

2003

## The experiences of mothers studying at university who have pre-school aged children

Alison Welsh  
*Edith Cowan University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses\\_hons](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons)



Part of the [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Welsh, A. (2003). *The experiences of mothers studying at university who have pre-school aged children*. Edith Cowan University. [https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses\\_hons/947](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/947)

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.  
[https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses\\_hons/947](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/947)

# Edith Cowan University

## Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author's moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).
- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

**THE EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERS STUDYING AT UNIVERSITY WHO  
HAVE PRE-SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN**

**by**

**Alison Welsh**

**Supervisor: Joan Strikwerda-Brown**

**A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor  
of Education (Honours)  
Edith Cowan University, South West Campus**

**Date of Submission: March, 2003**

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study of three women's experiences with studying at university whilst bearing the responsibilities of family and work, investigated the unique situations and problems that these mothers encountered. A qualitative research approach was utilised, using a narrative inquiry method to give voice to the student mothers, which has proved to be lacking in academic research.

In addition to an auto-ethnographic case study, two case studies were formulated by conducting conversational interviews with two other student mothers. Common themes were identified and discussed, with reference to the literature. The findings of this study suggested that the experiences of mothers studying at university were consistent with the past research that suggested they face many barriers to learning. The nature and origin of these barriers has been discussed and recommendations for modifications have been made.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature:

Date: march 2003

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The support and assistance of these people has made this thesis and the completion of my degree possible. Their kindness, understanding and energy was given so freely and their support was very much appreciated. Thankyou.

- Joan Strikwerda-Brown. You took on the role of my supervisor with commitment (and courage) and have given your time, wisdom, energy and encouragement limitlessly. I thankyou for your support, without you this would not have been possible. I *will* see you at graduation!
- My family. My incredibly understanding and patient husband, my mother and father, my sister Sally, Cliff and Val, Brooke and Paul and not least of all, my children. The true meaning of family can only be shown through amazing support such as the help and encouragement you have shown me. I cannot begin to mention all the little things that you have all done to make this possible. I thankyou from the bottom of my heart.
- The staff at Edith Cowan University. I have never known a door to be closed (that could not be pried open!). From the coffee shop staff to the lecturers, I thank you for your support and wisdom.
- The participants of the study. These busy mothers made time to tell their stories, share their ideas and strategies, and unlock the secrets to coping with demanding roles. I thankyou and I wish you the best of luck in your future careers.
- Jacqueline Hubbard. For being my inspiration, my guidance and my friend. You taught me to laugh at life and to stand up for what I believe in. You have

been there for me every step of the way and I thank you for your constant support and friendship.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>Abstract</b>	
<b>Declaration</b>	
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	
<b>Table of contents</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY</b>	<b>5</b>
Background and significance of the study	5
The research question	8
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>8</b>
Professions, power and caring	9
The unique situations of mothers in higher education	12
Working women and career advancement	16
A feminist perspective	19
Policy documents	22
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>24</b>
Narrative inquiry	24
Journalling	26
Selection of participants	26
The pilot study	27
Ethical considerations	28
Limitations	29
The research design	30

Analysis of the data	31
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: STORIES OF MOTHERS' EXPERIENCES AT UNIVERSITY</b>	<b>33</b>
Subject one: My personal experience	33
Subject two: Amy	44
Subject three: Samantha	49
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION</b>	<b>55</b>
Emergent themes	55
Children on campus and on-campus facilities	55
The attitudes of staff and students	57
Family responsibilities/multiple roles	58
Pregnancy and breastfeeding	60
Financial issues	62
The advantages of being a mother at university	63
Discussion of the research question	64
The specific needs of mothers of pre-school aged children who study at university	64
The nature and origin of the barriers to learning that student mothers faced	66
The strategies that mothers employed to cope with their demanding roles – Advice for future student mothers	67
Recommendations for universities	70
Recommendation 1 – Further research	70
Recommendation 2 – Creche	71
Recommendation 3 – Parenting rooms	71
Recommendation 4 – Make distance education available to more students	71

Recommendation 5 – Develop and value the ethics of caring	72
Conclusion	73
<b>REFERENCES</b>	75
<b>APPENDICES</b>	78
A Sample university policies	79
B Bachelor of Education Course details	88
C Sample letter of consent for participants	90
D Ethics approval	92

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	The research design	31

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

When I enrolled in a full time bachelor of education course at University as a single mother of a six-month-old baby, I did not expect it to be easy. One of the many reasons I enrolled was that I could see no acceptable future for my daughter or myself without a secure income from a personally satisfying job.

A lot has changed in the three years that I have been studying. I am now married. I have two children, a two-year-old toddler and a five-year-old child. Academically I have surprised myself by keeping a fairly high average throughout the course and thus being eligible for an honours degree. Discouraged by everyone I spoke to about accepting the opportunity, on the grounds that "You just can't do it with kids", I almost turned it down. It occurred to me that there was a research topic in this reasoning alone. It seemed everywhere I went there were people asking, "How do you manage to study with the kids and work as well?" I am certainly not the only mother to ever study at University; there were many others in the past, there are many in the present and there will also be many in the future. We are no longer 'invisible students' and I feel it is important to share and reflect on our experiences, both the good and the bad.

### **Background and significance of the study**

A recent critical incident from my personal journal describes the stress that mothers face when studying at university.

It was lunchtime before I remembered that it was my birthday. Both my children were sick and I had two assignments due and a performance to do for music. One child, my three-year-old daughter, was with my mother in law; my three-month-old baby was with me. She had a temperature and was very unsettled.

The music lecturer was in a particularly unapproachable mood that day. People had been asking her for help because they couldn't keep up with her lectures. I spent most of the night before preparing a music file to hand in on the day but she changed her mind and made it due next week. Nighttime is the only time I have to myself so I do most of my assignments after dark, leaving little or no time for sleep.

The baby did not settle during the lecture and I had to leave the room twice so we would not disturb other students. Towards the end of the lecture I realised that my baby was getting worse and needed to go home. I still had an assessed musical performance to do so I decided to ask the lecturer if I could do mine in the break. She responded with a sigh and the comment, "But I'll miss my coffee." I promised to only take five minutes and she agreed to let me do it.

During my performance she let three people interrupt me, which made me even more nervous. When I had finished my performance a friend tried to help me by carrying the baby while I packed up my things but the lecturer snarled, "What are you, the babysitter or something? Can't *she* cope on her own?" Every other day I thought I could but on this occasion I couldn't. I was tired and stressed and about ready to give up studying. Happy Birthday? I don't think so. (Journal entry 30/05/01)

Many women today are trying to juggle family, work, and study. They cope with enormous amounts of stress and experience feelings of guilt and inadequacy as a result of trying to be everywhere at once. My own personal experience has been a direct influence on the topic of my research.

In the words of Paulo Friere (1996, p. 29), "To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognise its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity." The 'oppressed' in this case, are the mothers who struggle to fulfil their potential and accept their right to a higher education. The current social climate almost demands a double income for each family in order to provide a reasonable quality of life. This puts pressure on women, not only to work, but also to earn a reasonable income.

A higher education is the answer for many women seeking financially and personally satisfying careers. The significance of the research lies in the quest for a 'fuller humanity' in which women are not only given equal opportunities but also an equal chance of success.

For the last hundred years, women have fought for equality and have now found that in many cases equality is quite useless in a reality that dictates difference. Sheridan (1991) argued that ;

"The gradual demise of the call for sexual equality and the rise of the insistence on sexual difference can be accounted for in purely pragmatic terms, that is trial and error – we asked for equality and it didn't work, let's insist on difference. Practically, this has been the case in a number of areas." ( p. 153)

One of these areas is higher education. Both male and female students are given the same opportunities, but are these opportunities equal when the different needs of females who are also mothers are considered?

"The stumbling block to the proposed 'equal society' was (either or both) women's reproductive capacity and the responsibility of childrearing" (Sheridan, 1991, p. 154). It seems that although women have rights equal to males, they are only really being given choices such as having children, pursuing a career, or struggling in a patriarchal society to cope with both. Any choice has repercussions and is equally sacrificial. Women who choose to pursue a career and have children face innumerable problems and the harsh judgement of a society that believes 'you can't have your cake and eat it too'. Smith (1997) addressed this point:

"Women are judged for having too few or too many children, for deciding not to have them at all, for neglecting or spoiling them, for failing to take care of their husbands or partners, for their sexual conduct ... for any

decision, in other words, which gives the impression they are putting their own needs first." (p.164)

The decision for a mother (particularly a mother with very young children) to begin a full time course at University is seen by many people as the mother putting her own needs or desires before her children's, as it is still often perceived that a mother's place is at home with her children. So when a woman decides to further her education despite having a young child or young children, what does she face? How does she cope and what helps or hinders her progress? These questions were examined and refined to create the research question below.

### **The research question**

What are the experiences of mothers studying at university who have pre-school aged children?

More particularly this project aims to:

- Identify the specific needs of mothers who study at University,
- Describe and analyse the experiences of three of these mothers,
- Investigate the nature and origins of the problems and barriers to learning that student mothers face, and
- Focus on the strategies that mothers employ to cope with their demanding roles.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review began with a general evaluation of topics such as equal rights for women, gender/sex distinction, women's studies, the history of women's oppression and liberation, gender within institutions and the changing

family, and progressed to a more precise search for studies similar to the research. Although there were limited studies found that specifically examined the experiences of mothers in higher education, there were many that considered issues such as balancing work and family. Studies that probed the experiences of mothers at university were rare, and all of the inquiry into this topic stressed the importance of further research (O'Keefe, Henly & Anderson, 1998; Home, 1997; Watkins Herrin & McDonald, 1998). Quantitative studies tested attitudes and evaluated stress levels (O'Keefe et al., 1998; Home, 1997) but the unique stories and experiences of mothers were missing from the research. In all, the voices of mothers in higher education have been significantly under-represented in past research.

The literature and studies relevant to the research will be discussed under the following headings: the unique situations of mothers in higher education, working women and career advancement, professions, power and caring, a feminist perspective, and policy documents. These headings aim to organise past research into linked themes. Some of these themes have more relevance to the research than others, but all explore issues affecting women today in their struggle to raise children, work and study in a patriarchal, hierarchical society.

### **Professions, power and caring**

In reviewing literature addressing power and caring issues within the professions, the works of Noddings (1992), Garbarino (1983), Hugman (1991), Wilding (1982) and Doust (2001) were prominent. From Noddings (1992), I borrow the notion of the ethics of caring and the argument for changes in

education, from Garbarino (1983), the belief that our training and culture impose conceptual baggage and with Hugman (1991) I share the perception that power within professional roles affects the level of commitment to caring. Wilding (1982) pointed out the power held by policy makers in defining the needs and problems, with little or no knowledge of the situation. The research by Doust (2001) illustrated the very real problems associated with power and caring in higher education today.

Noddings (1992) defined a caring relation as "in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings – a carer and a recipient of care, or cared for" (p.15). Noddings (1992) argued that schools paid too little attention to the development of caring and moral reasoning. In learning to become a nurturing and caring professional teachers must recognise that a re-ordering of priorities is needed.

The current emphasis on achievement may actually contribute to students' feeling that adults do not care for them...What about the things that really matter to the students- and for that matter, to all of us? Are we just chess pieces to be pushed around in a world game of competition?... are arguments for liberal education badly mistaken? Worse are they perhaps mere political manoeuvrings? (Noddings, 1992, p.xii)

A key aspect of this study is that since the mothers involved were training to become professional teachers, the ethics of caring is an important issue of which they must be aware (Noddings, 1992). Moreover, they must feel that the role of caring is an important and valued aspect of teaching. It is my strong belief this cannot be conveyed if the student mothers themselves do not feel valued in their efforts to develop into a caring teacher. Noddings (1992) argued that the role of caring is a dyadic one in which the person receiving the caring must respond to and recognise these efforts in order to establish a caring

relation. Hugman (1991) elaborated this in claiming that, "this commitment is expressed through the enabling of the other person or the idea to grow, develop and achieve the maximum possible of her, his, or its potential" (p. 9). The caring relation between university staff and students is significantly limited by the institutions' focus on economic practices (Doust, 2002). It is not that the lecturers do not care, it is more that they are not valued for caring, or given the tools (such as time, adequate numbers of full-time staff and counsellors for students referral) to truly enable all students to reach their full potential. Garbarino (1983) uses the metaphor "If the only tool you have is a hammer, then you tend to approach everything as if it were a nail" (p. 17), to describe the investment in professional roles and practices blinding professionals to other tools and resources for improving the quality of human life. I would argue that the professionals, in the case of the university setting are not so much 'blinded' by their roles and practices but discouraged by an institution that does not value caring. Slaughter & Leslie (1997) stated,

The university, which focuses on economic practices and encourages the overworked dwindling teaching staff to do 'more with less', does not value this caring and emotional investment in students well being. For a money hungry institution lack of caring causes morale to suffer. The purpose of teaching translates into quotas and dollars, and student welfare is merely a token effort. (p. 6)

So, although many lecturers care, they are not encouraged to pursue this supportive stance and are forced to view students as numbers. It would be difficult for lecturers to claim a supportive and inclusive caring relation with student mothers when even the structural facilities of the university setting do not allow this.

Power plays a significant role in the caring relations of professionals (Noddings, 1992; Wilding, 1982; Garbarino, 1983; Hugman, 1991 & Doust, 2002). Hugman (1991) discussed the influence power has in defining peoples' lives:

Care thus became inextricably linked to control (Satyamurti, 1979) ... this had implications for the internal organisation of the caring professions as well as for their relationship with wider society (p. 14).

The power of caring lies in the professionals' decisions about who is deserving or undeserving of care. Policy makers define peoples every day lives with little understanding of the uniqueness of their situations (Wilding, 1982). The university may offer caring, but does it offer it equally? And does the caring provided meet the students' needs? Research suggests it does not (Doust, 2002; Noddings, 1992; Hugman, 1991).

### **The unique situations of mothers in higher education**

Studies of women in higher education were mainly concerned with university staff, women's studies and specific ethnic groups. Two of the studies reviewed examined the specific situation of mothers at university. One focused on breastfeeding on campus (O'Keefe et al. 1998), and the other, a quantitative study, involved examining role strain, stress, role demands and support relating to mothers studying at university (Home, 1997). O'Keefe et al. (1998) recognised the growing number of non-traditional students, particularly the increased enrolment of parents in American universities. They investigated the issue of infant feeding as it related to students and university staff members. One hundred and seven students, staff members and administrators at a north central American university took part in a study to examine the experiences and social context for breastfeeding on campus. The study aimed to probe attitudes

towards breastfeeding, examining not only opinions about whether breastfeeding was best for babies but also about the mother, the right setting for feeding and the appropriate time for feeding.

The participants were required to complete a questionnaire testing their attitudes to breastfeeding and defining their personal experiences with breastfeeding. Experience with breastfeeding was defined as breastfeeding, having been breastfed or having observed breastfeeding during the participant's lifetime. Of the one hundred and seven participants, only two reported having no experience with breastfeeding (O'Keefe et al., 1998). O'Keefe et al., noted that "breastfeeding is the recommended method of infant feeding because it is associated with scientifically documented health benefits" (p.129). Despite the obvious health advantages and the convincing worldwide argument that 'breast is best' the study showed interesting results in its analysis of the social context of breastfeeding on campus.

Experiences of student mothers in O'Keefe et al's (1998) study showed that the combination of breastfeeding and college life can be very stressful. Mothers reported attempting to slip to classes between feedings, or taking their babies to class. Pumping and storing milk also caused problems on campus and many mothers resorted to using a public lavatory to feed their babies or to pump milk (necessary for continuing an adequate milk supply, or for the mothers comfort). A university employee reported an experience where she was told she could not feed her baby in a private library office because "food was not allowed" (O'Keefe et al. 1998, p. 132).

Attitudes towards breastfeeding were positive, with most participants believing it was natural and the best method for infant feeding. However, participants had mixed feelings about the suitability of public settings for breastfeeding.

Breast feeding the baby at the office or during class, pumping and storing milk, leaking milk, and taking nursing breaks are likely to continue to provoke responses from a community that is supportive of breast feeding only under certain restrictive circumstances of person, place and time. Consequently, public education beyond "breast is best" is needed to ensure changes in attitudes and behaviours that support women in the natural, healthy care of their babies by breast feeding. (O'Keefe et al. 1998, p.131)

O'Keefe et al. (1998) recommend a variety of interventions to promote, support and protect breastfeeding on campus. These included alternative or flexible work schedules that minimised separation of mother and infant, policies permitting babies at work (with guidelines for ensuring a safe and suitable environment), comfortable and easily accessible nursing mothers rooms and importantly, collaboration of student health services, professional education programs and committees to encourage breastfeeding mothers.

Research by Home (1997) also supported the need for greater recognition of mothers needs at university. Home (1997) argued that although faculty members understood that mothers have unique situations requiring extra support, they were not always able to respond to those needs. "One obstacle to responsiveness is the lack of empirically based guidelines identifying which situations increase risk of stress and role strain and which supports reduce vulnerability" (Home 1997, p. 336). The survey of four hundred and forty-three women carrying work and family responsibilities whilst studying, aimed to identify and measure situations that caused strain and stress. Terms such as

role conflict, role overload and role contagion were used to define the situations that caused mothers to experience stress and strain.

Combining higher education and family is especially problematic, as both are greedy institutions that demand exclusive loyalty, virtually unlimited time commitments, and high flexibility. Women are expected to show that neither family nor studies suffer because of their involvement in both domains. (Home, 1997, p. 336)

In my experience, and the experiences of the participants of this research, the 'greedy institutions' have caused almost a survival mode where you forgo a little from both domains in order to ensure neither suffer enough to significantly effect either your grades or your family's wellbeing. Choosing to meet immediate needs and deadlines rather than working towards long term plans keeps both domains running reasonably smoothly. Home (1997) identified the reality of most students' financial situations as work being a necessity, and stated that:

"educators who might lament that these women are spread too thin (Home, 1993) need to realize that many have not chosen to learn the hard way... 'I do it to pay the rent and feed my family'" (Home, 1997, p. 337).

The need for educators to understand that students cannot put aside work and family responsibilities is vital in developing a more supportive learning environment (Home, 1993).

The university support variables tested by Home (1993) included distance education, recognition of prior learning, university day-care, assignment date flexibility in crisis situations, study skills workshops, instructor accessibility, part-time study and access to workplace equipment, data or personnel. Of these variables, only one was shown to ease stress and role strain. Distance education was found to increase students' control over the place and time of learning and to reduce the strain caused by university study. Home (1993) then pointed out that distance education was not available to all students and that it was often reserved for students unable to attend normal classes due to geographic location. Home suggests "that benefits might flow from expanding access to a range of distance education options. These options should be available to all students whose life situations and responsibilities make time conflicts a potential problem" (Home, 1993, p. 340).

In conclusion, Home (1993) argued that further research was not only imperative but urgent:

Multiple role women cannot wait for the results of such studies. These students face high costs and carry heavy responsibilities, and the limited available support is not always effective. Educators and researchers need to work together to devise strategies to enhance multiple-role management, while evaluating the usefulness of those strategies. (Home, 1993, p. 340)

Certainly, the efforts of universities and researchers can improve experiences for mothers but these strategies cannot be devised without listening to the voice of mothers. This thesis attempts to give voice to mothers and include them in empowering others to succeed in multiple roles.

### **Working women and career advancement**

Watkins, et al. (1998) addressed the juxtaposition of career and family and its impacts on professional women, with a view that "Many subtle restrictions exist that prevent women from acquiring promotions, tenure, and other forms of advancement" (Watkins et al. 1998, p.1). The "subtle restrictions" were discussed under headings such as Geographic Immobility, Limited Bargaining Power, Limited Job Market, Nepotism and Institutional breeding, Inability to Combine Family and Career, Public Mindsets, Housework, Part-time Employment and Childcare Provisions (Watkins, et al.). A number of these factors have been relevant to my own personal experiences. Those that have been most restrictive have been the inability to combine family and career, public mindsets, housework, part-time employment and childcare provisions. Trying to maintain a successful career path whilst caring for a family often means doing everything in halves and finding the time to complete assignments and study can be literally impossible when the family's needs are more urgent.

'Public mindsets', although not physical barriers, are particularly restrictive. As Watkins et al. (1998) stated, "Society vehemently declares that childcare is the responsibility of women. Mothering, not fathering, is the prevalent societal norm creating personal role conflicts that permeate institutions of higher learning" (p.2). These restrictive mindsets are not necessarily limited to men. In fact, some women who have devoted their lives to caring for their families feel it is their right and responsibility to remind other women of their 'proper place'. With these restrictive mindsets come expectations about how women should behave. The expectations placed on women, such as childcare, housework and even the responsibility to be a good wife, become overwhelming when combined with work and study. Men on the other hand, have two traditional roles, that of a 'breadwinner' and that of a father (after work, of course). These roles are unlikely to clash, as 'breadwinning' is often seen as the chief responsibility of fatherhood.

The statistics provided by Watkins et al. (1998) emphasised that women were disadvantaged by family obligations, whilst men were free to pursue their careers. Their research found that fewer married women achieved high academic rank than married men. Men were also more likely to combine parenting and academic careers successfully. In fact, it was found that fifty percent of university women in their study remained childless and only fifteen percent had three or more children. When you compare this to the thirty-three percent of university men that fathered children it illustrates the difference in role expectations. A man may continue to pursue his career relatively uninterrupted while a female is far more affected by childrearing responsibilities. Research also suggests that as the family size increased so did the difficulties

for the mother, and so career advancement for the professional woman often meant limiting family size (Watkins, et al. 1998).

Although these statistics are not directly related to student mothers' experiences in higher educational institutions, they do provide a poignant perspective on the prospects for career advancement after the completion of a degree. In addition, they highlight the gender inequalities in the dilemma of balancing work and family.

Marshall (2002) also discussed the problems that women face when pursuing a career whilst raising young children. Seventeen female student affairs administrators with children were surveyed to capture their stories and gain an understanding of how they successfully negotiated their multiple roles. Although the seventeen participants said they were personally satisfied by their careers and felt they were better parents because they were intellectually fulfilled, they noted many 'tradeoffs' in combining career and motherhood.

Marshall (2002) reported that the downsides to juggling multiple roles were: decisions about jobs and moving became more complicated when they had to consider their children's wellbeing and childcare provisions, they worked fewer hours and earned less money, professional planning became a luxury as the needs of the children were more important, and they found they had to limit their involvement in professional organisations. The personal downsides included: lack of time, family responsibilities and career came first, before their own personal needs, the lack of sleep and energy – no spare time, lack of regular exercise, even by former athletes and feeling guilty about not doing as

good a job as they wanted either on campus or at home, it was also suggested that the lack of leisurely pursuits and limited time and energy led to marital strain.

In light of the fact that the seventeen participants were coping with only two main roles; work and family and that eleven of them reported having private nannies, two more had stay-at-home husbands and fifteen of the seventeen even paid a regular cleaner, it seems that student mothers may experience even more difficulties. Student mothers often have the added strain of working part-time (or even full time) and earning significantly less than, for example, a qualified student administrator. They do not have the financial stability to afford the level of childcare utilised by the participants of Marshall's (2002) study and so endure much more 'overlapping' of their multiple roles. Student mothers face the demanding role of family carer, without the assistance of a private nanny and the full-time role of university studies, without the income of a full-time job. In addition to their already stretched time constraints, many student mothers take on part-time work. The downsides reported in Marshall's study must certainly be intensified for student mothers.

### **A feminist perspective**

Of the many researchers who have looked into feminist issues, none have yet produced definite answers to the problems that still exist within a false equality. The best way to illustrate this is with an example from current feminist literature:

The classic example is when a high-flying City executive announces that she's giving up her job because she can't do it properly and look after her children. Columnists immediately rush into print, crowing that 'you can't have

it all' and making working mothers who haven't given up their jobs feel guilty, when the real point is that each woman's circumstances are different and she should be able to decide for herself. (Smith, 1997, p.165)

Women are in fact, able to decide for themselves. It is the difficulties that they face in the workforce (or in the case of the research, in higher education) that render them unable to sustain both career and family. Equal opportunity, in this case is not as desirable as recognition of difference and support to compensate for obstacles.

As Smyth (1997) stated, "All research has a viewpoint – it may not always be made explicitly, although on other occasions it may be quite overt and upfront" (p. 21). The theoretical perspective will inevitably influence the methodology and the choice of literature to be reviewed. Underpinning the proposed research is the explicit feminist theoretical perspective. Stanley describes this perspective,

"We reject the idea that men can be feminists because we argue that what is essential to 'being feminist' is the possession of 'feminist consciousness'. And we see feminist consciousness as rooted in the concrete, practical and everyday experiences of being, and being treated as, a *woman*." (Stanley and Wise cited in Crotty, 1998, p.161)

Marian Lowe wrote "a particular contribution to women's studies has been an analysis of the university as a social institution and its function as an agent of control" (Lowe, 1991, p. 49). The university as an agent of control is a significant aspect of this research. Mothers' personal experiences are directly linked to political and social ideology and the patriarchal, hierarchical society that controls them. Universities are perpetuators, if not instigators, of this patriarchal ideology that gives women equal opportunity but refuses to change to accommodate them.

The specific epistemological stance of the research is the feminist analysis. The research had strong egalitarian and anti-elitist elements. The theme "Personal is political" is fundamental in establishing this theoretical base. Feminists believe that a re-structuring of society is needed in order to truly liberate women (Lowe, 1991). Liberal feminists are content to compete within the existing system and contend for equal access to education, equal pay rates and inequality of opportunity, while radical feminists call for the rejection of all hierarchical oppressive social structures (Lowe, 1991). Marxist socialist feminists take a more personal stance and examine not only the social structure but also the details of people's lives and in particular, the barriers to social change.

This particular perspective has been chosen because it seeks not only for the origins of women's oppression but also for strategies to change society and institutions. "There has been a general recognition that changing women's role will require change in social institutions as well as in individual consciousness" (Lowe, 1991, p. 48). 'Individual consciousness' suggests the fundamental and rarely questioned beliefs about women's roles in society and the home, the 'normal' or the everyday things that we all take for granted. The narrative inquiry method of the research allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and question their individual consciousnesses. As their stories unfolded, the mothers analysed their experiences, and realized that they had not stopped to consider the 'bigger picture'. They commented that they had never really thought about why they did things; they just did it to survive. Paulo Freire (1996) speaks about a research methodology that presents people with

significant dimensions of their contextual reality, stimulating critical thinking and leading to a greater understanding of the bigger picture. This 'conscientization' as Freire (1996) terms it, is an empowering concept, one which would lead mothers to consider their unique situations and question the patriarchal society that forces them to juggle multiple roles.

This study examined the experiences of women in a patriarchal institution and has endeavoured to suggest ways of changing the structures of universities, and to investigate the barriers to learning that mothers face. The Marxist socialist feminist perspective has given a more personal, in-depth approach to the topic than perhaps, the liberal or radical feminist perspective would have permitted.

### **Policy documents**

A number of Australian and other university policies that provided the protocol for lecturers, parents and guardians when children are brought onto university premises were reviewed. Each university had its own rules concerning safety and responsibility when children are on campus. Most agreed that children were not allowed in laboratories or areas of potential danger and that permission from the lecturer should be sought in advance if students intended to bring a child into a lecture.

Some of the university policies examined included a background to the reasoning behind the policy. One particular Australian university policy (not named for ethical reasons, see Appendix A) noted the high numbers of mothers of pre-school aged children currently in the work force. Higher education was

said to have contributed to the likelihood of mothers continuing employment after the birth of children. It is also important that this policy recognised that:

"family responsibilities impinge on all aspects of an individual's life and are not confined to be 'private' sphere. The ways in which such responsibilities impinge on work and education means that they are a concern of the University as a whole." (Appendix A, university policy two)

At the time of this research, the policy of the university in which this study was conducted did not include a background or reasons behind the formulation of the policy. It did however, state its commitment to promoting equity for students and staff. This policy was discussed with the participants and was referred to during discussion of the research findings where relevant.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

It was necessary for the method of this study to be uncomplicated yet facilitate the collection of rich, empowering stories. It was intended that this study be emancipatory in nature, so the method also needed to encourage participant's critical reflection. My personal journal and reflection of my experiences was the source of the main case study. I began keeping a journal during my first year of study and wrote intermittently throughout the four years.

During my third year of study I started a new journal with the specific intent of use in this research. Secondary case studies were formulated from data gathered from two voluntary participants. The research involved conversational interviews with these subjects. Each participant was interviewed twice, and diary entries and anecdotal notes were examined when relevant.

### **Narrative inquiry**

The qualitative research was undertaken from a narrative point of view, which is best described as "when data collection, interpretation and writing are considered a 'meaning making process' with similar characteristics to stories." (Gudmundsdottir, 1996, cited in Bell, 1999, p.16). One of the benefits of narrative inquiry is that it allows an incredibly personal depth of insight. It is particularly well suited to the theoretical perspective because of the feminist belief that objectivity is impossible when dealing with human beings. "The quest for objectivity is seen as futile by feminist scholars, since biases are inherent in our view of the world" (Lowe, 1991, p.49).

Narrative inquiry also allows for reflective autobiographical excerpts. I have kept a journal of some of my experiences at university and included

relevant sections as part of my personal case study. As with all forms of narrative inquiry, the interview/journal data was analysed to develop common themes and decide what was relevant to the research. The writing stage was the culmination of the information analysed, with reference to the research question and aims.

Gray, cited in Bell, (1999) outlines some of the problems associated with the narrative inquiry method. These problems include time-consuming interviews and developing a trusting relationship between researcher and storyteller. This possible problem was attended to by using the more relaxed form of questioning advocated by Burgess (1998) known as conversational interviews. As the conversations focused on no more than two main storytellers, they were not overly time consuming. The problem of developing a trusting relationship in order to develop more intimate stories was alleviated by the fact that the subjects were fellow students or people in a similar situation to myself. The only problem encountered was that my personal connection with the mothers' experiences made it difficult for me not to verbally agree with their perspective, and to hide my empathy in order to remain objective. My resulting concern was that the mothers would not contribute much information and the depth of the stories would suffer. In actual fact, the mothers spoke freely of their experiences with little need for guidance. The mothers used the conversations as a self-reflection period, where they acknowledged their struggles and achievements, perhaps for the first time. On two occasions the children of the participants were present during an interview. One of these interviews took place at university, the other at a participant's home. Having the children

present was a possible indication of the difficulties in finding childcare and was an example of the frequent interruptions that result from a child's presence.

## **Journalling**

"The journalling process contains the potentiality to transform the individual's values and actions, to transform the chaos confronted in the situation and to contribute to the individual and socio-cultural understandings" (Street, n.d).

It was for these reasons that I chose to use journalling as a method of data collection for the main case study. My personal experiences had a tendency to be overwhelming and were quickly pushed aside in order to cope with the next situation or difficulty. I found that through journalling my experiences I enabled time for reflection and questioning such as: what was happening, where was I going and why was I in this situation? By documenting my experiences I could see very clearly not only my values and actions but also the values and actions being imposed upon me by others.

## **Selection of participants**

Originally I planned to complete an auto-ethnographic study including and analysing only my own experiences. For the purpose of enhancing validity it was decided that formulating case studies of three participants, including myself would provide a rich source of data whilst still being a manageable sized project. Although two other participants were included, the main case study remained auto ethnographic thereby giving a very personal perspective and depth of insight to the research. The criterion for subject selection was that the female participants should have young children who were under the age of four for the majority of the time that the participants studied at university. Age,

marital status and socio-economic status were not controlled. Both participants had two children, although the number of children was also not part of the selection criteria. The participants being full-time students for the majority of their studies was also a criterion considered important to the validity of the study.

One of the participants (Amy) was a peer during our four-year studies. She was selected because of her willingness to participate, her reliability and because she met the criteria of the study. My supervisor recommended the other participant, Samantha. I approached Samantha and she was willing to participate, although she had graduated from the bachelor of education course one year previous to the study. Both participants had experienced changes to their circumstances during the course of their studies. For example, the addition of another child, moving house, change in work situations and changes in childcare provisions were varying events for the participants. These changes were recorded during the conversational interviews and observed during the analysis of the data.

### **The pilot study**

To prepare for the process of conversational interviewing I formulated prompt questions and tested them by conducting a pilot study. Pilot studies are recommended as they are "useful in refining the research problem and methodology" (Edith Cowan University, 2002). I enlisted the help of a fellow researcher and friend to 'try out' the interview questions. As the friend was a mother of teenage children she did not give answers that may have been expected from the research participants. She did however, give me valuable

feedback about the direction of my questions and helped to re-word any that may have been leading. This was extremely beneficial in preparing for the real interviews and in clarifying the interview process. Conducting a pilot study also helped to alleviate some of my nervousness about the relevance of my questions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

As with most qualitative research, the participants were required to reveal information about themselves and their situations that could have been quite personal and private. In order to protect the rights of the participants and ensure that the research was conducted in the utmost professional and ethical manner, appropriate university ethics clearance was sought before the research began. In addition, the following guidelines were formulated and adhered to throughout the research process:

- The participants were voluntary, and could withdraw from the study at any time they wished.
- Participants were given the option to refuse to answer any question during a conversation, and to withdraw from a conversation at any time
- Participants were given a draft copy of the thesis before submission and given the option to withdraw any comments they made and did not wish to publish.
- All participants (and their children/families) were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. The researchers' children were also given pseudonyms.
- Every attempt was made to conduct the research unobtrusively with respect for the families' unique situations.

- Participants revealing, or expressing serious concerns were to be referred to the university counsellor for professional guidance.
- The university in which the study was conducted has remained unnamed. Any material, references or descriptions that may identify it have been excluded.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of the study, outlined below, are the considerations predicted or observed during the research process. For the most part, they were addressed through careful planning and by consulting my supervisor.

- Interviewer bias. Being in the same situation as the participants had advantages but it also meant that it was possible for me to lead the participants' discussions and interpret their experiences as I would my own. By being honest with the participants and explaining my lack of expressed empathy before beginning the conversational interviews, I may have alleviated some of the bias. Burns (1995) warns that bias can occur in all forms of inquiry, but particularly in the analysis of events in case studies. In analysing the data, I questioned my own perspective and looked only at the stated experiences, rather than what I felt the participants may have meant.
- Validity of the data. Using only three subjects may mean the study is limited in its breadth of perspective. I felt it was necessary to limit the number of participants in order to achieve depth and look closely at the experiences. Creswell & Miller (2002) advocate this approach:

"...to describe the setting, the participants, and the themes of a qualitative study in rich detail. According to Denzin (1989), 'thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts.... Thin descriptions, by contrast, lack

detail, and simply report the facts' (p. 83). The purpose of a thick description is that it creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study. Thus, credibility is established through the lens of readers who read a narrative account and are transported into a setting or situation" (p. 128).

It was also necessary to limit the number of participants to create a realistic time frame.

- **Audio taping.** The use of a tape recorder was a possible limitation of the study as it may have made the participants feel uncomfortable and less willing to tell their stories. By using a very small, unobtrusive tape recorder and conducting long conversational interviews, participants seemed to forget that they were being recorded and relax.
- **Generalisations.** The experiences of mothers may not be consistent throughout all universities, for this reason, the findings may be of limited use. A certain amount of generalisation has been made about the circumstances of mothers in higher education. The experiences of the participants may be comparable to other mothers studying at universities similar to the subject university. The study findings and suggestions should be considered limited in this regard, pointing out, once again, the need for further research.

### **The research design**

The research was conducted using three case studies: an education graduate, a fourth year education student and myself. Given the unique nature of the participants involved, and the possibility that one or more may find the extra obligations too much to cope with, other students with children were asked to be 'back-up' participants. Fortunately, despite busy schedules and difficulties

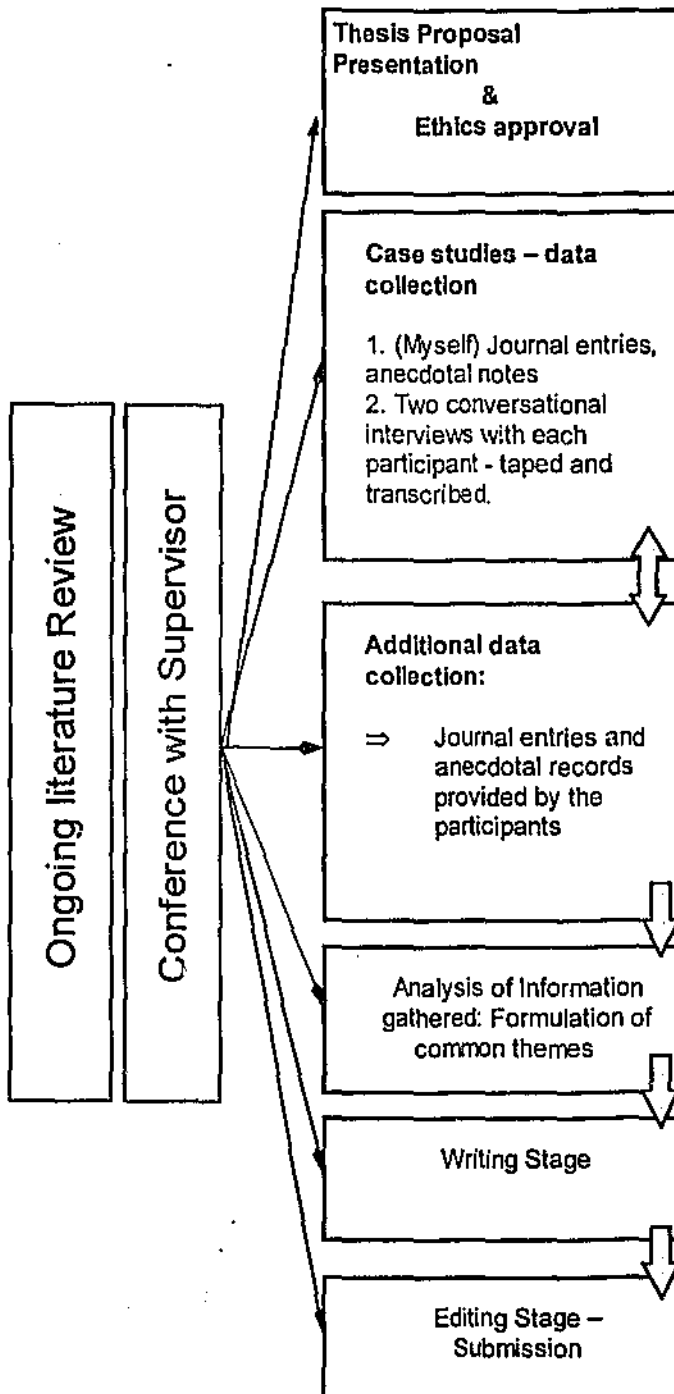
in contacting participants there was no need to make use of the back up participants. Figure 1 illustrates the research design.

### **Analysis of the data**

Analysis of the data involved identifying common themes within the stories. The themes were then further examined to identify underlying reasons for these similarities and compared with past research. One of the aims of the study was to investigate the nature and origins of the problems and barriers to learning that student mothers face. This was attempted by analysing the transcripts and data collected, and through comparing the themes from previous research with the emergent themes of the study.

Suggestions for improving the experiences of mothers at university were formulated by examining common problems encountered. The participants revealed a number of coping strategies they had developed, mostly by trial and error. These strategies and suggestions may be of interest to universities in their planning for inclusive higher education. They may also be of specific interest to mothers undertaking or considering studies at university.

**Figure 1 – Research design**



## **CHAPTER FOUR: STORIES OF MOTHERS' EXPERIENCES AT UNIVERSITY**

The stories told by the participants are recounted without below and discussed in chapter five. The stories have been recorded in narrative format allowing the individual participant to voice their experiences. My personal experiences of studying, working and attending to my family's needs have been recorded below. As it would be almost impossible to write of every experience I have had since the commencement of my studies, I have included only those specifically relevant to the study. Experiences based either at the university or linked to university requirements in relation to the combination of family, work and study are the main focus.

In recounting the stories of Amy and Samantha I have tried to remain a 'silent observer' and have included as many as possible of the details that were relevant to the study, described to me during the conversations. The ensuing discussion of the stories (Chapter five) analyses the emergent themes and compares and contrasts them with the appropriate literature.

### **Subject one: My personal experience**

I began my university studies as a single mother. I was attracted to teaching because of the hours, the holidays and the secure income. A desire to find better methods of teaching than those I had experienced in my own schooling also influenced my decision to choose teaching. I knew that being a single mother would make it hard to study but at the time, I had my family's support and long-term, it was by far the best option.

I had to leave early on orientation day, because I was breastfeeding and panicked that my baby might starve without me. Despite this the first year was relatively easy. My mother supported me by looking after my daughter while I worked and day-care was available for the days that I attended classes. I was still breastfeeding but Gayle had begun to take solids, so an evening feed was sufficient. Occasionally I had to take Gayle to university with me but she was a quiet baby and slept most of her first year.

Although I was blessed with a child that slept all night, I worked night shifts in a bar, finishing well past midnight most nights. University lectures were quite a challenge on five hours sleep each night. I was lucky that I had a lot of support during my first year of study. My neighbours at the time were two lovely ladies that lent me their laptop on the many occasions that my dilapidated old computer crashed. I met an incredibly supportive friend during my first year. She taught me how to present assignments, how to use a computer and how to laugh at life.

It was during my first year that I had my first real sense of the attitudes of some towards mothers who study. A fellow student approached me one day and offered her advice. She said, "I've discussed it with my husband and we both agree that you should be at home with your daughter". I was astounded, not only by her attitude but also by her perception that it was her right (and duty) to tell me my place. I tried to ignore negative attitudes and focused on the positive encouragement from friends and lecturers. During this time I was re-acquainted with an old friend who became my defacto partner and eighteen

months later, my husband. He also supported my studies and took on the role of Gayle's father as though she was his child.

My second year of university study became logistically quite difficult. Gayle was now two and a half and taking her to lectures was not as easy as it had been. It was not that she was noisy or disruptive, but education students are naturally curious about and interested in children, so the focus was frequently on Gayle and not the lecturer. People sitting behind Gayle would whisper to her during lectures and pass her pens and pencils to play with. I found I could not concentrate on the lecture because I was so sensitive to the slightest disruption that Gayle might cause.

On one occasion during a lecture, Gayle sat beside me pretending to take notes. The lecturer asked the class to think of three things in response to a topic she raised. We were given a little 'think time' to come up with an answer. I looked down and noticed Gayle had stopped 'writing' and was deep in two-year-old thought. Suddenly, she blurted out "I can't think of three things, sorry!" The front three rows dissolved in laughter and the lecturer had to wait before continuing the lecture.

It was around this time that my mother and I had an argument, temporarily ending her role as a support person. I coped by increasing the time that Gayle spent in childcare and by tutoring to help pay for the extra fees. My night bar work continued but my partner (now fiancé) looked after Gayle. I alternated weekend work between a second hand furniture shop and the local supermarket. University had become a rest place for me, a quiet haven where I

could enjoy the company of others. Despite this there were many times that I wanted to defer or quit, and find one full-time job with regular hours.

An entry from my personal journal at this time shows the confusion and turmoil I felt about coping with multiple roles:

Uni is going pretty well, we had a holiday over Easter but I hardly noticed! Between moving house, working and watching Gayle I didn't even have time to do the assignments that are due straight after the break. Two assignments are being marked this week, one big report and one essay. I hope I do well. If I don't do well this semester I am going to seriously consider deferring for a year to work. There are so many reasons for me to leave uni and go to work. [my partner] is working too hard and we hardly see each other. I have two jobs but they are not enough to pay for much. I can only really work on the weekends and that's not enough. If I was working full-time somewhere I could have regular hours and a good income. We could relax and pay off the house without the worry of not knowing if we can pay off unexpected things. My car is due for a service and there are bills that need to be paid first. On the other hand – I really want to finish what I have started (for once!). I *want* to be a teacher. The rewards at the end of the four years will be worth the struggle. I think I am just having half-way second thoughts – I've been told most students have them. The main concern is that [my partner] has too much responsibility on his shoulders right now. Gayle is still not asleep. It sounds like she has the powder again. I think I will go and check. (Journal entry, 08/05/01)

Many of my journal entries reflected my feelings of being torn between family responsibilities and study. As time progressed, I wrote less about deferring and more about getting on with it. "The number of times I have nearly quit uni to get a job! it has been a long, hard struggle – and it's not over yet...It's just going to be survival!" (Journal entry 10/03/02).

Luckily, university classes were quite easy for me, as the curriculum was frequently related to my first hand experience with my own child's development, particularly the acquisition of language skills. One assignment involved taping and transcribing a sequence of conversation with a child. I used Gayle as my 'test' child and achieved a high mark for an assignment completed with little

trouble at all. Childless peers expressed difficulties with finding a child and arranging access for the taping session. They also did not have the relationship that I had with my own child and found it difficult to solicit a response from an unknown child.

I completed my assignments at night, as it was my only spare time. On receiving an assignment I would vow not to leave it to the last minute and to start immediately. In reality, this rarely happened, as I could not justify working on something that was not due for a week or more when I had more urgent family responsibilities. I envied the women whose houses were always spotless and whose children were immaculately groomed. Leaving assignments to the last minute was not always a disadvantage. Many lecturers covered the material needed for the assignment in the lectures just beforehand. On many occasions issues raised by other students led to last minute changes in the assignment expectations or assessment criteria. One particular lecturer changed the whole assignment criteria four times before setting the final outline. On another occasion I spent a sleepless night finishing an assignment only to discover that the due date had been changed and that we had an extra week to complete it. The lecturer had only informed one tutorial group and not the other.

During the third year of my course I (unexpectedly) fell pregnant with my second child. This was an incredibly difficult period where I had to choose between giving up studying or continuing with two children. With the support of my fiancé's family I decided to continue without deferring. This decision was influenced by my observations of a peer, who fell pregnant, gave birth and returned to classes with her baby. She breastfed confidently at the back of the

room during classes and seemed to cope amazingly well. I thought if it could be done, then I would do it. I had come too far to give up or defer (possibly never returning).

We married during the September of my second year of university in a local hall and had one night away for a honeymoon (we took Gayle with us). The wedding planning was extremely disruptive to my studies and I remember it as a very stressful time that ended abruptly with our wedding day. My husband was now working ten to twelve hour days, six days a week, sometimes seven.

Being pregnant at university was difficult. A certain amount of teacher education is physical and there are compulsory practices involving full-time teaching loads. My second teaching practicum in a year one classroom was extremely tiring. On the third day the teacher informed me that chicken pox was going around and that some students in our class had contracted it. I spent the remaining days worrying unnecessarily about my unborn child and contracted influenza instead.

Exams were particularly difficult when I was pregnant. Sitting in an uncomfortable chair for three and a half hours with a huge stomach is a challenge. I had to leave to go to the toilet at least twice during every exam and I had to eat every hour or I would feel nauseous and dizzy. To make matters worse I stepped on a bee before one exam and my already swollen foot doubled in size. A friend took me to the doctor just hours before the exam and I was given a covering note to explain why I should not be expected to perform at my best. I sat the exam in a special room, where the examiner tried to make me

as comfortable as possible. Unfortunately, he felt I should have my foot elevated and propped my leg up on a chair. This is an extremely difficult position to maintain when you are six months pregnant. He then asked me every half hour if I was okay and shifted the chair regularly, trying to make me at least look comfortable. Despite the comical circumstances and the doctor's note excusing a poor performance, I managed to achieve a high mark for that exam.

My second child, Bella, was due around the commencement of my third year of study. I planned to return to university classes at the start of term and take work with me for the days I would be in hospital. However, I developed high blood pressure and fluid retention half way through my pregnancy. I continued to work, as we needed the money, especially over Christmas. My doctor expressed his concern over my stress levels and suggested I spend half a day in bed each day. Having been so busy for years now, I had almost forgotten how to rest. Half a day in bed seemed like an eternity to me so I ignored his advice. Six weeks before the baby was due I developed pre-eclampsia and was rushed to hospital for an emergency caesarean. Luckily the baby was unharmed, but it took me a lot longer to recover than I had anticipated.

I spoke to the lecturers and they agreed to let me study from home, although I had enrolled in on-campus units. I was extremely grateful and worked hard, finishing one unit with one of the top marks for our class. I only attended classes when it was essential. On these occasions I brought my daughter with me. She slept through many lectures, waking only for feeds. Breastfeeding in the back of the classroom was not as easy as my peer had made it seem. I was

not quite that confident and ended up breastfeeding in the toilets or on the bench outside the education building. This was a favourite spot for smokers and was not the best place for breastfeeding. I breastfed for three months before introducing a bottle, partly for the convenience and partly because I did not seem to be able to supply enough milk.

My daughter was just six weeks old when the nursing students approached me. They asked if they could use Bella as a 'demo baby' for the bathing newborns procedure. I hesitantly agreed and we crowded into a nursing classroom. The lecturer explained how to bath a newborn and asked my advice on the best way to test the water and hold the baby. The nursing students were fascinated and thanked me for the first hand experience they had gained, having a 'real live baby' to bath.

As Bella grew older she began to attend childcare and spend less time at university with me. I found it extremely difficult to book both children into day-care on the same day because of the age difference and the staffing ratio. Some days they would have room for Gayle and not for Bella, and other days they could only have Bella. Permanent bookings were hard to get and if you did manage to secure one, you were charged for public holidays, days when the centre was closed and days that your child may not have attended due to illness. The fees for childcare centres were quite high and although government subsidy did cover some of them, we found it difficult to keep up with the payments.

My third year professional teaching practice was completed in a local school so my mother-in-law looked after my children. At the time she was not working and offered to help out. One morning during my second week, the bus company that she occasionally drove for rang and asked if she could fill in for an absent school bus driver to do the afternoon run. It was very late notice but I thought I might be able to negotiate with the school's Principal to leave straight after school finished. When I approached her and explained the situation she reluctantly agreed and said, "As long as you know it's unprofessional". At the time I was upset that she had not been more understanding but after learning more about duty of care, I understood that this would not be accepted in a real teaching situation. However, in a real teaching situation, with a real income, I would have been able to afford day-care and the problem would not have arisen. I felt professionalism, in this situation, was a luxury I could only afford with the income that accompanies a teaching position.

My fourth year of university was what I have come to think of as a "hang in there year". I found lecturers to be very understanding when it came to my Assistant Teacher Program (ATP- refer to Appendix B). I stressed the need to complete the nine weeks of teaching in a school close to home in order to be near my children. It was arranged and I spent nine weeks in a great local school. My mother-in-law, day-care and friends cared for my children while I spent an enormous amount of time and energy preparing programs and learning experiences. My supervisor noted the enormous amount of assessment that the classroom teacher had handed to me and reminded me to rest occasionally. She asked how I was coping with my children and I remember saying to her that I had expected everything to fall in a big heap and how

surprised I was that everything was still running smoothly. I found the challenge exhausting but also exhilarating. At the end of my last teaching practice I received an 'outstanding' mark for both professionalism and teaching.

With only two units to finish and this thesis I began to work as a relief teacher for local schools. My husband resigned from his job of four years in order to take a more flexible position in a vineyard. His new employer allowed him to take time off at short notice if I was called in to work. Anticipating only a few days relief work a week, I thought I could continue studying relatively uninterrupted. I was wrong. The work flooded in, and the money was too good to refuse. My husband could work two days before he would earn what I could earn in one day. The problem was that lecturers had anticipated fourth year students working and adhered rigidly to the attendance rules for the last two units. I had to turn down every Wednesday's work to attend university. Some mornings I would turn down as many as three or four schools asking me to work. It was extremely difficult to concentrate on my studies after starting work and experiencing the 'real world' of teaching and the 'real income' that goes with it.

When a Principal phoned me and offered me a position as a kindergarten teacher three days a week I jumped at the chance. It meant regular hours, my own classroom and an easier to arrange childcare schedule. I was encouraged by the teachers at my ATP school to accept the opportunity as it would allow me to gain real teaching experience and a 'foot in the door' for merit select positions. Three days a week did not seem like much and I was allocated half a day for planning. As it was my first teaching position and I was keen to try so

many things, I spent hours on preparation, some of which was never used. In retrospect, had I not taken the position I would not have been offered a merit select position in another school, which I accepted on completion of my studies.

Being a parent was a great asset to me in my liaison with the parents of my students. Many of the parents (as they later told me) were sceptical about my capabilities as I was a young graduate. They later told me how happy they were with their children's progress. During parent interviews I was able to empathise with their concerns about their children and speak from first hand experience backed up by my theoretical knowledge. I doubt whether these parents would have warmed to me so quickly had I not been a parent myself.

Although my work was a great success, my studies had lapsed and I found I had to take two days leave to finish assignments left to the last minute. This thesis is in fact, proof in itself of the difficulty I have had in maintaining the balance between work, study and family responsibility, particularly when the allure of an income made work seem much more important. During the writing stage of this thesis I was living a semi-nocturnal life, sleeping during the day when Bella slept and staying awake in the peace of the night to write.

Having completed my four years of study I am looking forward to having just two main roles, family responsibilities and career. My studies have been an enriching and fulfilling part of my life for four years but I am glad to join what I see as 'the real world'. Upon receipt of an academic scholarship a writer contacted me asking if she could publish a story including some details about me. It took me two weeks to return her email and I apologised profusely for the

delay. She sent a return email thanking me for my permission and said of the wait "I have a vague (yet terrifying) idea of what your life must be like" So, would I do it all again if I knew then what I know now? Yes, I think I would.

### **Subject two: Amy**

Amy was a fourth year education student with two young children. For privacy reasons Amy's two children have been given the pseudonyms 'Gemma' and 'Martin'. At the time of the interviews Gemma, Amy's first child was six years old. Martin, Amy's second child had just turned four. Amy was not married but had recently reconciled with her partner, the father of her children. Throughout her university studies she had lived with her mother and her mother's young children. Part-time work, full-time study and parenting had been Amy's life for the previous four years.

When Amy left school she began studying commerce before leaving to travel with girlfriends. When she returned, she fell pregnant with her first child. Of her intentions to study Amy said, "I had always intended to go to uni, I never intended to be a teacher". Her choice to enter the teaching profession was influenced by her responsibilities as a mother. According to Amy, being a teacher had a lot to offer parents, such as the same holidays as your children, the possibility of teaching at the school they attended and a secure income. The benefits of being a teacher, in Amy's case seemed to outweigh personal choice and ambition. "I think I should be doing business...I'm not saying I don't enjoy it, I don't think I'm crap at it [teaching], it's just a very different sort of profession" (Amy, Oct., 2002 personal communication).

Amy brought her children to university on numerous occasions. She spoke of one occasion in particular that she was acutely aware of being different to other students. On starting university, Amy attended orientation day. Amy's first child was only four and a half months old and still breastfeeding, so she had no choice but to bring her. Amy tells the story laughing in retrospect, although at the time she found it very embarrassing.

I brought Gemma with me so I felt quite silly for most of the day. I wasn't quite twenty yet and I was still breastfeeding and pushing around a pusher. Into our public lecture in a lecture hall. I had to take her out and change her nappy which was soooooo embarrassing! Still at that, you know [stage]...she was four and a half months old so I did get embarrassed (Amy, personal communication, Oct, 2002).

Amy recalled her first year of university as being awkward and busy as she rushed between lectures and a local day-care centre to breastfeed her daughter. The policy at childcare centres prevented children with infectious illnesses from attending. This meant that if Amy's children were unwell, they were excluded from childcare and had to either attend university with Amy or, if the illness was serious, Amy would stay home and miss classes. On the occasions that Amy missed university classes she downloaded notes from the university server, or asked a friend to pass on their notes. Amy recalled one lecturer spending half an hour running her through the information she had missed when both her children were sick.

Amy said she felt more comfortable taking her second child to university with her because she was more confident in herself. This was also because she felt the other students had matured and were no longer looking at her "as if [she

was] bringing a toy or a nuisance along" (Amy, personal communication, Oct. 2002).

Amy said that on one occasion during her first year of study, she was asked to leave the computing laboratory because she had Gemma with her. Amy said she did not have a printer at home and was forced to bring her children to university to use the computers because day-care was not available and her mother was busy.

**Amy:** I actually got kicked out of the computing room once with [Gemma], by the head guy there. He came and said to me "You can't have children in here".

**Interviewer:** How did you feel?

**Amy:** Pissed off! I had an assignment to finish off, I was only, I wasn't sitting there doing the assignment, I was, you know, doing the last minute things and printing it off.

**Interviewer:** How long do you think you would have needed to finish it?

**Amy:** Probably about half an hour. I was very young and very timid.

**Interviewer:** Have you ever taken your children back there?

**Amy:** Yep! [laughs] Yeah, I take them to the other one [computer room], with their chips and their drink and sit them on the floor.

(Amy, personal communication, Oct., 2002)

Amy said she was aware of the rules when she took Gemma to the computer room but felt she had no choice. She grinned as she described her determination that she would not be excluded on the basis of her children.

In her second year of study, Amy relied more heavily on day-care and made bookings for Wednesdays and Thursdays so that she could work on assignments and use the library. She said she hated taking her children to the library with her. "I'm sure I go bright red," (Amy, personal communication, Oct. 2002) said Amy. She told me about the time when Martin turned the photocopiers off at the power points and she panicked that they would be damaged. Thankfully, they just came straight back on again when she turned

the power back on. Amy said Gemma was better to take to the library because she would sit and read. Martin liked to run around. When I asked Amy if she could finish her work with Martin running around, she replied:

"Not generally, no. You just go with that. You say to yourself 'I'm just going to go and photocopy these five pages and that's it' you just can't bring them up for longer than that... I find that I have to bring the kids up [to the university library], I mean, you don't have any choice. You've got to do stuff for uni. There's not a crèche here" (Amy, personal communication, Oct. 2002).

Booking day-care for two days a week alleviated the problem of bringing her children to the library but day-care policy meant she paid for a full day even if she picked up her children just after lunch. Amy told me that her partner did not like their children to go to day-care, so she usually picked them up promptly after completing her university commitments.

Amy also worked part-time during her second year as a bus aid for a handicapped child. She would get up at 5:30am, work, and then attend university classes. She also said she worked as a barperson at various stages of her studies. She laughed as she told me how terrible her bar work was and said "I don't know why we do it to ourselves!" (Amy, personal communication, Oct. 2002).

As Amy lived with her mother and her mother's small children, during her studies they were able to support each other by alternating babysitting and other tasks, such as the shopping. When asked about her relationship with her mother, Amy paused for a moment before answering "We pretty much see on the same level...an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. So that's sort of good and in one sense it's bad. She does favours but you've got to do them back as

well" (Amy, personal communication, Oct. 2002). Amy said her mother was supportive and encouraged her to finish her course.

Her fourth year of study was the most difficult for Amy. She knew that her ATP would be difficult to arrange so she began preparation four months in advance. Booking day-care for her children proved to be quite difficult, as they could not let Amy know until just two weeks before ATP that her booking was available, despite the four months notice. It was only the fact that another child discontinued care that Amy was able to make arrangements.

As Amy reflected on ATP and on her studies in general she expressed a sense of lost identity. Her focus on 'getting through' meant she lost sight of her personal needs and went into 'survival mode'. In this section of an interview, I sat silently and Amy spoke as if she were talking to herself, reflecting on the difficulties of the past four years:

I can't wait to finish. It's funny, it's been my sole goal, to get everybody through this. And I guess that's the thing too, my whole focus was to get everybody through ATP and everyone still be okay, and now it's like, well, I know what the kids need but what do I need? What's for me next? It's been a long four years and I can't wait until it's finished. (Amy, personal communication, Oct. 2002)

Amy's second interview occurred just before her internship (refer to Appendix B). She was unsure of where she would be going for the internship and told me of the problems she had securing a position. Originally, Amy had planned to take her children to a remote country location and complete her internship with the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). Amy was prepared to pay for her children's flights and costs. A lecturer secured a position for Amy but did not mention to the SIDE that Amy would be taking her children

with her. When Amy telephoned to confirm the internship details, she was told they could not find a family willing to take her with her children, so she would have to find alternative arrangements. This was disappointing for Amy. She felt it would have been a great opportunity for her future teaching career "I thought it would be really good to go away because I want to go when I start work" (Amy, personal communication, Oct. 2002).

At the end of the second interview I asked Amy if she would choose to study again if she knew back then what she knew now. She looked at me and sighed, "I don't think I can answer that, I don't know, it's been very hard, maybe" (Amy, personal communication, Oct. 2002).

### **Subject three: Samantha**

Samantha struck me as someone with an extremely positive outlook on life. As I sat in her dining room listening to her stories of challenging, and seemingly impossible situations, I marvelled at her ability to smile and tell me how lucky she had been. Each situation was overcome and it was "no big deal" to Samantha. She frequently pointed out the brighter side of difficult times. Every so often, she mentioned something someone had done to help her, even if it was just holding her baby, smiled and said "and that was nice" (Samantha, personal communication Oct. 2002 ; Jan. 2003).

At the time of the interviews Samantha was married with two young children. Samantha's husband ran his own business, which provided the income for Samantha to study for four years. Although having the income meant Samantha did not need to work, she said she missed the support of her husband as he worked long hours, six days a week.

Samantha was pregnant when she decided to undertake a teaching degree. Her first son was just two weeks old when she started her course. Packing her first assignment in her hospital bag she intended to make a start immediately. "I didn't do it! I just remember, it was there," (Samantha, personal communication, Oct., 2002) laughed Samantha. Samantha brought her son to university classes for the first few months of his life. She said it was easy to carry him in a harness while he was young and slept most of the day. "I remember, I only chose to take him into art [classes] because it was hands-on and a bit more noisy, I knew it wouldn't be sit down lecture stuff" (Samantha, personal communication, Oct., 2002). During the lectures that Samantha's son attended, if he cried she took him straight out and listened at the door. She expressed a concern about disrupting other students and was not worried about missing the lecture. She said she was a 'listener' and was able to pick up what she needed to know and remember it. If her son had been really disruptive, Samantha said she would have used a tape recorder to record the lecture.

One of a physical education unit's assessments was to choreograph and perform a dance (in a group). The timing of this assignment was particularly difficult for Samantha. She was pregnant during most of her group's practice sessions and prior to the last two practices, had given birth and had stitches. Her group had chosen to do the 'hucklebuck', an extremely physical dance requiring a lot of energy and movement. Samantha laughed as she told me "It did hurt and they [other group members] were all telling me sit down, sit down!" (Samantha, personal communication, Oct., 2002). During the actual videotaped assessment Samantha expressed the difficulty she had with having her newborn son present:

It was my group's turn and everyone that been handling him was in my group, so I ended up giving him to another girl. And she wasn't very comfortable with children. So it's halfway through my dance and he started to cry 'hello, I want my mum back', so it was very hard because I was doing an assessment. But then another student came and helped her out. (Samantha, personal communication, Oct. 2002)

Despite the difficulties, Samantha described the times when she brought her first son to university classes as a positive time in her life. She liked the idea of her peers watching him grow up.

I was carrying him in a harness and then everyone else wanted to have a go and a cuddle and stuff, and our teacher at the time carried him around. That was really nice. Over the year during uni everyone liked seeing him grow up and even the guys liked to play with him, it was really nice. (Samantha, personal communication, Oct. 2002)

With her first child, Samantha had her mother-in-law's support and day-care as a back up. However, when her second child was born, her mother-in-law was not available due to work commitments, which meant Samantha relied heavily on day-care. "I tried to get them in the days that uni was happening, and then the day would change and it's very hard to change your days at day-care" (Samantha, personal communication, Oct., 2002).

On the few occasions Samantha missed university classes due to her son being unwell, she said it was easy to get notes from people or to download them from the university server. She attributed her coping during the first year to being organised and doing assignments before they were due. She said it was hard to do assignments before they were due "because it was that thought that the lecturer's going to give last minute hints and I wouldn't get it, and it happens like that!" (Samantha, personal communication, Oct. 2002).

According to Samantha, her second year of study was relatively easy. Her son stayed with her mother-in-law during university classes and her husband looked after him while Samantha did group assignments. She said she would not have her son with her if she was working off campus on a group assignment, because she did not consider it to be fair on the other group members.

During her third year of study, Samantha fell pregnant with her second son and her situation became more difficult. She remembered being pregnant at university as "Horrible, I remember being pregnant during exams, that was awful! I had talks to do too when I was very pregnant and I was breathless, it was like I'd been running and it was just horrible!" (Samantha, personal communication, Oct. 2002).

Being pregnant in her fourth year of study, Samantha's due date coincided with the last week of her ATP. This caused many problems for Samantha and initially she was told she would not be able to complete her ATP.

I had a big problem because I was due in the last week of ATP. But I knew I had no problem [being pregnant during ATP] and I had him on the second last day of term and I took him in to school the next day for the children to look at. I remember at the beginning of term I had a really hard time to do my ATP because you have to have a doctors' note if you work up to the last day, if you're pregnant in State and Catholic schools. I think the Catholic schools were not keen to have me, because I was so pregnant, even though I was married, and the lecturers weren't going to let me do it...I was pretty annoyed. Not upset, I was really annoyed. I wanted to do it then, thinking that having two [children] it would have been really hard. (Samantha, personal communication, 2002)

Samantha explained her situation to a staff member (Melanie), who proved to be very supportive. She did not ask her to speak to the lecturers involved but Melanie felt that Samantha had been treated unfairly so she intervened. A

verbal apology from the lecturers concerned followed and Samantha was allowed to complete her ATP, provided she began teaching two weeks earlier to allow for her due date. When I asked Samantha how she felt about completing her ATP whilst pregnant she replied:

They [the lecturers] were really worried about my stress but they apologised and said 'Well, you know what you can handle'. I ended up working at the school that I went to. I did see another person who did the same and it was too much for her. I think it has to be done on a personal basis. It takes a lot to get me stressed. I know my limits but I guess some people don't. (Samantha, personal communication, 2002)

Samantha theorised that her second child had benefited from her teaching practices, although he was not yet born. She had read that it was recommended that you read, talk and sing to your unborn child as often as you could during the pregnancy. This was supposed to enhance the relationship between mother and child and create a better basis for the child's later language development. Samantha laughed as she explained "I could be wrong, but I think if you look at him now, some of the things he comes out with... I think it was because I was doing all those things you are supposed to do when you're pregnant" (Samantha, personal communication, Oct. 2002).

When Samantha's second son was born during her fourth year of study she decided to bottle feed him. The reasons for this were that he was attending day-care part-time, she felt it was more convenient at university and because she was teaching part-time and did not feel it was appropriate to breastfeed in the classroom (Samantha, personal communication, Oct. 2002). Samantha said she knew breastfeeding was the recommended method of infant feeding but felt she had to make things as easy as possible. Having her newborn son in the

classroom with her was, according to Samantha, a great experience. The children played with him during morning recess after he had his bottle.

At the time of writing, Samantha was still teaching, with two children and was thoroughly enjoying her chosen profession. When I asked her if she would do it all again (study with young children) she hesitated, "Umm, well, if I knew then what I know now [long pause as Samantha considered the question] yes I think I would. It's worth it in the end" (Samantha, personal communication, 2002).

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

In this final chapter the experiences of mothers who study at university are examined, from a Marxist socialist feminist perspective. It is hoped that the recommendations following the discussion will be a step towards giving voice to mothers who study at university with young children. It is also hoped that this study will inspire others to complete much needed further research.

The themes that emerged from the study are discussed and then further examined in relation to the research question and aims. The common themes that arose were: children on campus and on-campus facilities, the attitudes of staff and students, family responsibilities/multiple roles, pregnancy, breastfeeding, financial issues and the advantages of being a mother at university.

### **Emergent themes**

#### **Children on campus and on-campus facilities**

All three participants in this study found it necessary to bring their children to university at various times. Sometimes it was just a short visit to the library, or to meet with lecturers, other days they attended lectures or hands-on workshops with their children. There were many reasons for bringing children to university, the most common being that childcare was not available. This was either because the university attendance was at short notice, there was no available childcare bookings and family support was temporarily unavailable, or due to the fact that the child/children were too unwell to attend childcare. Another reason for children's presence on campus was that they were being

breastfed and separation from the mother was not desirable from either perspective.

There were many important issues raised during this study in relation to children on campus. The first was that the university was not equipped to cope with young children. There was no crèche available to alleviate the problems associated with 'dropping in to the library' for a minute to pick up a book, do some photocopying or research for an assignment. All three mothers agreed that visiting the library with their children was something of a nightmare. Children were so obviously out of place in the quiet surrounds of the library and they were frequently looked upon as disruptive. Crèche facilities would have been extremely beneficial to the participants of the study, and also to their children, whose 'disruptive' behaviour was often due to either natural 'child curiosity' or boredom.

Bringing a baby to university had its own unique needs such as breastfeeding and nappy changing facilities. The mothers involved in this study reported changing their babies in the toilets, in their prams, on the desks of the university classrooms and in their cars. There were no specialised or more hygienic options available. Although there were places that you could breastfeed a baby, there were no private areas specifically set aside for breastfeeding.

The findings of this study suggest that women's experiences with bringing their children to university were negatively effected by the lack of facilities. The university was not designed to be a child-friendly campus and this

made it difficult for the mothers to do what they had to do on campus whilst caring for their children. The lack of facilities also indicated a wider lack of acknowledgement of mothers and children on campus.

### **The attitudes of staff and students**

It is difficult to measure the attitudes of staff and students towards mothers who study at university because firstly, the attitudes may be only interpreted or perceived by the mothers, and secondly, people change and develop, particularly in a university setting where studies of social justice and critical thinking can alter one's perception of others. The attitudes described below are based only on the subjective perception of the mothers, not on data gathered from other students or lecturers. In light of this, the discussion below is of relevance to this particular study and may be an indication only of the perceived attitudes towards mothers studying at university.

The mothers involved in this study reported having been taught by some incredibly helpful, caring lecturers in some instances and also in others, by indifferent, sometimes insensitive lecturers. Whether they chose to 'look on the bright side' or whether they genuinely experienced a majority of caring lecturers is unknown, but all participants told stories of being helped, listened to and having been able to negotiate circumstances. The attitudes of other university staff, such as library staff, student administration and sessional staff were reported to be slightly less understanding. Mothers felt uncomfortable visiting the library with their children because of 'the looks' from the staff and suggested that the staff viewed children as disruptive and not welcome in the library.

The attitudes of other students ranged from being extremely understanding and helpful to disinterested and even disapproving in one particular case. Each participant had had different experiences with other students' attitudes towards their role as a mother. Amy reported mostly negative attitudes, particularly during her first year when she was a young mother and the students enrolled in the same year level were, according to Amy, young and immature. I experienced a range of attitudes, with some staff and students blatantly opposed to mothers studying and others in awe of what they saw as an impossible task (to study with children). Samantha reported nothing but caring and helpful attitudes. She stressed how willing people were to help and how interested they were in her children.

### **Family responsibilities/multiple roles**

Perhaps the strongest common thread between all participants was the shared feeling of being torn between family responsibilities, university requirements and work commitments. The downsides to coping with multiple roles, recorded by Marshall (2002) were certainly evident in the experiences of the three participants of this study. Lack of time, energy, leisurely pursuits and feeling guilty were among the downsides that Marshall (2002) listed. Participants coped with these in their own way. Amy decided to 'just get through' at university and not worry too much about achieving high marks. Samantha drew on her supportive family to enable her to find a balance between study and family. I found that sacrificing a little from each sphere at different times meant I was able to strive for both high academic achievement and a contented family. All participants were forced to make choices about what was more important at a particular time and live on a short-term basis for the

good of the long-term plan. An example of this was Samantha's many experiences of sitting at the computer, trying to complete an assignment only to have her train of thought interrupted by her son needing his nappy changed, or needing to be breastfed. The assignments may well have been important but her son's needs were urgent.

All participants noted the problem of finding time for assignments. They found it difficult to concentrate with their children's constant interruptions. Staying awake at night was one option used by both Samantha, and myself although Samantha said she was not a 'night person' and only stayed up if it was really necessary. Amy and Samantha both said they were organised enough to complete assignments before they were due, saving the last minute hurrying and possibly losing the hints and subsequent extra marks given by lecturers. The danger of leaving assignments to the last minute was that, unlike other students who may have been able to negotiate a free day (or night) to complete a pressing assignment, mothers ran a higher risk of not being able to find the time. An unwell or restless child could quickly ruin any chance of finishing before the deadline. Samantha and Amy acknowledged this risk and preferred to finish earlier so they avoided missing deadlines. On the other hand, I usually left assignments to the last minute to justify my working on them to family and friends (and perhaps myself). It was more justifiable, in my opinion to say, "Sorry, I can't come over/take Gayle to see you/clean the house at the moment, I have an assignment due tomorrow and I have to finish it" than it was to say "Sorry, I'm working on an assignment". Leaving assignments to the last minute cost me many hours of sleep but allowed me to keep my studies relatively 'hidden' so they did not impinge on family commitments.

Another emergent aspect of coping with the multiple roles of mother, student and employee was the problems that arose when children became ill. All participants experienced times when their children were unwell and were excluded from childcare. On some occasions this occurred when university classes were scheduled. This gave the mother the dilemma of choosing to take their child with them or to miss the class. Depending on the seriousness of the illness, both options were taken at various times. Mothers reported that taking a sick child to university often caused feelings of guilt. The best thing for the child was to be at home resting, but with an eighty percent compulsory university attendance rate, mothers could not afford to miss too many classes.

### **Pregnancy and breastfeeding**

As two of the mothers involved in this study were pregnant during their studies, and all three mothers breastfed at university, there were many shared experiences warranting discussion. Being pregnant at university was difficult for both Samantha and myself. The physical components of the Bachelor of Education course were not easy. They required moderate levels of stamina, fitness and strength. It was quite an effort to play a game of volleyball, perform a dance or participate in warm-up games whilst pregnant. An understanding lecturer made these components much easier for Samantha and myself and I observed other pregnant women being permitted to sit out at various times.

University classes were frequently scheduled to last for two to three hours. Sitting down for long periods of time was uncomfortable, but leaving the room too often meant missing information. Hands-on classes with lots of

movement and discussion were easier to cope with and concentrate through than lectures requiring long periods of immobility. Samantha also expressed frustration with giving tutorial presentations when she was pregnant. She said she felt out of breath and sounded as though she had been running.

Examinations were another experience that both Samantha and I found were affected by our pregnant state. Sitting on a hard chair for three hours, hunched over a desk, writing is not desirable for any student but is particularly uncomfortable for a pregnant woman. Regular toilet breaks were also needed in order to relieve the pressure of the baby on the bladder.

A more positive factor of pregnancy during university studies was that it was seen by the mothers to be an advantage for the developing relationship between mother and child. Both Samantha and I spent more than the usual amount of time talking, reading and singing due to our teaching practices and felt this would benefit our unborn children. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the reality of these perceived benefits, but previous research suggests that unborn babies learn and react to their mother's voices well before birth (Stoppard, 1988).

Breastfeeding on campus proved to be a difficult and inconvenient experience for all three mothers. This was consistent with the research by O'Keefe et al (1998) that showed that the combination of breastfeeding and college life could be very stressful. While Amy and I shared a lack of confidence and embarrassment about breastfeeding at university, Samantha said it was 'inconvenient'. All three mothers breastfed their second child for significantly

less time than their first and attributed this decision to factors related to university commitments. Some examples of the factors affecting their decision to bottle feed are: feeding on campus was embarrassing/inconvenient, the child had to be fed by others and not enough breast milk supply due to irregular or sparse feedings.

As there were no private facilities for breastfeeding, and class schedules, embarrassment and inconvenience deterred continuance of breastfeeding, mothers reported negative experiences with breastfeeding on campus. Despite the widespread research about the benefits of breastfeeding, mothers were compelled to bottle feed due to their unique situations.

### **Financial issues**

Financial issues affect the majority of students as studying consumes a large amount of time without financial reward. Many of the students at the university setting of this study worked part-time whilst studying. Mothers' financial issues become unique when you factor in the costs of day-care and the already stretched time constraints. Mothers are often forced to work, either to supplement their partner's income and social security benefits (if any) or as the sole source of income. Raising young children is extremely costly, especially when they attend day-care. Most mothers whose children attend day-care are at work whilst their children are being cared for. This compensates for the costs of day-care. Student mothers bear the costs of day-care without the income provided by employment.

Working can also provide a tangible measure of mothers' efforts. Studying requires time and effort and there are no immediate rewards. A four-year degree has made me feel as though I have been running on an exercise machine, putting in a huge effort but getting nowhere. Likewise, family responsibilities consume energy, time (often around the clock care) and money. Motherhood is often referred to as a 'thankless job', so it is not surprising that women can rush around all day and feel as though they have accomplished nothing. So when mothers are compelled to take on even more commitments (in addition to full-time study), in the form of employment, there are many factors that may be driving them to this decision. These include financial security or survival, equality within the family, career advancement (if the employment is in that field) and a desire to feel rewarded for efforts may influence student mothers' decisions to work.

### **The advantages of being a mother at university**

Despite the difficulties faced by the mothers there were many advantages involved in being a mother at university. These perceived advantages were not obvious in all participants' experiences, but most shared at least one or two of these benefits.

- Insight into curriculum. Mothers felt they had a unique insight into child development, something that no amount of reading or studying a textbook could provide. First hand experience with providing care and observing child development was of benefit to the mothers in studying for a teaching degree.
- Extended family through the university students. Other students at university were likened to extended family. They watched the children

grow up and to some extent shared the role of caring. It was also of benefit to the childless students to gain first hand experience with children

- A determined drive and commitment to achieving goals. Participants of the study were fiercely determined to succeed. Mothers studying are likely to remain focused and committed to long-term goals because of the effort associated with achieving them. To put it bluntly, nobody in their right mind would put themselves through studying with children without a clear and very much needed goal.

### **Discussion of the research question**

The themes identified and discussed previously have outlined the issues that emerged from the study. Further discussion with reference to the research question has been organised under the headings of: the specific needs of mothers of pre-school aged children who study at university, the nature and origin of problems and barriers to learning that student mothers face, the strategies that mothers employ to cope with their demanding roles and recommendations for universities.

#### **The specific needs of mothers of pre-school aged children who study at university**

Analysing the stories of the mothers and recording the unique situations that they faced identified specific needs of mothers of pre-school aged children, studying at university. Situations that defined their needs as being different to other students were that they were coping with the multiple roles of family responsibilities, university requirements and work commitments. Their time was

consequently very limited and their roles often overlapped. The needs discussed below were not all deficits, that is, needs not met. Some were fulfilled and noted as being either essential or important. The needs that were not met, such as on-campus facilities may be considered important, but as the participants have proven through their success, not essential.

Mothers studying with pre-school aged children frequently brought their children to university which highlighted the specific needs of both the mothers and their children. The first and most obvious need was for adequate facilities. Mothers needed a private place to breastfeed. They also needed a hygienic and safe place to change nappies. The lack of facilities led mothers to cope by changing to bottle-feeding, changing their babies in awkward or unhygienic places. For mothers to feel included and considered the facilities of the university must meet their needs. Crèche facilities would also benefit busy mothers struggling to care for their children whilst meeting university requirements. Parenting rooms and crèche facilities would enable students to attend university with their young children and feel less "like you are bringing a toy or a nuisance along" (Amy, personal communication, Oct. 2002).

The second need was defined by the problems faced in meeting the attendance requirements of the university and finding day-care to match their university class schedule. Good quality, readily available childcare provisions were an important need identified by the mothers. As the university setting of this study shared its childcare facilities with an adjoining education facility it was difficult to secure a booking.

A need that all three mothers expressed was that they needed lecturers to be understanding of their unique situations. Particularly when they brought their children to university, they felt they had to have the lecturer's support to compensate for the difficulties they faced. "I hate taking the kids to lectures in the labs...it [the children's noise] echoes and [the lecturer] is not very understanding, she makes you feel guilty" (Amy, personal communication, Oct. 2002).

### **The nature and origins of the barriers to learning that student mothers faced**

The nature of the barriers to learning was located in the lack of facilities on campus, problems such as lack of time and extra pressure to sustain the "greedy institutions" (Home, 1997) of the family and university. It was also evident that the barriers were inextricably linked to the control and power of the university.

The origins of such barriers lie in the acknowledgment that universities are patriarchal, hierarchical institutions that have failed to recognise and address deep social change (Doust, 2002). Inequalities in our society are maintained by the economic rationalism, that is the goal of today's universities (Doust, 2002). Wilding (1982) explains the power relationship associated with resource control "Professional power in resource use is substantial and it is often exercised with few political or bureaucratic controls" (p. 37). A specific example from the mothers' stories that illustrates the power of the university to control access to resources is the experience of Amy, in the computer laboratory. When Amy was asked to leave the computer room because she had

her child there with her, she was forced to conform to the power of the university. It was university policy that children were not allowed in the computer rooms but this policy combined with the lack of childcare facilities forced Amy to choose between breaking the rules, or not meeting the requirements of her course. Amy's choice to repeatedly return to the computer room (with both of her children) despite being aware of the policy, suggests that she was forced to rebel against the control of the university because of her unique situation. Her determination to complete her course was motivation for her rebellion. By limiting access to the resources, the university was effectively choosing who could study without barriers and who could not. The power in such policies and access to resources is described by Wilding (1982):

Fundamental to the power of the professions in policy making and administration is an acceptance of their right to define needs and problems. It underpins their power and provides a necessary legitimization for its exercise. (p.29)

The needs of mothers were not considered when designing policy that restricts their access to resources without providing solutions to such problems. The problem of bringing children to a university with no crèche facilities to use the computers was not addressed, perhaps because it was not recognised.

### **The strategies that mothers employed to cope with their demanding roles – Advice for future student mothers**

All three mothers reported strategies they employed to enable them to cope with their busy lives. Most strategies were consistent among all three participants although all stressed the need to do what is best for one's own unique situation. These are the suggested strategies, formulated from our experiences, which may be of benefit to mothers studying at university:

- Be organised. Although this may seem impossible at the time, if you are clear about what needs to be done and develop efficiency in your efforts you can save precious time. Collecting the information for two assignments at one time can save an extra trip to the library at a later date. Be organised too in your home, have strategies at hand to give you a few moments peace (a collection of videos for the children may be enough to keep them occupied while you complete an assignment). If you have to bring your children to university with you make sure you have ample food, drinks and toys to keep them amused. Completing assignments before the due date may alleviate some last minute stress but remember, it is all up to the individual, do not feel guilty if you leave them to the last minute, find out what works best for you.
- Know your limits. Realise that you can't do everything and try not to take on extra commitments. Listen to your body and try to reduce stress if you feel you are not coping. Delegating can be an extremely efficient way of coping if you have willing support.
- Use a tape recorder. If your children are at university with you, consider using a tape recorder to record any information you might miss if you have to leave the room. You can also use a tape recorder to save time studying, just replay the tapes of previous lectures while you iron, wash dishes or complete other monotonous tasks.
- Establish support networks. You are not alone in your experiences, other mothers may be in the same situation as you. Student mothers may be able to arrange "pay back – childcare" where you take turns to baby sit whilst completing assignments. It is also a great benefit to have someone to talk to that understands your needs and unique situation.

- Keep a sense of humour. Try to laugh at the ridiculous and enjoy your time studying. I drew cartoons about the stages of a child's development during a particularly 'in-depth' lecture, which kept a friend and I amused and still helped to reinforce the content. If everything seems too much to cope with, spend some time with your children or an uplifting friend, you may just need to look at the funny side before getting back on track.
- Concentrate on the positives: In addition to keeping a sense of humour you should concentrate on your reasons for enrolling in university studies. Remember your long-term goals and try to focus on the benefits that you will gain from achieving these goals. Feeling guilty is detrimental to coping, it tends to eat away at you and stop you from concentrating properly. If you feel guilty about leaving your children try to remember that quality time is better than quantity of time. Look at your children and family and realise that they *are* well cared for and that you *have* been there for them.
- Leave the housework if you can. This particular recommendation was controversial for the participants as one felt it was acceptable to leave the house work and the other two found it hard to work in a disorganised or messy house. Again, choose the option that suits you. If you like to have a tidy house try to find ways of economising. Clean floors and clear bench tops can make a house appear tidy without too much effort. Teach your children to put things away, even very young children can help to pick up toys.
- Book day-care in advance or find reliable childcare. If you can afford an extra few days of day-care when you are not committed to university

classes, it can be extremely beneficial. Booking day-care in advance will save last minute dilemmas and ensure your peace of mind.

- Do not work unless it is absolutely necessary. Although it may be tempting to work, seriously consider the consequences and make sure it is really necessary. If you can survive without working you will have more time and energy. Remember that although your budget may be stretched during your studies you should earn a reasonable amount after the completion of your degree.

### **Recommendations for universities**

The study revealed a number of deficits in the inclusivity of mothers studying at university. These recommendations for universities apply specifically to the context of the study of the regional university in which the study was completed, but may also be applicable to other universities. The negative experiences of mothers at university were more often than not, related to a lack of recognition of mothers' unique situations on the university's part.

### **Recommendation 1 – Further research**

The urgent need for further research has been advocated by many of the limited number of researchers who have looked into the issue of mothers studying at university (Home, 1997; Marshall, 2002; Stalker, 2001; Watkins et al. 1998). This study may have helped to shed light on the experiences of mothers at university but it has also served to illustrate the need for further research. Further research will bring recognition to mothers' experiences and highlight the urgent need for changes in universities. Larger studies involving

more participants and a greater variety of data collection methods may provide a greater breadth of knowledge.

### **Recommendation 2 – Crèche**

Bringing their children to university caused many difficulties for the mothers in this study. They found it hard to 'drop into the library' or computer laboratories as their children could be disruptive to other students. A crèche facility on campus would provide the care needed for the necessary short visits to university when other day-care arrangements are impractical for just a short period of time. Even if the facility was only available on certain days, mothers may be able to schedule their library visits/meetings with lectures/use of the computing facilities for those days when crèche was available.

### **Recommendation 3 – Parenting rooms**

Mothers bringing very young children on campus were faced with difficulties in finding a suitable place to breastfeed and to change nappies. For the three mothers who participated in this study, this was a major factor in their decision to discontinue breastfeeding. It is important that mothers are not deterred from breastfeeding as the many health benefits are well documented. If the university were to provide a safe and private area for breastfeeding and nappy changing some of the difficulties associated with bringing children to university would be lessened.

### **Recommendation 4 – Make distance education available to more students**

Home (1993) stated that distance education reduced the stress that students coping with multiple roles endured. Making distance education

available to students faced with extenuating circumstances, rather than basing access on locality would eliminate the difficulty of bringing children to university. It may also give students more flexibility and control over the time and place of study, thereby reducing stress (Home, 1993). The problems with making distance education available to more students but still not all, lies in the deciding who is eligible and who is not. The power invested in those making such decisions would enable them to control the lived experiences of the students involved.

#### **Recommendation 5 – Develop and value the ethics of caring**

As universities are pushed into economic rationalisation they are cutting down on permanent staff and devaluing the role of caring in facilitating student success and well being (Doust, 2002). This study has found that a number of caring actions initiated by lecturers alleviated some of the problems student mothers faced. Because of these actions students' felt their efforts were valued and remained determined to achieve their goals. Had the lecturers been concerned only with quotas and dollars, the experiences of the participants may have been significantly more negative. According to Doust (2002) individual lecturers usually care about the situations of their students. Universities, however, do not. This means that lecturers often feel dissatisfied with their teaching and students may not be receiving the care that they need in order to achieve their full potential. In training people to become professionals, universities must also consider that these individuals may well be in a position to care for others, such as in the profession of teaching. The ethics of caring must be modelled as well as explicitly taught, rather than the often hypocritical stance evident in the university, which encourages students to care but makes

them feel uncared for. Noddings (1992) recommends increasing the emphasis on caring in education. "If we decide that the capacity to care is as much a mark of personhood as reason or rationality, then we will want to find ways to increase this capacity" (Noddings, 1992, p. 24).

## **Conclusion**

This study has examined the experiences of mothers studying at university with pre-school aged children. It was found that their experiences were consistent with the limited amount of past research that suggested they face many barriers to learning. The nature and origin of these barriers has been discussed and recommendations for modifications have been made. This study has endeavoured to add the human touch to the research, giving voice to the participants and telling their stories as a process of empowerment.

During the final stages of writing this thesis I was approached by a mother of a young baby. She had recently enrolled in the Bachelor of Education course and was seeking my advice. As I looked at the enthusiasm in her face, I thought about the stories of the mothers that I had just researched and of my own struggles to achieve a degree. Should I have discouraged her? Told her to wait until her child was older? I must admit, I did think of it, but why should mothers be disadvantaged by their unique situations? It is uncertain when (or even if) the situation of mothers in higher education will change, one certainty is that it will never change if women are not there to be seen and heard. The voice and presence of mothers at university may motivate further research and so

initiate changes. So how did I advise the newly enrolled mother? I shared with her my experiences, my resources and the strategies for coping discussed in this thesis. My door will be open to her should she need assistance, with the aim that she will avoid some of the difficulties that the three mothers involved in this study have faced. I hope that in turn, she will do the same for other mothers when she graduates.

## REFERENCES

- Bell, J. (1999). *Doing Your Research Project* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.): Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Burgess, R. G. (1988). Conversations with a purpose: The ethnographic interview in educational research. *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, 1, 137-155.
- Burns, R.B. (1995). *Introduction to research methods*. Melbourne: Longman.
- Creswell, J.W., & Miller, D.L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124-30.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin.
- Doust, M. (2002). *What's Happening to Universities?*. Unpublished Masters thesis, Women's Lives and Mature Age Entry to University. Flinders University, South Australia.
- Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*: London: Penguin Books.
- Gunew, S. (1991). *Feminist Knowledge and women's studies*: London: Routledge.

Home, A. (1997). Learning the hard way: role strain, stress, role demands, and support in multiple-role women students. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 33, p. 335-46.

Hugman, R. (1991). *Power in Caring Professions*. Macmillian: London.

Lowe, M. & Benston, M. (1991). *The Uneasy Alliance Between Feminism and Academia*. London: Routledge.

Marshall, S. (2002). When Wonderwomen Hang out in the Ivory Tower. *Women in higher education*, 11 (4) p. 28+.

Noddings, N. (1992). *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education*. Teachers Collage Press, Columbia. New York.

O'Keefe, T., Henly, S., & Anderson, C. (1998). Breast Feeding on Campus: Personal Experiences, Beliefs, and attitudes of the University Community. *Journal of American College Health*, 47 (3), 129-34.

Sheridan, S. (1991). *From margin to mainstream, situating women's studies*. London: Routledge.

Smith, J. (1997). *It's Different for Girls*: Great Britain: Chatto & Windus.

Smyth, J., Hattam, R. & Shacklock, G. (1997). *Pursuing a Qualitative/Critical research Thesis in Education*. Adelaide: Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching.

Stalker, J. (2001). Misogyny, women, and obstacles to tertiary education: A vile situation. Adult Education Quarterly. 51 (8), 288-305.

Stoppard, M. (1988). *The Pregnancy and Birth Handbook*. Dorsley Kindersley: London.

Street, A. (n.d.) *The Practice of Journalling*. Unpublished [Booklet], Percy Baxter Foundation.

Watkins, R., Herrin, M., & McDonald, L. (2002). The Juxtaposition of Career and Family: A dilemma for Professional Women. Advancing Women In Leadership. (12), 1-6.

Wilding, P. (1982). *Professional Power and Social Welfare*. RKD: London

## **APPENDICIES**

	<b>Page</b>
<b>A</b> Sample university policies	<b>78</b>
<b>B</b> Bachelor of Education course details	<b>87</b>
<b>C</b> Sample letter of consent for participants	<b>89</b>
<b>D</b> Ethics approval	<b>90</b>

## **Appendix A: Sample University Policies**

## **Policy One**

The University [name omitted] Policy on Children on University Premises is intended to ensure:

- equal opportunity for scholarship and employment to those who are responsible for care of children, and
- the health and safety of children on University premises.

### **Background**

In Australia today it is increasingly acknowledged that family responsibilities (especially those relating to dependent children) directly impinge on employment and educational opportunities. Within the context of higher education, it is clear that such responsibilities have significant impact on the educational opportunities of students and the employment opportunities of staff. There is not precise information concerning the members of this University who are responsible for young children. However, the figure is likely to be high. It is known that within the Australian population at large more than half of the mothers of pre-school aged children and two-thirds of those with school age children are currently in the work force. Further, as women's levels of education increase, so does the likelihood that they will remain in paid employment after the birth of children. It is important, too, to note that over 95% of the fathers of young children in Australian Society are in paid employment.

The International Labor Organisation has recognised that many workers, both women and men, have domestic responsibilities and that these may, at time, impinge on workplace responsibilities (Convention No 156 and Recommendations 165, 1981). As an equal opportunity employer, the University has an interest in supporting its members to balance the various demands they face as workers and as people with family responsibilities.

Consistent with these observations, the University recognises that:

1. family responsibilities impinge on all aspects of an individual's life and are not confined to be 'private' sphere. The ways in which such responsibilities impinge on work and education means that they are the concern of the University as a whole;
2. family responsibilities affect both women and men;
3. students and staff should have access to the same educational and employment conditions regardless of their status with respect to dependent children

The University also recognises it has a responsibility, under Section 16(1) of the NSW Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1983, to provide premises that are free from risk to the health and safety of non-employees.

### **Policy**

Following on from the recognition of these factors, the University is committed to:

1. supporting the long-term aim of child care facilities for all students and employees who need them. This commitment includes an understanding that child care facilities should be readily available and easily affordable by those who want them.
2. providing premises which are accessible to those who are accompanied by children and which is, where practicable, compatible with children's use. This includes provision for pram/stroller entrances in buildings and ramps throughout the University's premises.
3. recognising its responsibilities under Section 16(1) of the NSW Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1983, for protecting non-employees, including children, from exposure to risks to their health or safety arising out of the University's activities. For this reason the University does not permit children in laboratories, workshops or storerooms, except for those occasions when public displays are mounted and supervised, when children are attending a clinic within the University, or other supervised children's activities take place, including work experience and Summer Schools. Other areas not listed above may also pose risks to children, and access to them should be restricted.  
The University also requires that children brought onto the University's premises be under the supervision of a parent or guardian at all times.
4. recognising the need for dependent children of students to attend classes occasionally. For example, a parent may have a babe in arms, child care arrangements or plans may have fallen through, or it may be a pupil free day in schools. Students should seek permission for a child or children to attend a class with them. When making such requests, students should bear in mind the size of the tutorial rooms. The student must ensure that the class is not disrupted by the child. Permission for children to attend classes with students is at the discretion of the lecturer or tutor concerned. While requests for students to bring their children to classes should be considered sympathetically, lecturers and tutors must bear in mind the University's legal obligations not to put at risk the health and safety of both the children and the students. Students' dependent children are not permitted in practical classes held in laboratories, workshops or clinics.
5. recognising the need for staff to bring their dependent children to work occasionally. For example, a parent may have a babe in arms, child care arrangements or plans may have fallen through, or it may be a pupil free day in schools. Staff members should seek permission from their Head of Department to bring a child or children into their workplace. While requests for staff to bring their children to work occasionally should be considered sympathetically, Heads of Departments must bear in mind the University's legal obligations not to put at risk the health and safety of both the children and staff.
6. allowing parents to take children into the Library occasionally, Union or any other non-teaching areas subject to any particular regulations which may apply in any particular area eg. the Bar of the Union. Parents who take children into a Library must ensure that other Library users are not inconvenienced.
7. providing leave and benefits which reasonably accommodate the competing roles of students and employees with respect to their family responsibilities.

### **Explanation of Terms**

**Premises** covers all the University's campuses, field and research stations, buildings, grounds, vehicles, farms, commercial operations and other locations under the University's control.

**Children** is used in this policy to mean young people under the age of 18. The policy is not intended, however, to restrict the access of staff members and students of the University under the age of 18 to areas relevant to their work or studies. Note that the level of supervision and other health and safety precautions needed for staff and students under 18 would generally be greater than for staff and students 18 and older.

A **laboratory** is a place of specialised work, research, clinical or diagnostic evaluation, teaching and/or learning. Laboratories are commonly used in many scientific disciplines from chemistry, physics, botany and zoology to medicine, psychology, dentistry, chemical engineering, agriculture and veterinary science. The term laboratory may equate with workshop in engineering areas such as mechanical, electrical, aeronautical and civil engineering.

Computer laboratories which contain only terminals and/or personal computers should generally not be unsafe for children to be in, but issues of data security may arise if children are present.

**Workshops** cover not only engineering areas, but also art workshops and other areas where machinery and tools are used.

## **Policy Two**

### **OBJECTIVES**

This policy has been developed to inform staff and students of their responsibilities and the University's expectations when children are brought on to University premises. This will ensure that the University provides a safe environment for children while respecting the parental needs of guardians given that the University may be deemed liable for the safety and health of children in the workplace. Guardians should understand the importance of this policy and the associated guidelines.

### **DEFINITIONS**

**'Child(ren)'** means people under the age of 16. The policy is not intended, however, to restrict the access of staff members and students of the University under the age of 18 to areas relevant to their work or studies or children attending approved activities.

**'Employee'** means a person by whom work is done for the University under a contract of employment on a full time, part time, sessional or casual basis.

**'Field Trip'** means an activity conducted external of the University campus either local or rural and it is in the interests of the University.

**'Guardian'** means the person (employee, parent, student) who brings the child onto the campus.

**'Occasionally'** is defined as "ad hoc" or irregular in the case of bringing children onto University premises.

**'Premises'** covers all the University's campuses, field and research stations, buildings, grounds, vehicles, farms, commercial operations and other locations under the University's control.

**'Laboratory'** is a place of specialised work such as research, clinical or diagnostic evaluation teaching and/or learning including all areas using hazardous substances (chemicals).

**'Studio'** means an area involving dancing, music and or visual art activities.

**'Workplace'** means a place where employees work or are likely to work in the course of their employment.

**'Workshop'** means areas involving the use and maintenance of electrical and mechanical machinery and tools.

### **POLICY**

1. The University is committed to promoting equity for all staff and students and to ensure that individuals are not disadvantaged in their academic and career aspirations by actual or perceived family responsibilities. The University is a place of work and study, and the activities of the University and its community should be respected and not unduly interrupted.
2. The University understands that although a range of child care options are available to employees and students throughout the wider community, there are circumstances where a guardian may wish to bring a child(ren) onto the University's premises to attend University related programs,

or on occasions beyond teaching/educational activities. Guardians should therefore utilise the following procedures in circumstances that are either unforeseen or difficult to avoid, and where they are unable to make alternative arrangements.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES**

1. The provisions of this policy applies to employees, students, guardians and visitors wishing to bring children into University workplaces during working hours. It is recommended however, that similar principles be followed on Public Holidays, weekends and after normal working hours.
2. Children are welcome to be on campus for approved University activities, such as Open Day, academy performances, approved teaching programs, community playgroups and on guided tours. This also applies to areas of public access.
3. Requests for children to attend lectures/tutorials on an occasional basis must be made in advance or on arrival and agreed to by the relevant Head of School, lecturer or tutor, and the approval is to be documented. Requests are to be treated with flexibility and sensitivity, and no reasonable request refused.
4. If a child is not accompanied by a guardian during an emergency situation, the guardian is to notify the Head of Department or Security that the child is on campus.
5. Requests to bring children on a field trip must be made in advance in writing, and directed to the Head of School or the immediate supervisor. Authorisation is to be in writing and provided by the Head of School or the immediate supervisor.
6. The guardian is responsible for all aspects of the child's behaviour, safety and financial reimbursement for any damage sustained to University property. Children shall be under the direct supervision of the guardian at all times. In addition, there are some areas which are intrinsically hazardous and to which children cannot be admitted. These areas are:
  - areas licensed to sell alcohol, unless accompanied by an adult, and the child is not sold alcohol;
  - all laboratories (unless an approved University teaching program);
  - maintenance workshops;
  - visual arts and ceramics studios;
  - the lake on [name omitted] Campus; (unless supervised by a guardian) the lake at [name omitted] Campus near building 27 (unless supervised by a guardian); and

- designated University kitchens.

Although the areas listed below are not considered hazardous as such, activities conducted in these areas may have the potential to lead to injury and damage to equipment, therefore, consideration should be given to some restrictions in:

- music studios; and
- computer laboratories and workshops;

7. Permission for a child to be on University property may be withdrawn should the child be disruptive in the workplace, or to other employees or students in the classroom or study area.
8. Sick children, particularly children with known infectious diseases must not be brought into the workplace/teaching area at any time. Should employees require to be absent from the workplace to mind sick children, the University has various forms of available leave to assist on this matter.
9. Monitoring, intervention and resolution of any problems or disputes rests with the Head of School, Supervisor (or person who authorises the request) and the employee and student member concerned in accordance with the University's Grievance Resolution procedures.

## **GUIDELINES**

### **• Responsibilities**

#### **1. University Employees**

1.1 Employees who wish to bring children into the workplace during normal working hours are to direct the request in advance or on arrival to the Head of School or their immediate supervisor.

1.2 Employees must ensure that colleagues and students are not unreasonably inconvenienced by the child(ren)'s presence.

#### **2. Supervisors/Lecturers**

2.1 When considering a guardian's request to bring a child into the workplace/teaching area, the supervisor/lecturer should consider both the guardian's needs and the needs of co-workers and students. Factors to consider may include:

- the age of the child;
- the length of time involved;
- the frequency of attendance;

- if a member of teaching staff, the subject matter being taught (ie, may be upsetting for children);
- the environment, safety and health issues; and
- the degree of interference with other employees and students.

2.2 In the event of a child becoming disruptive, the supervisor has a responsibility to request the guardian to remove the child from the premises for the comfort and safety of colleagues and students.

2.3 For information on occupational safety and health legislative responsibilities, staff should contact the University Occupational Safety and Health Section for guidance and assistance.

### 3. Students

3.1 Students who due to extenuating circumstances need to bring a child into a teaching area must seek permission in advance or on arrival from the relevant lecturer or tutor.

3.2 When considering a student's request to bring a child into the workplace/teaching area, the supervisor/lecturer/tutor should consider both the student's needs, the needs of co-workers and other students. Factors to consider may include:

- the age of the child;
- the length of time involved;
- the frequency of attendance;
- the subject matter being taught (ie, may be upsetting for children);
- the environment, safety and health issues; and
- the degree of interference with other employees and students.

3.3 Students must ensure other students and staff are not unreasonably inconvenienced by the child(ren)'s presence.

**3.4 Students must not expect University staff to care for their children.**

**Appendix B: Bachelor of Education Course Details**

### General information

The Bachelor of Education (Primary) qualifies students to teach at junior, middle and upper primary levels. The award is granted after the successful completion of four years of full-time study and aims to develop professional knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The degree includes compulsory units studied by all students and elective units which are chosen by students to enable them to specialise in a particular area or combine a number of related areas of study. Students are required to complete 31 units.

### **Assistant Teacher Program (ATP)**

In the fourth year, students undertake an Assistant Teacher Program comprising one term of approximately ten weeks of continuous teaching practice in a primary school. The Assistant Teacher Program is conducted during the seventh semester across the normal second term of the school year.

### **Internship semester**

Depending on availability of placements in schools, high achieving students who have a maximum of four units left to complete their degrees may be offered the opportunity to undertake their final semester of study via an internship position teaching in a school. Interested students will be expected to complete an expression of interest prior to commencing their ATP and to liaise with the primary internship coordinator.

## **Appendix C: Sample letter of consent for participants**

## Letter Of Consent To Participate In Research

I ..... consent to participating in the research project being undertaken by Alison Welsh as part of her Bachelor of Education Honours Degree at Edith Cowan University, Bunbury Campus. I understand that the aim of this research is to investigate the experiences of mothers who study at university with young children.

In giving my consent, I understand that:

- My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time throughout the research project without any pressure or prejudice
- The information that I provide will be used only for the purpose of this research and any further use is to be negotiated
- The interview will be audio taped and transcribed by the researcher and a copy of the transcripts will be made available to me
- Recorded interviews will be destroyed
- Any information that I provide may be amended or deleted by me at any time during the research process
- I will not be identified in either the research process or the final document and my personal details will remain confidential

Participant Signature .....

Date .....

Any questions regarding this research project can be directed to Alison Welsh on

Thank you for your assistance in this project. It is greatly appreciated.

Alison Welsh

## **Appendix D: Ethics approval**

31 October 2002

Mrs Alison Welsh  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

FACULTY OF REGIONAL  
PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

SOUTH WEST CAMPUS  
(BUNBURY)

PO Box 1712, Bunbury  
Western Australia 6231  
Telephone (08) 9780 7777  
Facsimile (08) 9780 7800

ABN 54 361 485 361



100 years of forward thinking.

Dear Alison

Re: *What are the Experiences of Mothers of Children aged three and under who study at University?*

I am please to advise that your research proposal has been approved by the Higher Degrees Committee on the condition that you consider the points offered by the Reviewers. The Committee has also approved your ethics declaration.

This approval means that the Committee believes that you have developed your proposal to a stage where worthwhile research can be conducted on your topic. It is important for you to understand that this approval does not mean that an examiner will be unable to find fault with your work.

If you have not already received a copy of the University publication *Masters (by coursework /project) and Honours Handbook* it may be viewed at <http://www.ecu.edu.au/research/projecthandbook.htm>. Alternatively, a hard copy may be obtained from the Higher Degrees Office.

Prior to submitting your thesis for examination, you must obtain confirmation from your supervisor that your thesis is ready for examination, and that the format in which you intend to present your thesis adheres to University requirements. To assist you in the preparation of your thesis I have attached a *Thesis Preparation Checklist*, which you may find useful as well as information on Library resources available to you. For examination, two spiral bound copies of your thesis are required.

You may now apply for postgraduate student research funding to support your research. Should you wish to make a claim, or require clarification on the process, please contact me on [REDACTED].

I wish you every success in your research.

Yours sincerely  
[REDACTED]

Fiona Fletcher  
Executive Officer, Higher Degrees Office  
Regional Professional Studies  
Attachment: Thesis Preparation Checklist