 2006; Nye, Foskey & Edwards, 2013). In this way, it can be seen that metaphor is often incomplete. I realise that the metaphorical use of ropes and knots has a breaking strain, and could collapse or fall apart at some stage. In real terms, there is potential danger of being caught inside the metaphor, trying to match writing and thinking to it, as opposed to using the metaphor to conceptualise thinking and writing. The use of the term ‘stuff’ as a metaphorical link is noteworthy here. The aides’ reference to stuff was problematic. The word ‘stuff’ captures their expressions and encounters, and so it is useful to draw together their experiences using this term as a heading or framework. However, the issues the aides identify as stuff are not small. Stuff is significant. Consequently, using the word ‘stuff’ in this study does not sit as easily with the terminology of small stuff.

Reflecting upon the conceptual framework underpinning my study, I recognise that I am not seeking one finite direction or explanation. While the use of metaphor helps reveal experiences and understandings, I am not drawing upon this tool in search of a truth. My thinking and reflection are not constrained by metaphor. Rather, using metaphor affords an organisational tool for exploring the lived experiences of Preparatory Year teacher aides.

Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis comprises eight chapters. This chapter, Chapter One, has opened a discussion about the lived experience of teacher aides in the Preparatory Year in Queensland Catholic schools. I have presented the philosophical framework of the study, situating van Manen’s (1984) phenomenological approach within an historical review of phenomenology. I have discussed the ontological and epistemological foundations of this study, and positioned myself as researcher within this framework. The research question, goals and rationale of this study have also been introduced.

The following chapter, Chapter Two, begins by situating Queensland teacher aides historically in kindergarten, then preschool settings. This chapter then considers current practice and examines the introduction of the Preparatory Year of schooling in Queensland. Issues of system-wide educational reform, which affect the lived experiences of teacher aides, are discussed.

Chapter Three explores of the role of women and the issue of maternal feminisation in early childhood education. This leads to a review of teacher aides in the literature, in particular, the role of the aide in early childhood classrooms. Issues of silence and its effect on marginalisation and belonging are explored.

Chapter Four presents the research methodology. I detail the research approval process, and explore implications of power, reflection and reciprocity. I present the methods and approaches used and specifically developed for the collection and analysis of data for this study.

Chapters Five and Six present the stories and discussions from the teacher aides themselves. I offer perspectives from my investigations of the literature, to provide further insights into the lived experiences of teacher aides in Preparatory classes. Chapter Five, ‘Organising Stuff’, considers the organisational nature of their role. Resource allocation, both human and built-environment, impacts enormously upon the lived experiences of teacher aides in Preparatory classrooms. This chapter presents a discussion on pertinent issues raised by the aides, including classroom design, the provision of toilets and the allocation of hours. Chapter Six, ‘Teacher Stuff’, begins with stories of the aides’ initial entry into Preparatory classrooms. I share the stories of their roles, and consider the nature of their pedagogical relationships in the classroom.

‘Political Stuff’, Chapter Seven, takes a broader view, addressing some of the themes and experiences arising from the aides revealed in Chapters Five and Six. The chapter opens with a discussion about the document analysis frameworks used in this research. It then explores the nature of some policies and texts in relation to the lived experiences of aides offered in the previous chapters.

The final chapter, Chapter Eight, presents a conceptual model, which offers a synthesis of the research to reflect upon contextual issues. The significance of role identity for Preparatory Year teacher aides is considered across three levels: politically, organisationally and professionally. Implications for policy and practice are presented. I discuss the contribution of this study and possibilities for further research.

Chapter Two: Looking Back—An Historical Context

We learn the rope of life by undoing its knots.

(Jean Toomer, 1984–1967)

Introduction

Van Manen (1990, p. 11) reminds us that ‘phenomenology attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence’. Consequently, to enable the stories of teacher aides to be heard, it is important we take into account ‘the socio-cultural and historical traditions that have given meaning to [their] ... ways of being in the world’ (van Manen, 1990, p. 12). Therefore, to further our understandings of the lived experiences of a small group of teacher aides in Preparatory classes in Queensland Catholic schools, it is useful to locate the historical socio-cultural landscape of the education system in which they work.

I open this chapter by looking back at the historical context of the early childhood settings some aides in my study previously worked in, and moved from, when they commenced employment in Catholic Preparatory classes. A brief history is offered here; an expanded account of the historical context is presented in Appendix One. This discussion forms the first strand of this chapter. I then focus on the introduction of the Preparatory Year in Queensland. This section is the second strand of this chapter, and presents a review of this reform’s introduction in Queensland. In keeping with van Manen’s phenomenological approach, I explore issues arising from this investigation, which may affect teacher aides’ experiences of the Preparatory Year, such as receptivity to reform, the role of the school leader and school culture in the reform process.

While investigating the literature, I observed a notable lack of published research regarding the Preparatory Year in the first years of implementation. A contributing factor may have been the Queensland Government’s lack of support for researchers wanting to investigate this matter. This directly impacted on my research as I originally planned to locate the study in state schools. However, my application was not considered aligned

with Education Queensland's current research priorities. The research approval process is explained further in Chapter Three of this study.

Furthermore, the exploration of the context of the Preparatory classes was challenged by the dearth of robust scholarly research available at the time of writing. The introduction of the Preparatory Year affected children, staff across all sectors, as well as parents, and received considerable media attention, particularly in *The Courier Mail*, a statewide daily newspaper. The “watchdog” role of the mass media (Alysen, Oakham, Patching & Sedorkin, 2011; Carson, 2013; Jones & Jones, 1999; Tiffen, 2010) in publicising political issues is relevant here. While issues such as bias, quality control and ethics must be considered (Alysen, Oakham, Patching & Sedorkin, 2011; Carson, 2013; Cunningham & Turner, 2010; Jones & Jones, 1999; Tiffen, 2010), the potential of media to provide ‘critical scrutiny of authorities’ (Tiffen, 2010, p. 95) is pertinent. Carson’s (2013) doctoral thesis affirmed the significance of the “watchdog” role of Australian newspapers, and found strong correlations between investigative journalism in newspapers and the dissemination of information in the Australian public sphere. Drawing upon newspaper and media articles as a data source in order to learn more about the research topic (Ploeg, 1999), affords an opportunity to explore the reform process from a range of texts. Alysen, Oakham, Patching and Sedorkin (2011, p. 10) assert that ‘local papers produce journalism that speaks directly to their audiences’ concerns’. Significantly, this study explores the lived experiences of “ordinary” people working in schools. As such, their stories, experiences, and the context of their everyday work environment are most likely to be informed by popular press and reported in local media (Alysen, Oakham, Patching and Sedorkin, 2011).

Importantly, this chapter locates teacher aides in Preparatory classes in Queensland Catholic schools within a historical time and place. Understanding the context provides insights into the situation in which Preparatory aides find themselves today.

Looking Back

A review of the history of Australian early childhood education reveals the role of teacher aides supporting teachers and young children, developed in kindergarten contexts. The latter years of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of kindergartens by charitable associations in Australia. Key organisations, such as the Free Kindergarten Union,

Sydney Day Nurseries and later the Crèche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland, now known as C&K, arose. These services reflected a twofold commitment: the care and education of young children, as well as social reform and support for needy families (Bowes, 2004; Brennan, 1998; Weiss, 1989). Kindergartens offered sessional programs, with the emphasis on the education and socialisation of young children. However, the shorter hours of the kindergarten program did not suit working class mothers; as a result, day nurseries, forerunners to childcare centres that provide care for infants to school aged children began to emerge. While these groups emphasised the importance of qualified staff, especially trained teachers (Brennan, 2013), these same expectations were not held for assistants helping the teachers. Interestingly, specialist qualifications were not considered mandatory for teacher aides working in kindergartens until 2003, with the introduction of the *Queensland Child Care Regulation 2003*.

The role of teacher aide was a key feature of Catholic kindergartens. The development of the Catholic Kindergarten Union by Dr Beovich, Director of Catholic Education in Victoria in the 1930s, was in direct competition to the Free Kindergarten Union movement. Arising from the need to be competitive in the market place, the provision of voluntary workers to assist trained teachers working in Catholic kindergartens was also introduced by Beovich in the 1930s. Significantly, this volunteer role was a precursor to the role of teacher aides today. Volunteer teacher aides required no qualifications, nor was it considered necessary for kindergartens to formally employ or pay these workers. On the contrary, this volunteer work was considered beneficial to young women as preparation for their later married life and their life vocation as mothers.

The 1930s witnessed the development of significant early childhood reforms both in Queensland and nationally. In 1930, the Queensland primary school syllabus included a formal Preparatory Grade to be completed over eighteen months. Students attended for a half-day, and in combination with Grade 1, this was defined as the 'Infant School'. Preparatory students were four and a half years to five years old (Library Services, 2013). In 1938, Preparatory classes were increased to two years; however, Preparatory was later abolished in 1953. Although the government had started planning towards the creation of a state preschool system, this was not implemented until 1973.

State preschool education in Queensland

In 1943, a preschool Coordinating Committee, with representation from C&K and Education Queensland, took on responsibility for the state's kindergartens. The government began reserving suitable land for preschools, but it was not until 1972 that the Queensland government began advocating a universal, sessional one year of preschool education for children. This year was targeted at children aged four to five years old: the immediate year before commencing school. This policy was enacted in 1973, along with the creation of the Preschool Education Branch, which later became the Division of Preschool Education. The government began establishing state preschools offering sessional programs on primary schools sites (where possible) throughout the state. Additionally, the Preschool Correspondence Program was also established to support children in remote areas. From 1996, early education classes were also established in small primary schools, integrating preschool with early years' classes. I began my teaching career as teacher in charge of an Early Education Class, comprising preschool with years one and two in a small school north-west of Brisbane.

Mellor (1990) reveals that the expansion of state preschools was so immense, that by 1981 over 90 per cent of Queensland children aged between four and five years attended preschool—either through the Preschool Correspondence Program at home, in state preschools, early education classes or C&K centres. In many cases, children were receiving two years of early childhood education before school. Many three-year-old children were attending a kindergarten program before attending either state preschool, or returning to the C&K centre for their preschool year. Mellor (1990) also raises the issue of disparity in salaries paid between the state preschool award and the kindergarten teachers' award. This resulted in many teachers leaving C&K and community centres to work within the state preschool system. While Catholic parishes established kindergartens, offering sessional programs for children of kindergarten and preschool age, it is interesting to note that the first Catholic preschool did not open in Queensland until 1988. Like their state counterparts, these Catholic preschools were housed in school grounds. Enrolment was for children turning five years old. The introduction of Catholic preschool classes was fifteen years after the development of a state preschool service throughout the state. Preschools can be seen as 'relative newcomers' (Grajczonek, 2006, p. 7) to the Catholic education system.

The creation of the Division of Preschool Education in 1973 was a coup for early childhood education in Queensland. Rather than locating preschool education and policy within an existing division of government, the creation of an autonomous division enabled a wider scope for reform, policy and service implementation (Education Queensland, 2006). In line with this, university courses offering specialist qualifications in early childhood education also expanded. Colleges of Advanced Education offered short courses to enable teachers working in primary classes to teach preschool. At the same time, new diploma courses offering both preschool and primary specialisations became available for undergraduate students. In 1977, the first accredited childcare course was available in Queensland. The Brisbane Kindergarten Teachers College offered a two-year Associate Diploma in Childcare. Graduates found employment in childcare centres as group leaders and assistant directors. Some also worked as teacher aides in kindergartens and state preschools. Interestingly, when applying for positions as aides in kindergartens, some graduates of this course were considered overqualified for the role (K. Parker, personal communication, 29 April 2009). Some short certificate courses were available for teacher aides through Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges; however, qualifications were not mandatory for these workers in schools, kindergartens or childcare centres. Nearly thirty years later, Education Queensland accredited a suite of three qualifications for education support in 2001, which were upgraded in 2006. The *Queensland Child Care Regulation 2003* saw the introduction of prescribed qualifications at Certificate Three level for assistants working in Queensland childcare centres or kindergartens. In practical terms, the focus of training was on the teacher as an expert in the field.

In 1998, the *Preschool Curriculum Guidelines* (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1998) were published, providing guidance for teachers working across a variety of settings offering preschool classes throughout Queensland. Interestingly, in the same year, the Division of Schools replaced the three previous autonomous divisions of preschool, primary and secondary education. A flow-on effect of this was the broadening of Education Queensland's definition of early childhood to comprise the years from preschool to Year 3 (Education Queensland, 2006). Arguably, the loss of the autonomous preschool division may have affected the strength of the preschool sector's capacity to advocate for policy and service provision for preschool-aged children.

By 1995, there were 581 state preschools, 142 early education classes and 32 special education developmental units in place, with 34,397 children enrolled at state preschools (Library Services, 2013). By 2006, approximately three quarters of state schools across Queensland provided sessional preschool programs. Although often situated within school grounds, the state preschool system still provided separate and specialist buildings and playgrounds. Staff teams working in preschools were afforded a great deal of autonomy and flexibility. However, 2007 heralded the introduction of the Preparatory Year throughout Queensland schools and the cessation of state preschool education. This chapter now investigates this reform.

The Introduction of the Preparatory Year in Queensland

During the time the state preschool system continued to expand, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, significant national policy directives were at play. Australia ratified the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) in 1990. In the same year, the *International Labor Organisation Convention 156* was ratified, giving parents the right to employment without discrimination. Along with these, the National Competition Policy and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) affected early childhood policy initiatives at both Federal and state level. A significant flow-on effect was the legal responsibility of governments to provide care and protect children's rights. With more parents involved in the workforce, the provision of quality early childhood services became paramount. Additionally, like other nations at the end of the twentieth century, Australia was undergoing significant demographic, social and economic shifts, from the traditional primary and natural resource industries to knowledge, information and communication technology-based industries. In response to these demands, reforms were introduced to ensure that schools prepared children to meet these changes and future economic needs (Ailwood, 2008; Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2012; Davies, 2002; Na & Moon, 2003; Press & Hayes, 2000; OECD, 2006).

The introduction of the *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century* (1999) saw a focus on retention and participation rates in schools, as well as literacy and numeracy benchmarks. In response to the national agenda, the Queensland Government, under the leadership of Premier Beattie, endorsed the framework *Queensland State Education 2010* in February 2000. Issues of change are clearly identified and are

consistent with those identified in the literature of that time (Davies, 2002; Press & Hayes, 2000). This framework added strength to the need to identify a broad strategic direction, for state schools to achieve the Smart State initiatives of the Beattie government within a tight fiscal framework. A clear aim of the *Queensland State Education 2010* framework was to satisfy the government that public investment was being met, and to ensure value for taxpayers' money (Department of Education, 2002).

The tension between economic growth and the priority of education as a key factor underpinning the push for national development has been identified in the literature (Press & Hayes, 2000; New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People and Commission for Children and Young People Queensland, 2004). This has led to a disparity of access to formal education and care options. *The National Preschool Education Inquiry Report* (Walker, 2004, p. 10.) found 'there is not equitable access to a high quality free preschool education across the country'. Findings outlined in Walker's (2004) report indicate that Australian preschool services are very fragmented, and issues such as costs, delivery hours, funding formulae and child ratios promote inequity. In response to these trends, Australian state and Territory governments have investigated ways to increase preschool attendance and facilitate the transition to school (Press & Hayes, 2000). A major issue addressed in the *Queensland State Education 2010* report was the aim for students to participate fully in the future knowledge economy. The government aimed to increase school retention rates to match other leading Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations, which at the time of this report, were considered below average in Queensland. The introduction of new curriculum directions, a variety of pathways into tertiary learning or workplace training, and the development of more effective information and communication technologies within schools were also critical issues. To achieve these changes, the need for solid foundations within the schooling system, and improved outcomes in pre-Year 1 education were emphasised. These factors provided the basis for reform in the early years. However, while this initiative sought reforms based on quality research into the needs of preschool children, it was qualified by the need to recognise resourcing restraints.

To enable the translation of these reforms into action, the *Queensland The Smart State Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (The State of Queensland, 2002) green paper was presented in March 2002. Key to the *Getting Ready for School* (The State of

Queensland, 2002) reform were three major issues: Queensland's performance on the national benchmarks for literacy and numeracy; the raising of the school entry age, in line with other states; and the universal access of all children to a Preparatory Year of schooling. Notably, the government's fiscal agenda was very clear from the outset. These reforms were to be implemented within a tight economic strategy.

A Preparatory Year of schooling trial

To affect this reform, trials into a Preparatory Year, alongside the current preschool year, were designed to introduce and establish the benefits of a Preparatory Year provision. These trials would provide information to the government on the importance of extra preparation, in terms of readiness and educational outcomes, the newly commissioned *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006), and issues such as length of time needed for preparation, where to provide this and whether all children need this preparation. Importantly, these trials would also determine whether to continue the current preschool provision. The Early Childhood Education Unit was established within Education Queensland to oversee the trials and provide leadership and a support framework for this initiative. A Ministerial Early Years Reference Group, comprising representatives from a variety of key stakeholder sectors, was also formed. The Queensland Early Childhood Consortium, comprising a group of researchers from several Queensland universities, evaluated the trials and submitted reports to the Minister. The Beattie government emphasised that the trials would assess different ways of providing quality early childhood education that suited the needs of Queensland children and parents (The State of Queensland, 2002a, p. 3). A major implication of the reform was that, while more teachers would be employed to meet the demands of class sizes, the teacher aide provision would be reduced to fifteen hours per week. This decision was criticised by the media (Allen, 2004a, 2004b; Barrett, 2006; Odgers & Livingstone, 2006) and C&K (2003a, 2003b), and considered a challenge to the effective implementation of the Queensland Studies Authority (2006) *Early Years Curriculum*. While many of the groups represented by the Ministerial Early Years Reference Group supported the provision of a later school entry age, they expressed concerns about the provision of early childhood qualified teachers, and fiscal restraints that included the reduction of teacher aide hours, building and playground resources, the abolition of a preschool provision, as well as evaluation of the trial process.

While the reform campaign encouraged innovation in the trials, the opportunity was minimal. Preparatory classes could only be trialled on a school site, excluding kindergarten and day care centres from the trial process. This was inconsistent with the *Queensland The Smart State Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (The State of Queensland, 2002) green paper, the government's social justice advocacy and aim for community participation in schools, identified in *Destination 2010* (Department of Education, 2002), and the commitment to equality of opportunity given by Premier Beattie, Ministers Bligh and Foley (The State of Queensland, 2002b). Importantly, this strategy minimised the competition of other service providers to provide Preparatory classes (Fynes-Clinton, 2002a), and defined their roles as providers of 'pre-Prep' programs only. The then Minister, Minister Bligh, stated there was no role for community-based education services to duplicate what the state sector was offering (McGuire, 2004). This view is consistent with the directive 'to increase Education Queensland's share of school enrolments' (Department of Education, 2000, p. 26). This marketing agenda is in keeping with the findings in a report from Press and Hayes (2000, p. 26), who note a gradual shift towards non-government schools. They also note that in 1997, 26 per cent of Australian primary-aged children attended school outside the government sector. Preschools and childcare centres attached to private and church schools were highlighted in this trend. Premier Beattie applauded the introduction of the trial process, stating that 'it's absolutely essential that we have this extra preschool year because it directly affects literacy and numeracy' (Jones, 2002, p. 5). Interestingly, Beattie's approval for the provision of an extra preschool year was contrary to that stated previously in the *Queensland The Smart State Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (The State of Queensland, 2002). This report acknowledged that while other states and countries offered two or three years of early education before school, this government would set its path on cost-effective strategies and the current investment in state preschools. It was clear that the government would not provide both a preschool and a Preparatory Year.

This directive was despite local, national and international research of the period, proving that investment in the early years was significantly rewarded. Principal research during this time (McCain and Mustard, 1999; Schweinhardt & Weikhart, 1998; Walker, 2004) added weight to the view that preschool programs, based upon open, child-initiated curricula, assist in the development of critical skills for life-long learning, not limited to

academic preparation for school. Moreover, Fynes-Clinton (2002b) affirmed that a review of twelve OECD countries supported at least two years of informal education before commencing school in Year 1.

Three-year trials began in 2003; however, in the *Preparing for School Trials Update* (Thorpe, Tayler & Tennant et al., 2003), Education Queensland was already indicating that at the end of the trials, the preschool program would be replaced by a full-time Preparatory Year, available in state, Catholic and Independent schools. This prediction was inconsistent with the government's emphasis on the importance of the trial process and evaluation to inform its decision making. *The Executive Summary of the First Progress Report from the External Evaluation of the Preparing for Schools Trials* (2003) suggested that this report provided promising data, including principals' perceptions of better preparation for children and early identification of special needs. However, this report also highlighted problems regarding equitable access for children, stress factors in terms of Preparatory teachers' expectations and teacher aide time, with substantial variation of allocated hours occurring throughout the trial (Thorpe et al., 2003). *The Executive Summary of the Preparing for School Trials External Evaluation Progress Report 2* (Thorpe, Tayler & Tennant et al., 2003), tabled in December 2003, identified similar positive attitudes from the trial schools, and benefits in terms of preparation and identification of special needs. However, the issues of equitable access and limited teacher aide time, as well as the Preparatory teachers' attitudes in terms of frustration and tiredness, were also consistent with the first report.

A Preparatory Year as a political platform

In January 2004, the Preparatory Year became a political platform in the Beattie election campaign. Premier Beattie committed to a non-compulsory, full-time, universally available Preparatory Year from 2007, and abolished state preschools in 2007. This policy included increasing the school entry age by six months from 2008. As a result, children entering Year 1 were required to turn five years, six months old before July of that year. Children could attend the non-compulsory Preparatory Year if they turned four years, six months before July of that year.

The implementation of this policy contradicted the reform process. The validity of the trial process was seriously undermined by the announcement of this policy. *The*

Preparing for School: Report on the Queensland Preparing for School Trials 2003/4 (Thorpe, Tayler and Bridgstock et al., 2004) was not due for presentation to the Minister until the end of June 2004. The report was to ‘inform government’s decision on implementation of a universally available Preparatory year’ (Thorpe, Tayler and Bridgstock et al., 2004, p. 32) The trial report process had been structured as a longitudinal study, and was expected to inform specific issues such as pedagogy, required resources (human and physical), performance of specific ‘at risk’ groups and the role of teacher aides within the first eighteen months of the three-year trial process.

Implications of the Preparatory Year trial evaluation

In July 2004, the Education Minister at the time, Minister Bligh (who became Queensland’s premier after Beattie) stated that the *Preparing for School: Report on the Queensland Preparing for School Trials 2003/4*, by Thorpe, Tayler and Bridgstock et al. (2004) ‘confirmed the government’s decision to provide a full-time Prep year’ (Bligh, 2004b, para. 4). Yet, the public release of the evaluation report *Preparing for School: Report on the Queensland Preparing for School Trials 2003/4* (Thorpe, Tayler and Bridgstock et al., 2004) was delayed until late September 2004. The delay in releasing this document further challenged the reform process, by restricting comment on whether the report met all its objectives.

The Minister reported that while no specific conclusions could be drawn about the ideal amount of teacher aide time, the report found some teachers did not feel adequately supported by the professional development offered, and that the location of the Preparatory classroom was also a concern. In their report, Thorpe, Tayler and Bridgstock et al. (2004) highlighted that Preparatory teachers were proactive, highly experienced and qualified, highly regarded by parents and principals, highly motivated and had chosen to be involved in the trial (Thorpe, Tayler & Bridgstock et al., 2004). Yet the progress reports demonstrated these same teachers were experiencing stress, tiredness and frustration, with less than half satisfied with the allocation of teacher aide time. Principals of trial schools concurred with this, and advised that budgeting for additional aide time was vital to ensure the Preparatory programs’ success. The commitment by the Beattie government for universal access to a Preparatory Year from 2007 had significant implications for human resources, both for teachers and teacher aides. It could not be

assumed that all Preparatory teachers from 2007 would be as proactive or have experience in early childhood education.

Many teachers, parents and professional groups, such as C&K, Queensland Teachers Union, Queensland Independent Education Union, the Queensland Council of Parents & Citizens Association and the Queensland Association of State School Principals, voiced concerns in the media regarding the trial process and the implications of the new system (Allen, 2004b, 2006a, 2006b; Elvish, 2004; Fynes-Clinton, 2002a, 2002b; McGuire, 2004; Odgers & Allen, 2004). C&K continued to lobby for parental choice within the system, advocating that ‘parents should be able to choose which pre-schooling program, including a Preparatory Year, best suits the needs of their children’ (C&K, 2004).

Resourcing the Preparatory Year: A challenge to the Smart State platform

The abolition of the state preschool program had serious repercussions for many young children and their families at the time. While ‘pre-Prep’ programs were offered in kindergarten and childcare centres, attendance fees restricted access for many. Wardill’s (2008) report found that at the time of the Preparatory reform agenda, only 29 per cent of kindergarten-aged children (three- to four-year-olds) in Queensland participated in programs led by degree qualified teachers: the lowest rate in the country. C&K settings stipulated that ‘pre-Prep’ groups must be taught by teachers holding early childhood degrees. Childcare services at the time of this reform employed group leaders, who usually held a TAFE or equivalent diploma, to work with children in this age group. Removing the state provision of preschool programs led by qualified early childhood teachers increased the disparity in child learning outcomes between socio-economic groups. This action was inconsistent with the government’s agenda for schools to prepare all children for the competitive knowledge market. Interestingly, the Beattie Labor government’s decision to abolish the provision of state preschool in Queensland was at odds with the Federal Labor Party’s election initiative to invest \$252 million to boost state preschool provisions (Symons, 2004).

While the government committed some GST revenue towards the *Queensland The Smart State Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (The State of Queensland, 2002) program, it has not allocated additional resources to fully address the key issues. This economic strategy conflicted with the findings of the *Schooling for Tomorrow: Networks*

on *Innovation* report (OECD, 2003), which emphasised that governments needed to invest more in the future, targeting additional resources to the areas of greatest need to promote equity and change, rather than reinforcing the status quo (OECD, 2003, p. 128). Corrie (1999b, p. 5) asserts that ‘currently, the educational reform agenda is linked to market-based ideology, which is driven by fiscal restraint’. The Beattie government’s implementation of the Preparatory Year without the completion of the three-year trial and open evaluation process, the abolition of state preschools, the reduction of resources such as teacher aide hours, playground and equipment provision, concurs with the political agenda raised by Corrie (1999b), seriously challenging the ‘Smart state’ agenda.

The Preparatory Year initiative was rolled out across Queensland in 2007. The first year saw a reduced intake of children aged from four and a half to five years. This half-year cohort of Preparatory children significantly affects school and university placements, as these children will continue to progress through their schooling as a smaller group. Children not eligible for this small cohort skipped the Preparatory Year, and went straight from preschool into Year 1 classrooms. Again, these Year 1 classes were also affected by reduced enrolments. While no additional building infrastructure was required for these primary classes, teaching and support staff numbers were affected in many schools.

Of significant concern is the lack of information about teacher aides’ perspectives. While teacher aides were interviewed as part of the trial report process, the reports offer little detail. It is unclear whether aides were questioned about resource allocation, such as building design, toilet location or preparation facilities. The disregarding of the Preparatory teacher aides’ voices exemplifies how teacher aides are silenced and marginalised in both practice and theory. McGillivray (2007, p. 128) asserts that invisibility may ‘be sustained through lack of voice and presence in policy and discussion’. In practical terms, the silencing of aides’ voices may affect teacher aides’ classroom practice: they may feel undervalued and disempowered.

These are some issues from a reform perspective. However, what does this mean for teacher aides? This chapter now turns to the resource provision (human and built-environment) of the Preparatory reform, from 2007 until the present (2013).

Resourcing teacher aide hours: quantity shapes quality

Teacher aides formerly employed in state and Catholic preschools are now working in Preparatory classes at the discretion of principals. Teacher aide provision for the Preparatory Year received a great deal of media attention. In 2005, the government allocated an additional 10,000 hours of aide time to be used throughout Queensland, to support the early years classes (Preparatory Year to Year 3). This review of hours in 2005 was reported to have resulted from intensive lobbying by educators, parents and key educational associations and unions (Odgers, 2005). Crucially, this funding was allocated on a needs basis. Principals were given responsibility for assessing their school needs, according to a sliding scale of enrolment patterns and socio-demographic analysis. While this allocation gave principals in some schools the flexibility to allocate additional Preparatory teacher aide hours at the beginning of the year, an increase to the base maximum of 15 hours of aide time per Preparatory class was not committed.

The lobbying for additional hours of teacher aide time by educators and parents has continued (O’Gorman, 2008) and is evidenced in media articles (Barrett, 2006; Bower, 2007, 2009; Cripps, 2007; Eklund, 2006; Fagan, 2006; Livingston, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Odgers & Livingstone, 2006; Williams, 2011). King (2006) reported at the time of the State Government Estimates inquiry in June 2006, no costs had been figured towards the allocation of teacher aide time in preparation for the 2007 school year. Three Queensland State elections have taken place since the Preparatory Year trials. During each election campaign, the Queensland Labour Party and the Liberal National Party (LNP) promised action towards full-time Preparatory teacher aide provision (Odgers & Livingstone, 2006). The Labor party was reinstated at the first two elections; however, no additional hours resulted. The election campaign of 2012 flagged the provision of additional teacher aide hours in Preparatory classes by both parties (Chilcott, 2012). The Newman LNP took office in March 2012, promising additional aide time. The consequent rollout of additional hours by the incumbent LNP government has seen 107 schools offering up to 25 hours of aide time per week in Preparatory classes during 2013. It remains to be seen how long this additional funding stays in place, and whether further extensions to this provision will be made.

A wide variance in aide hours can be seen in Queensland schools. Some Independent and Catholic schools (including one of the schools in this study), which operated preschools with full-time (30 hours per week) aide hours before the Preparatory Year initiative, continue to allocate full-time teacher aides in their Preparatory classes. Many other Independent and Catholic principals have allocated additional resources to their base funding of 15 hours. As a result many Preparatory classrooms in these schools have teacher aides working 20–25 hours per week. Some have continued with the 15 hours allocation. Many parent auxiliary groups attached to schools are also reported by media sources to be contributing funds towards extra aide time in Independent, Catholic and state schools (Chilcott & Templeton, 2010; Livingstone, 2007c; Metcalf, 2007). Teacher aide hours in state schools also show considerable variance. Many state schools have increased their allocation of teacher aide hours in Preparatory and early years' classes at the beginning of the year, to support children's transition to new classes. These hours are then reduced during the year. Some small Preparatory classes, and composite classes with Preparatory and early years students in state, Independent and Catholic schools, have less than 15 hours a week of aide time.

The Courier Mail (Livingstone, 2007c) reported that some principals assigned teacher aides to work across several Preparatory classrooms in order to manage resource hours. This practice occurred in one of the schools in my study. Importantly, this enabled many aides to continue working a full-time week, without losing income. While some aides were offered the opportunity to work additional hours, this was not the case for all. In 2011, industrial action was threatened by United Voice, the union representing aides in state schools. This union was protesting at 80 per cent of teacher aides earning less than the minimum wage in the proposed enterprise bargaining agreement (Chilcott, 2011c). The aides sought and won the potential to increase their work hours across the school week. In real terms, this means that aides already employed in the school are given the option of taking any additional hours on offer, rather than new aides being employed. As explained above, this may result in some aides working across more than one classroom.

However, working with more than one class presents challenges to teacher aides' relationships with teachers and students, as well as personal health issues, such as tiredness. Some teacher aides join a class half-way through a day and are immediately expected to pick up on what the children are doing, or begin or complete tasks set by

teachers. Restricted hours do not allow time for teachers and aides to discuss the program or expectations. The non-contact time previously allocated in the former preschool provision enabled teachers and aides to discuss, review and plan. Often this would happen while sharing preparation and clean-up tasks together. The limited hours of teacher aide time may now see teacher aides revert to a ‘housekeeper’ role, preparing and cleaning resources over two or more classes. However, many teachers wish to use teacher aides with children and make this a priority for the short time the aides are present. Media and Union reporters note that this affects these teachers, who are left with the preparation and clean-up of resources themselves (Allen, 2006b; Spriggs & Wise, 2004). In turn, this may affect the types of resources teachers choose to use with children. The *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006) encourages children’s use of concrete materials to construct meaning and knowledge. However, cleaning art equipment, making playdough, preparing clay, setting up obstacle courses and the like may become too constraining on teachers’ time.

Teacher aides have faced a change in their work practices, with shorter contact hours per group of children. This reduction of hours directly affects adult–child ratios: a crucial international benchmark of quality practice in education (*Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* (Cth); National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC), 2005; National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC), 2006; *Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008* (New Zealand)). At the time of this reform, there was general consensus among early childhood professionals and researchers that smaller classes and higher adult–child ratios improve quality in early childhood programs (NAEYC, 2005; NCAC, 2006). Given the importance of the additional adult–child contact that teacher aides provide for so little money, it is paradoxical that a government could justify the reduction of hours and still use the rhetoric of providing quality educational experience.

A quality agenda

The State Government claimed that expenditure on this reform would accomplish the goals of universal access for schooling for all Preparatory aged children, leading to improvement in literacy and numeracy levels (The State of Queensland, 2002b). In time, this expense would result in the state’s increased capacity to actively contribute to and

compete in the global knowledge society. While quality agendas and concerns were prevalent in research and the national market place of early childhood settings for nearly two decades before the Preparatory Year reforms, the Queensland Government expenditure for education was still closely tied with socio-economic benefits. Whereas the former state preschool provision encompassed essential quality features such as specialist early childhood teachers, full-time teacher aides, toilet facilities inside classrooms and large purpose-built play environments and resources, this same commitment to high quality resources (human and built) could not be mirrored in the Preparatory Year budget. Yet government rhetoric touted this reform as delivering quality for all Queensland children (The State of Queensland, 2002b).

During the Preparatory Year trials, further influential research linking high quality early childhood education and care with socio-economic benefits (Elliott, 2006; OECD, 2006) was published. Still, little modification to the Preparatory reform policy and rhetoric occurred. In spite of the published research on the importance of quality provision for early childhood, some infrastructure for Preparatory classes was reduced from the trial period. Reports by Early Childhood Australia (2008) and Queensland Parliament (2008), as well as newspaper articles (Allen, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b) detailed concerns such as toilet blocks built more than 30 metres from classrooms, and a number of classrooms were built smaller than the trial sizes. While some provision for increases to teacher aide hours was made, this was not universal.

In 2008, pivotal national political action raised the quality agenda ‘front and centre’ (Logan, Press & Sumsion, 2012, p.9). The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) pledged to improve educational quality for all Australians, and set the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEEDYA, 2008), from which the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2011), and the *Australian Curriculum* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2011) were drawn. Couched within the quality discourse, this declaration consisted of two goals: ‘Australian schooling promotes excellence and equity... (and) all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens’ (MCEEDYA, 2008, p. 7). Eight actions were promised, three of which were particularly relevant to this current discussion: ‘supporting quality teaching and school

leadership; strengthening early childhood education; ... (and) promoting world class curriculum and assessment' (MCEEDYA, 2008, p. 10).

Through these reforms, the Commonwealth Government and States (as COAG), have raised the quality agenda from the margins to the forefront of education policy. However, quality is somewhat elusive and very complex. While these policies and frameworks may support provisions of quality practice, they are constrained socially, economically and politically by the prevailing government. Issues of power, control and the status quo come into play. Recent research by Logan, Press and Sumsion (2012) offers insight into the complexities of quality in Australian early childhood education and care. The authors identify seven streams of research around quality and argue for further investigations to challenge taken-for-granted views or discourses of quality.

Among the initiatives that arose from the COAG (2008) agenda, two are pivotal to this study: the development of a national school curriculum; and a quality framework for early childhood education and care. I now turn to consider some implications of the National Quality Framework (ACECQA, 2011).

National Quality Framework

In response to the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008), The *Education and Care Services National Law 2010* (Cth) and *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* (Cth) have been developed as key legislative documents forming the National Quality Framework (ACECQA, 2011). A crucial element of the National Quality Framework is the early childhood curriculum framework, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments, 2009). Commonly referred to as the *Early Years Learning Framework*, it aspires 'to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years and through the transition to school' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 5).

It is significant to note that *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009) advocates the view of the competent, capable and engaged child. It acknowledges the significance of childhood as a unique time, and the importance of being in the present. This is quite different to the idea of childhood as

preparation for adulthood, which underpinned the Beattie government's agenda to prepare children to contribute to, and compete in, future global knowledge-based societies. While preparing for and supporting transitions are central to the framework, promoting secure and reciprocal relationships is now considered fundamental to successful development, learning and transitions. This framework calls for engaged, responsive and reflective educators. Indeed, the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2011) expects this.

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (DEEWR, 2009) positions and entitles all who work with young children as 'educators' and 'pedagogical leaders'. Flanked by the National Quality Standard (ACEQA, 2011), there are clear expectations of the educator's role in relation to children. Educators are responsible for planning, implementing and assessing the curriculum, and implementing policy and quality directives. Importantly, this document covers children from birth to five years. In Queensland, some four and five-year-old children are in kindergarten or childcare centres, which work under these guidelines and regulations. Other four and five-year-old children are in Preparatory classrooms, which are not bound by these expectations. This raises concerns for children as well as educators. Teacher aides in Preparatory classrooms with four and five-year-old children are not expected to undertake the same level of pedagogical responsibilities as teaching assistants in childcare and kindergarten services, or family day care educators. While some aides may be pleased not to have the responsibility of these expectations, it may also be difficult for teacher aides in Preparatory classrooms to be regarded in the same professional light as others who take on these responsibilities daily.

Another concern is that many teacher aides working in Preparatory classes may be actively involved pedagogically, without the recognition of this being part of their role. Others may shirk from engaging pedagogically, not seeing this as an important aspect of their role. This incongruity between the school and early childhood and care sectors is problematic. Differing expectations are both divisive and confusing.

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC, 2010b) *Early Childhood Education and Care Position Statement* acknowledges the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEEDYA, 2008). This document defines

early childhood education and care as ‘inclusive of all children from birth to eight years’ (QCEC, 2010b, p. 1). The QCEC states that Catholic schools and authorities will assess:

capacity to provide viable early childhood education and care services after considering matters such as funding sources, site suitability, governance and management models, employment of qualified staff, curriculum implementation and resource provision (QCEC, 2010b, p.2).

Discrepancies have arisen. While schools are expected to consider provision and implementation of resources and facilities to improve the quality of education for children up to and inclusive of eight years, the Preparatory Year provision in these same schools has fallen short. Yet Preparatory children are aged from four years six months to five years and six months old, far below the definition ceiling of eight years of age. Confusingly, while the *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* (Cth) apply to before and after school services, and to early childhood education and care services, they do not apply to schools. The *Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011* (Cth) set the Queensland educator-to-child ratios for children over preschool age in early childhood education and care services as ‘one educator to fifteen children’ (MCEEDYA, 2011, p. 276). Preparatory classes in primary schools have adult-child ratios far exceeding this. These higher ratios significantly affect pedagogical practice. The expectation that one teacher can effectively implement and assess high quality curriculum to 28 young children, and in some cases 32 children, without full-time teacher aide support is perplexing. These expectations do not support effective educational or pedagogical practice. Moreover, safety concerns inside and outside the classroom have arisen.

Resourcing safety: who’s at risk?

The reduction of teacher aide hours has also presented safety concerns for children. Issues such as effective supervision of children in the classroom, playground and when using toilets have been reported in *The Courier Mail* (Allen, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Chilcott, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Metcalf, 2007; Odgers & Allen, 2004). The Government’s position on aide hours has always been linked with the increase in children’s age. Being six months older than the previous preschool system, it was assumed that children would not require as much support (Allen, 2005b; Welford, 2005). This view was not supported in

the literature at the time this reform was implemented (NAEYC, 2005; NCAC, 2006; ECA, 2004), nor currently (ACECQA, 2011).

Many schools have refurbished classrooms to provide Preparatory classes. Media reports indicate that many of these classrooms are smaller than those used in the Preparatory trials (Allen, 2004a, 2005a, 2005b, 2006b, 2006c), without toilet facilities. Some Preparatory classes are in double story buildings with toilet access more than 100 metres away (Queensland Parliament, 2008). The lack of close toilet facilities means more time is spent on this task. Teachers in charge of these classes have few choices: to either provide adult assistance and supervision by their aides or set up buddy systems with children. When left alone without aides, teachers need to decide whether to leave the class unattended, take the whole class to the toilets or ‘buddy’ children together to use the toilet. Negotiating stairs, especially if children are unwell or have soiled clothes, is also a safety hazard for both children and adults. Children using toilets unattended also holds potential risks including health issues, bullying and abuse. Media reports of Preparatory children being sexually abused by other Preparatory aged and older school children in school toilets includes cases of Preparatory aged children being forced to remove their pants, and being urinated upon by other children or having sex acts performed on them (Hansen, 2010). Children wandering off after break times or during toileting have also been reported in the media (Chilcott, 2009a; Metcalf, 2007).

The issue of safe toileting practice contrasts starkly with centre-based care regulations for children of the same age during the same period to the current day. The *Child Care Regulation 2003* in Queensland, and the *Children’s Services Regulation 2004* in New South Wales, stipulated close supervision of children using toilets or hand washing facilities. School aged children attending out of school hours’ care programs using school toilets were also protected by regulations covering hygiene. The *National Standards for Outside School Care 2003* (Cth) instructed carers to exercise due care and consideration when using school toilets, ‘especially if toilets are unclean, have no toilet paper, soap or paper towels’ (NCAC, 2003, p. 30). On a daily basis, Preparatory children toileting by themselves may not have access to these basic health commodities.

More recently, Quality Area Two of the National Quality Standard ‘focuses on safeguarding and promoting children’s health and safety’ (ACECQA, 2011, p. 47). These

standards' key factors include 'maintaining adequate supervision of children ... monitoring and minimising hazards and safety risks in the environment ... implementing effective hygiene practices' (ACECQA, 2011, p. 51). It can be seen that these requirements challenge many current practices of Preparatory classes.

Teacher aides' safety

What about the safety of teacher aides? What other safety risks do they face? Preparatory aides and teachers are reported to face heightened stress levels and potential burn out (Allen, 2006b; Livingstone, 2007c; Metcalf, 2007; Williams, 2011). A 2007 survey, conducted by the Queensland Teachers' Union, revealed that 93 per cent of Preparatory teachers have reported increased stress levels since the beginning of the 2007 school year (Metcalf, 2007). Physical safety issues also arose for staff. Reports of increased violence and physical abuse by Preparatory aged children on other students and staff have been reported in the media (Chilcott, 2009b, 2009c, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2013b, 2013c; Bower, 2009; Donaghey, 2010; Elvish, 2013; Keegan, 2013; Kyriacou, 2013). This has led to suspensions of Preparatory children from school. While suspensions were not recommended under the previous state preschool system, media reports indicate that Education Queensland has cited an increase in the number of suspensions given to Preparatory aged children since 2006, arising from increased numbers of young children in schools (Chilcott, 2009b, 2011a, 2011b).

School suspensions are categorised as short, from one to five days; and long, from six to twenty days. During the Preparatory Year trials in 2006, six students were suspended for up to five days. The following year this number rose to 139 students. In 2008, 184 Preparatory aged children had been suspended from school from one to five days. 2008 was the first year a full cohort of Preparatory Year age eligible children (between four years six months and five years six months) attended schools throughout Queensland. The figures increased to 371 short suspensions in 2010; by 2012, 518 suspensions had been issued to Preparatory aged children. Some children received multiple suspensions. The total number of Preparatory aged children suspended in 2012 was 317, of which 270 were boys (Chilcott, 2013a). The question arises whether the increase in suspensions is a result of changes in children's behaviour or inappropriate expectations and settings in Preparatory classes. It is likely that many schools are not appropriately prepared for this

age group, or groups of this size. Further, the limited fiscal resource provision for the Preparatory Year has done little to alleviate these challenges.

Media reports assert that many teachers blamed the increase in violence in the first few years of the Preparatory reform on children being ill prepared for school (Chilcott, 2009b, 2011b). Home backgrounds, behavioural issues and a lack of participation in educational settings before attending Preparatory are underpinning factors cited by social welfare agencies, principals, teachers, teacher unions and parent and citizen (P&C) groups (Chilcott, 2009b, 2011a, 2011b; Kyriacou, 2013). Teachers' unions and school associations have appealed for full-time teacher aides to stem the violence (Chilcott, 2009c; Chilcott, 2012).

The appeal of a free, universal Preparatory Year reform has resulted in most age eligible children participating in the program. However, it appears that many arrive at school without the 'personal, social and learning capacity' (Connor & Linke, 2012, p. 12) that would afford successful transition to, and participation in, school. As revealed earlier in this chapter, these children may not have attended kindergarten programs prior to commencing Preparatory class. Similarly, children who have attended kindergarten or childcare programs will have had the benefit of smaller child-adult ratios, affording more immediate and responsive support. The reduction of teacher aide hours in Preparatory classes has resulted in less adult support. This has challenged both the adults' ability to effectively support children's behaviour, as well as limited children's opportunity to play and develop according to individual needs. The fiscal restraints of the Preparatory reform have had significance for safety outcomes. Allen (2004) and Bower (2009) assert that unlike the purpose-built preschool facilities, smaller sized Preparatory classrooms offer little space for children (Allen, 2004; Bower, 2009).

Additionally, the rise of teachers working in Preparatory classes without specialist early childhood qualifications may also be a contributing factor (Elvish, 2004, 2013). Many teachers and aides working in Preparatory classes do not hold specialist early childhood qualifications, and may be unfamiliar with key practices and principles, such as holistic learning, play-based inquiry, co-constructed curriculum and emergent practices. Neither might they understand the significance of time, trust and secure relationships on young children's learning (ACECQA, 2011; DEEWR, 2009). The introduction of a national

curriculum agenda places even more pressure on teachers and aides in Preparatory classes, who are already navigating relatively new curriculum guidelines.

Curriculum implementation and implications

To recap from earlier in this chapter, the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2011), like the National Quality Standard (ACECQA, 2011), was developed as part of a raft of educational goals set by COAG in 2008. *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum* (2011) emphasises the development of literacy and numeracy skills in the early years of schooling as ‘the foundation on which other learning is built’ (ACARA, 2012, p. 16). We can see a link to the earlier *National Goals for Schooling In the Twenty First Century* (1999) report (discussed previously in this chapter), which identified numeracy and literacy improvements as key outcomes. Nationally, the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2011) is expected to be implemented in schools from 2014.

While a national curriculum affords opportunities for consistent, high expectations for all Australian children, it also presents significant challenges. During the rollout phase of the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2011) in Queensland, Preparatory teachers were expected to teach English, maths and science subjects from the new national curriculum in 2012, while simultaneously implementing the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006). Petriwskyj, O’Gorman & Turunen (2013) raise the dilemma of differing ideological bases between curricula documents. The authors argue that the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2011) has some alignment with ‘scholar-academic and social-efficiency ideologies’ (Petriwskyj et al., 2013). Outcomes such as preparing children for effective participation and efficiency in the future, as well as the citizenship and social capital, are evidenced. As a result, literacy and numeracy competencies are considered key tenants of this curriculum.

The *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006) shares some alignment with participation and readiness for the future. However, it positions children as capable and active participants in the present, and views children ‘as capable young people who have been learning since birth. They are able to take part purposefully in, and contribute to, their learning. Their ideas and diverse experiences enrich learning programs’ (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006, p.10). This curriculum challenges the view of teachers as ‘transmitters of knowledge’ (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006, p.

11) and endorses the teacher's role as a builder of relationships, scaffolder and planner of children's learning, and the teacher as learner (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006, p. 12). Active learning, based on inquiry, play and investigation, is promoted. Yet, as revealed earlier in this chapter, the teacher's ability to implement child-responsive pedagogical practices, which promote children as active learners, may be compromised and hindered by the lack of teacher aide time.

The development of literacy and numeracy are not exclusive of inquiry-based or play-based learning. On the contrary, the significance of children learning and developing literacy and numeracy concepts and competencies, while actively investigating and exploring through play is well supported, and a critical practice of *Belonging Being Becoming: The Early Years Learning framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009). While *Belonging Being Becoming: The Early Years Learning framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009) has been written to support children from birth to five years, this curriculum framework is not used in Preparatory classes. Significantly, the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2011) prescribes content only. This document does not mandate how content is delivered, or which pedagogical styles should be used. In real terms, teachers are afforded the opportunity to engage professionally, rather than being viewed as technicians (Petriwskyj et al., 2013). Conversely, the *Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C)* (Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE), 2012) documents in Queensland present units of work and lesson plans for teachers. The *C2C* (DETE, 2012) initiative has been designed to assist teachers as a starting point for understanding and implementing the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2011). Initially, the use of the *C2C* (DETE, 2012) resources was mandated throughout Queensland state schools; however, this expectation was revised shortly afterwards (Petriwskyj et al., 2013). The Assistant Director-General Education Queensland in 2012, Mark Campling, assured early childhood teachers that:

Opportunities for negotiated learning in the prep classroom remain important. Students should have opportunities to share in decision-making about their learning and to shape and contribute ideas about learning contexts, investigations and solving problems (Campling, 2012, p. 21).

Yet, without teacher aides working in Preparatory classrooms for a full day, adult-child ratios are increased. Consequently, it becomes very difficult for teachers working with a

class of up to, or exceeding, 28 four and five-year-old children to facilitate shared decision making and problem solving.

Importantly, Campling's statement was also qualified by reiterating that 'schools can decide how to manage time and the classroom setting when delivering the Prep curriculum' (Campling, 2012, p. 21). In practice, many principals still expect staff to use the C2C (DETE, 2012) resources to comply with the aim of a universal curriculum. There have been numerous media reports of increased pressure upon children to sit in more formalised, sit-down group or individual activities, as opposed to exploratory learning through inquiry or play (Chilcott, 2010b, 2010c, 2011d, 2013b, 2013c; Chilcott & Chalmers, 2010; Elvish, 2013). Without explicit pedagogical direction offered in the documents, early childhood teachers and aides in Preparatory classes may find it difficult to enact or justify play-based learning, especially if the principal or other teachers do not share similar early childhood philosophies or understandings. Limited teacher aide hours present further challenges in relation to adult-child ratios, and resource organisation, as revealed earlier in this chapter.

Importantly for my study, the change of curriculum delivery from active, inquiry-based learning to more formalised desk-based, worksheet activities has great implications for the role of teacher aides. Whereas in early childhood and the former preschool settings, aides interacted with and supported children through play, conversations and incidental opportunities, more formalised approaches to learning may see aides take on more clerical roles (photocopying resources, preparing worksheets) or assessment tasks, such as collating work samples. These new roles may be different to the aides' expectations of, and training for, their classroom role. Many aides are untrained, which may place even more stress upon them, and upon others to support or provide professional development opportunities for them.

While the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2011) is mandated, the Preparatory Year in Queensland is not compulsory. Not all children attend a Preparatory class. Therefore, not all children will complete the first year of this curriculum. The non-compulsory nature of the Preparatory Year also means that while most children are enrolled in Preparatory classes, they do not have to attend regularly. This places increased pressure on teachers and aides supporting children who miss blocks of work. As a result, the Queensland

Association of State School Principals called for the Preparatory Year to be compulsory (Chilcott, 2010c). However, other key groups (Early Childhood Teachers' Association, QCEC, Queensland Council of P & C Associations) have voiced concerns that children may not be developmentally ready for this, resulting in the behavioural problems identified earlier in this section, and continue to support the non-compulsory nature of the Preparatory Year.

Compounding these issues is the minimum age at which children can commence Year 1, which has increased by six months from 2008. This has ramifications for teachers from Year 1 throughout the school sector, as levels of maturity exhibited by the children in these classes may vary. The evaluation of the Preparatory trial (Thorpe, Tayler & Bridgstock et al., 2004) indicated that children in Preparatory displayed an accelerated level of learning and social adjustment in comparison with those attending Preschool. Interestingly, this seems at odds with the portrayal of 'Terror Tots' in *The Courier Mail* (Chilcott, 2009b, 2011a). Many teachers from trial schools identified that the current primary school curriculum would need to be modified to meet the needs of the children undertaking a Preparatory Year (Pearson, Boal & Byrne, 2004; Spriggs & Wise, 2004). However, newspaper reports state that the introduction of the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2011) has seen all year levels facing significant increases in curriculum expectations (Chilcott, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011d; Chilcott & Chalmers, 2010). As the Preparatory Year is not compulsory it can be assumed that some children will enter Year 1 classrooms without Preparatory Year experience, just as some children enter the Preparatory Year without previous experience. In practical terms, teachers and aides may have to undertake additional professional development or spend additional time developing strategies to support children working across a wider range of classroom experience and social maturity levels. This will further affect the existing time constraints of aides and teachers, potentially adding to stress levels.

Overcrowded curriculum: overcrowded classrooms

The universal access of all age-eligible children to the Preparatory Year was another issue that affected classroom teachers and aides. Unlike state preschool, in which the maximum number of children in a group was 25, all children enrolled in state schools can attend. While the target number of children in a Preparatory class is 25, logistically it is

impossible for all state schools to meet this target. To address this, some schools have less or more than 25 children in a class (Chilcott, 2010d). Of concern are media reports of Preparatory Year class sizes reaching 32 children in some schools in 2013 (Chilcott, 2013a). While Catholic schools initially sought to keep numbers to 25 children or less per class (Livingstone, 2006a), the *Catholic Employing Authorities Single Enterprise Collective Agreement–Diocesan Schools of Queensland 2010* mandates the target size for Preparatory classes in Catholic schools at 25–28 children.

Some schools create multi-age classes combining Preparatory aged children with other early years classes (Livingstone, 2006a). While some small schools have offered mixed age group early education classes for many years, preschool children traditionally attended these classes for alternate full days with teacher aide support. While not compulsory, most Preparatory aged children attended school each day. The formation of composite classes of Preparatory and Year 1, 2 or 3 classes further challenges the stress levels of teachers and aides working with these children. Importantly, Preparatory teacher aides are allocated to classes dependent on the numbers of Preparatory children enrolled, not total class size.

We can see that the reduction of teacher aide time significantly affects classroom practice. However, teacher aides also work within a school community. How does this reform influence their relationships with other members of the school community? Teacher aides' professional partnerships with teachers, children and parents alike may have been affected by the significant reduction of aide time per Preparatory class each week. This has the potential to affect the teacher aides' role and participation in constructing a collaborative curriculum, the observation and interpretation of individual children, as well as strategic and group planning.

Kilgallon, Maloney and Lock (2008) reveal a lack of literature investigating educational reform in early childhood education. Not surprisingly, a review of the literature revealed a dearth of studies investigating teacher aides' experiences of, and receptivity to, the educational reform process. To help foster understanding of how teacher aides' might experience such a change, I turned to related literature investigating educational reform. I now outline the issues affecting teachers and school leaders, and the role of school culture in the change process to inform this brief review.

The challenge of educational reform

Thoonen, Slegers, Oort and Peetsma (2012) identify two theoretical perspectives on educational change. The first centres on the capacity of the school to change and transform from within. Leadership, school culture and teachers' professional growth and agency are vital to the success of this transformative process. The second perspective considers the schools' implementation of reform from outside. In this view, teachers are considered 'recipients and consumers' (Thoonen et al., 2012, p. 443) of policy or curriculum. Importantly, the authors contend that policy initiatives are rarely successfully implemented or transferred to (or between) schools without being re-framed or re-resourced to suit the local context. In other words, while a policy or initiative might be considered integral to affecting change in teaching, the school organisational climate, including time, resources and staff receptivity to the policy is pivotal. Thoonen et al. (2012) suggest that both theoretical perspectives inform each other. Schools that have a strong professional pedagogical culture, supported by effective leadership might be able to respond more effectively and integrate external policy more easily than schools without a strong transformational capacity. This work concurs with earlier work by MacGilchrist, Myers and Reed (2004). These authors argue that policy makers forget that no two schools are the same; they suggest that 'the culture of a school is seen as the deciding factor when it comes to a school's state of readiness and its capacity to improve' (MacGilchrist, Myers & Reed, 2004, p. 38).

These works have particular currency for this study. The introduction of a system-wide reform, such as the Preparatory Year, has resulted in schools having to transform existing practices and policies affecting teacher aides. Schools that have a culture of professional agency and strong pedagogical leadership might be more adept at managing the changes involved in the reform agenda. Secondly, it cannot be assumed that this reform will be implemented identically in every school.

Bohlman and Deal (2003) suggest a symbolic frame for organisational change. The authors identify four frames or lenses, which are useful to consider when facilitating change. These include a human-resource frame, which promotes support and participation; a structural frame, which emphasises roles and procedures; a political frame, where issues can be renegotiated and re-framed; and a symbolic frame, which

incorporates valuing culture through ceremonies and stories evidenced in transition rituals, to acknowledge and mourn the past as well as celebrate the future.

With the announcement of the Preparatory Year policy, the government included a number of schools in the trial process, continuing to phase in more until 2007, when all schools provided Preparatory classes. A potential challenge that preschool teachers and school leaders outside of the trial process faced was the recognition of their work as valid or successful, in light of the government's new reform. Strategies to assist the development of the school culture undergoing the change process identified in Bohlman and Deal's (2003) symbolic frame for organisational change were evidenced by some schools acknowledging the end of the preschool era with festivities for current and past families and teachers. Importantly, this frame recognises the significance of valuing culture. In line with this frame, both Education Queensland and the Early Childhood Teacher's Association of Queensland have offered a celebratory review of the history of state preschools in Queensland (and the contribution of teachers and teacher aides in this process), on their respective websites (<http://ecta.org.au/>; <http://education.qld.gov.au/>). This might have assisted school staff making the transition from preschool to Preparatory classes.

The Preparatory reform affected teacher aides and teachers. It is timely to consider the significance of the impact of reform, to better understand the teacher aides' lived experiences.

At the chalk face: teachers' receptivity to reform

'Teachers are considered by most policy makers and school change experts to be the centre piece of educational change' (Datnow, Hubbard & Mehan, 2002, p. 71). This view can be recognised in the then Minister, Minister Bligh's referral to teachers being at the 'chalk face' of the Preparatory reform process (Bligh, 2004a, para. 7). However, teachers' receptivity towards reform depends on their level of involvement, commitment and ownership of the change effort. The literature affirms the place of teachers as key to the success of educational reform (Bantwini, 2010; Levin, 2010). Reform efforts need to be based in an understanding of teachers' professional lives and development. Stamopoulos (2012, p. 45) asserts that 'relationship building and trust... (are) critical in avoiding the resistance to change that appears to emerge when new reforms are implemented'.

Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan (2002, p. 79) caution that if teachers do not see the value of the reform, they ‘resist the reforms and the time and effort that are required to make them work’. These views are well evidenced in the literature (Calabrese, 2002; Fullan, 1991; Levin, 2010; Weller, 1996).

Corrie (1999a, p. 33) warns that ‘a basic assumption of system-wide reform is that all teachers will implement the policy according to the guidelines and that the policy will meet all needs, regardless of the content’. Corrie (1999a) draws upon a socially constructed view of knowledge and reality, discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, and argues that teachers are likely to construct their own understandings about a policy shaped by their individual experience and context. Recent work supports this view. Bantwini (2010, p. 83) argues that teachers’ ‘knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions play a fundamental role in understanding the reforms’. Importantly, Corrie (1999a) observes that teachers may experience philosophical dilemmas as they respond to reforms.

In real terms, the Preparatory reform presents many opportunities and challenges for teachers and teacher aides. The universal access of pre-primary education for Queensland children is a highly commendable initiative of the government. However, the fiscal restraints underpinning this reform have placed significant pressures upon teachers and teacher aides in their daily practice. Logistical issues affect teachers’ pedagogical choices, and in turn, the role of the aide in the classroom. These include increased workloads due to the reduction of teacher aide hours, implementing new curricula within the physical space allocated to Preparatory rooms, and supporting children’s varying levels of experience, maturity and physical tiredness across a full-time week. While the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006) advocates that teachers adopt a co-constructed, emergent curriculum approach with children, some teachers have found themselves using more directed teaching strategies to manage these constraints. Moreover, the challenge of implementing the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2011) alongside the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006) adds further complexity. Thus, teachers and teacher aides in Preparatory classrooms might be likely to find themselves facing philosophical dilemmas, as identified by Corrie (1999a).

The literature suggests that people can often be sceptical about change brought upon them by external agencies, such as management or government (Calabrese, 2002; Cutcher, 2009; MacGilchrist, Myers & Reed, 2004). Calabrese (2002, p. 327) argues that ‘people resist change that they believe is not in their best interests. They cooperate with change when they believe the change will benefit them’. Earlier work by Zeffane (1996) identifies forces within the individual, as well as systemic forces, affect people’s readiness to change. The individual level encompasses factors such as knowledge, skill, self-awareness and self-esteem. Forces within the system include leadership, culture and the climate of an organisation. This theme can be seen in the work of Van der Vegt, Smyth and Vandenberghe (2001), who also support the view that change involves both individual and organisational perspectives. The authors identify five personal concerns that are activated by organisational issues when implementing policy in schools. These are:

- Identity inclusion: how the individual perceives the opportunity to express themselves professionally and personally.
- Investment of effort: how much intellectual and emotional effort is required to commit to the change?
- Professional competence: the individual’s sense of mastery or skill required by the new process.
- Influence: the perception of power and influence in the changed organisation.
- Fairness: the individual’s perception of how fair their new position will be in relation to the contribution or investment made.

In practical terms, it can be seen that concerns centre on how the change will affect an individual, both personally and professionally. Concerns about the amount of time and effort spent in bringing about change are also identified. Importantly for this phenomenological study, recent work by Cutcher (2009) explores the significance of identity and lived experience on employees’ attitudes to change. Cutcher (2009) argues that resistance to change is drawn from a range of life experiences, both within and outside the work environment.

The literature suggests that understanding the background of change from which leaders and teachers are coming from is imperative for change to be effectively managed. Ford,

Ford and McNamara (2002) suggest three backgrounds of resistance to change: complacent, resigned and cynical. The ‘complacent background’ is built from past success; the ‘if it’s not broken, don’t fix it’ state of mind. This is consistent with the findings of Riordan and Chesterton (1999, p. 14), who state that ‘past academic success of the school seemed to act as a constraint on curriculum change’. The ‘resigned background’ is constructed from past failure, in which people expect to fail, and blame themselves. Statements blaming a lack of skills or a lack of power often come into play in this background. The ‘cynical background’ is also constructed from past failure. However, the blame is passed from the personal level to an external force. This background is pessimistic, and when the change initiative fails, the belief is strengthened. ‘Nothing can change until “it” changes’, and ‘This won’t work either’ are statements that suggest a cynical background.

Just as teacher aides and teachers bring individual perspectives to the reform agenda, leaders also interpret and implement change in unique ways. Chapman et al. (2010) proposes that even if head teachers view a reform or new policy as important, they may still resist change. I now turn to leaders’ roles in educational change.

The role of the school leader and educational reform

Head teachers or principals may resist change, regardless of whether they agree with reform or not. Chapman et al. (2010) suggest that this might be because they lack knowledge or skills regarding the policy; or lack motivation. Alternatively, principals might not see the implementation of a particular policy as their responsibility. Binkley (1997) reports that the principal’s interpretation of policy change language could significantly affect the policy implementation at school level. ‘The enactment and the interpretation of policy change will be different in different schools within a school district, depending on the professional belief system through which the principal mediates the language of the policy change’ (Binkley, 1997, p. 71). Additionally, the way leadership and change processes differ in schools may reflect the school’s past history of success or failure (Riordan & Chesterton, 1999; Thoonen et al., 2012). Strong leadership is critical to the successful initiation of reform and subsequent implementation (Chapman, Burton & Werner, 2010; Datnow, Hubbard & Mehan, 2002; Park, 2012). Yet the research indicates school leaders often experience problems in relation to management and

leadership. Dimmock's (1999) study of the principal's role in a reform process found two major types of dilemmas. General, values-based, personal-professional dilemmas, called 'states of mind', as well as specific, practical, organisational dilemmas were identified. The study also found that a major dilemma for principals managing educational reform was the imbalance between responsibilities gained at school level, as a result of restructuring, and the lack of enabling power, authority and resources to support the enactment of those responsibilities.

It can be seen that the role of the school leader is imperative to the change process. This has serious implications for teacher aides working in Preparatory classrooms in schools. While some principals strongly advocate for the early childhood years, others may not share the same view and thus will allocate personnel and resources elsewhere. School leaders (principals, deputy principals) have faced enormous challenges to both their personal and professional roles in association with the introduction of the Preparatory Year. To manage the implementation of Preparatory in their schools, they have had to find answers to key issues such as resource allocation and requirements (both human and physical) and pedagogical change. Effectively supporting children, teachers, teacher aides and parents through this reform process is difficult if they do not possess a clear understanding of change processes, as well as a sound understanding of early childhood. The importance of such awareness has been identified by Stamopoulos' (1998) study of the introduction of pre-primary centres in Western Australian schools. The author reports that principals expressed difficulties in understanding early childhood curriculum and pedagogy, and indicated the need for professional development and specialised study to manage this part of their role effectively. These findings concur with those of Boardman (2003), whose study of educational reform in Tasmania also suggests that defective educational provisions are possible if the leader fails to possess the appropriate technical knowledge and understanding of early childhood philosophy. So, leaders face challenges on two levels: intellectually and pragmatically. This presents a significant challenge to Preparatory teachers and aides, not the least being their commitment to this change. As revealed earlier in this literature review, teachers working in the Preparatory trials experienced significant challenges despite being very experienced and volunteering for this role. Thorpe, Tayler & Bridgstock et al. (2004) indicate that areas of major concern for Preparatory teachers include the need for more professional development support with regard to understanding and managing the new curriculum, allocation of resources

including teacher aide time and space and location of the classroom. Current Preparatory teachers and aides have potential to experience feelings of reluctance and resistance, especially if they cannot convince school leaders to support them. Importantly, these concerns centre on issues affected by a change from the traditional preschool provision. Significantly, principals have also highlighted this imbalance in relation to the Preparatory Year implementation, especially with regard to physical and human-resource allocation.

The stress levels experienced by leaders implementing change are also concerning. Recent work by Phillips, Sen and McNamee (2008) in Sussex, England, has found that school principals have worse health outcomes and more occupational stress than the general population of workers, and groups of managers and professionals in the study. Primary school principals, in particular female principals, report the greatest amount of work-related stress. The earlier work of Dimmock (1999) suggests that while many principals invest considerable care and consideration for their staff in appreciating their reform efforts, this is sometimes at the expense of their own welfare. A dilemma arises for principals in that the more concern they show for their staff, the more in need of care they become themselves. This is consistent with research by Boardman (2003), who identifies that not only are leaders feeling stressed, they are exhibiting stressed behaviour traits, which can only have a detrimental effect on the quality of their leadership, and their professional relationships with staff members in the school.

Implications of system wide reform

Any system reform will clearly result in change. The introduction of the Preparatory Year in Queensland was a system-wide change to a centrally controlled system. It involved a change from a non-universal, part-time preschool provision to a universal full-time, yet not compulsory, Preparatory Year of schooling. The literature suggests that involvement in the change process at both the individual and organisational level is fundamental to its success. The importance of supporting the individual's receptivity to change has been recognised in the literature; however, this is inconsistent with the Queensland Government's action. While the recognition of past preschool provision on Education Queensland's website has been useful, it falls short of supporting teacher aides with the issues of change inherent in the introduction of the Preparatory Year.

The issues surrounding the introduction of the Preparatory Year in Queensland schools from 2007 were considerable and complex. This educational reform, centrally controlled from within government, was grounded in restrictive economic strategy, and affected teachers, aides, school leaders, parents and children alike. Edwards (2001, p. 10) emphasises that, ‘crucial to any policy implementation between a central government and thousands of teachers is the glue or cement of trust.’ Cranston (2002) suggests that this trust is tenuous, as there is unresolved tension between the centre or bureaucracy setting educational policy and yet enabling individual schools with the freedom to respond to local needs. The fiscal restraints associated with the roll out of the Preparatory Year identified in this paper reflect this argument. Cranston (2002, p. 61) challenges the educational reform agenda:

The essentially linear roll out model of ideas from the system centre eventually to schools has been replicated over and over again. The conduct of lengthy consultation processes with key stakeholders, seemingly with the implication that the system is listening, does not hide the view of many that the centre has the answers even before asking the questions of the stakeholders!

The concerns of parents, teachers, and professional groups regarding the trial process and implications of the new system add weight to Cranston’s viewpoint.

Synthesis

This chapter has explored the development of the educational setting in which teacher aides in Preparatory classes find themselves today. It began with a brief historical view of the aides’ role in early childhood education in Queensland. Additionally, the Preparatory Year reform in Queensland was explored to present insights into Preparatory aides’ current workplace situation. Issues arising from the Preparatory trials and subsequent introduction of this reform, such as reduced teacher aide hours and changing curriculum expectations have been identified within the second strand of this chapter. Teacher aides in Preparatory settings have witnessed significant changes in their work practice. Many aides have been expected to manage these changes without effective fiscal and professional support. Importantly, their views and perceptions of many of these changes have not been made public. Their voices have been marginalised, a theme well-rehearsed in the literature (Bourke, 2008; De Nobile & McCormick, 2008; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Godwin, 1977; Goessling, 1998; Johnson & Faunce,

1973; Lewis, 2005; Warren, Cooper & Baturo, 2004; Weiss, 1994; White, 2002). This thesis will now further explore the issue of silencing.

Chapter Three: A History of Silencing

Untangling the knots of complexity found within our thoughts, feelings and perceptions, we learn to untangle the knots of our lives.

(Feldman, 2001, p. 14)

Introduction

The voice of the teacher aide is notably lacking in research, as ‘their narratives have rarely been deemed important’ (Lewis, 2005, p. 144). The dearth of research about teacher aides correlates with the issues of silence and marginalisation revealed in both historic and current literature. The teacher aides in this study, along with most others working in the field of early childhood education and care are women (Ailwood, 2006, 2007; Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock, 2008; OECD, 2006; Stonehouse, 1994). Consequently, this chapter opens with an exploration of what it means to be a woman working in the field of early childhood education and care. I investigate how issues such as maternal feminisation and marginalisation of the profession affect teacher aides working in early childhood settings. Issues of silence, job ambiguity, disempowerment and low status are revealed.

This leads to the second strand of the chapter, an examination of the research literature regarding teacher aides themselves. Following an extensive search, I discovered a shortage of research about teacher aides’ lived experiences. As a major focus of my study is to empower the voice of the teacher aide, this revelation regarding teacher aides’ experiences in the literature and my study is critical. Consequently, I present a review of studies that considers the place of teacher aides in the classroom, and their effect upon classroom practice and achievement. Alongside this, I explore studies that offer some perceptions of teachers working with teacher aides in classrooms, to gain insights into classroom practices and relationships. I then turn to the exploration of experiences and perceptions of teacher aides in the research literature.

This chapter begins by exploring the gendered nature of early childhood to help locate both the historical and current discourses of teacher aides’ roles. Teacher aides’ experiences are difficult to trace in the literature. However, accounts of teachers’

experiences in early childhood settings offer a view of the place of women in education historically.

Education: A Suitable Place for a Woman

Clifford (1991, p. 117) suggests that historically, societal acceptance of women's participation in the workforce has relied upon four evolving social conventions. Firstly, women have contributed to the economy by working in the family business. This may have involved farming or a trade; or alternatively, working in schools established by parents. Secondly, traditional women's work outside of the home was considered a useful preparation to a domestic career. Skills required for work mirrored those required for home duties, for instance nursing, sewing, teaching or cleaning. Following this, women might have been employed before marriage or pregnancy to create a nest egg or dowry. Employment widened women's contact with eligible men, furthering family prospects. Fourthly, material contributions to family welfare legitimised the labour force participation of married women. Supporting their families and/or parents, married women's employment helped families make ends meet. Clifford (1991, pp. 117–8) argues that teaching fits all four conventions. It was considered within a woman's sphere, an extension of the maternal role and an appropriate way for an educated woman to spend her time until she married or had children. Many women returned to work later in their married lives to supplement the family income.

The dominance of women in teaching might be attributed to two factors. The rhetoric of teaching being in the women's work sphere may have eased some friction, not only for women working, but also regarding the increased numbers of female, as opposed to male, teachers. The low wages paid to women enabled schools to expand their services, while minimising expenses (Clifford, 1991). School terms could be lengthened as more female teachers were employed. The flow-on effect of this was a decrease in the numbers of male teachers. Teaching for men was often considered an income supplement while they furthered their education or farming skills, or were waiting to be called to ministry (Clifford, 1991). However, low wages and increasing demands within the school calendar made it increasingly difficult for men to combine teaching with other pursuits. Whitehead (2007) argues that by the 1920s, teaching as an occupation was considered a last resort by men. Conversely, women's employment choices were limited and often unattractive. The

prevailing societal expectation was for women to become homemakers. As a result, limited training opportunities or career choices existed. It was considered an unviable investment to spend money on training women, when they may marry and leave their profession after a short time. However, with its strong ties to the maternal work sphere, teaching was not considered a career. Rather, it was considered a gentle position with favourable conditions, suitable for a girl until she married (Clifford, 1991; Fogarty, 1959; Whitehead, 2007).

School inspectorial reports offer a different opinion of the conditions of nineteenth century schools. Poor working conditions, including classrooms that were insufficiently lit, overcrowded and poorly ventilated exposed teachers to contagious diseases (Danylewycz & Prentice, 1991). The teacher's role in the physical maintenance of the school was also problematic. Teachers considered tasks such as cleaning the schoolhouse and laying the fires as outside their professional role. Gradually, school cleaning and laying fires were handed over to the caretakers' role. However, schoolroom tidying and decoration were considered part of the teacher's role (Danylewycz & Prentice, 1991). It was not usual for teachers to have assistance from volunteers, such as aides or parents, to help with these tasks. Other duties considered part of their role included maintaining school records, organising teaching resources and inspecting pupils for contagious diseases.

Teachers perceived themselves as poorly paid and not in control of the workplace (Prentice & Theobald, 1991). Poor wages and conditions reflected de-skilled industrial worker's salaries, and yet teachers faced constant demands to learn new skills (Danylewycz & Prentice, 1991). The argument for better salaries and conditions for teachers continues today (Bowes, 2004; Brennan, 1998, 2013; Fenech, Waniganayake & Fleet, 2009; Lewis, 2005; OECD, 2006).

Women teachers found themselves in an ambiguous position, facing a struggle between the societal view of a true woman and their position as members of the workforce. Burley's (2012) paper examining Irish Catholic Sisters' engagement in South Australian schools, in the latter part of the twentieth century reveals a similar conflict. Limited funds to provide teachers, especially in rural areas, as well as a lack of staff suitable to teach the Roman Catholic faith (Fogarty, 1959; Higgins, 1994), resulted in the immigration of many female members of religious orders from British and European countries to bolster

staff numbers (Burley, 2012). These religious women were strong, independent and courageous, leaving their homes in Ireland or elsewhere to travel to an unknown land with vast challenges. Yet, in their schools they projected the stereotypically female traits of the period: ‘purity, self-denial, sacrifice and submission’ (Burley, 2012, p. 196).

For these women, teaching was a vocation, a call from God to serve Him. It was not a career choice or a job to fill the time from leaving school to having children (O’Donaghue & Burley, 2008). These women were expected to commit to their role and take on many more tasks than was expected of trained teachers, or lay teachers in Catholic schools. As a result, the loyal and obedient female religious would often take on cleaning, fundraising, tutoring and supervisory roles above and beyond their state or lay teaching peers (O’Donaghue & Burley, 2008). While some may have viewed this commitment to teaching a deterrent, the female religious were represented in schools in terms of ‘heroic sacrifice’ (O’Donaghue & Burley, 2008, p. 182). This ensured further uptake of these teaching roles.

Several methods of training prospective teachers were established. Sisters would train potential teachers using a pupil-teacher method of training, similar to an apprenticeship. Enrolment provided the opportunity for female students to attain further education, and employment in the socially acceptable occupation of teaching. Interestingly, the style of pupil-teacher training method was still prevalent for early childhood teacher aides throughout the late twentieth century in Queensland. To undergo training and complete learning and assessment modules, prospective students needed to be ‘attached’ to an early childhood setting for the duration of their course. Unlike an apprenticeship, no remuneration was offered to the student throughout this time. One of the teacher aides in this study undertook her training for certificate qualifications in this way.

The question arises, were the female students in these early model schools ‘caught in a double bind of gender and religion, or were they liberated?’ (Burley, 2012, p. 186) Following the lead of the Sisters afforded these female students opportunities to progress their education and careers (Burley, 2012). Conversely, the Sisters’ example of teaching, coupled with the religious values of sacrifice, servitude and loyalty may have ‘entrenched ... the traditional values and attitudes of this era’ (Burley, 2012, p. 186). As a result, loyalty to the Church led to the protection of the Church at all costs (Burley, 2012; O’Donaghue & Burley, 2008). Most schools contained large numbers of poor, disaffected

and unruly students; the very population the Church aimed to cater for under its social justice frame. The members of these religious orders faced enormous challenges. Limited life experience, the challenges of celibacy and harsh working and living conditions saw many of these teaching religious (female and male) turn to the use of corporal punishment to gain order. However, 'the boundary between acceptable punishment and abuse was vague and ambiguous' (Coldrey, 2000, p. 348). Abuse was condoned by some, due to the difficult nature of the role, the sacrifice of some practices or liberties for the perceived greater good, and the 'quasi-martyr mood among staff who persevered' (Coldrey, 2000, p. 350). Notions of teaching as service or vocation, along with complexities around the multiple nature of the teacher's role continue today.

Early childhood educators in Australia: a woman's place

The introduction of kindergartens in Australia coincided with the first wave of maternal feminism influencing Australian society (Weiss, 1989). All those involved in teaching kindergarten were women, and the majority of kindergarten supporters were also women. Kindergarten teachers were overwhelmingly middle class, with the financial support required to enter a two-year training course (Brennan, 1998). Whitehead's (2007) investigation of the representation of women's work in Australia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveals that in the 1930s, 'womanliness' was considered a desirable attribute for teaching. This is in keeping with the literature, which suggests that kindergarten teaching was considered a woman's job; it suited the perceptions at that time of a woman's nature and ability (Brennan, 1998; Gahan, 2005; Weiss, 1989).

The nurturing role of the kindergarten teacher fitted the philosophy of maternal feminism (Ailwood, 2006, 2007; Weiss, 1989; Whitehead, 2007). The kindergarten director had multiple roles to fulfil (Weiss, 1989). Duties included educating children, educating other teachers, and social reform work in the community. Kindergarten teachers shared a maternal and social service role (Bowes, 2004; Gahan, 2005; Weiss, 1989; Whitehead, 2007). This role was likened to a missionary spirit (Weiss, 1989), with the focus on service rather than income (Gahan, 2005; Weiss, 1989; Whitehead, 2007). However, the introduction of the Lady Gowrie centres in 1939 furthered the development of a more scientific approach to early childhood practice. This led to a change in focus from service to social welfare. The focus was now on caring for the working class child (Gahan, 2005; Sims, 2007; Weiss, 1989).

‘The outbreak of World War II, altered the direction of early childhood education completely’ (Weiss, 1989, p. 69). Women across all levels of society were required for war work. As many women had young children requiring care, kindergarten organisations had to make provision for the children of working women, not just the working class child (Weiss, 1989). In the post-war years, early childhood was again transformed and redirected. The development of outer city suburbs, the baby-boom and the acceptance of early childhood education as important to the physical and psychological development of the child, saw a demand for more preschool programs. Kindergarten teachers were in great demand. Kindergarten teachers’ salaries were still low in comparison with primary schoolteachers. Furthermore, kindergarten teachers’ colleges were financially unable to provide the same number of bursaries that were available at government teachers’ colleges (Weiss, 1989).

In Queensland, many local groups began to organise their own kindergarten centres, often affiliated with C&K. The centres offered sessional programs for young children, with teachers working with two groups of children aged three-to-five-years per day. The emphasis of kindergarten programs was on education and socialisation, rather than supporting working women’s childcare needs (Press & Hayes, 2000). Teachers continued working with parents; however, their role became more of a professional specialist working along allied health professionals. The majority of teachers’ work with parents was focused on helping parents understand children’s developmental and educational needs (Gahan, 2005; Weiss, 1989).

Maternal feminism and early childhood education

The historical framing of the mother’s role as primary caregiver of the child has been well rehearsed in the literature (Ailwood, 2006; 2007; Brennan, 1998, 2004; Gahan, 2005; Mellor, 1990). Kindergarten teachers were primarily middle class women; however, they were legitimised through the maternal feministic role of kindergarten teachers as “‘mothers” or “housekeepers” to all of society’ (Weiss, 1989, p. 70). The relationship between maternal feminism and early childhood education and care has been well identified (Ailwood, 2006, 2007; Brennan, 1998, 2004; O’Connell, 2011; Prentice & Theobald, 1991; Sims, 2007; Weiss, 1989; Woodrow, 2007).

Yet few kindergarten teachers were mothers themselves. Whitehead's (2007) investigation of career advice for women in 1920s Australia reveals the contradictory discourses of teaching as women's work in relation to marriage. Marriage and motherhood was considered the primary objective for women. Teaching fitted the societal acceptance of an appropriate occupation for a woman before marriage (Clifford, 1991; Gahan, 2005; Whitehead, 2007). It was considered a good grounding in child rearing skills, useful for later motherhood. However, Whitehead (2007) reveals that at this time, many females holding university qualifications were perceived by males as intellectually threatening. Women looked within their profession for suitable marriage partners, yet the dominance of women in teaching limited social networking with their male teaching colleagues. This may account for many teachers remaining unmarried. Those who did marry often married men with higher qualifications (Depaepe & Simon, 1997), and left the profession upon marriage. This was a direct result of a Parliamentary Act, which enforced the dismissal of female teachers once they married (Ohlsson & Duffy, 1999). This Act was repealed in 1947, arguably due to expediency of solving a teacher shortage, rather than equality of sexes (Ohlsson & Duffy, 1999). Interestingly, while this Act may have been repealed, the practice still continued throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s in some parts of Australia. Those who remained in teaching for a long time 'were unmarried, childless or, more rarely, had grown families' (Weiss, 1989, p. 70).

While the 'mother's place is in the home' attitude was prevalent in the post-war period, many women returning from war work remained in the workforce. The feminist revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s saw the number of women returning to the workforce increase dramatically (Brennan, 2004; Ohlsson & Duffy, 1999; Weiss, 1989). The provision of long day child care for children became paramount. The role of the teacher in caring for children in long-hours care also became problematic, and the debate between education and care began to cause divisions in the field of early childhood education: a debate that continues today (Brennan, 1998, 2004; Brownlee, Berthelsen & Boulton-Lewis, 2004; Fenech et al., 2009; Martin, Meyer, Jones, Nelson & Ting, 2010; Sims, 2007; Weiss, 1989; Woodrow, 2007).

Regardless of the location of work, or the hours children attend, early childhood educators primarily continue to be women (Brennan, 1998, 2004; Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock, 2008; Moss, 2000; Sims, 2007). Negative features of the occupation include role

ambiguity and overload, uncertain employment and limited promotional opportunities, stress and burnout (Brennan, 1998, 2004; De Nobile & McCormick, 2008; Fenech et al., 2009; Goelman & Gou, 1998; Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock, 2008; McGillivray, 2008; Lewis, 2005; Sims, 2007; Souto-Manning, Cahnmann-Taylor, Dice & Wooten, 2008; Weiss, 1989). Increasing administrative duties and responsibilities, coupled with educational responsibilities for children and parent liaison has resulted in the transformation of the early childhood educator ‘from missionary to manager’ (Weiss, 1989, p. 67), without the career ladder and opportunities that other professions enjoy.

Maternalistic discourses, policy and practice: silencing the early childhood voice

The early childhood field has had difficulty managing role changes due to two factors: firstly, the rapid and continual expansion of government funding and involvement into early childhood; and secondly, the gendered nature of teaching (Weiss, 1989). The female domination of early childhood has also contributed to the perceived role of early childhood educators as maternal, unassuming and compliant (McGillivray, 2008; Osgood, 2010; Sims, 2007; Weiss, 1989). Weiss (1989) argues that ‘women are still largely tied to the ideologies of motherhood and uncomplaining and unassertive service to others’ (Weiss, 1989, p.71). Stonehouse (1994) agrees, asserting that the early childhood field has suffered due to close links with mothering, which requires no qualifications or remuneration (Stonehouse, 1994).

Some authors argue that educational settings help reinforce this gendered cultural perception. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999), Hard (2005) and Flear (2005) each assert that educational institutions may help reinforce the discourse about status and gender in teaching: most teachers are female and administrators or principals are men. The gendered nature of leadership in education is also explored by Goelman and Gou (1998), who argue that the centralisation of schooling, coupled with the introduction of standardised curricula and expectations, is perceived as threatening to male teachers, many of whom have left the profession. Others sought promotion to gain control and authority over the implementation of such standards. Women filled the void left in the teaching profession: a role considered suitable for their sex and as a preparation for marriage and later childrearing. Sinclair’s (2004) writing furthers these ideas. She argues that the archetype of Australian leadership conjures a traditional image of a stoic, resolute lone male settler. Sinclair (2004) discusses the difficulty of challenging this image, and

explains the problems she faced when teaching a predominantly male group of students at a business school in Melbourne. She contests that, like other women in similar situations, she faced standard responses of sexualisation and maternalisation. The author suggests that most managerial orientated leadership literature views women as ‘all-collaborative, conflict-avoiding, endlessly empathetic and, in the end, ineffectual’ (Sinclair, 2004, p. 14).

Interestingly, nearly twenty years after Weiss’s (1989) claims regarding the maternalistic perceptions of teachers, the same arguments are found in recent literature. The following examples from Ailwood (2006), and Woodrow and Busch (2008) highlight these:

ECEC remains an emotionally demanding workplace where the Froebelian image of the good and womanly mother/teacher serenely gliding through her day with a large group of young children dominates (Ailwood, 2006, p. 11).

Traditional images of early childhood professionals celebrate and valorize values of caring, capable women in the service of the nation through their labour, and self-sacrifice, in the happy garden of untroubled childhood – images that we know do not reflect the reality of working in contemporary early childhood contexts. Although these ‘Mary Poppins’ images are now outdated, and perhaps whimsical, the values of caring and nurturing are still perpetuated in the profession’s discourses (Woodrow & Busch, 2008, p. 89).

Ailwood (2006; 2007) and McGillivray (2008) build upon Stonehouse’s (1994) argument that the maternalistic discourses embedded in early childhood significantly influence policy and practice. Ailwood (2007) provides an insight into the contradictions within the field for professional status. Many early childhood teachers take pride in identifying themselves as both a professional teacher and mother. However, for others the professional status of early childhood remains challenged by the perceived naturalisation of teachers’ work, rather than crediting professional studies and university education. McGillivray’s (2008) research expands this professional struggle. The author suggests that tensions may exist between those who began their work in the field under the traditional discourses of maternalism and caring dominant in the 1940s–1970s, while those joining the field more recently are aligned with current discourses of management and leadership (McGillivray, 2008).

Osgood (2010) advances this argument and asserts that while subjective values such as care, nurture and emotion are central to effective pedagogical practice with young children, the dominant professional and policy discourses discount and resist these.

Osgood (2010) joins a chorus of professionals arguing for the deconstruction and reconceptualisation of early childhood policy and professional discourse (Ailwood, 2006, 2007; Bowes & Hayes, 2004; Brennan, 1998; Fenech et al., 2009; Fleer, 2005; Fleet & Patterson, 2001; MacNaughton, 2003; Osgood, 2010; Rodd, 1999; Sims, 2007; Stonehouse, 1994; Sumsion, 1999; Woodrow, 2007).

Another issue of concern is the confusion of terminology identifying those who work in the field of early childhood. Terms such as carer, caregiver, child-minder, early childhood professional, educator, pedagogue, practitioner and teacher are used; this contributes to uncertainty regarding what roles and responsibilities mean (McGillivray, 2008; Martin et al., 2010; Moss, 2000; Rodd, 1999, Sims, 2007). Underpinning this argument is the dichotomy between care and education highlighted earlier in this chapter. Key early childhood writers and professional bodies, including Early Childhood Australia; OECD (2006); Stonehouse (1994); Rodd (1998) and Fleer (2005) argue that the separation of care and education is divisive and disadvantages early childhood practice and policy. A flow-on effect of this is the continued fragmentation of the field, contributing to a weaker power base for political and social advocacy and reform (Hard, 2005; OECD, 2006; Rodd, 1998; Stonehouse, 1994; Woodrow, 2007).

The literature suggests that early childhood educators are reluctant to advocate for their own professional rights (Hard, 2005; Rodd, 1998; Stonehouse, 1994; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). Advocacy requires confidence, risk taking and assertiveness (Hard, 2005). Hard (2005) questions whether early childhood educators see these attributes as incongruous with the characteristics required for the education and care of children. Influential works of Stonehouse (1994) and Rodd (1998) explore the dilemma of a lack of political power and leadership from within the field. Rodd (1998) argues that the lack of political power contributes to a weak power base, and links the reluctance to become political with maintaining a low social profile. This is problematic for teacher aides and assistants. These educators are positioned lower politically than qualified specialist early childhood teachers. In practical terms, this lower socio-political and professional profile contributes to silencing the voices of the predominantly female early childhood field (Fleet & Patterson, 2001; Hard, 2005; McGillivray, 2008; Stonehouse, 1994).

Working in the margins: Ramifications of a low socio-political profile

Like New Zealand and the US, Australian early childhood educators have historically operated in settings apart from other sectors of the profession (Kilgallon, Maloney & Lock, 2008). Australian early childhood services have been located in different structures, with specific policies for each; for example kindergarten, child care and preschools. Fleer (2005) contends that while these distinct institutions provide greater autonomy for early childhood teachers, they have also marginalised them from school administration and curriculum. A question arises about teacher aides' position in schools. If qualified, specialist teachers are considered on the periphery of school administration and curriculum issues: where does this place teacher aides? Weiss (1994) argues that teacher aides experience even greater marginalisation in schools. Weiss (1994, p. 338) asserts that 'aides exhibit many of the pertinent characteristics of situational or social marginality while within the school setting'. A flow-on effect of this is feelings of isolation and the undervaluing of their work. The literature suggests a wider net can be cast when considering marginalisation issues of the profession. 'The current Australian socio-political context has tended to create an early childhood field in which staff feel underpaid and demoralised' (Fleet & Patterson, 2001, para. 2). Earlier work by Stonehouse (1994) argues that Australian society is not child-centred, and the low status of carers of young children reflects this. Moreover, federal funding platforms and instrumental policy, such as the *Child Care Act 1972* (Cth), have been developed through a focus on women's, rather than children's rights (Mellor, 1990). Hard (2005) adds weight to this view, stating that while there is a perception that childhood is valued in Australia, research suggests this is superficial. Stonehouse (1994) argues that this lack of status and value leads to a lowering of acceptable standards and practice.

The literature reveals that the low status of childcare work is not limited to the Australian context. The 2006 OECD report *Starting Strong II Early Childhood Education and Care* supports Stonehouse's (1994) earlier argument, and highlights the difficulties inherent in the female dominated early childhood sector, including low benchmarks for qualifications and low remuneration, which leads to low recruitment levels, high staff turnover and job dissatisfaction.

Thus, a low socio-political profile contributes significantly to continued low status in the early childhood field. Not surprisingly, the low socio-political status of teacher aides

working in early childhood years is also evidenced by the dearth of research presenting teacher aides' voices about their experiences in early childhood settings or early years' classrooms in Australia.

The Teacher Aide in the Literature

A review of recent literature reveals a shortage of empirical research about teacher aides (Achilles et al., 1993; Bourke, 2008; Finn & Pannozzo, 2004; Gerber et al., 2001; Johnson & Faunce, 1973; Lewis, 2005). A small body of work about the role of aides (para-professionals) working with children with additional needs exists, predominantly from research in the USA; however, there are limited studies about teacher aides working in early childhood classrooms or settings, particularly in Australia. Greenberg (1967) provides a useful review of the use of non-professionals in education from 1942–1967 in the USA. The use of teacher aides in US schools rose sharply in the early 1950s, due to teacher shortages (Alice & D'Heurle, 1957; Greenberg, 1967; Lewis, 2005). Many schools were involved in pilot projects to evaluate the effect of teacher aides in the classroom. Many early studies revealed that teacher aides were well received in the literature by authors who were involved in projects with teacher aides (Greenberg, 1967). Authors without connection to these early projects were less favourable. Greenberg (1967) asserts that the majority of the later studies in his review reflected positively on the benefits of teacher aides in classrooms. These included enabling teachers more time for professional activities, enhancing classroom productivity and curriculum enrichment. On the contrary, issues such as management and supervision of aides, and the difficulties some teachers have working with aides were not considered beneficial. Greenberg (1967) makes the comment that some studies were too descriptive or generalised. The subjective nature of many studies involving teacher aides has also been criticised by more recent authors (Finn & Pannozzo, 2004; Gerber et al., 2001). Some discussions about the use of volunteers as aides in the classroom are also evident in the literature. While Alice and D'Heurle (1957) and Grayson (1961) consider the use of parents as volunteer teacher aides in the school setting, they did not conduct rigorous research to defend their viewpoint. Nevertheless, these reports do offer insights into the perceptions of the value of teacher aides in a particular setting and time.

An aide to the teacher or a threat to professionalism?

Alice and D'Heurle (1957) reported on the use of voluntary aides in two Catholic parochial schools in America. Drawing upon their local community, the schools were able to draw upon a range of skilled and non-skilled volunteers to assist the teachers with non-professional duties. The authors commented that some aides were able to use their training to teach art, languages and speech. Many of these aides were parents of children attending the school. Alice and D'Heurle (1957) asserted that education was the primary responsibility of the home, but many parents had relinquished this. They argued that the use of a volunteer teacher aide system, using parents as aides, was a 'forceful device for getting parents to take their share in the education of the child' (Alice & D'Heurle, 1957, p. 270). The authors suggested that the use of teacher aides in schools had two major benefits: providing assistance to the teacher and augmenting parental involvement in the school.

Grayson (1961) documented her relationship as teacher with a volunteer aide (the mother of a child in her class) over one year. The author supported Alice and D'Heurle's view (1957) that parents working as voluntary teacher aides could promote constructive parent involvement in the school. Grayson (1961) also discussed teachers' dilemmas in maintaining a professional status when working with aides. Grayson noted she ensured it was her role to assign instructions, return work to the children and administer discipline. She stated clearly, 'the teacher must be secure in her classroom situation', and remarked that it would be inadvisable for beginning teachers to work with an aide. Protecting professional status should be paramount (Grayson, 1961, p. 138).

The perception of the teacher aide as a threat to the teacher's professional status is well supported in the literature (Johnson & Faunce, 1973; Gerarda & O'Reilly, 1978; Godwin, 1977; Warren, Cooper & Baturo, 2004). For example, Gerarda and O'Reilly (1978) questioned whether the use of parents as volunteer aides in the classroom would affect teachers' perceptions of professionalism. They found that the majority of teachers were positive about the use of volunteers or lay assistants. They argued that teachers with a higher professional role orientation were more adept in managing their own teaching role. These teachers were more focused on their students' needs, rather than on issues such as classroom control and subject content. The authors argued that teachers with lower

professional role orientation might consider volunteer (lay assistant) parents as invasive and potentially threatening to their own leadership (Gerarda & O'Reilly, 1978).

Beyond trivial pursuits and menial labour: aides' interactions with children

Godwin (1977) commented that while teacher aides have sometimes been perceived as infiltrating the profession, the majority of educators supported using them. French (1998) revealed that teachers perceive aides' roles in two distinct ways: as an assistant to the teacher or an assistant to the student. The teachers' positioning of the aide significantly affects the duties and responsibilities they assign to aides. Clerical and preparation tasks are more likely to be issued by teachers who frame the aides' role as an assistant to the teacher. Godwin (1977) concurs, asserting that most commonly aides have been responsible for 'attending to menial tasks and taking care of trivia to free the teacher to teach' (Godwin, 1977, p. 265). Interactive and instructional tasks are given priority by teachers who consider the aides' role as an assistant to children.

The positioning of the aide according to the teacher's perception is still evident in current literature. USA based researchers Sosinsky and Gilliam (2011) explored kindergarten teachers' views of the role aides play in classroom management and teaching. The study revealed the difference between teachers' and aides' levels of educational qualifications were an integral factor in teachers' decision making. Teachers with high levels of qualifications were unlikely to use aides with low levels of qualifications for teaching or pedagogical roles. Aides in these classrooms undertook more basic level tasks. However, where there was not such a discrepancy between the aides' and teachers' qualification levels, the aides were involved in more pedagogical and autonomous teaching duties. There was general consensus that teacher aides' were more directly involved with children in recent times than in the past (Bourke, 2008; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Johnson & Faunce, 1973; Lewis, 2005; Ratcliff, Jones, Russell Vaden, Sheen & Hunt, 2011; Sosinsky & Gilliam, 2011; Wallace et al., 2001; Webster et al., 2011; Weiss, 1994).

A range of authors support the direct involvement of aides with children (Bourke, 2008; Bowman & Berry, 1972; French, 1998; Godwin, 1977; Hayden, Murdoch & Quick, 1969; Sosinsky & Gilliam, 2011; Weiss, 1994). Hayden, Murdoch and Quick's (1969) research involved kindergarten and first grade children in New York during the 1967–1968 school year. They questioned whether children's attention span could be improved through the

provision of extra attention by a teacher aide in the classroom. They found the presence of a teacher aide, providing additional attention in the classroom, increased the length of children's attention span.

Bowman and Berry (1972) presented children's perceptions of the aide's role in their study into the teacher aide program operating in County Carrol Headstart and elementary schools during 1971–1972. Their research suggested that children perceived aides as people who offered specific instruction to individual children, being helpful, accessible and approachable, and who read to children or took them out to play. These findings align with Weiss (1994), who suggested that teacher aides contributed to children's motivation, self-esteem, trust and identity with those school qualities not measured directly by academic achievement tests.

Godwin (1977) discussed the use of bilingual aides to counterbalance the difficulties of poverty, biculturalism and bilingualism in South-West American school settings. He revealed that while these aides were assigned clerical and housekeeping duties, discussion with teachers and teacher aides found the most significant contribution resulted when the aide worked directly with the children. Five functions of the aide's work with children were discussed: informer; supporter/counsellor; model (in particular, demonstrating successful engagement in two cultures); a supervisor during breaks; and advocate. During supervision of children at recess times, the teacher aides would also teach children games, expanding their communication and relationship with the children. Godwin (1977) also noted that workshop discussions with new groups of teachers entering this program revealed that some were anxious about the aides' role as advocate. While the aides seemed comfortable with their roles, some teachers and administrators saw advocacy as an alliance between child and aide against the teacher (Godwin, 1977). This resonated with the theme of aides as threatening teachers' power or professional status, explored earlier in this chapter.

French's (1998) American study focused on teachers and aides working together in special education classes in elementary, middle and high schools. The findings of this study suggested that teacher aides provide 'a fundamental and crucial role in the delivery of instruction to students receiving special education services' (French, 1998, p. 362).

The success of teacher aides' direct intervention with children is contentious. Conflicting views are also evidenced (Finn & Pannozzo, 2004; Gerber et al., 2001; Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 1999; Giangreco et al., 2001; Giangreco et al., 2005; Guay, 2000; Ratcliff et al., 2011; Webster et al., 2011). Gerber et al. (2001) challenge the influence of teacher aides upon children's learning. Using data from Tennessee Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio), the effect upon children's achievement and behaviour after placement in one of three types of classes (small, full size, or full size with teacher aide support) for four years from kindergarten to Year 3 was examined. Only one positive effect on student behaviour and achievement in classes with teacher aides was found. This was an improvement in children's reading scores, with a teacher aide for more than two years.

Finn and Pannozzo (2004) assert that the perception that aides foster children's pro-social behaviour, promote student's identification with the school, foster parent involvement, alleviate pressures on teachers, and enhance pupil learning is not supported by data. Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) conducted by the US Department of Education in 1998–1999, the authors examined questionnaires from administrators and teachers. They found no positive benefit for children's achievement or behaviour in classes with teacher aides, and questioned the recruitment procedures and training of teacher aides. However, these findings are contestable as many other factors could be present, such as: class demographics; issues in regards to recruitment, training and ongoing support; and teachers' perceptions of the aides role. Like most of the literature, this study relied on others' perceptions of aides, not the aides themselves, and is yet another example of aides being silenced and marginalised in the literature.

The role of the aide in the classroom is problematic. The literature reveals that aides' roles have expanded from undertaking primarily clerical tasks to more direct involvement with children (Johnson & Faunce, 1973; Lewis, 2005; Ratcliff et al., 2011). Yet many aides have made this progression with little training or support.

Over a period of five years from 2003–2008, the longitudinal *Deployment and Impact of Support Staff* project, funded by the English and Welsh governments, was undertaken to provide data on the types of support staff deployed in schools and how these changed over time. The project also analysed the impact of support staff on teachers, teaching and pupils (Webster et al., 2011). During this time, teacher aide numbers increased and the

roles of support staff expanded. This study revealed that teacher aides were often expected to work individually with students, without access to the teacher's knowledge or instruction. Teacher aides found themselves trying to "tune in" to the teacher's delivery in order to pick up vital subject and pedagogical knowledge' (Webster et al., 2011, p. 10). The authors stated that pedagogical discussions between teachers and aides were *ad hoc* rather than planned, and often consisted of quick conversations before or after lessons, or before or after school. The authors argued that in many cases, schools relied on the teacher aides' goodwill to arrive early or leave late for these pivotal conversations to occur. The goodwill of the aides revealed in this study correlates with earlier discussions in this chapter concerning historical perceptions of teaching as 'service', along with maternalistic discourses.

Many studies examining inclusivity suggest that teachers often delegate too much responsibility to aides, leaving them to perform duties they have little, if any, training for (Bourke, 2008; Dover, 2002; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 1999; Giangreco et al., 2001; Giangreco et al., 2005; Goessling, 1998; Guay, 2000; Webster et al., 2011). In the school setting often the least qualified staff are expected to work with students with the most complex learning and behavioural patterns (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 1999; Giangreco et al., 2001; Giangreco et al., 2005; Guay, 2000; Rutherford, 2012). In educational terms, this can affect students' potential outcomes. Some studies found students with additional needs may experience detrimental effects from having aide support. This included dependency upon the aide for support, reduced peer contact and interaction, and less teacher involvement (Bourke, 2008; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 1999; Giangreco et al., 2001; Giangreco et al., 2005; Guay, 2000; Webster et al., 2011). Crucially, these studies also revealed that teacher aides supporting students with disabilities often worked without teacher supervision or support. Some teachers were reluctant to hold discussions with the aide, leaving critical issues such as the aides' role, classroom procedures and pedagogical expectations unspoken and difficult for aides to interpret. Again, many studies undertaken in this field reflect teachers' perceptions, leaving the aides' experiences or practices marginalised.

The progression of aides' responsibilities from clerical to instructional makes direction and supervision of aides increasingly important (Bourke, 2008; French, 1998; Guay,

2000; Macmillan et al., 2002; Ratcliff et al., 2011; Souto-Manning et al., 2008; Wallace et al., 2001; Webster et al., 2011). Wallace et al. (2001) attest that few empirical studies have been undertaken investigating the competencies required by teachers to effectively supervise aides; this issue is still pertinent today. As the teacher aides' role has developed, teachers have faced changes in their practice to incorporate the direction and supervision of aides in their classrooms. Thus, teachers have become managers of aides; often without adequate pre-service or in-service training (Bourke, 2008; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Guay, 2000; Ratcliff et al., 2011; Souto-Manning et al., 2008; Wallace et al., 2001; Webster et al., 2011).

How do teachers perceive the effect of this role? Do they feel this additional responsibility is worth it? To further gain insight into the relationships teacher aides experience in the classroom, I will now explore teachers' perceptions of teacher aides.

Teachers' perceptions of teacher aides

In their 2002 report, *A survey of the Impact of Government funding Cuts on Inclusion* to the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union, Macmillan et al. (2002) assert that 84 per cent of elementary class teachers were dissatisfied with the level of teacher aide provision. Additionally, 48 per cent of elementary teachers expressed concern with role definition of teacher aides. Four areas concerning teacher aides were highlighted: availability and assignment; preparation of teacher aides; the person to whom the aide was responsible when they were working with more than one class or teacher; and allowance of time to communicate with the aide (Macmillan et al., 2002). This supports the findings of Bourke (2008), Fisher and Pleasants (2012), French (1998), Guay (2000) and Wallace et al. (2001).

Warren, Cooper and Baturu (2004) explored the importance of allowing time for communication between the teacher and aide. They revealed a teachers' comment that communicating with and coaching the aide to improve their skills had enabled the teacher to feel more relaxed and the aide to become more independent and responsible in the classroom (Warren, Cooper & Baturu, 2004). The teacher acknowledged that while this was initially labour and time intensive, the results were positive. Warren, Cooper and Baturu (2004, p. 44) noted that 'the teachers' use of the teacher aides in these classrooms appeared to reflect differing beliefs with regard to what each teacher aide was capable'.

The authors explained that some teachers in the study were graduates in their first year of teaching. They noted that these teachers were trying to establish themselves. They questioned whether more confident teachers might be prepared to let go of their authority and allow aides to participate in planning and monitoring of classroom activities (Warren, Cooper & Baturo, 2004). This hypothesis resonated with the findings of Gerarda and O'Reilly (1978), discussed earlier in this chapter, who suggested that teachers with higher professional role orientation were less concerned with control and the presence of other adults in the room. These teachers were more focused on the diagnosis of needs, and subsequent resource and curriculum planning and implementation.

Johnson and Faunce's (1973) research in Minneapolis elementary schools investigated the perceptions of teachers and teacher aides regarding aides' roles in the classroom. This study looked at both the perceived role and the actual role of the teacher aide. Teachers and aides were asked to consider a list of forty one activities that aides might perform as part of their role, and rank these in two ways. Firstly, participants ranked the list according to whether they felt the aide should perform the particular task. Secondly, the teachers and aides ranked the activities according to the amount of actual time spent on each task by the aide. Their findings revealed that teacher aides ranked the instructional and emotional tasks as most important. The teachers' perceptions of what aides should do included instructional and emotional tasks, including the aides playing instructional games with the children. Clerical tasks such as duplicating materials, technical-housekeeping tasks such as preparing audio-visual materials, and supervisory tasks such as supervising children on recess, were also considered more important by teachers. While teachers ranked instructional and emotional tasks highly, they did not rank tasks such as helping children learn conflict resolution and social skills as highly as teacher aides. Both teachers and aides reported that the highest ranked activities for actual time spent by the aide were instructional and clerical. Aides spent most of their time assisting students having difficulty with work, and duplicating materials. Supervising students on recess and talking with students were rated the next common.

Johnson and Faunce (1973) also explored perceptions of teachers working in elementary schools that received no funding for teacher aides in the district. Interestingly, this group rated clerical, technical-housekeeping and supervisory roles more highly. They ranked helping children experiencing difficulty fifth, as opposed to both the teacher aides and

teachers in the comparison group, each of which group rated this activity as the first priority. Two possible reasons are proposed for this discrepancy. Firstly, government funding initiatives to provide teacher aides to support children have influenced the role of the teacher aide, moving their role from preparation and supervisory tasks to more direct involvement with children's learning (Johnson & Faunce, 1973; Lewis, 2005). As teachers working in funded schools have more experience working with aides, Johnson and Faunce (1973) suggested that these teachers may more easily recognise the value and experience of the aide.

Johnston (1989) analysed interview data from Tennessee Project STAR, and explored some of the results from teachers working with aides. They felt that aides helped 'provision, monitor, supervise, and clean up projects, hands-on activities and learning centers' (Johnston, 1989, p. 112), enabling more effective use of teaching time and more individual instruction. While most teachers suggested that working with an aide gave them a more detailed understanding of individual children's ability levels, some felt that having an aide reduced their knowledge of children's performance (Johnston, 1989). This was perhaps due to a reduction of teacher involvement with all pupils across the day. Teachers working with aides also identified changes to the management of classroom space, and noise levels. While some teachers regarded an aide as beneficial in terms of monitoring space and noise levels, others commented that having two adults working in the same space increased noise levels and decreased available classroom space. Johnston (1989) reported an overwhelming response from teachers working with aides regarding the amount of time available for interactions with children, especially in social and emotional domains. Teachers felt more relaxed and less rushed in their interactions with children, knowing they had the aide to support them.

A recent study asserts that teachers who work in a team with an aide tend to have 'greater career satisfaction' (Ratcliff et al., 2011, p. 167) than those who do not. However, the authors also noted that some teachers felt they did not have the skill set required to 'nurture positive professional relationships' (Ratcliff et al., 2011, p. 168). This view iterates earlier literature about the perceived difficulties teachers have working with aides (Bourke, 2008; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; French, 1998; Guay, 2000; Macmillan et al., 2002; Souto-Manning et al., 2008; Wallace et al., 2001; Webster et al., 2011).

Thus, the literature presents challenges and benefits for teachers. While increased time is required to communicate and instruct aides, a flow-on effect of more effective teaching and learning often occurs. Teachers perceived that working with aides provided more opportunities for individualising instruction, resulting in positive differences in classroom environment (Johnston, 1989; MacMillan et al., 2002).

The literature leaves little doubt that there are varying viewpoints about the teacher aides' role and place in the classroom. The exploration of these viewpoints presented in this chapter thus far may offer some insights into the socio-cultural and historical perspectives of the role of teacher aides. However, what about the teacher aides themselves? What are the lived experiences of teacher aides? Van Manen (1990, p. 5) reminds us that phenomenological research centres upon questioning the way the world is experienced. Therefore, I now turn to an exploration of the research literature about aides' perspectives and experiences.

Teacher aides' perceptions and experiences

With few exceptions, the voice of the teacher aide is notably silenced in the research literature (Bourke, 2008; De Nobile & McCormick, 2008, 2010; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Godwin, 1977; Goessling, 1998; Johnson & Faunce, 1973; Lewis, 2005; Rutherford, 2012; White, 2002; Weiss, 1994). Within this limited body of work, studies of teacher aides supporting bi-lingual children, or children with learning difficulties predominate. Researchers drawing on teacher aides' own experiences have utilised both quantitative (Table One) and qualitative or mixed methods (Table Two). The following tables present only research literature. Literature from the popular press and other non research based sources are important in reflecting their lived experiences but are deliberately excluded from these tables in order to highlight the dearth of research on teacher aides' experiences.

Table 1: Quantitative studies

Researcher	Context	Data methods	Key findings
De Nobile & McCormick (2008) New South Wales, Australia	356 Catholic primary school staff including teacher aides	Ranking survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher aides most satisfied with collegial relationships, supervision
De Nobile & McCormick (2010) New South Wales, Australia	356 Catholic primary school staff members including teacher aides	Ranking survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher aides least stressed staff members
Johnson & Faunce (1973) Minnesota, USA	300 teachers, 200 aides in primary schools	Ranking survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher aides spend most time supporting and supervising children, preparing materials Need for training so aides understand curriculum and pedagogy

Table 2: Qualitative and mixed methods studies

Researcher	Context	Data methods	Key findings
Baturo, Cooper & Doyle (2007) A remote Indigenous community, Queensland, Australia	7 primary and 4 secondary Indigenous aides	Observations and interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development led to greater sense of engagement, job authority and power in school
Bourke (2008) Queensland, Australia	8 primary school teacher aides working with students with learning difficulties	Phenomenology: In-depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significance of empathetic, affective relationships between aide and students Ambiguous job roles and responsibilities; isolation and marginalisation from decision making within schools Need for collaborative professional development
Ernst-Slavit & Wenger (2006) Washington, Oregon, Idaho, USA	20 bilingual aides studying to become teachers	Ethnography: Photographic analysis, Narrative, interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambiguous job responsibilities Fragmented, marginalised roles; acting as 'hidden teachers'
Fisher & Pleasants (2012) Midwest, USA	1867 aides working in general or special school settings	Mixed method Survey: quantitative (ranking) and qualitative (open ended comments) responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambiguous roles; expected to take on teaching responsibilities Lack of participation and exclusion from discussions with teachers or other staff Lack of appreciation of role
Godwin (1977) South-West USA	500 participants (teachers and bilingual aides) working with bilingual children from 1965-1970	Analysis of workshop discussions on role of aide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of multi-faceted role of aides: as supporter, informer, model, supervisor and advocate

Goessling (1998) Maine, USA.	10 aides working with students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms	Open-ended interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marginalisation, invisibility • Lack of clarity of supervision; coverage issues when working alone with students • Ambiguous job responsibilities; lack of training; no formal job evaluation
Lewis (2005) Illinois, USA	17 aides in primary schools	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aides are silenced • Need for inclusion in professional development and meetings • Need for research into policy issues to support aide's role
Rutherford (2012) South Island, New Zealand	17 teacher aides supporting children with high - very educational needs	Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invisibility of teacher aides in policy framework • Lack of respect and visibility of aide's role with students • Ongoing training of aides along with teachers/principals to share understandings and progress school practice
Wagner & French (2010) USA	40 aides, 37 teachers Aides completed survey but not interview	Mixed method quantitative survey (ranking) and qualitative (interviews)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aides are subordinate to teachers and mostly treated as such; marginalised from decision making in class or policies • Aides have little choice in regards to professional development activities
Weiss (1994) California, USA	Small impoverished primary school. 17 aides, 17 teachers	Participant observation, interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aides hold a marginalised, ambiguous position from which they can act as cultural broker • Teacher-aide relationships can be positive; however, aides must be subservient
White (2002) North Carolina, USA	5 African-American aides who transitioned to teaching roles	Phenomenology: Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aide's role as 'teacher without teacher pay', and servant • Under-valued, under-appreciated

The findings of De Nobile and McCormick's (2008, 2010) Australian research in Catholic schools suggesting that teacher aides were satisfied with collegial relationships, and the least stressed members of the educational team were at odds with the findings of the majority of research in the literature. It is noteworthy that De Nobile and McCormick (2008, 2010) recognised that the reliance on quantitative data precluded the exploration of their findings. Similarly, the exclusion of aides from the qualitative interview in Wagner & French's (2010) mixed method study was identified by the authors as limiting the findings. The use of phenomenological methodology in my study may offer further insights into the lived experiences of teacher aides in Queensland Catholic schools and contribute to the small body of research in this field.

When considering the dearth of literature exploring teacher aides' experiences, Lewis (2005) suggested a reason for this was that 'although teachers' voices have become credible in educational action research, there was still apprehension in accepting other voices from schools' (Lewis, 2005, p. 144). Lewis' (2005) research centres on teacher aides working in elementary schools in the state of Illinois, America. The aptly named *Seen but Not Heard: ESEA and Instructional Aides in Elementary Education*, has provided rare insight into teacher aides' perceptions of their role. The aides' narratives identified four aspects of their roles: personal issues such as educational experience and their current roles; pedagogy; professional development; and policy. Teacher aides felt their roles were challenging and ambiguous. This corroborated the earlier finding of Weiss (1994, p. 339), who stated that 'ambiguity and inconsistency characterized the aides' situation'. Lewis (2005) suggested that aides were faced with multiple responsibilities, often beyond the scope of their job description. This struggle made some feel overwhelmed by their role. Lewis (2005) highlighted the strong resolve of one aide to counter this confusion. Setting clear boundaries to 'draw the line' (Lewis, 2005, p. 138), the aide limited her responsibilities to fit within her terms. This aide felt others took on too much, 'forgetting their place' (Lewis, 2005, p. 138), leading to confusion about responsibilities and salary.

The issue of ambiguous job responsibilities has been documented (Bourke, 2008; Ernst-Slavit and Wenger, 2006; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Goessling, 1998; White, 2002). Goessling (1998) revealed her participants shared a concern of having to perform tasks they considered the duty of teacher, without feeling appreciated. 'Confusion about

supervision, evaluation and job expectations existed for all participants' (Goessling, 1998, p. 11). She noted one participant in her study described the aides' role as the 'invisible elves of the school' (Goessling, 1998, p. 9), and asserted that 'feelings of invisibility and marginalization persisted across all settings, grade levels and types of students supported' (Goessling, 1998, p.10). Other studies revealed similar concerns (Bourke, 2008; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Rutherford, 2012; White, 2002). Positioning the aide as a 'teacher without teacher pay', White (2002) revealed the struggle faced by aides who have to perform duties assigned by the teacher, and documented the feelings of aides about the level of unrewarded and undervalued responsibility expected in the classroom.

Job status and salary conditions were also concerns raised by teacher aides (Bourke, 2008; Bowes, 2004; Brennan, 1998; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Fleet & Patterson, 2001; Giangreco, Edelman & Broer, 2001; Lewis, 2005; OECD, 2006; Wagner & French, 2010; White, 2002). Ernst-Slavit and Wenger's (2006) three-year ethnographic study focused on bilingual teacher aides as they prepared to become certified teachers. The authors asserted teacher aides faced overwhelming demands on their time, low pay, poor conditions and fragmented schedules, with little instructional support. They affirmed that teacher aides, primarily women, were the lowest paid in schools. Lewis (2005) also attested that aides felt they were underpaid and their work undervalued; a theme still current in the literature. Fisher and Pleasants (2012) surveyed over 1800 teacher aides working in general and special education settings in one American state. Low job status and low pay rates were common concerns. The authors revealed many respondents affirmed that while they did not choose their job because of monetary recompense, the aides felt pay discrepancies (in relation to the responsibilities they assumed) were unfair. Many of the aides surveyed were working with high school students who earned more money at their part-time jobs than the aides supporting their educational needs (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012). While some aides felt there should be financial incentive to further their education, validation of their role through higher wages and more respect by administrators and teachers was a common theme in literature (Bourke, 2008; Ernst-Slavit and Wenger, 2006; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Lewis, 2005).

Wagner and French's (2010) study built on the literature concerning incentives for professional development, and investigated teachers' and aides' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for professional growth. Factors such as pay levels and opportunities for

promotion were motivating factors for the aides. Thirty-seven teachers and 40 teaching aides were involved in a professional development program over a period of one to two years, which comprised monthly lectures and discussions, with follow up visits to their settings, alongside interviews and questionnaires. The authors found that teacher aides were intrinsically less motivated to undertake professional development than their teacher colleagues. The authors contended these findings reflect that teachers' aides are:

more subject to extrinsic forces in the work place than teachers are. They are subordinates to teachers in terms of salary and benefits and are, for the most part, treated as such. That is, they have little to no input in decisions regarding center policies and processes, daily curriculum planning, or often even with whom they work. They are also far more likely to have no choice concerning participation in professional development activities (Wagner & French, 2010, p. 168).

This study proposed that motivation for undertaking professional development was linked to three workplace factors: interactions between the individual (teacher), the context of the professional development activity itself, and the (teacher's) work environment (Wagner & French, 2010, p. 169). Interestingly, while more teaching aides took part in this study than teachers, the authors only collected feedback from the assistants through a questionnaire. Yet teachers were invited to participate in interviews, and their voices can be heard through the data examples offered in the paper. So, while the discussion offered useful insights about professional development motivators for early childhood staff, the methodology marginalised the aides.

Wagner and French (2010) revealed that half the participants in their study felt they had little choice about professional development. The aides and teachers participated either because administrators arranged this, or they felt obligated to meet professional standards. The experiences of teacher aides in this study showed that many undertook the professional development. However, the earlier study of Lewis (2005) identified that aides were concerned about a lack of interest in their training by administrative staff, which led to a lack of access to professional development. Lewis (2005) explained that most training available for aides in the school districts in her study was in-house or teacher led. Lewis (2005) commented that aides were not always well trained, supervised or evaluated by their supervising teachers. Most aides felt they learnt the required skills by observing and absorbing knowledge, and adapting to teachers as they went (Lewis, 2005).

Bourke (2008) concurred that most teacher aides learnt about their job this way, and argued that the most effective professional training to support aides' development happened when embedded in daily practice. Bourke's (2008) study, one of very few Australian based phenomenological studies exploring teacher aides in schools, explored the experiences of teacher aides supporting students with disabilities and learning difficulties in Queensland schools. A key finding from this study was the significance of inclusive professional partnerships to support teacher aides' knowledge and professional learning. To be effective, professional development programs for teacher aides supporting students needed to be directly related to their work environment. They functioned best when collaboratively based with teachers and other support personnel on the job, or on site. The inclusion of teacher aides in planning and reviewing processes was paramount. Bourke (2008) argued that teacher aides and teachers benefited from the allocation of planning and discussion time to develop collaborative professional partnerships and promote shared discussion and understandings. Bourke's (2008) findings are supported by Fisher and Pleasants (2012), and are of particular relevance to my study; teacher aides in Preparatory classes in Queensland schools have seen their hours cut, making professional discussion times with teachers extremely difficult.

The teacher–aide relationship is pivotal to the success of collaborative, professional relationships. Weiss (1994) explored the teacher–aide relationship. Some aides expressed confusion and anxiety about their role with the class and other teachers. Other aides demonstrated that teachers and aides could develop an effective working relationship, overcoming 'interpersonal and cultural prejudices' (Weiss, 1994, p. 40). However, Weiss (1994, p. 340) commented it was the teacher aide 'who must acquiesce and adjust her behaviour to suit a teacher's demands'. Regardless of partnerships with teachers in the classroom, teacher aides are well aware they are not equal (Weiss, 1994). One teacher aide in the study commented that teachers did not want aides to 'improve themselves too much' (Weiss, 1994, p. 339). Rutherford's (2012) study identified that while aides are often expected to take on the role of the teacher many aides do not want this role. However, it was important for aides to have their work 'officially recognised and respected' (Rutherford, 2012, p. 171).

Giangreco, Edelman and Broer (2001, p. 495) suggested that 'when the expectations of team members match, there is a greater likelihood that para-professionals will feel

appreciated, respected, and not taken advantage of since there is individually agreed upon role clarity'. This outcome can be evidenced in De Nobile and McCormick's (2008) Australian study into job satisfaction in Catholic primary school staff. Their findings ranked teacher aides the most satisfied. The authors suggested that features of the teacher aides' job, including working closely with a variety of staff, working with children without the administrative burdens of teachers and job orientation may contribute to their higher satisfaction levels. In a later study on workplace stress (De Nobile & McCormick, 2010), the authors reinterrogated the data collected for the previous study and investigated occupational stress across differing staff groups: teacher aides, non-teaching staff including counsellors and clerical staff; teachers and executive managers. Teacher aides were found to be the least stressed in their role. De Nobile and McCormick (2010) speculated that possible reasons may be lower levels of responsibility, shorter work hours and collegial working arrangements. The authors proposed that 'close proximity to teachers in the classroom situation may provide opportunities for them to keep up to date with activities in the school and reduce role ambiguity' (De Nobile & McCormick, 2010, p. 502). The authors reported that their findings were unexpected, and the literature certainly confirms this. Satisfaction with collegial relationships is not commonplace in the literature, particularly when differing cultures were involved. Some authors asserted that the aides' relationships with teachers or the school are unequal and unjust (Baturu, Cooper & Doyle, 2007; Bourke, 2008; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006). Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006, p. 63) commented that bilingual teacher aides 'become marginalized "hidden teachers" working with students who are overlooked by an educational system filled with inequitable practices'. The authors argued that regardless of a growing culturally and linguistically diverse student population, teachers in the US remain predominantly English speaking, middle class Euro-American (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006). The teachers' perspectives shape school practice, which may not value the aides' contributions:

Even though paraeducators may be able to access the funds of knowledge of students and their communities, speak the language of the children they teach, and implement culturally relevant instructional practices, their work may not be recognized by those located in the 'legitimate' mainstream (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006, p. 65).

This research supported Weiss's (1994) contention that most teachers, along with schooling processes, are middle class, while many teacher aides have limited education

and are economically disadvantaged. Weiss (1994) argued that while teacher aides work with children and teachers, they belong to neither group and are 'denied privileges and responsibilities of both groups. Thus, aides are limited participants in the mainstream of school society' (Weiss, 1994, p. 338). The issue of socio-cultural disempowerment evidenced in schools is also central to Baturo, Cooper and Doyle's (2007) Australian study of Indigenous teacher aides. The authors contended that Indigenous teacher aides find that 'Australia's highly Eurocentric education system lacks cultural understandings and clarity, leaving them with undefined roles and a sense of disempowerment even though they often hold positions of authority and esteem within their own communities' (Baturo, Cooper & Doyle, 2007, p. 57). Echoing Ernst-Slavit and Wenger's (2006) findings, the authors claimed that most interactions between teachers and Indigenous teacher aides were 'impoverished and unjust' (Baturo, Cooper & Doyle, 2007, p. 57). These authors trialled a professional development program aimed at improving Indigenous teacher aides' mathematical knowledge and tutoring skills. They suggested that the program displayed a variety of positive outcomes. The aides' personal mathematical ability and their confidence also increased. Baturo, Cooper and Doyle (2007) asserted that this program boosted the aides' power and authority within the school, as well as their authority in the community. Of particular note was the increase in the aide's job authority, which related to job satisfaction, personal identity and self-esteem.

Issues such as job status, role ambiguity, and acceptance of tasks beyond the job description can also be linked to literature investigating maternal feminism and early childhood, as explored earlier in this chapter. In summary, the literature suggests that aides may experience role ambiguity, low status and salary levels, along with a sense of feeling undervalued, undertrained and overworked. Rutherford (2012) argued that the silencing of teacher aides in policy is a pivotal factor for role ambiguity and low status of aides in inclusive settings. Without representation and participation in policy, it is difficult for the aides' role to be recognised and validated. Teacher aides' role identity is problematic, presenting challenges to aides' participation in the classroom and educational environment. The literature revealed that successful, inclusive connections with co-workers, in particular the teacher with whom they work, were critical (Bourke, 2008; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012).

Outcomes of silence

Issues of marginality, silence, inequality and disempowerment may all challenge aides' perceptions of their value and place within a school community. In turn, this may jeopardise teacher aides' participation in, and sense of belonging to, that community. Price (1985) suggests that individuals develop a sense of belonging or identity through involvement with a particular type of work or with a particular work or organisational setting. Royal and Rossi (1996) expand this theme in their exploration of the importance of belonging to a community. The authors suggest that the territorial significance of communities has been weakened and the relational importance of communities has increased. They assert that individuals now rely 'on ties developed through various organisational affiliations for the support and feeling of attachment they once drew from communities of place' (Royal & Rossi, 1996, p. 395).

Literature about the relational aspects of communities of practice supports this view (Hislop, 2013; Hughes, Jewson & Unwin, 2007; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2000). Wenger (1998) suggests that everyone belongs to communities of practice, for instance families, workers, hobbyists and students. Wenger's (1998) influential writing on communities of practice is still evident in current literature (Hislop, 2013; Hughes, Jewson & Unwin, 2007). Using Wenger's (1998) framework, we can view schools as communities of practice (Dockett & Perry, 2005). Participation in communities of practice 'suggests both action and connection' (Wenger, 1998, p. 55). Thus, participation is twofold: personal and social. It involves the process of taking part in the community, as well as the relationship with others in the community (Hughes et al., 2007; Wenger, 1998, 2000). Critical to Wenger's (1998, 2000) work is the viewpoint of knowledge as socially constructed, examined earlier in this thesis. The author argues that participation in communities shapes what we do, 'who we are and how we interpret what we do' (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). Importantly, participation is also transformative. Participation in communities of practice is reciprocal. It not only influences our experiences but also the communities. Wenger (1998) asserts that this ability to affect or shape the communities' practice is a vital aspect of our experience with the community. Participation leads to engagement with the community. The author argues that engagement with the communities' practice is determined by involvement with the things that matter (Wenger,

1998). To be involved, we need to participate. Therefore participation and non-participation can affect involvement, and in turn engagement with the community.

When considering participation, Wenger (1998) distinguishes between peripherality and marginality. He argues that new members' participation in a community may be peripheral initially, and that their non-participation actually enables opportunities for learning. Their trajectory for involvement within the community is inward, towards engagement with the community. However, members who have been kept on the outside of the community for a long time may find that the community's practices maintain this marginality, closing their futures (Wenger, 1998). This view of non-participation and marginality correlates with the perceptions of teacher aides' in the literature.

Synthesis

Like the majority of Preparatory aides in schools, the teacher aides in my study are all women. Additionally, all six women are mothers. The construct of a feminised early childhood workforce affects contemporary issues teacher aides in Preparatory settings grapple with today including low status, marginalisation and role ambiguity. Troublingly, issues of feminisation and maternalism are considered major obstacles to professionalising the early childhood sector (O'Connell, 2011; Osgood, 2010).

This chapter has revealed a literature review also reflecting the low status and silenced voice of teacher aides working with young children. Issues arising from limited studies include difficult relationships with teachers who are ill prepared to work with aides, lack of role recognition and job ambiguity. A common theme was the view of teacher aides as marginalised from knowledge and professional development opportunities, and undervalued by colleagues. Additionally, this chapter has brought to light potential flow-on effects of marginalisation, such as limited participation in, and a low sense of belonging to, the school's community of practice.

This study seeks to raise awareness of the role of teacher aides in Preparatory classrooms in Queensland schools. I explore teacher aides' experiences in their daily work practice, so their voices may be heard. The following chapter examines the methods and approaches used to study teacher aides' lived experiences, using van Manen's (1984) phenomenological framework.

Chapter Four: Gathering Ropes

Often, problems are knots with many strands, and looking at those strands can make a problem seem different.

(Fred Rogers, 1928–2003)

Introduction

This chapter explores research design and methodology. It opens with a description of the initial rope work for this study, the research approval process, and introduces the aides. Following this, I present and discuss the data-generation tools employed and designed for this study, along with a discussion of the data analysis processes. I situate the reflective processes I undertook to examine the inquiry of lived experiences. I also examine the intersections of inquiry and reflection and how they inform each other in my phenomenological study. Notably, the use of reflective inquiry led to the use and development of expanded data-generation tools. An exploration of the context, use and analysis of these tools is offered. I have previously examined the conceptual and philosophical framework, as well as the research questions of this study in Chapter One. This chapter now turns to an exploration of van Manen's (1984) methodological structure, and I discuss the organisation of my research, including data collection and analysis decisions.

Initial Rope Work

Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that the conceptual framework and research questions of a study demarcate sampling and instrumentation choices. This affects, and in turn constrains, the possible types of data collection and analyses. My study centres on a phenomenological inquiry about teacher aides, thus delimiting sampling and instrumentation decisions. I chose a convenience sample of teacher aides working in Preparatory classes to hear and collect the stories, the ropes, of their lived experiences. This had implications for the research process, as well as the data collection and analysis methods. I begin this section by discussing the initial process of gaining approval for the

study. This process reminds me of the initial rope work undertaken by sailors preparing a vessel for sea.

The research approval process

I was originally interested in hearing stories from teacher aides working within Queensland state primary schools. My reason for this was that the majority of the Preparatory Year trials had taken place in state schools; subsequently most of the trial data originated from these sites, and the personnel involved. However, permission for this research project was denied from Education Queensland (see Appendix Two). I then sought permission from Brisbane Catholic Education to approach Preparatory Year teacher aides working in Catholic schools within the Archdiocese of North Brisbane. Approval was given for me to approach the principals of these schools, seeking their involvement in this study, with the proviso that participation of the Preparatory Year teacher aides would be at the discretion of the individual school principal (see Appendix Three). I also gained ethics approval from the University of New England (HE06/168; HE10/012) for this work (see Appendices Four and Five respectively).

Power of approval

Reflecting upon this approval process, I was concerned it may have hindered the opportunity to hear the teacher aides' stories. Already apprehensive that being involved in a project outside of working hours could prove difficult for these workers, I wondered whether they might be reluctant to share their own experiences due to perceived conflict of power or interests with other staff or parents. I considered that obtaining the principal's approval would prove difficult for some if their professional working relationships were not supportive. I was also aware that some principals would pass over this opportunity for their aides to become involved, for a range of personal, professional, political or social issues. While some principals might see this as an opportunity to assist information sharing about the Preparatory Year reform process, others may view involvement in this research as an additional stressor to their role.

Having identified schools through the demographic region of North Brisbane, I sent explanatory letters about my research interest to the principals (see Appendix Six). I sought permission to allow the involvement of their Preparatory Year teacher aides in this study, and enclosed letters of interest to be distributed to the Preparatory Year aides, at their discretion. The teacher aides were asked to contact me directly if they wished to take part in this study. Throughout this process, I was reminded of how the literature revealed a lack of information or research about teacher aides (Finn & Pannozzo, 2004; Gerber et al., 2001). I was anxious that this approval process would again limit the opportunity to study this infrequently heard group within the educational community. At the same time, I was also motivated to help free the voice of the teacher aides, consistent with van Manen's philosophy of action (1984), as discussed in Chapter One. I recognised that a phenomenological approach might enable agendas of power and marginalisation to be revealed (Usher & Edwards, 1994; van Manen, 1984). It could also provide an avenue for understanding pedagogical relationships, which have been lacking in educational research (van Manen, 1984).

Power of the researcher

I was very aware of the power I held through this process, and was mindful that teacher aides would see me in a position of power or control over their voices. I wanted to ensure the participants felt relaxed and comfortable, with both the other participants and me. Gaining the permission of the principal also set up a relationship of tentative trust between me and the principal, as well as between the participants and me. It was important for the participants to feel at ease with the research process; thus I aimed to provide as much information about the interview and research process as possible.

The participants

Undertaking a phenomenological study, I was not concerned with having a specific number of participants to reveal a truth or the right answer to predetermined questions. Rather, I was seeking to reveal what it means to be a teacher aide working in a Preparatory classroom. In 2007, four Preparatory Year aides expressed interest in this study. After the expansion of the study to Doctoral level, an additional two aides joined the study in 2010. I forwarded information to them about my research, and consent forms were completed (see Appendices Seven and Eight). The participants were females

between 40 and 60 years of age. They were all married with children of their own, and had varying levels of experience and qualifications (see Table Three). One had just commenced her career, switching from the banking industry. Another participant had many years of experience as a teacher's aide in community-based kindergarten settings, as well as a Catholic preschool. One had worked in childcare settings previously; another two aides had previously worked in primary and preschool classes. The sixth participant had experience as an assistant working with children with additional needs in a Catholic primary school. I allocated pseudonyms to each participant for confidentiality. The names used in this study are Amanda, Bec, Dianne, Jacqui, Leanne and Sally. The following table (Table Three) offers a summary of the participants' qualifications and experience prior to the commencement of Preparatory classes in 2007, along with the time frame of their involvement in this study.

The aides' lived experiences, represented by the metaphor of rope, have been explored in this study. The aides' experiences and relationships with others affect the appearance and breaking strains of these ropes. Some of these effects are revealed and examined in the discussions in later chapters. However, others are beyond the context of this research.

Data Collection

When considering the data collection methodology for this research, I explored van Manen's (1984) phenomenological framework. The nature of phenomenological data should not be confused with the data of scientific or positivist methods. Phenomenological data may include personal and others' lived experience descriptions, close observations and interviews. Data may also be drawn from experiential descriptions in literature, government documents and sources of lived experience, such as journals, art and music (van Manen, 1984).

In procedural terms, undertaking phenomenology involves both pre-reflective and reflective inquiry; encompassing data generation and interpretation. Van Manen (2002b, p. 25) uses the terms 'empirical methods' and 'reflective methods' to describe these two types of inquiry. Thus, to explore what it means to be a teacher aide in Preparatory classes, I decided to generate data through existential investigation (van Manen, 1984), then follow through with phenomenological reflection. This should not be seen as a linear

process. Each type of inquiry informs the other. However, for the purpose of situating my research methods, I present a description of the each inquiry activity separately.

Table 3: Participants

Name	Involvement in this study	Qualifications	Experience prior to 2007
Amanda	2007	Nil	7 years with Year 1 class (children aged 5–6 years) 1 year with preschool class (children aged 4–5 years)
Bec	2010–2011	Nil on entry. Certificate III in Education Support (2009)	Over 20 years with primary classes 2 years with preschool (children aged 4–5 years)
Dianne	2007–2011	Certificate III in Learning Support	Over 5 years as a support aide working with children with additional needs
Jacqui	2010–2011	Equivalent of Certificate III in Children’s Services	Relief aide in child care and kindergartens 2 years with primary classes
Leanne	2007–2010	Equivalent of Certificate III in Children’s Services	Approximately 10 years C&K community kindergartens (children aged 3–5 years old) 2 years in Preparatory class trial
Sally	2007–2011	Nil on entry. Certificate III in Children’s Services (2008). Commenced B. Ed (ECE) (2009+)	No prior experience as a teacher aide

Empirical methods: Existential investigation

Van Manen (1984, p. 42) outlines five components of existential investigation: ‘using personal experience as a starting point; tracing etymological sources; searching idiomatic

phrases; obtaining experiential descriptions from subjects; and locating experiential descriptions in literature, art, etc.’ These components guided my data collection and analysis.

To begin the data-generation processes, I began to canvass the literature to gain information about teacher aides. I was interested in exploring the nature of their work historically to give an insight into their current experiences. I also investigated literature regarding the Preparatory Year in Queensland to help position the aides in their geographic and temporal locations. At the same time, I investigated the use of focus group interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2005, 2011; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, 2011; Litosselti, 2003; Punch, 2005; Rose-Anderssen, Baldwin & Ridgway, 2010) as a tool to obtain ‘experiential descriptions from subjects’ (van Manen, 1984, p. 42), as well as examples and varieties of teacher aides’ lived experiences.

Focus groups

Focus groups are groups of individuals brought together to discuss specific topics. A moderator facilitates the activity, encouraging discussion and interaction. The interactions between participants create a synergetic effect (Freeman, 2009; Greenbaum, 2000; Huerta & Sandoval-Almazán, 2007; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, 2011; Kitzinger, 1994; Rose-Anderssen, Baldwin & Ridgway, 2010; Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007). As participants react to generated ideas and build on the views expressed by other group members, this synergistic approach produces a variety of ideas, opinions and experiences, which may not arise in individual interviews (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Greenbaum, 2000; Huerta & Sandoval-Almazán, 2007; Litosselti, 2003; Rose-Anderssen, Baldwin & Ridgway, 2010; Stewart et al., 2007). The provision of a comfortable, convenient and non-threatening environment optimises synergy and is critical to the overall effectiveness of focus group discussions (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, 2011; Morgan, 1998). Skrzeczynski and Russell (1994) suggest that a homogeneous group, for instance friends or people who feel comfortable together, effectively produces a synergy. Similarly, Lederman (1990) suggests that the use of like-kind participants promotes synergy, in which the sum of the group is greater than its individual parts. A key strength of gathering a group together with similar interests or experiences is the generation of a ‘collective identity ... (or) visible solidarity’ (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 898). As a result, homogenous groups can enable the development and understandings of particular

histories (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005) or knowledge. More recently, Rose-Anderssen, Baldwin and Ridgway (2010) studied the significance of communicative interaction upon the construction of meaning in three focus groups. The authors contend that diversity of experiences and expertise among participants is a crucial factor for generating both synergy and knowledge gathering.

Litosselti (2003, p. 18) provides a useful summary of the advantages of focus group discussions, which include:

- discovering new information and consolidating old knowledge
- gaining participants' views, attitudes, beliefs, responses, motivations and perceptions on a topic
- examining participants' shared understandings of everyday life, and the everyday use of language and culture of particular groups
- brainstorming and generating ideas, and possibly helping to identify solutions
- gaining insights into the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation
- exploring controversial, complex or sensitive topics.

A significant advantage of focus groups is the production of very rich data expressed in the respondents' own words (Stewart et al., 2007). This is particularly useful for my phenomenological enquiry, which in this study, endeavours to raise the voice of Preparatory Year teacher aides in the literature.

The use of focus groups as an effective means of giving voice to marginalised groups is evidenced across contemporary and earlier literature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2005, 2011; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, 2011; Morgan, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 848) argue that 'focus groups, although not a solution to the silencing of the oppressed, may help to facilitate this listening'. My reading of the literature had identified the silencing of teacher aides. When considering a data-generation tool, I became interested in finding a way to empower teacher aides' voices. Morgan (1998) warns the researcher about the level of their involvement in focus group interviews; 'If the goal is to learn something new from participants, then it is best to let them speak for themselves' (Morgan, 1998, p. 49). West (2008) concurs, noting that when moderators reduce their input and participants are given more opportunity to speak, they can offer insights or raise

issues not considered by the moderator. This supports earlier work by Greenbaum (2000), who recommended low levels of moderator involvement. The issue of researcher involvement is also taken up by Lidstone (1996), who argues that researchers and interview styles may risk prejudicing the data through influencing the participants. Litosselti (2003) argues that the moderator significantly influences participants by their presence, their role, their perceived background and actual participation. This poses a risk of bias. Litosselti (2003, p. 21) warns about the danger of ‘leading participants and encouraging them to respond to your own prejudices’. In practical terms, this results in participants saying what they think the researcher or moderator wants to hear, limiting both the discussion and the research’s scope. I became concerned that my involvement as a teacher in the focus group discussions would restrict the voices of the teacher aides. I sought a means to gather the aides together and support the revealing of their lived experiences, not mine.

Discussions with my university supervisors led me to investigate the use of synergetic focus group discussions as a data-generation tool. These collaborative discussions helped deepen my inquiry and research experiences. van Manen (1984) supports researchers looking to the work of others to help broaden their experience and further their thinking. I began reading about Lidstone’s (1996) use of synergetic focus groups discussions as a variant of focus group interviews. My reading revealed the following advantages of using synergetic focus group discussions for my study:

- to help minimise my voice as researcher
- to help minimise my role in the interview process
- to increase the participants’ feeling of empowerment over the direction and voice of the study
- to help break down any perceived barriers of the researcher as expert
- to promote the opportunity to share local yet diverse viewpoints and lived experiences (Sonter, 2009).

This synergetic approach resonated with me as a means of encouraging the voices of a group of disempowered teacher aides.

A synergetic approach

Lidstone (1996) reveals that Russell initially coined the term ‘synergetic focus group discussion’ in 1994. This qualitative data tool is particularly significant as it can help resolve the issue of researcher bias (Peirce, 2006; Wilmetts, 2002; Wilmetts & Lidstone, 2003). This method involves the participants ‘setting their own agenda to explore a particular phenomenon, issue or topic at the conclusion of an introductory monologue’ (Wilmetts, 2002, p. 8). The use of an introductory monologue stimulates discussions (Peirce, 2006; Russell & Massey, 1994; Skrzeczynski & Russell, 1994), but does not define conceptions that may limit or restrict the discussion. Russell and Massey’s (1994) study reveals that while participants did not discuss some issues outlined in the introductory monologue, additional issues were raised in the discussions. The introductory monologue has three purposes: to welcome and set participants at ease; assure confidentiality and give permission for any opinion to be raised; to motivate the group to want to contribute; and to set the topic by presenting a wide range of ideas within the topic (Lidstone, 1996; Peirce, 2006; Skrzeczynski & Russell, 1994).

Lidstone’s (1996) use of geography teachers as a peer-based group for a synergetic focus group discussion exemplifies Lederman’s (1990) promotion of ‘like-kind’ participants in focus group research. Lidstone (1996) argues that this group achieved candour ‘because the members of the group understood and felt comfortable with each other because they could draw social strength from each other’ (Lidstone, 1996, p. 164). Greenbaum (2000) supports this view, and suggests that participants in focus group discussions may feel a sense of safety in numbers and will discuss sensitive or controversial issues because others who have similar experiences may also be involved. Later studies (Peirce, 2006; West, 2008; Wilmetts, 2002; Wilmetts & Lidstone, 2003) confirm that synergetic focus groups enable participants to speak for themselves and ‘place[s] the decision on the direction of the discussion in the hands of the respondents ... [therefore the] risk of rejection is reduced’ (Wilmetts & Lidstone, 2003, p. 11). Consequently, this focus group method affords a powerful tool to capture and promote the voices of teachers’ aides.

Lidstone (1996) raises the issue of reciprocity in research. Synergetic focus group discussions can be advantageous experiences for participants, as they can learn more about the topic from the introductory monologue. Additionally, this approach enables participants to express and clarify their opinions, as they listen to and interact with co-

participants over a relatively short time frame (Lidstone, 1996). More recent work by Peirce (2006) and West (2008) supports the advantage of synergetic focus groups as enabling participants to ‘both contribute to and be influenced by the dynamism of group interaction’ (West, 2008, p. 111). I was interested in this positive outcome for the participants, as their involvement in this study meant they were giving time at the end of challenging, busy working days. Involvement in the synergetic focus groups offered the aides collegial support, knowledge building and networking opportunities.

Yarning: Facilitating discussion

Synergetic focus group discussions were deliberately chosen to suit both the conceptual framework of the study as well as supporting the voice and position of the participants in the research. The synergetic focus group discussions were held in a room at the kindergarten I teach at in north-west Brisbane. I chose this location for several reasons. I wanted a place that might feel familiar, where participants could feel comfortable and relax. I was mindful of their travel time both to and from the discussions, as well as parking ease and costs. The kindergarten is a community-based Gowrie Queensland affiliated centre, not aligned with either Catholic Education or Education Queensland. While this offered some degree of neutrality for the participants, it also enabled the aides a chance to see another early childhood venue, building upon the networking and professional development opportunity of the synergetic focus group.

Permission was sought from the centre management committee to host two focus group discussions after hours in the centre. I liaised with other staff (including cleaning staff) to ensure that the room was private and that participants could enter and exit confidentially. As the aides were attending these meetings straight after work, they were offered a light afternoon tea on arrival. A small digital voice recorder was placed in the centre of the table to enable all voices to be captured, and paper and pens were provided for use if required. I wanted to ensure the participants felt comfortable and secure in the setting, mindful that they felt their time, presence and participation was valued.

Participants were gathered together for two synergetic focus group meetings. Ninety minutes was allocated for each session, allowing time for the presentation of the introductory monologue and leaving time for round table discussion. The introductory monologues were introduced (see Appendices Nine and Ten), in which the discussion

procedure was outlined. Participants were reassured about confidentiality and anonymity, and that my role in the discussions would be limited to presenting this introduction, ‘so that the participants could control the direction of the discussions’ (Sonter, 2009, p. 171). The remainder of the monologue presented information to situate the discussion. The group was reminded that their conversations were not limited to this content, as I was seeking experiences and information. To reinforce the position of participants as controllers of the discussion, I distanced myself verbally and physically, out of direct vision of the group. During the discussion I neutrally observed, recorded and noted participants’ interactions, both verbally and non-verbally.

Skrzeczynski (1995) argues that the introductory monologue does not set an agenda and that the researcher is interested in everything participants have to say. This was of particular pertinence to my research goals. However, writing the introductory monologue presented a quandary. While writing the procedural aspects of the monologue was relatively straight forward, setting the topic was not. I was caught between presenting information about a range of issues to motivate discussion and the dilemma of constraining my research to the question of the aides’ lived experiences. The formative work of Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 27) recognises this challenge:

Qualitative research involves two actions that sometimes pull in different directions. First, you need to set boundaries...at the same time, you need to create a frame to help you uncover, confirm, or qualify the basic process or constructs that undergird your study.

Writing, re-writing and reflective discussions with my supervisors enabled me to present information across two themes. The first monologue offered information and questions about relationships (teacher aide with teacher, children, parents, principal & co-workers). The second concentrated upon resource allocation, such as building, playground and toilet provision, and curriculum resources. Separating the monologues by theme allowed me to break the information into manageable sections for discussion.

After presenting the introductory monologue, the group achieved candour and quickly settled into sharing stories of everyday events in their classrooms and schools. Listening to the ordinariness of the conversations taking place, I was cognisant of van Manen’s (1984) phenomenological importance of the everyday. I found myself trying to unravel and search for meanings behind these everyday stories. In particular, it became obvious to

me that the phenomenological stance of finding ‘the significant in the taken-for-granted’ (van Manen, 1984, p. 36) had become real to me. Reflective inquiry had begun.

The interplay between inquiry and reflection reminded me of a perpetual game of ‘tug-of-war’. My inquiry presented possibilities, pulling the rope one way. Yet, almost instantly my reflections and understandings jolted the rope back. The pull and tug motion of this process is central to van Manen’s (1984) phenomenological framework.

Reflective Inquiry

The reflective methods I drew upon initially in this study were thematic, exegetical and collaborative reflection (van Manen, 2002b). Each method revealed meanings about the teacher aides’ lived experiences and prompted further inquiry. The three methods also complemented each other, offering new insights to explore and think at a deeper level. In turn, these reflections guided and informed further data-generation processes and inquiry. The following section opens a discussion of the analysis of the synergetic focus group discussions, and the implications of this analysis for my study.

Finding knots: Thematic analysis

To undertake thematic reflection, both synergetic focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Van Manen (2002b) warns researchers that deep analysis is key to phenomenological research. This is a complex and creative process: not a mechanical decoding of text, but a grasping of understandings to ‘see’ meaning (van Manen, 2002b). Analysing the transcripts involved grappling with ideas within the spoken words and text. Trusting the process, and allowing space and time for this reflection, was critical. Repeatedly searching the text and repeated listening to the recordings of the aides allowed me to explore some knots ‘around which certain lived experiences are spun’ (van Manen, 1984, p. 59).

Listening and re-listening, reading and re-reading the text as a whole and in parts enabled me to gain new insights and meaning into the lived experiences of the teacher aides. The use of the rope and knot metaphor helped me analyse and listen deeper, and challenge my early assumptions. Given that the synergetic focus group discussions took place during the first six months of the Preparatory Year reform, I had expected issues of resources and

environment to be prevalent themes or knots. However, the knots of relationships, value and silence were far stronger than I had anticipated. The aides' stories revealed their disconnection across several levels: with colleagues, children, parents, professional development issues and policy directives. Similarly, issues surrounding workplace policy and procedures were also problematic for some of the participants, and required further investigation.

Exegetical Reflection

Closely studying related texts promoted my research. This process, known as exegetical reflection (van Manen, 2002b), offers further insights. My initial Master of Education (Honours) research explored what it meant to be a teacher aide in the literature, and set the context of the Preparatory Year historically and contemporarily. The upgrade of this research to doctoral level necessitated expanded data generation and analysis tasks. I researched concepts and themes arising from the data that I had not initially identified as part of the literature review process, such as document and policy analysis frameworks and Catholic education workplace policies. I undertook a critical policy analysis (Ball, 1994, 1997; Bacchi, 2000, 2009; Farrell, 2001; Nichols & Jurvansuu, 2008) of documents affecting Preparatory Year teacher aides. This involved searching, collecting and interrogating legislative policy and practice documents through both state and Catholic education departments.

Document and policy analysis

To consider the nature of some public documents in terms of context, the position and engagement of the aides, and possible ramifications of this, I sought frameworks that supported complexity. Issues such as assumptions, power and voice were forefront in my mind. I realised my questions concerning discourse and text were multilayered. Although scrutinising text within specific policies or statements could offer valuable insights, I was more interested in exploring broader discourses within the political and public space. With the lived experiences of the aides as the focus of this research, the analysis of texts and documents needed to afford a space in which I could be responsive to their voices and stories. Although writing this chapter would offer some analysis of texts such as policies or media commentary, my primary focus was to extend understandings of the nature of these texts to the lived experiences of the aides.

Every day, the aides were immersed in their life world of a Preparatory classroom. Phenomenology asks us to consider what this everyday experience is like (van Manen, 1990). I am reminded that phenomenological writing and research do not seek to find the truth; rather, they advance and deepen insight into the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). By reviewing documents that affect the teacher aides, I was not trying to determine the legality or accuracy of reports or policy, or offer revised ‘correct’ policy. Yet the nature of documents such as policies initially seemed challenging because they are typically considered to project or enforce a ‘correct’ or ‘right’ process or view.

Policy

Generally written to alleviate or avert a problem, policies are usually developed with the intent to provide clear rules or protocols for adoption. There is often an assumption that “‘problems’ exist and can be identified and indeed rectified’ (Bacchi, 2009, p. 31). This stance views policymakers as experts who provide the truth or the best solution for a problem, and the policy process as value neutral, linear and finite. The policy disseminates the ‘truth’ to others, without recognition of the agency of others or subjects in the process (Bacchi, 2009; Ball, 1990, 1994; Codd, 1988; Farrell, 2001; Nichols & Jurvansuu, 2008; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997).

However, this positivist viewpoint of policy development and implementation is problematic. Policies are not simply things or documents (Ball, 1994); rather, they are the ‘authoritative allocation of values’ (Prunty, 1984, p. 42). Codd concurs, and suggests that policy documents are ‘ideological texts that have been constructed within a particular historical and social context’ (Codd, 1988, p. 244). A substantial body of research acknowledges policy, and the policy process, as value laden, multilayered, complex and relational (Bacchi, 2009; Ball, 1990, 1994; Codd, 1988; Farrell, 2001; Marston, 2004; Nichols & Jurvansuu, 2008; Prunty, 1984; Taylor et al., 1997). The perceived linear structure of policy development is problematic. This positivist view disregards the relational nature of knowledge: the significance of context and values on policy and the interrelationship between policy players and policy text and processes (Bacchi, 2009; Ball, 1990, 1994; Codd, 1988; Farrell, 2001; Marston, 2004; Nichols & Jurvansuu, 2008; Prunty, 1984; Taylor et al., 1997). In response, the use of critical policy analysis is merited.

Conceptualising policy as both text and discourse, Ball (1994) asserts that policy analysis necessitates the exploration of both complexity and scope. He argues that policies are not only texts, but ‘processes and outcomes’ (Ball, 1994, p. 15). Taylor et al. (1997, pp. 19-20) concur, arguing that ‘critical policy analysis must pay attention not only to the content of policy but also to the process of policy development and implementation’. Ball (1990, 1994) draws upon Foucault’s body of work on the interrelationship and inseparable nature of power and knowledge, and contends that discourses construct certain possibilities for thought. They privilege, order and combine words in particular ways and exclude or displace other combinations. Adopting a critical view, Ball argues that meaning is not derived from ‘words but from institutional practices, from power relations, from social positions’ (1990, p. 18).

Examining and problematising contexts, textual analysis and the effects or consequences of policies, and then taking action to unveil these are fundamental aspects of critical policy analysis (Bacchi, 2009; Ball, 1994; Farrell, 2001; Nichols & Juvansuu, 2008; Prunty, 1984; Taylor et al., 1997). Different examples of this are well evidenced in the literature. Bacchi (2009) suggests that the first steps in critically analysing policy are to identify the problem represented within a policy and then explore the assumptions that underpin the representation of the problem to identify and contextualise the shape of the problem.

Rather than relying on a single theory or framework for analysis, Ball (1994) emphasises the utilisation of a range of tools through which to view and consider text and discourse. Ball (1994) endorses the use of a toolbox approach rather than a single or linear theory of policy analysis. He suggests this affords a space to consider complexities and the multilayered nature of policy. Taylor et al. (1997), Farrell (2001) and Nichols and Juvansuu (2008) support this broader view, noting a history of debate around theoretical structures or frameworks for policy analysis. Taylor et al. (1997) reiterates Ball’s (1994) assertion that ‘the critical analyst must take risks, use imagination, but also be reflexive. The concern is with the task rather than theoretical purism or conceptual niceties’ (p. 2). Farrell (2001) concurs, agreeing that the complex, multidimensional nature of policy gives rise to the use of multiple methods. Employing a range of methods to analyse the multidimensional nature of policy helps ‘make visible what may be invisible or hidden’ (Farrell, 2001, p. 252).

Recent work by Nichols and Jurvansuu (2008) explores two strands of policy research or theory: the multilayered landscape of policies and policies as discursive texts. In their discussion about the way policy frames the view of partnerships in integrated early childhood services in South Australia, the authors argue that examining a body or ensemble of policies rather than focusing on the analysis of single policies is fundamental in considering the multilayered nature of policies. ‘Understanding policy as layered means thinking about the simultaneous impacts of different policies which may have been produced by different agencies and at different times, but which form an ensemble which is currently in operation’ (Nichols & Jurvansuu, 2008, p. 119). This approach is consistent with earlier views of Codd (1988), Taylor et al. (1997) and Ball (1994, 1997). Ball (1997) draws on Elmore’s (1996) work and argues that focusing analytically on one policy precludes the investigation of competing or contradictory policies that may prevent or affect the enactment of others.

Ball’s (1997) critical review of educational policy and research highlights the need for the complexity of policy to be mirrored in policy analysis. Bacchi (2000, 2009) affirms Ball’s (1994, 1997) viewpoint and argues that deconstructing policy is complex and multifaceted. She urges policy analysts to move beyond examining the lived effects of policy in which discourse interrogation is confined to issues of power or constraint. So, while the issue of who holds power, who is acted upon and who is left out is of particular interest to this study, the agency of the aides within the political terrain is very important to consider. Bacchi (2000, 2009) and Ball (1994) strongly advocate for the agency of individuals to be taken into account. ‘There is agency and there is constraint in relation to policy—this is not a sum-zero game’ (Ball, 1994, p. 21). Bacchi adds to this argument and suggests that policy analysts seek further ways to emphasise the plurality of discourse to open up ‘space for challenge’ (Bacchi, 2000, p. 55). Bacchi’s (2000, 2009) work seeks to interrogate the multilayered and often contradictory nature of problematisation within policy discourse. She offers useful questions to guide the investigation of assumptions and responses and, importantly, for critical analysis, ‘destabilise current taken-for-granted ways of conceiving “problems”’ (Bacchi, 2009, p. 43).

Contemporary work by Adams (2011) complements the notion of expanding the practice of policy analysis. Exploring the relationship between policy and pedagogic

positioning, Adams (2011) calls for a view of policy as a response to practice rather than focusing on action as a response to policy. Adam's insights offer another lens through which to view policy and practice, and reiterates earlier defences for composite or mixed approaches to policy analysis and research (Ball, 1994, 1997; Farrell, 2001; Nichols & Jurvansuu, 2008).

Adopting the stance of utilising a multimethod approach for this study is significant for me as a researcher. Epistemologically, my study advocates that the nature of knowledge is subjective and socially constructed. Although critical analysis seeks to consider issues such as complexities and power, and take responsive action, following one published framework may minimise perceptions of what is considered possible. Reminiscent of Foucault's (1980, p. 131) work on 'regimes of truth', a narrow field of policy analysis frameworks or perceptions may project a perceived correct or right method irrespective of the context. Bacchi (2000) raises a similar concern that policy-as-discourse analysis is becoming a narrowed field that does not reflect its contradictory and diverse nature. This phenomenological study offers an opportunity to engage with a range of analysis protocols to promote deeper understandings of the nature of texts and contexts that affect the lived experiences of Preparatory teacher aides.

Analysis of these policy documents offered insight into how teacher aides are positioned in the policy process, and informed Chapter Seven: 'Political Stuff'. Importantly for my research, the interrogation of these current documents also helped divulge the effects of current practices on the Preparatory Year in the future.

This reflective process assisted the examination of strands within the ropes, as well as the process of unravelling knots in the ropes. Exegetical reflection also assisted the data triangulation process. I contrasted my knowledge and understandings about teacher aides with the lived experiences of the teacher aides revealed in the knots or themes that arose from analysis of the data.

Collaborative reflection

As I continued to write and reflect upon these interviews, I also engaged in conversations regarding the writing process and testing possibilities with my supervisors and colleagues. Richardson (2003, p. 499) argues that 'writing is a way of "knowing"—a method of

discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it'. Testing my interpretations with others, and sharing my writing enabled me to enrich my insights and, in turn, my writing. Presenting a paper discussing the internal consistency between the philosophy and methodological approach of phenomenology at the University of New England 2008 Postgraduate Research Conference (Sonter, 2009) was pivotal to the development of my early theorising and reflection. The subsequent peer review process for publication of this paper further scrutinised my thinking and writing. The presentation of a second paper discussing the data collection and analysis of the synergetic focus group discussions at the same conference in 2009 (Sonter, 2010) strengthened this reflective process. This collaborative reflection helped deepen my understandings and enrich my writing, which is the very heart of phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 1990).

A noteworthy aspect of my reflections was the growth in my understandings from when I first met with the aides during the 2007 discussions. My initial impressions of the ordinariness of the everyday conversations gave way to a deeper thinking. The process of developing a thoughtful awareness is considered critical to phenomenological inquiry (van Manen, 1984). Looking for the 'consequential in the inconsequential' (van Manen, 1984, p. 36) revealed essences of what it means to be a teacher aide in Preparatory Year. The seemingly ordinary, everyday rituals the teacher aides discussed initially seemed trivial. Yet this is how young children and a range of adults including teacher aides spend their every day, five days per week. This ordinariness is consequential for both the children and the adults involved.

These reflections significantly increased my understanding of the aides' lived experiences; however, I wanted to explore deeper to show the significance and meaning of their experiences. So, to explore the lived experiences of teacher aides in Preparatory classrooms in Catholic schools further, I used close observations as well as descriptive and imaginal experiences (van Manen, 2002b) (see Tables Four and Five). I discuss each of these in turn.

More rope: Expanded data-generation tools

After expanding my research to a Doctoral level, I contacted the aides to gauge their interest in meeting with me again. I could not make contact with Amanda because she had

moved schools; however, two Preparatory Year aides in one of the Catholic schools included in my ethics approval made contact with me and were interested in taking part in this study. I sought and gained permission from their principal. I held a collaborative conversation with the aides to discuss the expansion of the data-generation techniques.

Yarning again: Collaborative conversation

A collaborative conversation offered a chance to explore some of my reflections and thinking from the previous two synergetic focus groups. In addition, this forum afforded the opportunity for the aides to discuss their experience with the research to date, which in turn expanded my understanding and further informed the research process. Before holding the collaborative conversation meeting at the kindergarten in August 2010, I sought the aides' permission to record our conversation. Like the previous times we had met in 2007, I aimed to ensure that the aides felt comfortable and respected. I ensured the room was quiet and that we were not interrupted so that conversations could flow and remain confidential. Because this meeting was held straight after school, I offered the aides a light afternoon tea to maintain their energy levels and promote a relaxed environment. Unlike the synergetic focus group meetings, this time I stayed with the group, involved in the conversation. I explained the expanded data-generation experiences I wished to use, and sought the aides' interest in these. I asked if I could visit their classrooms to gain deeper understanding of their work and workplace. Bec, Sally and Dianne gave consent to the observations and further meetings and so I began coordinating visiting dates with each of them individually at a time that suited them. I emailed Jacqui after the meeting, and she also gave her consent to my visits. Leanne did not give consent. She explained that her working relationship with the teacher was very uneasy, and she was concerned that classroom observations would complicate this arrangement further.

Close observations

The use of close observations (van Manen, 2002b) allowed me to collect experiences from the lived world of each teacher aide in her Preparatory classroom. This method required me to take on the role of participant and observer at the same time (van Manen, 2002b). As participant-observer, I tried to build a close relation with each aide to foster understandings yet remain alert for opportunities that required me to step back and reflect

about what was happening (van Manen, 2002b). The classic work of Miles and Huberman (1994) reminds researchers that observing more than once provides opportunities to re-examine something that perhaps began to emerge in the first visit, to follow new leads or modify questions. With this in mind, I planned four visits to each of the four participants. The times for these visits were mutually arranged, and I tried to visit at different times to enable me to build a picture of each aide in a particular place over a period of two months. Successive observations helped me to uncover and illuminate the way teacher aides managed their particular work situations. At the end of each visit, I spoke with the teacher aide in order to discuss my observations, and answer any questions the aide may have had about the research process. These unstructured conversations afforded the opportunity for the aides and myself to clarify or raise further issues, building shared knowledge. The analysis of these observations also guided further inquiry into what it means to be a teacher aide in Preparatory in Catholic schools in Queensland, Australia.

While negotiating times to visit the aides, various obstacles arose. Sometimes, school events prohibited my visits. I was unwell for some months, which also hindered my progress. As a result, I decided to visit the aides towards the end of 2010, and then revisit them at the beginning of 2011. This also afforded the opportunity to witness how the aides worked with an established group of children and, possibly with a very different approach, how they worked at the beginning of the year with a new class of children just entering the school system. However, in December and January 2011, Queensland was struck by terrible floods. Greater Brisbane floods affected some of the schools where data collection was occurring. Some schools were closed for the first few weeks of term. Along with this, two of the teacher aides changed teaching teams at the beginning of 2011, and were not available in term one as was previously expected. The other two aides took sick leave for the first term. In response, I applied to the University Human Research Ethics Committee for an extension to my ethics application to enable me to continue visiting the aides and engaging them in this research. This was granted in March 2011 (see Appendix Eleven). At the end of the observation period, I had visited Sally and Dianne four times, and Bec and Jacqui on three occasions.

Table 4: Close observation schedule

Participant	Date & Time	Date & Time	Date & Time	Date & Time
Bec	15/11/2011	14/06/2011	9/08/2011	
Dianne	15/11/2010	22/11/2010	7/06/2011	0/08/2011
Jacqui	15/11/2011	14/06/2011	10/08/2011	
Sally	26/10/2010	16/11/2010	8/06/2011	10/08/2011

To assist my observation record keeping, I developed a checklist on which I quickly noted aspects of the teacher aides' role such as cleaning, preparation and interaction with children (see Appendix Twelve). I recorded in five-minute blocks, and wrote additional notes to support these observations.

Descriptive experiences

As well as close observation, I gathered examples of the Preparatory aides' daily work as lived experiences. Van Manen (1984, p. 55) reminds researchers that 'the object of phenomenological research is to "borrow" other peoples' experiences'. van Manen (1990) refers to this as protocol writing: a first draft type of writing that describes experiences without interpretation or explanation. After the third observation, I asked each aide to write a brief description of an event during part of the day that I had observed to capture a richer understanding of her lived experience. The aides seemed very tentative about this writing exercise. It appeared that, although they were happy for me to visit and observe them, they were not keen to write about their own experiences. Sally, Dianne and Bec each wrote a short descriptive piece, which they tentatively offered to me at the last collaborative conversation meeting. None of these descriptions matched an event or experience during my observation; however, these pieces did provide further insight into what the aides felt were worthwhile experiences to document and share.

Imaginal experiences

I also asked the aides to offer an imaginal description (van Manen, 2002b) through the use of drawing, painting, collage or photography (van Manen, 2002b). These materials are familiar to early childhood settings and available to these participants. The focus on imagery presented a different opportunity for the aides to express their presence in this study. Having already captured their voice on tape from the focus group discussions and written text from the descriptive experience, I felt that this visual exercise might provide an opportunity to view their experiences through another lens. Once again, I was not seeking explanations or interpretations, simply expressions of their lived experience as an aide.

I asked the aides to offer a drawing or photo or sketch to represent one particular aspect of their role in a day. When considering the data-generation tools for this study, I was very interested in the use of imaginal experiences and felt that this method would be most helpful. However, I was also aware of hesitancy about this request. Perhaps this activity seemed too difficult, or threatening? At the final meeting, Sally, Bec and Dianne shared their pieces. Each had used photography as a medium for sharing a story or experience. I spoke with each participant in turn about her image, and the aides shared their photographs with each other.

I also provided photographs of ropes and knots as well as real ropes used as variations of imaginal exercises. I discuss the development of metaphor as a data-generation tool later in this chapter; however, it is timely to discuss these imaginal experiences here. Following one of the observation visits, I asked the aides to choose from a selection of 12 images to represent aspects of their lived experiences (see Figure 1). These included representations of their role from beginning as an aide in a Preparatory classroom, their current perception of their role and their relationships within the class and school. I recorded their comments and photographed the selected images in turn.



Figure 1: The selection of photographs for representation exercise

At the final meeting, the aides were offered a selection of ropes to manipulate to represent aspects of their role and experiences (see Figure 2). The aides selected ropes to represent themselves, the teachers they worked with, the children and the parents. Along with this, specific organisational aspects of their role, for instance, the timeliest task they undertook, were considered.

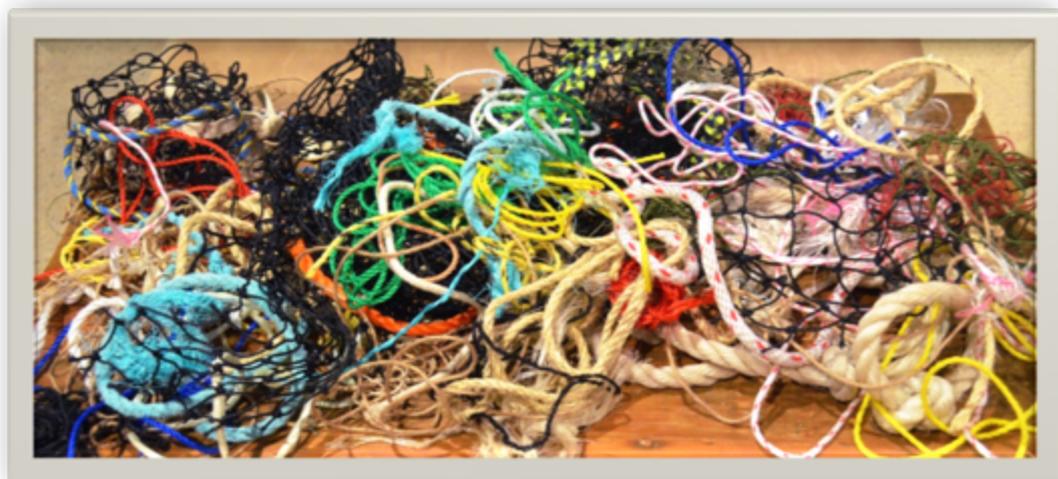


Figure 2: The selection of ropes for representation exercise

As the aides selected and manipulated the ropes, I took photographs and recorded the conversations. Originally, I had planned to undertake this exercise individually with the aides following an observation visit. However, in recognition of the synergy and collaboration evident during the group meetings, I revised this plan and, as a result, this activity was undertaken during the final group meeting.

Transcription and coding of the data

The representational task using ropes was the final data-generation exercise in this study. Throughout the five years of research, 26 sets of data were collected. Each data event was dated and numbered, and each set of data was transcribed. Within these transcripts, the participants' pseudonym initial was used and the transcripts were paginated. Table Five outlines the data-generation events, table code and date.

Table 5: Data-generation events

Data Source	Table Code	Dates
Synergetic Focus Group 1	1	20/06/2007
Synergetic Focus Group 2	2	28/06/2007
Collaborative conversation 1	3	25/08/2010
Observation visit Sally	4	26/10/2010
Observation visit Bec	5	15/11/2010
Observation visit Jacqui	6	15/11/2010
Observation visit Dianne	7	15/11/2010
Observation visit Sally	8	16/11/2010
Observation visit Dianne	9	22/11/2010
Photo experience Sally	10	1/12/2010
Observation visit Dianne	11	7/06/2011
Observation visit Sally	12	8/06/2011
Photo experience Dianne	13	8/06/2011
Observation visit Bec	14	14/06/2011
Observation visit Jacqui	15	14/06/2011
Photo experience Jacqui & Bec	16	14/06/2011
Observation visit Dianne	17	8/08/2011
Observation visit Bec	18	9/08/2011
Observation visit Sally	19	10/08/2011
Observation visit Jacqui	20	10/08/2011
Imaginal experience discussion	21	7/11/2011
Collaborative conversation 2	22	7/11/2011
Rope representational experience	23	7/11/2011
Descriptive piece Bec	24	7/11/2011
Descriptive piece Jacqui	25	7/11/2011
Descriptive piece Sally	26	7/11/2011

Throughout the following chapters, excerpts from the data are offered to illuminate the aides' lived experiences. To distinguish between quotes from the data and the literature, I have italicised quotes from the data. For coding purposes, I indicate the initial letter of the participant's pseudonym, the table code position and the page number from the data transcript. For example, a quote by Bec from the first collaborative conversation transcript, page four, is coded as B, 3p4.

I undertook thematic reflection and analysis of each set of data, searching for themes that were revealed within each of the above subsets of data, and the data as a whole. Once all the data were transcribed and triangulated, my reflections offered themes and insights to inform the research. A sense of disconnection, marginalisation and silence epitomised many of the aides' lived experiences, mirroring many findings in the literature.

The use of metaphor as a data-collection tool

I had recognised the lack of aides' voices belonging to educational literature. My literature review had also identified that issues of marginality, silence, inequality and disempowerment may challenge aides' perceptions of the value of their place within a school community. This in turn may jeopardise teacher aides' participation in and sense of belonging to that community. When trying to make more sense of this, I turned to the use of metaphors and imagery. I spent time considering the knot of belonging. I was interested to discover that the figure eight knot (see Figure 3) is also known as the blood bight (Wilson, 1998). To me, the visual imagery of the enclosed figure eight knot represented a sense of belonging and identity.

As I engaged with metaphor to deconstruct and reflect upon my own understandings, I also began to ponder about the use of this metaphor as a data-generation tool. Just as the imagery of a knotted rope assisted my thinking, I wondered if the use of photographs of knots or ropes might also provide a prompt or visual tool for the aides to consider and reflect upon their own experiences and understandings.

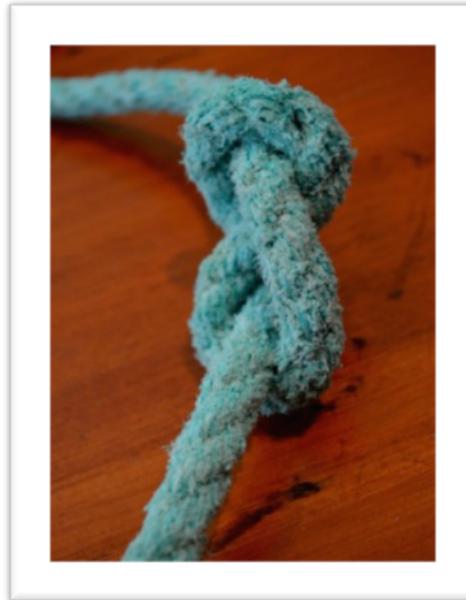


Figure 3: Alice Sonter (2013). *Blue 8 knot*.

The use of metaphor to elicit or investigate beliefs or understandings in educational studies is supported in the literature (Black, 2002; Forrest & Sonter, 2013b; McGrath, 2006; Singh, 2010; Sumsion, 2002). Within this field, metaphor is used as a tool for both writing and conceptualising, as well as a data-collection tool to obtain participants' opinions or reflections. Black (2002, p. 76) reveals that:

Teachers often employ a type of thinking that expresses itself in aesthetic ways, rather than lineal prescriptions. Non-linear forms of representation, such as visual imagery, drawing and metaphor, have great potential for revealing teacher knowledge and meanings, and for eliciting reflections.

Beatty, Leigh and Dean (2007) offer a discussion about a card set as a reflective tool for teachers to use when creating personal teaching philosophies. The authors suggest that benefits of this process include the physicality of the cards as an aid for cognitive processing, creativity is heightened as teachers are encouraged to think in non-linear ways and different learning styles are met. The authors also note collegial benefits because participants share their ideas with others. The use of photos as a prompt for thinking and reflecting could offer benefits similar to those of the card set.

While developing the concept of using ropes and knots as a data-collection tool through photographs as well as actual ropes, I tested the process with friends as well as university and work colleagues. I searched for photographs in books, online and in personal

collections depicting a variety of cordage, colour, thickness, age and wear to afford numerous possibilities for representation. To refine the selection process, I showed the images of ropes and knots I had collected to work colleagues and family. I sought opinions about similarities and differences between the images and possibilities of what the images may represent. I narrowed the selection of images to 12. I wanted to be able to offer a wide enough selection to afford choice, yet I was aware that presenting too many images could be confusing. Once the final 12 photos were chosen, I printed eight-square-centimetre colour copies of the photos and laminated these.

To practice and test the interview process, as well as the photo selection, I asked three work colleagues to work through the exercise with me. The responses from my colleagues suggested that there was enough variety. I made another two laminated sets of smaller photos to use for my recording purposes, or for participants to use if needed.

As this idea became more tangible, I also contemplated using actual ropes as another tool for opening conversations and representational thinking. Just as looking at photos might prompt thinking and reflection, I became interested in the potential of participants manoeuvring ropes to represent feelings or experiences. I purchased and collected new and aged ropes of different colours, thicknesses, cordage, weight, age, length and wear. Again, I tested the use of the ropes as conversation starters with university and work colleagues. Throughout the data-collection design stage of this work, I was very aware of ensuring the most effective use of the aides' time. The literature review and the findings from the synergetic focus groups had identified the pressure of time constraints to be a significant stressor for the Preparatory Year aides, and I had great respect for their generous gift to me of their time.

The presentation of interactive workshop sessions (Forrest & Sonter, 2012, 2013a; Sonter, 2011), which focused on designing research tools, provided other opportunities to test further, gain feedback and refine the use of these data-generation methods. At the 2011 University of New England Postgraduate Research Conference, I introduced the use of ropes and knots as both a writing tool and a creative means of opening conversations to draw on the aides' experiences (Sonter, 2011). I discussed the proposed focus questions for the conversations with the teacher aides, and then offered the delegates the opportunity to handle the ropes. Many talked about which ropes they related to in terms of their own feelings that morning. One chose a frayed rope, commenting on the stress of

balancing study with work and family commitments. Another busily collected short pieces, suggesting that the odd bits were reminiscent of her. Remarks and questions were also offered in support of using the metaphor, such as *How much are they [the aides] woven into the classroom? Are the short pieces of rope, which have little use, like the aides: disempowered?* Comments linking the physicality of manoeuvring the ropes aligned with the metaphor were offered. One delegate suggested that the inclusion of netting might represent the nets one slips through, like the holes in a system. Another pointed out that it was important to look for the weaknesses of the metaphor and data-collection method, which she likened to looking for the weak area of the rope.

Feedback during this session was very positive. I was interested to witness how quickly a synergy developed while the delegates were handling and discussing the ropes, similarly to synergetic focus groups held in 2007. The activities involving the photos of ropes and the ropes representational exercise resonated easily with the aides, just as it had with the workshop delegates. These representational experiences afforded great insight into the aides' lived experiences, which are shared in the next chapters.

Synergy and reciprocity

As a researcher, I was mindful of the teacher aides' commitment to this research, and their willingness to share their lives with me over a period of five years. Although this study aimed to give voice to teacher aides and raise their profile, I was conscious of a possible imbalance between the commitment and the potential benefit of the participants' participation. The literature points to a dilemma in reciprocation in research:

As we design research projects, we search for participants who will allow us to glimpse at or gather parts of their lives, record what we think we find, and then construct meaning from these recordings. In return, researchers offer participants precious little. (Trainor & Bouchard, 2012, p. 15)

Reciprocity in research can be problematic because of differing agendas between researchers and participants (Curry, 2012). Participants may expect specific results or actions, whereas researchers might present complex understandings rather than solutions (Curry, 2012). A means of countering this may be the adoption of a 'stance of reciprocity' (Trainor & Bouchard, 2012, p. 3) throughout the research.

The methodology and data-generation methods used in this study were developed from the key purpose of the study: an exploration of the lived experiences of teacher aides in Preparatory classes in Queensland Catholic schools. As a result, being involved in this study afforded occasions for the participants to connect and network with others, share information and build understandings about the Preparatory reform. Of particular interest to the Preparatory Year teacher aides in this study was the opportunity to meet together to share stories of their lived experiences. The synergy of the group was evident at each of the group meetings. It was as if the strength of the group afforded each individual the strength to speak out, question and laugh, share dilemmas and celebrate everyday moments. These meetings were enjoyable occasions, and reinforced the value of implementing data-generation methods in which the participants' voices are central.

Recognising an opportunity for further reciprocity, I changed the structure of the rope representation exercise to a group activity, rather than completing this exercise individually as first planned. Making this change enabled the aides to share their experiences and offer different perspectives to each other's dilemmas or challenges. This action is one example of me as researcher enacting 'caring reflexivity' (Rallis & Rossman, 2010). Rallis and Rossman (2010, p. 496) contend that 'caring reflexivity is defined by and enacted through relationships that recognize and honor the participants within their specific context'. Listening to and watching the aides share their experiences and feelings through the ropes representational exercise reinforced the reciprocity of the data-generation methods I had chosen. Sharing their stories together at the last meeting was a memorable and collaborative way to honour and recognise the teacher aides. This sense of reciprocity was a gift to both the aides and me, and certainly helped bind research and practice together.

Synthesis

This chapter has presented the methodology and research approval process for this study. The lived experiences of teacher aides in Preparatory classes in Queensland Catholic schools are the focus of this study—a topic unrehearsed in the literature. The participants, six Preparatory Year teacher aides, have been introduced. I have discussed the research design and raised the concern of the difficulty of locating and hearing the stories of these teacher aides within the research approval process. The selection of data-generation

methods to centralise the voice of this marginalised group of teacher aides was critical to this study. Specific data-generation tools such as synergetic focus groups and imaginal experiences helped to minimise the researcher's input and direction and, in turn, raise the profile of the participants.

Integral to van Manen's (1984) methodological structure, analysis and inquiry go hand in hand. Pursuing phenomenological inquiry demands deep analysis and thoughtful practice. As such, listening, reading and searching the texts for meaning; writing and rewriting; and reflecting individually and collaboratively with colleagues were key research practices. In conjunction with these strategies, the use of metaphor to deconstruct and analyse meanings was important to this process. To hear the 'teacher aides stories: not just the story I thought I would like to hear' (Sonter, 2010, p. 254), the use of metaphorical data-generation methods was beneficial. The design of tools to open conversations and investigate feelings, assumptions and experiences resulted from reflexive practice. Using these strategies afforded the experiences of the teacher aides to be heard. Moreover, adopting a 'stance of reciprocity' (Trainor & Bouchard, 2012, p. 3) enabled the implementation of the data-generation activities to be employed in ways that honoured and recognised the significance of the aides and their stories.

This study now turns to the aides themselves, and explores the meanings of their lived experiences in Preparatory classrooms through the analysis of the stories, experiences and descriptions captured in the data. The analysis of the data reveals ambiguity and marginality as major knots or hurdles in their lived experiences, reflecting the findings in the literature review. These issues are evidenced by a lack of role recognition, which affects their daily experiences and relationships within the classroom, within the school as an organisation, and in the political and policy arena. The following chapter, 'Organising Stuff', explores the organisational role conditions of the teacher aides, and offers insights into their lived experiences within Preparatory classrooms.

Chapter Five: Organising Stuff

I seem to be the one in there organising...and there's just jobs and stuff! (D, 3p1)

Introduction

This chapter explores the organisational nature of the aides' role and considers how the allocation of resources (built and human) affects their lived experiences in Preparatory classes. As revealed earlier, before the rollout of the Preparatory Year, many Catholic schools, including two schools in this study, did not offer preschool classes. One other school in this research study opened a preschool room in 2006 as a means of transition into the Preparatory Year in 2007. Without the experience of preschool classes at their school, many principals, staff and parents were unfamiliar with provisions, philosophy, principles and pedagogical practices suited to four- and five-year-old children. It can be seen that the introduction of the Preparatory Year presented enormous organisational challenges to schools, including building provision, new resources and personnel roles.

This study focuses on the aides in this situation. Their role is multifaceted, comprising pedagogical and organisational responsibilities. These facets often overlap. Organisational tasks often affect pedagogical aspects and vice versa. Some of the tasks undertaken by Preparatory aides could be categorised as housekeeping, such as preparing resources, tidying and maintaining equipment. These tasks also included clerical aspects of their role such as photocopying, maintaining photographic or observational records and timetables. This chapter begins by considering the effect the allocation and organisation of hours had upon their lived experiences.

Preparatory Aide Hours

Under the Preparatory reform package, Preparatory classes were provided with funding for teacher aides in relation to class size. The recommended Preparatory class size was 25. The allocation of hours for this class size was 15 hours. Classes with enrolments below 25 children had reduced funding allocations, and class sizes from 26 to 30 children were funded for 20 hours of aide time. A sliding scale model depicting the number of

hours allocated per class size was released to inform principals' decision making when determining teacher aide work hours. A discussion about hours was raised in Chapter Two. However, it is revisited here because of the effect on the teacher aides in this research.

The provision of hours for Preparatory aide time was a dramatic reduction from the previous state preschool allocation of 30 hours of aide time per class of 25 children. This reduction in work hours had significant bearing on two aides in my study, Bec and Amanda, who worked in schools that had previously provided preschool classes.

Same job—fewer hours

When Bec and Amanda had previously worked as teacher aides in preschool classrooms at their school, they both worked 30 hours per week with 25 children aged four to five years. When Preparatory classes were introduced in their school, their work hours were reduced to fit the new funding scheme.

Both aides were confused by the change in hours. They could not see a significant difference from what the school had offered in preschool classes. Amanda explained: *We did preschool last year in both rooms and then this year converted it to Prep. It hasn't been a change at all* (A, 1p2). Bec was also puzzled. While she acknowledged that there were building and structural changes, she believed that *going from preschool to Prep ... it's still activity based, you are still doing the same sort of things* (B, 16p13). Both aides identified that their role still comprised clerical and pedagogical responsibilities. Amanda fumed: *What I get annoyed at is last year ... you had to have two people because it was called preschool ... You had to have two people there. Now this year [you don't] because they have changed names, the age of the children* (A, 2p37). Amanda felt that the increase in the children's ages by six months was negligible: *the kids are virtually the same age because most of our kids did turn five at the beginning of the year* (A, 2p37) and did not warrant such a reduction of teacher aide hours. Both Amanda and Bec were upset that they were still expected to undertake the same tasks, with fewer hours and more children.

When the Preparatory Year was introduced at her school, Bec's work hours were reduced by a third to 20 hours per week, in line with the funding model for class size.

The class Bec worked in had 28 children—three more than the previous preschool enrolment size of 25 children. The funded aide hour provision for Preparatory class sizes between 26 and 30 children was 20 hours per week. This reduction of hours to 20 hours per week meant that she constantly felt stressed: *You are just not getting the time and I find I don't like it because ... everything rushed through and then I've got to think well I have to get 28 of these done* (B, 16p13). Bec found that the increased enrolment coupled with the reduction of hours significantly affected the children as well. She believed that children were rushed through activities and not supported effectively. She missed working 30 hours because she felt that this enabled her to have *a better rapport with the kids* (B, 16p13) whereas now she felt *so awful because you are pushing the kids through to get this [work] done* (B, 16p13). Worryingly, Bec had suffered from health issues related to personal stress and anxiety, which resulted in her taking a term off work. The hurried nature of her role and the pressure she felt to keep up would most likely have contributed to her ill health. Of particular concern was the amount of stress Bec felt with an enrolment of 28 children. The class size could be up to 30 children with the same teacher aide hours funding provision. This would mean an even lower adult-child ratio, which would result in Bec rushing more, spending less time with each child and having to manage the workload of an additional two children. This scenario could have affected her health even more.

Amanda's story differed. When the school changed from offering preschool classes to Preparatory classes, the parents were outraged. Amanda stated: *The parents cracked it about not having a full-time aide* (A, 1p2). The parents understood the value of the full-time teacher aide in preschool and wanted the same provision for their Preparatory children. The principal and administrative team responded and negotiated a fee increase to offset the additional wages. As a result, both Preparatory classes at Amanda's school employed teacher aides from 8.30 am until 3.00 pm. This was considerably more than the funded provision of 15 hours, and equated to 27.5 hours per week. Amanda was very realistic that the only reason the school could offer such a large allocation of teacher aide hours for Preparatory classes was because *the parents are funding it* (A, 1p2).

While Amanda felt fortunate to work 27.5 hours per week and was appreciative of the initiative of the principal to increase the hours in response to the parents, she was angry

that she was still left with a shortfall in hours from the previous year. She complained to the principal: *I said, 'You've cut me two and a half hours a week. That is five hours out of my pay. That is a lot of money for me, five hours'* (A, 1p21). She was upset that the principal may not have thought that five hours' pay would have a significant effect. She told him that, although *it might not be a lot of money for you* (A, 1p22), she found that the reduction considerably affected her wages and family. Like the other aides in this study, Amanda was a mother with children living at home. She had taken the role of aide at a school so she could earn an income to help support her family. The aide's role suited her and her family because it aligned with school hours and she did not need to pay for her children to attend care during holiday periods. Amanda was offended that the principal could not match the previous allocation of hours from preschool and commented: *I was a bit dirty that I dropped two and half hours this year* (A, 1p2). Amanda may have felt that the principal trivialised the value of her salary, and thus, like teacher aides in the literature, felt undervalued (Bourke, 2008; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Lewis, 2005).

Amanda's and Bec's experiences reflected the findings of the literature review, which confirmed that the reduction of teacher aide hours for Preparatory classes was a contentious issue. Many sectors fought hard for change, and many principals and schools provided additional funding from other resource allocations or fees to provide more teacher aide hours. Of the five schools in this study, Amanda's school was the only one that increased the school fees to support the funding of teacher aide hours for Preparatory classes.

Working arrangements and allocation of hours affected each teacher aide in my study. These organisational tasks were the principal's responsibility. In Chapter Two, I raised the issue of the effect of relationships between the principal and the Preparatory staff in securing effective resource allocation for Preparatory classes. The aides in my study unanimously believed that the principal's knowledge and understanding of the Preparatory Year informed what resource provision (built and human) was offered to them. Their stories offered key insights into the effect of workplace relationships between teacher aides and principals and the effect of these relationships upon work hours as well as their sense of belonging and job security.

I turn now to an exploration of the lived experiences of the teacher aides' work hours and arrangements and their perceptions of the principals' understanding of the Preparatory Year upon these work arrangements. I begin this discussion by considering the varied and often ambiguous working arrangements of the aides.

Workplace arrangements

All six Preparatory classes in my study showed variances in the work hours of the teacher aides. Bec, Jacqui and Dianne's Preparatory classes were allocated aide hours in line with the funding provision. Amanda's school provided additional hours through increased school fees. The Preparatory classes at Leanne's school were allocated additional aide hours by the principal. Leanne and Sally also worked additional hours within their classroom supporting children with additional needs. Some principals organised provisions so that Preparatory classes received more aide time at the beginning of the year, then tapered these hours off during the year as the children became more independent and familiar with school procedures.

The structure of the aides' work hours also varied within this study. Some aides were assigned to one class with one teacher, whereas others worked across two or three Preparatory classrooms. Two aides worked elsewhere in the school as well. Another contributing factor to the variance in teacher aide hours was the amount of voluntary work the aides undertook. Some aides worked unpaid additional hours to support the teacher and class. This practice was common from the introduction of the Preparatory Year and added to the ambiguity of the allocation of teacher aide hours.

Ambiguous hours

During the Preparatory Year trials, some aides worked longer than their designated hours to support the class and manage their responsibilities. Leanne began work as an aide at her school during the Preparatory trial. She explained:

When I first started with the Prep trial, first up they said, okay any hours you're working above and beyond, you've got to document it. Then they came back and said to me, no don't do it and then the teacher has got to say how they are coping without you. This went up and down all through the trial. (L, 1p27)

Leanne's comments showed the difficulty that arose for the recording of an accurate picture of teacher aide hours. In order for the Preparatory trial to document whether the provisioned hours were satisfactory and the effect of reduced aide hours upon staff and children, the aides were discouraged from working extra hours. After the trial finished, and Preparatory classes were introduced in schools, many aides worked extra hours to support the teachers and children, or to manage their clerical or housekeeping tasks. The aides' stories revealed many varied, unofficial work arrangements.

The funding for aides stipulated when an aide would be replaced. Often, if aides were away ill for a whole day, they would be replaced. However, if aides were ill or away for part of a day, they would not be replaced. A conversation between the aides at the second synergetic focus group meeting illustrated some of these flexible work arrangements:

If I had a sicky for the whole day I would get replaced, but if I left at midday to be at the appointment by one, I wouldn't be replaced. Because we were getting ready for the open day, she [the teacher] said, 'no, I would prefer you to come in until midday ... and have someone who knows what they are doing for half a day' ... But that was between her and me so she let me go for the rest of the day. (L, 1p44)

Leanne got on well with the teacher with whom she worked at the time of this discussion. The teacher valued Leanne's support and acknowledged the extra hours she worked. Leanne explained that her teacher offered her *a day off because I had done so many hours unpaid. But that was entirely between her and me (L, 1p44)*. Leanne affirmed that the principal was aware of this arrangement and supported the teacher's offer. Sally explained that she had a similar arrangement with her teacher. She commented that her teacher had:

allowed me to have a couple of hours off. I've banked them up because there could be something that I've got to go to for my daughter ... but that is only because I've done a lot of extended hours and she likes to reward me for that. (S, 1p45)

Leanne explained that, often, teachers acknowledged the extra hours that aides worked by giving gifts:

I saw one teacher aide walking out today with a bottle of wine. I said, 'Hang on a tick, where did you get that?' She said she gets something at the end of each term from her teachers. Quite often I will come in and if we've had a

really busy time, there will be a little box of chocolates and a thank you card, especially after first term. During first term I get lots of thank you cards. It is nice to be appreciated. (L, 1p45)

Although Leanne felt appreciated in 2007, this was not the case when we met again in 2010. When she commenced work with a different teacher, she did not feel as valued. She explained:

Well I'm just over a bit, I'm over it. You work your bum off, like I have started leaving the classroom tea and lunch if I don't have a duty I go to the staff room. (L, 3p5) So I walk in the door at 8.30 am and I walk out the door at five to three [2.55 pm] now. I used to walk in the door at 8.00 am and do catch-up work. Now if I walk in at 8.00 am I feel like I've got to do what's on my list, what's been left there for me ... so I walk out the door now and I do not do long hours. (L, 3p6)

Leanne resented working extra hours without acknowledgement from her teacher. She was very aware that other aides in the school took meal breaks and worked their allocated hours only: *other general aides and the learning support aides in the school, they all go to the staff room at morning tea and lunch. They all walk in the door at 8.30 am, they all walk out the door on time (L, 3p6)*. Leanne admitted she felt guilty initially when she decided not to volunteer extra hours, but she was resolute that she was not prepared to continue working extra hours without a sense of support or recognition. At the end of 2010, Leanne renegotiated her role, left the Preparatory classes and became a learning support aide at her school.

The maternal, relational nature of their role bears weight in this discussion. As discussed previously in this study, the literature points to the problem arising from the perception of work with children as undervalued and underpaid. Many aides may have felt responsibility or duty to support their teacher or the children by working longer hours. This in turn may have affected the aides because some may have felt pressured to commence work earlier or stay later, and felt guilty if they did not offer to extend their support without pay. They may have resented the lack of pay or status this afforded. Leanne's experiences offered insight into this dilemma.

The issue of unpaid hours was one of the most common causes for variance of work hours in my study. The other major reason for varied work hours was the provision of support hours for children with additional needs.

Varied hours—supporting children with additional needs

Supporting children with additional needs was common to most of the aides in this study. Four aides, Amanda, Dianne, Leanne and Sally, identified that some Preparatory classes at their school had children with additional needs enrolled; however, not all children received funding. As the Preparatory Year was the first year of school, many children were enrolled without a diagnosis. Some parents were not aware or did not recognise that their children had learning, behavioural or developmental delays or disabilities. Not all parents sought a diagnosis for their child, and others were still engaged in the process of referral and diagnosis. Further, a diagnosis did not automatically attract funding. Schools received funding dependent on the ascertainment of the child's diagnosis, level of ability and support required to assist the child's participation and learning. Like the Preparatory teacher aide allocation, it was the principal's responsibility to organise learning support aides to support these children.

Sometimes a learning support aide was appointed to work with the children in the classroom alongside the teacher and Preparatory aide. This system was in place at Amanda's school. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, both Preparatory classes at Amanda's school were allocated 27.5 hours of teacher aide time per week. Amanda explained that the other Preparatory class at her school that had 18 children enrolled received additional funding for one child diagnosed with Down syndrome. In this classroom, an additional support aide worked for 16 hours per week as well as the Preparatory aide, who worked for 27.5 hours per week. As a result, this Preparatory class of 18 children received 43.5 hours of aide time. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the parents at Amanda's school paid additional fees to support longer hours for Preparatory aides. It was unclear how the additional needs support aide hours in this particular class were funded. Amanda did not know whether the school received the equivalent of 16 hours of additional funding to support this child or whether the principal had reallocated budgets to meet the cost of the additional aide.

Often, principals would give these support hours to the Preparatory aide. This was beneficial for the children because they received support from a familiar adult. The aide benefited because her hours were increased, and the teacher benefited from both longer hours of aide support and the consistency of working with one aide across the week. This was the case for Leanne, who in 2007 gained an additional five hours per week of

work because of additional needs funding. She explained that her principal and the teacher saw *that one person in one room doing all those hours is the best thing for those children* (L, 1p48).

The paid additional needs support work was advantageous for the aides in terms of extra work hours, as well as promoting consistency for the children and teachers involved. However, the funding arrangement for children with additional needs was complex because most of the aides did not know how much funding was provided per child or how the principal assigned funds. This made it difficult for the aides to predict what additional work hours they might gain.

Although some schools, such as Leanne and Amanda's, increased the amount of aide time for the Preparatory class regardless of the funding levels, Dianne's did not. Not only were the classes in which Dianne worked resourced at the most basic level of funding, there was no consideration of the class dynamics. Dianne struggled to comprehend how Preparatory staff were expected to support children with additional needs without additional personnel or hours. In 2010, three years after she had commenced work in the Preparatory classes, she was angry that the Preparatory staff received no additional support. She was exhausted. She felt overworked and undervalued. She complained:

That's a problem I think that Prep aides have ... because you are in the room and you are given those hours and you get these special needs children which have every right to be there, but because there's somebody in there, no dollars come from anywhere, and you are just expected to pick up that slack as well.
(D, 3p2)

Dianne thought that the principal assumed that the Preparatory class was already supported with aide time and, therefore, no additional time or resources was required, regardless of the needs of the children. Dianne was frustrated by the perceived lack of support the Preparatory staff received from the principal. She felt that the principal did not fully understand or appreciate the Preparatory teacher aide's role, and had unrealistic expectations of her.

Great variances in both voluntary and paid work hours could be seen throughout the duration of my study. It was evident that some principals chose to allocate additional resources to increase aide hours to support Preparatory children. It also appeared that

there was a correlation between the principal's understanding of and receptivity to the Preparatory Year, and the organisation and allocation of teacher aide time for Preparatory classes. I will now consider this issue more closely.

Receptivity affects hours

Most aides in my study believed that the principals were keen to promote Preparatory classes to the school community. This additional year of schooling brought increased enrolments, income and entitlements to schools.

At the beginning of the Preparatory Year trial process, 52 Queensland state schools were selected to enter the trial for the first year along with 10 Catholic schools and four independent schools. During the second and third year, further applications were invited; however, places were strictly limited. To be accepted, principals and administration teams at schools invested considerable time preparing and submitting a detailed, comprehensive proposal. Leanne's school was involved in the Preparatory Year trial. In real terms, Leanne's principal would have been very proactive about gaining a Preparatory class at the school, and taking part in the trial process. However, it cannot be assumed that all principals were as keen.

When the Preparatory Year was rolled out in 2007, Leanne continued working at the same school, led by the same principal. She worked for 25 hours per week with a class of 22 children. The funding provision for the teacher aide with this enrolment was 13.5 hours per week. The principal at Leanne's school allocated additional hours to the class, despite the funding shortfall. Five hours of Leanne's hours were allocated from the budget for children with additional needs. The remaining six and a half hours were resourced *because of [the principal's] goodwill to do that. [The principal] has found the money to do that* (L, 2p36). Leanne commended the principal for being astute and catering to the needs of the teacher, children and aide. Leanne explained: *You know, she has taken on board [the teacher's] feedback and as I say we've had a few teachers over the years and she has taken on board all their feedback* (L, 2p36). She boasted: *We're scoring 20 [hours] with just 22 kids!* (L, 2p26).

Leanne had previously worked as an assistant in community kindergartens and had a comprehensive understanding of, and commitment to, play-based pedagogical practices.

Leanne was adamant that lower adult–child ratios significantly affected practice and quality. She was genuinely excited about the additional allocation of hours for the Preparatory class in 2007. She exclaimed:

We're doing the whole play-based curriculum and everything and it works well but [the principal] has always ensured we've had enough aide hours to do it, because we've always said that it can't work unless you've got it. She has been fully aware of that and always supportive because it just doesn't work. It can't work. (L, 2p26)

In practical terms, the principal's support and receptivity for the Preparatory Year affected Leanne's lived experience in terms of both employment and matching and affirming her professional pedagogical beliefs.

Reduced understanding—reduced support

However, most aides felt that, in spite of being receptive to the idea of a Preparatory Year, their principals had little understanding of Preparatory curriculum, personnel or children. Bec's frank statement captured the feelings of many of the aides: *They [school principals] are all keen to get the numbers but not understanding what it is all about. They have no idea what happens in Prep, absolutely none! (B, 3p3)* Bec and Dianne were angry at the lack of support offered from their principals for the Preparatory staff. A conversation in 2010 demonstrated this frustration:

Bec: The teacher and I were struggling ... but we didn't get any support ... it took til the end of the year to get something in place...

Dianne: And [the principal] not really realising what it's like in Prep and the support that's needed. (D, 3p3)

Bec explained that the lack of support made her initial experience of Preparatory very difficult. She felt isolated and forgotten.

During the photograph representation activity for data generation in 2011, Bec reflected upon her initial experiences in the Preparatory class. She chose a photograph depicting a tangle of ropes (see Figure 4) and commented: *We were left on our own! ... That could be your stomach! (B, 17p2)*



Figure 4: Alex Skelly (2006). *Knotted rope*.

Issues such as managing building resources such as toilets and the safety concerns resulting from this, supporting children with additional needs without extra funding and the rushed nature of the aide's role because of reduced hours and increased adult-child ratios were exhausting and stressful. Bec recalled feeling anxious and fraught with the amount of responsibility given to the aides' role without support or recognition.

She felt helpless, voiceless and very insecure about her role. She picked up a photograph of a rope maker knotting and splicing a rope (see Figure 5) and remarked: *That one would have been how I would have been feeling at some stage* (B,17p3).

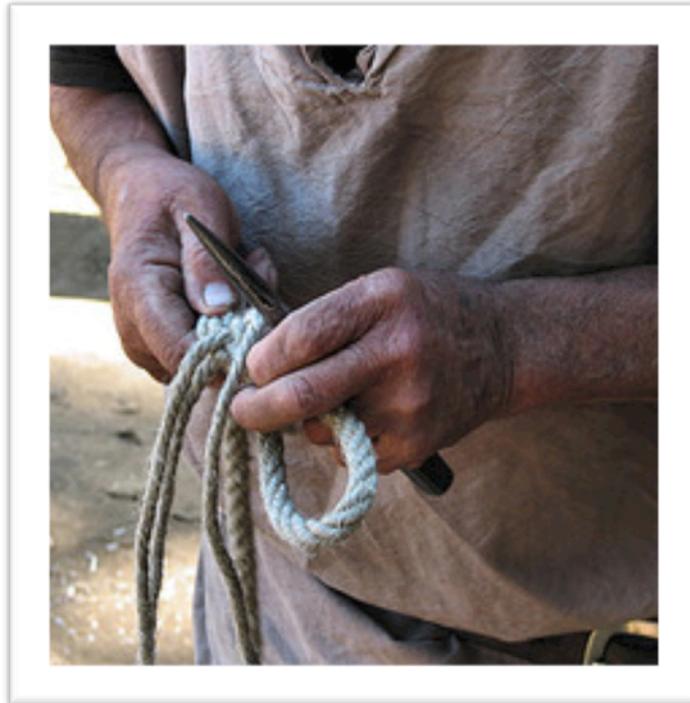


Figure 5: Irma (2008). *Rope maker at work.*

Bec's and Dianne's comments concurred with Stamopoulos's (1998) investigation of the introduction of pre-primary classes in Western Australia, which found that many principals grappled with the holistic nature of early childhood philosophy and principles. The aides' experiences also resonated with Boardman's (2003) study, which found that educational leaders in Tasmania were unlikely to facilitate effective resource provisioning for early childhood classrooms without sound knowledge of early childhood principles and practices.

The teacher aides felt that many principals were unclear about the aides' role and did not understand the range of organisational and pedagogical tasks they undertook, and their value to Preparatory children and teachers. Like Boardman's (2003) findings, they felt this affected both the organisation and allocation of teacher aide hours. Throughout the five years of my study, Dianne and I often discussed the allocation of hours. Her working arrangement differed from that of the other aides because she worked across Preparatory classrooms as well as elsewhere in the school. When I visited Dianne's school in November 2010, we took up the conversation about hours again. Dianne was infuriated with her working arrangement and lack of hours in the Preparatory classrooms. She commented:

Last year there was a change of principal and this year when school first started, no aide hours had been allocated to Prep! Of course we'd turned up at the school but I wondered what would happen if we didn't when the Prep children arrived! (D, 9p1)

Not only was the wellbeing of the children and teachers jeopardised by this action, the teacher aides' livelihoods and sense of job security, sense of worth and belonging to the school community were ignored. It appeared that the principal trusted that the aides would turn up in an act of good faith or from a sense of duty. This perception correlates with the issue of maternal discourses, in which work with children is considered a woman's duty or place. Worryingly, this action could have also made it very difficult for the incoming principal to reassign budgets and personnel to meet the needs of the Preparatory classes in a short time frame. Faced with this problem on entry to the school and the workload involved to rectify the problem, the new principal could have felt that the Preparatory classes were a nuisance, or of very low priority and importance, further affecting the relationship between the Preparatory staff and the principal. In Dianne's case, we can see a direct relationship between the hours allocated to her and the principal's view or understanding of the importance of Preparatory aides for classroom practice.

No support from teachers affects hours

During the synergetic focus group meetings in 2007, Dianne was surprised that the other participants were all working in one classroom and many had considerably more hours than her. After the first meeting in June 2007, Dianne spoke to her teachers about her hours. She explained that other schools were allocating extra aide hours to Preparatory classes. The teachers' responses shocked her. One teacher, who had taught Preparatory classes in another state in Australia, told Dianne she could not see a problem with the allocated hours. She told Dianne: *I don't know what people are complaining about because ... we got no aide time. They sat at desks; they did curriculum work (D, 2p28)*. Dianne explained that the other Preparatory teacher she worked with had taught in primary classes and was not used to having an aide so she saw no need for additional hours either. Dianne was upset by their comments. She tried to explain how the other aides found the extra time beneficial because it enabled the Preparatory staff to be more responsive to the children's interests and engage the children in discussions about what they would like to do. However, the teacher

dismissed this. Dianne recalled: *She said she couldn't stand not having something planned to do* (D, 2p28). This conversation worried me. It brought to light issues regarding the teachers' interpretation of the curriculum as well as their expectations of young children. Both these issues are outside the parameters of this study; however, the teachers' comments demonstrated the little understanding they had of the effect of reduced hours on Dianne's role or her lived experience in the classroom. Although she did not divulge any more information about this conversation, Dianne could have felt let down or affronted by the teachers' reaction, and may have been hesitant to broach issues regarding time or hours with them again. In real terms, the teachers' response silenced Dianne and potentially reduced her opportunity to seek further hours from the principal because she may have felt the teachers would see this as unnecessary and not support her.

A numbers game

Before the Preparatory Year was introduced, principals were familiar with allocating hours for aides to complete primarily clerical or housekeeping tasks, or to assist teachers with children in very specific time slots for academic support. When allocating hours for Preparatory classes, some of the aides in my study believed that principals followed this same process: filling hours without consideration of the importance of the relational nature of pedagogical practice.

Some aides believed that the principal thought that, as long as someone was in the room for the designated number of hours, that would suffice. This practice had key implications for two aides in particular—Jacqui and Dianne—who both worked part-time in Preparatory classes as well as elsewhere in the school. Dianne's and Jacqui's dual roles fragmented the time spent in the Preparatory classroom, which proved problematic for both them and the teachers with whom they worked. I now explore their stories more closely.

Knowledge of hours

Regardless of her teachers' beliefs about the role and place of teacher aides, Dianne felt that the Preparatory teachers were frustrated about allocation of aide hours. They had no input into how many teacher aide hours were budgeted or allocated for Preparatory

classes, or the length of time the aides worked within the hours provided. Dianne felt that the other aides with whom she worked were also frustrated by the lack of knowledge. She commented: *We don't know what we could be having or what we can't have because we don't know what the budget is* (D, 2p46). The teachers and aides were marginalised from the decision-making process and potentially missed out on resource allocation. In turn, the children were affected because there was less continuity of aide support as well as the potential for a decreased adult–child ratio and lack of resources.

She believed that the teachers felt that Preparatory aide hours were not a high a priority, and felt unsupported by the principal. However, it would have been difficult for the teachers to argue for extra aide hours if their feelings about the lack of value of aide hours in Preparatory classrooms were known. Again, this could further marginalise and silence the aides and complicate Dianne's argument for consistent hours in the Preparatory classes.

Dianne and Leanne talked about the structure of Dianne's hours and the effect on the teachers:

Dianne: The Prep teachers ... haven't had any say themselves in terms of what happens. I'm just gone, and it's like, well, Prep's not important over there.

Leanne: See your old principal wasn't very receptive to Prep. (L, 3p3)

Leanne had the most experience working as a Preparatory aide, and was familiar with many other schools in the area. She saw a distinct connection between the principal's receptivity to the Preparatory Year and the allocation of Dianne's hours, correlating with the discussion earlier in this section. Yet, if the principal knew that the Preparatory teachers did not see the value of aide hours, he may have allocated hours to other priorities in response.

Dianne's absence from the Preparatory classroom affected the teachers with whom she worked. The teachers lost Dianne's knowledge of the children, classroom and curriculum. Dianne noted that there were times when she would come into the Preparatory classroom and find that another aide had repeated some preparation work that Dianne had already undertaken, which wasted both time and resources. Over the years, different aides were appointed to the Preparatory classroom. Dianne explained

that, often, they would prepare resources in a different way than the teachers preferred, or reorganise resources, which created confusion for Dianne and the teachers. Dianne felt she wasted valuable time trying to locate resources that had been shelved elsewhere in the room.

Dianne commented that the teachers would refer to her in preference to the other aides. The other teachers would ask her where resources were or to prepare resources for a specific activity. She reasoned that this occurred because, in the past, there had been times of confusion because a different aide did not understand what was required of the timetable. Dianne remarked that, when she was away from the classroom, the teachers had to spend additional time organising the aides and checking resources, which affected their planning or teaching time.

Fragmented roles—fragmented hours

Not only was Dianne removed from the Preparatory classroom to work with children across the school, in 2010 she was appointed as the school workplace health and safety officer. This additional role involved seven days of training and brought on new challenges. Dianne complained that this role was much larger than she had expected. Dianne explained that she was called out of the room frequently, in particular, by the grounds person. She was not happy about this arrangement and felt her pedagogical role with the children was further undervalued. She was worried that the principal felt that he had invested time in her training and so now he was reluctant to find somebody else. This was of great concern to Dianne as she struggled to gain support from the principal to undertake professional development in her role as Preparatory aide. I explore this issue further later in this study; however, of particular interest here is the fact that the principal chose to invest time for Dianne to undertake this training and attend to safety matters within the school. Yet, her serious safety concerns regarding toilet arrangements for Preparatory children and staff, revealed later in this chapter, were ignored, and her role within and value to the Preparatory classes was diminished and threatened. Dianne's lived experience of her hours and role expectations affected her participation, sense of belonging and professional identity. I explore Dianne's story and these implications further later in this study. I now turn to Jacqui's experience of fragmented hours.

Like Dianne, Jacqui worked outside the Preparatory classroom during the week because she shared the role with another aide. Jacqui worked two days per week in a Preparatory class, and two days per week as a general aide at the school. Unlike Dianne, she enjoyed this balance. Jacqui was also a parent at the school and was involved in many fundraising and family activities. Jacqui had a friendly, confident disposition. The principal and administration team knew her well and, as a result, she was called upon to assist in the office frequently during her allocated Preparatory days. She rationalised: *The more you know the more, not that they expect from you, but the more capable you are ... I find because I'm capable, I get a lot of work because they know I do it quick and easily and without a fuss* (J, 14p4).

However, this presented a dilemma for both Jacqui and her teacher. In 2010, while I was visiting the room for an observation, Jacqui's teacher voiced her dissatisfaction with this procedure. She was irritated because, if another aide in the school needed to be replaced, the principal would often take Jacqui out of the Preparatory class to fill this position. Consequently, this would sometimes result in a different relief aide working in the classroom for each day of a week. She complained that the disruption to the classroom was acute because the relieving aide did not always know her, the children or the routine. Often, a relief aide may not have previously worked in a Preparatory class or hold qualifications specific to early childhood, making this even more difficult.

Both Jacqui and the Preparatory teacher believed that the principal thought that, as long as there was an aide in the Preparatory classroom, this was acceptable. Jacqui sarcastically remarked: *[The teacher] will cope, they'll be right! They'll just chuck someone else in there!* (J, 14p12). This arrangement suggested that the principal's understanding of the Preparatory aide's role was organisational, comprising clerical, preparation and cleaning tasks. There appeared to be little demonstrated awareness of the significance of consistent relationships, knowledge building and sharing between the children, teacher and aide in the classroom and the effect of this upon learning and teaching.

Like Dianne's experiences, these procedural arrangements illustrated the principal's lack of awareness that Preparatory teacher aides work directly with young children and

influence and benefit pedagogy and safe practice. In 2011, Jacqui worked with a new graduate teacher. In the first term, Jacqui was required to work in the office for several weeks: *They put me in the office and I had to train a new staff member* (J, 14p12). This left the graduate teacher working with a relief aide as well as the existing Preparatory aide. Jacqui felt this decision was unreasonable. She explained: *I mean it was pretty tough because I was in the office for probably three of the weeks that I was meant to be down here, so it was pretty unfair on [the teacher]* (J, 14p12).

Jacqui's experiences highlighted several dilemmas. She was viewed as competent and a valuable asset to the school; however, it seemed she was considered too valuable for her role in the Preparatory class. Again, this brings the low status of work with young children to the fore. While Jacqui enjoyed the status of the principal's confidence, she felt she was letting her teacher down, and the teacher was left in a compromised position. Further, Jacqui was concerned about the children's safe access to toilets in her absence because the classroom protocol relied on the Preparatory staff knowing which children left the classroom to use the toilet. The issue of children's safe access to toilets was raised in the literature review. Human- and built-resource provisions compounded safety concerns. This chapter has explored some effects of the human-resource allocation, which resulted in reduced aide hours. I now turn to consider the effect of built-resource provisions.

Built Environments

Provisioning space for the Preparatory Year was an enormous project for all schools involved in this study. New classrooms and playgrounds were built to accommodate the growth in school numbers. At some schools, existing classrooms were converted for the Preparatory children, and new classrooms were built for other grades. Some schools refurbished their existing preschool rooms as well; others used the preschool buildings and grounds as they stood and added new classrooms alongside these structures.

The new Preparatory Year classroom designs and specifications for Queensland state schools differed greatly from the previous state preschool regulations. As discussed in Chapter Two, key research (Thorpe, Tayler & Bridgstock et al., 2004) and newspaper reports (Allen, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b; Dullroy, 2004) revealed concerns about the reduced space allocation and toilet proximity. Although the size of the classroom was

difficult for one school in this study, the majority of the aides involved in this study were generally accepting of the size of their room. Because this study was undertaken in Queensland Catholic schools, the classrooms were not built to the same design as that recommended for Queensland state school Preparatory classes. Most of the aides felt that their classrooms were large enough to house the children and furniture adequately.

Despite the perceived adequacy of space, the location, layout and resource provisions within the buildings were not considered satisfactory and affected the aides significantly. Discrepancies in size, storage facilities and toilet access between Preparatory classrooms at their schools were problematic. Many aides felt it was unfair that classes housed in existing preschool rooms had purpose-built storage, kitchens, preparation areas and toilets within the building, while other Preparatory classes at the same school did not have these facilities. Many Preparatory classrooms were built in blocks of classrooms without adequate preparation and storage facilities and were located at considerable distances from toilets. Most of the aides spoke of difficulties of managing limited storage space, and impracticality of design. The building structures not only presented challenges to the aides in terms of organisation of resources or children, they also presented workplace health and safety concerns. I examine these issues first.

Work and storage space

Two aides in this study held major concerns about the design of the classroom and storage space in their classrooms. These buildings had been purpose built for the Preparatory Year. This school had three Preparatory classes; one used the existing preschool building and the other two were in a new building. Within this new building, one classroom enjoyed a large storage, office and preparation work area at the rear of the classroom whereas the room next door had a very small sink unit and one small corner bench with shelves. Bec explained that, when the room was designed, she had raised her concern about it because of the lack of storage and toilet facilities. She was disappointed that the aides were not asked for input into the design of the buildings: *No-one asked us what we thought, what works and what doesn't* (B, 14p6). Both Bec and Jacqui experienced problems working in the classroom without storage facilities because they had to leave their rooms to go next door to the storage and work area to prepare or collect resources. They found this difficult and recalled that their teachers

were frustrated with this arrangement. Jacqui explained that, when she worked in the room with the larger storage and preparation area, she: *used to get stuff ready in the room and listen to the teacher so I felt like I was part of the room* (J, 14p6); however, when she worked in the other room, she would *miss what's happening and I remember last year Bec used to do it a lot and [the teacher] would say 'Where's Bec gone again? Where's Bec?'* and she kept on going in and [getting] her (J, 14p6). Although the larger storage room adequately housed the materials required for the children, the location of this space was impractical.

Both aides felt that working in the room without the preparation workspace disadvantaged them. They lost time in moving between classrooms and missed what was happening in the room. The teachers were also disadvantaged because they were left in their room with the children on their own while the aide left to prepare, collect or clean up resources. In Bec's case, the teacher also left the room to find her, leaving the children unattended.

Although this space may have worked for clerical aides who were not involved with children, Preparatory aides have a pedagogical role with children as well as a clerical and housekeeping role. The multiplicity of the Preparatory aides' role was not considered in the design of this building, and the aides were excluded from offering input into a more effective working arrangement. This particular building design marginalised the aides from both their teaching partner and the children, and affected their sense of value and belonging to the class. However, of grave concern to most of the aides in this study was the lack of proximity of toilets and the subsequent issues this presented.

Toilets

To recap from previous discussions, although former preschool rooms were designed to include three junior unisex toilets, partitioned with low screens, within easy sight of the main playroom, toilets were not included inside Preparatory buildings. Throughout this study, from 2007 until 2011, the teacher aides raised the issue of toilets as a common, serious concern. Some schools with existing preschool buildings used these for one or two classes of Preparatory children; however, most of the Preparatory classes at the schools in this study used toilet blocks outside the Preparatory building. At four of five

schools in my study, the toilets were out of sight from inside the classroom. All toilet blocks in this study were segregated by gender. At one school, the toilets used by the Preparatory children were only accessible to Preparatory and Year 1 children. At all other schools, toilets closest to Preparatory rooms could be used by all schoolchildren.

Safety concerns with regard to children

Children's access to and use of toilets was an unresolved dilemma for the aides. Over the period of five years, many teachers and aides devised a variety of systems for supporting children's use of the toilets; yet the aides were unsatisfied with the process. Key problems identified by the aides were safety issues and the amount of time toileting involved. Importantly, these issues pertained to the aides as well as the children.

Access

Some children found using the toilets very difficult. Whereas toilets in preschool, kindergarten and childcare settings had screened partitions between each toilet, general school toilets, including facilities for Preparatory children, had lockable doors on each cubicle. Some small children avoided the toilets because they could not reach the door handle. Other children could *hardly open those doors, they are really hard to open* (B, 14p5). Some children were worried about closing the door in case they could not unlock it. Bec recalled several problems:

We didn't realise that one of the kids wasn't going to the toilet. We thought they were all going but this little one she was so frightened that she couldn't reach, so she never went. Her mother came and saw us and we thought how did we miss that? ... [another] couldn't open the door ... and one of our boys had already slammed his finger in the door, he can hardly open the door. (B, 14p5)

Bec was concerned that her teacher and she had not realised the child was avoiding the toilet. However, without direct access to toilets, the staff would not know whether all children were using the toilets. Bec agreed: *You hardly know what they are doing* (B, 14p5).

Often, the children needed to use the toilets during class time. This presented a common challenge for Preparatory aides and teachers. Together, these teams needed to facilitate children's safe and timely access to toilets. As a result, a variety of strategies were

implemented for Preparatory children to use the toilets. Dianne and Sally took all the children to the toilet several times during the day for the first term. At Dianne's school, the toilet block was located at the end of the classroom block adjacent to the playground. The teachers at this school expected the children to line up outside the toilet block with Dianne and wait for their turn to use the toilet. After this, the children returned to the teacher inside the classroom. Dianne was frustrated at the time wasted by having to monitor the toilets; however, she conceded that this was quite a safe option for the children. As the year progressed, the children began to access the toilets independently.

Many classes used a chart or tag system for toileting. The children would leave the classrooms in pairs of girls or boys, and usually only a maximum of four children could leave at a time. In some classes, children left the room alone to go to the toilet. To monitor who was leaving the classroom, some teachers made toilet charts on which the children would place their name or photograph when they were leaving the classroom. Amanda and Bec's teacher used a *board with names on it and if they went to the toilet they shifted their names* (B, 14p5). Jacqui's and Sally's classes used a lanyard tag system. Four lanyards were hung up next to the door. When children left the room to go to the toilet, they would take a lanyard to wear. There were two lanyards for girls, and two for boys of a different colour.

Because most toilets were out of sight of the classrooms, the children had potential not only to visit the toilet but also to play around the toilet and other areas of the grounds. Jacqui commented that they had to restrict the number of children leaving the classroom to two at a time, even when other children required the toilets: *We know that four [year olds] can't wait but then they ... they muck up. They run around. They hide behind the building* (J, 14p5). Sally agreed: *We have found that when we allowed too many to go they would have a party and play up so now we allow two to go, come back, another two to go, come back* (S, 1p31). Dianne also found children playing around the toilets during class time: *There was noise and two boys had gone to go to the boys' toilets and two girls had gone to go to the girls' toilets except they were playing tiggly so they were running in and out of the toilets* (D, 1p31). Dianne felt strongly that this was not the children's fault: *they are just little kids. They are just playing* (D, 1p31).

Amanda was worried about supervising children and maintaining their safety when the toilets were out of sight. The toilets for the Preparatory children at her school were just outside the classroom door; yet she found that the children still *play up then* (A, 2p1). She was alarmed that aides at other schools could not supervise children easily while they were toileting: *I don't know how you can do it with the toilets being far away from where you are* (A, 2p1). Not only could the children slip over on wet floors, they could also be harmed out of sight of the classroom.

Bullying and harm

In most schools in my study, older children accessed the same toilet block as Preparatory children. When they were away from adults, there was the potential for children to be bullied or provoked while visiting the toilet block. This risk was heightened for children who found using toilets while dressed in uniforms difficult and, therefore, spent a long time in the toilets undressing and dressing.

Bullying issues occurred in two schools in this study. Sally revealed: *We did have issues with bullying. A kid would actually be in there and bully a child* (S, 2p4). Dianne commented that a seven-year-old boy had been *picking on some of the Preps that were in the toilet* (D, 2p1). In both these instances, older children had harassed the younger Preparatory children, threatening or harming them out of sight of adults.

During the course of this study, several alarming incidents occurred in Brisbane schools that raised the issue of children's safety in toilets. Some schools reported incidents of intruders loitering around the children's toilet blocks or hiding out of sight inside the cubicles. Of particular concern during this study was the stabbing death of a young school student in the male toilet block of a Catholic school in North Brisbane. This chilling death not only affected this particular school community, but also raised the issue of bullying and children's safety in toilets. As a result of these incidents, many schools implemented or enforced existing buddy systems for children of all ages leaving classrooms during class time. However, three of the six classes of Preparatory children in my study still allowed children to leave the classroom alone to access toilets. The aides' stories about the children playing in and around the toilets and hiding behind buildings brought safety concerns to the fore.

Without having direct sight of the toilets, the aides had to leave the classroom to check the children. Dianne explained:

You can't see what they are doing down there. You don't know what they are doing and the teacher will quite often say to you, 'look they've been down there for a long time. Will you go down and check out what is happening please?' (D, 2p1)

Although the tag or board systems enabled the staff to know which child or children were out of the classroom, it was up to the staff to notice which children were absent and for how long they were absent. Preparatory classes often had more than 25 children enrolled. Classrooms were busy, and often teachers and aides could be engrossed with activities. Determining the length of time children were absent from classrooms was sometimes difficult. Teachers and aides sometimes forgot how long children had been out of the classroom, and so the aide had to leave the classroom to check. This procedure interrupted the aide's involvement in both organisational and/or pedagogical tasks, in turn, affecting the classroom teacher and children. Earlier in this chapter, I revealed Jacqui's concern about relief aides working in the classroom. If the relief aides did not know the children, they would not be able to identify which children were out of the classroom. This would put the onus of monitoring toilet access solely on the teacher, who could easily misjudge the length of time children were out of the classroom because of their teaching activities. Further, teacher aides were not present all day. As a result, teachers were the only adult in the Preparatory classrooms at times. This meant that teachers needed to call on other staff for assistance either to check on the missing children or to supervise the class while the teacher left the room. In some cases, the teachers left the classroom unattended to check the toilet area. This was another potential safety risk for Preparatory children.

Hygiene

Bec was disturbed about children wearing lanyards with tags when going to the toilet. She argued that they were unhygienic because they could be splashed with urine. She commented: *those tags are so disgusting; the boys will pee on them* (B, 14p5). Not only could lanyards be splashed with urine, the children could easily touch these while wiping after defecating. On return to the classroom, the lanyards were hung back in

position ready for the next person. No regular cleaning practices for the lanyards were evident or documented. Consequently, germs were easily transferred among children.

Using the toilet brought other hygiene issues to the fore. Although most girls pulled their pants down to use the toilet, some took off their shorts and underpants. Likewise, some boys also pulled their shorts and pants off to use the toilet or urinal. Some children would completely strip to use the toilet: *One child takes the whole lot off. Shoes, shirt and hat, just to do a poo and then he has to put everything back on again* (S, 1p34). Dianne was frustrated at the amount of time some children took to use the toilet because they would remove all their clothing, then have to re-dress: *They've just had to go to the toilet, but you've got to take your shoes, your socks, pants, jocks, the works off, and it takes a long time* (D, 2p1).

After toileting, the children who had removed their clothes to urinate would then struggle to re-dress: *I had one little boy who couldn't get his underpants back on. I said why are you taking so long? ... I went in and he had ... the holes around the wrong way. Oh it was hurting!* (D, 1p33). Leanne agreed: *Sometimes you have to re-dress them when you come back* (L, 1p33). Clothes would drop onto the floor, which was often accidentally wet from urine. Some children sat on the dirty toilet floor to re-dress. To address this challenge, the teachers and aides spent considerable time teaching the children not to remove their clothes to use the toilet. However, when they were out of sight of adults, some children continued to do this.

Quite often, the children who had only pulled their pants down would accidentally urinate on their shorts or underpants. Many times, the children would mistime their toilet visit and urinate in their clothes or on the floor in their haste to manage their clothes or wait for a toilet to be available. Leanne, Dianne and Amanda commented that, on occasion, the boys would deliberately urinate on the floor or walls:

Amanda: *The boys are disgusting...*

Leanne: *One of our little Preps the other day was (gesturing hosing)*

Dianne: *Painting the walls?*

Leanne: *Weeing everywhere! He's five years old and he's one of our older boys and he's acting like that!* (L, 1p32)

These behaviours were not uncommon for young children. However, in preschool, kindergarten or childcare settings, toilets are easily visible from the classroom, and adult assistance and supervision are readily at hand. Early childhood staff regularly mop or clean toilet areas throughout the day, replenishing toilet paper, soap and paper towel supplies to minimise the transfer of disease and prevent slippage. In contrast, school toilets are usually cleaned once at the end of the day only.

At Leanne's school, the children could access the former preschool classroom toilets during class time. She found that the children preferred to use these toilets because they were cleaner and more familiar to them. *They don't tend to use the toilets in the playground ... because they are smelly and they are horrible* (L, 1p31). Leanne was frustrated that the children did not access the bigger toilet blocks during break times. The children would wait until they returned to class to ask to use the preschool toilets. She complained:

It is just annoying ... [the teacher] will be having a discussion and someone will put up their hand. Yes, what do you think? Can I go to the toilet? She'll be like, here's me thinking I'm having all this lovely feedback, and it is someone wanting to go to the toilet. But they just had morning tea and they should have been [to the toilet] but they obviously don't like them, and I don't blame them. The big toilets are smelly. (L, 1p31)

The pungent stale smell of the toilet blocks was common to most schools in my study.

Access to soap for hand washing was another common dilemma raised by the aides. Dianne was angry that the toilets next to the Preparatory building were fitted out knowing *Preps were going to be in there and only the tall Preps can reach the soap bottles to get the soap* (D, 2p2). In many school toilets, children would play with the soap and so it would run out. Sally was frustrated that older children were pumping *all over the floor. So the Preps would go in there and slip* (J, 2p4). Some toilets did not contain soap because this was considered hazardous because it made the floor slippery. Sometimes aides would keep their own supplies of liquid soap refills and take them with them when taking the children on a toilet run.

Some schools provided cakes of soap; however, Dianne explained that at her school the cleaners no longer provisioned bars of soap because the *bigger kids were flushing the cakes of soap down the toilets* (D, 2p2). I was interested to hear that schools were using bar soap because cakes of soap are not considered suitable for early childhood centres because they split or crack easily, harbouring germs.

Hand drying also caused concern. Many schools had paper towels; yet the supplies often ran out during the day. Dianne's school had installed hand dryers; however, she commented that the children would make bubbles with the soap and then put their hands under the dryer, which resulted in bubbles flying everywhere. Many children shook their hands dry or wiped their hands on their uniforms or other children's uniforms to dry them. Some children did not wash their hands at all.

The aides' comments revealed their great concern about children's access to toilets. Key issues concerned the lack of hygiene and safety issues. Importantly, supporting children's access to toilets was also a significant safety hazard for the aides. It is to this issue I now turn.

Safety concerns with regards to aides

As discussed earlier, Preparatory toilets were situated out of sight of classrooms. Consequently, adults had to leave the classroom to see the toilet blocks. Usually, the aides supervised children at the toilets on their own. Sometimes children required assistance with toileting and so the aides had to enter the toilets. Some children needed help with managing uniforms or getting dressed. The aides were very concerned that toileting children placed them in an extremely vulnerable position.

Access

At times, these female aides had to enter the boys' toilets. Further, most of the toilet blocks used by Preparatory children were used by older children as well, in many cases aged up to 12 or 13 years old.

A conversation at the first synergetic focus group raised the topic of the apprehension the aides felt about accessing toilets:

Sally: *Do you just enter the boys' toilet?*

Leanne: *Oh yes.*

Sally: *Do you yell out: 'Anyone here?'*

Leanne: *I yell and if I get no response and I know someone is in there I go in...*

Dianne: *It is an issue with the boys' toilets. You do at times have to say 'Is there anybody else in there?' Or somebody will come out and you'll say: 'Is there anybody else in there?' (D, 1p33)*

The aides were cautious about entering the boys' toilets. Although they called out or asked others if anyone else was in the toilet before entering, they were relying on children to respond honestly and openly. If a Preparatory boy was feeling anxious, or if he was threatened by another boy to keep silent inside the toilet building, he may not have answered, or the perpetrator may not have responded. Similarly, if an intruder was hiding in the cubicle, as happened at another school, both the children and the aides were placed at high risk.

Alone with children in toilets

Differing schools had different policies on teacher aides being alone with children. Leanne explained that there was a relieving principal at her school who tried to enforce the policy of teacher aides being in the presence of another teaching staff member when working with or assisting children. She was perplexed because, although the principal told the aides they could not be alone with children, no additional support was offered for toileting children, so Leanne felt she was left vulnerable.

Sally was very interested to hear how the other aides managed toileting. Sally had the least experience out of all the aides in this study. She was very concerned that other aides entered the toilets by themselves. Her school had a strict child-protection policy, and she was not allowed to be alone with children in the toilet block or when changing children. She explained:

Sally: *A couple of them still have trouble with the toilets so I've actually got to get another aide to come with me to help because we're not allowed to do it on our own ... Or they'll mess themselves so they have to actually get changed.*

Amanda: *I do it on my own.*

Leanne: *I do it on my own.*

Amanda: *But I probably shouldn't.*

Dianne: *But that is a big issue ... Toileting really is an issue. Like we've all been told not to put ourselves in vulnerable situations and from the point of view of being in the toilets with children on your own, I don't know how much more vulnerable you can be. (D, 1p33–34)*

Dianne was angry that she was left in a precarious position while working alone with some Preparatory children and children with additional needs who required assistance with toileting, especially in the boys' toilet. *I am putting myself at risk (D, 1p34)*. When she asked for assistance, the principal told her: *We don't want to roster two people on to take somebody to the toilet because it just interrupts everything and it uses up so much time (1p34)*. Dianne was infuriated that she was left exposed: *If something happens or if a child says anything, who is going to come and support you when you've asked, what am I supposed to do? (1p35)*. While she undertook training for child protection, Dianne quizzed the Catholic Education guidance officer about the aides' position. Dianne told the other aides: *I said 'Well how much more vulnerable do you want us to be?' The response back has been don't go there...*

Amanda: *Meaning don't go in the toilet or don't even ask?*

Dianne: *Don't ask (1p36)*.

Dianne felt let down by this response. She strongly believed the toileting protocol was challenging and risky for students and staff alike. Dianne was furious that the principal seemed to ignore this issue, deeming it too expensive to solve. The principal did not consider it worthwhile to expend other resources to enable aide support for toileting children. Disturbingly, this was common practice in most of the schools in this study.

While the schools did not provide additional personnel support to enact a basic child-protection policy such as supporting children alone, particularly in vulnerable places such as toilets, all staff received training in child protection. Dianne revealed that the staff at her school had two training sessions for child protection: *We've had an extra one at our school since our priest was up to no good and got carted away by the police so we have had an extra dose! (D, 23p6)*. Although Dianne and her colleagues received

additional training to support the protection of children following the priest's alleged indiscretions, they were still left to toilet and change children alone at their school. Despite the training, the staff and children were still placed in vulnerable positions in regard to children's safety.

Along with issues of personal and professional safety, supporting and supervising children in toilets was problematic for the aides because of the amount of time absorbed in toileting procedures. Not only was the task of toileting children considered unsafe for aides, it was also laborious.

Toileting—a time consuming task

At the beginning of the year, for the duration of the first term, most Preparatory children in this study were taken to the toilet by the aides at designated toilet break times, for instance, before morning tea or lunchbreak. Often, the aides would also take the children to the toilet when collecting them from a class such as music or physical education: *when we are in a situation like PE or music when there's six toilets we try and toilet them up there* (J, 16p6). At some schools, the children were expected to line up near the toilets and wait for their turn, then return to the line. At other schools, the children returned to the classroom after toileting. The routine of toileting children was considered time consuming and tedious.

During the rope representation activity, I asked Dianne to choose a rope to symbolise the task on which she spent the most time. As she looked through the selection of ropes, she commented that some of the ropes were too neat. She selected a pale red-and-white-striped rope, which was frayed at one end. She placed this above the colourful striped rope representing herself (see Figure 6), and explained: *feels like I spend the most amount of time ... toileting 54 kids three times a day ... I feel like I need a magazine rack!* (D, 23p15). Whereas the other aides in this study worked with single classes, Dianne worked across two or three Preparatory classes throughout this study. At least three times per day, she would supervise the toileting of more than 50 children. Dianne was tired of spending so much time waiting while children used the toilets. However, her teachers thought this system worked best because it reduced waiting time for them.

She explained: *If they have got the children all lined up with the teacher, then after they've been to the toilet they go to the end of the line and they all have to wait all that time for everybody to go, whereas I go down with them and as they have been they go back to class* (D, 23p15). The teachers remained in the classrooms whereas Dianne stood with the children in line near the toilets. As they finished, the children returned to the classroom.

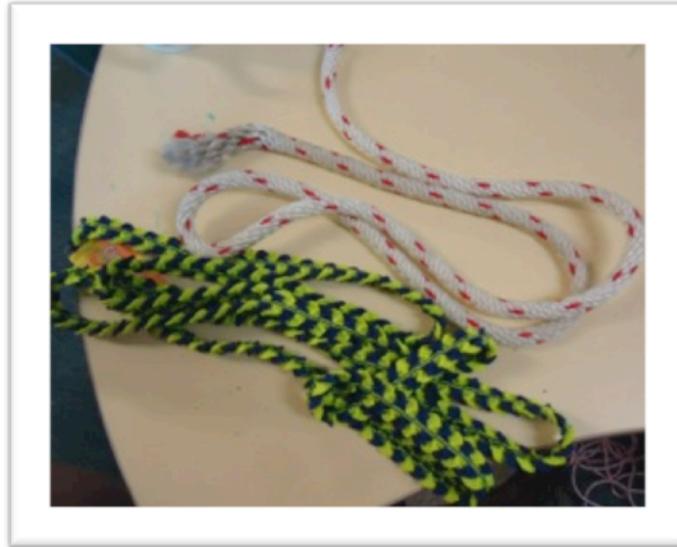


Figure 6: Dianne's most time-consuming task: toileting children

Jacqui explained that she was expected to supervise the children while they were waiting for the toilet. She was angry that the teachers working in classrooms close to the toilets became annoyed if children made too much noise while waiting in line. The teachers expected the children to stand silently. Jacqui was frustrated that, although the children would try to stand in line quietly, *teachers would come and yell at them for talking so I used to find it really hard* (J, 16p6). Jacqui, who had several years' experience working with young children in early childhood settings, was upset that teachers had unrealistic expectations of young children. She considered taking children to the toilet en masse a *big waste of time* (J, 16p5). Jacqui complained:

I used to hate it, they were made to stand and wait in lines to go the toilet and they couldn't talk. They had to stand there, zip their lips and wait and I'm like 'I hate this, I hate this, I hate this'. (J, 16p5)

In spite of classroom procedures facilitating children's access to toilets such as buddy or tag systems, without toilets inside the classrooms, all aides had to interrupt tasks and

leave the room to supervise or assist children with toileting. This differed significantly from previous preschool rooms or other early childhood settings in which staff members can see the children's toilets from inside the room and often assist children very quickly, or remind them about behavioural expectations before situations such as playing or misbehaving in the toilets escalate.

It is evident that resource provision such as building design, storage provision and toilet location affected the aide's sense of personal and professional safety, reduced their involvement with the class and teacher as well as interrupted the completion of organisational and pedagogical tasks within the classroom. The aides' stories also revealed concerns, particularly in terms of safe manual handling practices, about the organisation of resources for Preparatory children. This chapter now considers these issues.

Preparation and cleaning

Preparatory aides were responsible for the preparation, maintenance, cleaning and storage of most the Preparatory Year resources within the classroom as well as the outdoor environment.

Preparatory aides prepare and organise resources such as art materials, paper, books and glue. Paint pots, brushes, glue containers and the like require cleaning after use. Tables, benches and surfaces need cleaning after activities. The aides in my study undertook these and similar tasks daily.

Their stories revealed concerns about workplace health and safety in terms of manual handling:

My sink is an old-fashioned children's preparation sink and I have to bend to it and that has been a killer and no hot water (L, 2p9); and

I wash up the paint pots and things in ... a normal kitchen sink. The sink out the back that the kids have is the big laundry tub, deep sink. I'd like a sink like that at my height because you can't wash up the paint pots because for a start it is used for normal washing up and cups and things like that. I would rather have a special deep sink that is used for washing up the paints and things. But I won't use the one outside because it breaks your back. (D, 2p12)

The height of sinks varied greatly. Some preparation sinks did not have hot water plumbed to them. Consequently, the aides boiled kettles and filled buckets to clean glue and paint-filled pots and brushes effectively. Some buildings had cleaners-sink-style basins outside the classroom at children's height, which meant that the aides were stooping to clean. Further, this location resulted in the aides leaving the classroom to clean. This affected their participation in the room and left the teacher alone with the children. Because of this, many aides chose to clean at the kitchen sink inside. As a result, they were washing paints and glue in the same space in which kitchen utensils, coffee cups and food containers were washed. This practice posed a health risk of cross-contamination.

Safety concerns were also raised regarding the height of benches in relation to the types of stove top in some rooms. A common task for the aides in this study was making playdough for the children to use. If the modelling dough recipe required cooking, this was done on a stove top or in a microwave oven. Leanne struggled with the stove top that was provided for the Preparatory room. Not only was it very small, which she found impractical, it was too high to use effectively because it sat on top of the bench. She complained: *If I was cooking on it I would be on tippy-toes up there stirring a pot on top and I'm tall. I just found it totally impractical to use. It is not really good cooking playdough on the top of this thing* (L, 2p14). The height of the stove top presented a dangerous hazard for Leanne. Amanda brought in a microwave oven from her own home to use instead of cooking the dough on the stove top. Other aides resolved this problem by adding boiling water to the dough mixture rather than cooking it. Regardless of how the dough was prepared, the aides were still left with the task of cleaning the bowls and equipment, which caused problems such as back pain, hygiene concerns and participation, as discussed above.

Outdoor tasks

At the beginning of this study, most of the Preparatory classes spent time outdoors outside of recess times, as well as during morning tea and lunchbreaks. The children also participated in physical education lessons with a specialist teacher once or twice per week. While outside, the children played with fixed equipment, such as in the sandpits and on the climbing structures, as well as resources that were set up daily by the staff, such as obstacle courses, water troughs and ball games. Setting up an obstacle

course involved positioning timber planks and/or ladders for climbing, ropes and perceptual motor resources, such as hoops, targets, barrels and balancing boards. In many cases, the provision of outdoor play experiences was similar to the previous preschool program, which offered indoor and outdoor play each day. However, in preschool programs, teachers and aides used allocated non-contact time before the children arrived to set up the outdoor environment. The reduction of teacher aide hours in Preparatory classes meant that the aides often commenced work as the children arrived.

When asked to nominate their least-favoured task as a Preparatory teacher aide, both Sally and Dianne chose setting up outdoors. They considered this to be boring and tedious work, which was often hot and physically demanding. During the ropes representation exercise, Sally and Dianne selected pale, worn ropes to represent setting up outside.

When asked to choose a rope to represent the task she least enjoyed, Sally picked up a length of colourless rope and bundled it together (see Figure 7). She commented: *This is mine. I hate it, it's as dull as anything ... setting up the outside equipment and bringing it back in. Oh I hate it!* (S, 23p17). She placed this bundle of ropes next to the bright green rope representing herself.

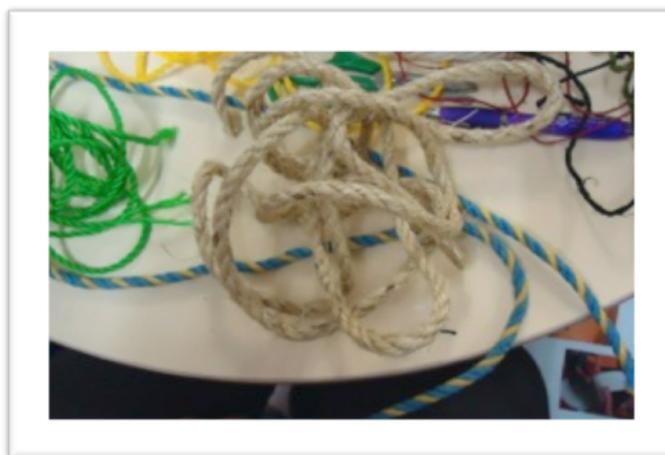


Figure 7: Sally's least-favoured task: outdoor set up and pack away

Dianne also selected a pale, frayed rope to represent her least-favoured task (see Figure 8). She laid this dull rope over the top of the other ropes representing herself (dark

navy-blue-and-yellow-striped rope) and the task she spent most time on (white rope with red flecks), which she identified as toileting children. Dianne explained: *I have added that dull one. It's all dull ... I hate getting the water troughs out and filling them up with the water 'cause we have to do it with a bucket and it's a hard job to do on your own* (D, 23p19).



Figure 8: Dianne's least-favoured task: preparing water troughs for outdoor play

Each Preparatory teaching team devised ways to manage the setting up, supervision and packing away of equipment. At some schools, the teacher aides were expected to set up equipment on their own after the children arrived. This arrangement brought workplace health and safety issues to light, especially in regard to lifting heavy or awkward-shaped equipment.

Sally explained that, when she had first commenced, she had been expected to set up and pack away the outdoor equipment, including the long timber planks on which the children climbed. She expanded:

at first I was doing it myself yes, but it was hard ... you know your planks and all that ... like I'd have to bring out the plank and then put it at one end and then run and put it at the other end and do things like that. (S, 23p18)

Lifting and positioning the long planks posed a hazard because Sally was lifting, bearing weight and twisting her body as she manoeuvred the planks into position. Sally explained that, after the first year, she requested assistance to lift *because some of the*

equipment, it's not heavy but it's awkward and ... so there's actually two of us that do it (S, 23p18).

Dianne was also expected to prepare and pack away awkward-sized outdoor equipment. Although the staff helped each other move the heavy planks, Dianne set up water play for the children regularly on her own. However, the playground did not feature a tap close by and so Dianne was left to position the troughs and then fill them by bucket. This meant repetitively filling buckets with water and walking over to the trough to fill it. After the children had played, Dianne needed to empty the trough with a bucket and then move the trough back into the storage shed. She complained:

The wheels on the trolley don't move properly ... [it is] not good ... you have to empty it and all that stuff ... You know you get them out of the storage room and then you have got to wheel them around and then you have to carry your buckets across. Yeah, I don't like doing that. (D, 23p19)

At other schools, the Preparatory staff devised a roster for setting up and packing away so that whichever group was playing outside first would organise the resources and the last group to play outside would pack away. Some teachers involved the children in packing away the planks and larger equipment as well as the smaller toys: *Because we have very little aide time ... if heavy stuff has to be out there it is done when the kids are out there. They line up and take out their baskets and stuff and that is when we take out whatever we are going to take out (D, 2p17).* While she felt this system worked at her school as well, Leanne disagreed with the way other teachers and aides allowed the children to access the storage shed unsupervised. Leanne had worked in kindergarten settings for many years and had a sound understanding of safety issues regarding equipment handling. She was concerned that there was often not an adult *supervising packing away the shed, which is huge. You just can't send kids in with equipment and just have them dump it (L, 2p17).* Leanne firmly believed that: *Kids shouldn't be doing certain things and should never be in the shed unsupervised. That to me is not reinforced enough in our current environment (L, 2p17).* The organisation of outdoor play resources was a common concern for all the aides.

Managing playground resources

At many of the schools in this study, only the Preparatory children were allowed to use play equipment for the sandpit or balls in the playground, and only during program

time, not break time: *Our kids play in the sandpit with all the buckets, shovels, spades and everything when we are out there but when they are on lunchtime they play in the area out in front of the Prep classrooms* (D, 2p20). Some aides were very frustrated that other classes accessed the Preparatory equipment during break times and damaged it. The aides were also annoyed that other teachers offered the Preparatory play toys for children to use during lunchtime. It was common practice for the aides to pack away the equipment so that no children or other staff could access it during morning tea or lunchbreaks. Others left out a small number of trucks or shovels and locked the rest of the equipment away or took it back to their classrooms:

Amanda: If we are out there and it is nearly lunchtime we pack all the stuff away. We won't even let our sand equipment stay out there...

Sally: Today I took the whole lot [of play resources] up to our classroom and I saw quite a number of students walk by to see where it was but no-one came in to ask us because they weren't game to.

Dianne: We have no play equipment at lunch. I mean no. The sand equipment and things don't come out at lunchtime. (2p19)

The aides were very protective of their resources. They believed that only the Preparatory children should be allowed to play with the sandpit toys or balls and trucks, and only during the outdoor program time when the Preparatory staff were watching: *When we're out there we bring out all the good stuff* (A, 2p19).

Many schools restricted where the Preparatory children could play during break times. Although some Preparatory classes had a designated playground area, limitations were placed on the children's access to these specific spaces during recess periods. Although most of the Preparatory classes had sandpits, the children were usually not allowed to use these during break time. The children had to share sandpit areas located elsewhere in the school grounds with older children. These sandpits were often less inviting because the sand quality was poorer, there was less shade or foliage and they had a very limited amount of toys, if any at all. The Preparatory sandpits were used during program time only, and the aides ensured that they remained tidy and clean. The sense of ownership of and belonging to the equipment was very strong among all the aides. They were fiercely possessive of their equipment and resources: *Our sandpit is under shade*

and it gets covered up every night, nice and neat and tidy. Nobody comes in to use our private sandpit (L, 2p20).

At some schools, the Preparatory children played together with other junior classes (Years 1 to 3), and in some small schools all the children played together. The aides found that break times caused anxiety and stress for many Preparatory children. Safety concerns for the children meant that children were restricted from many play activities in the playground. Bec was worried that the children were often restless and bored, which led to arguments or fights:

They've had an altercation because they are not allowed to do anything in the playground ... they're not allowed to use up a lot of energy and they get into trouble if they touch someone. You know, they can't kick the ball too hard. (B, 23p7)

As a result, the aides found that a considerable amount of classroom time was spent after each break debriefing and brainstorming playground issues:

The playground brings in new issues. When ours go down there this term they come back and we could spend half an hour ... [the teacher] will sit there and have ... a gripes session. So we sometimes send the talking stick around to hear their whinges and their gripes and things. It has taken all this term for them to get used to the playground and they will be more comfortable as time goes on. But it has been a big term, full on. I found the first term stressful and tired. We were tired, they were tired. It was long. (L, 1p28)

Although Leanne thought that the children would get used to the playground, this conversation was recorded at the end of the second school term. Half of the school year had passed and the Preparatory children were still experiencing anxiety about the playground.

Arguably, the lack of access to playground equipment such as sandpits and sandpit toys exacerbated this boredom. Although the aides and teachers were concerned that toys may be broken, or play spaces left untidy, the lack of access to play resources during break times would have been difficult for some children. Many of the Preparatory children would have attended kindergarten or childcare programs prior to their Preparatory Year. These settings afforded children a wide variety of play opportunities in the outdoors along with basic play resources such as sandpit shovels, buckets or trucks. Meal break playtimes in school playgrounds without play tools would have been

difficult and unfamiliar for many Preparatory children, who may have found playtimes overwhelming, lonely and particularly hot in summer.

It is evident that resource provision such as building design, storage provision and toilet location caused considerable anxiety for the Preparatory aides. Along with these structural issues were safety concerns about the organisation and implementation of daily indoor and outdoor tasks. Issues such as toileting children and setting up equipment raised in this chapter were considered contentious because the aides believed that the lack of aide hours allocated to support the implementation of these tasks in Preparatory classes placed the children, teacher and aides at risk. However, the aides also identified that it was very difficult to raise issues such as these because it might lead to their hours being reduced. Many of the aides' experiences revealed a worrying tug of war between keeping silent and job security.

The issue of silence was complex and prevalent throughout this study—often threaded underneath the surface of many discussions or observations. Earlier in this chapter, I identified worrying silences about the provision of resources, both built and human, for Preparatory classes. In the next chapter, I explore the stories of the aides lived experiences of their pedagogical role, and raise further questions and concerns regarding silence and marginalisation. This next section turns to considering the act of silence and discussing the implications of silence and, in turn, job security for the lived experiences of the aides.

Silence—Marginalising the Role of the Preparatory Aide

Silence was a dilemma for the aides. There were many instances in which teachers, principals or parents silenced the aides. Although their stories about silence were strong, I grew concerned that my perception of the aides as silenced and marginalised was overpowering the voices that I heard. Sometimes the aides silenced themselves and others around them. At times, the aides shut down opportunities to communicate and work towards shared understandings. Some aides felt that others should take the lead in sharing information, and sat back waiting for this to happen. Of course, there were reasons for these actions. Sometimes the aides were silent, or silenced others, because they feared jeopardising their hours or, indeed, their job. Some aides believed that it was not their place to speak out or advocate or complain, reflecting the problem of low

socio-political status and maternal discourses revealed in Chapter Three. Some aides felt that they had tried to advocate for a stronger voice only to be constantly shut down, and so were resigned to being in a marginalised, silenced position. However, it appeared that sometimes the aides deliberately chose to blame this silenced position on the actions of others as opposed to their own inaction. I turn now to examining each of these positions of silence.

Silence—lack of recognition

Teacher aides often felt that they were not seen within the school. The description of teacher aides as the ‘invisible elves of the school’ (Goessling, 1998, p. 9) resonated with the lived experiences of some of the aides in this study:

*People don't see, they think it just gets done, things just get done (J, 14p7);
and*

*Sometimes it is a thankless job, sometimes you think you are doing so much
and you are working so hard. (J, 14p4)*

Some aides felt frustrated that their work often went unrecognised. Bec was annoyed that there was little recognition of the experience and work teacher aides undertook. She complained:

*If you worked in an office you'd be on a Level 4 rather than a Level 2, so
you're not recognized for those skills ... you can't go any further once you get
to a Level 3 Step 3. That's it! There's no recognition for how long or how
good a job you are doing. (B, 14p10)*

Jacqui agreed and considered that she worked hard, especially when placed with inexperienced teachers, or teachers who were new to the school: *We are a stable factor here and we have been through things and know practically what's worked, what hasn't worked, an amazing resource, but you just wonder if that gets back to [the principal]?* (J, 14p11). While Jacqui knew that the principal considered her an efficient and capable worker, and often took her out of the Preparatory class to undertake relief work or administration tasks, she doubted that the principal understood the value of her role to the Preparatory class.

Jacqui and Bec worked at the same school and were particularly upset that the principal took little interest in their role or their experiences. They felt marginalised by the

principal because he did not visit the classroom or encourage them to discuss their role with him: *No-one comes down to check on how things are, what's happening ... at Prep no-one comes down, you don't get anyone coming to see how you are going* (B, 14p10).

A conversation between Jacqui and Bec expands this point:

Jacqui: *You know how teachers get feedback and the teachers get asked questions about how things are going, we don't, we never get asked about how things are going from [the principal].*

Bec: *But I guess that, I don't believe they know what our role is, about anything we do or are interested.*

Jacqui: *I think it would be nice to be asked.*

Bec: *I still don't think they know what we do, or how important the role is.*

Jacqui: *I think they need to sit down and talk with us once every while, to sit down with us and do like a staff review of how you are performing ... why don't they do that?*

Bec: *Even if they asked what areas do you see could be improved where you are working? You know no-one asks about what you have to put up with ... Or the other thing is are you doing a good job with the kids? Is anyone saying 'Well look, I think you should be doing this or trying this'. Or maybe, because we are older, they just assume that everything is going really well?* (B, 14p9)

These comments about the principal's lack of recognition of the aides were disconcerting. Some of the literature (Boardman, 2003; Stamopoulos, 1998) and the aides' stories revealed that principals often had little understanding about early years' practice. By not visiting the classrooms or talking to the aides about their role and their perception of their performance, the principal missed opportunities to increase knowledge. Bec and Jacqui's comments demonstrated a significant lack of interest from the principal about the roles of Preparatory aides. Disturbingly, the principal sought feedback from teachers about their concerns, but did not approach the aides. Not only were the aides silenced by the lack of interaction from the principal, they were also marginalised from the communication process because they were not teachers. Their lack of status potentially prevented them from the having the opportunity to voice their opinions, raise concerns or defend remarks made about their performance by the teachers.

Knowing that the principal did not choose to speak to them, the aides were unlikely to feel comfortable or confident enough to initiate a conversation or meeting to raise issues or concerns. The above comments by Jacqui and Bec highlight further the importance of principals fulfilling their responsibility to keep lines of communication open; it cannot be assumed that the aides would broach concerns with the principal of their own accord. Without knowledge of the aides' classroom practices and reviewing their performance, issues such as safety and security concerns, breaches of pedagogical practices or misuse of resources were not effectively monitored by the principal and may have been overlooked or covered up.

The lack of recognition identified by the aides reflected the findings of Goessling (1998) and Weiss (1994), presented in Chapter Three, who noted the marginalisation of teacher aides in schools. Jacqui and Bec explained that their principal had tried to instil a greeting protocol in order for all staff to feel acknowledged. There was an expectation in the school that all staff would be greeted and spoken to:

Jacqui: *I mean we are very lucky here ... we are treated pretty nicely like around in the classrooms, as soon as we walk in the door we are acknowledged by most teachers. There's probably one or two [who don't acknowledge us] but ... everyone stops, everyone says hello to [me] and that's huge.*

Bec: *[The principal] has enforced that, the meet and greet.*

Jacqui: *Yes meet and greet, speak. (J, 14p11)*

Although the principal had instigated this policy for the staff to adopt, he did not lead by example. The earlier conversation recounted above indicated that the principal did not speak to the aides. Bec was also angry that the principal did not acknowledge all staff members when addressing assemblies or public functions, stating:

When he [the principal] is talking at assemblies about teachers, it should be staff (B, 14p4); and

I get a little antsy when everyone says how good the teachers are and I think, Oh gosh, we have so many staff that aren't teachers, so they need to say staff, not teacher aides, groundsmen, secretaries but staff. If you didn't have staff you wouldn't have a school. (B, 14p12)

I was interested to know if Bec could have spoken about this concern. When I asked if she thought that she could make that comment to the principal, she tentatively replied: *It*

depends. I could try, if I wanted to pursue it I could, I think I could get away with it (B, 14p12). Bec's statement illustrated her marginal position. She thought she might 'get away with' raising a concern rather than suggesting she could be acknowledged or thanked for bringing an issue to light. 'Getting away with it' implied that, as long as she returned to her marginal position, it would be alright, demonstrating the power differential and lack of status. Although Bec was perturbed by this lack of recognition from the principal and thought she could 'get away with' raising a concern, she was not keen to take action. If she did not raise the complaint, the principal would not necessarily know that the aides felt disregarded or affronted. Thus, Bec's silence maintained her marginalised position.

Bec was very quick to clarify that the Preparatory teachers always acknowledged the aides. She emphasised: *They wouldn't do it down here, these teachers wouldn't do that [not acknowledge aides]* (B, 14p12). I wondered whether Bec thought she could raise the issue of inclusion with other Preparatory Year staff members. Bec affirmed that she could: *Oh gosh yes, I'd say that, 'Please when you are talking about anything I would really like you to include everybody and everyone in the school's hard work and part of it, just be thoughtful'* (B 14, p12). Jacqui, who worked in the classroom next door to Bec, commented that she thought that talking together was very important: *Actually, I think we need the six or so of us together and say how are you feeling because I don't think they [the Prep teachers] really know* (J, 14p12). Bec wondered about how this could be achieved and wondered: *Maybe on a pupil-free day we could allow half an hour [as a Prep team]?* (B, 14p15).

Although Bec stated that she could voice her opinion with other Preparatory staff, there was no chance to speak together as a group because the aides and teachers never met. This conversation revealed that the lack of opportunity to discuss issues with their teaching partners really silenced the voices of the teacher aides. The aides believed a major stumbling block to asking questions or enabling discussions with their teachers was lack of time. Whereas, previously, the allocation of hours in preschool had allowed for non-contact time for aides and teachers, the removal of non-contact time from the teacher aide hours meant that there was no longer time to discuss issues or curriculum or procedural decisions *unless we stay back* (J, 14p2).

Many aides expressed that they were already working extra hours to support their teacher and were not prepared to commit to any additional voluntary hours. Bec and Jacqui often worked longer than usual to assist their teacher. Yet it appeared that they did not want to commit to arranging a time to discuss this issue out of hours. They may have been concerned that, if they told the teachers that they were not happy with some aspects of their role or the expectations placed upon them, that the teachers would not wish to continue working with them and thus their hours or their job would be threatened. Perhaps they felt that it was not their place to raise this issue or the teachers would not understand their dilemma of marginalisation, and so it was better not to draw attention to themselves.

Speaking out

Contrary to the view of the early childhood educator being unassuming and compliant, Leanne ardently believed in pushing for fair work conditions and did not believe that educators should keep quiet if they had concerns. Leanne had the most experience in early childhood settings and was adamant that Preparatory aides should be able to access help and support when required. She had been involved with Preparatory classes since the school entered the Preparatory Year trial. She was very concerned about the reduced level of resource support (human and built) for Preparatory classes in comparison with the old preschool system. Taking the role of advocate, she often raised these concerns or voiced her opinion with teachers or the principal.

Leanne also adopted this position during the data-generation meetings. Often, she rallied and encouraged the other aides to speak out. She felt strongly that keeping quiet about the difficulties of the role was not helpful to the aides and it presented an unrealistic view of the Preparatory Year. She pleaded with the other aides: *If things are going wrong, you need to jump up and down and scream and have breakdowns and then you draw attention* (L, 1p46). Dianne explained to Leanne that she was having trouble with one of the aides with whom she shared the role. She said: *I seem to be the one in there organising, the other one is standing having a chat and not doing anything ... and there's just jobs and stuff!* (D, 3p1) Leanne advised her: *You need to have a dummy spit* (L, 3p1). Leanne strongly believed that Dianne needed to complain and make some noise to alert the teachers to this issue; otherwise, the teachers would not know *if you keep sucking it up and doing it* (L, 3p1).

As identified earlier in this study, the Preparatory aides' role was ambiguous. Lack of clarity around the provision and allocation of hours made it difficult for the aides to know their entitlements. Bec tried to seek information about her job conditions, and urged Jacqui to do the same:

Bec: *Have you reviewed your role description?*

Jacqui: *No.*

Bec: *Well you mightn't be getting paid enough.*

Jacqui: *That's right but how do you find out?* (J, 14p10)

Many aides did not feel that colleagues or the principal understood their working conditions and felt that, without a close working relationship with the principal, it was difficult to access information pertaining to their hours or job conditions. Some aides such as Bec took responsibility for finding out information or looked for ways to increase their understanding about some matters. Others, however, like Jacqui, did not know where to start and so they remained quiet. Once again, this lack of action may have been because of a concern that raising attention might threaten hours or the lack of status they experienced meant it was not their place to speak up or ask questions.

Jacqui was torn between speaking out and keeping quiet. She explained:

I think that until you sort of make ruffles they think they're all good, they don't think that someone isn't happy until you ring the bell, but that was probably more my issue plus ... as I was told 'no you're the new kid'. (J, 14p7)

Jacqui's comment was revealing. She understood the importance of raising concerns to share understandings or alert attention to potential risks. Yet, others silenced her because she was new to the role. Jacqui remarked that, when she had started, she had been concerned about some working conditions and was told to keep quiet by other colleagues. Jacqui did not want to complain or *ruffle any feathers* (J, 14p7). She was very aware that she was *the new kid on the block and a parent* (J, 14p7). Jacqui regretted not speaking out: *I should of then gone up and told my side of the story which I didn't* (J, 14p7). Although she did not wish to elaborate, her colleagues' actions really silenced Jacqui and made it extremely difficult for her to find the courage to speak out. Jacqui's experience highlights the effect that low status and job insecurity has on the everyday lived experiences of teacher aides.

Keeping quiet—keeping the job

There's a line as an aide between what you can and can't say 'cause you don't want to lose your job or hours 'cause you never know when you've got a job from year to year (B, 14p8). Most of the aides in my study were concerned about the security of their job. Hours were not guaranteed, and many believed that they should not raise concerns or complaints. When she was asked to relieve in the school office for three weeks, Jacqui told her teacher: *'the boss has asked me to work in the office. I'm sorry what can I do?'* *You know if I said to him 'No', mmm. So that side of it is hard* (J, 14p12). She did not feel that she could decline the administrative role that the principal asked her to fulfil. Worried that speaking out and drawing attention to herself could risk the security of her allocated hours, she *felt initially that I needed to shut up and just do the work 'cause you are lucky to get it* (J, 14p7). The literature points to the dilemma of maternal discourses and the perceived compliant, uncomplaining disposition of nice women who work with young children (Stonehouse, 1994). Jacqui considered that keeping a low profile and acquiescing to the principal's requests would guarantee her employment.

Dianne was also concerned that complaining or speaking out about her work arrangement would jeopardise her hours. She explained: *there are a lot more people around that will have your job* (D, 1p.46). The issue of job security was common to all the aides in my study.

Job security

At various points in the study, most of the aides felt undervalued by the insecurity of their position. At the same time, their stories revealed that many chose to work additional hours without pay. Some aides felt obliged to help their teacher; others enjoyed the relationship they built with the class and did not see this as a burden. These experiences were highlighted earlier in this chapter, and are explored further in Chapter Seven. Pertinent to this discussion of job security is the observation that working longer hours may have helped the aides to be viewed as a valuable asset to the teacher and class. Building a relationship could have strengthened the aides' chance of continuing work and gaining any additional hours if they were provided.

Leanne's, Sally's and Amanda's perceptions of their job security differed from those of the others. They were not concerned that someone else would take their position at school. In their experience, other staff did not want to work in the Preparatory classes. Amanda recalled that, when she was offered her current position, the principal *couldn't find any aides to come down to the Prep* (A, 1p20). Leanne remarked that *other aides don't normally volunteer to jump in and do Prep ... because it is so physical, a lot of aides just don't want to even go there* (L, 1p20).

Even though she was worried about job security, Dianne conceded that taking on the role of a Preparatory aide was unattractive to many. She commented: *Somebody said to me, 'Oh God! All you're going to be doing is cleaning up paint and stuff all the time. Why would you want to do that?'* (D, 1p20). Leanne explained that many aides were not interested in the role, even though they did not know what happened in the Preparatory classes. *They won't come into our room* (L, 1p46).

Although she did not think that the role of Preparatory aide was attractive to other aides working in the school, Leanne was very careful not to reveal her work hours to others. She commented:

I don't spruik what hours I get. At the end of the year we normally all sign contracts say for 15 hours. Then once the numbers are finalised at the beginning of the next year we all get new contracts. I do not tell anybody what I've got and don't ask anybody. (L, 1p48)

Like other aides in this study, Leanne perceived that other aides in the school were jealous of the funding arrangement for aide hours in Preparatory. This made work relationships awkward because she was aware that other aides were concerned that their hours were neglected, or under threat because her principal chose to allocate more hours to Preparatory classrooms.

Dianne also felt that the aides working with children with additional needs at her school were worried about the allocation of hours to Preparatory classes. She explained that the school had increased enrolments in 2008, which led to the introduction of an extra Preparatory class. However, at the same time, some children with high needs who attracted funding were to leave the school. In 2007, Dianne spoke about the dilemma the extra hours for Preparatory were causing:

Next year there should be three Prep rooms so there should be more Prep hours, and the other aides have sort of said 'Well I hope they don't think that is just going to the designated Prep aides'. That is about their livelihood coming into it. Because the other stuff is all special needs funded, we've got two, three leaving next year. (D, 1p47)

Amanda explained that, at her school, the length of service determined the allocation of hours to aides. She asked Dianne: *Don't you do last on, first off? If the hours are going to be cut they should be cut from the last on. That is how we work it (A, 1p47)*. Although Amanda thought this was a fair system, she complained that her hours had been reduced when she moved into the Preparatory aide role, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Dianne worked within the Preparatory classes as well as elsewhere in the school. She sensed her dual role fragmented her sense of belonging and value to the Preparatory classes. When she approached the principal about the possibility of working with the preparatory children for all of her hours, she was confused by his reaction. She explained:

I said to the principal the other day ... 'The Prep hours are always going to be there. You are going to have Prep classes. You could have at least one aide on so many permanent continuing hours' and he said that he would never do that. (D, 1p50)

Dianne did not have an easy relationship with her principal. She was frustrated by his lack of appreciation of the value of her role to the Preparatory classes. She complained: *There has got to be somebody in the Prep class. I mean the hours are going to be there. It is the same as having somebody working in the office (D, 1p50)*. The aides' experiences in this study indicated that principals ensured that the administration of the office was supported by the provision of hours; this was not always the case for the Preparatory class.

Along with the concern of which aides at their school were allocated hours, some aides in my study expressed that the introduction of the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2011) and the principal's perception of how this curriculum was to be implemented in the Preparatory Year affected their sense of job security.

Bec: *I'm on permanent but that doesn't mean anything ... it really depends on the school what hours they give you ... but this will all change when the new curriculum comes in.*

Jacqui: *It probably will, because they are not going to need the teacher aide times.* (J, 14p8)

Although the school was funded for Preparatory aide hours, Dianne's principal was convinced that this arrangement would not continue. Dianne commented:

The principal said to me the other day that when you look at the Prep hours the aides are going to get, the reality is you're going to get less and less and less, because it's going to get more and more structured, and there's just going to be less and less to work with. (D, 3p1)

Like other aides in this study, curriculum changes were another threat to Dianne's long-term employment as a Preparatory aide. Dianne felt undervalued and sensed that her job was in danger. Further, the lack of job security affected her sense of commitment to further study: *If all we know is we've got our job for 12 months why would you be bothered doing too much?* (D, 1p50). This feeling of resignation, brought on by workplace arrangements, may affect her role pedagogically and professionally. The following chapter broadens this discussion further.

Synthesis

This chapter has explored the organisational role of Preparatory aides. This is a new role in schools, and the provision of built resources such as classroom design, equipment and children's toilets, along with the allocation of human resources such as work hours significantly affects the aides working in Preparatory classrooms.

The change in building and personnel resources from the old preschool system to the new Preparatory Year is significant. In spite of protests from a variety of key sectors, the Preparatory Year resource provision has remained relatively unchanged. Work and storage space have been identified as problematic by most of the aides in this study. Manual handling issues cause great concern, and result in tasks remaining uncompleted, or ineffectively managed. Of particular concern is the provision of toilet facilities for Preparatory children. Most of the aides in this study raised worrying safety issues in relation to toilet access and protocols.

The lack of full-time hours for Preparatory aides adds further complexity to these issues. Fewer hours results in fewer interactions with children and teachers. Most aides feel stressed about the level of work they are expected to complete in a short time frame. They criticise the rushed nature of their day and the lack of time available to support children and teachers effectively. Without time for professional discussions with their classroom teachers, or other colleagues, the aides feel disempowered. Many aides believe that their role is undervalued and unrecognised. In addition, worries about job security are amplified by reduced, unpredictable hours. The reduction of hours contributes to their sense of marginalisation and lack of role recognition. Further, it is evident that some aides may feel a reduced sense of commitment to their role and ongoing professional development, given the insecurity of their workplace arrangements.

Complicating these problems is the lack of understanding by some teachers or principals. The level of insight into early childhood principles and practice, along with an understanding of the purpose and value of the Preparatory Year profoundly affects how Preparatory Year resources—built and human—are viewed and organised in schools. The lived experiences of the aides show that the principals' receptivity to and understanding of the Preparatory Year affects the aides' sense of connection, worth and job security. The next chapter considers the pedagogical aspect of their role and its effect on their lived experiences.