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## Children's perceptions of tasks, structure, routines and roles in two multi-age (P-1) classrooms

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# **CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF TASKS, STRUCTURE, ROUTINES AND ROLES IN TWO MULTI-AGE (P-1) CLASSROOMS**

**By Anne Yeoward Dip Teach. (E.C.E)**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for**

**the Award of:**

**Bachelor of Education with Honours**

**at the**

**Faculty of Education  
Edith Cowan University**

**Date of Submission : July, 1996**

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## ABSTRACT

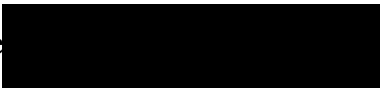
In Western Australia, multi-age grouping is being explored as a means of providing a rich learning environment which helps children to learn, caters for individual differences and recognises the child's social and cognitive development (Rice & Bosich, 1994). To date, no study on the child's perceptions, expectations and experience of school within this organisational framework has been conducted.

The purpose of this study is to find out about young children's perceptions of tasks, structure, routines and roles in a multi-age class. What are children's perceptions of the class grouping and task content in a multi-age class? What are children's perceptions of the routine that exists in a multi-age class? What are children's perceptions of the rules that exist for the children and adults in a multi-age class?

A situational case-study was conducted, using six children from two multi-age classrooms (P-1) in a Perth metropolitan primary school. Three girls and three boys ranging in age from four years to six years were selected from the multi-age classes. The children were drawn from the same locality and had similar socio-economic backgrounds. Naturalistic observations assisted the researcher to see directly the everyday behaviour of the children in the multi-age grouped classrooms. This also enabled the researcher to build up a rapport with the children and allow for an adaptation period. Each child participant was interviewed informally by the researcher, who focussed the discussion on the activities and events that the children were directly involved with in the multi-age classrooms. Data from the observations, teacher reports and interviews were used in conjunction with the structure provided by the two level conceptual framework.

**DECLARATION**

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment 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 published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature 

Date .....14.11.'96.....

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## **Chapter One**

### **INTRODUCTION**

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the study

There is increasing recognition in the educational community that the early years of schooling are of crucial importance. Children are society's most precious resource and a sound investment for the future (Cumming, 1991). Recent inquiries into early childhood were prompted by desires to improve the quality of service provision at this level and thus to recognise better the value of good early years programmes to children's later success.

The fourth term of reference from the report by the Ministerial Task Force of Voluntary Pre-primary Education in Western Australia (Ministerial Task Force, 1993), also known as the Scott Report, was to consider a "*P-2 structure within the context of vertical integration.*" The introduction of ungraded P-2 classes was viewed as an alternative programme to the age level classes common in Western Australian Government schools. The Ministerial Task Force outlined ideas to consider the P-2 years of school as a single "band" rather than as three distinct grades. A pilot project was subsequently introduced in thirteen Western Australian Government schools in 1994, to examine the implications of multi-age classes in the early years. It was reported in a Multi-age Grouping Schools Newsletter (1994), that the project is part of the Education Department's commitment to support teachers and parents who may question whether traditional grouping of children by chronological age is the most effective organisational strategy for young children.

This study focuses on the child's view of multi-age grouping. Multi-age grouping may be seen by adults as a challenging option, but it is not known what children think of such an organisational strategy. An adult's understanding of how young children perceive and experience the classroom environment and the learning process may be considerably different from that of children. Therefore, educators may learn new insights by considering life in a multi-age group class through the child's eyes.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

In recent years, there has been a growing body of research which has revealed an increasing awareness of the children's perceptions of their learning (Cullen, 1991; Pramling, 1988). Qualitative researchers have successfully used child interviews to gain insight into the children's perceptions of life in school and the expectations they hold within the class (Cullen, 1988; Goodnow & Burns, 1985; Pramling, 1988; Tammivaara & Enright, 1986; Thorkildsen, 1991). However, it was suggested by Tammivaara & Enright (1986), that it is the difficulties of communicating adequately with young children that has often kept researchers from the world of the child from the child's point of view. It was reported by Donaldson, Grieve & Pratt (1983), that much of the research carried out in the first half of this century appeared to focus on young children's incapacities. In recent years changing perceptions resulted in children being recognised as more capable than once thought. Donaldson (1985) suggested that children are underestimated as competent thinkers, and that a distorted portrayal of the world of childhood by adults can be the result. How young children think about their daily life in a multi-age grouped classroom could supply valuable information for researchers who want to understand how children develop and learn.

In multi-age grouped classrooms, teachers are challenged to rethink the strategies they use and their understandings of the way learning happens. The teacher's approach will set the scene for how children construe themselves as learners within a multi-age grouped classroom. This study is focused on the children's perceptions of multi-age grouped classes and documents the experiences of six children in two multi-age grouped classes in a Perth metropolitan primary school.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

This study investigated the following two research questions.

1. What are the children's perceptions of:
  - (a) the class grouping and task content in a multi-age class?

- (b) the structure that exists within a multi-age class?
  - (c) the routine that exists within a multi-age class?
  - (d) the roles that are assumed by the children and adults in a multi-age class?
2. How do the teacher's behaviours and expectations compare with the children's perceptions of schooling?

#### 1.4 Definition of Terms

**Multi-age grouping** is sometimes referred to as mixed age grouping, vertical grouping, or non-gradedness. The term usually refers to grouping children in classes without grade designations and with more than a one-year span (for example, P-2; 1-2; 1-3). This integrated approach promotes the implementation of co-operative learning and cross-age tutoring, where the interaction between the less able and more able children is seen to benefit all individuals both academically and socially (Katz, L.G., Evangelou, D., & Hartman, J.A., 1991).

**Composite classes** can also be referred to as multi-grading, split, mixed-age or mixed year classes. This arrangement differs from the multi-age classroom, in that they are usually formed as a result of the distribution of student numbers, where there may not be enough students in a year to justify a straight year level class. Composite classes may also be formed deliberately in a school if they are seen to be an advantage. Even though children in composite classes will have opportunities to interact with children of different ages and abilities, the children are normally still taught within their designated year level.

**Single age grouped classes** are classes which consist of children who are all in the same school year and therefore would be born in the same calendar year. They are sometimes referred to as a straight year, horizontal, traditional, homogenous, chronological or single age grouping.



**Rural Integrated Programme (RIP)** incorporates multi-age groupings into schools in certain rural areas of Western Australia. Most rural integrated programmes are aligned with the composite class structure. Due to the small numbers of children in many rural schools, provision has to be made so there is an even distribution of work load among the teaching staff. This may involve combining or splitting grades to form one class. The children are still normally taught at their designated year level.

**Perceptions** involve how the children perceive and make inferences about their world. These perceptions may be shaped by the child's knowledge, experience and values.

**Pre-Primary (P)** offers a noncompulsory year of full-day or sessional (short hours) programmes for 5 year olds in Western Australia. The remaining sessional programmes will be replaced by the full-day programme by 1998.

**Year One (1)** involves the first year of compulsory schooling for 6 year old children (turning six between January and December of the enrolment year) in Western Australia.

**Tasks** in the classroom comprise assigned work set by the teacher and child-selected work from the learning environment provided by the teacher. The types of tasks and activities usually acknowledge the range of developmental levels, capabilities and interests of the children.

**Structure** within a classroom relates to the fabric or framework around which learning experiences are built and mediated. The teacher's organisation of the task structure and rule structure components highlighted in this study may explicitly or implicitly communicate to the child how the teacher sees the children's roles and what the teacher values. Therefore, the meaning of the task structure and rule structure could differ across classrooms.

**Routines** are regular and predictable sequences of events that help children master the expected plan and format of activities over a day. Routines familiarise children with patterns of expected behaviour. Routines referred to in this study, include activity routines, instructional routines and management routines.

**Roles** in the classroom involve the roles and responsibilities of the teacher, teacher assistant, parent helpers, voluntary helpers, student teachers and children. The roles within the classroom can be influenced by friendship and authority relationships, the curriculum and the physical environment.

## **Chapter Two**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

## **Chapter Two**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This section outlines literature which examines multi-age grouping in early childhood education. Multi-age grouping as a concept has received much attention in recent years. A large proportion of literature examines the advantages and disadvantages of multi-age grouping, which include the educational and organisational implications. Studies have investigated the views and opinions of teachers towards multi-age grouping (Savage, 1994), but there has been no research on how children view multi-age grouping.

The literature reviewed, sets a theoretical base for the study and a basis for the conceptual framework. Discussion on the 'competent child' is based around a Vygotskian perspective, which has important theoretical implications for multi-age grouping. The final section sets out the body of research which has successfully used child interviews to gain an awareness of the children's perspectives on their learning.

With the recent implementation of full-day schooling for five year olds in Western Australia, many questions have been directed about appropriate educational provision for young children. The inclusion of multi-age grouping as an organisational strategy and a term of reference with the Ministerial Task Force Report (1993), prompted considerable debate amongst the educational community. Multi-age grouping should meet the individual needs of the child, by recognising that children learn at different rates and move through different stages of development. In recent years, multi-age grouping as an approach has become part of a growing change in education. Advocates suggest that it is a step towards a more effective educational experience for children (Surbeck, 1992).

Elkind (1987) recommends mixed-age grouping as a developmentally appropriate alternative to the rigid lock-step curriculum. It could help the teacher to be more sensitive to the normal variability of young children. In view of the proposed benefits of mixed-age groupings in educational settings, much attention has been given to benefits for the children's social and intellectual development (Roopnarine & Bright, 1993; Katz, et al. 1991).

Research by Brookes (1990) suggested that multi-age grouped classes provide many opportunities to build a child's self esteem, tolerance, leadership and social skills. Critics of multi-age grouping appear to be concerned that older children would be disadvantaged because working with younger children would not be as challenging. However, research on peer tutoring which connects older and younger children in an educational context indicates that there are benefits for both (Alton-Lee, 1983; Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Limbrick, McNaughton & Cameron, 1985). Brookes (1990) also reported that teachers may not be able to provide high quality education, as they would be dealing with a range of ages and different ability levels, apparently making it difficult for the teacher to be aware of each child's specific needs. Many parents also have preconceptions about what school is and expectations of what schools should provide for young children.

Until recently (and perhaps still) adults may have had an understanding of childhood which underestimated children as competent thinkers. Gaustad (1992) emphasised the importance of recognising different learning styles, which do show that children of the same chronological age vary greatly in their readiness to learn. It was suggested by Gaustad (1992), that education is often based on the assumptions that children of the same chronological age will progress and develop at the same rate. These are questionable assumptions and will be explored in more detail in the following section.

## 2.2 The competent child

It has been noted above that children have been underestimated as competent thinkers. These underestimations are largely a result of Piaget's portrait of early childhood, which dominated the study of mental development this century (Cole & Cole, 1993). Neo-Piagetians have sought to revise the negative connotations of viewing young children as egocentric and pre-logical. They claim that children can reason logically as long as the questions and experiences given to the child are meaningful. Failure to take another person's perspective can also be seen in older children and adults (Siefert, 1993).

There has been concern that Piaget's cognitive learning theory does not take into account the learner's social context (Fleer, 1992). In Vygotsky's view (1934/1986) cognition originates as a shared experience. Although both Piaget and Vygotsky view children as active participants in their own learning, they disagree about what the child is capable of learning with assistance. Vygotsky places great importance on the dialogue between the adult and child, or between an older peer and the child. Siefert (1993) characterises the younger child as an apprentice. The child observes the adult or older peer and then carries out that task at his/her own level of ability. It is then that the knowledge and skills gradually become internalised by the child. In a Vygotskian framework, the adult or older child's guidance has been referred to as cognitive scaffolding. Children in mixed age groupings can tap into each other's zone of proximal development as they develop and learn. These current concepts of cognitive development imply that children with similar but not identical abilities can stimulate each other's thinking and cognitive growth (Veenman, 1995). Wood (1988) describes the zone of proximal development as the 'gaps' between unassisted and assisted competence, which could be referred to as the child's actual and potential ability (Katz, et al. 1991).

It was suggested by Phillips and Soltis (1991), that in comparison to Piaget, Vygotsky did not place much emphasis on the "stage" of development where the child might be. The Piagetian stages were seen to be a "static" indicator of what a child could achieve without the assistance of another peer or adult. Malaguzzi

(1993) argues that children are no longer viewed as isolated and egocentric and only constructing knowledge from within. Instead, Malaguzzi (1993, p.10) emphasised, “Our image of the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and, most of all, connected to adults and other children.”

Wertsch (1991a, 90) cited in Berk & Winsler (1995), agreed that the Vygotskian view is unique and that a child’s thinking is not bounded by the individual brain or mind. Wertsch (1991) described the mind as extending beyond the skin, and being inseparably joined with other minds.

Catherwood (1994b) painted a revised picture of cognitive development, indicating that a child’s cognitive development emerges as a complex patchwork. With this view, children and adults process information in a similar way. However, adults are seen to be developmentally advantaged by having more experience or greater familiarity with the area of knowledge being investigated. Catherwood (1994b) claimed that children do not lack the necessary cognitive processes, yet they inevitably lack experience and perhaps confidence when engaging in unfamiliar cognitive territory. Therefore, a developmental change would be referred to as a quantitative phenomenon rather than a qualitative (or stage-like) one (Catherwood, 1994b p.26).

Hendricks, Meade, & Wylie (1993), conducted a recent study on cognitively competent children in early childhood education. This study investigated experiences which influence the development of children’s competencies. As part of the research design, Hendricks, et al. (1993) collected data on the children through observations, child interviews and information from the child’s parent and teacher. Hendricks, et al. (1993) emphasised the importance of tuning into and becoming aware of what children are thinking. With this valuable information, schools can then enhance, enrich and extend the educational programme.

There have been several misconceptions about the competencies of young children as effective informants in educational research. Recent research as described in this

study, has refuted these views, demonstrating how a child's perspective can successfully be obtained. These studies emphasise the need for an ecological perspective, helping each child to focus on meaningful concrete experiences. This will enable researchers to discover how young children perceive and experience life in the classroom.

Butterworth (1993) described how research in earlier decades tended to focus on cognitive competence and performance, where performance was seen to be a reflection of an underlying competence. This view is not questioned, as competence and performance are seen to be closely related to contextual variables.

A perspective is emerging that will provide an ecological foundation for the development of thought and action in culturally constrained contexts. 'Cold blooded' cognition was replaced by 'social cognition' and this emphasis, in turn, has given way to 'situated cognition' in the last decade. (Butterworth, 1993, p.10)

The image of 'children as novices' is a powerful one (Goodnow & Burns, 1995; Butterworth, 1993; Siefert, 1993; Catherwood, 1994a). It is now the widely held view that children do not lack competence, but they lack experience and need time and opportunities to build on their experiences.

### **2.3 Research focusing on children's perceptions**

Educational research is usually written from the adult's perspective rather than from the child's point of view. Therefore, adults may miss what may be essential in the child's world. Vary rarely have children been asked to speak for themselves (Coe, 1991; Huttunen, 1991; Reifel, 1988; Takanishi & Spitzer, 1980).

It was suggested by Weinstein (1983), that in the past educational researchers have ignored the intelligence that children bring to school. It has only been in the last decade, that researchers have started to investigate seriously the child's point of view of the classroom processes. It was previously commented by Hartup (1979), that our



knowledge of the children's understanding of classroom phenomena is shockingly incomplete.

The difficulties of communicating adequately with children is recognised as problematic in research (Reid, Landesman, Treder & Jaccard, 1989; Tammivaara & Enright, 1986). A weakness in the interview technique could lie with the accuracy with which the children report their thoughts and feelings. It may be difficult to understand the child's point of view and the interviewer may misinterpret the child's response (this would apply to people of all ages). If children answer questions differently, is it because of their different perceptions or is it because they cannot express themselves? Yet, if educators are to work effectively with children and understand them adequately, so to promote and enhance their learning and well-being, then it is important that children's perceptions are acknowledged and understood.

Interviews and anecdotal accounts provided by young children could provide some important insights into how young children think about their daily life in the multi-age grouped classroom, and could supply valuable information for researchers who want to understand how children develop and learn (Reifel, 1988).

In recent years, many qualitative researchers have successfully used child interviews to gain awareness of how children perceive themselves as learners. Pramling (1988) used interview techniques to study the pre-school children's ability to reflect on their own learning. Pramling focused on the child's point of view and conducted semi-structured interviews, in an attempt to get children to explore their thoughts as far as possible. Pramling interviewed and observed three groups of pre-school children who were working with the same curriculum topic for approximately three weeks. The final interview was conducted after a six month period. Pramling found that the children's awareness of their own learning increased significantly in the group who worked with dialogues about learning that were related to the content.

Goodnow & Burns (1985), conducted a study of Australian children's perceptions of family life, school and friendships, which enabled the children (grades 1-6) to use their own words in expressing their views rather than having an adult describe the children's responses. A framework was built from the children's comments rather than from pre-existing theories of what children may or may not comment on. One limitation of this study, was the risk that the child may give the interviewer an answer the child thinks the interviewer wants, rather than what the child really wants to say. Perhaps this is due to the power that children perceive adults as having, although participants, whether adult or children may sway answers in particular directions.

It is not inconceivable that adults have more power than children, as adults inevitably have to make decisions and take responsibility for the needs of young children. However, it is imperative that good decisions are made for children, to ensure that effective and appropriate learning environments are established. As one child stated in Goodnow & Burns (1985, p.2), "Children think of different things from adults, so adults can learn from kids' ideas." One way to understand children is to ask them about life in their classrooms.

The study by Goodnow & Burns (1985), clearly showed how important it is that educators and researchers are more flexible with their perceptions of children. The children's comments revealed how articulate the children were and a great deal was discovered by reading the children's comments.

Cullen (1988) discussed the use of interview techniques with regard to young children's perceptions of their learning in early education contexts. In Cullen's view, talking with children about their learning is important as a child's perception of a task may differ considerably from that of a teacher. Cullen investigated the concepts of strategic teaching and learning. Strategic teaching as a construct is closely aligned to scaffolding or guided participation, reflecting the Vygotskian perspectives. Cullen suggested that the teachers' abilities to scaffold or guide

students' learning is greatly facilitated by the practice of talking with children about their learning.

This view is also shared by the Reggio Emilia approach to pre-school education, that focuses on the social construction of knowledge, an emphasis inspired by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory.

Reggio Emilia education begins with the view of the child as a competent and complex social being who is motivated and learns from social interaction and relationships with others. (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p.142)

With this emphasis, the teacher has an important role in assisting the children to learn to listen to others and communicate successfully. Berk & Winsler (1995), commented that certain interaction styles can assist in promoting children's cognitive development. The teachers are viewed as partners with children in the learning process.

Klein (1988) argued that the children's perceptions of life in school assist in illuminating the process of becoming a student at school. This information can help educators structure appropriate curriculum and relate to young children's needs in their first years of school. Yet research indicates that little is known about how a young child perceives school, or what their understanding of school is all about (Gamble & Woulbroun, 1995; Kantor, 1988; Klein, 1988; Klein, Kantor & Fernie, 1988).

There has been much less research on what children think of and know about this place called school or about the reality of daily life in the classroom. (Klein, et al. 1988, p.32)

A study by Kantor (1988), used an ethnographic perspective and involved daily observations, video recordings and interview techniques to elicit the perceptions of children and their parents. The study was designed to capture how "meanings for school" are constructed. This information is important in uncovering the process of

early school socialisation. Kantor (1988) argued that young children “learn how to go to school” and that this learning involves the children acquiring certain social knowledge and communication abilities in order to become successful participants. A child becomes part of a social system that incorporates different values, rituals, rules and attitudes. Klein, et al. (1988) described how much is involved in the formation of a child’s understanding of school, which includes the child exploring new roles (student and teacher), understanding new procedures (packaway/cleanup), interpreting new events (mat time) and becoming familiar with the different learning centres and tasks (for example, puzzle area). Klein, et al. (1988) described these daily events or activities as a script which helps children to anticipate, predict and understand the recurring events or structure in their school experiences.

Taylor (1988) suggested that a perspective emerges when we talk to children, listen to them, and try to understand what is important to them in their everyday lives. Observations are a valuable tool for assessing a child’s development and learning. However, observations alone can be restricting, as it is only possible to interpret what is observable. By listening and talking to children, it is then possible to report a child’s perspective. It is difficult to ‘see’ what a child sees, but by attending to a child’s perspective, clearer insights can then be drawn.

A child’s ‘point of view’ is one of the many ways of assessing how children learn and perceive life in the classroom. Yet for many years, a child’s perspective would not have been sought or deemed significant. Young children were not considered capable of considering alternative views, due to their egocentrism, or inability to take into account other views (Cox, 1991).

Within this chapter, current literature focuses positively on what children can do and are capable of, and evidence has been given to support this view. Each of these ‘snapshots’ have presented a different angle on young children’s perspective taking ability, demonstrating that although young children may not be as competent as older children and adults, they are more capable than once thought.

## **Chapter Three**

### **METHOD OF INVESTIGATION**

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#### **3.1 Conceptual framework**

A conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in a narrative form, the main dimensions to be studied - the key factors, or variables - and the presumed relationships among them. (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p.28)

The two level conceptual framework adopted in this study illustrates some of the factors which influence how a young child operates within a multi-age grouped classroom. At the first level (refer to Figure 1. p.19), the child is the central component of the framework, surrounded by the external factors which may influence the nature of the child's response to the multi-age class. How a child works within the multi-age grouped classroom is crucial to their learning. The class environment will influence the form and extent of social and cognitive development taking place.

Figure One gives a contextual view of the external factors which influence the nature of a child's response to a multi-age class. The child's perceptions will be the main focus for this study.

The context acknowledges that children come from families that differ in size, basic values as well as economic and ethnic backgrounds. These factors may influence how the child perceives school. Therefore, the child may come to school with pre-conceived notions of how school will be. It was suggested by Jackson (1990) that the school often becomes the receiver of attitudes rather than a creator of them.

Parents and the community may have expectations for the multi-age grouped classrooms. These expectations may be similar as those for the traditional classes. Most parents want the best for their children and often what is 'best' is shaped by their own experiences of school (Schools Council, 1992).

Teachers also have an effect on how the children perceive and work in the multi-age class. Teachers not only teach content, they also reflect attitudes towards what they teach, other people and the learning process. How teachers construe themselves as teachers will often reflect on how they construe children as learners (Klein, 1988).

The second level (refer to Figure 2. p.20), directly relates to the research questions. How a young child works within the multi-age grouped classroom deals with the process of learning rather than with the product of learning. This framework explores the various dimensions of that process, which involves the parents, teacher, peers and the learning environment within the multi-age grouped class. For the purpose of this study, the second level of the conceptual framework will be the focus. Emphasis will be placed on the children's perceptions.

### **Tasks**

One way to examine the process in the classroom context is to focus on the tasks children encounter. The tasks may require the children to reproduce information after instruction, or the children may be expected to understand the nature of the task and draw inferences (Doyle, 1981). It needs to be ascertained if the children understand the tasks, and whether the tasks cater for the range of developmental levels, capabilities and interests in the multi-age grouped classrooms. The degree of teacher direction and degree of child choice when selecting tasks needs to be considered carefully. Can the types of tasks and activities be managed by mixed-age groups? Talking with children could also reveal that children's perspectives of a task differ considerably from that of a teacher. This could include the children's perceptions of the topics, activities and subject matter. The learning that takes place is influenced by the structure of the tasks and activities (Kantor, 1988).

### **Structure**

The structure of the classroom environment, helps each child understand how the class operates. Klein (1988) suggests that information about the structure of the class, involves the physical environment, the curriculum and the implicit and explicit

roles of the actors within that structure. Joyce (1987) describes the structure as a programme or set of rules, which a child then relates to their environment. How a teacher organises the task structure and rule structure, could determine how a teacher sees the children's roles. For example, in the multi-age grouped class, are the children expected to sit still, listen and do the teacher directed activities, or are the children given freedom to make choices and act independently? Is there a relationship between the child's and teacher's view of the task structure and rule structure in the multi-age grouped classrooms?

### **Routines**

Yinger (1979, p.169) defines routines as established procedures whose main function is to control and co-ordinate specific sequences of behaviour. In an early childhood classroom, routines are useful where actions and behaviours are repetitive, such as activity routines instructional routines and management routines. Routines help to familiarise the children with the structure and sequence of the activities and the appropriate behaviour expected in each area. Mitchell & David (1992) suggest that the routine helps to shape each day and make life predictable and secure for young children. The routine of the day has in a sense, a ritualistic quality to it. The curricular events become part of the children's daily routine, which then become part of a "script" or a predictable set of events that make up a school day. Children generally have a 'script' or routine of their school day and they usually know the 'acts' they experience (Fivush, 1984; Klein, Kantor & Fernie, 1988; Reifel, 1988).

### **Roles**

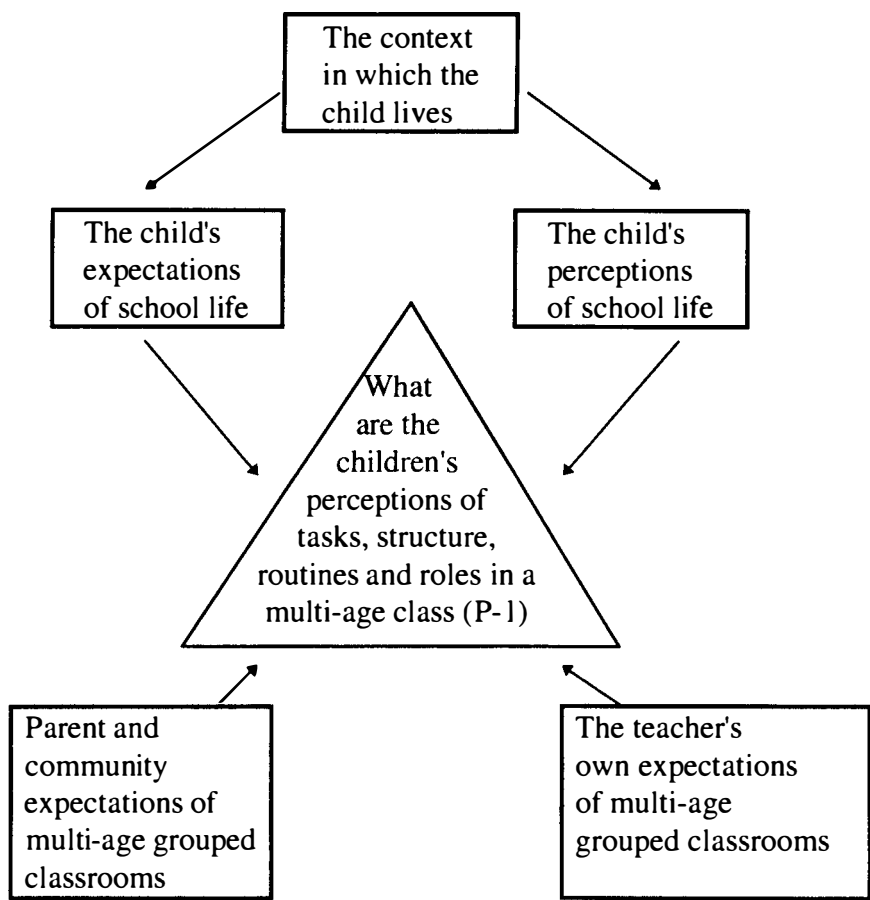
Weinstein (1983) described the classroom as having multiple actors operating within it, who take into account friendship and authority relationships. These roles vary from a class teacher role, teacher assistant, parent helpers, voluntary helpers, student teachers and the children's own peers. How do the children explain the roles and responsibilities of the teachers, teacher assistant, parents and children? How are the children receiving messages about these roles in the multi-age grouped classroom? Klein, Kantor & Fernie (1988) expressed the view that the roles of the teacher and



child are transmitted in a variety of subtle ways, such as the physical environment in the classroom, the curriculum and the roles of other individuals.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

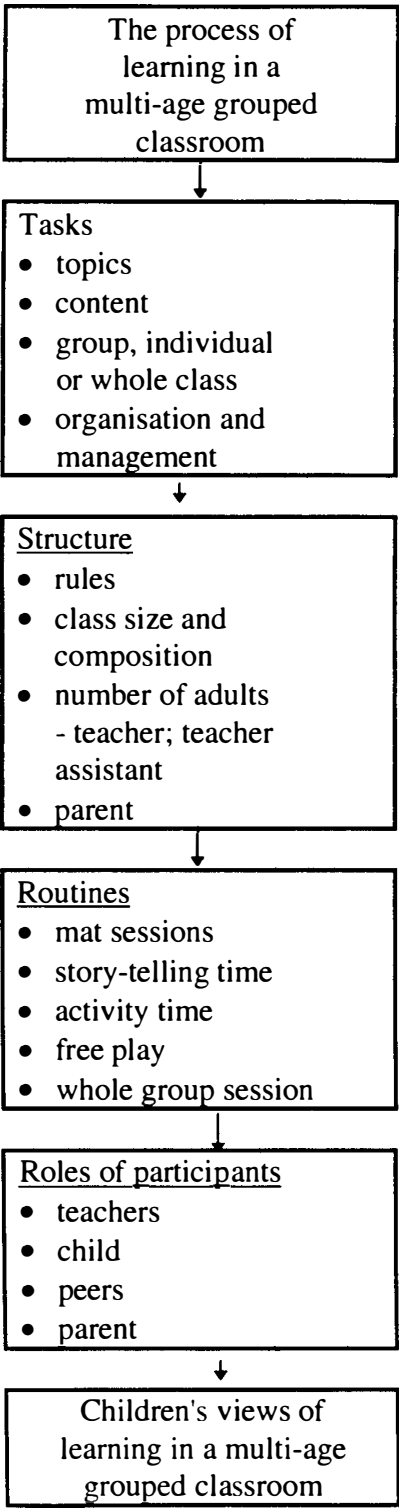
Level One



**Figure 1** External factors which influence the nature of a child's response to a multi-age class

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Level Two



**Figure 2.** Internal factors which influence the process of learning in a multi-age class

### 3.2 Design of the study

The method of research adopted in this study fitted within the qualitative paradigm. A situational case-study was prepared, focusing on six children from two multi-age group classrooms (P-1), in a Perth metropolitan primary school. The aim of the study was to look at the situation in which the children found themselves in their multi-age classrooms. What children say about the tasks, structure, routine and roles can tell us much about how they see classroom life.

The two multi-age classrooms in which the study took place, were based in one of the Perth metropolitan primary schools currently taking part in the Flexibility in Schooling Project. In 1995, (at the time of data collection) seventeen schools in Western Australia (country and metropolitan regions) were taking part in this project. The school in which this study took place, was in its second year of operation in a full-time P-1 multi-age programme.

Three girls and three boys from four to six years of age, were selected from the two P-1 classes operating within the one school. The six target children were chosen after an observation period of approximately four weeks. The children were chosen on the basis of gender (three girls and three boys); the range of age from four to six years; and the preparedness of the children to take part when interacting with the researcher. The researcher ensured that there was a balance of children in age and gender from the two P-1 classes.

The teacher's views of the tasks, structures, routines and roles in the multi-age grouped class were also considered to be an integral part of the study. The researcher wanted to ascertain if there were any differences between the participants and teachers perceptions of the tasks, structures, routines and roles.

The difficulty of communicating adequately with young children is recognised as problematic in research. The researcher spent a considerable time observing the classroom environment to develop an understanding of how children interacted

within it, in order to establish a rapport between the researcher and the children, and to help facilitate open communication and understanding.

### **3.3 Data collection and analysis**

The data collection technique used in this study was based on observations and interviews with the chosen participants and class teachers in the two multi-age group classrooms (P-1), in the selected Perth metropolitan primary school. The interviews and observations were used as a means of gaining information about the teacher's and children's perceptions of the tasks, structure, routines and roles in the multi-age class.

Data were collected in four phases in this study. This collection process involved:

- (a) interviews (refer to Appendix A) with the class teachers to establish grouping arrangements and structure, routines set in the class and to clarify the roles expected of the children and adults in the setting. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted before the observation period took place.
- (b) observations of the multi-age classrooms (P-1), to note the overall plan and the behaviours of children in the setting in regard to the selection of tasks, task completion, application of rules and routines, formation of groups and assumptions of roles. These observations took place over a three month period. Within the first five weeks of the observation period, the six participants were selected. Another six weeks was then spent observing these children closely for a day and a half every week. Within the observation period, a profile was developed of each participant to assist the researcher in developing a clear understanding of each participant's action/behaviour in the multi-age setting (refer to Table 1. p.30).
- (c) informal interviews with the participants were conducted, to obtain their perceptions of how groups work together, what is expected of the

participants, what routines exist and the roles taken up by those in the setting. The informal interviews took place in the twelfth week of the observation period. Examples from the observations were used to help construct the interviews. This ensured that the questions asked related specifically to the context and were relevant and meaningful to the child, as they were related to activities/events that were taking place for the child at that point in time. Within the interview schedule (refer to Appendix B), the researcher designed a range of questions, which were used as a guide to ensure that there was consistency between the informal interviews. The researcher asked open-ended questions which dealt with issues directly relevant to the child. To help establish a comfortable and non-threatening interaction with the children, the researcher used puppets, story books, photographs and other suitable aids to stimulate discussion on activities they were involved with in the classroom. In addition, the researcher had engaged in considerable interaction with each child in the weeks leading up to the interview so each child was very familiar and comfortable with the researcher. The researcher is also an experienced early childhood teacher skilled in establishing rapport with young children.

- (d) discussions of the findings with the participants were shared with the classroom teachers to review their construction of events. This took place during the final stages of the writing process to assist in triangulation. The main focus of this task was to establish if there were any "gaps" between what the teachers expected of the tasks, structure, routines and roles and what the children's perceptions of these were. As there was a considerable time lapse between when the data were collected and the writing process, it was not possible to share the findings with the child participants.

The use of more than one method in collecting data for this study helped the researcher understand when and why there were differences. Denzin (1976) describes triangulation in research as the combination of two or more theories, data sources, methods or investigations in the study of a single phenomenon.

### 3.4 Limitations of the study

It was suggested by Keats (1988) that a problem with interviewing young children is the need to gain and keep the young child's attention. Further problems may evolve if the child has a limited attention span and is highly distractable. Young children may also have a limited vocabulary and experience difficulties in understanding, particularly if asked complex questions. For the purpose of this study, the participants were asked informal open-ended questions which referred to concrete rather than abstract terms and concepts in the context of their multi-age group classroom.

Yarrow (1960), cited in Parker (1984), argues that a failure to adapt the interview relationship to the developmental stage of the child, seriously compromises the validity and reliability of the interview. Interviewing children has been referred to as a double-edged sword.

Properly managed, it can be a sensitive and revealing tool in building our understanding of children, recklessly (sic) managed, it contributes to the collection of spurious labels in which too many school children are already confined. (Parker, 1984, p.18)

The degree of accuracy in understanding each participant will depend on the researcher's knowledge of each participant as well as the experience of working with the participant in the multi-age grouped classrooms. The classroom teacher is in a strong position to observe how the child is adjusting to the learning and social environment of the multi-age grouped classrooms. Although classroom teachers' views are subjective, they were valuable in helping the researcher to develop a comprehensive view of how each child works in the multi-age grouped classrooms.

The researcher identified the children as pre-primary aged and year one aged participants, to assist the reader in distinguishing between the age groups. This

clarification may inadvertently sway towards separation of the class into those two groups.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

A letter was sent to the Principal describing the study, as well as requesting permission to conduct research at the school (refer to Appendix C). This was followed up by an interview with the Principal and P-1 teachers from the multi-age grouped classrooms to discuss how the study would be conducted. Parental consent was obtained before the participants were invited to participate in this study (refer to Appendix D). The parents and staff of the children from the multi-age classes were informed about the research before and after the research had been done.

The researcher discussed with the children from both multi-age group classrooms, what the research was about and how they would be assisting the researcher in telling a “story about their class”. The children were told that to help the researcher write the story, their voices would be recorded. The children were informed that their voices would be recorded on a tape-recorder, using a radio microphone. This provided the researcher with accurate transcripts of the participants’ conversations.

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher used a pseudonym code when referring to each participant. This ensured that the participants would not be identifiable when reading the completed study (refer to Table 1. p.30).

The researcher followed the Australian Early Childhood Association (A.E.C.A) Code of Ethics (refer to Appendix E), to ensure that the rights of each child would be acknowledged.



**Chapter Four**

**RESULTS**

## Chapter Four

### RESULTS

The data analysed in this chapter is divided up into two major sections. The first section describes the classroom setting, a description of the P-1 teachers and gives information on the daily schedule and the activities and programmes operating in the two P-1 classrooms. Information is also given on the participants used for the study, to assist readers in developing a clear profile of each participant.

The second section, presents data collected over the three month period. This involved the interviews and observations of the classrooms, teachers and participants, which were used as a means of gaining information about the teachers and children's views the tasks, structure, routines and roles in the multi-age classrooms.

#### *Section One*

##### **4.1 Classroom setting**

Data were collected from two P-1 classes in a multi-age setting. The two classes differed in size and in the structural layout. The classrooms had a clear demarcation between the various learning areas, which is illustrated in the floor plans (refer to Appendix F). One classroom, referred to as Class A, is considerably longer and more rectangular in shape, in contrast to the other P-1 classroom (Class B), which was square in shape.

The furniture, equipment and materials available were similar in both settings. For example, both classrooms contained a writing centre, puzzles, listening post, books and a carpeted area for group discussions. All of the children had access to a block building area, home-corner, table games, playdough, collage and box construction and a range of art/craft activities which varied slightly according to the changes in the teacher's weekly programme. Class A had the home-corner/dramatic play area

and block building areas as learning centres within the classroom, whereas Class B used the space available in the adjoining rooms.

The physical arrangement of the learning centres differed between the two P-1 classrooms. For example, Class A was divided into distinct learning areas. These were special areas designated for the listening post, book area, art/craft area, puzzles and blocks. Half of the room was set up with various learning centres which resembled a pre-primary classroom, in contrast to the other half of the classroom which had desks and chairs set up in four small groups. This area had been partitioned off with a large white-board, which the teacher used for modelled writing activities. This section of the room resembled a traditional primary classroom setting. There was a clear demarcation between the areas and clear traffic ways for the children to get from one area to the other.

The two adjoining rooms used by Class B, incorporated a block building area, home-corner and general art/craft area. Within Class B, the teacher had placed additional learning centres, such as puzzles, books, writing centre, listening post and a general mat area. The desks had been placed into small groups, that gave all children a clear view of the blackboard which the teacher used frequently in her day to day teaching. The layout of Class B appeared to resemble a more traditional primary classroom.

The dimension of each P-1 classroom and the teacher's own preference for creating a learning environment, shaped the way the two P-1 classes were created. For the purpose of this study, Class A and Class B have been described separately to assist the reader in understanding how the classes differ. However, the P-1 children from both classes have access to the whole P-1 learning environment during activity time and other designated times.

## **4.2 P-1 Teachers**

The teachers who taught in the two P-1 classrooms differed in their qualifications and years of teaching experience. The teacher in Class A is an early childhood

trained teacher with over 18 years of teaching experience in early childhood education, having taught in Government schools in the metropolitan and country regions of Western Australia. Approximately half of that time was spent in pre-school and pre-primary centres. Two years was spent teaching in a year one class and experience was also gained teaching incidentally throughout the primary grades (1-7). The teacher in Class A has also undertaken advisory and consultative roles within the Education Department of Western Australia.

The teacher from Class B is a primary trained teacher with 6 years of teaching experience in Government and non-Government schools. This included schools in the country and metropolitan regions, as well as a year teaching overseas. This teacher had experience teaching in the junior and middle primary grades. The present class was her first experience teaching pre-primary children in the P-1 setting. The teacher in Class B had started teaching the P-1 class in a full-time capacity in second term, due to the original teacher retiring at the end of first term. During term one, the current teacher in Class B taught as a relief teacher in Class A for one and a half days a week. The replacement relief teacher in Class A who the researcher observed on numerous occasions, had 3 years of teaching experience in the junior primary and middle primary years.

Both P-1 teachers mentioned that they 'complimented' each other with ideas for teaching in the multi-age (P-1) setting, due to the fact that one teacher was primary trained and the other teacher was early childhood trained. The P-1 teachers met once a week after school, so they could plan the P-1 programme together.

### **4.3 Profile of the participants**

Three girls and three boys from four to six years of age, were selected from the two P-1 classes operating within the same Perth metropolitan primary school. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, each participant is referred to by a code name. The use of a code name also assists in building a 'profile' of each participant.

‘PP’ refers to a pre-primary aged participant. Four pre-primary participants have been used in this study. Because one pre-primary boy declined to continue his participation after ten weeks in the study, another pre-primary boy was invited to take part at this stage.

‘Y1’ refers to a year one aged participant. Three participants were used for the study. All of the participants were numbered and given a short description, to help the reader develop a ‘profile’ of each participant (refer to Table 1, p.30).

The age of each participant was recorded at the start of the study. Details of each participant are as recorded on Table 1.

**Table 1      Profile of Participants**

CODE	GENDER	AGE	CLASS	COMMENTS
PP.1	boy	4yrs 10mths	A	Quietly spoken in a group situation, but shows confidence when interacting on an individual basis. Appears to be very receptive/attentive about what is happening in the classroom environment. This is reflected in his work samples and the questions he asks in class, as well as the comments he makes when asked a question.
PP.2	girl	5yrs 2 mths	B	Keen to participate in a range of activities in class. Very responsive to staff and peers.
PP.3	boy	5yrs 1 mth	B	Talkative and enthusiastic to share his thoughts about activities/events in the classroom environment. Asks a lot of questions. Excellent language skills. Took part for eleven weeks. In the eleventh week (when informal interviews took place), this child's mother had a baby. Teacher B commented that PP.3 had become unsettled and uncooperative at school. PP.3 was reluctant to participate on the twelfth week. The researcher did not feel it was appropriate to pursue him.
PP.4	boy	4yrs 7 mths	B	Keen to participate, but easily distracted. Took part for one week (the twelfth week)
Y1.A	girl	5yrs 11 mths	A	Her second year in a multi-age grouped classroom. Advanced reader and self motivated. Very caring and protective of the pre-primary aged children. Appears to enjoy peer tutoring (this has been observed on many occasions).
Y1.B	girl	6yrs 4 mths	B	Her second year in the multi-age grouped classroom. Appears to be confident and self-sufficient. Well organised and motivated within the classroom. Very interested in writing/language activities.
Y1.C	boy	6yrs 5 mths	A	His second year in a multi-age grouped class. Appears to be confident and assertive in class. Demonstrates leadership skills (other children are seen to listen to him and follow his lead).

4.4 Classroom schedule

A total of 23 children were enrolled in each P-1 class (both classes had started with 25 children in each class at the beginning of the school year). The class numbers comprised pre-primary aged girls and boys and the year one aged girls and boys as set out below.

Class A	pre-primary girls = 5	year 1 girls = 6
	pre-primary boys = 6	year 1 boys = 6
Class B	pre-primary girls = 5	year 1 girls = 4
	pre-primary boys = 7	year 1 boys = 7

Each P-1 teacher worked from a timetable she had drawn up at the start of the school year. The two timetables (refer to Appendix G & H) varied slightly in the morning schedule. For example, the timetable from Class B, reveals more time allocated to oral language activities. However, during the three month observation period, there was a general consistency between the two P-1 classes in allocation of time to learning areas and types of activities. The timetable in Class B had been written by the teacher who retired at the end of term 1, and the new teacher decided to follow this basic timetable structure to ensure continuity for the children in her care. Teacher A and B drew up another timetable (refer to Appendix I), which was displayed at the end of term two (the end of the researcher's observation period). Teacher A and B were observed working from the same timetable schedule during the observation period.

The afternoon schedule for both P-1 classes was identical. On Monday and Tuesday afternoons the pre-primary aged children went home at 11.50 am. All pre-primary children who attend the full-time programme in Western Australia are entitled to four full days of school a week. The P-1 teachers at this school send the pre-primary aged children home at the start of the week, rather than at the end of the week, as many children at this school were tired at the start of the week due to their busy

weekends at home. The P-1 teachers had an afternoon each for their class preparation, so on a Monday or Tuesday afternoon each P-1 teacher taught a combined year one group.

As is highlighted on the P-1 timetable in both classes (refer to Appendices G, H and I), a typical day in the P-1 classes included the first hour of each morning with free child-choice activities. During this time, the children were free to work in the different activity areas that had been set up in the two P-1 classrooms. The children were free to move around the whole P-1 environment, interacting with adults and other children within the learning centres from both P-1 classrooms. The hour set aside for free-choice activity time, gave children enough time to choose more than one activity and concentrate on a particular activity which interested them. The free-choice activity time also allowed for flexibility within the programme. Even though a child was encouraged to complete a task begun, children were free to decide how long they wanted to engage in an activity and with whom they wanted to work. The P-1 children in Class A were encouraged to self-monitor their work on individual activity worksheets. The activity worksheets had been designed by a colleague in another school (refer to Appendix J). Children were responsible for their own activity sheets and were encouraged to tick and date the activity they had worked on that day. The same sheet was used over a number of weeks and was checked periodically by the classroom teacher. This system of self-monitoring had been started as a trial for the P-1 children in Class A in term two. No formal system was being used in Class B, apart from the teacher's own anecdotal records of each child.

The children from both P-1 classes had an oral sharing time at the completion of activity time. During this time, the children could share what they had done in large groups, small groups or partner sharing, depending on the teacher's instruction. It was noted from the observations that a particular oral procedure was followed in both classes, depending on whether the children had a speaking or a listening role. The class rules were closely followed and all children were expected to listen and pay attention. A verbal warning was often used as a prompt to keep the children on task.



After morning recess of approximately 20 minutes, the P-1 children from both classes stood in lines within their class groups outside the entrance to the P-1 classrooms. The classrooms were locked when classes were in recess due to previous episodes of theft and vandalism in the area. During recess and lunchtime breaks the pre-primary and year one children could play anywhere in the primary school grounds. These areas were supervised by the rostered duty teachers.

When the teachers returned from the staff room, the P-1 children assembled into their own classrooms for a whole group language lesson with their class teacher. This usually involved a shared book experience, followed by a discussion incorporating some teacher directed questions about the book/event. The pre-primary and year one aged children then worked together for approximately half an hour on a related language activity, designed by their own class teacher. Even though the two P-1 classrooms shared themes, for example 'The Sea' in term two, the teachers were observed presenting different lessons/activities associated with this topic. It should be noted, that the researcher also observed the pre-primary and year one aged children together for one day a week when the relief teacher taught in Class A. The researcher was only able to observe the year one children together on the second half day of the observation, due to the pre-primary aged children going home at lunch time. Teacher A informed the researcher that she did not prepare lessons for the relief teacher. The relief teacher was expected to organise lessons to fit in with the teacher's current programme.

The pre-primary aged children as a whole were given a modified activity based on what the year one aged children were doing. For example, in Class A, the teacher had designed a series of lessons for the year one aged children to enhance their phonological awareness and word study skills. On these occasions, the year one aged children mainly used worksheets, whereas the pre-primary aged children may have drawn a picture and practised some 'writing', depending on their rate of development. When the pre-primary aged children finished the table activity, they were free to work in the learning centres within their own P-1 classroom.

A similar system operated in Class B, except that the pre-primary aged children were also free to move into the two adjoining rooms to work with the blocks, manipulatives and the home-corner, as well as the learning centres set up in their own classroom area. On a few occasions, the researcher observed the pre-primary aged children from Class A and Class B working together in the two adjoining rooms with the teacher assistant's supervision (the teacher assistant was shared between Class A and Class B).

At 11.15 am, approximately one hour before the lunch break, both pre-primary groups moved to the outside playground area within the P-1 environment for a free-play period. The teacher assistant remained outside to supervise the pre-primary aged children, and the P-1 teachers remained with the year one aged children in their designated classrooms. During this period, the year one aged children worked on the concrete 'hands on' maths programme. Approximately twenty minutes before lunch, the pre-primary and year one aged children assembled together in their own P-1 classroom mat area. This time was set aside for a story, discussion time or a game before the lunches were distributed. The teachers used their own discretion as to how this time was used. On a few occasions, the researcher observed the P-1 children from Class A sharing an outdoor play time immediately before the lunch period.

The P-1 children ate their lunches in the open playground area used by the children from grades 1-7. This area was supervised by the duty teachers on roster. The P-1 children did not have access to their own classroom or playground area during recess or lunch time. After the fifty minute lunch break, the P-1 children lined up in their respective classes and waited for the teachers to unlock the doors to the P-1 classroom area. The children assembled into their own classrooms for a silent reading period of twenty minutes. During this time, the year one aged children changed their library books, which was monitored by their class teacher. The pre-primary and year one children were requested to sit quietly together during the silent

reading period. They could sit anywhere in the classroom, such as at their desk, on the mat or floor, at the book corner or in the puppet theatre.

At approximately 1.20 pm, the pre-primary and year one aged children had a story read to them by their class teacher. This was then followed by a subject area lesson, such as science, social studies, music or a physical education lesson. During one afternoon a week, the pre-primary and year one aged children would watch a video together, and were sometimes joined by another grade in the school. The P-1 children also visited the local library opposite the school once a week, to listen to a story read by the librarian and borrow a book. The children from a year 5 class joined the P-1 classes on Thursday afternoons for a 'buddy time'. This programme is implemented to encourage peer-tutoring and co-operative learning between the older and younger children. During 'buddy time' the year 5 and P-1 children worked together on four rotational activities that were organised by the P-1 teachers. The researcher did not observe any of these sessions in operation.

#### **4.5 Activities /Programmes in the P-1 classes**

Observations were conducted for one and a half days a week over a three month period. During this time, the researcher had the opportunity to observe both P-1 classes in operation during the same time schedule and day(s) every week. This enabled a consistent pattern to emerge, that helped the researcher become familiar with the daily schedule, routine and general programme.

Both teachers described many of the activities and tasks as static or constant, as they were reinforcing skills that needed to be developed over a period of time. Therefore, the activities were repeated on a daily basis over a week or even longer, depending on the teacher's programme. During the activity (free-choice) time, the P-1 children had access to the activities that had been set up by the teachers in the two P-1 classrooms. The activities were mainly open-ended activities such as games, manipulatives and construction games, as well as the 'constant positive' type activities, that were a constant feature of the learning environment. This time was not an art/craft period, as might be found in some traditional pre-primary settings.

The following activity areas were usually available to the children during the activity free-choice period. A brief description explains the function of each area.

- number bingo - a mathematical board game.
- manipulative/construction games (for example: lego; quips; clever sticks; duplo; gearios) - play materials and equipment that encourages the children to actively explore the materials in an open-ended way.
- box work - construction with three dimensional waste and scrap materials.
- collage trolley/table - an activity involving glueing and cutting of paper and waste materials. The children can explore and experiment with their ideas in an open-ended way.
- puzzles - jigsaw puzzles and inset boards are structured pieces of play equipment that vary in degree of complexity in relation to the skill of the child. Jigsaw puzzles are specifically used to enhance children's fine motor skills, visual acuity and perception, task completion and persistence.
- felt-board - a versatile piece of equipment that can be used for felt stories and games.
- puppet theatre - used for puppet play. Class A had a cardboard carton puppet theatre, decked with curtains to resemble a framed stage.
- dress-ups/home-corner - an area used to enhance imaginative open-ended play, often involving direct imitation of adult roles. Props, child-sized furniture and dress-ups are provided to encourage a rich variety of inventive play.
- playdough - clay and dough can be used in an open-ended way to encourage expression of ideas, feelings and muscle development. Equipment such as cutters, rolling pins, plastic knives and plates can also be added to this activity.
- easel painting - easels have boards in vertical positions, suited for the height of young children. Children can paint with wide sweeping strokes whilst standing.
- tinkering table - an assortment of materials are provided for free exploration and discovery, particularly associated with science and technology. An example seen in Class A involved the tinkering table set up with a dismantled clock and screwdrivers and other tools available for the children to work with.

- writing table - a table set up with an assortment of writing paper, worksheets and writing implements, to encourage children to develop their fine motor skills, expression of ideas, language and writing/drawing skills. Both Class A and Class B had a writing table in their classroom, and children were free to use this area during free-play activity time.
- listening post - children wear head phones when listening to taped stories at the 'listening post'. Both Class A and Class B had this facility, and children used it during free-play time or during a teacher directed activity. Up to six children may be plugged in at one time to listen to stories.
- book corner - a designated area available in both P-1 classrooms. Children can sit on the floor or on cushions and read books of their choice during free-play activity time and the quiet reading time after lunch.
- table games - usually involving board games that are played at the table or on the floor with a specified number of children. These games usually have simple rules, and the children are expected to share, wait for turns and follow a sequence (depending on the game). Many games reinforce a specific skill/concept, for example, counting, number and colour.

Both teachers used the Western Australian 'First Steps' language programmes in their classrooms, which covered spelling, reading, writing and oral language. Each P-1 child had been diagnosed and their progress tracked on continua in these areas. First Steps strategies were implemented to cater for each child's developmental needs.

## ***Section Two***

The following section presents the collection of data, which is divided into the four sections or the focii of the study. This collection process was described in Chapter three (3.3). Each of the sections or phases incorporates the routines, structure, roles and tasks of the two multi-age grouped classrooms.

## 4.6 General observation

### 4.6.1 Routines

Within the daily schedule, the observations clearly showed that the teachers have planned an order of events that incorporated indoor and outdoor activities and self-chosen and teacher-directed activities. The schedule and procedure within the two P-1 classrooms were established to provide a predictable routine for the children. During the twelve week observation period, the researcher observed a consistent routine between the two classrooms, which included the same activity/lesson timetable and time schedule.

Both teachers planned for flexibility within their programmes, particularly with the afternoon schedule. For example, if both teachers felt that the children needed extra time outdoors, then this would be allowed. Teacher A had explained to the researcher that a lot depends on what she wanted the children to achieve on the day. Both teachers attempted to make the most of outdoor play, particularly during the winter months when rain limited the children's outdoor play time. The pre-primary and year one aged children were free to move between the two P-1 classes during activity time. However, observations revealed that the children tended to stay within their own classroom 'boundary' and interact with children from their own class. For example, two year one aged boys from Class A informed the researcher that they preferred to stay in their own class because they "liked it better".

As the weeks progressed, the researcher observed that more children were starting to move between the two classroom areas. In the ninth week of observations, some children from Class A and Class B were starting to interact more frequently in the open area between the two classrooms (where the children from Class B have their home-corner area, blocks, manipulatives and collage tables). On one occasion, the researcher approached a year one aged boy from Class B who was working in Class A during the activity period, and asked him why he had chosen to work in this area/space. His answer indicated that it was because his friends were in the other class and he liked to work with his friends. On another occasion, a year one aged girl from class A was observed working in Class B during activity time. She

informed the researcher that she had chosen to work in the other class because it was quieter and she had a headache because her class was too noisy. She also mentioned that she liked the 'other class' because she had some friends in there.

The general observations revealed that the children appeared settled and organised within the daily routine. The children appeared to work with a purpose and they appeared to be self motivated.

In summarising the main points, a consistent routine was observed between the two P-1 classrooms, incorporating the same activity and lesson timetable. Both teachers planned for flexibility within their programmes, particularly with the afternoon schedule. During activity time, the pre-primary and year one children were free to move between the two P-1 classrooms. Earlier observations noted that the participants tended to work and play in their "home" classroom environment during the activity (free-choice) period. This was particularly prevalent with the pre-primary aged participants. However, as the weeks progressed, the year one aged participants were seen to be utilising all areas of the P-1 environment and interacting with children from the other P-1 class, many of whom were year one aged children. Many of the pre-primary aged children tended to stay in their own class area throughout the three month observation period. Observations revealed that the pre-primary aged participants tended to interact mainly with the pre-primary aged children and sometimes year one aged children in a mixed-age group (for example, a combination of pre-primary and year one aged participants). These children may have belonged to their own classroom environment, or were children who had entered the pre-primary child's classroom area.

#### **4.6.2 Structure**

The observations helped the researcher develop an understanding of the children's perceptions of the structure, which included the task structure and rule structure within the multi-age class. With each observation, the researcher made note of the events that happened and subsequently interpreted those events. Repeated observations were then reviewed for patterns to help the researcher develop a clear

picture of classroom events and behaviour, that could be used in helping tap perceptions.

At the start of every school day, the children from both classrooms were expected to attend a morning session with their class teacher. This was a consistent part of the daily routine, in which the pre-primary and year one children were expected to help 'construct' the daily chart (day of week, date, weather), and find out who was at school (class roll). Both classrooms had a carpeted mat area where the daily discussions were held. Each teacher sat on a chair in front of the children on the 'mat' (carpeted area). The teacher controlled the events and the children were expected to follow specific directions. Class rules were apparent, the children were expected to put up their hands if they wanted to speak. The rules were the same for the "pre-primary" and "year one" children.

Each teacher then talked to her own class of P-1 children about the activities that had been set up for activity time. Even though the activities were chosen and set up by the teachers, the children were free to choose what they wanted to do and with whom they wanted to work. During activity time, the teachers were not observed to be intervening directly with the children, unless a child needed a specific direction or prompt to stay on task or remember a rule. For example, Teacher A would call out 'Hickory, Dickory...' and the children would chant 'stop'. This stop signal was observed to be a consistent strategy between the two P-1 classes. Both teachers used this signal successfully to gain the children's attention, before a direction or command was given.

After activity time, both groups had a sharing time, in which individual children were chosen to 'share' what they had done during the activity period. Teacher A sometimes varied the activity structure of this routine by implementing partner sharing in which all the children chose a partner from the P-1 group to share their news. Teacher A and Teacher B were seen to be consistent with the rule structure in their classrooms. If any problem arose, Teacher A would stop the class, gain all of the children's attention and inform them which rule had been infringed (for example,



listening). Teacher A would then remind the children of the rules and encourage the children to chant/recite them with her. Teacher A was also observed praising children who were working well, making reference to the particular behaviour that she was commending.

Teacher B often reinforced the appropriate class behaviour with all the children (P-1) together on the mat. To reinforce the positive behaviours being discussed, Teacher B would identify children on the mat who were listening and behaving well. A class faction chart was also used. All children in the class were divided into factions (red, blue, yellow and green). The title of the chart read, "Which faction is going to win the race?" The faction chart served as a group incentive. If a child was seen to be working/behaving appropriately, then the child could earn points for their relevant faction. Teacher B controlled how far the child could progress on the chart. For example, on one occasion the researcher observed Teacher B announce to the class that it was pack-away time (given as a verbal instruction). Teacher B then promised 20 faction points for the child who did a good job at pack-away time. If a child broke a class rule (for example, disruptive at mat-time), then the child could lose a point for his/her faction. Teacher B informed the researcher that she tends to work on the positives rather than the negatives.

The faction chart is part of a whole school system. Every Tuesday, the Year 7 children count the faction points for the whole school. The winning faction is announced at the school assembly. Each term, the members of the winning team receives a reward (for example, an ice-cream), and at the end of the year the winning team receive a trophy. The researcher did not observe this system being used in Class A. This may have been due to the fact that on most occasions, the researcher had observed a relief teacher teaching instead of Teacher A.

Teacher B was also observed rewarding children with stickers for good work. This was often done with lots of verbal praise and it was brought to all of the children's attention why this person was being rewarded with a sticker. On one occasion, Teacher B held up a year one child's work on the mat and told the class why she

liked the work, so the child's work was seen to be a model to the other children. This was followed with verbal praise, "What I call superb work".

Whenever Teacher B was not happy with the children's behaviour, she would stop the class and ensure every child was paying attention. Teacher B would then explain why she was feeling this way. On one observation, the following comment was heard from Teacher B.

"Today has not been a nice day. I have seen many people hitting etc., you are not your usual beautiful selves. Remember to always treat others as you would like to be treated. Some people are feeling sick and have a bad cold. Take care of yourself and each other. Let's make sure we have a nice day. I always expect your best work, always."

The two classrooms conducted similar mat sessions. These occurred before activity time, after recess, sometimes before lunch and immediately after the lunch period. The P-1 children were all expected to abide by the class rules and follow the directions of the class teacher. For example, when the teachers gave directions or discussed issues on the mat, the P-1 children were expected to sit quietly and listen.

In summary, observations reveal that a rule structure was in place in both P-1 classrooms. The rules were the same for the pre-primary and year one aged children. The class rules were often reinforced during mat-time discussions and the children were clearly told the consequences of breaking those rules. The teacher in Class B was seen to use a class faction chart regularly, and tangible rewards (ie. stickers) were used as a form of positive reinforcement for good work and behaviour. No similar system was observed in Class A.

### 4.6.3 Roles

The observations revealed that the children are exposed to a number of adults who have different roles within the multi-age group classroom setting. These roles vary from a class teacher role, teacher assistant, voluntary helpers and student teachers. The children are used to many visitors, such as teachers and administrators from other schools in Western Australia, who come to observe the multi-age group classrooms, take notes and liaise with the staff. It is apparent by the confidence and friendliness of the children, that they were comfortable with the visitors in their classrooms.

To summarise, the children in both P-1 classroom are exposed to a number of adults who have different roles within the multi-age grouped classroom setting.

### 4.6.4 Tasks

Each P-1 teacher talked to her class at the beginning of the day (first mat session) and described the activities that had been set up in the class area. Even though the children had access to both P-1 classes, there was a tendency for both teachers to discuss the activities set up in their own class boundary. However, on one occasion Teacher A was seen to talk about the activities in both P-1 classrooms, to give the children in Class A an idea of what extra activities were available on that day.

The pre-primary and year one children worked together during activity (free-choice) time across the two P-1 classroom areas. Examples of the types of tasks available to the children during the activity/free choice period were listed in section 4.5 of this study.

Many of the tasks available to the children during activity time were open ended and individualised. The children were encouraged to manipulate and explore the range of materials available, many of which were transformational (for example, play dough, blocks, collage, paints, sand tray), where the children could make or manipulate a range of different things as they desired. The children were encouraged to work independently and make their own decisions about what tasks they wanted to explore. The children were not expected to produce a tangible object at the end of

the activity period, yet the children were encouraged to 'share' what they had explored, made or discovered during this time. More emphasis was placed on the 'process' rather than the 'product'.

The 'social process' appeared to be highly valued in both multi-age classrooms. Group time (on the 'mat area' in both P-1 classrooms), emphasised the 'sharing' of tasks completed or explored, as well as incorporating new discussions or special events planned by each P-1 teacher.

The period following recess, involved tasks that involved more teacher direction and planning. A language lesson was prepared, usually involving a shared book experience with the pre-primary and year one children. The P-1 children remained in their own class area with their class teacher during this period.

The "pre-primary" and "year one" children sat together for the shared book experience, but they did not always work on the same follow-up activity prepared by their class teacher. It was noted on many occasions, that the pre-primary aged children were often given a modified version of the task that the year one aged children were working on. For example, all of the children were looking forward to a "class picnic", which was to be held at the end of the term. As a lead up to this special event, the children had been working on language activities based on their class picnic. During one lesson in Class B, the year one children were required to write and illustrate on a worksheet what they would take on their picnic. The pre-primary children were asked to draw pictures of the items they would like to take on their picnic and the teacher helped the pre-primary aged children write the words. As a follow-up activity, the year one children were expected to remain in their seats and complete a word sleuth worksheet related to the 'picnic' activity. The pre-primary aged children were given some free time to work within the different learning centres in Class B (for example, puzzles, blocks, books).

One hour before the lunch period, both pre-primary groups played outside in the P-1 yard, whilst the year one children remained with their class teachers for a maths

lesson. The tasks after the lunch period varied according to the daily timetable. Most of the tasks were prepared and directed by the class teachers. The pre-primary aged children joined the year one aged children for three afternoons a week (Wednesday, Thursday and Friday). On these afternoons, the children's tasks were under the subject areas of science, creative writing, music and literature. Other activities included a visit to the community library, 'buddy time' with the year 5 class, video and sport.

In summary of the main points concerning the observation of tasks in the P-1 classrooms, it was noted that the tasks observed during the activity time before recess were generally open-ended and the children were free to choose who they worked with and what they worked on. Both P-1 teachers discussed with their children the types of activities/tasks that had been set up in their own area, but often did not mention the other P-1 classroom.

The tasks following recess, involved more teacher direction. The P-1 children remained in their own class area with their class teacher during this period. The pre primary and year one children often sat together for the same language experience (often a large shared book), but they did not always work on the same follow-up activity prepared by their class teacher.

## **4.7 Observation of participants**

### **4.7.1 Routines**

During the observation period, the researcher kept a record of the areas/activities which the participants utilized, as well as noting the children, teachers or assistants with whom the participants interacted.

It was noted that many of the participants tended to work and play in their 'home' classroom environment. For example, Y1.B informed the researcher that she was allowed to go into both classes, but she preferred to play in her own class (Class B) because there were more things to play with. Y1.B commented further, that the

other teacher did not have much in her class, yet the playground belonged to her class.

The observational data of the participants appears to show that the year one aged participants would move frequently into the other P-1 class during activity time and interact with the other children, many of whom were year one aged children. For example, Y1.A was observed working at the drawing/writing tables with the two year one boys who were from Class B. Y1.B was observed working in Class A on the tinkering table with a year one boy from Class A. Y1.C was observed playing alone on a magnetic fishing game in Class B.

The observations revealed that the pre-primary aged children tended to stay within their own class area. On a few occasions, a pre-primary aged participant was observed interacting with a year one aged child from the other P-1 class. This was usually following the year one child's entrance to the pre-primary child's classroom area. For example, PP.4 was observed working at the writing table in his class (Class B) with a year one aged girl from Class A. No discussion had taken place between them, it appeared that they were only sharing the same work area. On another occasion, PP.2 was observed playing with two other pre-primary aged children (boy and girl) from her class area (Class B), in the open activity area between the two classrooms. The third child was a year one aged boy from Class A. Lots of active social play was taking place between these children, as they were role-playing a beach scene with the props provided by the class teachers.

Many of the recorded observations were taken during the activity time period (before morning recess), which Teacher A referred to as 'independent learning time'. After morning recess, the P-1 children resumed to their own class area for a whole group language session. These lessons were conducted by the children's own class teachers. The children from Class A and Class B did not mix during these sessions. However, the pre-primary aged children from both classes had a 45 minute free-play period together in the P-1 playground area before the lunch break.

The pre-primary aged children went home on Monday and Tuesday lunch times. Whilst the year one aged children from both P-1 classes worked together in the afternoon on music, science and physical education activities. On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday afternoons, the timetable varied with movement, singing and sharing games, 'buddying' with the Year 5 class and sport.

In summary, the observations and interviews with the teachers indicated that the participants were free to move between the two classes during the activity period before morning recess. Observations of the participants revealed that the year one aged participants were seen to move into the other P-1 class during activity time, whilst the pre-primary aged participants tended to work and play in their 'home' classroom environment rather than utilize both areas.

The only opportunity the children had to move between the two classrooms was during the 'activity time' before recess (referred to as 'independent learning time' by Teacher A). After recess, the P-1 classes resumed lessons in their 'home' classroom environment. After the language lesson, the pre-primary aged children from both P-1 classrooms were taken to the outside yard area for a free-play period, whilst the year one aged children stayed in their 'home' class area for maths or extended language activities.

#### **4.7.2. Structure**

Observations of the participants indicated that they were aware of a structure within their classroom(s). Within the activity/free-choice time, the children were observed interacting with their peers, teachers and other adults in the multi-age setting. Various incidents were recorded, in which the children were observed sharing their perspective of the rules, which involved negotiating with other children, to ensure the rules were carried out.

For example, during activity time, Y1.C was playing a board game at a table with three other year one aged children (from Class A), including Y1.A. When another child queried whose turn it was, Y1.C outlined the 'rules' of the game. Y1.C

appeared to be 'in charge' as he directed the other children on how to play the game. Y1.A announced she had finished with the game and left the table. The other children ignored Y1.A and continued to look and listen to Y1.C. Another year one aged boy then argued with Y1.C over whose turn it was. Again, Y1.C explained the rules and then decided whose turn it was. The other children appeared to listen to Y1.C and did not challenge his views. The researcher observed that Y1.C had an accurate interpretation of the rules given or set out for this particular game.

Other observations revealed that Y1.C tended to take a leading role in his P-1 class, and that his peers listened to his point of view. Y1.C spoke confidently in mat situations and was often praised openly for his good work by his class teacher in front of the other children.

During the observation period, the researcher asked each participant informal questions about classroom events that are seen by the children as structured by class rules. For example, the researcher asked Y1.B if the pre-primary and year one children could sit where they wanted to and Y1.B replied,

“No, ‘cos the teacher decides and we have to sit where she says.”

When the researcher enquired if the pre-primary and year one children could do the same things, Y1.B shook her head to indicate no, then after a pause added,

“Sometimes, like activity time, but the pre-primaries are allowed to play outside and we are not.”

During another observation, the pre-primary and year one children from Class A were making kites together in the language lesson after recess. The teacher had given the children a verbal instruction to colour in the kite outline, cut it out and assemble the kite pieces together so it could be hung. The researcher asked Y1.A if the pre-primary and year one children were doing the same activity. Y1.A answered,



“No, we are not doing the same activity, we are doing the same work. Pre-primaries have to do activities and the year one children have to do work. The pre-primaries don’t do the same things because the pre-primaries play outside and we have to stay inside and work.”

The researcher then enquired what work this was. Y1.A replied,

“Work is maths and other stuff when the pre-primaries play outside and run around inside, no, mainly outside. Pre-primaries sometimes do work. Sometimes they do the same work as the year ones, like today, with the kite activity.”

Y1.A acknowledged that the pre-primary and year one children were working on the same activity, but it appeared to be an exception to the rule, rather than the standard procedure. During the same observation, the researcher asked PP.1 if he liked working with the year one children. PP.1 answered,

“Yes, but the pre’s and one’s do things differently.”

When the researcher asked how they did things differently, PP.1 answered,

“They don’t do activity time, they do something else.”  
(‘they’ referred to the year one children)

In summarising the main points, the participants were conscious of the class rules, as on many occasions, the participants were observed discussing the class rules (particularly the year one participants). The rule structure was the same for the year one and pre-primary children. However, the task structure tended to vary according to the pre-primary or year one status. The general consensus amongst the participants, is that the pre-primary or year one children often do things separately and the tasks are not always the same. For example, the pre-primary children do

'activities', whilst the year one children 'work'. The pre-primary children play outside, whilst the year one children stay inside and work.

### 4.7.3 Roles

It was difficult to ascertain from the observations, if the participants had an understanding of the different roles within their classroom environment. However, the interactions between the participants and teachers revealed that the participants were aware of authority figures other than those of their own parents.

For example, all of the participants were seen to listen and respond to their teacher's directions at mat-time and other times of the day when the teachers were instructing the children. An effective and consistent 'stop' signal was used in both P-1 classrooms to gain the children's immediate attention. The pack-away signal for the clean-up routine was another cue to ensure that all of the children responded to the authority or role being played by the teacher. The researcher only observed the class teachers giving these signals. The teacher assistants or helpers were never seen or asked by the class teachers to direct the children in this way.

Even though the participants responded to their class teacher's instruction and signals, it was difficult to establish from the observations if the participants were aware of any authority concepts in their class. This refers to the children's ability to differentiate between the teacher assistant, parent helper, teacher or even fellow peers. No significant differences were observed in the participants perceptions of adult roles. This understanding was explored in more depth in the interviews with the participants.

In summary, the observations revealed that the participants were aware of authority figures in their class. The class teacher (in the participants 'home' class environment), was seen to control the mat discussion, instruct and direct the children during teacher directed lessons, as well as being responsible for giving the pack-away signal. The observations alone, did not give the researcher enough information

on how the children may or may not differentiate between the authority of the teacher, teacher assistant, parents or peers within the classroom environment(s).

#### **4.7.4 Tasks**

The observations assisted the researcher in developing an understanding of the participants' interests and abilities as they worked within the P-1 classrooms. Information was also gathered about the associates with whom each participant interacted.

The P-1 teachers set up a variety of tasks in activity time from which the participants were free to choose. Due to the structure of the teachers' timetables, this was the only opportunity that the researcher had to observe the two P-1 classes working together.

During activity (free-choice) time, the P-1 teachers assumed a more supervisory role, that did not involve any didactic instruction. It also gave both P-1 teachers the opportunity to move more freely between the classroom areas and observe individual or groups of children, as well as discuss issues with other staff members present.

At the start of the observation period, the researcher noted that many of the participants were choosing to work with tasks/activities that were within their own classroom environment. The participants were free to choose what they wanted to do and with whom they wanted to work. On many occasions, the participants were seen to engage in tasks with children of the same year group and often from their own class.

For example, in the second week of the observation period, PP.2 was observed working at the drawing tables with four fellow pre-primary children from her class (Class B). PP.3 was observed playing with the felt board with two year one aged boys from his class (Class B). Y1.B was observed playing in the home-corner in Class B with a year one boy and two pre-primary aged girls from Class B. Y1.C was observed playing with a manipulative/construction game with three year one

aged boys from his class. PP.1 was observed playing with the puzzles in his own class (Class A) with another pre-primary aged boy from Class A. Y1.A was observed playing in the home-corner in Class A with a pre-primary and year one aged girl from Class A.

During the three month observation period, the researcher developed a series of 'centre records' to help keep a track of the areas in the P-1 classrooms in which the participants worked, as well as the tasks they completed and with whom they interacted. The 'centre records' were used during the activity/free choice period before recess.

Towards the end of the observation period, the researcher noticed that the year one aged participants had started to move more frequently between the two P-1 classrooms. For example, in week eight, Y1.A (from Class A), was observed interacting with two year one boys from Class B, at the drawing/writing table in Class B. Y1.B (from Class B) had moved into Class A, and was working on the tinkering table with a year one boy from Class A. Y1.C (from Class A), was observed working with the blocks in Class B with two other year one boys from Class B. The pre-primary aged participants were seen to remain in their own classroom environments and tended to interact with children of the same age or with a mixed age group. For example, PP.4 (from Class B), was observed interacting in the home-corner with a year one and pre-primary girl from Class A in Class B. PP.1 (from Class A), was observed working on puzzles with three pre-primary aged boys from the same class. PP.2 (from Class B), was observed drawing at desks in Class B with another pre-primary aged girl from Class B.

In week five of the observation period, the researcher noted that both P-1 teachers had re-organised the seating arrangements in their classrooms. The pre-primary and year one children were now sitting together at the same desks. Each desk accommodated two children, which now represented a pre-primary and year one child. In previous weeks, the year one and pre-primary children had sat separately in

different desk groupings (as illustrated in Appendix F). Each child had a name card displayed on the desk top.

Teacher B informed the researcher that she had seated the P-1 children together according to a particular criteria. It was hoped that the P-1 seating arrangements would encourage friendships, promote tolerance (for example, Aboriginality) and to encourage conversation between the more verbal and non-verbal children, which Teacher B described further as quiet and loud children. The children's abilities were also considered, for example, the teacher decided to sit PP.2 and Y1.B together because they were both 'bright' and 'they complimented each other'. Teacher A also anticipated that the new seating arrangement would enhance peer tutoring and more co-operative learning.

The teacher in Class B was observed on a few occasions giving pre-primary aged children the same tasks as the year one aged children in the language lesson after recess. Usually the "pre-primary" language activities had a drawing focus rather than a reading/writing focus, as was found with the "year one" children's work. On two occasions, PP.2 and PP.3 worked on the "year one activity" instead of playing outside with the pre-primary children for the free-play period before lunch. PP.2 was asked by her class teacher to show her finished work to the school Principal. Teacher B informed the researcher that she often let PP.2 continue working with the year one children, as PP.2 was considered to be an advanced pre-primary child. The researcher asked PP.2 if she played outside with the other pre-primary children and PP.2 answered, "Yes, I play outside, because I am a 'pre'."

In summary, the only time the two P-1 classes worked on tasks together, was during the activity period before recess (independent learning time). Observations revealed that many of the participants were keen to choose tasks/activities that were within their own classroom environment, and with children from the same year group (this appeared to be more prevalent with the pre-primary participants). New seating arrangements were introduced in Class A and Class B in week five of the observation period, enabling the pre-primary and year one aged children to sit next

to one another during table activities (these pre-primary and year one children had previously sat at separate desks). Both teachers hoped that the new seating arrangements would enhance the children's social and language skills, as well as facilitate peer tutoring and co-operative learning amongst the P-1 children.

Towards the end of the twelve week observation period, the year one participants were seen to be moving more frequently between the two P-1 classrooms. The tasks for the pre-primary and year one participants varied after recess. The pre-primary and year one children often had the same story for large shared book reading after recess, but the follow up language activities were usually different. For example the "year one task" may have had a reading/writing focus, whereas the "pre-primary task" may have had a drawing focus as directed by the class teacher.

## **4.8 Interviews of participants**

### **4.8.1 Routines**

The researcher wanted to find out about the participants' perceptions of the frameworks that had been set up in the multi-age classrooms, and if they felt comfortable with the routines that had been established. During the informal interview procedure, the researcher used a form of stimulated recall with each participant, by viewing classroom photographs, drawing pictures and reading story books to stimulate discussion and thoughts about school life. Each participant was then asked to tell a story about their day at school.

The participants' descriptions varied in length and detail. The pre-primary participants gave briefer anecdotes than the year one participants. The pre-primary participants appeared to talk more generally with less detail of specific activities or routines. PP.1 drew his story then asked the researcher to write for him. His comments were brief and he omitted much of the daily routine, yet he appeared to talk about the issues that were important to him. The anecdote given, was a description of some of the events PP.1 had experienced on that day, as observed by the researcher (refer to Appendix K, p.136).

PP.2 also talked generally, omitting much detail from the daily routine. Her day was punctuated with recess and lunch breaks and her description indicates that she assumed choice and control over what she wanted to do. There was also much attention to 'we' in her description.

"We make things. We read books and we make things with the playdough and we change the helper day chart. We think about what we want to do. Then we do drawings and we make things. Then we have recess and go outside. When the siren goes we come inside and at lunch the siren goes, we line up and then we go inside. Before we go home, we get our bag and then go home."

PP.4 gave a briefer description of the daily routine, it appeared that he had lost interest at this point of the conversation.

"Call roll and then it's activity time, then we have sharing and then we go somewhere and watch videos and then we go outside to play and then that's it."

The year one participants gave more detail regarding the routine of their school day. All three year one participants were in their second year within the P-1 class, so they had greater experience of school life.

There was consistency between the year one and pre-primary aged participants' comments about the class routine. The morning and afternoon breaks were punctuated with the recess and lunch breaks, and a predictable script of classroom events of the school day was described. However in regard to details of regular activities, Y1.C was the only participant who gave an in depth description of the daily rituals, such as sharing time, news and activity time. Y1.C appears to have 'strong' perceptions of the rules and of what his teacher expected, particularly during mat-time.

“In sharing time you have to put your hand up so you can share, when the teacher says you can, you stand up and share.”

When describing home-time, Y1.C added,

“Before we go home, we go on the mat in the classroom and we have to wait for teacher to hand out work, then we can go home.”

Y1.B was also conscious of what she is expected to do in her classroom.

“When the teacher calls me out, I have to read my reading book with someone. Then you have to sit on the mat with the kids and listen to the teacher and do things. Then the teacher says pack-away time.”

Y1.A talked more generally, giving a very brief outline of what happens throughout the day. Like Y1.B, this child was conscious of what was expected.

“We sit on the mat, then we do the roll and then we do activities. When the piano goes, we have to clean up and then sit on the mat. Then we have to do some work at our desks. Then it is the end of the day and we go home.”

In summary, the participants' descriptions of their daily routine varied in length and detail. All of the year one aged participants were in their second year of the multi-age programme, so they had been exposed to the daily routine for a longer period of time, (including having greater maturity and age). This could have accounted for the year one aged participants longer and more detailed descriptions about the activities and routine in their classrooms. As discussed in the interviews with teachers about routine, there was consistency between the comments made between the year one and pre-primary aged participants about the class routine. It was apparent by the comments made by the year one aged participants, that they were very conscious of what the teacher expected them to do in the classroom.



#### 4.8.2 Structure

Each participant was asked if they had rules in their class, and if so, what they were. It was clearly apparent by the answers given to this question, that the participants were aware and conscious of the classroom rules. A range of comments, which share a common thread were as follows,

PP.1 “No hitting. No breaking and that’s all.”

PP.2 “Don’t rip books and do not write on the blackboard.”

PP.4 “Look after kids and look after toys.”

The year one aged participants tended to give a longer description of the class rules as well as a possible consequence for breaking that rule.

Y1.A “No fighting, no punching or kicking. No tripping like fighting and tripping, not even piggy-backs because you might hurt somebody.”

Y1.B “No running inside, no writing on the tables and no punching and kicking and spitting no fighting and punching and biting, no bumping into each other and no dropping things and running off, so leaving other people to pick up and then say “I didn’t do it.”

Y1.C “No running in the class because you’ll hurt yourself and no fighting and no pushing and that’s all.”

The issues dealing with physical aggression, concerning the damage or injury to others and to school property were paramount in most children’s answers. These comments were also reflected in other answers given to questions that were not specifically about the classroom or school rules. For example, the participants were asked what they thought is the most important thing about school. The answers given to this question revealed that the participants were concerned about caring for each other, not breaking rules and caring for classroom equipment.

PP.1 “No hitting or kicking or fighting.”

PP.2 “No ripping books.”

PP.4 “Lego and puzzles.”

Y1.A “Looking after the pre-primaries.”

Y1.B “Don’t run on the footpaths and no kicking.”

Y1.C “Helping the kids learn to do something. Help the kids with drawing”

The pre-primary and year one children demonstrated by their actions and general discussions, that they are very conscious of the class rules within the classroom setting. The children were often seen ‘policing’ each other, and would describe the consequences of breaking the rule. For example, when a year one girl from Class A touched some phonic cards that were displayed on a wall in Class B, she was promptly informed by some children in Class B that they were not allowed to touch the teacher’s stuff or they would get into trouble. This observation exemplifies many of the participants’ comments.

In summary, the interviews revealed that the participants were conscious and aware of a rule structure in their classrooms. Again, the year one participants gave longer and more detailed descriptions of the class rules. Rules concerning physical aggression and damage to property were the main focus in the participants’ comments.

### **4.8.3 Roles**

The discussions held with the child participants of this study, revealed that the children shared a common view of who was in charge of their classroom.

PP.1 named his class teacher, two relief teachers and the P-1 teacher from the other class. PP.1 also added that the other P-1 teacher really belonged to the other class. This comment clearly showed that this child recognised that even though teachers may share teaching roles, each P-1 teacher has a special class of children to teach.

PP.2 did not name specific teachers, apart from indicating that there was more than one teacher. Her answer referred to ‘the teachers’. PP.4 described ‘the teacher’ as the ‘person in charge of my class’. When the researcher enquired who this was, PP.4

named the P-1 teacher who taught in his classroom area. Y1.C described his own P-1 class teacher. No mention was made of the other teachers. Y1.B mentioned both P-1 teachers and the teacher assistant. Y1.A described the P-1 teachers (including the relief teacher and assistant), four fellow peers (pre-primaries) and herself as being in charge of her classroom. When the researcher enquired why this was so, and what they did to be 'in charge', Y1.A mentioned that the four pre-primary children and herself always helped with pack away time, and they often did more than other children in her class. Therefore, these children helped the teachers to be in charge of their class.

Y1.A "All the people in the class have to pack-away the things that they do.

Sometimes they don't, so some pre-primaries (Y1.A named four pre-primary girls) and me have to help pack-away the activities. We do more packing away stuff than the other kids. We help the teacher to be in charge."

Each participant was asked, "What does your teacher do in the classroom?" The results indicated that the participants perceived that their teacher's main roles were to assist, control, organise and praise the children in the classroom.

Y1.A talked about the teacher's role during the routine of pack-away time, "She has to tell us to pack-away the stuff."

Y1.B described the teacher in terms of giving the children praise and rewards, "She gives people papers, stamps and stickers and does writing like, 'good work' 'excellent work' and 'good try'."

PP.4 described a range of roles, "She talks to people, plays the piano and tells us when it's pack-away time."

Y1.C, PP.1 and PP.2 made reference to some of the tasks that the teacher helped them with:

PP.2 “She works and calls out names to read.”

PP.1 “When we’re reading a book, she sits on the chair and reads.”

Y1.C “She helps us write a little bit.”

Each participant was then asked what they thought was the most important thing that their teacher expected them to know and do.

PP.1 “Clean up and know everything.”

PP.2 “Have a reading folder.”

PP.4 “Puzzles.”

Y1.A “Work and listen.”

Y1.B “No giving your friends lunch or giving your friends \$2 or money  
and no giving lunch money to other people.”

Y1.C “We have to do our jobs and that’s all, and we put the books away.”

Another question asked each participant if mums, dads and other visitors helped in their class, and if so, what they did. Each participant agreed that their class had parents and visitors and that these people helped the children to read, write and play inside and outside.

Y1.A agreed that mums, dads and visitors came to the classrooms, but disagreed that they helped in any way. Y1.A responded, “Yes, Vanessa’s Mum is here.” When the researcher asked if they do anything in the classroom, Y1.A answered “No.”

The other participants agreed that they had parents and visitors, and that they did help in some way.

PP.1 “Talk.”

PP.2 “Yes, read and that’s all.”

PP.4 “Yes....mmmm...yes.”

Y1.B “Let us read and tells us to do jobs.”

When the researcher asked, “What sort of jobs?”, Y1.B answered,

“Like you get a plastic cup and you put jelly in it and mix it around, put it in and get a crocodile and get a big thing and then you put the cups on it and then you put it in the fridge. Dads don’t help us but sometimes aunties, my aunty helps me and my Mum.”

When the researcher asked what visitors do when they come into the classroom, Y1.B answered,

“They do maths with us and play outside. They watch people and do some reading and ask people what they are doing and that’s all.”

Y1.C responded, “They help the pre-primaries do some things and sometimes they help us write something.”

The participants were also asked if anyone else works in their classroom.

PP.1 “No-one else.”

PP.2 “Don’t know.”

PP.4 “Us kids.”

Y1.A “No-one else.”

Y1.B “You and Damien’s Mum.” (‘you’ referred to the researcher)

Y1.C “Jason, Naomi, Melanie, Anthony and Carmel and Jodie and Sally.”

(Y1.C had named six year one peers from his own classroom)

Each participant was asked how they knew they had done a good job or some good work in their class. The researcher envisaged that the participants’ explanations about these areas would give insight into their perceived roles in the classroom. The responses varied between the participants. Three participants felt that they knew themselves when they had done a good job.

Y1.A “Because I work hard.”

Y1.C “We know ourselves because we help pack away.”

PP.1 “I know because I did it.”

One pre-primary participant indicated that he did not know.

PP.4 “I don’t know.”

Two other participants felt that the teacher told them when they had done a good job, and often this was due to helping others and packing away.

Y1.B “I get the dustpan and broom and I sweep and put stuff away. People tell you when you’ve done a good job.”

PP.2 “If you’re good in class and help them, then you get a star. If the teacher does not tell me, I’ll ask.”

It was interesting to note that the participants from Class A felt that they knew themselves when they had done a good job in the classroom whereas the participants from Class B appeared to be more conscious of verbal praise and tangible rewards (ie. stickers) from their class teacher.

In summary, the interviews revealed that the participants shared a common view of who was in charge of their classroom. All of the participants named a class teacher, which sometimes included a teacher from the other P-1 class. A year one participant also felt that because four pre-primary children and herself helped to pack-away (more than fellow peers), then they helped to be ‘in charge’ of their class. Therefore, the issue of being ‘in charge’ was not just a teacher’s role in this child’s eyes. The participants’ comments about the teacher’s main role in the classroom indicated that they assisted, controlled, organised and praised the children in the classroom.

#### 4.8.4 Tasks

The researcher asked each participant to draw something they like to do at school. This procedure was used to assist the researcher in understanding each participant's general perception of their school/classroom and the tasks they favoured. The descriptions with the participant's drawings, all indicate that the participants like to write and draw (examples of the participant's drawings and descriptions are found in Appendix K).

PP.1 "I like to play with the playdough and puzzles. Playdough is my best."

PP.2 "I like to write at school."

PP.4 "I like playing with the games on the mat. I like to draw me and write about the farm concert."

Y1.A "I like most about school - drawing and writing" and "I played with Denise and Zoe and Marisa. I like to play with playdough."

Y1.B "I like play in the home-corner and I like playing and writing."

Y1.C "When I write it is really fun. Do you know why? It is really fun."

The discussions with each participant, reveals that the pre-primary and year one children both like the same sorts of activities and friendships play an important role in their enjoyment of school. Observations and children's drawings (see Appendix K) also substantiate this evidence.

Each participant was then asked if they would like to draw something they did not like about school. The responses varied with this question. The year one participants appeared to be very clear about what they did not like at school.

Y1.A "I don't like the puppet theatre."

Y1.B "I don't like hard work like maths."

Y1.C "I don't like people fighting at school."

Only one pre-primary participant made a reference to something he did not like at school. PP.1 and PP.2 said they liked everything at school and there was nothing they did not like. PP.4 mentioned that he did not like the listening post. It appeared

that the pre-primary children had ideas on what they didn't like, but it was not clearly restricted to the classroom or school environment. PP.1 decided to draw something he did not like at home, which referred to hanging out the washing at home.

PP.1 "I like to do everything at school, but I don't like hanging out the washing at home."

PP.2 (no comment or drawing was made)

PP.4 "I don't like the listening post at school."

The drawing activity followed with a question asking each participant if they were able to choose what they wanted to do in their class. Each participant was encouraged to talk about an activity or activities that they had been engaged in on that day. All of the participants, except one year one girl agreed that they had a choice of what they could do in their class. Each child was encouraged to talk about what they could choose to do.

PP.1 "I choose all the play dough all the time. If I don't get there I do a puzzle instead."

PP.2 "Write."

PP.4 "You can do what you want to do, like blocks, books and listening post and construction things."

The year one aged participants varied in their responses. Y1.A was the only participant who disagreed that they were allowed to choose what they could do in their class. When the researcher asked why this was so, Y1.A answered,

Y1.A "I'm not allowed to choose the work that the teacher says we have to do."

When the researcher asked what work this was, Y1.A commented further,



Y1.A “Hard work. Hard work for the year ones, and if the pre-primaries want to join in and do it, they can.”

The researcher then asked Y1.A if there was anything that the children could choose themselves.

Y1.A “Yes, but only the activities.”

Y1.B “Yes, we can play on the blackboard and read books, play in the home-corner and play with the playdough. We can also read reading folders, play with the tinkering box and write and do hats.”

Y1.C “Yes, we can do lots of things, like play with my friends, play with the blocks, read and listen at the listening post.”

The researcher then asked the participants if the pre-primary and year one children could do the same things at school. All of the participants responded negatively to this question. It was as if the children had a clear picture of what the year ones and pre-primary children could and could not do. Some of the responses were as follows.

Y1.A “No, the year ones do work like Maths and Language, but the pre-primaries can do any activity they want to.”

Y1.B “No, but sometimes they do, like at day time in the home-corner.”

Y1.C “No, because all the time they don’t do what the class’ll do. The pre-primaries colour in, but we don’t, we have to write.”

The responses from the pre-primary participants were similar, in that they were clear what they could do and could not do in their classroom.

PP.2 “No, they do different things, the year ones read and the pre-primaries don’t, and every night the year ones read to their mother’s and the pre-primaries don’t.”

PP.4 “Some do, some don’t.”

PP.1 “No, ‘cos when we go outside, ‘hey don’t, they’re not allowed to”

The researcher then asked PP.1 if the pre-primaries and year one children do the same things inside. PP.1 answered, “They don’t at activity time, the year ones do something else and the pre-primaries do anything.” The researcher and participant then talked about that particular day at school. PP.1 commented, “We have to do what the year ones do, but the pre-primaries can do something else if they want to.”

The comments by PP.1 also matched the explanation by his class teacher. Teacher A has a system whereby the pre-primary children can work with the year one children if they choose to. However, if the pre-primary children did not want to work with the year one children, they were free to work in any of the other activity areas which the teacher referred to as ‘constant positives’. Constant positives are the types of activities/areas that are a constant feature of the classroom learning environment, as is typically found in most early childhood classrooms, such as blocks, puzzles, painting, play dough and so on. Teacher A has a system operating in her class that gives the pre-primary and year one children varying degrees of choice. Teacher A described this system as non-negotiable and negotiable. Non-negotiable means that the year one children have to do an activity, as indicated by the class teacher. Negotiable means that the pre-primary children have a choice of whether they want to join in the year one children or not.

This system only operated in Class A. In Class B, the pre-primary and year one children did not appear to get a choice whether they did an activity or not, the teacher usually decided this. For example, the researcher observed the pre-primary and year one children working in a language lesson, where all of the children were expected to complete a worksheet identifying the sorts of things they would take on

their class picnic. The teacher from Class B commented to the researcher that this activity may be too difficult for some of the pre-primary children, but they were only expected to draw a picture of the items they would like to take on a picnic. The pre-primary children did not have a choice of whether they could do this activity or not. One pre-primary child asked if she could do something else, but she was told to ‘have-a-go’ and remain seated. The other pre-primary children talked amongst themselves and appeared keen to share their work with the class teacher and the researcher.

The two P-1 teachers often prepared separate activities for the pre-primary and year one children. Even though these activities were similar and based on the same story book or topic/theme being explored in the classroom, the pre-primary children’s activities were modified. Teacher B informed the researcher that her expectations were not as high for the pre-primary children as those for the year one children.

The participants were asked if the pre-primary and year one children do the same amount of work. The responses varied with a definite ‘no’ to ‘sometimes’.

Y1.A “No, ‘cos they don’t really have to do any. The year ones have to help them. The year ones do more work.”

Y1.B “Sometimes.”

Y1.C “Sometimes.”

PP.1 (no comments were given to this question)

PP.2 “No. They only do the writing and drawing the same as pre-primary. But not other things. The year ones do lots of work, hard things for pre-primaries.”

PP.4 “No. The year ones play stuff and the pre-primaries go outside. The pre-primaries go outside heaps, the year ones only go outside twice.”

Perhaps this child felt that the year one children were disadvantaged, because they have less time outside to play. This could also be in contrast to a pre-primary child,

who may envy a year one child for being allowed to ‘work’ inside, whilst he/she has to ‘play’ outside.

Another question that dealt with ‘tasks’ in the classroom, asked each participant what sorts of things they did when they worked.

PP.1 “Make things, like my dinosaur and kite. When I’m at the table I work.”

PP.2 “Write and draw things underneath the writing and books.”

PP.4 “Play with stuff. When the year ones play with stuff the pre-primaries go outside. The year ones don’t, they work inside. The pre-primaries play outside heaps of times, the year ones only go outside twice.”

Y1.A “Maths and language.”

Y1.B “Draw.”

Y1.C “Colour in and write.”

To summarise the main points on tasks, the discussions with each participant revealed that the pre-primary and year one children both enjoyed engaging in the same sorts of tasks in the classroom. Friendships also appeared to have an important role in the participants enjoyment of school. All of the participants agreed that they could choose what they wanted to do during activity time, yet at other times of the day, the teacher tells the children what they have to do. All of the participants were clear that the year one and pre-primary children could not do the same things at school. The dichotomy of tasks centred on the year one children doing maths, language and reading tasks, as opposed to the pre-primary children colouring in, playing outside and doing whatever they wanted to.

## **4.9 Interviews of teachers**

### **4.9.1 Routines**

Each teacher gave a detailed and descriptive account of her daily routine. These accounts were consistent with what the researcher had observed over the three month period.

Teacher A made a comment during the teacher interview (held at the end of term one), that some changes would take place in her programme in second term. These changes mainly referred to the language activity period, which was held after recess. During the first term, the pre-primary children mainly worked separately from the year one children. Even though the pre-primary children may have done an activity based on what the year one children were doing, the activities were not necessarily the same. In term two, the pre-primary and year one children were to be placed in four groups, which were then rotated through four activities. These same four activities were presented over the week. Teacher A informed the researcher that if the pre-primary children did not want to work with the year one children, then they were free to work in other activity areas. Teacher A commented that the pre-primaries always chose to work with the year one children and added, “All work is done in context, the pre-primary children have a choice.”

Teacher B was working as the relief teacher for Class A when the teacher interviews were conducted at the end of term one. Therefore, the sequence of the daily routine was the same as the description from Teacher A.

Teacher C (who retired at the end of term one), gave a more detailed account of the daily routine and sequence of events. The description of the routine was similar to Class A, except there was a rostered daily news session and question time before the scheduled activity time began. Teacher C had the rostered activities operating from the beginning of the year. The rostered activities for the pre-primary and year one children were conducted after recess in the language lesson from Monday through to Thursday. Friday was set aside for a whole group language activity. Teacher C pointed out that the children had not been placed in ability groups, yet one “responsible” child with leadership qualities was placed in each group. It was deemed important by the teacher that the groups remained stable throughout the year, so that the children felt settled and secure. In addition, the teacher claimed this routine was easier for classroom organisation. Teacher C was adamant that the activity groups were not competitive.

In summary, the interviews revealed that the teachers had established a predictable routine in their classrooms. Due to a staff change at the end of first term, the researcher did not observe Teacher C, or see her class in operation whilst Teacher C was in charge. It appeared that Teacher A and Teacher C had some differences with the daily routine operating in term one. Teacher A mentioned that the pre-primary children worked separately from the year one children in term one, whereas Teacher C had placed the pre-primary and year one children in activity groups that were not determined by age or ability. Teacher A commented that rotational activity groups for the pre-primary and year one children would be established in term two within these rotational activity groups. The pre-primary children were free to choose what they wanted to do and with whom they wanted to interact. During the time the interviews were conducted, Teacher B was the relief teacher for Class A. Therefore, the comments that Teacher B made about the routine, paralleled those made by Teacher A.

#### **4.9.2 Structure**

Each teacher was asked to comment on the rules and expectations that were in place in their classroom. Teacher A and Teacher B both made reference to the Canter discipline policy which was used for the whole school (P-7) behaviour management programme. The Principal required each class to make up class rules at the beginning of the year with the children.

Teacher A informed the researcher that she prefers to take extra time to do this with the children, as she felt it would be unreasonable to expect the children to help formulate rules in a context where they were not yet familiar. Teacher A also believed that the rules should be easy for the children to understand and keep. For example, 'not speaking when someone else is speaking'. There are also rules that the children made up together as a class, by working out what would be a consequence if that rule did not exist. For example, if everyone spoke at the same time, then no-one would be able to listen and learn. Teacher A felt that it was important not to have too many rules, as it was preferable to work on positive rather than negative behaviour. In a final statement, Teacher A commented,

“My one rule of thumb...don't do anything to anyone else that you wouldn't like done to you. That is a basic expectation. Treat people as you would like to be treated.”

Teacher B reiterated on many of the points mentioned by Teacher A. A further comment was made about the formulation of the class rules at the beginning of the year. The Principal approved of each set of class rules (made up by the teacher and children) and every parent receives a copy of the written rules (refer to Appendices L,M and N). The parents also were asked to sign the form and return it to the class. Teacher B then described a playground behaviour management programme, which involved a SAD area. SAD stands for safety, abuse and disobedience. If the duty teacher observes any child from P-7 being rude, fighting or any other unruly behaviour, then the child is sent to the SAD area for a period of time. The SAD area is a small designated area (concrete area) in the playground. The deputy principal keeps a daily record of the children in this area. If a child receives five 'reprimands', then the child will miss out on a reward.

Teacher C felt it was not necessary to have lots of rules in the classroom. The children were expected to respect each other and value each other's work. The children were not permitted to make fun of a child with a lesser ability or at a child who had a different developmental level to themselves. It was also important that the children respect one another's property and possessions. Teacher C explained that the rules were set by the children at the beginning of the year. The advantage of the multi-age class, is that the rules instigated in the previous year are carried over to the new year. As the current year one children are now in their second year within the multi-age class, they were encouraged to teach the pre-primary children the classroom rules and general routine. Teacher C categorically stated that the children do know the rules, and the children do most of the "policing".

“The children do most of the policing around here. They become quite disciplined. It's not a hard thing. We find that the children control one another more than anything.”

In summary, the interviews with the classroom teachers indicated that the children played an important part in formulating the rules at the start of the school year. The rules were designed to be easy for the children to understand and keep (examples of the rules used in Class A and B are illustrated in Appendices L and M).

### 4.9.3 Roles

The researcher wanted to find out if the teachers perceived themselves as the participants did. The teachers were asked what their role was in the classroom. Each teacher described that their main role was to be a facilitator in the classroom.

Teacher A     “I think my major role is facilitator. That obviously has to be balanced by being a teacher in the sense that I model a lot of things. I have to model correct grammar. I have to model writing procedure.”

The teacher in Class B felt that even though the role of a facilitator was important, there were also times when it was necessary to be totally teacher directive.

Teacher B     “I’d like to say I was a facilitator, it’s a nice word to use and I hope that I am. But obviously there are times when you have to become totally teacher directive.”

Teacher C (who retired from Class B and the end of term one), also felt that being a facilitator was her main role.

Teacher C     “Facilitator. I would say that that’s mainly my role. The days of standing up in front and the dictatorial chalk and talk they’re well and truly dinosaur age type things. I think we set the scene for learning and children take it from there, and so we provide the activities and facilitate and just encourage the children to get the very best and the most they possibly can out of it.”



Each teacher was asked if their role had changed since moving into a multi age setting. The teachers from Class A and Class B now both considered themselves to be different teachers since having taught in a multi-age class. However, Teacher C felt that her role had remained the same in a multi-age class, as she had always taught in that way.

Teacher A      “I think it has changed exactly what I’ve said as a facilitator and because I’ve stopped becoming the only teacher in the classroom. I’ve handed over my classroom to the children. I think I’ve done that always but never to the degree that I’m doing it now.”

Teacher B      “Yes. Well, I think as I was saying before, with the different levels to have a pre-primary - I mean, it’s sort of like a composite class, like I always had before. But with a composite 4/5 class I had a few years ago, the fours were doing one activity and the fives were doing a totally different activity - there was no togetherness. Whereas in a P-1 environment, I’m trying to get the one mat session but then have it’s different levels.”

Teacher C      “No, I’ve always taught in this way. Not at all.”

The teachers were asked how the children determined who was ‘in charge’ at any particular time.

Teacher A categorically stated that the children knew that the P-1 teachers were in charge, and the children understood the Principal’s and Deputy Principal’s role in the school. This teacher was also confident that the children could not see any difference between the two P-1 teachers, and that both teachers were equal in the P-1 setting. The children would possibly also consider the teacher assistant as a teacher.

Teacher A      “The kids know who is in charge. I think they’re smart enough to know that’s a general thing. I don’t think we’ve sat down and said,

“I’m the boss so you listen to me”. The only thing, you know, little things, like I’ve got a yellow chair that sits on the mat and the kids say, “Well that’s the teacher’s chair”. Whether that’s got anything to do with who’s in charge. It hasn’t been verbalised, they just kind of know intuitively.”

The teacher from Class B expressed the view that the children knew who was in charge, yet they may get confused with the different adults involved in the classroom. Some parents had the tendency to step in inappropriately to discipline the children, instead of referring the matter to the teacher. However, it was felt that the children have got used to having a few ‘bosses’. The teacher from Class B added that she tried to encourage the children to solve their own problems and not to rely on the teacher(s) too much.

Teacher C answered this question from the child’s perspective, adding that she has had some very capable pre-primaries who were just as capable of taking leadership roles as the year ones. This does depend on the groups of children in the class each year.

All of the teachers who were interviewed, described the teacher assistant as having a similar role in the multi-age classroom. Teacher A considered that the assistant’s role has changed considerably since the multi-age grouped class was implemented. Teacher A felt that the teacher assistant now worked alongside the children more than when she worked as a "straight pre-primary assistant." Teacher B also deployed the assistant to take small groups of children, particularly with oral language activities. The assistant was required to assist with supervising the pre-primaries, which incorporated more of a teaching role. Teacher C described the teacher assistant as a great support to the teacher and children in the multi-age class. Teacher C explained that the assistant helped things to flow in the classroom, and the children enjoyed having an extra person there. Teacher C also felt strongly that the teacher assistant should be used more as a human resource, rather than for the

cleaning, particularly if the assistant is trained and can help children develop specific skills.

The P-1 teachers were also asked if parents were involved in the classroom, and if so, how. The three teachers who were interviewed all agreed that parents have an important role in the classroom. Both P-1 classrooms have a parent roster available, which operated within the morning session (from 8.45 am - 12.20 pm). No roster was set up in the afternoon, unless for specific activities. All parents had a choice to come at a time and day that suited them. The teacher from Class A added that some parents come on a weekly basis and other parents come once a month or once a term. The teacher from Class B mentioned that a 'select few' were actively involved. This amounted to about seven parents out of a class of twenty-three. The parents on roster assisted by listening to reading and often taking small groups of children as directed by the class teacher. Sometimes they also helped to cut things out, colour in and make charts. Many of these parents were also involved in fundraising events associated with the P & C (Parents and Citizens group, connected to the primary school). Teacher C also referred to a 'small clique' of dedicated parents who came in on a rostered basis. This teacher felt that a multi-age grouped class definitely needed an extra pair of hands to help the day-to-day programmes run smoothly.

The P-1 teachers were asked two questions which dealt with the expectations of the child as a learner and the role of the child in the multi-age classroom. Teacher A expected the children to be independent, make choices and show the ability to self monitor. Each child was expected to be responsible for his/her behaviour as well as belongings. The year one children would be monitored more closely, whilst the pre-primary children would learn incidentally. Teacher A had 'buddied' an older child (year one) with a young child (pre-primary), and the children were expected to learn from each other. This teacher felt that the routines and rules were passed on naturally to the children, particularly from the older to the younger children. Teacher A had modelled and discussed the routines and rules with the class, but had never felt it necessary to sit down and enforce the rules and roles in the class.

The teacher in Class B had different expectations of the children in a multi-age grouped class as opposed to children in a straight year one class. The year one's were expected to set an example to the pre-primary children, and if necessary, the teacher would put pressure on the year one children to show correct behaviour and to constantly model to the pre-primary children. However, there was not as much expected from the pre-primary children, as Teacher B considered there to be a big gap between the pre-primary and year one children, particularly in the first term of the school year. The pre-primary and year one children were expected to be active and to question everything at all times.

Teacher C did not have any particular expectations of the pre-primary or year one children. "The only thing I expect is that they are on task and that they are doing their best, and that they are using the skills I'm trying to instil in them." These basic skills referred to looking and listening, remaining on task and doing their best at all times. Teacher C also emphasised that it is important to know each child as an individual.

In summary, all teachers described that their main role in the classroom was that of a facilitator. Teachers A and B felt that they were now different teachers since having taught in a multi-age class, whereas Teacher C felt that her role had not changed. Teacher A was confident that the children would know who was in charge of the P-1 classes, and that both P-1 teachers would be equal in the multi-age setting, which could also involve the teacher assistant. Teacher B shared a similar view to Teacher A, but felt that the number of adults working in the P-1 classrooms would be confusing for the children. All teachers described the teacher assistant as a valuable human resource, who worked alongside the teacher and children.

All teachers agreed that parents had an important role in the classroom. The teachers' views of the child's role in the multi-age class and the expectations of the child as a learner varied slightly in the two P-1 classrooms. Teacher A expected all children to be independent, make choices and show the ability to self monitor, yet the year one children would be "monitored" more closely than the pre-primary children. The pre-primary children were expected to learn more incidentally. In

Class A, the year one children each had a pre-primary buddy and the children learnt from each other. Often the routines and rules would be passed from the older to younger child. Teacher A felt that this happened naturally. Teacher B (the relief teacher in Class A, when the interview was conducted), expected the year one's to set an example and model correct behaviour to the pre-primary children. Teacher B commented that her expectations were not as high for the pre-primary children. Teacher C mentioned that she did not differentiate between the pre-primary and year one children. The pre-primary and year one children were treated in the same way.

#### **4.9.4 Tasks**

The questions asked the teachers to describe how the activities and projects were carried out, and who decides how they will be explored. The three teachers agreed that the activities/projects were usually teacher directed, but the children were given some degree of choice. Each teacher tries to capitalize on what interests the children (for example, what they bring to school), and use these ideas for future planning.

Teacher A added that the school priorities and the curriculum also determined part of the programme. Teacher A felt that the teacher begins the thought of the project and the children take the idea further. Teacher B hoped that the children would help to build on the theme, by bringing things to school to help the theme develop and expand.

Each teacher was asked to explain how the projects and activities were carried out. Teacher A felt that it was the teacher's role to provide the children with an underlying structure. In this way, the teachers would set up the activities/equipment and 'model' for the children if necessary. It was up to the teacher to ensure that the children were using the equipment and games appropriately. The projects and activities were programmed according to a theme, or whatever was happening in the classroom at that time. On other occasions, activities would have been presented to ensure that certain concepts/skills were being covered in the programme.

Teacher B described activity time as totally child orientated. A total of eighteen activity areas were counted, including the block corner and book corner. The

children had total choice of what they wanted to do during activity time, yet if a child was observed only playing in one area, then the teacher would re-direct if it was felt necessary.

Teacher C explained that activity time was set up according to whatever skills the teachers wanted to pursue throughout the week or term (for example, cutting skills, seriation skills and so on). The type of activities also depended on the level of development that the children were demonstrating. Teacher C also referred to activities/projects that were not necessarily confined to the 'activity' period before recess. The activities (language period) after recess were often centred around a big shared book and a thematic integrated approach was developed. For example, an activity that could flow on to maths and language work was adopted. Sometimes these activities were based on whole group, small group, rostered groups or co-operative learning groups involving just two children at a time. Parent help was imperative, as Teacher C liked to have a parent at each activity station.

The researcher then asked each teacher to clarify how much time the children spent on free play activities and how much time they spent on the more structured activities. Each teacher confirmed that when the pre-primary children finish an activity, they are expected to go back to their activity centres (ie. constant positives). The pre-primary children were described as having less teacher directed time than the year one children. The year one children were described as having much less time outside to play as they spent more time being directed by the teacher for activity based lessons.

Teacher C claimed that one hour of activity time would be unstructured for the pre-primary and year one children in the morning session. The pre-primary children would also have at least an hour in the afternoon. However, this was not usually the case for the year one children. Teacher C also emphasised that nothing is static and changes occur over in time. The structure of the day could also vary, depending on the children's developing concentration and skills.

In summarising the main data collected from the teacher interviews, the three teachers agreed that the class activities and projects were usually teacher directed, even though the children were given some degree of choice. The children's interests were also considered in the planning process, and ideas and themes could extend from these. School priorities and curriculum needs also determined part of the programme. Teacher A felt it was important to 'model' activities/tasks, to ensure that the children were utilizing the activities effectively. Teacher A and B only discussed the activities and tasks that the children were involved with before recess (independent learning time). Teacher C extended the period following recess, adding that a thematic integrated approach was often developed that involved the pre-primary and year one children.

All teachers described the pre-primary children as having less teacher directed time than the year one children. It was also acknowledged that the year one children had less time to play outside and more teacher directed time for activity based lessons. The comments were consistent with the researcher's observations.

## **Chapter Five**

### **DISCUSSION**



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This chapter outlines a discussion of results collected during the study. The data provided a systematic framework, which assisted the researcher in developing an understanding of the participant's perceptions of the routines, structure, roles and tasks in a multi-age setting. The conceptual framework (refer to Figure 2. p.20) directly relates to the research questions, which focus on the children's perceptions.

The findings from this study, along with previous research (Cullen, 1992; Goodnow & Burns, 1985 ; Hatch, 1990; Parker, 1984; Pramling, 1988; Takanishi & Spitzer, 1980; Tammivaara & Enright, 1986), indicate that children's perceptions can effectively be obtained by using informal interviews. In addition, the information from the teachers' data and the observational data used in this study, helped to support and triangulate the information collected from the children's interviews. The participants were motivated and attentive during the informal interview procedure and sustained attention was generally evident. The questions asked within the informal interviews elicited clear responses from the participants, displaying a high level of comprehension and co-operation. Results generated in this way were also triangulated against data gathered from teachers. The children appeared to enjoy participating in the study and telling "stories about their class". This was confirmed by the warm welcome the researcher received from the children when arriving at the school for the weekly visits. The researcher also received drawings and notes from a number of children in the class.

This study focused on the perceptions of six participants from two multi-age classrooms. The results reflected the participants' perceptions of their classroom processes, which were not always synonymous with the teachers' views.

#### **5.1 Perceptions of routine**

The participants' perceptions of the daily routine, appear to be consistent with the order of events described in each teacher's routine. The informal interviews and

anecdotal accounts provided by the participants provided some insights into how they perceived the daily routine. The researcher wanted to ascertain if the participants perceived there to be a relationship between what they were expected to do and what they actually did in school.

Each participant described aspects of their school day that captured their perception of the daily routine. Even though each participant described a similar sequence (which paralleled the teacher's comments), the descriptions varied in detail. It was as if each participant described a part of the daily routine that he/she perceived as significant.

The comments by PP.1 could indicate that this participant is conscious that the teacher rewards children who behave at mat time.

“When I get to school I put my bag on the boxes. Then I sit on the mat. I sit nicely and then I get a sticker or a faction point. I go out to play and I play with Gareth when he is here, he is home sick now.”

This child's expectations of mat time deal with 'behaviour', which involves doing what is expected by the class teacher. Mat time appears to be an important routine of the day, as every participant made a comment about this routine event. These comments depicted mat time as a "ritual event" which predominated the course of the daily routine. The interviews and anecdotal accounts reveal mat time as an event when the pre-primary and year one children sit together in their 'home' class environment with their class teacher. The researcher noted that the pre-primary and year one children shared in the same mat time activity in their own classroom. The pre-primary and year one children were observed to be treated as 'equals', as any questions or comments were directed to all of the children sitting on the mat.

This was reflected in a comment by Teacher B, who was describing how her role had changed since moving into a multi-age class. Teacher B had previously taught

composite classes with middle primary school grades, as previously described in section 4.9.3.

“I had a 4/5 a couple of years ago and the fours were doing one activity and the fives were doing a totally different activity - there was no togetherness. Whereas in a P-1 environment I’m trying to get the one mat session but have its different levels.”

The observations indicated that the daily routine after recess was organised around subject areas. The teachers directed their own language lessons and maths activities before the lunch period. All children remained in their own ‘home’ classroom environment during these periods. The afternoon was set aside for other subject areas, such as music, social studies, science, literature, library and sport. Even though the pre-primary and year one children were expected to share the same routine, some differences were evident to the researcher. These differences were also acknowledged by some of the participants, and these views were not necessarily synonymous with the class teachers.

After recess, the classrooms conducted separate lessons, as organised by their class teachers. The children did not venture beyond their classroom without supervision. The year one children remained in their ‘home’ classroom environment until the lunch bell, whereas the pre-primary children from both classes moved to the P-1 playground area for free-play after the whole language lesson. The pre-primary children were supervised by the teacher assistant during free-play time. The year one children remained in their classrooms for a maths lesson with their own classroom teacher. This arrangement was described as a ‘rule’ by the relief teacher in Class A, when responding to a year one boy who queried why he could not play outside with the pre-primary children. The researcher observed this child and many others in Class A watching the pre-primary children play during this time (Class A overlooked the pre-primary playground, refer to Appendix F). Teacher A described this as an advantage from her point of view, as she could see and hear what the pre-primary children were doing.

The participants' perceptions described a different routine for the pre-primary and year one aged children within parts of the day. For example, discussions with participants during the three month observation revealed that the year one participants perceived the year one children's routine to be built around 'work' in contrast to 'play' for the pre-primary children (for example, refer to section 4.8.4). Literature focusing on children's perceptions of work and play, suggest that young children associate child-chosen activities with play and teacher-assigned activities with work (King, 1979). Perlmutter and Burrell (1995), argue that there needs to be a balance between child-chosen and teacher-assigned activities in the daily routine. There is concern that recess is becoming the only officially sanctioned voluntary play period left for the children in the primary grades. Maloney (1995) suggests that early childhood programmes are increasingly viewed as preparation for formal schooling. Instead of young children learning by 'play', play may be viewed as the 'optional extra', or a 'fill in' activity, which the child is free to engage in when the assigned tasks have been completed.

The pre-primary aged participants shared the same view as the year one aged participants, informing the researcher that the pre-primary and year one children did things differently. The perceptions centred around the pre-primary children having more time to play, reflecting an awareness of a different routine for the pre-primary and year one children. Most of the research on play has focused on children in the pre-primary environment (King 1987; Perlmutter & Burrell, 1995), portraying play as an invaluable part of the daily routine. King (1987) further suggests that young children perceive work and play differently as they move from the pre-school to the primary school environment. For example, a pre-primary child may associate a child-chosen activity as 'play' and a teacher-directed activity as 'work', whereas a primary aged child may label a teacher-directed activity 'play' if they perceive it as 'fun'.

The comments made by the pre-primary and year one participants revealed that outdoor play time was referred to as 'play', and that the participants had a strong

perception of what the pre-primary and year one children were allowed to do within the daily routine. There was a high degree of agreement between the participants when describing the daily routine, suggesting that the participants shared a common view of the school day. Many examples can be found in Appendix K, when the participants were given the opportunity to draw a picture of a day at school, including what they liked and did not like to do at school.

Participants tended to emphasise certain events/activities when describing the daily routine. These described the pre-primary children playing outside, whilst the year one children remained inside to work, and pre-primary children colouring in, whilst the year one children write. A year one participant (Y1.A) described the pre-primary children as doing activities, whilst the year one children did work. Generally, the pre-primary and year one children were seen to do things differently. The more detailed description of the daily routine by the year one participants, could be due to having more experience of a class routine. All of the year one participants were in their second year within the same multi-aged grouped classroom.

The teachers' descriptions of the daily routine were consistent on matter of sequence but not on outcome. Teacher A and Teacher B made comments that could indicate that the pre-primary and year one children are treated differently. For example, Teacher A indicated that she would be monitoring the year one children more closely, whereas the pre-primary children would be learning incidentally. Teacher B expected the year one children to model constantly to the pre-primaries and commented that she does not expect as much from the pre-primary children. Teacher B also considered there to be a big gap between the pre-primary and year one children in term one.

Teacher C (who retired at the end of term one), claimed that she did not differentiate between the pre-primary and year one children, as she felt that it was important to know each child as individuals. These children were expected to do their best, keep on task and practise the skills being taught in class. Some of the comments made by these teachers, fitted the ideals of multi-age grouping literature, supporting the

developmental approach recognising the individual needs of each child. However the comments contrasted with the way children perceived their daily experiences in the multi-age grouped classrooms.

Good and Brophy (1994, p.87), claim that the teachers' expectations often become self-fulfilling. In this way, expectations about children could cause them to treat the children in ways that will make them respond as the teacher expected they would. The teachers may communicate the different expectations by treating the children differently. Both Teacher A and Teacher B shared similar views about their expectations of the pre-primary children as learners in the classroom. The expectations appeared higher for the year one children. When reviewing the daily routine within Class A and Class B, the year one children often completed different worksheets during the whole language lesson. The year one aged children had a separate 'hands-on' maths lesson, whilst the pre-primary aged children played together in the playground outside. If year one children perceive the maths lesson as a constraint then their disposition towards mathematics may be influenced by this context.

Klein (1988) suggests that messages about school are communicated to children in a variety of subtle ways, and little is known about how children understand these messages.

Messages are transmitted through the structure of the classroom, the curriculum, and the roles of the various actors within that structure. What teachers say, and often what they don't say, tells children much about what is expected of them as learners and participants in the school culture. Yet we know very little about how children interpret these messages; how they decide what becoming a student is all about. (Klein, 1988, p.37)

## **5.2 Perceptions of structure**

The participants' perceptions of the classroom structure were analysed under task structure and rule structure. Observations and informal interviews were used to gain an insight into the participant's perceptions. The participants responses from the

informal interviews and incidental conversations reflected their perceptions of the structure inherent within the classroom(s).

A rule structure appears to be embedded in both classrooms. The participants shared some common views of the rule structure, which mainly dealt with physical aggression and damaging school property. The children in both classrooms were often observed reminding fellow peers about what they were allowed or forbidden to do. These comments and the observations may reflect how the participants perceive school to be. There are many external factors which influence how a child thinks about school (such as parent and community expectations and the general context in which the child lives). Corsaro (1988) described the school environment as having frames or boundaries comprising adult ideas, materials, rules and restrictions, adding that when a child enters school, their perceptions already contain the frames or boundaries that incorporate their understanding of the nature of school. Jackson (1990) commented that the main role or focus for a student in the classroom involves the adherence to rules, regulations and routines. These comments could infer that a child's understanding or perception of school do not necessarily depend on what they learn in school, but rather what they learn about school. These perceptions have implications for teachers who endeavour to implement Vygotskian's theory in their teaching.

In exploring this notion, the researcher asked the participants what they thought was the most important thing about school. The answers given to this question revealed a shared concern about not breaking rules, caring for equipment and each other. No reference was made to 'learning' or work related activities. This perspective could imply that the classrooms are rule governed and structured, and that the participants perceive school as a place where 'fitting in' and doing what is expected precedes learning and classroom activities.

The interviews with the class teachers revealed that a democratic rule structure had been put in place in both classrooms. The children helped to create the classroom rules, which included the consideration of natural or logical consequences. The researcher was informed by each teacher that the 'rules' were kept to a minimum and

were clear for the children to understand (refer to Appendices L, M and N). Both teachers preferred to work on the positives rather than the negatives. There appeared to be consistency in the general rule structure, but there did appear to be a difference in how each teacher dealt with rules that had been infringed. Even though both teachers used verbal reprimands when necessary, Teacher B was also seen to deduct points from the class faction chart as a deterrent. This chart was generally used as a group incentive, so if a child lost a point, then his/her faction would be affected. This was only observed on one occasion, as Teacher B tended to focus on positive behaviour. Children in Class B were often granted bonus faction points or stickers for helping to pack-away, behaving appropriately and working hard. However, PP.1 (Class A) made a comment about receiving stickers and faction points for sitting nicely on the mat, so it is possible that the same or similar system was in place. No child commented about receiving points for learning new subject matter. The researcher did not observe a faction chart or stickers used in Class A, and Teacher A did not mention such a system. A list of written rules (refer to Appendix L) was given to the researcher after the observational data had been collected.

The participants' perceptions of the task structure within the multi-age classrooms, revealed that the participants implied different connotations to the words "work" and "activities". Activities were described as the pre-primary tasks and work was considered to be a year one task. This perception was shared by many of the participants. The dichotomy between the work and play activities was expressed by many of the participants. The participants understanding of the task structure was one that offered different types of activities and choice for the year one and pre-primary children. Some of the participants comments inferred that the year one children had less choice than the pre-primary children, particularly in regard to outdoor play. This comment was suggested by a year one participant (Y1.A), who claimed that there was a difference between what the pre-primary and year one children were allowed to do.

"The pre-primary don't do the same things because the pre-primaries play outside and we have to stay inside and work."



This view was shared by a pre-primary participant (PP.1), who claimed that the pre-primary and year one children did things differently because the year one children did not ‘do activity time’ as they were required to do something else. This child did not elaborate on ‘the something else’.

This structure could therefore differentiate learners on a pre-primary/year one axis. It could be questioned whether this is the ideal of multi-age grouped classes, or whether there should be more individualised variation where, over a day, all children have equal opportunity for choice. However the compulsory status of year one as opposed to the non-compulsory status of pre-primary in the school system may also underlie the outcomes noted.

The task ‘structure’ of the day resembled a script, that from observations appeared to be predictable and consistent, as described with routine in 5.1. The first mat session resembled a daily ritual, in which the children helped construct the charts and calendar. This was followed by a brief discussion about the tasks that had been set up in the activity period. On most occasions, the researcher observed both teachers only describing the tasks that had been set up in their own ‘home’ classroom environment. Yet it could be questioned whether all the children understood that they were permitted to move between the two classroom areas. Doyle (1979) suggests that knowledge of the task structure is imperative if children are to operate effectively in the classroom. How children utilize the tasks and resources available within the classroom structure will have an impact on how they learn. It is questionable whether all of the children were aware of the types of activities and the amount of choice available during activity time. Perhaps some of the children were disadvantaged due to their lack of school experience and knowledge of the classroom context.

### **5.3 Perceptions of roles**

Jackson (1990) described the characteristics of school life as being determined by crowds, praise and power. The young child is learning to live in a crowd, which involves living and working in the presence of others in an evaluative setting under

the guidance of other people in positions of higher authority. A further comment by Jackson (1990, p.21), described school “as a place in which the division between the weak and the powerful is clearly drawn.” Children from a young age learn that the teachers are in a position of higher authority and that children are merely the “pawns of the institutional authorities.” In many respects, the teacher becomes the child’s first “Boss” in the school setting.

Within the multi-age group classroom(s), the children are exposed to a number of adults who have different roles, ranging from the class teacher, teacher assistant, administrators, voluntary helpers, parents and student teachers. An assumption cannot be made that an adult’s view of the roles within the multi-age classroom are identical to the child’s. Hatch (1990) argues that it is the widely held view among young children that any adult within their classroom must be a teacher.

Weinstein (1983) describes student perceptions of teachers as ‘person perception’. The children’s views of the teacher may depend on ecological factors, such as prior classroom experiences and the developmental level of the child. For example, an older child with more exposure or experience in a classroom setting, may have different perceptions of the various adult roles, than a child with little or no previous experience of school. Weinstein (1983) added that the classroom is the “teachers’ native culture” and the young child must adjust to this “classroom culture”. Fernie (1988) asserts that if children are to be successful in school, they must learn a ‘student role’, which will then guide their future academic and social participation in the classroom.

The informal discussions with the participants revealed that they shared a common view of who was in charge of their classroom. Each participant named a teacher or teachers and some participants named the relief teachers and teacher assistant. It was evident that the participants did not view all adults as being in ‘charge’ or in a position of authority. The participants conceptualised authority to the staff members involved in both classrooms. Each participant agreed that mums, dads and other visitors helped in their class, yet not in a position of authority. Therefore, these

results could indicate that authority concepts are not just considered to be any 'adult' in the classroom. Yet it was interesting to note that a year one participant (Y1.A) also acknowledged four pre-primary children and herself as being 'in charge', because they often helped the teacher to be in charge of the class by 'packing away' more than fellow peers during the clean-up time. This was perceived to be an assigned authority position, which gave these children special status in the classroom. Laupa (1994) mentioned that studies on authority attributes have not been done with children under age seven. Even though considerable research has investigated young children's moral concepts, little is known about their authority concepts.

The participants responses to who was in 'charge' of their classroom indicated that they appeared to be conscious of a hierarchy within their classroom structure. This was indicated by the order in which they named the teachers, relief teachers and teacher assistant. This could indicate that the participants were making distinctions between the different staff members. For example, PP.1 named his class teacher first, followed by the relief teachers and the other P-1 teacher. Y1.B named her own class teacher before the other P-1 teacher and teacher assistant. Y1.A named her own teacher before the other P-1 teacher, relief teacher and teacher assistant. A final comment made reference to herself and her peers as helping the teacher to be 'in charge'.

Research indicates that very few studies have examined students' perceptions of teachers (Jackson, 1990; Klein, 1988; Klein, Kantor & Fernie, 1988; Solomon & Carter, 1995; Weinstein, 1983). Yet, teachers are considered to be an important element in the knowledge children develop about school. Jackson (1990) suggests that there is no other activity, apart from sleeping, that occupies as much of the child's time as attending school. Jackson (1990) further suggested that from the age of six onwards, the child would probably be more of a familiar sight to his teacher than to his own parents. This slight exaggeration does exemplify that the teacher is of central importance within the child's developing perception of school. Minuchin (1987, p.250) reiterates on this point, by describing important aspects of the

teacher's role. "The teacher is a crucial part of the child's experience. She or he is guide and resource; the model of a knowledgeable and problem-solving intellectual style; an identification figure; a haven; and a mediator in the presence of conflict or distress."

Klein (1988) claims that the role of the student is communicated to children in a number of subtle ways, such as the structure of the physical environment, the curriculum and the roles of the various actors within the classroom structure. Klein (1988, p.37) commented that "What teachers say, and often what they don't say, tells children much about what is expected of them as learners and as participants in the school culture."

When describing what their teacher did in the classroom, it was found that the participants perceived the teacher's role as one who assists, controls, organises and praises the children in the classroom. The participants' comments appeared to indicate that the teacher's role varied between giving instructions or directives, such as telling the children to "pack-away" or doing "good work". No comments were made about learning new subjects, discipline or disciplinary strategies that the teachers might have used in the classroom environment. The participants did not describe their teachers in a nurturing role or as play partners. However, it appeared that the participants viewed their teachers as supportive, attentive and available within the classroom environment (refer to participants comments on pp. 59-60).

Each participant was asked to discuss what they considered to be the most important thing that their teacher expected them to know and do. The participants' answers indicated an awareness of a rule and task structure, which involved 'doing our jobs', cleaning up, putting books away, working and listening, doing puzzles, having a reading folder, not giving money away and 'knowing everything'. This interpretation revealed a consciousness of the student role that involved knowledge and appropriate actions to ensure successful participation in classroom life rather than in learning per se. Research by Blumenfeld, Hamilton, Bossert, Wessels & Meece (1983), suggests that a child's understanding of the student role is often

affected by information provided by the teacher. For example, the teacher who focuses on the tasks to be done, completing tasks and always expecting high standards of quality and effort, may be inadvertently sending messages to the students of the importance of the academic role.

The teachers' understanding of their main role in the classroom revealed that they all perceived themselves to be 'facilitators' in the classroom. Teacher A stressed that her role as a 'model' for the children in the classroom and was no longer the only 'teacher' in the classroom, as she had handed the classroom over to the children. This view was reflected in a comment by YI.A who described how some fellow peers and herself helped her teacher be 'in charge' of her class by working harder at pack-away time than fellow peers. Teacher B strived for a balance between being a facilitator and teacher directive, to suit the learning situation. Teacher C also emphasised the need for the teacher to 'set the scene for learning', so the children could get the best and most they could out of it. Overall, the participants' comments indicated that they perceived the teacher's main role involved one of authority, praising, controlling and organising the children in the classroom. These comments were synonymous in both classrooms.

#### **5.4 Perceptions of tasks**

As discussed in sections 5.1 and 5.2 the results indicate that the participants were clear about what they could and could not do in their classroom. The results highlighted a perceived dichotomy between the year one and pre-primary tasks, in which the participants identified activities as pertaining to year one or pre-primary. For example, when the researcher asked each participant if the pre-primary and year one children did the same things at school, all of the participants disagreed. The year one participants described year one tasks that involved maths and language, whilst the pre-primary aged participants were seen as being able to choose any activity, which included easier tasks such as 'colouring in' instead of 'writing'. YI.B identified the home-corner as a shared activity between the year one and pre-primary children. The pre-primary aged participants' comments also reflected an awareness that the year one and primary children did some things differently at school. These

comments included the year one aged children taking home reading books and reading to a parent, whilst the pre-primary aged children did not, as well as the pre-primary aged children having more play-time outside than the year one aged children. The participants' comments appeared to shed some light on their understanding of the school tasks.

Almost all of the participants (the exception being a year one child), agreed that they had a choice of what they could do in their class. The year one participant who disagreed, commented that the only period of the day when the children were given 'free-choice' was during the 'activity time' before recess. This participant indicated that the teacher chose the work for the remainder of the day, as was reflected in her comment (YI.A) "I'm not allowed to choose the work that the teacher says we have to."

A central theme in both Class A and Class B dealt with the concept of 'choice', even though both classes varied slightly in the degree of choice the children had. Teacher A's system of 'non-negotiable' and 'negotiable' allowed a degree of flexibility in the pre-primary children's entitlement to choice. 'Non-negotiable' usually dealt with the year one children having to do an activity, whereas 'negotiable' gave the pre-primary children the option of joining the year one children for the teacher chosen activity, or choosing their own open-ended activity, such as the 'constant positive' tasks that were a permanent feature of the classroom (for example, blocks, puzzles, manipulatives, etc). YI.A was clearly aware of this arrangement when she described the work that the teacher said they had to do, such as the teacher chosen activities after recess.

YI.A "Hard work. Hard work for the year ones, and if they pre-primaries want to join in and do it, they can."

Even though the pre-primary aged children in Class A had a choice whether they wanted to join the year one aged participants for specified teacher directed activities, the pre-primary aged children were always seen to choose to work with the year one

aged participants. The system of 'negotiable' and 'non-negotiable' for teacher chosen activities for the pre-primary aged participants was not seen to operate in Class B. This was clear in the observations when on one occasion, a pre-primary aged child asked Teacher B if she could do something else (she did not appear to want to do the activity chosen by the teacher). The pre-primary child was promptly told to remain seated and "have-a-go". Whilst observing another language lesson taking place in Class B, the researcher asked a pre-primary aged child what he was doing (the year one and pre-primary aged children had been given the same worksheet to complete) and the child indicated that he did not know. This pre-primary aged child was then seen to copy what his year one-aged neighbour was writing next to him. This child did not seem to be aware of the purpose of the activity. It appeared that the task on hand was work that the pre-primary aged child had to do, and perhaps did not understand.

Kelman (1990) associates choice with control. Giving young children choice will help them develop independence, competence and self esteem. The observations recorded above, could indicate that the pre-primary aged children in Class A are given more freedom of choice and control of what they wanted to do in the classroom, than the pre-primary aged children in Class B and the year one aged children from both classes. Kelman (1990) further suggests that choice, decisions and control are not synonymous, yet are often closely related in the classroom. For example, many teachers may associate their control with authority, enabling the teacher to be 'in charge' and effective. Kelman (1990) argues that much of the 'control' that teachers exercise belongs to children, yet teachers may be fearful in giving children 'control' in the classroom.

A study by Mandell (1986), cited in Klein et al. (1988), explored a range of classroom settings and found that the highly structured settings, where the children's activities were controlled by the teacher, provided limited opportunities for peer interaction, but successfully taught children to comply with adult task requirements. Klein et al. (1988) expressed the view that messages about 'school' are often embedded or sometimes obscured in school activities. Therefore, the messages and

images a young child receives about school will ultimately influence future perceptions of school life.

Teacher B informed the researcher that she found it difficult giving the pre-primary children extra 'hands-on' activity work, and that she felt the pre-primary children were disadvantaged because of this limitation. Research suggests that an appropriate learning environment permits children to engage in the processes of learning. This type of learning environment would allow for high levels of choice and initiation, based on the children's development and interests, as well as plenty of opportunities for play (Bredekamp, 1987; Schickedanz, Chay, Gopin, Sheng, Song & Wild, 1990; Stone, 1994/5). It could be questioned whether the teachers in Class A and Class B were catering for the children's different developmental levels if the pre-primary and year one children were separated during particular lessons and activities. For example, in the maths lesson period, the pre-primary aged children from Class A and B were given free-play time outside, whilst the year one aged children worked in their own 'home' classrooms. Mathematics is an ideal time to provide many open-ended activities and problem solving experiences that the pre-primary and year one aged children could work on together. It is also debatable whether the classrooms in this study reflect a true multi-aged programme, or whether they represent a mix of composite and multi-age grouped classrooms. Gaustad (1992), suggests that the labels P, 1, 2 should not be used in multi-age programmes, as children belong to one class, not two or three separate grades. Unless we change the terminology, the mind-set will not change.

In summarising the main points concerning perceptions of tasks, the participants' comments indicate that they were aware of choice during activity time, but the other periods of the day were generally determined by the teacher. The participants were also aware that the pre-primary and year one children often did different things at school. The participants' comments reflected that the year one children were usually assigned to 'work' activities, whilst the pre-primary children were allowed to do 'activities'. When the participants were asked to talk about the work in their classroom, the year one participants described maths, language, writing and drawing.



A pre-primary participant (PP.4) said that the year one children worked inside, whilst the pre-primary children played outside, adding that he was allowed to play outside when he finished his work inside. Another pre-primary participant (PP.1) described work as something 'he did at the table', and that the pre-primary children could do anything in the language period following recess, whilst the year one's did 'something else'.

The interviews conducted with the classroom teachers explored the teachers' views of the tasks inherent within the multi-age classrooms. The three teachers tended to describe the 'activity time', rather than the lessons following recess. All of the teachers indicated that the pre-primary children had less teacher directed time than the year one children, and that the year one children had less time outside to play.

## **Chapter Six**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

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This study has focused on children's perceptions of the tasks, structure, routines and roles in their multi-age group classrooms. In light of the literature focusing on children's perceptions, the results of this study suggest that the participants are active interpreters of their classroom life.

Many important issues have been raised within this study. The final chapter will reiterate the main points discussed in the literature and the important findings from the data. It needs to be noted, that the generalizability of the findings of this study should be treated with caution. The researcher acknowledges that multi-age programmes can vary between schools, as do the teachers and children who are part of these programmes.

#### **6.1 Multi-age grouping**

Multi-age grouping could be viewed as an idea that may attend to the diversity that children and educators are faced with in classrooms today. A fundamental question concerns the nature of best practice for the 4-8 year old children in the P-2 classrooms. What may have changed for children's learning and experience when multi-age classes are established? The new wave of interest in multi-age grouped classes highlights some positive outcomes and some concerns from the perspectives of the teachers and researchers. A recent Victorian study by Walker, presented at the First Years of School Conference in Hobart (1996), claims that children in multi-age classes have higher self esteem and adapt more easily to social situations compared to the children from the single age classes, whilst there was no noticeable difference in academic ability among the two groups.

Multi-age grouped classes receive commendation from many teachers who are teaching in this way. These teachers normally have chosen to work in a multi-age

setting. Parents and teachers in these settings note positive outcomes, which include greater flexibility in schools and a more co-operative and collaborative learning environment. Hogben (1994) describes a strong continuity of learning where teachers can help to build a positive and strong relationship with children and families over a two or three year period. New children to the class are joining a group who are familiar with the class structure and routine and who therefore may lend support. Teachers may focus better on individuals and assist children to work at their own developmental level. Each child has opportunities to associate and work with others on the basis of skills, abilities, interests, personality and age. Just as there are different teaching styles, there are also different learning styles. Teachers in this study reflected the above sentiments when talking about their programmes.

However, potentials of the type expressed rely on the children not being seen as separate 'pre-primary' and 'year one' children, but as a community of learners at various stages of development and with a variety of needs. Multi-age grouped classes disband traditional age/grade designations and children become part of classes composed of ages intentionally grouped for learning. This developmental approach is an important underpinning to the quality and success of the multi-age programme.

## **6.2 Developmentally appropriate practices**

Issues of multi-age grouping practices need to be examined more closely in Western Australian schools. Advocates of multi-age grouping argue that it represents a fundamental change within junior primary classes. A paper by Corrie (1995), discussed the broad differences between pedagogies of early childhood education and primary school education in relation to the current educational reform in Western Australia, where these areas are brought together in multi-age (P-1) settings. There is some concern that the current reform may lead teachers away from early childhood pedagogy, which in turn may detract from the underlying principles of multi-age grouping. Corrie (1995) argued that early childhood teachers need to

make their voices heard and be advocates for their profession to ensure that there is not an inadvertent drift to primary pedagogy (for young children).

Savage (1994) suggests that many teachers appear to be more concerned with the organisational and management problems, rather than understanding the reasons underlying multi-age grouped classes. Therefore, the practical aspects of implementing a multi-age class are taking precedence over teachers developing an understanding of the philosophy behind multi-aged classes. This is a real concern and begs an answer whether the practice of multi-age grouped classes matches the rhetoric and whether the rhetoric of multi-age grouping can be achieved in reality.

Corrie (1995) noted that the importance of play may be valued differently by teachers in multi-age grouped classrooms. Shifting the status of play will impact on multi-age programmes. In this study, the importance of play for year one children appears different from that for pre-primary children. The children in this study differentiated activities as 'work' or 'play', the consequences of which may not have been considered by their teachers. Previous studies by Cleave, Jowett & Bate (1982), and by Tayler (1987), also indicate these differences. The current emphasis in Western Australia on student outcome statements and assessment profiles, may change the balance of early years programmes towards the 'product' in preference to the 'process'. Research which examines processes in multi-age classes is necessary for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of programmes of this type.

Katz (1994) argues that because of the distinctive characteristics of young children, the pedagogical quality of early childhood programmes needs to be judged differently from the programmes designed for later schooling. Quality is determined by a range of perspectives incorporating the setting, equipment, staff and administrators. An assessment of quality from a top-down perspective also needs to embrace the bottom-up perspective, investigating how the day-to-day quality of life is experienced by the children in the early childhood classroom. Katz (1994) suggests that extensive contact and observations of the participants by an experienced teacher would make this process feasible.

The rich source of information gained from this study focused on the users, being the children. The study provided some valuable insights about the structure, tasks, routines and roles of the P-1 classes from the children's viewpoints, incorporating the bottom-up perspective as advocated by Katz (1994).

### **6.3 Researching children's perceptions**

When studying children's perceptions, the context in which children work needs to be considered when developing a clear understanding of how they think. The interweaving of context throughout this study has emphasized the importance of having an ecological view when studying children's perceptions.

As discussed in chapter two, recent studies are now acknowledging that children's perceptions of school and their educational experiences are important, yet have often been overlooked or ignored in previous years (Ainley 1995; Danaher, 1995). Educational researchers underestimated the potential of children in constructing their school experiences and have avoided studying the young child's perspective in light of the perceived difficulties of interpreting such information from an adult's point of view. It has been suggested by de Voss (1979), that schools are often considered to be difficult places in which to do research, particularly if researchers are steeped in traditional research techniques that tend to see children as subjects, rather than as perceptive individuals with a valuable point of view.

Donaldson (1985) suggested that many adults tend to assume that the grammatical sophistication of the child's speech is indicative of their incapacity to think clearly. Donaldson (1985) maintains that in the 1960's, Chomsky's emphasis on children's language production tended to ignore what children could receive and understand. This view was exacerbated by Piaget's research, which portrayed children as being competent in practical skills, but limited thinkers up to the age of seven (when tackling Piaget's tasks). Donaldson (1985) argues that children must be asked

meaningful questions that are ‘in context’, as without these important considerations, we could be setting the children up for failure.

Further supporting this notion, recent literature has emphasized the need to focus on the relationship between perception and cognition in young children, particularly with regards to the social foundations of knowledge, much of which stems from Vygotsky’s social cognition theory. Butterworth (1993, p.1), asserts that a child needs “to understand what adults mean when they pose questions designed to reveal children’s reasoning capacities.” Butterworth (1993) added that a child’s thinking is influenced by the physical, social and cultural contexts. This view is shared by Siegal (1991), who stated that a child does not necessarily lack knowledge of language, but the child may experience difficulty in understanding the adult’s language and the meaning of the questions being asked.

As highlighted in this study, a child’s perspective or point of view about school life supplies valuable information to educational researchers who want to understand children more effectively (Gamble & Woulbroun, 1995; Reifel, 1988; Takanishi & Spitzer, 1980; Tammivaara & Enright, 1986). However, much of the research about young children has been done from an adult’s perspective (Coe, 1991; Entwistle, 1987; Huttunen, 1991). Gamble & Woulbroun (1995) suggest that gathering information directly from the children is feasible but is often seen as controversial. Perhaps this explains why there has been hesitancy amongst researchers to consider a child’s point of view. Tammivaara & Enright (1986, p.226) claim that many researchers insist on “examining the lives of children in the future tense (children as they “develop” into adults) rather than in the present tense (children as they “are” in their everyday lives).” A further comment expressed concern that this “adult-centrism” presents a distorted portrayal of young children by adults, with the risk that children’s true abilities could be underestimated.

Children think differently from adults and usually the younger the child, the greater the difference will be (Gabarino, Stott & Faulty of the Erikson Institute, 1989). Yet how an adult interprets a child’s thinking depends on the adult’s understanding of

the child's developing cognitive capacity. As previously discussed, this has been exemplified by earlier studies highlighting the differences between Piaget's theory (emphasising the stages of development) and Vygotsky's theory, which emphasised social cognition (Catherwood, 1994a & b; Berk & Winsler, 1995; Slee, 1993; Siefert, 1993; McInerney & McInerney, 1994). Research on young children is considered to have an adult centred bias, where educators may assume that the learning experiences and environment they provide are clear and meaningful to the children, when in fact, they are not. This study indicated that children's perceptions of life in their classes did not always correspond with their teachers' ideas. Practices in place for certain reasons in the mind of the teacher may not be translated by children as being in place for the same reasons. Coe (1991) suggests that educators tend to focus on the adult's perspective rather than the child, which does not respect the child as a learner. Huttenen (1991) argues that a child's thinking should not be limited by an adult's perspective. It is important to validate a child's point of view through the child's eyes.

#### **6.4 Summary and implications of findings**

It was commented by Goodnow & Burns (1985, p.2) that "We often assume that we know what children are like. We know what they want, how they think, what matters to them, what is good for them. Very often we know less than we think." Goodnow and Burns (1985) suggest that a possible reason for this assumption, could be that we see children and their lives through adult eyes. Therefore, we may interpret what children say and do, using the memories of our own past experiences. Within this study, the in-depth observations of the everyday events in the multi-age classrooms have attempted to go beneath the surface to reveal the true complexity of life in a multi-age class and how young children perceive it to be.

There were some discernible parallels and erroneous assumptions between the teachers' and participants' perceptions of life in the multi-age group classrooms. Similarities in the descriptions of daily routines were notable, but subtleties related to the relative importance of events emerge from the data. The regular mat-time



sessions between Class A and Class B were seen as a 'ritual event', where the year one and pre-primary aged children could sit together with their class teacher and share discussions and events. There was no separation between the pre-primary and year one children, apart from the children being in their own 'home' class environment. The pre-primary and year one children were given equal opportunities to answer questions and interact during these sessions. On first impression, the researcher had found it difficult to discern between the pre-primary and year one children.

The routine following recess was perceived as 'different' by all year one and pre-primary participants. A dichotomy of tasks for the pre-primary and year one children changed the structure of events, resulting in a separate play-time for the pre-primary and year one children. Generally, the pre-primary and year one aged children were seen to do things differently after the activity periods (independent learning time). Teachers A and B both acknowledged that the pre-primary aged children had a separate play-time, whilst the year one aged children remained in their 'home' classroom environment for maths and extended language activities. Although both teachers and children noted these differences, the relative importance of these differences to the teachers and children appeared to vary. Children perceived those in year one as being limited or restricted in what they could do compared to their pre-primary aged classmates.

The rule structure was clearly embedded in each participant's perception of school life. The two class teachers appeared to use different strategies when dealing with rules that may have been infringed. Even though both teachers emphasised positive reinforcement, Teacher B utilized many extrinsic rewards, such as stickers and bonus faction points, whereas Teacher A relied on more verbal praise. It was noted that when the participants were asked how they knew they had done a good job in the classroom, the participants from Class A felt it was a reflection of their good work, whereas the participants in Class B felt it was because their teacher had told them. Also noted was that children's perceptions of class rules were translated into what they should not do, whereas teachers' perceptions were couched in more

positive terms. Teacher A felt it was important to 'model' appropriate behaviour constantly in the classroom and that she 'shared' the role of teacher in the classroom with the children. This was amplified in a comment from a year one participant (Y1.A) from Class A, who described how she helped to be in charge of the class with four other children in Class A. Teacher B claimed to vary her role to suit the learning situation. At times she was a facilitator, whilst on other occasions, she felt it was necessary to use a teacher directed approach.

Multi-age grouping is a topical issue in early childhood, particularly as it is currently being trialled in 30 volunteer schools throughout Western Australia in 1996. The perceived advantages and disadvantages of multi-age grouped classes have fuelled much debate between researchers, educators and parent groups. Misconceptions about multi-age grouping, particularly concerning the structure of the classroom, and a perceived "less structured approach" have been noted by Lodish (1992), who claims that structure depends more on the teacher's style of teaching and organisation, than on the nature of the grouping. Lodish (1992) also notes that the teaching style needs to fit the child's learning style, regardless of whether the child was in a mixed-age or single-age class.

Advantages and disadvantages of multi-age grouping were not the focus of this study. Within this study, the researcher spent considerable time describing the organisational framework of the two P-1 classrooms, which involved the structure, roles, routines and tasks of the multi-age classrooms. The informal interviews and observations of the participants in the two P-1 classrooms enabled the researcher to develop an understanding of the children's perceptions of their multi-age classrooms in the context of teacher views and class practices. Guastad (1992) suggested that informal discussions with children are an important part of the success of multi-age grouped classes, as talking with children helps teachers understand a child's point-of-view. Results of this study support the importance of teachers talking with children if they are to assess the relative merits of strategies being used. Conclusions drawn by children about practices in place may not be the same as targets set by teachers.

The literature review in this study raised some important philosophical issues regarding the pedagogical reasons for establishing multi-age grouped classrooms. Multi-age grouped classrooms ideally should be established from a developmental philosophy rather than for administrative necessity. Educators need to be clear about the pedagogical reasons for establishing multi-age grouped classes, and these reasons need to be discussed and shared with the administrators, teachers, parents and children. This will incorporate both a top-down and bottom-up perspective as described by Katz (1994), in her discussion on quality in pedagogy and practice in early childhood programmes. In addition, help in demystifying multi-age grouping will assist in ensuring that clear philosophical and pedagogical reasons are established when forming multi-age grouped classes.

Multi-age grouping has become prominent in journal articles, the media, books and conference presentations. It appears that multi-age grouping is a 'catchword' used to describe classes that teach more than a one year level within a class. Yet there are many issues that need to be addressed to ensure that appropriate practices which support learning by multi-age groups are being implemented.

An important consideration concerns the staffing allocation for the multi-age grouped classes. The P-1 classrooms identified in this study were taught by a teacher qualified in early childhood education (Teacher A) and a teacher qualified to teach primary education (Teacher B). Both teachers mentioned that they complimented each other in the P-1 environment, as they often shared ideas, as well as having a supportive relationship. Some differences were noted between Class A and Class B. Observations and discussions with the participants revealed that the pre-primary aged children had more choice in Class A than Class B. For example, the pre-primary aged children from Class A had a choice regarding joining the year ones for language activities after recess, whilst the pre-primary children in Class B were expected to join the year one children and "have-a-go". The physical design of both P-1 classrooms differed in size and layout (see Appendix F). Class A appeared to resemble a traditional pre-primary setting, whereas Class B resembled more closely a junior primary classroom. The dichotomy of task structure was evident in

both classrooms, in that the pre-primary and year one aged participants were conscious that they were engaged in different tasks at certain times of the day. The pre-primary aged children were perceived as having more free-play time outside whilst the year one children were expected to stay inside to read and write.

Gifford (1991) recommends that schools should aim to ensure that early childhood classes are taught by teachers qualified in early childhood studies. If multi-aged classes were to be taught exclusively by primary trained teachers, then more open early childhood programmes could be lost. Halliwell (1990) expressed concern that the primary curriculum frameworks would push the early childhood curriculum towards primary methods and objectives, that would not be suitable to the early childhood curriculum. As a result, the pre-primary children could be placed under immense pressure whilst working within inflexible programmes based on formal skill acquisition.

Whilst recognising the importance of early childhood training is imperative, all teachers who are to work in multi-age classes should attend courses that focus on the theory and practice of multi-age grouped classes. This will assist teachers to have adequate knowledge of child development and education strategies which support children's individual learning styles. Surbek (1992) believes that teachers need to be committed to the philosophy of multi-age grouping, as well as having the ability to articulate the philosophy of the multi-age grouped programme. These factors are considered by Surbek (1992) to be the cornerstone upon which appropriate multi-age grouped programmes are created. If such a belief infrastructure does not exist, then the programme may not succeed.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This study provided some insights into how young children perceive life in their classroom environments, clearly showing that children have ideas from which we can learn and which illustrate their thinking. The comments made by the six participants in this study have given a child's perspective of school life. Tapping the opinions of children in schools is considered to be one of the bases on which

improvements in educational programmes and activities can be made. A recent issue of Unicorn (1995) provided examples of students' views of their educational experiences from primary school through to university settings. Dempster commented,

How well schools reply to their young critics in the future will be one measure of their responsiveness to the changing needs of our youth. At the same time, however, it will provide evidence of how much the gatekeepers of knowledge can mould their pedagogy to maintain and enhance their students' enthusiasm for their education. My hope is that we never lose sight of what our students think of us, what we do and how we do it. (Dempster, 1995, p.3)

The findings from this study clearly show that the way children perceive their classroom experiences is not always the same as the way teachers perceive classroom experience. We need to challenge comfortable beliefs and assumptions about classroom life (Jackson, 1990). Exploring children's thinking is a necessary component to this process, as children are the primary source of information on their learning styles and needs. In most cases, children can express their views to parents and teachers (if parents and teachers are prepared to listen, and if it is the appropriate time for the discussion to take place), yet children's views are rarely sought on school matters, even though schools are run for the benefit of children.

Multi-age grouped classes are part of the many changes happening in early childhood programmes in Western Australia. The schools electing to incorporate multi-age grouped programmes are currently doing so by choice, being part of the Flexibility in Schooling Project. The rhetoric describing these multi-age programmes appears to be more attuned with early childhood philosophy, stressing the importance of adopting flexible, developmentally appropriate programmes with a child-centred perspective. It is also suggested that multi-age grouped classes help teachers become more aware of age and stage related differences, as multi-age programmes are designed to provide for the children's range of abilities, rather than

teaching children in a particular programme at a designated year level. The emphasis in the multi-age grouped classes, falls on the open-ended curriculum, which allows children to perform at different levels whilst working together on the same project. When using this approach, the older and younger children are able to learn from each other in both directions (Gifford, 1991).

Gifford (1991) questioned whether many teachers who are currently teaching in the multi-age grouped classrooms, are in fact teaching in an integrated developmentally based way. It appears that mixed-age composite classes are often implemented and labelled multi-age grouped classes. These concerns were raised by the researcher in regards to the P-1 classes observed within this study. It was queried why the pre-primary and year one aged children were segregated for periods of the day (for example, maths and some language activities), when mixed-age experiences would provide opportunities for enriched interactions between younger and older children. Pratt and Treacy (1986), concluded that teachers should be discouraged from adopting formal whole class activities in composite groups, and instead use open-ended activities that will cater for students with a wide range of abilities.

A study by Veenman (1995), discussed the importance of differentiating between the multi-age and multi-grade classes, claiming that multi-grade classes were formed out of necessity, whereas multi-age classes were formed deliberately for their perceived educational benefits. Veenman (1995) stresses that even though multi-grade groups are a step towards nongradedness, it would be incorrect to label a class multi-age when it has not been established for pedagogical reasons. The study was conducted in classrooms established as multi-age for pedagogical reasons and yet some of the practices were indicative of practices described as multi-grade. Veenman (1995) raises concern that the instructional practices found in multi-grade and multi-age classes are often poorly understood. Further research needs to be undertaken to explore these issues. The ideal of multi-age grouped classes may not be easily translated into practice. The rhetoric of multi-age grouping may match the reality to some extent but demand further consideration when data of practice is analysed. There appear to be some discrepancies between the theory of multi-age grouping and

the practice observed in this study. However, because of the scale and focus of the present study, firm conclusions on links between theory and purpose of programmes described by teachers and practices experienced and explained by children cannot be drawn.

Manne (1996) describes 'ideology' as a form of rationalisation and criticises studies that often only concentrate on those issues that show positive effects rather than negative effects. Manne (1996) fully supports qualitative studies that are based on children's experiences, as they are real and not necessarily idealistic. Educators need to reflect on what the children are saying. This view was fully supported by Castle (1989, p.212), in the concluding comment acknowledging that children's perceptions are an invaluable component in education today:

Although we cannot see with a child's eyes, we can learn to become more adept at taking the child's perspective. Through sensitive teaching, we gain a greater understanding of the child's world. Understanding the meaning a child attributes to a learning situation helps us plan a more child-centred approach. Through children's eyes we discover new perspectives, possibilities and hope.

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**APPENDICES**



## Appendix A:

### Interview Format (teacher interviews)

Before the interview begins and the tape recorder is turned on ... reassure the interviewee that there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions about to be asked.

The interviewee's knowledge is valuable.

All information collected from this interview will remain confidential

1. What do you see as the elements that contribute to a successful P-1 (multi-age) class?  
 \* This will take into account the teacher's own expectations.  
 (When I observe/talk to the children, I will find out if they share the teacher's expectation).
2. Who decides what activities/projects will be explored?  
 \* For example ... is it something that motivates the children?  
 ...extracting ideas from thoughts the children share in group time
3. How are the projects/activities carried out?  
 \* For example ... talk to the children?  
 ... recall past experiences and/or activities?
4. What do you expect of the child as a 'learner' in your classroom?  
 \* For example ... are the children encouraged to learn from one another?
5. What is your role in the classroom?
6. Has your role changed since moving into a multi-age setting?  
 (Does the theory - organisation of the multi-age class ...change your role as a teacher?)
7. What is the teacher assistant's role in the classroom?
8. What is the child's role in the classroom?
9. Are the parents' involved in the programme?  
 If so ... how?
10. What rules and expectations are in place in this classroom?
11. How do the children determine who is 'in charge' at any particular time...  
 (ie. when the children are working with older and younger children and a range of adults ... such as class teacher, teacher assistants, parent helpers...)
12. How often do you make contact directly with individual children?

13. Who do the children work/play with? Do age, size, gender, ability make a difference?
14. Please describe the sequence of a day ...
15. How much time do the children spend on free play activities ... and how much time do they spend on the more structured activities?
16. As a summary, what would you say is your philosophy about working with children in a multi-age class?

## Appendix B

### Interview Format (for pre-primary and year one aged participants)

#### Materials needed:

- tape recorder and tapes (labelled)
- A3 paper and artline pens for drawing
- story-books (to stimulate discussion) \* book titles listed on following page
- photos taken of the P-1 area

\*\* have the tape-recorder on the whole time.

\*\* Tell each child what I am doing ... I am writing a story about your class - and I need your help. I am going to ask you all sorts of things about your class.

1. Ask each child to draw something they like to do at school.  
(Perhaps read a story to stimulate ideas...)
  - (a) Draw what you like to do in your classroom
  - (b) Is there something you don't like about school?  
Draw a picture of this ...
2. Do you get to choose what you can do in your class?  
(encourage the child to talk about this)
3. What sorts of things do you do in your class?  
(elaborate)
  - \* When do you do ...
  - \* Who do you work with?
  - \* What areas do you work in?
  - \* Who do you most like to work with?
4. Do the pre-primary and Year 1 children do the same things at school?
5. What is the most important thing about school?
6. What is the most important thing your teacher expects you to know?  
What is the most important thing your teacher expects you to do?
7. Who is in charge of your classroom?
8. What does your teacher do in the classroom?
9. Who else works in your classroom?  
What do they do?
10. Do mums'... dads'... and other visitors help in your class?  
What do they do?

11. Do you have rules in your class?  
What are they?
12. (Use photographs/pictures for situation recall) .. to talk about specific times of the day and the different areas within the classroom.
  - ie.
    - \* What do you do during 'activity time'?
    - \* Where do you have 'activities'?
    - \* Who do you like to be with during activity time?

Also, discuss

  - \* mat-time
  - \* circle time
  - \* freeplay
  - \* recess/lunch
  - ie.
    - What do you do?
    - When you have freeplay time
13. Who do you like to work with?
14. What sorts of things do you do when you 'work'?
15. Do the pre-primary and Year 1 children do the same amount of work?
16. Tell me about the things you do at school/in the classroom?
17. Tell me a story about your day at school.
  - ie.
    - What do you do at the beginning of the day in the morning through to the middle of the day right up to the end of the day.

(\*\* The story-books would serve as a great stimulus...)
18. How do you know when you've done a good job or some good work in your class?

\* *story-books used:*

Radford, D. (1993) *First days at school*. London : Walker Books Ltd  
Sumiko (1983). *My school*. London : A Picture Corgi.

## **Appendix C**

### **Covering letter for study (sent to Principal)**

Edith Cowan University  
Pearson Street  
CHURCHLANDS WA 6018

10 February, 1995

Dear Principal

I am currently enrolled in the Bachelor of Education Honours programme at Edith Cowan University. As part of this course, and with the assistance of my supervisor, Associate Professor Collette Tayler, I am conducting a research project on children's perceptions of tasks, structure, routines, and roles in a multi-age class (P-1).

A situational case-study will be prepared, focusing on six children from a multi-age class. The data collection used in this study will be based on observations, informal interviews with the target children and discussions with the class teacher. It is estimated that the data will be collected over a 12 week period.

It would be much appreciated if I could arrange an interview time with you, to discuss the possibility of collecting my data from your school. I will contact you by phone next week to arrange an interview time.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Anne Yeoward

## Appendix D

### **Covering letter for study (Parents/Guardian) with signed agreement form**

Edith Cowan University  
Pearson Street  
CHURCHLANDS WA 6018

1 May 1995

Dear Parents/Guardian

I am a student from Edith Cowan University and I will be conducting a research project on the children's views of multi-age grouping (P-1) at your child's school. This research will involve observing the children within the classroom environment and asking them questions about their everyday experiences at school. How young children think about their daily life in a multi-age grouped classroom could supply valuable information for those studying children's development and learning.

To help me analyse the data I collect, the children's dialogue from observations and interviews will be recorded. The dialogue of six children will be selected for closer study.

Please be reassured that all information gathered will be confidential and the children I speak to will remain anonymous. I will be happy to answer any queries that you have. Please read the accompanying permission slip and sign it so I can commence the project knowing you have no objections. I will assume that a non return of the permission slip will be considered an acceptance.

For any more information about this study , please contact your child's class teacher, myself or my supervisor, Associate Professor Collette Tayler at Edith Cowan University, Tel 273 8401.

Yours faithfully

Anne Yeoward

**SIGNED AGREEMENT**

I ..... have read the information provided and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree/do not agree that my child ..... may be observed and asked questions about their daily experiences within the P-1 classroom (please circle the appropriate word).

I agree/do not agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided that my child is not identifiable.

Participant's Parent/Guardian:.....

Investigator:.....

Date: .....

Please return completed form to your child's class teacher by 15 May 1995.

Thank you

## **Appendix E**

### **A.E.C.A. Code of Ethics**

#### **AUSTRALIAN EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSOCIATION**

#### **CODE OF ETHICS**

##### **1. IN RELATION TO CHILDREN, I WILL:**

1. Acknowledge the uniqueness and potential of each child.
2. Recognise early childhood as a unique and valuable stage of life and accept that each phase within early childhood is important in its own right.
3. Honour the child's right to play, in acknowledgment of the major contribution of play to development.
4. Enhance each child's strengths, competence and self esteem.
5. Ensure that my work with children is based on their interests and needs and lets them know they have a contribution to make.
6. Recognise that young children are vulnerable and use my influence and power in their best interests.
7. Create and maintain safe healthy settings that enhance children's autonomy, initiative, and self worth and respect their dignity.
8. Help children learn to interact effectively, and in doing so to learn to balance their own rights, needs and feelings with those of others.
9. Base my work with children on the best theoretical and practical knowledge about early childhood as well as on particular knowledge of each child's development.
10. Respect the special relationship between children and their families and incorporate this perspective in all my interactions with children.
11. Work to ensure that young children are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, age, race, religion, language, ability, culture, or national origin.
12. Acknowledge the worth of the cultural and linguistic diversity that children bring to the environment.



13. Engage only in practices that are respectful of and provide security for children and in no way degrade, endanger, exploit, intimidate, or harm them psychologically or physically.
14. Ensure that my practices reflect consideration of the child's perspective.

## **2. IN RELATION TO FAMILIES, I WILL:**

1. Encourage families to share their knowledge of their child with me and reciprocate by sharing my knowledge of children in general with parents so that there is mutual growth and understanding in ways that benefit the child.
2. Strive to develop positive relationships with families that are based on mutual trust and open communication.
3. Engage in shared decision making with families.
4. Acknowledge families' existing strengths and competence as a basis for supporting them in their task of nurturing their child.
5. Acknowledge the uniqueness of each family and the significance of its culture, customs, language and beliefs.
6. Maintain confidentiality.
7. Respect the right of the family to privacy
8. Consider situations from each family's perspective, especially if differences or tensions arise.
9. Assist each family to develop a sense of belonging to the services in which their child participates.
10. Acknowledge that each family is affected by the community context in which it operates.

## **3. IN RELATION TO COLLEAGUES, I WILL:**

1. Support and assist colleagues in their professional development.
2. Work with my colleagues to maintain and improve the standard of service provided in my work place.
3. Promote policies and working conditions that are non-discriminatory and that foster competence, well-being and positive self esteem.

4. Acknowledge and support the use of the personal and professional strengths which my colleagues bring to the work place.
5. Work to build an atmosphere of trust, respect and candour by:
  - encouraging openness and tolerance between colleagues
  - accepting their right to hold different points of view
  - using constructive methods of conflict resolution, and
  - maintaining appropriate confidentiality.
6. Acknowledge the worth of the cultural and linguistic diversity which may colleagues bring to the work place.
7. Encourage my colleagues to accept and adhere to this Code.

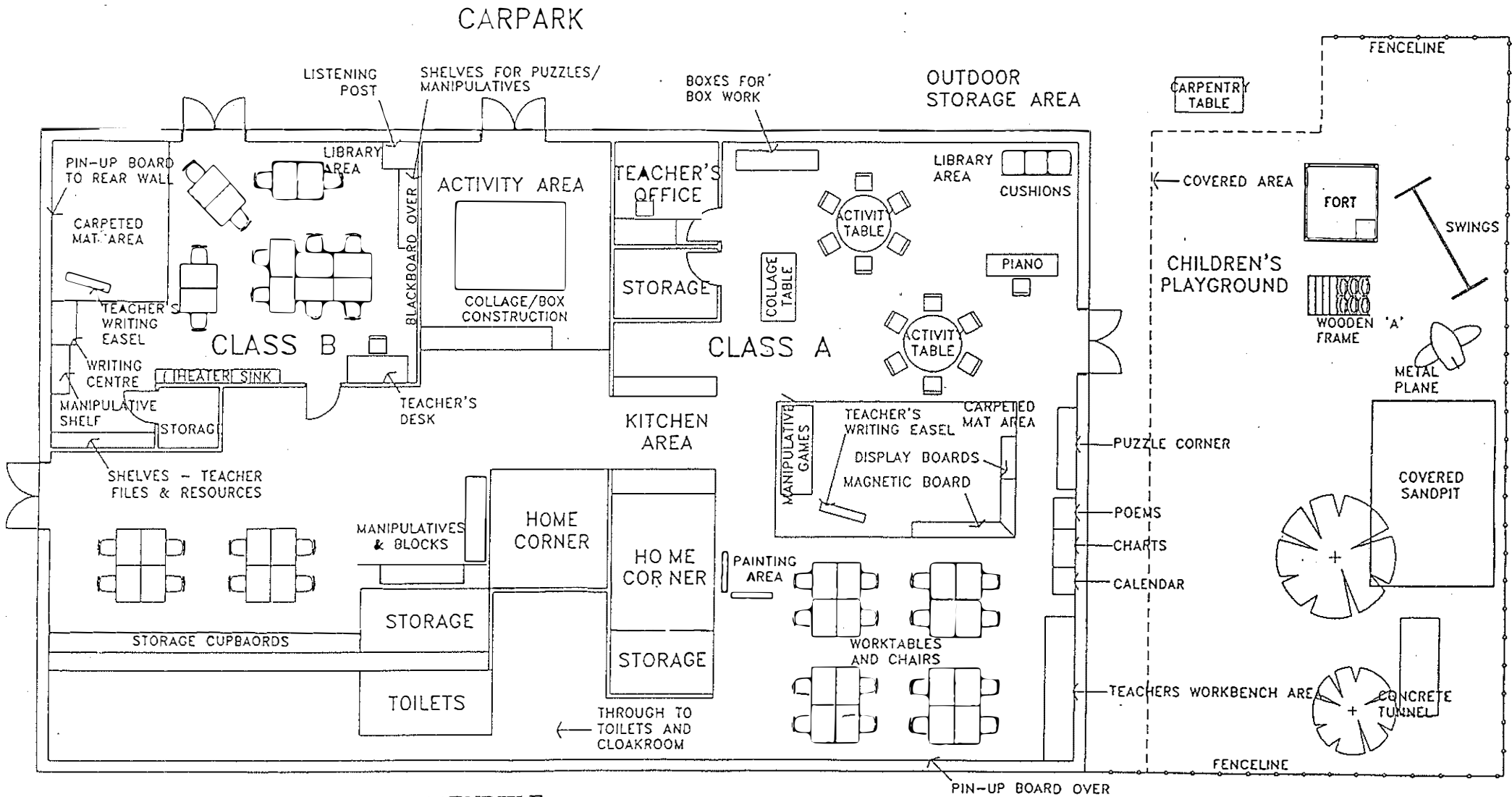
#### **4. IN RELATION TO THE COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY, I WILL:**

1. Provide programs which are responsive to community needs.
2. Support the development and implementation of laws and policies that promote the well-being of children and families and that are responsive to community needs.
3. Be familiar with and abide by laws and policies that relate to my work.
4. Work to change laws and policies that interfere with the well-being of children.
5. Promote cooperation among all agencies and professions working in the best interests of young children and families.
6. Promote children's best interests through community education and advocacy.

#### **5. IN RELATION TO MYSELF AS A PROFESSIONAL, I WILL:**

1. Update and improve my expertise and practice in the early childhood field continually through formal and informal professional development.
2. Engage in critical self-reflection and seek input from colleagues.
3. Communicate with and consider the views of my colleagues in the early childhood profession and other professions.

4. Support research to strengthen and expand the knowledge base of early childhood and, where possible initiate, contribute to and facilitate such research.
5. Work within the limits of my professional role and avoid misrepresentation of my professional competence and qualifications.
6. Work to complement and support the child rearing function of the family.
7. Be an advocate for young children, early childhood services, and my profession.
8. Recognise the particular importance of formal qualifications in early childhood studies, along with personal characteristics and experience, for those who work in the early childhood profession.
9. Act in the community in ways that enhance the standing of the profession.



**CLASS LAYOUT**  
SCALE 1:100

**APPENDIX F**  
**Class layout and playground area**  
**(Class A & B)**

Appendix G

Class A Timetable

TIMETABLE CLASS A

(Term 1 - 1995)

TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
					Staff Meet
8.55	Activity Time	Activity Time	ASSEMBLY	Activity Time	9.15 Activity Time
9.40	Pack Away	Pack Away	9.30 Activity Time	Pack Away	
			10.00 Pack Away	Oral Language	
9.50	Oral Language	Oral Language			Pack Away
10.10	RECESS	RECESS	RECESS	RECESS	RECESS
10.30	Language	Language	Language	Language	Language
11.15	P.P. Outdoors	P.P. Outdoors	P.P. Outdoors	P.P. Outdoors	P.P. Outdoors
11.25	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths 11.50	Maths 11.50
11.50	Music (yr 1's)	H/writing yr 1's	11.50 PP Music Yr 1's H/writing		
12.20	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
1.00	Silent Reading Health	Silent Reading Social Studies	Writing	Writing Yr 1s	Science
1.15			Community Library	PP & yr 1's to library (change books)	
2.45	Literature	Art	Phys Ed	Music  2.30 Literature (Video)	Sport

## Appendix H

### Class B Timetable

#### TIMETABLE CLASS B

(Term 1 - 1995)

TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8.55 - 9.30	Activity time	Activity Time	Assembly	Activity Time	Staff Meeting
9.30-9.45	Oral Sharing	Oral Sharing	Oral News telling	Oral Sharing	Activity time
9.45 - 10.10 10.10 - 10.30	Phonological Awareness	Phonological Awareness	Phonological Awareness	Word Study	Activity time
10.30 - 11.15	Language Activities	Language Activities	Language Activities	Language Activities	Language Activities
11.15-11.40	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths
11.40 - 11.50	Literature	Literature	Literature	Literature	Literature
11.50 - 3.10	11.50-12.20 Music	11.50-12.20 Handwriting	11.50-12.20 Handwriting	P/E Outdoor	Literature
	1.00 - 1.15 Silent Reading 1.15-1.45 Handwriting 1.45-2.45 Health 2.34-3.00 Literature	1.00-1.15 Silent Reading  1.15-2.15 Social Studies  2.15-3.00 Art/Craft	1.00-2.00 Science 1.30-2.00 Library Community Library  2.00-3.00 Creative Writing	1.00-2.00 Creative Writing  2.00-2.30 Music  2.30-3.00 Literature TV Video	1.00-1.15 Silent Reading  1.15-2.00 Creative Writing Drama
3.00 - 3.10	Classroom Clean up	Classroom Clean up	Literature	Literature	Sport




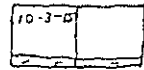











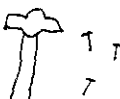
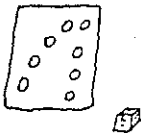
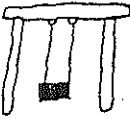


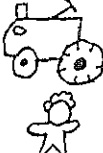

## Appendix I

### Timetable Class A & B (designed by Teacher A and B during the later part of researcher's observation period)

TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8.55	Journal writing	Journal writing	Assembly	Journal	Staff Meeting Late start
9.15	Activity time	Activity time	Activity time	Activity time	Activity time
9.50	Pack away	and oral	sharing		
10.10	RECESS	RECESS	RECESS	RECESS	RECESS
10.30	Language	Language	Language	Language	Language
11.20					
11.50	Pre-primaries to Year 1's	go home handwriting	Social Studies		
12.20	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH	LUNCH
1.00	Silent	Reading			
2.00	Music	Phys Ed	Movement singing, sharing games	Buddying	Sport
3.10	Home	Home	Home	Home	Home

## ACTIVITY TIME

Appendix J

<p>painting</p> 	<p>draw/sketch</p> 	<p>blocks</p> 	<p>blackboard</p> 	<p>sewing</p> 	<p>computer</p> 
<p>home corner</p> 	<p>books</p> 	<p>play dough</p> 	<p>collage</p> 	<p>puppets</p> 	<p>research</p> 
<p>water</p> 	<p>writing</p> 	<p>puzzles</p> 	<p>tinkering</p> 	<p>board games</p> 	<p>outside games</p> 
<p>sand</p> 	<p>making</p> 	<p>toys</p> 	<p>dress ups</p> 		

Activity worksheet record (Class A)



## **Appendix K**

### **Participant's writing and drawing samples.**

- Each participant was asked to draw something they liked to do at school and then something they did not like to do at school. This procedure was used to assist the researcher in understanding each participant's general perception of their school/classroom(s).
- Each participant was asked to tell a story about their day at school (refer to Appendix B). Some of the participants decided to illustrate this, asking the researcher to scribe for them.
- \* The participant's names have been erased from the drawings to ensure anonymity.
- \* The drawings collected were reduced on the photo-copier to A4 size from A3 sized paper.

**Appendix K****PP.1: (i)**

A comment describing what this participant likes to do at school.

*I like to play with the playdough and puzzles.*

*Playdough is my best.*

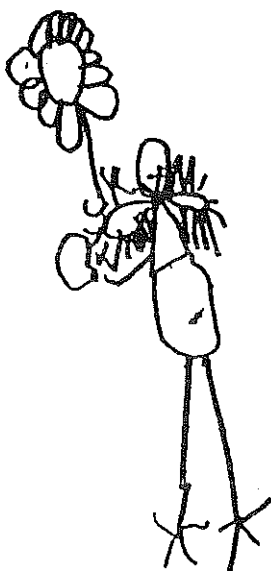


*I like to play with the  
playdough and puzzles.  
Playdough is my best.*

PP.1: (ii)

A comment describing what this participant does not like at his home.  
He indicated that he liked everything at school.

*I like to do everything at school but I don't like hanging out the washing at home.*



I like to do everything  
at school but I don't like  
hanging out the washing  
at home.

**Appendix K****PP.1: (iii)**

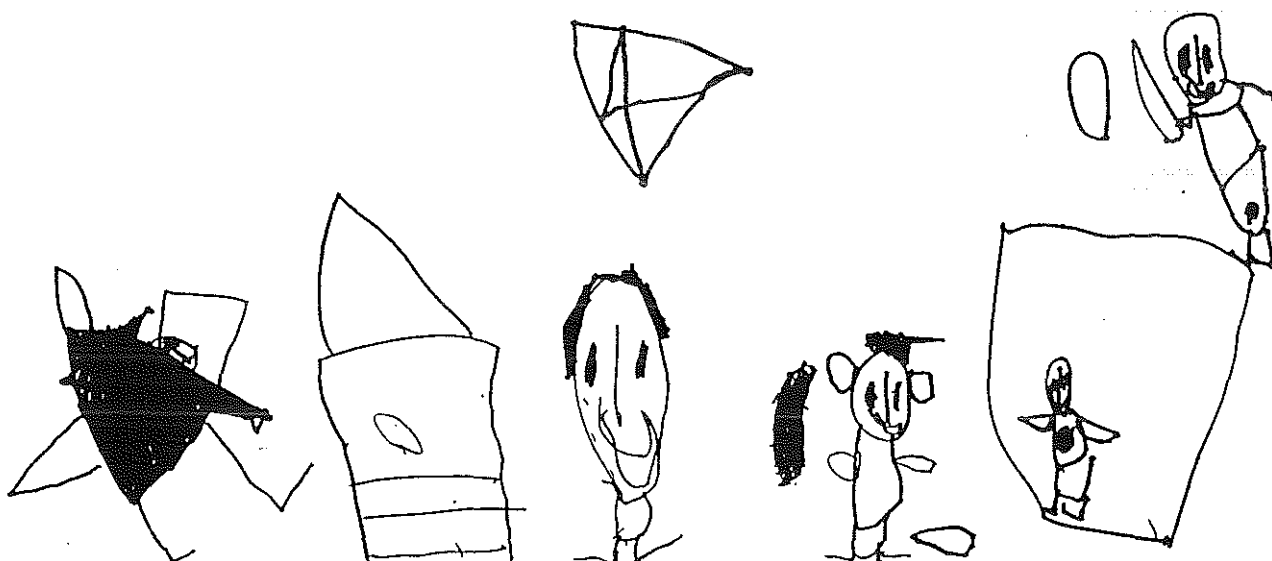
**A story of PP.1's day at school (no drawing was made with this story).**

**The researcher asked PP.1 what he does at school. PP.1 told a story which the researcher wrote down (no drawing was made with this story). PP.1 decided to draw a picture (with story) of 'his day at school' at a later stage of the informal interview. This has been recorded in section iv (p.137).**

*When I get to school I put my bag on the boxes. Then I sit on the mat. I sit nicely and then I get a sticker or a faction point. I go out to play and I play with Gareth when he is here. (He is home sick now).*

**Appendix K****PP.1: (iv)****Drew a picture describing what happens during a day at school  
(descriptions L-R sequence)**

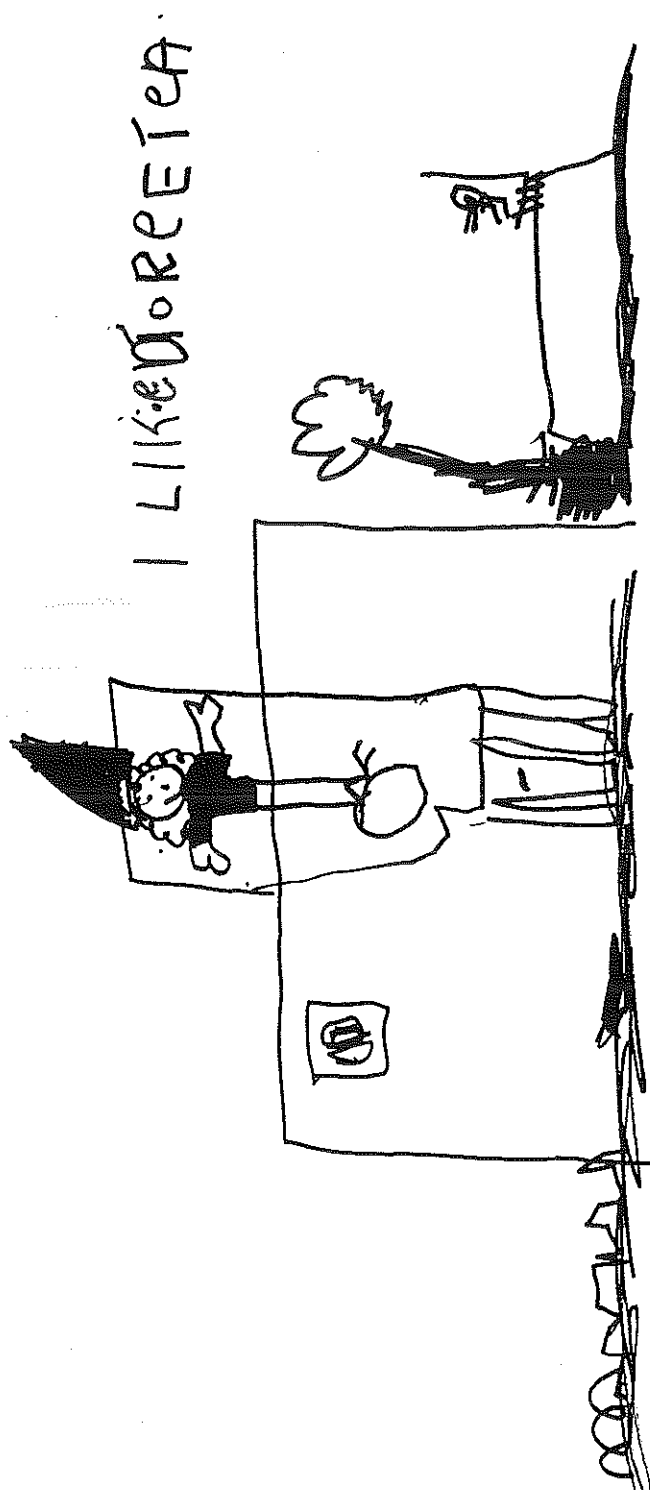
- *I am walking to school*
- *This is my school*
- *This is my teacher*
- *I am playing with playdough*
- *I am sitting on the mat*
- *I am catching a football*
- *Now I go home.*



## Appendix K

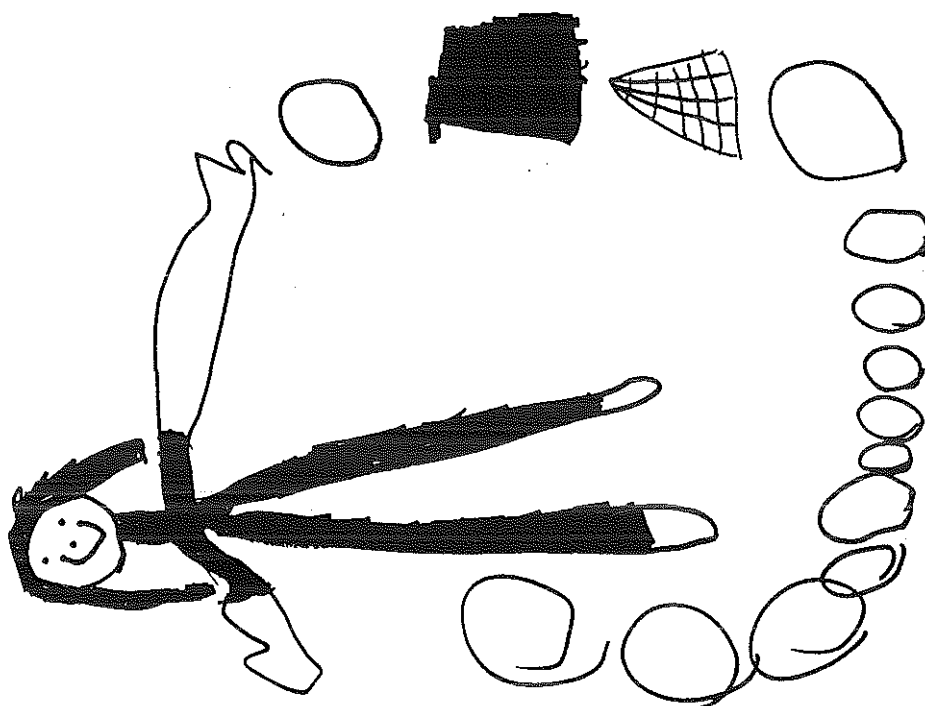
PP.2: (i)

A comment describing what this participant likes to do at school.

*I like writing at school.**I like writing at school.*

**Appendix K****PP.2: (ii)****Drew a picture and told the researcher a story about her school day.**

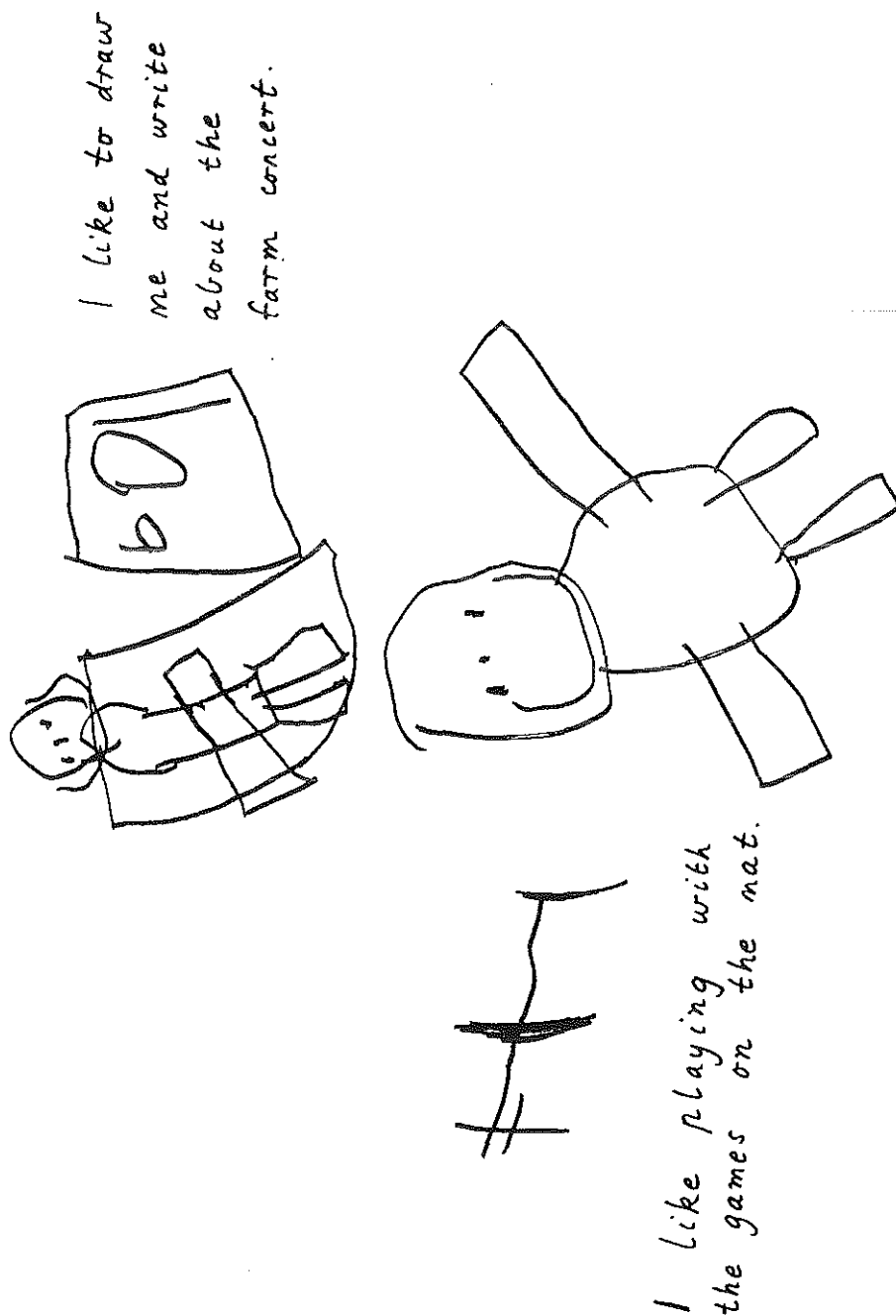
*My sister is watching me go to school. I am at school and I am having fun playing on the slides, climbing thing and tunnel outside.*



## Appendix K

PP.4: (i)

A comment describing what this participant likes to do at school.

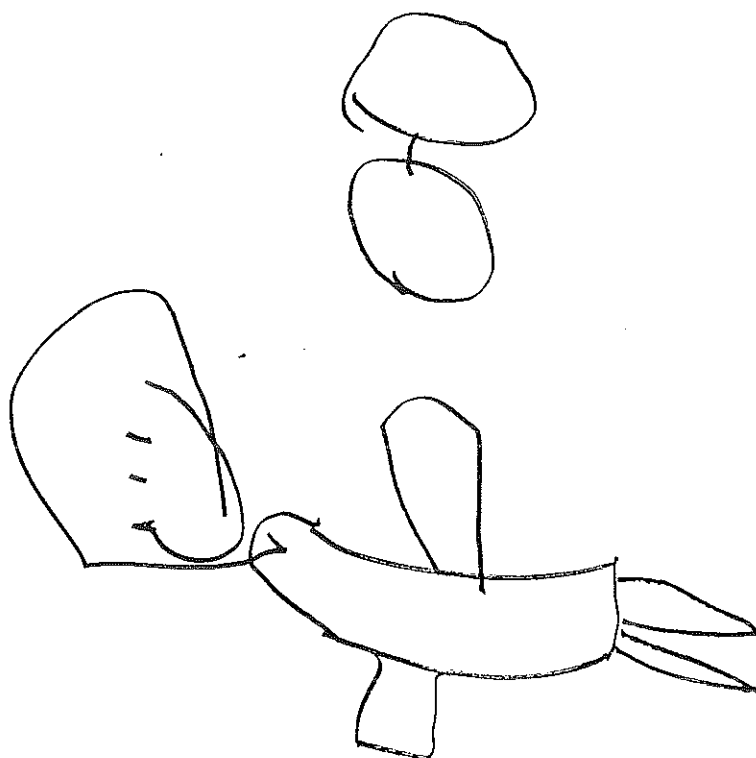
*I like playing with the games on the mat.**I like to draw me and write about the farm concert.*



**Appendix K****PP.4: (ii)**

**A comment describing what this participant does not like at school.**

*I don't like the listening post at school.*



*I don't like the  
listening post at  
school.*

**Appendix K****Y1.A: (i)****A comment describing what this participant likes to do at school.***I like most about school drawing and writing.*

I like most about  
School drawing and writing

## Appendix K

Y1.A: (ii)

A comment describing what this participant does not like at school.

*I don't like about school is the puppet theatre.*

I dont like about  
scool the puppet theatre.

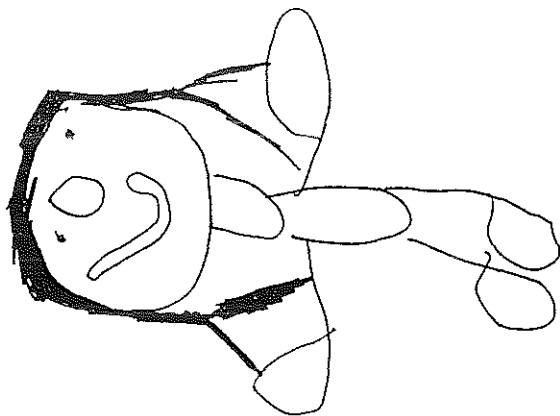
Appendix K

Y1.A: (iii)

Drew a picture and wrote a story about her day at school.

*I played with Denise and Zoe and Marisa. I like to play with the playdough.*

I played with Denise and Zoe and Marisa  
I like to play with the playdough



## Appendix K

Y1.B: (i)

A comment describing what this participant likes to do at school.

*I like playing in the home-corner and I like playing and writing.*

I Like Play in the  
Home Corner and I  
Like playing  
and writing



**Appendix K****YLB: (ii)****A comment describing what this participant does not like at school.***I don't like hard work, like hard maths.*

I don't like hard  
work like hard  
maths

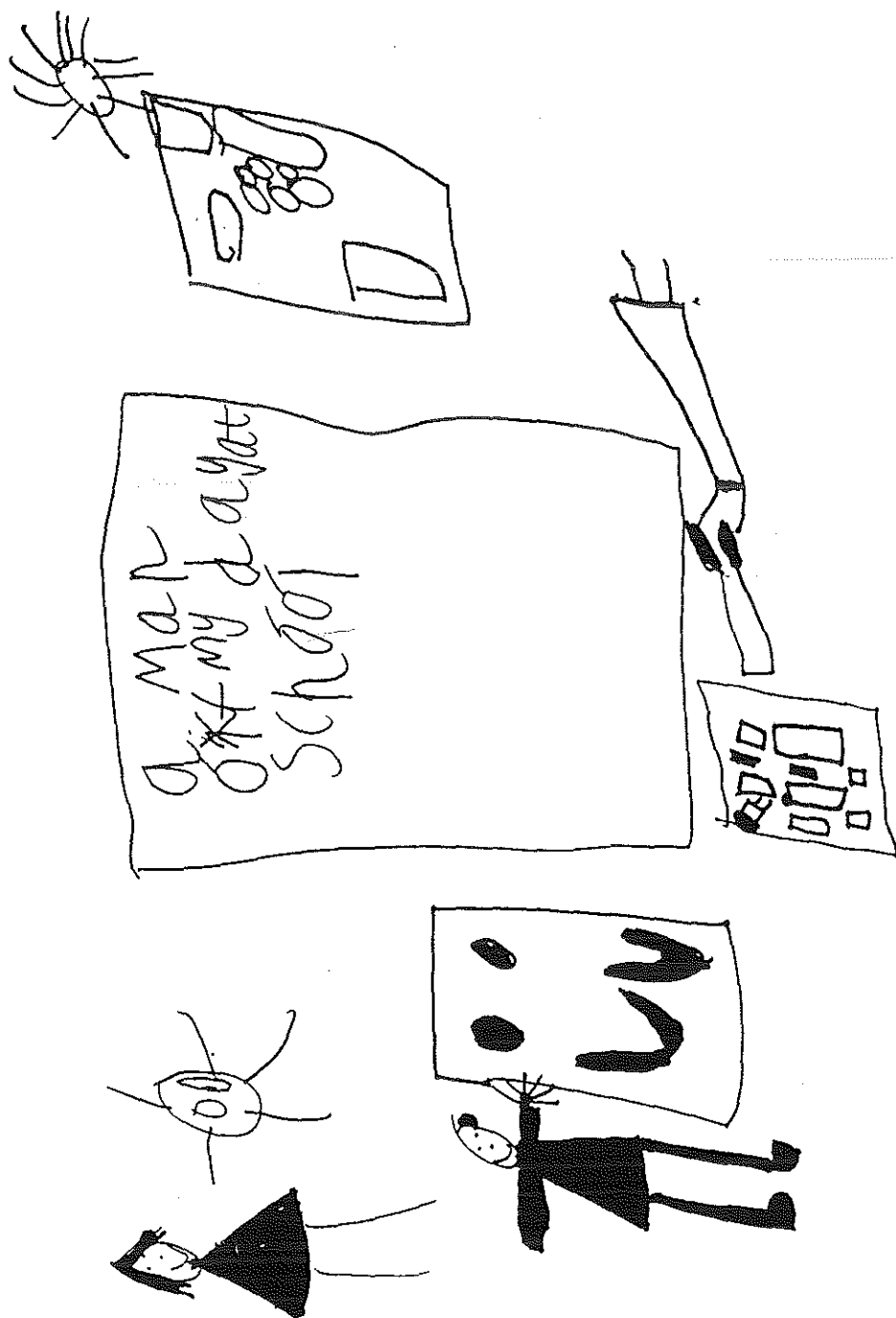
## Appendix K

Y1.B: (iii)

Drew a 'story map' describing a day at school (Y1.B suggested that a 'story map' would be the best way to describe this).

(descriptions L-R sequence)

- *I am playing with playdough*
- *I am playing with puzzles*
- *I am playing on the caterpillar outside*
- *I am playing outside in the tunnel.*



Appendix K

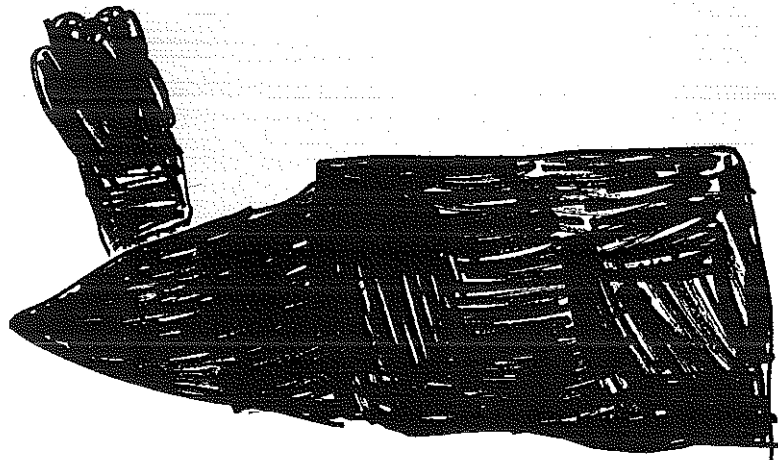
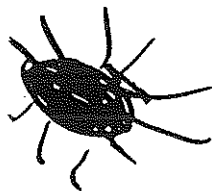
Y1.C: (i)

A comment describing what this participant likes to do at school

*When I write it is really fun.*

*Do you know why?*

*It is really fun.*



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Dr oo now

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it e r e l e  
fu n

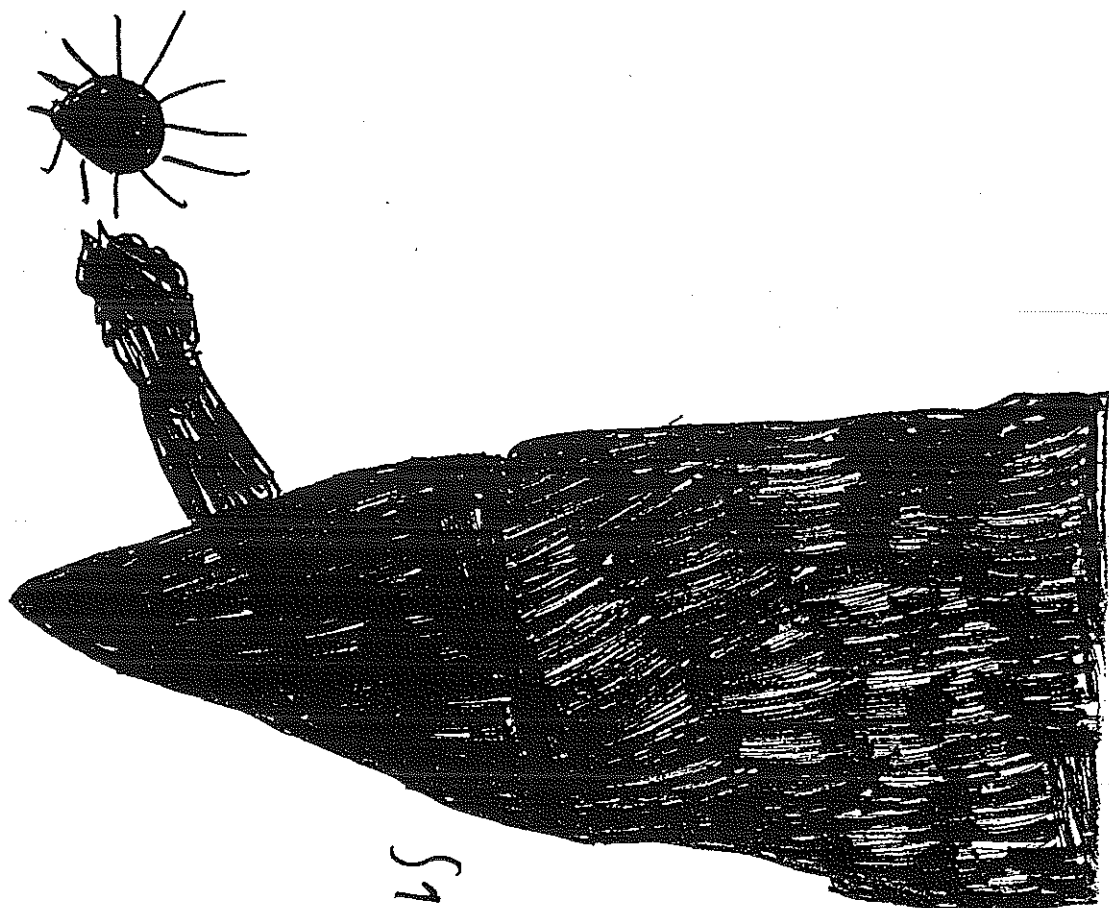


Appendix K

Y1.C: (ii)

A comment describing what this participant does not like at school

*I don't like fighting, it is too dangerous.  
Do you know someone can get hurt?*



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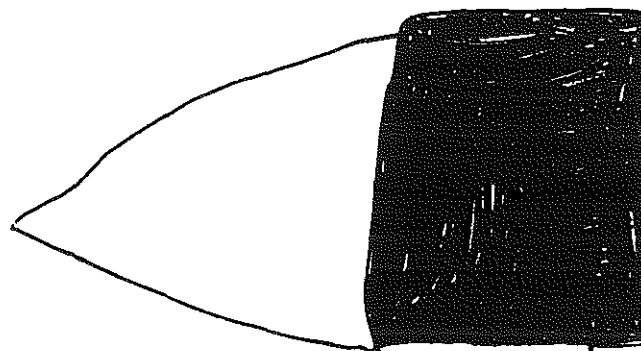
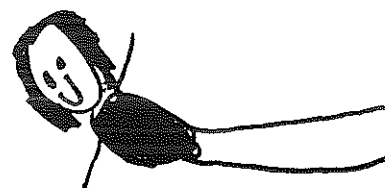
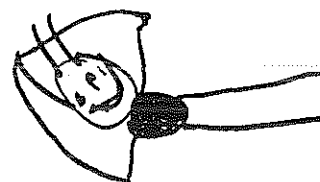
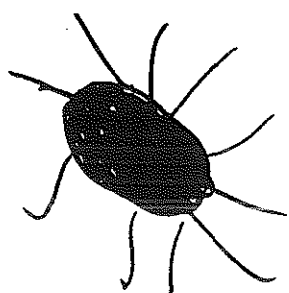
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**Appendix K****Y1.C: (iii)****Drew a picture and told the researcher a story about his school day.**

*I am at school with my teacher and my friends,  
I am playing outside and I am happy.*



## Appendix L

### Classroom discipline plan - Teacher A

## CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE PLAN TO PARENTS

Year: P-1

Teachers Name: **Teacher A**

It is with pleasure I welcome your child to my class. In order to provide my students with the excellent educational climate they deserve I have developed the following classroom plan that will be in effect at all times.

Would you kindly review it with your child before signing and returning the form below.

Signed:

Class Teacher

## Behaviour Rules For My Classroom

1. Listen carefully
2. Follow directions
3. Work quietly. Do not disturb others who are working
4. Respect others. Be kind with your words and actions
5. Respect school and your own property

## Discipline Plan For My Classroom

When a student breaks a rule:

1st time	Name on the board	-	WARNING
2nd time	X	-	Time out (sitting away from others)
3rd time	XX	-	Exclusion from pleasurable activities
4th time	XXX	-	{Note sent home
5th time	XXXX	-	{Parent interview
Severe clause	Time out (5 minutes) ask if child wants to return to group.		

### Positive Consequences I Use When My Students Behave

Faction points,	Stickers and stamps,
Extra responsibility	(eg. take a message), Honour Certificates, Praise

## Classroom Discipline Plan - AFTER SCHOOL DETENTION

Parent contact is required when detention is to exceed:	P to 3	- 10 minutes
	3 to 7	- 15 minutes

\*\*\*\*\* IF NO CONTACT IS MADE BEFORE SCHOOL CLOSES

Detain to limit and send child home with a "NOTICE OF AFTER SCHOOL DETENTION".

Any child receiving In-School or Out-of-School Suspension will automatically forfeit the right to participate in the end of term excursion. There is to be no carry over from one term to the next.

RETURN TO TEACHER - from Parent(s)

I/We have read your Classroom Discipline Plan and discussed it with my/our child.

Parent(s)/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Childs Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS:

## Appendix M

### Classroom discipline plan - Teacher B

#### CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE PLAN TO PARENTS

Year: P-1

Teachers Name: **Teacher B**

It is with pleasure I welcome your child to my class. In order to provide my students with the excellent educational climate they deserve I have developed the following classroom plan that will be in effect at all times.

Would you kindly review it with your child before signing and returning the form below.

Signed:

Class Teacher

#### Behaviour Rules For My Classroom

1. Listen carefully
2. Follow directions
3. Work quietly, do not disturb others who are working
4. Respect others. Be kind with your words and actions
5. Respect school and personal property.

#### Discipline Plan For My Classroom

When a student breaks a rule:

1st time	Name on the board	-	WARNING
2nd time	X	-	Time out - (sitting away from other children)
3rd time	XX	-	Exclusion from reward
4th time	XXX	-	Detention at play and lunch times
5th time	XXXX	-	Detention after school

#### Positive Consequences I Use When My Students Behave

Faction points, stickers, stamps, honour certificates and extra responsibilities (eg. - message taking)

#### Classroom Discipline Plan - AFTER SCHOOL DETENTION

Parent contact is required when detention is to exceed:

P to 3	- 10 minutes
3 to 7	- 15 minutes

\*\*\*\*\* IF NO CONTACT IS MADE BEFORE SCHOOL CLOSES

Detain to limit and send child home with a "NOTICE OF AFTER SCHOOL DETENTION".

Any child receiving In-School or Out-of-School Suspension will automatically forfeit the right to participate in the end of term excursion. There is to be no carry over from one term to the next.

.....  
RETURN TO TEACHER - from Parent(s)

I/We have read your Classroom Discipline Plan and discussed it with my/our child.

Parent(s)/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Childs Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS:

Appendix N  
Classroom discipline plan - Teacher C

CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE PLAN TO PARENTS

Year: P-1

Teachers Name: **Teacher C**

It is with pleasure I welcome your child to my class. In order to provide my students with the excellent educational climate they deserve I have developed the following classroom plan that will be in effect at all times.

Would you kindly review it with your child before signing and returning the form below.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Class Teacher

Behaviour Rules For My Classroom

1.

When a big person is talking stop and listen

2.

Do not call out

3.

Always do your very best work

Discipline Plan For My Classroom

When a student breaks a rule:

1st time

Name on the board

-

WARNING

2nd time

X

-

tick on blackboard

3rd time

XX

-

tick on blackboard

4th time

XXX

-

when three ticks children have time out in classroom corner

Severe clause

Time out (5 minutes) ask if child wants to return to group.

Positive Consequences I Use When My Students Behave

Praise, stickers, stamps,

Children given special rewards

-

"Star of the day" award.

Praise is a constant part of the days proceedings.

Classroom Discipline Plan - AFTER SCHOOL DETENTION

Parent contact is required when detention is to exceed: P to 3 - 10 minutes  
3 to 7 - 15 minutes

\*\*\*\*\* IF NO CONTACT IS MADE BEFORE SCHOOL CLOSES

Detain to limit and send child home with a "NOTICE OF AFTER SCHOOL DETENTION".

Any child receiving In-School or Out-of-School Suspension will automatically forfeit the right to participate in the end of term excursion. There is to be no carry over from one term to the next.

RETURN TO TEACHER - from Parent(s)

I/We have read your Classroom Discipline Plan and discussed it with my/our child.

Parent(s)/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Childs Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS: