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School staff positions on P1 composite classes

Elizabeth Stamopoulous
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School Staff Positions on P1

Composite Classes

Elizabeth Stamopoulous

Dip.T., B.Ed., M.Ed.

A Thesis Submitted for the Fulfilment of the
Requirements of the Award of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences

Edith Cowan University

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

(iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature

Date 10th December, 2001
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To my husband Kon, my children, John, Stan and Paul, my parents Stan and Nina, and my sister Rosalyn, my sincere gratitude for their patience and assistance in helping me reach my personal goal.
As a result of a government strategic decision in 1995, a new formation (the PI class) has emerged in Western Australian primary schools and its implementation is now set to accelerate across the state. Unlike multi-age groupings, PI is constructed when there are insufficient numbers of children to run straight pre-primary classes. School staff responsible for developing PI classes have raised a number of concerns. For example, the basis on which PI curriculum is to be built has yet to be promulgated. Also, a formal process for dealing with the ideological differences with respect to pre-primary and primary education has not been articulated. A further concern centres on the exclusion of the early childhood professional community from the decision to introduce PI. As educationists and the community look towards government and employers for guidance and direction, school staff are already involved in the task of constructing, implementing and evaluating PI classes.

The stance that school staff adopt towards PI will be critical to its success or failure. This study investigates that stance in terms of the conceptual and behavioural position developed by school staff involved in PI. It does so from a symbolic interactionist perspective.

Data for the study came predominantly from interviews with six principals, fifteen teachers and ten teacher-aides at three government and three independent primary schools. Further data was collected from classroom observations, informal conversations with school staff and document analysis.

An analysis of this data identified self-interest and educational ideology as powerful influences on the way school staff defined PI. Different definitions of the PI situation led to the construction of different modes of accommodation. For example, a supportive stance was adopted when PI was seen to enhance staff self-interest and student learning; an oppositional stance predominated when PI was seen to impede staff self-interest and student learning. Overall, the findings of the study indicate that PI's future success is conditional on the provision of educational leadership, appropriately trained staff, mechanisms for resolving philosophical differences, PI curriculum, guidelines, and quality support structures.
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INTRODUCTION

The last two decades of the 20th century witnessed a series of worldwide educational reforms aimed at producing more economically competitive workplaces. Macro socio-economic changes, restructuring, international competitiveness, deregulation of the economy, increased political control and a worldwide economic recession form an integral part of these reforms. Increasingly prevalent is the push for improved productivity using fewer resources. In the education sector, the desire for increased productivity and improved student learning has led to numerous innovations in the areas of school development, curriculum development, teacher development and community development.

Worldwide changes have impacted on all levels of education, including early childhood. Traditionally isolated from other sectors of education, early childhood is now being thrust increasingly into the primary school sector. A global trend towards mixed age class groupings (MAG) has led, in some places, to the combination of early childhood and primary school students. Multi-age groupings (MAG) involve a deliberate mixing of age and year levels for pedagogical reasons. By contrast, multigrade classes are formed for economic or administrative reasons and involve children from two or more year levels being taught separately and presented with year-specific curricular (Veenman, 1996). It is important to differentiate between both approaches as “multigrade classes are formed out of necessity; multi-age classes are formed deliberately for their perceived educational benefits” (Veenman, 1995, p. 319).

Both internationally and nationally, there have been instances of mandated policies or directives specific to MAG and multigrade groupings being imposed on schools with little guidance, support or preparation and with few resources or expert personnel, time or space. In Britain, as early as the 1980s multigrade classes were
introduced when declining student numbers compelled schools to admit four-year-old children into the same class as infant school children. According to British studies, unresolved philosophical differences, along with curriculum, staffing and resource issues impeded the inclusion of younger children into infant school settings. Concerns were raised about the type of curriculum offered to four year old children and the unrealistic expectations placed on teachers to simultaneously provide an appropriate education for four year old children and children of compulsory school-age in the one classroom. (Bennett & Kell, 1990; Cleave & Brown, 1982; Ghaye & Pascal, 1990; National Association of Head Teachers’ Early Years Conference, 1986, cited by Sharp, 1988; Stevenson, 1987).

The literature clearly outlines differences between early childhood and primary education and the inappropriate practices that emerge when policy makers and school staff move away from the basic developmental needs of young children, towards more formal curriculum driven approaches (Bennett & Kell, 1990; Corrie, 1999a; Elkind, 1986; Goldstein, 1997; Hitz & Wright, 1988; Kamii, 1985; Roper, 1987; Sava, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1988; Wein, 1995). For these reasons, many educationists cast doubt on the ability of school staff to incorporate early childhood philosophy into primary school settings (Bloch, 1987; Goldstein, 1997; Miller, 1991; Tayler, 1996). According to Goldstein (1997), “both in practice and in theory the goals of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) and elementary schooling seem mutually incompatible” (p. 24). In fact, Goldstein also questioned whether developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) would ever find its way into schools and whether “the field of early childhood education will redraw its boundaries and abandon the kindergartners, first graders, and second graders housed in elementary schools?” (p. 25). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) acknowledged differences in philosophy and curriculum, recommending they be dealt with swiftly because academic curricula did not always support MAG and multigrade groupings. Both internationally and nationally, differing philosophical beliefs and curriculum practices between the early childhood and primary sectors have long been a site of contestation and resistance to government takeovers (Bloch, 1987; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Mosley, & Fleege, 1993; Elkind, 1993; Fishhaut & Pastor, 1977; Hirsh-Pasek, 1991, Meisels, 1992, Miller, 1991; Stamopoulos, 1998; Tayler, 1996).
At present, innovative groupings such as MAG and multigrade are accentuating such differences and prioritising the need for comprehensive evaluations. A Swedish study (Sundell, 1994b) on mixed-age classes, for example, found that a large age span does not improve children’s socio-emotional development and learning. Sundell warned of the dangers of implementing changes prior to comprehensive evaluations of theories: "If this result is confirmed in future research, the introduction of mixed-age classes in Swedish nursery schools and compulsory schools exemplifies the dangers of instructional recommendations based on untested theories and extrapolations from personal experiences" (1994b, p. 390). In Australia, The Senate Inquiry into Early Childhood Education (1996, p. 101) not only prioritised the need for thorough evaluations of mixed-age grouping but called for an examination of its effects on teachers. It urged that the "evaluation of pilot schemes look closely at the impact of multi-age classes on teachers and the implications for professional development, classroom support, resource allocation and training". The Senate Inquiry singled out the perceptions of teachers as an integral part of the change process.

Currently in Western Australian schools the early childhood profession is facing profound educational change, as a result of changes to classroom combinations. One of these is an innovation called ‘P1’, which involves grouping pre-primary and year one students in the one class. Unlike other composite primary year classes, P1 demands an amalgamation of early childhood and primary curriculum, practice and philosophy. To date, the basis on which P1 curriculum and pedagogy can be built has not yet been explored. Nor has a formal process been articulated for dealing with the ideological differences and beliefs that exist in schools with respect to early childhood and primary education.

P1 constitutes a new arena for the study of contestation between early childhood and primary school stakeholders. To date, no studies have been located that examine the position school staff construct with respect to P1. The exclusion of the early childhood professional community from the decision-making process has prioritised the need for evaluation of P1’s construction and implementation. As indispensable agents of change, school staff are capable at will, of enhancing or obstructing its success. The way they define this organisational change, their mode of
accommodation and ultimate stance, will be critical to its success or failure. It is therefore important to clarify the origins of P1 and map the context in which it was introduced.

THE BACKGROUND LEADING TO P1 CLASSES IN WA

Kindergarten organisations were first established in all mainland capital cities of Australia between the years 1895 and 1910. They were privately run centres under the leadership of kindergarten directors who trained and worked primarily in the field of early childhood education\(^1\) (ECE). The kindergarten director’s role was that of an educator in charge of assistant teachers, student teachers and young children. The director instructed children in the mornings and conducted home visits and parent meetings in the afternoon. The Australian community perceived kindergarten as a separate entity to public schooling and strongly supported its independent existence.

In 1912 government attempts to incorporate kindergartens within the public school sector failed. Supported by strong community resistance to this intervention, Lillian de Lissa of the Kindergarten Union of South Australia addressed the Royal Commission in Education in 1912 to defend the need for autonomy. De Lissa opposed attempts by government to push for the inclusion of kindergartens into the public school sector because, “it (the Kindergarten Union) could do the job much cheaper than the public schools ‘because so much service is given in a missionary spirit’” (Weiss, 1989, p. 68).

The first successful government attempt to intervene in the kindergarten field began in 1938, when the government established Lady Gowrie Child centres in each Australian city. However, intervention was limited to these centres and did not penetrate into public schools. By the end of World War II, kindergartens were gaining increasing popularity with middle class parents. They were no longer perceived as having advantages only for disadvantaged children (Kerr, 1994; Piscitelli, McLean and Halliwell, 1992).

\(^{1}\) Early Childhood Education is the education and care of children between birth and eight years of age. It includes childcare, kindergarten, preschool, pre-primary, P1 classes and years one to three.
During the 1950s and 60s the WA government continued to pursue the notion of ownership. However, attempts to take over kindergartens and absorb teachers into the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) failed. In fact, strong resistance emerged on the ground that kindergartens were run differently to primary classes. The different philosophical beliefs and educational practices that characterised each field made it difficult to integrate kindergartens within the public school system (Kerr, 1994; Smart & Alderson, 1980). Until this time, kindergarten directors who trained and worked primarily in ECE ran kindergartens.

In 1972 the Nott Report provided the WA Government with the opportunity to successfully involve itself in ECE on a significant scale. This resulted in many kindergartens being administered by EDWA rather than the Kindergarten Association of WA. EDWA directed its principals to provide administrative and educational leadership and assistance to pre-primary teachers. Few principals, if any, had trained or worked in the early childhood field.

The Pre-School Education Board, its members and parent communities endeavoured to obstruct the intervention of government in early childhood education. Although, their efforts did not stop government intervention, it did slow down the intended take-over. For example, as a result of growing resistance, full responsibility for five-year-olds was not instigated until 1978 (Kerr, 1994). Even by 1979 there were still approximately 400 community-based kindergartens that had resisted transference to the Education Department. Opposition sprang from a concern that early childhood philosophy would be diluted once younger children were included in primary schools. Smart & Alderson (1980) elaborate:

> The fact that it took from 1972 to 1978 to implement this recommendation can at least, in part, be attributed to the resilient opposition mounted from within part of the kindergarten movement to what they saw as an assault on their independence and standards (p. 90)

During the 1980s further government developments emerged with the release of *Education in Western Australia* (Beazley, 1984). Although its focus was mainly the school sector, ramifications of the report’s recommendations permeated into the field of ECE. The Beazley Report was followed by *Better Schools in Western Australia: A Programme for Improvement* (Ministry of Education, 1987), which proposed
changes to the leadership duties of principals. The principal was to become administrator, manager, instructional leader and appraiser of teachers. The reforms recommended in the *Better Schools in Western Australia: A Programme for Improvement* were intended to replace the traditional bureaucratic system with increased school autonomy (Chadbourne & Clarke, 1994). The Better Schools policy of devolving control from central office to schools, resulted in the closure of the Western Australian Early Childhood Branch within the central Ministry of Education. According to Kerr (1994, p. 191), “With this closure pre-school teachers lost their centralised support structure which resulted in fragmentation of leadership and networks in the field.” The loss of central leadership made way for school based leadership. Early childhood centres were placed under the administration of principals of primary schools and EDWA rather than kindergarten directors and the Kindergarten Association. Principals were directed to incorporate preprimary centres into the school system and provide administrative and educational leadership to preprimary teachers. Few principals had an academic or practical background in ECE.

In May 1985, government economic rationalism affected early childhood funding. A decision was reached, “to terminate Commonwealth funding support for preschoolers in the states and territories from 31 December 1985” (Kronemann, 1998, p. 4). Abolishing this grant saved the Commonwealth $33m in one year (1985-6) but impacted negatively on early childhood services.

In 1987, the Better Schools reform promised to promote “efficiency”, “effectiveness” and “accountability”. Devolution and community participation were key ideas in this report. The reforms aimed to make the school, not the system, the major unit of change. However, industrial, legal, bureaucratic and ideological issues emerged to threaten its success (Chadbourne, 1992). In 1987 the Ministry of Education introduced a new form of accountability by directing each school to demonstrate the, “extent in which it had incorporated ministry policy and community priorities into its operations” (Ministry of Education W.A., 1989b, p. 3). School development plans

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2 In 1987 the Education Department of Western Australia was renamed the Ministry of Education. The original title was re-adopted in January 1994. The terms that were in existence during the period being discussed are used in this thesis.
and accountability to the local community emerged as a new priority. The new amendments to the Education Act assented to on 8 July 1988, “provided the opportunity for community participation in the formulation of the educational policy and operations of the school” (Annual Report, 1988/89, p. 18). The ramifications of ‘devolution’ and ‘community participation’ spread through the school system into the field of ECE. Principals faced the task of administering, leading and assessing early childhood staff, without written guidelines. It was not until 1989 that the Ministry of Education published *Guidelines, Pre-primary, Pre-school Administration* which outlined some non prescriptive roles and responsibilities.

Early childhood became the focus of attention in 1993 with the inclusion of full-day pre-primary classes in primary schools. The Ministerial Task Force on voluntary full-time preprimary education and related matters reported to the Minister for Education. Its report (Scott Report) met with criticism from the early childhood profession, school staff and various sectors of the community on educational grounds and the swiftness of its implementation. The Scott Report (Early Childhood Education Council, 1996, n.p.) indicated that if “the Education Department decided to guarantee local access to pre-primary programs” it would be necessary to group some pre-primary children with older primary age children. However, community pressure escalated until in 1994 the Western Australian government released a ministerial statement, acknowledging that, “the hurried introduction of full-time preprimary education for only one-third of the children of the state along with the poorly co-ordinated provision for four year olds is unsatisfactory” (Moore, 1994, n.p.). In 1994, a Director of Early Childhood Education Policy was appointed to oversee the Task Force Recommendations.

In 1995, EDWA informed the WA community of its intention to implement ‘Good Start’ into government schools. Schools were directed to view ECE as one whole stage (K-3) rather than separate stages. However, once again resistance built up from many sectors of the community about the changes to the school entry age and about

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3 Good Start was initiated to provide quality, developmental programs for all 5 year-olds in their preprimary year by the end of 1998. There was to be a transfer of kindergarten programs from the Department of Family and Children’s Services to EDWA and an adjustment of the entry age for kindergarten children.
pre-primary education being reformed without adequate reflection on educational issues. During a study undertaken in one metropolitan district of the Western Australian Department of Education (Stamopoulos, 1995) principals revealed they had little if any theoretical or practical background in ECE, were provided with inadequate professional background assistance to deal with problems and held strong concerns about their ability to provide early childhood educational leadership. Data from this study was reported in *The West Australian*, July 12, 1995 amidst community concern about the quality of learning for pre-primary children and the early childhood profession’s exclusion from the decision-making process.

In 1995 Education Minister Moore once again acceded to public pressure and modified ‘Good Start’ by stating there would be no changes to the school entry age until the year 2000. He announced that a comprehensive system of accountability would be developed. He also announced a range of other developments, namely: long term research using six focus schools; the provision of support material and professional development packages; the appointment of a Director of Good Start; and the formation of a new Early Childhood Education Council (ECEC) to monitor and advise on the Good Start initiatives. The ECEC was established in 1995 to provide independent advice to the Minister for Education and the government and serve as an avenue in which early childhood issues could be discussed (ECEC, 1996). In the corresponding period EDWA developed a strategic plan document “Schooling 2000” (still not released) which supported the formation of the Curriculum Council and highlighted the importance of educational leadership. The Curriculum Council of WA was established in 1997 bearing responsibility for curriculum co-ordination between the years K-12 (Moore, 1995c).

A promise in 1995, by the Minister for Education (Norman Moore) to the community for local access, signaled the beginnings of P1 combination classes in WA schools. A letter to parents from Moore informed them that, “over the next four years the Government will be ensuring all four and five year olds have access to educational programs at their local school” (Moore, 1995a, 1995b, no page). Parents responded positively to this promise. However, problems emerged during the implementation process. As predicted in the Scott Report, it was not possible to accommodate all
children in preprimary classes (Tite, 1995). Parents were subsequently notified that “students may be in multi-age classes in years K-2” (Moore, 1995a, 1995b, no page).

The ECEC reminded parents and teachers that according to the Scott Report, P1 classes could be turned into a virtue provided they operated as well-thought-out multi-age classes. The Scott Report acknowledged there was no agreed “magic formula” for doing this and recommended that the Education Department work out its own formula (in the form of a new policy). The ECEC publicised that EDWA had studied MAG classes in other states, conducted WA pilot projects on Rural Integration Programs (RIP) and was in the process of formulating MAG policy (Early Childhood Education Council, 1996, n.p.) To date, the results of these studies have not been released. According to Tayler (1996, p. 8), the implementation of this political promise (local access) would be challenging but the reality was less certain. Tayler pointed out that if divergent learning experiences are not provided then, “the provision for fours will not be relevant nor will it be high quality early childhood provision.”

By July 1997, EDWA had directed principals to decide whether they would include multigrade P1 classes. In EDWA’s words, “If it is deemed more appropriate, schools may choose to form P-1 classes if pre-primary children cannot be accommodated in separate groups” (EDWA, 1997, no page). Principals were now responsible for changing the school’s organizational structure to include P1 combinations and for making early childhood educational decisions about curriculum, staffing, resources, space allocation, implementation and evaluation.

Early childhood specialists, school staff and parents responded to the emergence of P1 combination classes with strong concerns. The early childhood profession’s exclusion from the decision-making process further accelerated resistance. The Early Childhood Teachers’ Association of Western Australia (ECTAWA) urged EDWA to conduct studies of K-3 structures in other states, pilot projects in WA and local research into MAG (McDonald, 1995). Tite (1995) voiced further early childhood concerns by cautioning that in P1 classes, “there is little documentation which can tell us whether pre-primary children are getting the same quality education as they do in straight pre-primary” (p. 9). ECTAWA told EDWA that, “the early
childhood professional associations will be closely monitoring Good Start to ensure that the Minister is true to his word” (ECTAWA, 1995, p. 13). The Western Australian Council State School Organisation (WACSSO), a strong parent group, also voiced concerns about the possible dilution of early childhood philosophy, the adoption of more formal learning and problems associated with local access (Olson, 1998). There has always been a history in WA of strong parent opposition towards government intervention in the early childhood field which, “has raised pre-primary on the political and community agenda” (Hyde, 1999, p. 11). Early childhood changes are still meeting strong opposition from parent groups (Hyde, 1999).

In 1996, human resource problems emerged over the redeployment of cleaners to teacher-aides’ positions. Privatisation had resulted in some cleaners taking voluntary severance, transferring to other contractors or seeking redeployment. Once again, ECTAWA approached EDWA, who reported it was ‘obligated’ to provide those who chose redeployment, with non-cleaning positions. ECTAWA was informed by EDWA that a Redeployment Committee and Panel was set up to “ensure that redeployees have the necessary skills, or capacity to acquire these skills in a resasonable [sic] period of time in order to carry out the duties of the occupation they have chosen to enter” (Barnett, 1996, p. 3). In response to growing concerns from ECTAWA that redeployed cleaners were being placed in early childhood classes, Barnett (1996) said there was no requirement for teacher-aides to hold tertiary qualifications. ECTAWA, however, argued that teacher-aides employed in early childhood programs were an integral part of curriculum development, implementation and evaluation. As one teacher aide confirms, additional responsibilities include, preparing and implementing tasks for pre-primary children and assessing their learning, so that, “the teacher concentrates on the Ones while I deal with the Pre’s” (Rochester, 1996, p. 2).

In 1998, claims were made by the Miscellaneous Workers’ Union (MWU), teachers and parent groups that re-deployed school cleaners were being positioned as teacher aides. According to the MWU “The only investment the Education Department makes in their training is that it places these cleaners in a school to work alongside another teacher assistant for up to six months” (Ashworth, 1998, September 19). Although, “the department recognises that training in the area of early childhood
educational development can be beneficial” there were no pre-requisite formal skills required (Ashworth, 1998, September 19). The WA Industrial Relations Commission also took an interest in this issue and stated that, “The education assistants contribute to the teaching program…without enthusiasm and motivation, an education assistant could have a negative influence in the classroom” (Ashworth, 1998, September 19).

Principals and school staff were further hampered with issues relating to pre-primary allocation of space. The Senate Inquiry into Early Childhood Education in Australia (1996) reported that attempts by the States and Territories to ensure appropriate space was made available for early childhood settings had been “largely ineffective.” They were of the opinion that people responsible for collating information lacked knowledge of the requirements needed to run a quality early childhood program. More specifically these people, “lacked not only specific early childhood training but the specialised expertise to understand fully how particular physical setting[s] can support [an] effective early childhood teaching program, or militate against it” (Senate Inquiry, 1996, p. 103).

In WA, diminished space for P1 was a continual concern which fuelled further resistance. Ewing (1997) compared the Australian Early Childhood Association's (AECA) recommendations for play space, published in 1995, with existing space allocation in WA early childhood classes. AECA standards for "high quality" were 4.64 square metres per child, for "good quality" 3.9 square metres and for "basic quality" 3.25 square metres. The indoor space in newly designed WA early childhood classes in 1997 was 1.4 square metres, which is less than half the recommended space for "basic quality" standards. As a result, learning centres needed to be reduced and basic equipment removed because there was insufficient space for their inclusion. According to Ewing (1997, p. 12), "These compromises are resulting in practices which are not consistent with the performance indicators of best practice as outlined by the Education Department".

Alongside diminishing material resources, human resource assistance for P1 classes, was reduced without consultation with the early childhood profession. EDWA instigated the reduction of teacher-aide assistance time, specifically in P1 classes, on
the grounds that these classes included year one children. Full-time pre-primary classes, however, were still allocated full-time teacher-aides. According to EDWA, certain conditions were to apply to P1 composite classes in 1998. Pre-primary children who attended a P1 composite class would be provided with 0.2 teacher-aide time if there were between 2 and 7 pre-primary children in the class, or 0.5 teacher-aide time if there were between 8 and 14 pre-primary children in the class. The State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia (SSTUWA) actively opposed the reduction in teacher-aide time. Early childhood practitioners and sectors of the community questioned how early childhood philosophy could be maintained under these conditions.

In 1997 critics noted that it had taken about three years to draft guidelines for early childhood school staff which were eventually released in 1998 (Corrie, 1997). The document, *What is Good Early Childhood Education?: A Statement for Schools and Communities on the Education of Children 3-8 Years* provided an overview of early childhood learning and development, curriculum, teaching, assessment, and accountability and early childhood within a whole school philosophy. However, although MAG was briefly mentioned, no specific reference was made to P1 classes. Anecdotal comments from the early childhood profession revealed growing frustration that schools were being expected to include P1 structures, yet they were invisible in key early childhood documents. With an absence of guidelines and support, P1 classes were perceived as lacking credibility and viability.

Towards the end of 1999, Tranby and Sawyers Valley (two focus schools) released booklets on MAG flexible groupings, integrated curriculum, collaborative planning and school restructuring (EDWA, 1999; Moir & Dyer, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c). In 2000, EDWA prepared for changes to the new school starting age by dispersing information packs to primary and high school. Principals were notified that local access was being altered to accommodate pre-primary children in clusters of schools rather than providing them access to their local school. In a letter to principals, EDWA advised school staff that although, "sessions are not compulsory, all eligible children are guaranteed places within clusters of local schools" (Sample information letter for parents/caregivers supplied by EDWA to principals, 2000). School staff and parents were informed that, "in some schools, more mixed age classes may have
to be formed as a result of the half cohort” (Sample information letter for parents/caregivers supplied by EDWA to principals, 2000). The half cohort situation was to remain in the school system until the year 2014 thereby accelerating and pledging the inclusion of P1 classes in the primary school sector (EDWA, 2000).

As P1 is currently set to multiply across the state, with little written documentation or consultation with the early childhood professional community, it is important to set this study in perspective by outlining the views of two influential WA bodies, the State School Teachers Union Western Australia (SSTUWA) and the Western Australian Council State School Organisation (WACSSO).

**UNION CONSIDERATIONS**

The State School Teachers Union Western Australia (SSTUWA) is an important element in the West Australian educational context. Its role is to enhance the welfare of members, protect their interests and respond to their needs. Although, membership is restricted to state school teachers, the SSTUWA believes the early childhood profession has some concerns, which warrant investigation. These concerns were voiced in an interview with the union officer. A draft account of this interview was given to the union who made several amendments to it.

**Industrial issues**

In June 1998, the SSTUWA responded to member concerns by issuing a policy in response to constraints placed by EDWA on P1 classes. The union directed members to reject the proposed 0.1 DOTT time allocations. Furthermore, it urged members to accept nothing less than 0.9 teacher-aide assistance. The union explained how EDWA had stipulated that teacher-aide time was to be calculated on a sliding scale. For every P1 class with two to seven pre-primary children, 0.2 aide time would be allocated; 0.5 aide time would be provided for between eight and fourteen pre-primary children in the class. The union warned that, “the additional aide time must be provided within current school staff allocation as central office will not fund this item” (Western Teacher, October, 1998, p. 13). It further stipulated
that whole school decision-making must occur prior to the inclusion of PI classes and that appropriate pre-primary facilities, resources, training and support be allocated. Formal grievances could be lodged through the Teachers’ Award Grievance Procedure.

Following an industrial agreement between EDWA and the SSTUWA, an Early Childhood Education Reference Group was established to clarify the status of MAG. Despite this move, the official SSTUWA position on PI remains unchanged:

Currently the SSTUWA and EDWA are in dispute over industrial conditions. The SSTUWA has attempted to negotiate with the department since last year, but this has been completely unsuccessful. Issues involve DOTT time, 0.9 teacher-aide time and the class sizes for PI. Current industrial negotiations for a new certified agreement include these industrial issues. (SSTUWA, interview, 2000)

**Educational issues**

The SSTUWA had received complaints about educational matters from union members in respect to PI classes. These complaints centered on leadership, staff appraisal, staffing in respect to PI formal learning, local access and the new cohorts. Members were dissatisfied with the provision of leadership and principal’s lack of knowledge of teaching and learning in early childhood, in particular K-1. Teachers feared that principals’ appraisals of staff performance would threaten job promotion and security. The union spokesperson explained, “Members are happy for an early childhood trained principal to assess them, but not a principal who is not early childhood trained” (18th July, 2000). When the SSTUWA approached the early childhood directorate in EDWA to discuss and resolve such leadership issues, they were informed this was the responsibility of the District Offices. The union claimed that on PI issues EDWA was responding with a “not interested”, “too hard” attitude. In other words, “the early childhood directorate was not taking an active role in respect to the leadership needs of its teachers” (18th July, 2000). The SSTUWA and its members were angered with the lack of “solidarity and support and consistency between the early childhood directorate, district offices and schools” (18th July, 2000).
There were also strong concerns about staffing issues. EDWA’s staffing directorate had informed the SSTUWA that preference would be given to early childhood trained teachers for early childhood teaching positions. However, a senior EDWA officer had written to a temporary teacher explaining how teachers could teach in early childhood if they had the relevant qualifications or at least two years experience in ECE. A position was given to a primary trained teacher not an early childhood trained temporary teacher, because the former had two years experience teaching in early childhood classes, namely, in years 1, 2 or 3. This means that without doing a conversion course, a primary teacher can teach years, 1, 2 and 3 to gain “early childhood experience” and then be placed in a P1 class. Of concern here is that not all years 1, 2 and 3 are taught using an early childhood philosophy. This practice places at risk the job prospects of early childhood teachers, early childhood philosophy and practices, and the credibility of P1 classes. Furthermore, it creates in teachers, “a lack of confidence in their department leaders” (18th July, 2000).

To add to the process, members expressed concerns that learning for pre-primary children was becoming increasingly formalised through student outcome statements (SOS). At a recent meeting in Glassdale Primary School (pseudonym) a senior department officer informed parents that the outcome statements guarantee that a developmental approach will be implemented. This is proving to be contradictory and confusing for members, “when in many settings SOS are leading to formalising the programme” (18th July, 2000).

The recent EDWA, Information for Schools: Pack two contains a video, which has also sparked local access concern. According to the SSTUWA, it ends with the statement, “every child is guaranteed with local access.” However, “this does not mean every child is guaranteed a position at their local school.” By the end of August, District Committees will decide which schools/centres will run K programs in 2000. Some schools will NOT have the numbers to run a ‘viable’ program” (18th July, 2000).

1 The Curriculum Framework K-12 establishes learning outcomes for all WA students. It provides a structure through which educational programs can be constructed to ensure students achieve agreed outcomes.
The SSTUWA reported rising anger from its members over the new cohorts and spread of P1 classes. Members believe they are losing ownership of early childhood and see their profession to be at risk. More and more, members are viewing P1 classes as the perfect grounding for EDWA and government bodies to accelerate academic pushdown and formalise early childhood. They expect the union to voice their concerns to the employer’s department representative. “Of greater concern to the SSTUWA and members is that the government does not have the children’s interests at heart. There is not the trust that existed in the past. A result is parents moving their children to private schools” (18th July, 2000).

The union’s stance is now to join forces with parents, “to campaign for improvements to the Government’s proposed changes in early childhood” (Western Teacher, October, 2000, p. 5). Its aims are to ensure the government addresses specific issues raised by its members and parents related to local access, quality of programs for pre-primary, P1 composite classes and the half-year cohorts. The union and parents claim the government must staff P1 classes with full staff entitlement because this policy, “increases the difficulty for the school to provide the quality activity based program pre-primary children require, and specifically disadvantages split pre-primary/year 1 classes” (Joint union/parent kindergarten/pre-primary campaign newsletter to members, October, 2000).

As the SSTUWA and parents amalgamate in a show of strength, early childhood education is once again in the public arena. Concerns for quality of education, inadequate support structures and continued demand by stakeholders for documented research and evaluation of P1 classes, are producing an uneasy climate in WA primary schools. In an era where accountability is a system priority and parents a vital component of school cultures, these issues need to be swiftly resolved.

**PARENT CONSIDERATIONS**

The Western Australian Council State School Organisation (WACSSO) is an influential parent group affiliated with six hundred and thirty Parent & Citizens groups in WA. It has been an advocate of early childhood since the inclusion of pre-
primary in government schools and it has retained strong bonds with the early childhood profession. Though not a representative for the early childhood profession, WACSSO presents a voice for parents and provides further contextual considerations on P1. Its decision to combine forces with the SSTUWA has further necessitated the need to investigate its perspective on P1. Information about WACSSO’s position on P1, as reported here, was gained from conversations with an officer of that body. A draft account of that position was constructed from the field notes and read over the phone to that officer who agreed with the account that appears below.

In a clear statement to government and EDWA, WACSSO firmly indicated it would not support P1 classes. It warned of problems associated with EDWA’s 1997 staffing formula and re-iterated the need for appropriate resources and guidance. It predicted ECE would be engulfed in the primary school sector and doubted whether early childhood philosophy could be successfully amalgamated with traditional primary philosophy. In WACSSO’s opinion, P1 would come “at the cost of destroying the quality of education preserved for most of this century by non-government early childhood organisations” (interview, WACSSO Officer, 2000).

On many occasions, WACSSO’s State Councillor presented such concerns to government and EDWA representatives and demanded written documentation of P1’s success. To date, EDWA has not provided them with evidence of any benefits of P1 classes to student learning. WACSSO’s own research has been fruitless, accelerating a lack of trust in government and EDWA. Even the promise of ‘local access’ was short-lived as information of its practical implementation began to unfold. In 1995 the Minister for Education, Norman Moore promised parents that, “over the next four years the Government will be ensuring: all four and five year olds have access to educational programs at their local school” (Moore, 1995a, 1995b, n.p.). At that time, the promise of ‘local access’ was met with cautious optimism by WACSSO who queried how it would be implemented within the economic constraints of the budget. Although dubious, they supported it acknowledging “the rights of parents to pursue their children’s education at their local government school, if that is their choice” (Olson, 1998, p. 9). However, when Moore (1995a,
1995b, n.p) released a statement notifying parents that, “students may be in multi-age classes in years K-2”, WACSSO’s response was dissatisfaction.

WACSSO contested the changes only to be reminded by EDWA that if parents were not satisfied, their pre-primary children did not have to attend, as pre-primary was a non-compulsory year. According to WACSSO, Moore’s verbal assurance to parents in 1995 that the half-cohort would be implemented as a pre-primary class was not honoured. According to parents, P1 was not considered a pre-primary class. Added to these dilemmas were further modifications to include children in ‘clusters of schools’ rather than inclusion at their local school. The exclusion of the early childhood professional group and the community in the decision making process was of further concern. WACSSO affirmed its intention to continue applying pressure on government and to lobby for the survival of early childhood philosophy and practice.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

P1 has been implemented without consultation with the early childhood profession and few if any guidelines or support. To date, no evaluations have been conducted, which examine the effect of P1 on student learning. For these reasons, it is important that the views of school staff of P1 classes are documented and explored. Therefore, a central research question for this study is: What stance do school staff construct with respect to P1 classes?

The term ‘stance’ here refers to the conceptual and behavioural position developed by school staff. In terms of symbolic interactionism, the chosen theoretical framework for the study, stance refers to the participants’ definition of the P1 situation and their mode of accommodating that definition. Thus, the following four subsidiary research questions have been formulated to help guide the investigation.

1. How do school staff define the P1 situation?
2. On what basis have they constructed this definition?
3. How do school staff respond to their definition of the P1 situation? What modes of accommodation do they adopt?
4. On what basis have they selected their modes of accommodation?

DEFINITIONS

Because many terms are used differently in different contexts the definition of terms used in this study is set out below. In some cases, the definitions specify aspects of the contextual boundaries of the study.

**P1 classes:** classes in which pre-primary (non-compulsory year of schooling) and year one children (compulsory year of schooling) are combined in the one class, for educational or administrative benefits.

**Multigrade classes:** classes in which children from two or more grades are taught by one teacher in one room at the same time, while retaining their respective grade-level curricula and assignments.

**Multi-age classes:** the deliberate mixing of both age and grade levels for their perceived educational benefits.

**Early childhood education:** the education and care of children between birth and eight years of age. It can consist of childcare, kindergarten, preschool, pre-primary, P1 classes, years one to three.

**Pre-primary year:** the education and care of children turning five years of age between January and December of that year. This is the year prior to the first year of compulsory schooling.

**Principal:** a person appointed to manage a primary school which provides educational programs for children (approximately 5 - 12 years of age) spanning pre-primary to year seven.

**Primary school teacher:** a person who has undergone specialist study in the primary field and is trained to teach children between the ages of six and twelve.
**Early childhood teacher:** a person who has undergone specialist study in the field of early childhood education (3-8 years or 0-8 years).

**CONCLUSION**

Worldwide educational changes, aimed at producing more economically competitive workplaces and higher quality learning, are occurring in all levels of education. In the early childhood sector, one such change, P1, has led to an amalgamation of early childhood and primary school students in P1 classes. This move has met with growing opposition from a range of stakeholders, both in the school sector and the wider community. Accusations of inadequate leadership, an absence of support structures, philosophical differences and concerns for the way in which the early childhood and primary years are to be combined, provide the basis for this opposition. The exclusion of the early childhood profession from the decision-making process has sparked further criticism. Of particular concern is that school staff are already involved in the task of constructing and implementing P1 classes despite the fact that government administration and curriculum expertise have not kept pace with the critical needs of stakeholders.

Therefore, the perspective and priorities of school staff with respect to the development and delivery of P1 classes are important. To date, the impact of P1 classes on school staff and student learning remains unknown.

The following chapter develops a conceptual framework for collecting and analysing data. It outlines the basis on which school staff might build their definition of the P1 situation and the manner in which they might respond to that definition.
2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter reviews the research literature to construct an appropriate conceptual framework for the purpose of collecting and analysing data. The framework is derived from symbolic interaction theory, which captures the way in which individuals construct a stance towards change.

Symbolic interactionism was selected as the basis for this study because of its long association with humanistic research and its assumptions about human action and interaction. Although more prominent in the 1960s and 70s, it is still widely recognised as a qualitative research approach alongside more recent post modernist and post structuralist approaches. Like Goffman’s sociology of the interaction order, it prioritises interaction as central in understanding social life (Watson, 2001). However, it differs from other theories that see individuals action in terms of the context and choices offered and remain separable from the role in which they engage (Davies & Harre, 1990; Shotter, 1986).

As a theory, symbolic interactionism is primarily concerned with the ‘self’ and its interpretative role within the social system. The ‘self’ is viewed as the core of human personality and the pivot point from which behaviors, judgements and goals are constructed. Symbolic interactionism views individuals as proactive, in control of their lives, responsible for their actions and a critical agent of the change process (van den Hoomaard, 1997; Wood, 1982).

Symbolic interaction theory embraces the diversity of human nature and multiple voices and perspectives. It enables the researcher to construct a framework through which the complex perspectives of school staff can be explored. Through its appreciative and illuminative capacity, it enables the collection of rich, comprehensive information on individuals and is primarily concerned with the ‘self’,
actors’ construction of a definition of a situation and their mode of accommodation. Symbolic interactionism has been selected for this study for the added reason that it reflects the researcher’s philosophical beliefs about human nature, human behaviour, and human society.

**SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

In more specific terms, the purpose of the literature review is to construct a conceptual framework, which outlines the basis on which school staff (principal, teachers and teacher aides) might build their definition of the P1 situation and the manner in which they might respond to that definition. The literature review is divided into two main parts. The first part investigates the process and grounds on which individuals construct their definition of the situation. This is linked to subsidiary research questions 1 and 2, namely:

- How do school staff define the P1 situation?
- On what basis have they constructed this definition?

The second part examines the way in which individuals can respond to their definition of the situation, that is, their selected mode of accommodation, and the basis on which they select their mode of accommodation. This is linked to subsidiary research questions 3 and 4, namely:

- How do school staff respond to their definition of the P1 situation? What modes of accommodation do they adopt?
- On what basis have they selected their modes of accommodation?

**Definition of the situation**

Symbolic interactionists claim that human conduct is ‘situated’, that it can only be understood in the context in which it is found (Hewitt, 1976; Wood, 1982). Although the self, significant others, time, place, culture and structure are vital
components of a ‘situation’, they only exist if individuals indicate to themselves that they are important (Blumer, 1969). The meanings that individuals attach to situations and their interpretations of their world are the pivot point from which behaviors are constructed (van den Hoonnaard, 1997).

The first component of a situation, the ‘self’, consists of the individual’s self-concept, personality traits, priorities, needs, goals, knowledge, skills, experiences, values and beliefs. These relate to the individual’s, “wants, his (her) feelings, his (her) goals... his (her) situation, his (her) conceptions of himself (herself), his (her) recollections, and his (her) images of prospective lines of conduct” (Blumer, 1969, p. 64). The second component consists of, “the expectations and demands of others, the rules of his (her) group” (Blumer, 1969, p. 64). Therefore, significant others, their expectations, power and vested interests create another dimension in which human conduct is ‘situated’ (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986; Scott, 1995; Woods, 1996).

Time is the third component of a ‘situation’ (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986; Wood, 1982). The ‘self’ and its development over time have an impact on a ‘situation’ (Hewitt, 1976; Wood, 1982; Woods, 1996), because individuals make reference to time as they discuss events that occurred in the past, those currently under review or those planned for the projected future (Hewitt, 1976; Wood, 1982). Individuals’ perceptions are based on their past experiences, that is, what occurred on a particular day, month, year or decade. For example, school staff may perceive government-initiated educational reforms as suspicious if they evoke memories of similar reforms that failed. On the other hand, if past experiences were satisfying staff may define a change as one that will enhance self-interest and improve student learning.

A fourth component of a ‘situation’ is place (Wood, 1982). Place is made up of physical and social space. The physical or geographical space is where human conduct is ‘situated’; for example, this may be in the individual’s workplace (Woods, 1996). Human conduct can also exist in the social sphere where social reality and roles are constructed. According to Hewitt (1976), “Social space refers fundamentally to the concept of role – to the fact that people experience situations as sets of people making various roles and from particular role standpoints” (p. 108/109). A fifth component of a ‘situation’ is culture. In fact, cultural values and
norms, which are specific to certain situations, emerge within the social sphere (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986; Walter, 1932; Woods, 1996).

Structural features are the sixth component of a ‘situation’. An individual’s position in the social structure, their religion and nationality all impact on a ‘situation’ (Denzin, 1996; Hewitt, 1976; Scott, 1995; Walter, 1932). Structural features, such as social class, establish conditions that additionally impact on a ‘situation’ (Woods, 1983).

Individuals engage in a mental process of constructing meanings that leads to a definition of the situation (Scott, 1995; Skidmore, 1975). According to symbolic interactionism, “situations are constituted as individuals select, order, and interpret disparate external circumstances to create patterns that are meaningful to them and that form foundations for their own behaviors” (Wood, 1982, p. 39). Individuals pursue their plans by constructing meaning, proactively engaging their environment to satisfy their own needs and acting on the basis of their definition (Denzin, 1996; Hewitt, 1976; Scott, 1995). Their motives, emotions, social structures and actions are grounded in their definition of the situation (Denzin, 1996). The particular ‘situation’ that forms the focus of this thesis is the PI situation.

Process by which individuals construct their definition of the situation

Symbolic interactionism is grounded on three fundamental ideas. First, that human beings act toward phenomena on the basis of the meaning they attach to the phenomena, a process which is linked to the psychological process of definition. Second, meanings arise in social contexts, a phenomenon which is linked to the social psychological process of interaction. Finally, individuals modify and manage particular meanings through an interpretive process of self-communication, an outcome which is linked to the ‘self’s’ internal thoughts. This thesis explores how the processes involved in these three fundamental ideas enable school staff to construct their definitions of the PI situation.
Psychological process of definition

When individuals are challenged with a problem that requires a solution they engage in ‘minded’ behavior; that is, a mental process of construction that leads to a definition of the situation. This process involves thought without any overt action. The individual, “performs a mental trial and error process by using symbols for the elements of the situation and manipulating the symbols until the correct outcome is found” (Skidmore, 1975, p. 143). As such, individuals reflect on needs, in the context of the demands, expectations and restrictions that they encounter with the experiences they identify as meaningful (Ritzer, 1983; Wood, 1982). Benefits and risks are then estimated by projecting one’s thoughts into the future and viewing the consequences of constructions (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986). As Skidmore (1975) notes, “Alternate solutions are symbolically extended to the situation, and the consequences of taking each alternative are worked out before any action is attempted” (p. 143). In the words of Blumer (1969), “in such self-interaction he [the individual] may hold his prospective act in suspension, abandon it, check it at one or another point, revise it, or devise a substitute for it” (p. 55).

Situations are therefore ‘interpreted’ through a mental process of construction (Blumer, 1969; Hargreaves, 1993; Scott, 1995; Waller, 1932; Wood, 1982; Woods, 1996). The perspective of symbolic interaction is that human action is not shaped by external phenomena or stimuli, but by the meaning that ‘actors’ place on those phenomena; that is, by what the phenomena symbolise for the ‘actor’ (Waller, 1932; Wood, 1982). In this thesis, the ‘actors’ are the school staff [principal, teachers, teacher-aides] who act toward P1 on the basis of the meaning they attach to it. Principals are included in this study as part of the profession on the assumption that they are educational leaders of their school, not agents of central office.

Social psychological process of definition and interaction

Meanings arise out of social interaction. They are neither solely intrinsic, nor solely dependent on individuals, nor created in a vacuum (Blumer, 1969). According to symbolic interactionist theory, “meanings are social products that are constructed through our interactions with others and the ways in which others act toward
phenomena” (Wood, 1982, p. 68). Therefore, symbolic interactionists are centrally concerned with, “the inner experience of the individual and how the self arises within the social process” (Woods, 1996, p. 32). As such, the ‘self’ and its interaction with the ‘social system’ must be seen as interdependent. This is because the individual’s perception of ‘self’ is dependent on the attitude of others who comprise society (Blumer, 1969; Scott, 1995; Skidmore, 1975; Woods, 1996). In fact, the notion of the ‘self’ as an object, “presupposes a point of view that is outside the self, but a part of the social order” (Skidmore, 1975, p. 159). In order for the ‘self’ to construct meaning it must be involved in a process of social interaction. Social interaction is a vital component in its own right (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1996), which is possible because the individual has, “the ability to symbolize aspects of his (her) world and communicate via those symbols with himself (herself) as well as his fellows” (Skidmore, 1975, p. 151). That is, through role taking individuals can view themselves as an object from the standpoint of others and project themselves into the viewpoint or perspective of another person (Blumer, 1969; Hewitt, 1976; Skidmore, 1975). In order for school staff to construct meaning in the P1 workplace, they become involved in a social psychological process of definition and interaction.

The ‘Self’

As noted earlier, symbolic interaction theory is centrally concerned with the ‘self’ and its interpretative and interactive process within the social system. The ‘self’ is the core of an individual’s personality, the pivot from which behaviors, judgements and goals are constructed. In fact, it is the ‘self’ that emerges in communication with others and continually interacts with others. As such, the ‘self’ is not static but constantly in the process of constructing, revising and assuming multiple roles. Many undefined situations confront individuals in the course of their lives (Waller, 1932). Therefore, the ‘self’ is fundamental to the identification, description and explanation of minded behavior, social interaction and construction of definitions of the situation (Hewitt, 1976; Scott, 1995; Skidmore, 1975).

Psychological and social psychological processes are dependent on the ‘self’ because the ‘self’ is the engine through which meanings and definitions of the situation are constructed. As meanings arise in social contexts they are modified and managed
through an interpretative process of self-communication and self-indication and then acted upon (Skidmore, 1975; Wood, 1982).

Through an interpretive process of self-communication, the ‘self’ modifies meanings that ultimately lead to the construction of a definition of the situation. First, individuals communicate with themselves as to what is considered significant. Second, they call upon past experiences and link them to their cognitive and value systems. Third, they construct a meaningful definition of the situation (Wood, 1982).

Two dimensions of the ‘self’, the ‘I’ and the ‘Me’, are the central point from which self-communication emerges. The first dimension, the ‘I’, is impulsive and can be referred to as the actor and doer. The ‘I’ describes the individuals’ feelings, their response to the attitudes of others and the reasons for their response (Hewitt, 1976). This is a subconscious process in which individual thought becomes a pivotal point on which decisions are made. As Woods (1996) explains,

> If we are to understand the ‘I’, we must explore people’s innermost feelings, their impulses and passions, their hunches and risk taking, the things they would like to do but cannot, what prompts them to act in certain ways, and what gives them pleasure and what causes pain. (p. 47)

The second dimension, the ‘Me’, is referred to as the thinker, evaluator, reflector and role-taker. The ‘Me’ carries on the tasks of self-regulation and social control and monitors the ‘self’ to ensure that it acts in accordance with society. More specifically, “the ‘Me’ acts to evaluate the innovations of the ‘I’ from the perspective of society, encouraging socially useful innovations while discouraging undesirable actions” (Baldwin, 1986, cited by Woods, 1996, p. 36).

The ‘I’ and ‘Me’ co-operate as collaborators, not opponents. “The ‘Me’ does not attempt to block the ‘I,’ but instead organizes and directs its activities” (Hewitt, 1976, p. 64). In fact the impulsiveness of the ‘I’ is as important as the reflectiveness of the ‘Me’ to how we behave. As Hewitt (1976) explains,

> The “I” is impulsive…but as the impulse occurs, the second phase of the self, the “Me”, comes into play: the individual checks or inhibits his act, considering how it
will be received by others (specific or generalized) and choosing the plan of action he thinks best. (p. 55-56)

By engaging in dual perspectives, individuals are able to view themselves as an object, consider the perspective of others, and inform the self as to what the appropriate response should be (Wood, 1982). As such, society and the meanings that arise in social contexts are dependent on the ‘Me’ and its alternation with the ‘I’ (Hewitt, 1976). The ‘I’ and ‘Me’ select and interpret objects that reflect their personal desires so that definitions of the situation are constructed and conduct formed. Definitions of the situation are grounded in an individual’s phenomenal world, that is, “everything that makes up an individual, such as past experiences, self-concept, goals, feelings, thoughts, skills, attitudes and values” (Wood, 1982, p.30). From this basis, individuals are driven by the desire to fulfil their own physiological and psychological needs but also possess the capacity to forfeit these needs in deference to the well-being of others. In a general sense, then, the “I” provides the basis for ‘self-interest’ and the “Me” provides the basis for ‘service to others’. This thesis is concerned with how school staff modify and manage particular meanings through an interpretive process of self-communication that is linked to the ‘self’s’ internal thoughts.

Basis on which individuals construct their definition of the situation

The preceding analysis indicates that individuals construct their definition of the situation on the basis of self-interest and/or the well-being of others. They have the capacity for choice - to pursue self-interest or serve the common good (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986). Put differently, while people are driven by the desire to fulfil their own physiological and psychological needs, they are also social creatures who hold concerns for the welfare of others. Individuals identify what they want and then engage in a mental process of interpretation, construction and definition (Blumer, 1969; Woods, 1983). As they, “imagine alternative lines of conduct as well as the responses of others to their acts, they are confronted with the need to choose between what they want and what others may want or need” (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986, p. 105). Their choice of self-interest and/or the well-being of others, is the basis on which definitions of the situation are constructed. These bases have implications for investigating how school staff construct their definitions of the P1 situation.
Self-interest

Self-interest is a strong motivating force when individuals construct their definitions of the situation. As Hewitt (1976) points out, self-interest can be regarded as, “subjective ‘springs of conduct’ – forces, drives, urges, and other states of the organism that impel, move, push, or otherwise direct its behavior” (p. 84). When blended with individual temperament and character, self-interest can become a powerful force impacting on the way in which situations are defined. Also, “the natural inclination of each individual living thing is to meet its needs as best it can and to overcome obstacles in its path as best it can” (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986, p. 105). This means determining in any situation, ‘what is in it for me’, whether it is in ‘my’ interest to place ‘myself’ at risk and what the personal benefits are likely to be. Change therefore, requires individuals to determine their own meaning of a situation and indicate to themselves what is meaningful (Blumer, 1969; Fullan, 1991; Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991).

Abraham Maslow (1970) proposed one of the best known theories on motivation. He argued that individuals must satisfy some basic needs before they address any others. He identifies and lists five broad needs in a hierarchical order of priority.

The first basic need is physiological. This need is given highest priority in Maslow’s hierarchy because it is essential for self-preservation. Food, water and air are vital needs necessary for survival and are shared by both humans and animals. Without food there is starvation, without warmth there is cold and without protection there is exposure to the elements. Without nurturing and nourishment individuals suffer and die. Survival, comfort and protection are an integral part of self-interest. Failure to satisfy this physiological need jeopardises self-preservation.

The second basic need is safety and security. The self is motivated to protect itself against threat, danger and deprivation. When changes promote fear or insecurity the need for security is activated (Waller, 1932). The potential of earning a good salary is interrelated with the need to avoid hunger, as such, and assists self-preservation (Ilacqua, Schumacher & Li, 1995). Individuals in financial need who know work is scarce are likely to accept changes in their work places so as not to jeopardise their
job tenure. They project the consequences of their actions and define job loss as a threat to self-preservation. At the same time they support changes that improve their work conditions and workload, maximise enjoyment, reduce stress and maintain their mental health (Hargreaves, 1972).

The third basic need is belonging. This involves affiliation, acceptance and affection that satisfies the affective domain (Hargreaves, 1972). Inclusion in a group promotes a positive self-image and feelings of worthiness (Waller, 1937). “Self-image is shaped by its reflection in the attitudes of others” (Scott, 1995, p. 107). Failure to achieve a sense of belonging leads to isolation. The need for belonging is not restricted merely to self-interest but also provides the psychological basis on which individuals strive for the common good of mankind. Being social animals, people display concern for others and illustrate awareness that without society, a sense of belonging would be replaced by a sense of isolation.

The fourth basic need is the enhancement of ego and self-esteem. Individuals are motivated by the desire for respect, status, reputation, approval and recognition. For example, job success and satisfaction are linked to status, recognition and improved reputation. Success promotes the worth of individuals in the eyes of significant others (Scott, 1995). Significant others have the capacity and power to directly influence self-interest. Therefore a primary concern of individuals is to safeguard self-interests by looking competent in the eyes of significant others. Humans want to perform well and gain the approval and respect of others. This enhances their status and position in their social group and promotes recognition (Scott, 1995; Skidmore, 1975; Waller, 1937). Self-esteem provides a powerful motivation to make the link between individual behavior and social order (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986).

The fifth basic need is self-actualization. This enables individuals to develop to their full potential and express themselves creatively and personally. It reflects the desire, “to be inspired, motivated, enthused, reassured, and what one described as ‘renewed’” (Woods, 1996, p. 47). When individuals have satisfied the other four needs they are ready to pursue their desire for self-actualisation (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986). These needs are important because joint actions emerge from a process of interpretation and definition (Blumer, 1969).
Maslow’s theory, then, offers support for the claim that human behavior is based on self-interest and the common good. Other theorists such as Hertzburg, focus more specifically on behavior in the workplace, which is a focus of this study. Both Maslow and Hertzberg’s theories of motivation share a common assumption that individuals seek to satisfy physiological and psychological needs. Indeed, aspects of Herzberg’s theory of job satisfaction can be matched with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. With reference to Herzberg, Khan (1995) notes that,

Achievement, recognition and the intrinsic interest of the work itself match the higher levels of self-actualisation in Maslow’s theory of needs. On the other hand…extrinsic factors such as pay, security and physical working conditions match the lower order needs in Maslow’s theory. (p. 25)

Extrinsic factors that relate to job context factors are linked to Maslow’s lower order needs (Khan, 1995). These include financial reward, group cohesion and style of leadership being implemented (Khan, 1995). On the other hand, intrinsic factors allow individuals to personally grow and fulfill their psychological needs. They include the “challenge and interest of the work; perception of the worth of the work; participation in decision-making or amount of responsibility and decision making power accompanying the job; and control/freedom of the job” (Khan, 1995, p. 24). Ilacqua, Schumacher & Li (1995) concluded that job satisfaction is a result of intrinsic factors and, “job dissatisfaction is related to extrinsic factors” (p. 51). When self-interest is threatened individuals define change as, “involving loss of benefits or little personal pay-off” (Rodd, 1994, p. 121).

Extrinsic factors can enhance or impede job satisfaction and subsequently self-interest. They can generate compensatory wants that are either accepted or rejected by individuals according to their needs and motivation. The fulfillment of one need can lead to the fulfillment of another need (entrained wants). According to Kimbrough & Burkett (1990, p. 141) “promoted properly, the entrained-wants idea leads to a pyramid of improvements in the school, each one building on the other”, a point particularly relevant for this thesis.

Self-interest is influenced by the belief systems developed in societies. For example, the culture of capitalist societies encourages humans to satisfy self-interest, whereas the culture of some other societies discourages this behavior. The Pueblo Indians of
New Mexico and Arizona, for instance, are encouraged to pursue the common good before self-interest. They are discouraged from accepting recognition whatever the magnitude of their success (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986). Without individuals, society cannot exist. Without society, individuals cannot achieve a sense of belonging.

The fulfillment of human needs enables individuals to grow and experience such psychological rewards as security, satisfaction, success and status. Physiological and psychological factors trigger individuals to respond to stimuli in ways that maximize personal advantage. Self-interest is a powerful ingredient in human life that influences the way individuals define situations. This thesis strives to understand the basis on which school staff defines the P1 situation. More specifically, whether they are driven by the desire to fulfill their own physiological and psychological needs, and/or whether they are driven by a concern for the welfare of their students.

Well-being of others

From a symbolic interactionist point of view, the meaning that individuals attach to a situation is dependent on the self's internal thoughts and beliefs about what constitutes the well-being of others in their workplaces. Through a mental process of interaction and interpretation individuals remove themselves from a situation, take on the attitude of the 'generalised other' and assess their behavior, "in terms of generalized norms, values and beliefs. Mead called this 'the generalised other', and it is a crucial element in how he saw the relationship between self and society" (Woods, 1996, p. 34). More specifically,

What people know of their world is also organized in terms of what they think is likely to happen under various conditions; beliefs about cause-effect relationships in the social as well as the natural world; conceptions of means-ends relationships (what must be done in order to accomplish a given end); notions about what is morally or normatively necessary or forbidden in various situations. (Hewitt, 1976, p. 122)

Therefore, members of a culture or sub-culture may develop a shared view about what constitutes the well-being of others (Hargreaves, 1995). They tend to support groups or institutions in which they are members and this has a significant impact on their conduct (Hargreaves, 1995; Hewitt, 1976; Scott, 1995; Wood, 1982). For instance, "people who feel strongly attached to a group are more likely to co-operate
with one another to secure group objectives” (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986, p. 115). They prefer to remain part of an institution that is predictable and has, “a common response on the part of all the members of the community to a particular situation” (Skidmore, 1975, p. 156). In some instances, ‘definitions’ of what constitutes the well-being of others are already part of an accepted body of knowledge that members of a society share.

These general considerations can be applied to the key concepts and concerns of this thesis. This study has as its focus the primary school workplace, in particular P1 classes. Within this workplace there are two distinct and separate sectors of education: early childhood and primary. Strong solidarity exists amongst members in the early childhood field to support the adoption of developmentally appropriate programs rather than formal academically orientated programs and curriculum-focused pedagogy. This stance is based on empirical evidence that curriculum-focused pedagogy does not meet the needs of children during these formative years (Elkind, 1988; Goldstein, 1997; Kamii, cited in Decker & Decker, 1988; NAEYC, 1987; Roper, 1987; Rowley, 1991; Shepard & Smith, 1988). Many supporters of early childhood philosophy claim that developmentally appropriate curriculum embody developmental goals (physical, creative, socio-emotional and cognitive) that are beneficial for student learning. However, developmentally appropriate programs are interpreted in many different ways, producing a diverse range of programs, and a lack of uniformity. French and Pena (1997, p. 3) explain how, “early childhood educators are committed to interactionist and constructivist theories which incorporate an active learning environment in which the child engages in learning with concrete materials and meaningful experiences.”

Advocates of traditional primary philosophy, on the other hand, focus more heavily on cognitive development, which places less emphasis on personal and social aspects of student learning (Alderson, 1992; Tayler, 1992). Traditional primary philosophy is based on the belief that knowledge should be transmitted by teachers and absorbed by students. This philosophy tends to be relatively rigid in structure and reflective of “the values of conformity, uniformity, and accountability that characterise many traditional elementary school environments” (Callahan, 1962; Cremin, 1961; Cuban, 1993 cited by Goldstein, 1997, p. 4). Traditionalists believe that, teacher-dominated,
transmission-oriented practices will improve student learning (McLaughlin & Oberman, 1996). Self-contained classes, age appropriate curriculum and the division of learning into subject areas generally govern traditional primary philosophy, which is not supportive of a learner-centered approach as a means of improving student learning. Although school curricula documents that promote learner-centred approaches exist in primary schools, these are not always adopted, despite their visibility in primary science, maths, language arts curricula, such as genre approaches to writing and invented spelling.

However, institutions are not rigid. Although individuals remain in control of society, there is room for innovation and flexibility (Scott, 1995; Skidmore, 1975). Social groups and institutions may adopt rules and conditions of admission, but these are not static and may be altered by groups or individuals. It is in fact, individual members who construct the culture and traditions of institutions and alter their structure. Although structural features may “set conditions” for interaction, individuals remain in control and “nothing at the distinctly ‘sociological’ level contravenes this process” (Skidmore, 1975, p. 158).

However, “for smooth interaction to occur, it is necessary that all interpret situations in the same way” (Woods, 1996, p. 33). School staff who adopt either a traditional primary philosophy or an interactionist/constructivist early childhood approach, may find it difficult to reach consensus on how young children learn best. This is because a traditional primary approach differs from an early childhood approach in philosophy, curriculum, teaching styles, classroom management and evaluation (Barblett, 1996; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Mosley & Fleege, 1993; Corrie, 1997; Elkind, 1988; Elkind, 1993; Fishhaut & Pastor, 1977; Graue, 1993; Hirsh-Pasek, 1991; Hitz & Wright, 1988; Meisels, S.J. 1992; Pratt & Tracey, 1986; Seefeldt, 1988; Stamopoulos, 1995; Tayler, 1992; Thurman, 1970).

In this thesis, the well-being of students is conceived and defined in terms of psychosocial development and improved student learning. An underlying assumption is that school staff are interested in whether P1 supports the type of school development, teacher development, curriculum development and community development that is said to enhance student learning. This assumption is associated with education
reform agendas in Australia and other parts of the world that over the past decade have focused on school renewal, curriculum innovations, improved standards of teaching and restructured education structures, on the assumption they are directly linked to student learning. In fact, educational reforms are couched in expressions of how these areas can raise student achievement levels (Corrie, 1999b; McGinn, 1999). A review of current reform agendas reveals a diversity of opinion on how student learning can best be improved. For some, the overriding solution and over fundamental unit of change is school development, while for others it is teacher development, or curriculum development or community development.

**School development:** One educational reform agenda for achieving a breakthrough in the ‘productivity of student learning’ pins its hopes on school development. The rationale behind this agenda is that the school is the primary unit of change. Part of this rationale is that good schools make good teachers and a good education system.

The school development agenda involves macro-level and micro-level reforms. Macro-level reforms include devolution of power and responsibilities from centralised government to local school, with the focus on whole school level change (Dimmock & O’Donoghue, 1997; Hargreaves, 1994). In Kentucky for example, the Kentucky Education Reform Act (July 13, 1990) enabled schools to remove barriers between early childhood and elementary grades and implement developmentally appropriate practice as a whole school reform (Privett, 1996). In Australia, the ‘Schools of the Future’ program, resulted in a shift from a centralized system towards school based management (Caldwell & Hayward, 1998; Spring, 1996). In WA, legislative changes enabled government to instigate, “major system-wide reform of the curriculum, of management and administration, and of the part played by all stakeholders” (Dimmock, 1990, p. 197). The implementation of *Better Schools in Western Australia: A Programme for Improvement* (Western Australia, Ministry of Education, 1987) gave schools increasing control over educational decision-making.

Micro-level reforms on the other hand, target school restructuring and flexibility for, “promoting changes in work organisation, pedagogical practices and learning processes (Dimmock & O’Donoghue, 1997, p. 49). Such reforms support shared
philosophies, facilitative leadership, school visions and effective school cultures as avenues through which student learning is enhanced (Ainscow & Southworth, 1996; Campbell, 1985; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Hargreaves, 1995; Hoy, Tarter & Witkoskie, 1992; Knight, Lingard & Porter, 1993; Lieberman & Miller, 1984, 1986; Little, 1982; Louis & Miles, 1990; Nelson & Hammerman, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1991; Sarason, 1991; Sellars, 1996; Thieseen, 1993; Wallace & Wildy, 1995; Yee, 1998). So important is whole school development that a recent innovation for students at risk, the ‘Roots & Wings’ program, claims success because of its ability to sustain whole-school reform (Slavin & Madden, 1999).

Advocates of school development, focus on school cultures as a means of supporting school improvement (Allen & Glickman, 1998; Hargreaves, 1995; Nelson & Hammerman, 1996). In fact, “the literature on effective schools suggests that high performing schools are those with an effective culture and that participative decision making is a key prerequisite for these cultures to develop” (Purkey & Smith, 1985, cited by Robertson & Briggs, 1998, p. 33). In these instances, collaborative cultures are promoted as superior to non-collaborative ones and more successful in supporting school improvement (Campbell, 1985; Little, 1982; Lieberman & Miller, 1984, 1986; Lieberman, 1988, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1991). This is because they reduce the likelihood of school staff working in isolation, fearful of challenging school norms that are characteristic of low consensus schools. School development is viewed as, “personal, idiosyncratic and micropolitical involving much negotiation, arbitration and coalition building as well as sensitivity to colleagues’ professional views and personal feelings” (Ainscow & Southworth, 1996, p. 250).

established power-based relationships, advocates claim school reform will replace, “the inefficiency, inflexibility, cost, impersonality and alienating capacity of (old-style) state bureaucracies” (Knight, Lingard & Porter, 1993, p. 6).

Principals’ ability to provide leadership and their acquisition of an appropriate knowledge base are also viewed as significant aspects of school development (Chalmers, 1992; Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1984; Spring, 1996; Weiss, 1989; Wildy & Wallace, 1997). Furthermore, there is a need for principals to remain, “emphatic in matters related to students’ welfare and the good of schools, and this provides a clearly defined, well-known and shared boundary around acceptable practice for students and teachers” (Wildy & Wallace, 1997, p. 144). Advocates of these reforms also believe that, “inspiring visions mean nothing until something different and better happens for children” (Schwahn & Spady, 1998, p. 47).

Reforms that promote disequilibration and reconstruction and a move away from traditional learning and school staff working in isolation from others are supported by interactionist and constructivist theory (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996). Bonding, collaboration and continuity ensures improved student learning from one year level to the next and accelerates the change process (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996; Gifford, 1994; Nelson & Hammerman, 1996; Szabo, 1996; Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 1998). As such, school staff remain, “part of a complex system, extending from the school…to society at large. Changes in one part of the system echo throughout the entire system” (Nelson & Hammerman, 1996, p. 9).

Advocates of school development endorse current educational reforms that strive for better conceptual understanding amongst all school staff. If constructivism is to be adopted as an epistemological paradigm, then school staff require new pedagogy and practice, a greater conceptual understanding of how students construct their own meanings and a ‘reculturing’ within the school (Fullan, 1993; Nelson & Hammerman, 1996). Only then will educational reforms promote quality education for all children, which leads to improved student learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1996).
**Teacher development:** A second educational reform agenda for increasing the ‘productivity of learning’ pins its hopes on teacher development. The rationale behind this agenda is that teachers are the fundamental unit of change; that is, good teachers make good schools and good education systems. An assumption here is that legislation merely establishes a framework for improvement, but within this framework, teachers act as indispensable agents of change, capable at will, of enhancing or obstructing success (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997). In order to provide quality care and respond to change, teachers need to acquire professional knowledge, develop instructional techniques, alter their beliefs and evaluate and review their practices (Anderson, 1997; Argyris & Schon, 1974; Day, 1997; Elmore & Sykes, 1992; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Nelson & Hammerman, 1996; Richardson, 1990, cited by Smylie, 1995). For teacher reforms to succeed, it is imperative that teachers are motivated, not alienated by reform, and provided with quality support structures (Fromberg, 1992; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Hargreaves & Evans, 1997; Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991). Advocates of teacher reforms, claim that inadequate teacher training programs, professional development and support structures will impede student learning (Caldwell & Hayward, 1998). Furthermore, reforms make no difference, “if teachers do not teach differently or students do not learn differently, with improved outcomes” (Caldwell & Hayward, 1998, p. 119).

Findings of major reports released overseas support the importance of teacher development in improving student outcome. They indicate a need to review teacher development, including pre-service education and ongoing teacher education. Of particular concern here is quality and the importance of teacher appraisal, professional development and career development. These findings correspond to those documented in major reports released in Australia that highlight the need for a continuum of support for teachers.

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International and national educational reforms highlight a growing urgency for teacher support and accountability (Elliott, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Hattam & McInerney, 1999). Distributed and shared leadership, teacher empowerment, changing roles and responsibilities are being advocated (Miller, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1991). School restructuring is about changing school power relationships and empowering teachers, therefore, collaboration and collegiality must replace hierarchy and isolation making teachers participants rather than instruments of school policy (Hargreaves, 1994; Spring, 1996; Wideen, Mayer-Smith & Moon, 1996). Patterson & Fleet (1999) endorse regular after-school collaborative sessions, professional development days and collaborative work as effective. Weber (1997) elaborates,

What research has been showing conclusively is that where teachers are brought into more leadership roles, only a fully collaborative effort between principal and teachers will produce effective instruction. Where principals give teachers full administrative responsibilities in a school, without the benefit of information, active participation, or cooperation, mistakes will be made and wheels reinvented. (p. 255)

Until recently, reform agendas have focused little attention on teachers of young children. For example, because of uncertainty about early childhood education, the Holmes Group consciously omitted it from its agenda (Day & Goffin, 1994, p.3). The NAEYC response was to, “initiate discussion with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and acquire separate portfolio review for early childhood teacher education programs in 4-year institutions” (Day & Goffin, 1994, p. 4). Further developments emerged when the NAEYC recently launched the National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Preparation, to conceptualize a competent system of early childhood professional preparation and development.

In Britain during the 1980s, an absence of specialist early childhood teachers working in infant classes became a major staff concern. Younger children in nursery classes were taught by specialist teachers trained to teach and care for this age group. However, children of reception classes with school aged children were taught by teachers not trained in this age group. David (1992, p. 14) investigated the perceptions of school staff and found, “many of the teachers involved in teaching four-year-olds in reception classes have felt inadequately trained and plead for in-service courses, particularly where they need to be able to articulate to parents the
importance of learning through play". School staff found many teachers of four-year-olds in reception classes feel inadequately trained and seek in-service courses (Bennett & Kell, 1990; Sharp, 1988). The Select Committee “recommended that there should be an expansion of both initial and in-service training for teachers of nursery and young infant children” (Sharp, 1988, p. 77). The committee opposed and lamented the trend away from specialist training because of its predicted impact on student learning. In Tasmania, “generic job descriptions...mean that teachers with no specific early childhood training can find themselves teaching in early childhood” (Senate Employment, Education & Training References Committee, 1996, p. 86). Of concern to many, is that this trend is becoming increasingly visible in WA. As new structures replace old, inservicing is prioritised along with the sharing of knowledge, so classroom practice can be reinvented from a new conceptual framework (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996; Nelson & Hammerman, 1996).

Educational reforms that encourage teachers to reconceptualise their practice and follow a radical point of departure from present thoughts and practices are linked to constructivist theory (Brooks & Brooks, 1996; Nelson & Hammerman, 1996). Changes such as P1 challenge teachers, encouraging them to teach differently and more actively (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Elmore & Sykes, 1992; Falk, 1996; Richardson, 19901, cited by Smylie, 1995).


Curriculum development: A third educational reform agenda for improving the ‘productivity of student learning’ pins its hopes on curriculum development.
Throughout the world changes to broad curriculum frameworks, subject-specific innovations, cross curricula initiatives, and outcomes-based education have been adopted in a bid to improve learning. The rationale is that enhancing the quality of curricula will improve student learning. However, a diversity of opinion on the most appropriate kind of education for young children surrounds the field of early childhood education. Bihr, cited by Goodrich (1981), explains that, “Some say only play, some want a watered down first grade, some recommend the cognitive approach” (p. 13). Arguably, “no single kind of early childhood program has a monopoly on quality” (Mitchell, 1989, p. 670). Therefore, advocates of curriculum reform differ in their philosophical approach. According to Spodek (1985), there are five origins of curricula in early childhood classes, namely: ‘children’ (eg Froebel and Montessori); ‘developmental theory’ (eg Gesell); ‘learning theory’ (eg Skinner); ‘organized knowledge’ (eg Bruner); and ‘school content’ (eg the Bereiter-Engelmann Program).

In the past, the construction of early childhood curricula has been the teacher’s responsibility. Currently, government interventions, the inclusion of early childhood in primary school settings and mandated curriculum frameworks have restricted this practice. Many advocates of curriculum reform claim that educational reforms and changes to the status of early childhood education have deepened divisions rather than bonded the early childhood and elementary/primary sectors of education and have accelerated the push towards early academic learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Elkind, 1986; Goldstein, 1997).

Early childhood advocates claim that young children do not learn in the same way as older children. They cite reputed educationists such as Froebel, Montessori, Piaget and recent research findings to support their argument. Concerns are also echoed by organizations such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals, International Reading Association and other professional organizations who direct their members to resist formal academic learning in early childhood classes (Hitz & Wright, 1988; Sava, 1989). The literature reports differences between early childhood and primary education in terms of curriculum, programs of teacher training, teaching methods and styles (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Mosley & Fleege, 1993; Elkind, 1988; Fishhaut & Pastor, 1977; Goldstein, 1997; Graue, 1993; Hirsh-
Pasek, 1991; Meisels, 1992; Sava, 1989; Shepard & Smith, 1988). Competing, contradictory philosophies on how young children learn best need to be resolved if coherency is to prevail in schools. The debate over what form early childhood should take in public schools needs to be resolved (Rowley, 1991).

After decades of debate in the US concerning what constitutes a quality program for young children, pressure escalated to the point where the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) intervened and released a position statement on developmentally appropriate practice that was aimed at all sectors of education. The NAEYC (1987, p. 36) boldly stated to its members that,

> Programs have changed in response to social, economic and political forces; however these changes have not always taken into account the basic developmental needs of young children which have remained constant. The trend toward early academics, for example is antithetical to what we know about how young children learn.

In the US, the 90,000 member NAEYC published its first professional consensus document, *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8* (Bredekamp, 1987) on the evident differences between constructivist and traditional approaches. However, there were few indications of real change so the NAEYC published a revised version of "Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) to re-iterate its endorsement of developmentally appropriate practice and as a response to educationists calling for a reconceptualisation of early childhood curriculum. "The document is underpinned by a socio-cultural perspective and acknowledges that children's behaviour, learning, development and social relationships are as much culturally and historically constituted, as biologically constituted" (Taylor, Diezmann, Lennox, Perry & Watters, 1999, p. 61). Socio-cultural perspectives became a focus because of the criticism and many issues raised about the sensitivity of the statement to culture and diversity of context.

Curriculum concerns are not restricted to the USA. Take for example, the results of various British studies during the 1980s on the inclusion of four-year-old children in infant classes. British teachers, like teachers in WA schools, were expected to provide a quality program for younger children using a constructivist approach, and
amalgamate this with a more traditional approach for year one. Evidently, however, differing philosophical underpinnings on how young children should learn impeded their work. Added to their dilemma was the fact that four-year-old attendance was optional while year one attendance was compulsory (Bennett & Kell, 1990; Cleave & Brown, 1992). Moreover, the teachers claimed they could not provide an appropriate education for four-year-old children and children of compulsory school age without adopting more formal aspects of learning in their classrooms (Bennett & Kell, 1990; Cleave & Brown, 1992; David, 1990). They expressed concerns about the curriculum being offered to four year old children and the unrealistic expectations on teachers to simultaneously provide an appropriate education for four year old children and children of compulsory school-age (Bennett & Kell, 1990; Cleave & Brown, 1992; Ghaye & Pascal, 1990; National Association of Head Teachers' Early Years Conference, 1986, cited by Sharp, 1988; Sharp, 1988, cited Better Schools, DES, 1985; Stevenson, 1987). Further difficulties were identified, namely, the immaturity of young children, unsuitability of staff and inadequate resources. (Bennett & Kell, 1990).

According to school staff in Britain, during the 1980s, the inclusion of four-year-olds in schools had a negative impact on the quality of learning experiences for younger children (Bennett & Kell, 1989; Cleave & Brown, 1992; Sharp, 1988). Inspector Ron Weir (cited by Cleave & Brown, 1992, p. 9) presented his report at an NFER conference in 1988 and stated that, “Four is a distinctive age and stage – the needs of children of this age are distinctive and if the curriculum is to respond effectively it also needs to change and become distinctive.” The majority of participants in one study concluded that, “four year olds should be in a separate class with a specific curriculum, qualified helpers and proper resource provision, and that the most appropriate form of school provision was that provided in nursery classes” (Bennett & Kell, 1990, p. 18). These concerns were accompanied by calls for, “a thorough examination of what constitutes an appropriate curriculum for a four-year-old child and how to translate the principles of early education into practice, within the constraints of an infant environment” (Sharp, 1988, p. 88). Of particular concern was that educational reform driven by political considerations would erode early childhood curricula.
The White Paper 'Better Schools' (DES, 1985) made similar observations. The conclusion drawn from all these studies is that the curriculum in infant classes may not be appropriate for younger four year olds. As Bennett & Kell (1990, p. 7) point out,

> The picture that emerges from the research evidence is clearly not a rosy one. It portrays inappropriately trained teachers attempting, with little assistance, to provide a differentiated curriculum to classes of some 30 children covering an age range of two or three years. Teachers are characterised as having honourable intentions but without the experience, resources or parental support to carry them out. They thus fall back on stressing the 3Rs, thereby denying the four year olds the curriculum they need and deserve.

Philosophical differences between both fields left ignored, can lead to inappropriate practices. For example, in WA the provision of funds by EDWA for commercial kits to be used in early childhood classes were used to support a traditional primary approach to learning (Corrie & Barratt-Pugh, 1997). Corrie (1999b, p. 9) elaborates,

> The pedagogy promoted in commercial kits reflected traditional primary school teaching: whole-group instruction in lock-step curriculum. Therefore, it is suggested that the use of commercial kits in the early childhood curriculum represented a 'push-down' of traditional primary school pedagogy to early childhood settings.

Corrie (1999b) elaborates that in instances where primary school pedagogy is used as a basis for programs, it is unlikely that early childhood teachers will report children’s interests are enhanced.

In summary, constructivist and interactionist theory claims that, “learning proceeds through the individual construction of understanding, not by accepting facts and rules from teacher or textbook” (Nelson & Hammerman, 1996, p. 4), and concedes that students learn best when they construct their own knowledge (Corrie, 1999b; McLaughlin & Oberman, 1996). Teachers who can capitalise on these principles by re-inventing and constructing new curriculum and translating new innovations and curricula theories into effective learning experiences can enhance student learning (McLaughlin & Oberman, 1996; Nelson & Hammerman, 1996).

**Community development**: A fourth educational reform agenda for improving student learning pins its hopes on community development (Cranston, 1996; Rust, 1993). A
growthg body of evidence which shows increased parent involvement leads to
greater student performance has triggered this agenda (Sanders & Epstein, 1998;
Sullivan, 1998). Low achievement rates and high drop out rates have compelled
reformists to view the partnership between schools, parents and the community as
vital in enhancing school effectiveness and improving student outcome (Sanders &
Epstein, 1998). Parents are now being included in school decision-making processes
in an effort to unite school and community members in educational reforms aimed at
improving the quality of student learning (Cranston, 1996; Rust, 1993). The
rationale behind such reforms is that parents, who participate in shared decision-
making, become active participants in their child’s education. They develop closer,
positive ties with schools, which minimises resistance and leads to improved student
learning (Kronemann, 1998). Such involvement requires parents to go beyond
serving as fundraisers and become active participants in their child’s education
(Kronemann, 1998). Indeed, “the closer the parent is to the education of the child,
the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement” (Fullan &
Stiegelbauer, 1991). Advocates of community development claim that closer school
and community ties make good schools and good education systems.

The importance of community development is advocated internationally. Studies in
the US, United Kingdom (UK) and Canada encourage parent participation as a
25), for example, asserts that,

...support is required not only at the policy and legislative levels but also at the
school and community level where the concept has to be put into practice. Issues
related to how comfortable teachers and parents are with any innovation are critical
for its successful implementation.

A study in Britain, funded by the National Foundation for Educational Research
(NFER), looked at multiage groupings and found, “over two-thirds of the teachers
said they were under pressure from parents to provide a more formal curriculum”
(Sharp, 1988, p. 84). In the USA research discovered school staff in multigrade

3 Dauber & Epstein, 1989; Epstein, 1988; Epstein & Dauber, 1988; Fantini, 1980; Mortimore et al.,
1988; Rosenholtz, 1989; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988; Ziegler, 1987, cited by Fullan & Stiegelbauer,
classes complaining of increased stress and the temptation to satisfy parents by including developmentally inappropriate practices. More specifically,

Parents of kindergartens worried the work was too hard; parents of second graders worried the work was too easy. It seemed as if no one was happy...The stress of parent pressure made her doubt herself and her skills and tempted her to throw her standards out the window. (Goldstein, 1997, p. 22)

Goldstein also reported that resistance accelerates when change, “threatens and unnerves parents because developmentally appropriate practice contradicts the traditional expectations and norms of elementary schooling” (1997, p. 22/23). Parent resistance has long been a source of pressure for policy makers and school staff (Angus & Olney, 1998). In WA, changes to the entry age, “met with strong opposition from many parent groups” (Hyde, 1999, p. 11). In a quest to increase student productivity, closer ties between schools and communities are now encouraged.

Advocates of community development claim problems can be minimised when parents are active partners in change. This occurred in Britain, where close partnerships with parents resulted in decreased parent pressure for their younger children to participate in a more formal curriculum (Sharp, 1988). However, closer bonds between school, home and community need to be accompanied with communication that is well articulated and meaningful to parents (Caldwell & Hayward, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1991; Sellars, 1996). For children’s learning to improve, there needs to be sufficient professional dialogue between schools and community to promote social harmony and disperse knowledge of good practice to the home environment (Caldwell & Hayward, 1998; Sellars, 1996). Education is shaped by different stakeholders, therefore schools should no longer be seen as isolated units, but part of a working team with parents and the community (Fullan, 1993).

Positive community school relationships enhance the change process and improve student learning (Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990). This occurs because communities are not powerless but have the strength to exert pressure on schools. Therefore,
student learning improves when there are closer ties between schools and parents (Fullan, 1991),

Closing comments

Two broad bases on which school staff might build their definition of the PI situation have been identified through a review of literature. These bases are self-interest and the well-being of others. Self-interest is embedded in the fulfillment of physiological and psychological needs. The well-being of others is conceptualised within a diversity of views of how educational reforms can improve student learning. For some, the solution may rest in improving school development, while for others it may focus on teacher development, or curriculum development or community development.

According to symbolic interactionism, school staff are able to construct their own definition of the PI situation and their active response to PI will be embedded heavily in that definition of the situation. It can be assumed that the more school staff see PI contributing to self-interest and well-being of others, the more likely they are to be supportive of it. If they do not define PI as enhancing their self-interests and the well-being of their students, then it is highly unlikely they would be supportive of it.

Response to their definition of the situation

Disturbances to an individual’s definition of the situation is altered or disturbed. This can shatter three taken for granted assumptions that people often bring to typical situations. First, that their interpretations and concepts of a situation are valid and accurate. Second, that significant others share the same concepts as them. Third, that as long as their definition of the situation operates and permits meaningful action there is no need to query it (McHugh, cited by Hewitt, 1976).

Human conduct is a function of individuals interacting with objects, events, or other people, interpreting them in symbolic terms and then deciding upon a course of
action. Individuals may act singly, collectively or as representatives of a group, in an attempt to, “fit one’s own line of activity in some manner to the actions of others” (Blumer, 1969, p. 8). Their behavior is “actively constructed in accordance with [their] generally held definition of the situation” (Woods, 1983, p. 3). For some individuals, change may be interpreted as rational and in their interests, while for others it may be defined differently (Scheerens, 1998). Having the ability to choose, they select various ways to secure their personal goals and needs (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986).

This section of the chapter examines the ways in which individuals respond to their definition of the situation and the basis on which they select their mode of accommodation.

Ways in which individuals respond to their definition of the situation

Different definitions of a situation can lead to different modes of accommodating it. For example, responses to perceived pressure for change can take the form of complete rejection, part rejection or acceptance to complete acceptance (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1 Range of responses to change

From the wide range of various modes of accommodation, which emerge from the literature, three broad areas are examined in this section, namely: opponents, negotiators/conformists and system supporters. These terms will be discussed in terms of modes of accommodation to change because P1 is still at the early reform stage.
Opponents

Opponents attempt to resist change and impede its progress by verbally criticising its existence in an overt or covert manner. Their overall intent is, “obstructing the implementation of the reforms, undermining public confidence in the new order, and mobilizing support for a return to the old system” (Chadbourne, 1989, 54).

Two types of opponents can be identified from the literature: active opponents and passive dissenters. Active opponents resort to 'open warfare' or 'guerrilla warfare' on the grounds of resentment, hostility and anger (Waller, 1932; Wood, 1982; Woods, 1996). They employ 'open warfare' strategies that may involve public demonstrations, confrontations or abandoning the workplace (Corrie, 1996). Strikes, boycotts and even death emerge as further strategies used to obstruct change. According to Van der Westhuizen & Theron (1996) some individuals oppose change to the point of death. However, according to Connell, Ashenden, Kessler & Dowsett (1983, p. 85), in the school sector “outward resistance only becomes the predominant mode of attachment to the school for a minority.”

Active opponents may confront change in a more covert manner by using 'guerrilla warfare'; sabotage and the strategies of the underground resistance fighter. Their resistance may also include psychological resistance, negative perceptions and attitudes (Van der Westhuizen & Theron, 1996). The value of both these types of resistance (overt and covert) are often necessary and functional parts of the change process, in that they serve to clarify motives, convictions and loyalties (Van der Westhuizen & Theron, 1996).

Passive dissenters respond in a milder manner than passive opponents. They avoid confrontation by non-involvement stamped with indifference, withdrawal and/or passive resistance, which may result in an uneasy truce, coolness and avoidance. Or as Chadbourne (1989) explains,

Their resistance, then, takes the form of refusing to endorse the reforms publicly (or privately), taking no initiative to make the new process work, and having to be lead or carried every step...With them, it is a case of devaluing organisational change by treating it with studied indifference. (p. 54)
The passive dissenter has two priorities. First, to safeguard self-interest and the well-being of others without antagonising significant others. Second, to register their disapproval and refusal to support the change. Rodd (1994) observes that when individuals withdraw, their behavior indicates an unwillingness to resolve the conflict. Instead they camouflage the conflict, which remains hidden beneath the surface. This is why passive dissenters, faced with new policies, withdraw and cautiously close the door behind them. In this way they, “attempt to keep the familiar world intact [while] counter-arguments are rehearsed and resistance rationales developed” (Whitaker, 1993, p. 64/65).

Negotiators and conformers

Negotiators and conformers share some of the opponents’ views of change, but adopt different modes of response. Negotiators accept that change is inevitable and are willing to support it if satisfactory conditions and concessions are provided. On the other hand, conformers are unwilling to actively oppose change nor negotiate because of the fear of reprisal and their belief that they possess insufficient power to facilitate negotiation.

Negotiators use bargaining as a means of reconciling needs or interests, achieving objectives, maintaining orderly behavior and pacifying situations (Hewitt, 1976; Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986; Keane, 1996). Through negotiation and interaction, problems are highlighted, solutions sought and harmonious relationships maintained (Rodd, 1994). The interactive process allows positive conduct and bonding to be maintained and working agreements to be formulated. Negotiation and agreement emerge when individuals are rewarded for declining resistance.

The negotiation process is often intricate and difficult to implement. For example, achieving a fine balance between over-and under-compensation is not easy. This is because over-compensation can signify weakness while under-compensation can result in resentment and rebellion (Woods, 1983). Furthermore, ‘open’ negotiations may be based on good will and willingness to reduce conflict. ‘Closed’ negotiations however, may be adopted when individuals adapt the bargaining conditions and alter
their agreed upon response (Woods, 1983). A truce benefits both parties in reducing stress. Each faction normally agrees to go easy on the other resulting in a redefinition of the situation and avoidance of disequilibrium (Reynolds, 1976).

Conformists share some of the opponent and negotiators’ views of employer initiated change. However, they are unwilling to actively oppose change because of the fear and risk of reprisal, not because they necessarily support the change. They conform because they perceive they have insufficient power to do otherwise (Woods, 1983). They are unwilling to adopt a policy of non-involvement or negotiation, because they believe they are in a weak bargaining position (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986). Their response is compliance, if not capitulation, because they believe their own interests and those of others are best safeguarded in this way.

Research on group dynamics shows that conformity is expected of members of a group and group pressure is often applied to members who rebel (Hargreaves, 1975). Corrie’s research refers to staff who, “changed their knowledge so that it aligned with knowledge articulated by the headteacher” (1996, p. 235). Such alignment is not shared knowledge but compliance. Individual’s personality needs and the general system needs are articulated as one, in the form of “pattern maintenance and conformity need-disposition” (Skidmore, 1975, p. 105). Conformity tends to be higher in groups which experience a feeling of powerlessness (Hargreaves, 1975). For example, Cleave & Brown (1992) noted how British teachers, opposed to four year olds inclusion in infant classes, felt powerless against this change and on that basis conformed to change.

Supporter

System supporters define employer-initiated reform as benefiting themselves and/or enhancing the well being of others. They publicly defend this type of change and support its inclusion in the workplace. They speak confidently of its strengths and are optimistic of its future outcomes. As Chadbourne (1989) explains, they “defend the new system against attack, ‘talk up’ its strengths in appropriate forums, and generally convey optimism about the future outcomes of the changes” (p. 54). They believe social order will be maintained by supporting such reform and view it as
being compatible with their own philosophical stance and that of their employing organisation (Hewitt, 1976; Scott, 1995, Wood, 1982).

System supporters tend to take a 'consensus model' perspective on employer-initiated reforms. They assume that special reforms reflect a consensus of norms and goals among members of the organisation. They see 'them' versus 'us' conflicts as springing from temporary misunderstandings that can be readily removed and replaced with common interests and democratically agreed upon objectives and values.

Basis on which individuals construct their modes of accommodation

People respond differently to situations for various reasons. First, they may hold different definitions of the situation. Second, they may hold varying degrees of power. Third, they may be subjected to different forces that pressure them to re-evaluate their definitions of the situation and focus on projected costs and benefits to themselves and others. Fourth, different kinds of relationships may have developed from one individual to the next.

Different definitions of the situation

Conflicting definitions of the situation are prevalent not only in school workplaces, but also in society (Woods, 1996). It is not uncommon for those who initially hold similar definitions of the situation, to alter their stance, withdraw their support and develop different definitions (Dimmock & O'Donogue, 1997; McGinn, 1999). For example, when teachers find it difficult to accommodate change, and are apt to alter their stance throughout the change process (Van der Westhuizen & Theron, 1996). Individuals may initially agree with change on the basis of self-interest and ideology, but later oppose it in terms of the pace of change, level of support and implementation procedures (Chadbourne, 1989).

Research shows that school staff differ in their willingness to accept and deal with change (Dalin, 1978; Gjerde, 1983; Lovell & Wiles, 1983; Hanson, 1985; Coetsee, 1993, cited by Van der Westhuizen & Theron, 1996). When school staff are unable
to reach a consensus, change is often delayed or rejected (Hargreaves, 1995). In these instances, there is low tolerance for opposing views, which makes consensus of opinion difficult to reach. According to symbolic interactionist view on human nature, as, “imperfect, self-interested, self-enhancing creatures that they are, people resist society, even as they rely upon it and take it within themselves” (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986, p. 149).

Ideological factors often trigger resistance in school workplaces (Hargreaves, 1995). In these instances, conflicting teacher attitudes, philosophy and traditional beliefs impede an agreed response to change (French & Pena, 1997). These factors can take the form of, “changes in values and belief systems that may affect program goals, such as moving from an adult-centred, curriculum-driven program to a child-centred developmental program” (Rodd, 1994, p. 121). An example here is the type of, ‘academic push-down’ supported by traditional primary teachers and rejected by the early childhood sector (Elkind, 1988; Goldstein, 1997; Kamii, cited in Decker & Decker, 1988; NAEYC, 1987; Roper, 1987; Rowley, 1991; Shepard & Smith, 1988; Tayler, 1998).

Mandatory reforms can also trigger conflicting definitions of the situation. For example, the results of a study by Hatch & Freeman (1988) showed that, “kindergartens in Ohio are academically oriented, skill-centered programs and that many educators involved in these programs experience conflict between their own beliefs and what they are expected to do in practice” (p. 162).

School staff who reject the directives of change instigators or principals as incompatible with their own beliefs, provide an indication of the diversity of definitions of the situation. For example, British staff held different definitions of the situation to policy makers, believing the needs of four year olds were non-compatible with the demands of school organisation (Cleave & Brown, 1992). They reflected on the learning experiences provided to four year old children, and expressed strong dissatisfaction with such changes (Cleave & Brown, 1992). According to Goldstein (1997) even under the most optimum US conditions, including DAP into primary year levels is difficult and frustrating for teachers. Furthermore, McLaughlin (1993) found, “embittered frustrated teachers…all existed
in professional communities with powerful norms of privacy and unchallenged sacred principles or personal beliefs” (p. 99).

In New South Wales, the early childhood profession faced dilemmas trying to implement change in a school system that was traditional and more likely to retain the status quo (Patterson & Fleet, 1999). In WA, problems incorporating early childhood and whole school policies were also prevalent (Corrie, 1999a). In stressful situations such as these, “people cannot find or create meaning as they interact with one another, and they are paralyzed” (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986, p. 11).

When people and institutions hold views that are dissimilar, conflict can bind individuals to their own group and accentuate differences in definition. In such situations, individual’s display their commitment and loyalty to their group and may unite against opposing definitions of the situation. They prefer familiarity and order to conflict and change (Simmel, cited by Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986).

Varying degrees of power

Differences in the distribution of power directly impact on people’s definitions of the situation and their response to similar situations. For example, individuals who hold greater power are more likely to negotiate or adopt a more assertive stance, than those who hold less power. The importance of power cannot be underestimated and is reported on by Hewitt (1976) along with negotiation and self-interest. More specifically,

Power, negotiation, and self-interest must be seen as central to the interactionist conception of social order...If we examine the situations that are defined, the roles made and taken in everyday life, the objects toward which people act, the routine and problematic situations they confront, we discover that they are inextricably bound up with inequalities of power, the pursuit of individual and collective self-interest, and the ongoing negotiation of social order, whether in any of the numerous units that make up a society or at the larger societal level. (p. 175)

Power influences an individual’s ability to negotiate and compromise. It determines whose definitions of the rules will predominate and who is in a better position to bargain and pursue their self-interest (Hewitt, 1976). Power determines the point to which individuals will respond without fear of the responses of others. Power is
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immersed in inequalities. For this reason different people respond differently to situations that appear identical or similar. Hewitt & Hewitt point out that, “power is always a matter of degree, since people rarely have complete freedom of action or the capacity to enforce their will totally” (1986, p. 107).

To symbolic interactionists, power and coercion are not just abstractions; they have tangible effects on individuals as they go about their everyday lives, pursuing their own ends and responding to the acts of others (Britzman, 1991; Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986). Individuals have the capacity for self-determination, which enables them to consider the views of significant others as insignificant to ignore them, or seek the approval of new audiences, or conform to the expectations of others and secure their approval (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986). The use of power may force some individuals to conform but creates negative feelings towards such instigators (Rodd, 1994). This results in anger, aggression, bitterness, rebellion and at times sabotage (Rodd, 1994).

Power relationships that are linked to opposing definitions of the situation have the potential to become powerful sources of resistance because they challenge individual needs and wants (Ben-Peretz, 1996). Thus, educational change needs to be, “accompanied by significant, not superficial redistributions of existing power relationships among principals, teachers, parents and students” (Hargreaves, 1994). When there is consensus of opinion and an absence of conflict there is no need for negotiation. There is also no need to negotiate in situations where stakeholders have sufficient power to dismantle resistance. However, when there is no consensus of opinion and individuals do not have a monopoly of power, then there is a need for negotiation and consensus.

**Greater power:** When individuals hold greater power than others they become more willing to actively oppose change, bargain with significant others for concessions, or pressure others to support a change. Therefore, “the resources of power are varied, ranging from naked force to the control of information and knowledge, the dispensation of rewards by controlling jobs and financial resources, and the manipulation of symbols” (Hewitt, 1976, p. 174). This is because workplaces are not merely places of work but places of authority with inequalities of power (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler & Dowsett, 1982). For example, in the school workplace
principals hold greater power over school staff, while the latter hold greater power over students (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler & Dowsett, 1982).

Majority opinion can constitute a strong force that impacts on individuals or minority groups. Individuals can be subjected to various power tactics in the hope that it will induce conformity. First, attempts are made to convince individuals that a specific change is in their self-interest and those of others. Second, the importance of loyalty and support to the group is outlined and future reciprocation of support is suggested. Third, there are threats on individuals who do not conform. And fourth, the ultimate exclusion of non-conforming individuals from the group (Wood, 1982). These forms of coercion require substantial power because in ensuring, “a considerable degree of direct supervision; one has to be in a position to carry out a threat in order for it to be effective” (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986, p. 107).

When different individuals respond differently to the same situation, change agents may need to employ strategies of manipulation and co-optation to eliminate differences of opinion (Van der Westhuizen & Theron, 1996). A danger here is that school staff may discover they have been misled and react in a more overt and damaging manner.

Discourse, outlining the conditions in which individuals interpret their situation, becomes powerful when institutions sanction a change as benefiting both its members and promoting the welfare of others (Britzman, 1991). For example, educational institutions that sanction or oppose Pl can strongly suggest a mode of accommodation to their members. According to symbolic interactionism, individuals would then respond to a directive according to their interpretation of the projected costs and benefits of Pl to themselves and students.

**Equal power:** Individuals who believe they hold individual or collective power equal to that of their opponents are more likely to negotiate than those in a weak bargaining position. This is because, “power is an element that affects how exchange occurs. Where people have roughly equal resources, they decide to enter exchange relationships” (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986, p. 109). As such, they are more likely to be supportive of change and in a conflict situation both parties will negotiate and
improve their self-interests, by using their power to attain maximum advantage at minimum cost. Workers may seek higher pay and improved working conditions, while employers seek to want to minimize labor costs and maximize control.

Minimal power: Individuals with minimal power and a lower status tend to be more passive and less willing to enter negotiations. Such individuals occupy a weaker bargaining position. Research conducted by Rosenholtz (1991, p. 158) found that, “the majority of teachers working under less empowering circumstances were not willing to break or bend rules, even under the most dire circumstances”. When pressure is applied by powerful others, teachers are often forced into reproducing policies (Woods, 1979). When their status increases and they feel more powerful, they often become more assertive. So dynamic is the force of power that, “What we do reflects the power of others over us, not just our own perceptions and desires” (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986, p. 12).

Pressures and projected costs and benefits

Varying degrees of pressure imposed on individuals by institutions and significant others can result in different modes of accommodation to similar situations. Take the case of a principal who exerts pressure on staff to accept change and uses, “threats for example, job loss withholding promotion, dismissal and transfer” (Theron & Westhuizen, 1996, p. 9). School staff who have permanent employment may be less threatened than those who are temporary and not guaranteed of work. Those who are financially independent or close to retirement may respond differently to those who are financially dependent or young graduates.

In times of change or crisis, institutions may apply pressure on members to remain loyal to their institution (Hewitt, 1976; Scott, 1995; Wood, 1982). Take, for example, the stance by NAEYC (1987, p. 36) when it boldly stated to its members, “The trend toward early academics, for example is antithetical to what we know about how young children learn.” Or, Lady Plowden’s statement in 1982 to the Preschool Playgroup Association in England, expressing her disapproval of four year olds being admitted into reception classes on the basis of administrative grounds. She urged members to consider her view in these terms:
I deplore the present practice of beheading nursery schools and playgroups by sending the four year old into the reception class of the infant school so as to fill empty spaces and no doubt keep the numbers up in the school. (Bennett & Kell, 1990, p. 3)

In these situations individuals may feel pressured to respond negatively to change if it threatens their perception of ‘duty’. For example, where early childhood education is perceived to be a public responsibility rather than a private one, staff may feel obligated to become involved (Tayler, 1998). On the other hand, their reaction may be different. For example, increasing pressure may weaken them and thus leave many early childhood trained teachers feeling that they have lost the fight against curriculum escalation in their classes (Goldstein, 1997; Hatch & Freeman, 1988; Hills, 1987 cited by Hyde, 1999, p. 28). They may feel disempowered and pressured by mandatory reforms and directives they are asked to include in their classes (Helsby & McCulloch, 1996).

Relationship with others

Relationships based on similarity and intimacy are closely tied to power and different modes of accommodation (Wood, 1982). Individuals are empowered when they share views and philosophies with each other and are more willing to negotiate, collaborate and formulate shared decisions (Blumer, 1969; Wood, 1982). Even when similarity and intimacy exists, opposing definitions of the situation can trigger ‘balkanized teacher cultures’ that emerge as, “separate and sometimes competing groups, jockeying for position and supremacy like loosely connected, independent city states” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992, p. 71). Balkanized teacher cultures are strongly insulated from each other and have a tendency to generate conflict and opposing definitions of the situation (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994).

In early childhood centres, individual philosophies can differ to the point where different definitions of the situation can become a source of conflict. For example, in Queensland preschools and Western Australian pre-primary centres, “teacher philosophy, teacher priorities and the strategies used can differ markedly bringing significant discontinuity to the flow of early years programs across an educational setting” (Tayler, 1988, 1992; Hayden & Newman, 1996, cited by Tayler, 1998, p.10).
This view is supported by Rodd (1994) who claims, “It is evident that the early childhood context provides a ripe arena for conflicts to emerge given that individual philosophies about caring for and educating young children are derived from subjective beliefs, values and preferences supported by personal experience” (p. 51). In these instances individuals’ responses may impact on their relationship with others if they, “seek to defend themselves in various ways – by rationalizing what they see as their own failures, by attacking others, or perhaps by resolving to excel in the very qualities they feel lacking in themselves but present in others” (Hewitt, 1976, p. 89).

When trust and intimacy are absent individuals become guarded, displaying a reluctance to communicate their feelings. Social interactions are then marked by, “ignorance, suspicion, or pretense in what interactants know of one another’s roles” (Glaser & Strauss, cited in Hewitt, 1976, p. 143). Such “suspicion contexts” arise when participants are unsure of the other’s identity or views and find it difficult to predict their definition of the situation (Hewitt, 1976). They attempt to determine whether their definitions of the situation are similar or whether their power links are greater or weaker. They are less likely to actively oppose and more likely to observe cautiously as passive dissenters. Distrust results in suspicion because trust grows in an enduring consensual relationship in which bonding occurs; as such, “trust is earned, not given” (Keane, 1996, p. 30).

Leadership style can also be a source of relationship conflict. Authoritarian leaders produce higher levels of conflict than democratic leaders (Rodd, 1994). However, authoritarian leadership may be more acceptable to younger and inexperienced staff than to more mature and permanent staff (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992). As younger staff gain confidence, leaders need to adjust their style and provide greater freedom. This is because the role of school principals is linked to the style of partnership developed amongst school staff (Tayler, 1998). Thiessen (1993) investigated how principals adopt four distinct images: comptroller, accommodator, processor, and provocateur to deal with tensions and problems that emerge as a result of change. As comptrollers, they anticipate conflict and dealt with it before it escalates. They meet opposing views that need to be dealt with. In their role as accommodators they diffuse conflict and encourage social harmony amongst staff. As processors they
construct resolutions that school staff can support and apply. As provocateurs they stimulate continuous confrontations so as to generate resolutions.

According to McLaughlin (1993, p. 99) communities of staff, “with powerful norms of privacy and unchallenged sacred principles or personal beliefs” may respond to change in different ways to those exposed to alternative, less rigid beliefs and practices. This is because partnerships vary from culture to culture, and place to place, with power and status dispersed unevenly amongst different contexts. Therefore, “the perspective, relative power and position of participants, whether teachers or parents, shapes their beliefs about children’s entitlements and about optimum partnership. These differences result in individuals responding differently to various situations (Tayler, 1998). As such, the capacity of school staff to enter partnerships, form alliances and reach shared consensus is vital to the change process (Fullan, 1993). Leadership is recognised as vital for understanding power relationships and maintaining staff relationships (Kagan, 1994). Principals need to be included in the bargaining process because they are catalysts in achieving increased learning (Keane, 1996). In fact, relationships cannot survive in constant conflict and opposing definitions of the situation (Keane, 1996). Staff resentment and rebellion is a result of staff inability or unwillingness to maintain positive relationships (Rodd, 1994).

**CONCLUSION**

This chapter has outlined the way in which individuals respond to their definition of the situation and the basis on which they select their mode of accommodation. School staff construct responses to reforms that are embedded in their definition of the situation. Change forces them to re-examine their own beliefs, re-define their situation, re-construct their realities through interaction, negotiation and compromise and attempt to resolve conflicts. The bases on which they construct their modes of accommodation are varied and dynamic. Four of these bases have been examined; namely: different definitions of the situation, power, pressures and different kinds of relationships.
The conceptual framework constructed in this chapter (from a symbolic interactionist perspective) provides an instrument for making sense of the way in which school staff might build their definition of the P1 situation and the manner in which they might respond to that definition. The conceptual framework is derived from a review of the research literature and forms the basis of the research questions. Two main dimensions, self-interest and the well being of others, emerge as important bases on which individuals construct a definition of the situation.

In keeping with the theoretical basis of this study, the conceptual framework is linked to symbolic interactionism and the related theories of humanism and constructivism (see Figure 2). It is designed to inform rather than dictate or constrain data collection and analysis. Figure 2 outlines the conceptual basis for a symbolic interactionist account of school staff's stance in respect to P1 classes. Two main areas considered pertinent to this study are outlined in the conceptual framework. The first area examines school staff's definition of the P1 situation. The second area investigates their response to their definition of the P1 situation.

Certain symbolic interactionist assumptions are reflected in the conceptual framework. First, school staff are role makers rather than role takers. Second, they construct their stance according to their definition of the situation. Third, they take into account other people's definitions of the situation, foresee the consequences of their actions and develop strategies that will enable them to construct a stance in respect to P1 classes.

School staff engage in 'minded' behavior, that is, a mental process of construction that leads to a definition of the situation. This process involves thought, not overt action. An analysis of the research literature indicates that two broad dimensions, self-interest and the well being of others, are likely to form the basis on which school staff construct their definition of the P1 situation. Each of these two broad dimensions consists of several components. Self-interest incorporates physiological, psychological, social, spiritual and moral needs. These include the need for self-preservation, safety, security, belonging, the enhancement of ego and self-esteem and self-actualisation. Personality traits, personal beliefs, values, knowledge, skills and experiences are also influences to individuals' definitions of the P1 situation.
Figure 2  Conceptual Framework

Staff definition of P1 situation

Supportive

Neutral

Oppositional

Self-interest
- physiological needs
- psychological needs
- social needs
- spiritual needs
- moral needs

Well being of others
- school development
- teacher development
- curriculum development
- community development

constructed from

Staff response to definition of P1 situation

supporter

negotiator

and/or

conformer

opponent

constructed from

Different definitions of the situation

Power

Pressure

Relationships
Several other assumptions underlying the conceptual framework developed in this chapter. First, school staff define the well being of others in terms of the educational welfare of students. Secondly, school staff are likely to assess P1’s capacity to serve students’ interests in terms of whether or not it supports school development, teacher development, curriculum development and community development that claims to enhance student learning.

The second part of the conceptual framework indicates the ways in which school staff may respond to their definition of the P1 situation. School staff are likely to take a supportive stance towards P1 when they define it as a change that enhances their self-interest and the educational welfare of students. When they see P1 as impeding their self-interest and students interests, their stance is likely to be oppositional. When they define P1 as making little if any difference to self-interest and the well being of others, their stance is likely to be neutral or one of indifference.

As an extension of these types of stance, four modes of accommodation were selected that are pertinent to this study: supporter, negotiator and/or conformist, and opponent. Four main reasons emerged why school staff may adopt one or more of these responses. First, staff may have different definitions of the situation. Second, within their definitions of the situation they see themselves as having varying degrees of power. Third, the amount of pressure they are subjected to may force them to re-evaluate their definitions of the situation and focus on projected costs and benefits to themselves and others. Fourth, the different kinds of relationships they have with others can form a basis for different responses to the same situation.

The stance taken by school staff to employer initiated reforms is not a one-way linear response. Rather, it is a two way process in which school staff continually re-define their situation and reconstruct their mode of accommodation. Disturbances to definitions of the situation can lead to altered responses which in turn alter the definitions. Staff definition of the P1 situation may lead to the construction of different roles and multiple realities comprising a diversity of components. Put differently, the way in which staff define the P1 situation is complex, multi-faceted and dynamic, and their stance towards P1 will comprise their definition of the P1 situation and their response to that definition.
This study is based on a qualitative paradigm of inquiry informed by symbolic interactionism. It is advised by a phenomenological position in which researchers become the major research instrument, search for patterns, interpret data, reach an understanding of participants' perspectives and sometimes construct a new theory.

A quantitative paradigm of inquiry differs from a qualitative model because it is supported by a positivist position characterised by the following postulates. Tentative hypotheses and theories are pre-determined and fixed prior to data collection. Formal instruments are used to manipulate and control variables and reduce data to numerical indices (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The researcher's position is detached, objective and impartial.

Qualitative approaches are appropriate when participants' perceptions are being investigated and situations are studied holistically. Qualitative methods of inquiry are open, flexible and sensitive to the complex and interconnected world of people. Punch (1998, p. 243) observes that, "qualitative methods are the best way we have of getting the insider's perspective, the 'actor's definition of the situation', the meanings people attach to things and events." Qualitatively, reality is interactive, socially constructed, multi-layered and everchanging, not one whole that can be sub-divided into parts to be examined (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Schumacher & McMillan, 1993).

In a qualitative approach, multiple methods are used to gather, interpret and reflect on data. The researcher's knowledge, experiences and skills are used to investigate real life situations and explore the context in which people live (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Shumacher & McMillan, 1993). The phenomenological approach is suited to investigating real life situations (Burns, 1997; Punch, 1998).
Qualitative research includes, “such areas in inquiry as ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutic inquiry, grounded theory, naturalist inquiry and ethnography” (Patton 1991 as cited by Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 3).

Theoretical perspectives such as symbolic interactionism, are adopted because of their perceived strengths. According to Hargreaves (1993), symbolic interactionism has the capacity and strength to compile meaningful data in the five ways shown in Table 1:

Table 1 Types of Symbolic Interactionist Capacity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Capacity of Symbolic Interactionism</th>
<th>Description of Capacity</th>
<th>Strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appreciative capacity</td>
<td>Explores social action from actor’s viewpoint. Understands the basis of social interaction.</td>
<td>Has implications for policy. Articulates with macro level work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designatory capacity</td>
<td>Provides language of discourse. Articulates commonsense knowledge</td>
<td>Communicates knowledge gained from thoughts of others. Has implications for policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective capacity</td>
<td>Provides participants with means to reflect on own activity</td>
<td>Self-reflection. Has implications for policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immunological capacity</td>
<td>Informs policy and protect it from failure.</td>
<td>Has implications policy formation. Articulates macro level work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrective capacity</td>
<td>Offers critique of macro-theories</td>
<td>Articulates with macro level work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Woods (1996) adds four additional categories to this list. He argues that in addition to the strengths Hargreaves (1993) outlines, there are further benefits to be gained from this theoretical perspective (see Table 2).

Table 2 Additional Strengths of Symbolic Interactionism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Capacity of Symbolic Interactionism</th>
<th>Description of Capacity</th>
<th>Strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illuminative capacity</td>
<td>Provides comprehensive deep rich information on individuals, groups, institutions and issues</td>
<td>Investigates issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical capacity</td>
<td>Can generate theory and exert influence on macro-theory and lead to reformulation</td>
<td>Has the capacity to generate theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy-making capacity</td>
<td>Able to have direct policy implications</td>
<td>Informs authorities of policy implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative capacity</td>
<td>Helps effect change within school when researcher and school participants work together</td>
<td>Promotes professionalism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Symbolic interactionism is suited to this study, because it guides the researcher to develop conceptual and categorical components of understanding that emerge from the data, rather than impose preconceived categories linked to pre-set research questions on the data (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1991, cited by Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

An anthropological approach was not selected as a basis for this study because the researcher was not in a position to be immersed in the field over a long period of time (Punch, 1998). Instead, the researcher could only make shorter visits to a range of schools and then depart, “from the situation to rethink the meanings of the experience” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 25). It was also not possible to use a participatory research approach as a basis for this study. This is because participants were not involved in constructing research priorities or collecting and interpreting data in an action-oriented process. Therefore, the researcher was not involved as a co-teacher but remained non-reactive taking care to establish a relationship marked by trust and respect (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

DATA COLLECTION

The participants

The participants in this study comprised school staff (principals, teachers and teacher-aides) categorised as professional workers in the school context. Their inclusion was imperative because it was the profession that was excluded from the P1 policy adoption process and it was their perspective that the study sought. Parents and students were not included in the study for two reasons. First, they are generally not regarded as part of the teaching profession and secondly, their inclusion would have reduced the depth to which the stance of professional school staff could be investigated. The perspectives of students and parents on P1 remains a matter for further research.

The participants in the study were based in three government and three independent Western Australian schools. They included one female and five male principals, fifteen
female P1 teachers, and ten female P1 teacher-aides. All of these participants demonstrated a keenness to voice their perceptions on P1 and provide a practitioner's account of their definitions of reality.

*Principals*

Six principals were selected for inclusion in the study. They were chosen from a list of schools with P1 class combinations obtained from EDWA’s Good Start Implementation Unit, the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA), the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and personal telephone contact with independent schools not attached to these organisations. Referral from EDWA personnel, early childhood specialists, principals and university staff was used as the basis for a snowball sampling strategy (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). As P1 was a recent policy directive there was a limited choice of P1 classes.

The work experiences of principals ranged from primary schooling, secondary schooling through to tertiary teaching. One principal held limited practical experience in a pre-primary class as a principal of a one teacher rural integration program school. The amount of practical experience principals held as leaders of schools ranged from one year to twenty-one years. (see Table 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Formal Qualifications</th>
<th>Practical Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years as Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code omitted</td>
<td>Teacher Training Certificate</td>
<td>Years 3 to 7</td>
<td>21 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code omitted</td>
<td>Currently completing PhD in Communication Studies</td>
<td>Years 2, 3, 6 &amp; 7</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code omitted</td>
<td>B. Ed. major in Educational Administration</td>
<td>Years 1 to 7</td>
<td>19 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code omitted</td>
<td>Currently completing M.Ed</td>
<td>Years 3 to 7</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code omitted</td>
<td>B. Ed. with Honours</td>
<td>Years 2-10</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 3, the six principals held no formal qualifications in early childhood. Five had attended university between 1988 and 1996 while the sixth one could not recall the date because it was, “many years ago”. Most principals had experienced considerable changes in EDWA and government policy during their principalship and were able to reflect on the way they previously had responded to changes in their schools. Codes were omitted from Table 3 to ensure anonymity.

*Pl teachers*

Fifteen teachers were included in the study. They were not purposively selected or part of a snowball sampling strategy (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). They were included because they were teachers of Pl classes. Of the ten teachers in the three government schools, nine were primary trained and qualified to teach children from years one to seven, while one was early childhood trained and qualified to teach children from birth to eight or three to eight years of age. Of the three independent school teachers, two were primary trained, while the remaining three early childhood trained. (see Table 4 on page 69). Codes were removed to ensure participants retained anonymity.

The symbols appearing in the data collection chapters for teachers, can be explained as follows: ‘P’ represents the code for the ‘Principal’ attached to the teacher’s school, ‘1-6’ represents the number allocated to each of the six principals, ‘Pl’ represents the ‘Pl class’ and ‘A-F’ is the letter allocated to each of the Pl teachers within each school.

The last year in which teachers attended university ranged from 1970 to 1997. Nearly half the teachers completed qualifications in the 1990s while the remainder attended university or college prior to this date.
### Table 4. Demographic Data on Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Code</th>
<th>Formal Qualifications</th>
<th>Completion Date</th>
<th>Previous Year Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Bachelor Education with Honours. ECE.</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Degree in Primary Education</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Degree in ECE</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Degree in Primary Education</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>P1, P-2, 1, 3, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts in ECE.</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Nil-new graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Bachelor Ed Advanced Teaching Skills Primary Ed</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 1/2, 2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Graduate Diploma in Primary Education</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>P-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Diploma in Teaching in Primary Education</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1, 1/2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Diploma in Teaching Primary Education</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 2/3, 3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education in Primary Education</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Diploma in Teaching Primary Education</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1, 2, 1/2, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Diploma in Teaching in Primary Education</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1, 1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Degree in E.C.E.</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Pre-primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Bachelor of Education in Primary Education and Music.</td>
<td>Unrevealed</td>
<td>Kindergarten to Year 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Diploma in Teaching in Primary Education</td>
<td>Unrevealed</td>
<td>Junior primary &amp; Middle primary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher-aides**

The ten teacher-aides who worked in the P1 classes of the six schools in the study were included in the sample. Codes were omitted to ensure anonymity. (see Table 5). The symbols making up the codes are listed in the data chapters and can be explained as follows: ‘P1’ represents the code of the principal and school to which the teacher-aide belongs. ‘TA’ represents the code of the teacher-aides and the number following represents the school in which they are employed.
Seven of the ten teacher-aides had completed teacher assistant courses prior to or during their current positions as teacher-aides. All had some practical experience working with pre-primary children. In fact, more of them had been exposed to early childhood courses than had the teachers in this study.

At the time the teacher-aides were interviewed, one teacher-aide had been transferred from the school and therefore could not be involved in the study. This teacher-aide was a re-deployed cleaner who did not speak English and used sign language as a means of communicating with children.

**School sites**

The context in which people work has a bearing on the kind of data collected. The institutional structure of schools can impose constraints and conditions that impact on
social relationships and change. Woods (1979) identifies numerous such constraints. These include, “the mass nature of schooling, the heavily standardized and systematic requirements, the formal traditions of teaching...all the trappings of rooms” (p. 22). Various cultural elements and traditions exist that can constrain social action (Scott, 1997). A brief overview of the six school sites follows.

The six schools (three government and three independent) were located in the northern, southern and western metropolitan regions of Perth. Two of the schools were situated in older, more established working class areas surrounded by a large number of flats and small homes. One newly built school was set amongst medium to large homes in a growing middle-class suburb. Another school was located in a city area surrounded by businesses and few if any residential homes. The remaining two schools were located in older, more established, middle class suburbs and serviced the children of middle to upper class parents.

The six schools were similar in two ways. Students ranged in age from four to twelve years. Pre-primary and year one children were instructed in P1 class combinations. Differences were also evident across the six schools. The number of children in the six schools ranged from 85 to 360. The number of children in each P1 class combination ranged from 23 to 26. The number of teachers in each school, ranged from five to seventeen. Most schools had a mixture of split (eg Year 1/2) and straight (eg Year 1) classes. One school had four split classes and no straight classes. (see Table 6)

The physical environment in which P1 classes were located varied in each school. In some schools P1 classes were constructed in separate classrooms which were smaller than pre-primary classes. In a few instances, P1 classes were part of an open cluster space with other year levels. Only one school had a P1 classroom that was purpose built and part of the MAG trial program.
### Table 6  Year Levels in Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Levels</th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
<th>School 4</th>
<th>School 5</th>
<th>School 6</th>
<th>Number of classes across schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/7</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/6</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>½</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2*</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>P1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1*</td>
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<tr>
<td>K</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total N° Classes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2 Year 2, Year 1 and Pre-primary combined.
*1 Year 1 and Pre-primary combined.
*pp Straight pre-primary class.
* Two year 1 and three pre-primary classes divided into 5 P1 groups.

### Sources of data collection

In qualitative studies the trustworthiness of data depends largely on the methodological skill, knowledge, sensitivity and integrity of the researcher. In this study, the researcher has extensive knowledge in teacher education and research studies. Teaching experience has also been accrued within university, early childhood, primary schools and the hospital school system. The researcher has previous research experience with school projects, university research projects and a Masters in Education by full research. The experiences provide grounding in methodological skills. They also provided an understanding of the need to establish rapport with participants and remain ‘naïve’, nonreactive and nondirective (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The researcher has no affiliation with government, EDWA, the independent school sector, SSTUWA or WACSSO. She values the early childhood profession’s voice and perspective.
Table 6  Year Levels in Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Levels</th>
<th>School 1</th>
<th>School 2</th>
<th>School 3</th>
<th>School 4</th>
<th>School 5</th>
<th>School 6</th>
<th>Number of classes across schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/7</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/6</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2/3</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Classes</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P2 Year 2, Year 1 and Pre-primary combined.
P1 Year 1 and Pre-primary combined.
Pp Straight pre-primary class.
* Two year 1 and three pre-primary classes divided into 5 P1 groups.

Sources of data collection

In qualitative studies the trustworthiness of data depends largely on the methodological skill, knowledge, sensitivity and integrity of the researcher. In this study, the researcher has extensive knowledge in teacher education and research studies. Teaching experience has also been accrued within university, early childhood, primary schools and the hospital school system. The researcher has previous research experience with school projects, university research projects and a Masters in Education by full research. These experiences provide grounding in methodological skills. They also provided an understanding of the need to establish rapport with participants and remain 'naive', nonreactive and nondirective (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The researcher has no affiliation with government, EDWA, the independent school sector, SSTUWA or WACSSO. She values the early childhood profession's voice and perspective.
Therefore, this study attempts to provide the early childhood profession with an avenue through which their voices and perspectives can be documented and explored.

Multiple methods (triangulation) were adopted to overcome the kinds of bias and limitations that can exist in single method studies (Denzin, 1974). During the data collection period, the researcher sought participants’ perspectives of the PI situation through interviews, observations and document analysis.

*Interviews*

Interviews were the primary source of data collection. They were selected as an holistic way to gain meaningful data on participants’ beliefs, perceptions, expectations, attitudes and values. Their flexibility enabled the researcher to probe and clarify issues that emerged. Two types of interviews were conducted: semi-structured and informal conversations. Semi-structured interviews took place on an individual basis in the workplace setting with a view to establishing a rapport with participants in comfortable and familiar surroundings.

As detailed later in this chapter, the interview schedule was influenced by data collected in the initial phase of the study. Limited written documentation from EDWA and the literature made it necessary to arrange interviews with key government and independent personnel, to determine the types of PI issues they believed were emerging in schools. These issues were then interwoven into the interview schedules.

General questions for the main study were constructed to allow a systematic and comprehensive coverage of pertinent areas. The question typology presented by Patton (1991, cited by Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) provided a basis for the following six general categories of questions:

- Experience/behaviour questions on what participants were currently doing in their job.
- Opinion/value questions on the beliefs of participants.
- Feeling questions on the feelings of participants towards change.
- Knowledge questions on the knowledge participants held.
- Sensory questions on what participants observed were the reactions of significant others.
- Background/demographic questions on relevant socio-demographic information.

Questions were adapted to suit individual participants in the study. For example, some participants, in response to a broad question, would provide rich data with little intervention or guidance from the researcher. Other participants required a more structured approach where guidance and probing was expected and welcomed. In a few instances, participants asked to view the questions beforehand, though only for the first interview. In each case, they fleetingly glanced through them, appeared re-assured and then handed them back to the researcher. In further interview sessions they appeared comfortable without being given prior indication of content.

The interviews were emergent in design. At the completion of each interview, the researcher left the school to transcribe the data, reflect on it, compare it with data collected from the other schools and identify issues and themes for subsequent interviews.

The duration of interviews was approximately one and a half to two hours per session. A series of interviews was conducted over a period of approximately fifteen months, until 'saturation point' was reached. The number of interviews per participant varied from one (teacher-aides only) to seven. Altogether fifty-six interviews were conducted. Each interview was audiotaped, transcribed and returned to participants for verification.

Informal conversations with participants were conducted throughout the data collection phase and used to supplement interviews. In these instances questions emerged from the immediate context and were not pre-meditated. The information gained helped clarify observations and expand points made during the interview sessions. These
conversations occurred during class visits, staff meetings, parent meetings, telephone calls and even shopping centres.

Observations

Observations provided another important supplement to interviews and informal conversations. They occurred in schools, classrooms, staffrooms and at parent and staff meetings. Observations were used as a basis for informing the researcher’s interpretation of the interview data. They provided a more complete picture of the P1 situation and offered additional opportunities for the researcher to understand participants’ definition of the situation. Observations were conducted over a time span of several months to a year. As time progressed the researcher found it easier to become an unobtrusive observer.

Document analysis

Despite an extensive search, the researcher could find few documents in WA pertinent to P1. No system level document seemed to exist to provide participants with assistance or guidance. In most schools, there were no school level documents that focused on P1. School policy statements and newsletters fleetingly addressed P1. Only one principal had provided each teacher with a small booklet (developed by the principal) that contained information on the way P1 groupings would be constructed, implemented and linked into the school’s philosophy, ethos and organisation.

Phases of data collection

Data collection occurred in seven interconnected and consecutive phases. (see Figure 3). Phase one was a preliminary period in which individuals were approached to provide guidance on sample selection and a deeper insight into the nature of P1 internationally, nationally and locally. Phases two to six occurred in the natural school setting in which participants worked.
PHASE 1  
Preliminary Data Collection  
- Informal conversations with a range of personnel  
- Analysis of Data  

PHASE 2  
Selection of six principals  
- Interviews with six principals  
- Observations of six principals  
- Informal conversations with six principals  
- Analysis of Data  

PHASE 3  
Interviews with principals  
- Permission sought to interview teachers  
- P1 teachers interviewed  
- Analysis of Data  
- Teacher observations  
- Analysis of Data  

PHASE 4  
Principals given preliminary data analysis document  
- Principals return document  
- Analysis of Data  
- Interviews with principals  
- Analysis of Data  

PHASE 5  
Permission sought to interview P1 teacher aides  
- Interviews with P1 teacher aides  
- Analysis of Data  

PHASE 6  
Teachers given preliminary data analysis document  
- Teachers return document  
- Analysis of Data  
- Interviews with teachers  
- Analysis of Data  

PHASE 7  
Early childhood specialists at AECER conference in Canberra interviewed and asked to respond to data findings  
- Six principals, four teachers and one teacher aide 'audit' the data  
- Analysis of Data
In this setting the researcher observed, interviewed and sought to identify explicit and tacit knowledge of the way in which participants defined their situation and responded to it (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Participants were then asked to validate their data. Phase seven comprised two stages. The first stage began at an interstate conference where the researcher had the opportunity to show the preliminary findings to a range of educational specialists. Two early childhood curriculum specialists, who were experts in the field, were interviewed. Stage two comprised six principals, four teachers and one teacher-aide with expertise in P1 and was implemented after the data collection and analyses phases were completed.

Phase 1

Through informal conversations with representatives of EDWA’s Good Start Implementation Unit, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA), Catholic Education Office (CEO) and independent schools not attached to any of these organisations, a list of primary schools with P1 class combinations was compiled.

Forty-one individuals were approached to provide guidance on sample selection and a deeper insight into the nature of P1 internationally, nationally and locally. They included an international authority on mixed-age groupings, Australian and WA early childhood specialists, EDWA and independent school personnel, university staff, principals, teachers, teacher-aides and parents.

Phase 2

During the beginning of phase two, six principals were selected to participate in the study. At that stage, it was difficult to provide a better gender balance, therefore one female principal was included in the study sample. The literature indicates that, “there are gender differences in how knowledge is received, understood and integrated”
Principal selection was determined on five grounds. Principals were responsible for P1 classes during the data collection phase. There was an equal balance of principals from government and independent sectors. Maximum variation existed in respect to schools, educational districts and parent communities. There was a balance of principals who had instigated P1 for pedagogical or administrative reasons. The sample was to include male and female representation.

Three government school principals and three independent school principals were selected. Their inclusion provided a broad base to understand P1 and the constraints and supports that define the early childhood context within primary settings. At the time, there was a limited number of schools with P1 classes in WA.

Each principal was provided with a comprehensive outline of the study. Permission was sought for the interviews to be audiotaped. Issues were discussed such as confidentiality, anonymity and the right of participants to withdraw from the study at any given time. An agreement was signed between the researcher and the participants (Appendix 1).

Trust between the researcher and the principals was considered vital to a study of this type as principals were being asked to share their thoughts, plans, perceptions and intentions with the researcher. The honesty and willingness of the principals to participate was important. The interviews with the six principals were conducted in their offices and audiotaped so that data could be recorded accurately and swiftly. The researcher transcribed the interviews then returned the transcripts to participants for verification. Principals were asked to read the transcripts and reflect on their comments. They were encouraged to include additional data to the interview transcripts or alter any comments if they considered it necessary.
Interview data were then collated and analysed. Data analysis included inductive category coding and simultaneous comparing of units of meaning across categories. Themes and patterns were identified and interwoven for subsequent interview sessions. Throughout this phase, data analysis was early, ongoing and inductive.

Informal conversations with principals emerged during staff meetings, parent meetings, school tours, recess and lunch breaks. Most principals were reluctant to create school-based PI documents because there had been no external guidelines or written documentation on the matter.

Phase 3

Follow-up interviews were conducted with principals. At the completion of the second round of interviews, several principals acknowledged they had a limited knowledge of PI, especially the intricate details of how PI curriculum was being constructed and implemented. They requested that the views of teachers be incorporated into the study. The other principals were approached for permission to include their PI teachers in the study and all agreed.

At a one-to-one meeting with teachers, the researcher provided them with a comprehensive outline of the study. Permission was sought for the interviews to be audiotaped. Issues such as confidentiality, anonymity and the right of participants to withdraw from the study at any given time were discussed. All teachers agreed to participate in the study and an agreement was signed between the researcher and teachers (Appendix 1).

Interviews of all teachers were conducted within several weeks. Although the fifteen teachers had initially agreed to be audio-recorded, one teacher declined to do so at the time of the interview. She was eager to remain in the study but preferred to take a sample of questions home, provide written answers and then participate in a telephone interview with the researcher. The fourteen interviews were subsequently transcribed...
and returned to teachers so that they could check for accuracy. When the transcribed copies were returned, they were analysed and the themes and patterns that were identified helped to inform subsequent interview sessions. During this phase, observations of P1 classrooms were conducted to provide a more complete picture of the P1 situation and offered additional opportunities for the researcher to understand participants’ definition of the situation.

Phase 4

A summary of the data analysis was given to the principals for their input. This document had been constructed from interviews, observations and informal conversations conducted with the principals. Each principal had expressed a desire to discover the kinds of P1 issues other principals had faced and how they had dealt with them. The six principals were asked to read the document, expand on points made, reflect on issues and suggest amendments. They were reminded that their input would be incorporated in the final draft. The preliminary data analysis documents were returned to the researcher with minor adjustments and no elements of ‘surprise’ reported.

Phase 5

The researcher approached principals for permission to include teacher-aides in the study. At the time EDWA had notified schools that they would be reducing teacher-aide time in P1 classes, which caused anxiety amongst most principals, teachers and teacher-aides. Most participants believed that the role of teacher-aide in a P1 setting needed to be understood and that their perspectives be included in the study.

As before, the study was explained in detail and issues of confidentiality, anonymity and their right to withdraw from the study were addressed. The teacher-aides agreed to be audiotaped. An agreement was then signed between the researcher and each teacher-aide. (see Appendix 1). All interviews were conducted within a time frame of several weeks, then transcribed and returned to the teacher-aides to check for accuracy.
Phase 6

A preliminary analysis of P1 teachers’ interviews and conversations was compiled and handed to each of the fifteen teachers. Teachers were asked to read the document, expand on points made, reflect on issues and suggest amendments. They were reminded that their input would be incorporated into the final draft and asked to return the document. Fourteen of the fifteen teachers reported no elements of ‘surprise’ on reading the preliminary data analysis. One teacher was surprised that teachers were not early childhood trained. Subsequent telephone interviews were conducted with four teachers when additional data needed clarification and elaboration or when teachers requested such interviews.

Phase 7

Phase seven comprised two stages. In stage one of this phase, the researcher attended the Australian Research in Early Childhood Education (ARECE) Conference in Canberra where she had the opportunity to show the preliminary findings to a range of educational specialists. Two early childhood curriculum specialists, who were experts in the field, were interviewed for approximately two and a half hours. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and returned for verification. Stage two comprised six principals (three female), four teachers and one teacher-aide with expertise in P1 and was implemented after the data collection and analyses phases were completed. Each of the participants had experience leading or managing P1 classes. Two principals, two teachers and one teacher-aide, on their own initiatives, requested the full documents while the remainder were presented with sections of the final analysis to peruse.

Both stages were implemented to gain an understanding of how representative the participants were of a broader group (national and local) and to determine whether there was a diversity of opinion and multiple voices within the profession. Their responses were not analysed nor portrayed as a central part of the thesis, but are included as footnotes. At no time was their inclusion meant to alter, justify or question any aspect of
a participant's stance towards P1. In the footnotes, verbatim comments of school staff are enclosed in inverted commas. Comments from the two interstate specialists are distinguishable from those of the school staff because they are not enclosed in inverted commas.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis was early, ongoing, inductive and emergent in its approach. Themes and patterns were grounded in the data and emerged largely through a process of inductive reasoning. An attempt was made to ensure that the identification of patterns were guided rather than restricted by the conceptual framework. Although data collection and analysis were partly influenced by the literature, the researcher remained open to the findings and modified the framework to accommodate the data. Data collection, data analysis and the literature were therefore intertwined and bonded through a flexible iterative process.

The analysis of data was not a linear process where the literature was examined, data collected, data analysed and the study concluded. Data analysis was ongoing as interviews and observations were conducted. The analysis induced a continuous search of the literature to enable the researcher to gain greater in-depth meaning of participants’ responses and understand the interpretive processes used by participants in respect to P1. By taking on the role of 'other', the researcher conducted microscopic analyses of principals, teachers and teacher-aides’ definitions and responses to P1, so as to reach an understanding of how they derived their meaning (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). A macroscopic analysis of contextual issues was also conducted to enable the researcher to investigate the meaning P1 held for groups in the wider society (Chenitz & Swanson 1986). These accounted for the shared meanings of participants and their ideological positions towards a change (Chalmers, 1998). Therefore, government representatives, early childhood specialists, EDWA, the SSTUWA, WACSSO and specialists from the eastern states of Australia, were interviewed to provide the researcher with further background to make sense of the data.
To illustrate the methodology and process of analysis used in this study, a description of the systematic and distinct steps employed by the researcher are presented. They present a comprehensive ‘audit trail’ that traces the researcher’s initial ideas through to the final research outcomes.

**Stage 1 - Initial data analysis**

The first stage involved four steps. First, interviews were transcribed so that the verbatim transcripts could be returned to participants for accuracy, reflection and additional input. Second, additional data provided in follow-up interviews or in written form were acknowledged, transcripts modified and then photocopied in readiness for the initial stages of coding and theme building. Third, the researcher accessed the literature and other relevant sources when themes, individual contexts or other issues needed further elaboration and clarification. For example, when principals revealed dissatisfaction with the inclusion of re-deployed cleaners as P1 teacher-aides, some principals were unsure of the origins of this directive and were keen to have it investigated. In such instances, the researcher consulted the literature and EDWA personnel for clarification. The process throughout this first stage was therefore, ongoing, inductive and emergent and one in which data collection, data analysis and the literature were intertwined. During this time a positive rapport between participants and the researcher developed.

**Stage 2 - Inductive category coding and simultaneous comparing of units of meaning across categories**

The second stage of analysis included five steps and involved inductive category coding and simultaneous comparing of units of meaning across categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Coding involved an extensive process of sorting the data, coding the data and the discovery of concepts that fit the data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; van den Hoomaard, 1997). First, transcriptions were repetitively read until themes began to emerge. Second, emerging themes were carefully coded and manually separated into individual
containers by cutting transcripts with scissors. Computer programs were not used in this process because it was believed that manual approaches would allow the researcher to carefully explore themes without being distracted by computer programs (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Third, duplicate sets of themes were then displayed on a series of charts. Fourth, miscellaneous themes were separated and left aside for future use (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Fifth, themes were further broken down into sub-themes, separated into other containers and the results displayed on a further series of charts.\(^1\) For example, during the process of reading of transcripts, identifying and coding themes and manually separating them into individual containers, it became clear that for the majority of school staff, Pl impeded job satisfaction because it increased their workload and added to the complexity of their work. When themes were coded, broken down into sub-themes and displayed on a series of charts, it became evident that principals, teachers and teacher-aides had offered various reasons why their workload had increased and their work had become more complex. From one slice of the data, for example, it emerged that there was shared consensus amongst principals and teachers that Pl had further magnified the differences that existed between the early childhood and primary sectors of education. In their opinions, there was an unrealistic expectation that staff construct a Pl curriculum without guidelines and assistance. For example, they claimed it was difficult to implement a traditional approach for year one children and a constructivist approach for pre-primary children. On the other hand, they found it difficult to reconceptualise their teaching practices. In the opinion of most principals, P1 had increased the number of grievances they needed to manage, which required additional funding, accelerated staff unrest and impeded job satisfaction. Through inductive category coding and comparing of themes across categories, additional issues emerged to create meaning

\(^1\) The researcher made alterations in subsequent interviews. When interviews were transcribed, themes were highlighted and coded by cutting and pasting immediately onto computer. Subcategories were made and refined. This made it easier and more effective to transfer the data onto the computer when structuring the data analysis section and eliminated the physical separation of data into containers and re-entering of data in its new form, on computer.
from the data. Through the ‘constant comparative method’ of analysis, it was possible to refine and further develop sensitizing concepts (van den Hoonaard, 1997).

During this process, the researcher sought verification from both supervisor and colleagues that the coding of participants’ comments, to derive concepts from them, was accurate (Punch, 1998; van den Hoonaard, 1997).

**Stage 3 – Refinement of categories**

The third stage consisted of two steps that supported a refinement of categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Lincoln & Guba’s (1985) suggestion of adopting propositional statements was incorporated into this section and statements of fact that were grounded in the data were used to convey meaning and write rules of inclusion (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). First, data were re-grouped into containers and re-arranged on charts as rules for inclusion were made. For example, ‘self-interest’ and ‘educational ideology’ were emerging as two dimensions that participants appeared to be using to construct their definition of the PI situation. Coding the data became a necessary step in identifying themes and responses (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). To illustrate the category name and code used to refine categories now became ‘Self-interest’ (SI). The rule for inclusion was that PI was valued because it enhanced job security, job satisfaction, job success and job status. This became a lengthy, time-consuming process in which data was re-read to ensure it met the rule for inclusion. However, an added complexity of this process emerged when data indicated that PI had resulted in not only positives but also a range of negative issues in respect to ‘self-interest’.

The researcher consulted the literature and discovered qualitative researchers adopt various approaches to solve such issues. For example, Maykut & Morehouse (1994) explained how some qualitative researchers (Kidder, 1981) revised propositional statements to categorise both positive and negative instances, while others used positive instances to derive these statements (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). In this study large amounts of data emerged that were both positive and negative and needed to be placed
in separate categories. To have ignored either the positive or negative aspects of this study would have compromised its credibility and flawed the research. Categories were refined and expanded upon again, to cater for instances in which P1 was defined as an impediment to job security, job satisfaction, and job success and job status.

The second step, involved a progressive and continual refinement of categories as the researcher attempted to make meaning from the data and link it to symbolic interaction theory. This was a long and complicated process in which data collection, analysis and the literature bonded together to result in the development of a data presentation.

Stage 4 – Exploring relationships and patterns across categories

The fourth stage of data analysis explored relationships and patterns across categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Principals, teachers and teacher-aides offered a comprehensive range of data that needed to be connected and linked together. With most data, salient relationships and patterns were formed, while in some instances propositions stood alone. For example, teacher-aides were the only group to respond to their definition of the situation by adopting the stance of ‘system conformer’.

Developing a framework for reporting similarities and differences between the responses of principals, teachers and teacher-aides was difficult because of the vast amount of data and range of issues. After examining individual data, a decision was made to compare principals’ data as a group, then teachers and teacher-aides. Cross-cutting comparisons were made amongst principals, teachers and teacher-aides and relationships and patterns across categories were established.

An example of this process can be outlined by using one aspect of data, curriculum development, and tracing the perceptions of one principal. This particular principal defined P1 as enhancing curriculum development in two ways, namely, by enabling children to interact with a greater age range of others, and by providing adequate space and resources to conduct an appropriate early childhood curriculum. Further analysis
revealed that the second reason was due to a unique situation not found in the remaining five schools. In this school, the pre-primary centre had closed down and all resources had been transferred to the P1 class. As the school was losing student numbers, there was a surplus of classrooms, enabling two classrooms to be amalgamated into a P1 class. For this reason, this principal was alone in reporting that P1 had enhanced curriculum development in these ways.

However, this principal also reported negative aspects of P1 that had impeded curriculum development and threatened student learning. These aspects focused on the inadequate background of principals, lack of leadership and guidance, insufficient resource support, the wide range of children's developmental levels and staff stress. This principal in fact reported twenty-one instances in which P1 had impeded curriculum development.

In order to determine whether there were similarities or differences between the responses of this principal and the remaining five principals, data from each of the six principals were analysed until relationships and patterns emerged. A score of '1' was given for each comment made in a sub-category (themes). Individual maps of principals were then constructed to determine the number of issues reported by principals, their areas of distribution and overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with P1 with respect to curriculum development. Principals' data were then compared with teachers and teacher-aides to determine whether relationships and patterns existed across categories.

A macroscopic analysis was then conducted to investigate the meaning P1 had for interstate specialists, who had been asked to reflect on the data analysis. Furthermore, a macroscopic analysis was carried out to determine the meaning P1 had for the SSTUWA and WACSSO and to explore relationships and patterns in the data amongst these stakeholders. Finally, other school staff were selected to reflect upon the data and identify relationships and patterns with their own experiences.
This process of analysis reflected what Denzin & Lincoln call, “regular, ongoing, self-conscious documentation--of successive versions of coding schemes, of conceptual arguments--of analysis episodes--both successful ones and dead ends” (1994, p. 438). The process of coding and categorising each participant’s comments and exploring the relationships and patterns across categories was challenging, time consuming and intense. Through mental constructs the researcher distinguished patterns and meaning from data, by reflecting on past observations and creating new ones. Van den Hoonard (1997) refers to this time-consuming and complex process as ‘dimensionalizing.’ Woods (1992) accurately captures the experience in these terms:

Wrestling with mounds and mounds of ever accumulating material; searching for themes and indicators that will make some sense of it all; taking some apparently promising routes, only to find they are blind alleys; writing more and more notes and memos; rereading notes and literature for signs and clues; doing more fieldwork to fill in holes or in the hope of discovering some beacon of light...For most people, the pain barrier must be confronted and broken for quality theory to emerge. (p. 388-389)

When theoretical saturation was reached data collection ended and data analysis became more accentuated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). This stage of analysis intensified as the researcher examined the data, made connections and illuminated existing patterns of meanings (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Stage 5 – Writing the research

The fifth data analysis stage involved writing up the research. This process was complex and time-consuming and required a series of different structures before a suitable one was found that linked both data and symbolic interaction theory. For example, initially an attempt was made to present principals’ data as case studies. However, this method was not adopted, as it would have made principals readily identifiable to significant others. Another attempt was made to display principals’ data in a majority/minority structure, but this was unsuccessful because the six principals were all different and exploring themes and patterns would have fragmented the experiences of each principal, making it necessary to qualify each point. As a result, ‘composite voices’ were constructed for principals that clearly illustrated pertinent
themes. The data of teachers and teacher-aides on the other hand, was much easier to accommodate and present in terms of majority/minority viewpoints. Throughout this stage, data collection, data analysis and referral to the literature was iterative.

Throughout the written stage, the researcher attempted to remain impartial and avoid imposing a judgement, without acknowledging the origins of the source and indicating whether it originated from participants, expert opinion or the researchers own evaluation (Wolcott, 1990). This stage is interpretative as the researcher ponders on the “validity, reliability, and overall meaning of materials...as the field researcher is wedded to a complete data set” (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 67).

**TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE FINDINGS**

Writers such as Glesne & Peshkin (1992), Maykut and Morehouse (1994) and Schumacher and McMillan (1993) identify various processes that improve the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings. The processes adopted in this study are, multiple methods of data collection; building an audit trial; member checks; a comprehensive description of the process and outcomes of the study; a description of the researcher’s role; and the adoption of a scientific attitude. As this is an interpretivist study linked to symbolic interaction theory, trustworthiness replaces the positivist criteria of validity and reliability. ‘Trustworthiness’ is the term preferred by qualitative researchers (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Moorhouse, 1994).

**Multiple methods of data collection**

The combination of interviews, observations, informal conversations and document analyses provided multiple sources of data. The triangulation involved here adds assurance that the phenomena have been identified, understood and are properly represented and presented (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).
Building an audit trail

An audit trail was built from the researcher’s journal, original interview transcripts, field notes, observations and descriptions of the comprehensive and numerous attempts to find a structure that was appropriate. As such, this allowed stability and trackability of data to emerge (Guba, 1981). The audit trail provides the reader with a clear and concise account of the study from beginning to end, and this helps create dependability (Guba, 1981). In this thesis, retrospective accounts are given of how data were synthesised, along with verbatim accounts, direct quotes and descriptions from field notes (Miles & Huberman, 1984). An audit trail offers an avenue for confirming that the researcher’s interpretations are embedded in events, not simply individual constructions (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability in this study was achieved through prolonged exposure to the six school workplaces, persistent observation, in-depth interviews, peer debriefing, triangulation and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member checks

Member checks involved consulting with research participants to ensure that their story was accurate and that the researcher had produced a recognisable reality. Transcripts were returned to participants for verification. Once preliminary data were collated, the findings were circulated to participants in the study. Validation was also sought from people external to the study. These included early childhood specialists and principals, teachers and teacher-aides involved in PI classes. Their inclusion provided an additional check to see if the findings represented a ‘recognisable reality’.

Comprehensive description of the process and outcomes of the study

In this thesis, a comprehensive description of the process and outcomes of the study is outlined, so that readers can judge its credibility and transferability (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The credibility of the data is enhanced in five ways. First, data
collection occurred over an extended period of time (one and a half years data collection and inclusion of other school staff one a half years later); therefore the study is not restricted by a short data collection phase. Second, the inclusion of multiple data gathering methods enhances its credibility. Third, the development of closer ties between participants and the researcher allowed trust to develop. Fourth, regular ‘debriefing’ meetings between the researcher and participants helped ensure truthfulness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Fifth, feedback from other school staff provided the researcher with another set of voices for interrogating the data.

The comprehensive analysis of transcripts, observations and documents, presentation of theoretical plans, rich descriptions of contexts and raw data, enable the reader to make judgements about the prospects of transference to other work contexts. Therefore, the visibility of systematic documentation becomes an important component of trustworthiness (Gubrium, 1988). The ultimate goal is for descriptions to become transferable to other work contexts, which then leads to a generalizability of findings (van den Hoonaaard, 1997).

**Description of the researcher’s role**

The researcher in this study was an ‘outsider’ unknown to participants. She held no status in any of the six school settings. Her role was that of a non-participant observer. At the same time, the researcher attempted to develop rapport with participants based on trust, openness and a guarantee of confidentiality. As Kirk & Miller (1986, p. 9) report, the researcher watches, “people in their own territory, interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms.

**Adoption of a scientific attitude**

The researcher adopted a “scientific” attitude by searching for other studies which may have refuted or confirmed the evidence (Popper 1974).
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to address ethical issues pertinent to the conduct of the study, the following measures were taken. Ethical clearance was sought and gained from the Ethics Committee at Edith Cowan University, prior to the commencement of the study. This process was comprehensively followed and the requirements and suggestions of the University were observed.

Participants were then provided with a comprehensive description of the study, outlining its projected benefits and costs to individuals and society. This occurred through phone contact, individual meetings with researcher and participant, written confirmation and written consent. Undertakings were made to safeguard participants by ensuring confidentiality and anonymity and a request made for participants to sign a consent form (see Appendix 1). Participants were informed they could withdraw their consent at any time, including the use of personal data collected prior to their consent. A comprehensive overview of the nature of the research and their involvement was provided, so that informed consent could be obtained (Punch, 1998).

Participants were presented with transcribed copies of their interviews to edit, if necessary. Each of the interviews was conducted in private. The researcher accepted a responsibility to safeguard the rights of participants in the study. Data were coded so that no names appeared on the transcribed interview data or field notes. Thus, no details were included which would make the parties identifiable. Audiotapes and notes were stored and records will be destroyed after the required time period. Data were not used for purposes other than the study and taped conversations were wiped after transcription.

CLOSING COMMENTS

This chapter addresses phases in the research process. First, it provides a description and justification of the use of qualitative methodology, in particular symbolic interaction theory. Second, it describes the development of data collection and outlines the sources
and phases considered pertinent to such a study. Third, it presents an overview of data analysis, with a comprehensive description of the systematic and distinct steps adopted by the researcher. Fourth, it outlines the processes used to improve trustworthiness and describes ethical considerations.

Three approaches (descriptive, interpretative and theory building) are used to qualitatively analyse data (Strauss & Corban, 1990, cited by Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Each approach varies along a continuum ranging from minimal level interpretation to high level abstraction. In this thesis, approach one is covered, by allowing school staff to tell their P1 story without interpretation. Approach two, however, is the predominant mode used. In particular, the thesis involves the construction of the school staff stances on P1 by selecting, interpreting and abstracting data collected for the study. The third approach is not exhaustively addressed in the thesis, but close links were identified between the school staffs' definition of the situation and their modes of accommodating it.

The following chapters, four to nine, present an analysis of the data from principals, teachers and teacher-aides. The accounts of the P1 stance developed by these three types of school staff are presented in isolation from each other. The final chapter of the thesis, analysis the different stances in relation to each other.
4

PRINCIPALS’ SUPPORT FOR P1
A COMPOSITE VIEW

INTRODUCTION

The exclusion of the early childhood professional community from the change process has prioritized the need to investigate how principals define the P1 situation and on what basis they construct their definition. Their perspective in determining whether P1 is in their best interests or those of children is important because they are the leaders of the schools in which P1 teachers and students work.

This chapter presents principals’ definition of the P1 situation using a ‘composite’ approach. That is, the definition of the P1 situation outlined in this chapter is a composite constructed from the supportive comments about P1 that the six principals collectively made. These composites do not represent individual principal’s constructions of P1. The next chapter presents a composite definition constructed from critical comments about P1 that the six principals collectively made of ‘ideal types’. This approach has been adopted for three reasons. First, during the period of data collection few metropolitan primary schools had begun to include P1 class combinations. Had a case study approach been used, the identity of the six principals would be easily recognisable to significant others and their anonymity could not have been guaranteed. Second, each principal did not provide rich, thick descriptions of P1, which also made it difficult to present data as six detailed case studies. Third, there were no majority/minority views because each of the six principals’ work contexts was different. Exploring themes and patterns would have fragmented the experiences of each principal, a process that would have made the data less coherent and meaningful.
The ‘composite voice’ of the six principals is reported in present tense. This is to distinguish it from teachers and teacher-aides’ whose data are written in the past tense because they are constructed from individual statements. As noted in chapter three, footnotes appear in the data chapters. These are not analysed, nor portrayed as a central part of the thesis. Their inclusion is meant to indicate the range of multiple voices, not to alter, justify or question any aspect of a participant’s stance towards P1.

**P1 ENHANCES SELF-INTEREST**

Principals who are supportive of P1 say it enhances their self-interest in four ways. It assists their chances of job success, provides them with job security, makes their jobs more satisfying and improves their job status.

**Job success**

Principals define job success in terms of satisfying employers and parents’ expectations. Prospects of job promotion improve when employers and parents view P1 as an innovative change and acknowledge principals’ efforts in positive ways.

*Expectations of employers*

P1 gives principals an opportunity to show their employers that they are innovative in terms of taking risks and venturing into new ground and co-operative in terms of complying with directives. In one particular case,

> I applied for the school on merit, won it on merit. Part of what I did at the interview was address how I thought the school would go...As long as I can produce the outcomes no one can criticise the methodology that we use here...The proof is in the pudding. (Principal 2)

Therefore, P1 tests principals’ loyalties and increases their chances of promotion and favorable transfers, particularly when employers value compliance and loyalty.¹ It

¹ “Some principals ’used’ it to show they were up with current trends” (RP2).
enables principals to impress employers with their efforts, which improves the prospect of promotion.²

Expectations of parents

P1 enables principals to satisfy parents’ expectations. Generally, parents do not wish to enroll their pre-primary children in other schools and then move them back to their local school to be with their siblings in year one. Nor do they want to waste time transporting children to other schools. P1 principals are able to meet parents’ expectation and retain school numbers by removing the need to seek pre-primary admittance elsewhere. For example,

we were asking children to go and do pre-primary somewhere else, and then have them come in and change at a time in their life when they’re quite vulnerable. So they make friends elsewhere and then change to this system and have to fit in again to a new structure. So we thought, in view of our educational philosophy, that was the worst time in their lives to be doing that sort of change...in fact we should go a little bit further and actually accommodate them from pre-primary so that they can then establish with a teacher. They can continue within year one and become used to the system. (Principal 4)

In schools presently operating MAG from years one to seven, with insufficient student numbers to run a pre-primary class, children now commence in the pre-primary year. Children are provided with continuity and stability and do not need to move from one school system to another, enabling them to form seamless friendships. This occurs because,

the next level, the transition from the pre-primary to year one is not physically different. It’s not traumatic in their mind. There is perceived by the children a natural progression from their entry into school or pre-primary. They’re involved with the year ones...the pre-primaries aren’t a different entry point into the school. They are part of the school culture...they are there with the year ones. They’re also there with all the other year levels as well. (Principal 6)

So, in cases where decreasing numbers of children make it economically nonviable to run pre-primary classes, P1 enables pre-primary children to be combined with year one

² "In schools where initial MAG trials occurred, it could be true, but in other P1’s it is not true. In our school case it is the opposite" (RP6).
children. In the case of P1 schools, parents no longer approach principals, expressing disapproval with the present system. They express satisfaction because children continue with the same teacher and peers in a familiar school system.

**Job security**

Principals can use P1 as a way forward. They can include pre-primary children at the school, win back families previously lost, increase student numbers and eliminate school closures. This reduces the threat of declining numbers. Indeed,

> the numbers dropped off until such stage as in August last year we thought we were only going to have four children to enrol so we had to come up with some other answer. The Department wouldn’t run a centre with less than thirteen so the choice was to either close the centre altogether or run a RIP program. (Principal 1)

In these instances, principals begin, “pushing the small school angle because that’s our only way of survival” (Principal 1). Parents accept the educational advantage of being part of a small school and are proactive towards P1 as a means of retaining their children at the school. This enhances job security because principals no longer face the risk of their schools closing down or being downgraded because of decreasing school numbers.

**Job satisfaction**

P1 makes the work of principals more satisfying because it removes the physical isolation that exists between pre-primary classes and other primary classes and draws school staff together. It eliminates past frustrations and feelings of failure in trying to unite both sectors of schooling. P1 is easier to manage because pre-primary is located on the school grounds, not in an isolated centre several kilometres away. Pre-primary staff are now part of the school, which makes supervision of children more manageable. Playground duty is shared with primary school staff.3 Pre-primary staff attend recess/lunch times at the school, form friendships with other staff and are no longer

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3 “Not always – very controversial” (RP2).
referred to by primary school teachers as “removed and different”. A closer tie emerges between early childhood and primary teachers as they jointly attend staff meetings, become involved in school matters and offer support to each other. This makes principals’ jobs easier:

I have found the support of other staff in this school has been vital for her (Pl teacher) to survive. She has been able to talk about her woes and difficulties and they have an understanding of what she’s dealing with and give her sympathy. So she has the network within the school. (Principal 4)

Pl links pre-primary children closer to the school. It removes the need for children to adjust to a pre-primary setting and re-adjust to a year one school setting. Accordingly,

in the past, pre-primary centres have been off site to primary schools. Anecdotal knowledge tells me that the change from a pre to a formal primary setting impacts on the children. This is because the move is from an appropriately structured environment to a differently structured environment. One never looked at that change as being a notion of transition but rather, you can stop being ‘pre-primary’ and now you are over here and you’re ‘year ones.’ (Principal 6)

Pl enables principals to minimise differences between the early childhood and primary sectors of schooling through teacher selection. In the past, these differences have made the work of principals stressful. Principals can now ensure that individual philosophies are compatible with those of the school. Principals report that when, “the teacher and school have compatible philosophies it makes for a great working environment” (Principal 2). Shared perspectives remove differences of opinion on how young children learn and promotes continuity of learning from one year level to the next.

**Job status**

The professional prestige and standing of principals in the school and local community improves when employers and parents view Pl as innovative and imperative. Pl helps identify principals as leaders.4 Their schools become recognised as examples of best

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4 “For some, it was their downfall” (RP2).
practice when others seek their knowledge and experiences. Their status improves when they provide professional development for other school staff. Often,

My staff are providing more professional development for outside staff than those inside. That is further developing them because by talking through your ethos, your philosophy and your organisation, it becomes stronger in how you actually do it. We’re averaging probably one group of visitors every two to three weeks. (Principal 2)

Visitors who seek access to P1 classes transmit favorable reports to employers, colleagues and parents and gain solutions to their own experiences.

**P1 ENHANCES STUDENT LEARNING**

Principal support P1 because it enhances student learning. They have no direct evidence of the link between P1 and student learning, but have views on the relationship between P1 and school development, teacher development, curriculum development and community development, all of which are believed to improve student learning.

**School development**

P1 improves school development. It unites two areas of education, early childhood and primary and eliminates the divisions that exist between both fields. Furthermore, it enables principals to select staff who are supportive of the school’s ethos and philosophy. Finally, it bonds school staff through collaborative teaching.

*Unifying the early childhood and primary sectors of education*

P1 improves school development, both physically and educationally. Physically, P1 is now in closer proximity to other year levels, enabling staff to attend meetings and participate in school decision-making. Therefore, “the mixing of those children with the

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5 “Only in FISP schools and private schools” (RP6).
6 “Yes!!!” (RP4).
other children of the school, is a positive of the PI system” (Principal 1). Pre-primary children attend assemblies and enjoy the same recess/lunch times as primary students.

Educationally, PI enhances consistency and teamwork across the school and ensures continuity of learning. Ironically, the absence of PI curriculum guidelines necessitates collaboration as staff attempts to construct a curriculum that meets the educational needs of PI children are often difficult. Although initially reluctant, teachers eventually collaborate, combining their specialised knowledge and experience. When there is philosophical consensus amongst teachers, then a united school vision unfolds. PI is then constructed in agreement with school philosophy, ethos and organisation.

PI not only bonds school staff together but also children. As part of the school system, pre-primary children are encouraged to sit at desks like other primary school children. They are less traumatised entering year one, than when they come from a pre-primary environment, and develop pride in being a part of the whole school. Therefore,

> These kids are now regarded as part of our school and not something separate. They join in with all our physical activities, our PE, our sports days. They’re all a part of that and to my mind that’s good preparation to develop that sense of pride in our school and what we’re doing. (Principal 3)

Staff who are supportive of the school’s ethos and philosophy

PI classes require staff who are in consensus with the school’s ethos, philosophy and organisation. Principals give employment priority to teachers with a background in early childhood studies and a philosophy compatible with the school. They, “advertise and select on the basis of qualifications and an understanding and willingness to be part of the team of this school” (Principal 6). Through careful teacher selection, PI

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7. “Staff interaction has been due to management of timetables and other school aspects not purely due to PI. The counter argument would be that in schools where no PI exists there is no school based staff interaction and co-operation etc. This is not the case” (RP6).

8. “The developmentally appropriate practice necessitates collaboration. I believe that guidelines are available. Not as clearly spelt out as in formal education, but through the needs of developmentally appropriate practice” (RP4).

9. “We have a buddy system whereby older year 6/7 students mix freely with P/1 class” (RP4).
eliminates or minimises the philosophical differences that historically have plagued the early childhood and primary sectors and projects a united school image.\textsuperscript{10}

\textit{Uniting school staff through collaborative teaching and learning}

P1 unites and bonds school staff through collaborative teaching. As a team, teachers revise and modify the curriculum, form horizontal and vertical groupings, decide on common teaching strategies and their effectiveness, take a direct role in the assessment of children and offer support to team members.\textsuperscript{11}

P1 is sufficiently flexible to accommodate horizontal and vertical groupings. In one school, six teachers combine a whole group of approximately one hundred children, twice a week. The children are then divided into smaller groups for activities.\textsuperscript{12}

P1 promotes a harmonious school environment. Staff express concerns, address weaknesses and trust the support of their colleagues. Problems and challenges are solved on a team basis as teachers extend and share their specialised knowledge. Children are exposed to and gain from the specialised knowledge and experience of more than one teacher. P1 does not restrict learning to classrooms governed by one teacher and it removes the restriction of fixed classrooms. Being part of a team minimises the physical exhaustion that teachers’ experience when they work in isolation from their colleagues.\textsuperscript{13}

P1 is part of a whole school vision rather than a separate entity. As a team, P1 teachers report their progress to staff at school staff meetings, enabling other staff to reflect on their progress and offer advice and support.

\textsuperscript{10} "This seems to presuppose that schools can select staff. This is not always so" (RP3).
\textsuperscript{11} RP3 indicated agreement with two ticks.
\textsuperscript{12} "In this school the number based drive would not have existed, only the philosophical/developmental drive" (RP6).
\textsuperscript{13} RP4 indicated agreement with two ticks.
Teacher development

PI improves teachers’ specialised knowledge and experience because it provides external and internal supports. As teachers develop expertise student learning improves.

External supports

PI provides teachers with external support structures, which enhance their professional development. Teachers have access to MAG information and are given guidelines on how to implement it. External advisers visit schools to discuss programs and introduce new strategies. Principals can attend regular full-day monthly meetings with other MAG trial principals and are in a better position to assist teachers. External support staff are accessible when staff are part of the MAG trial and early literacy project. The Catholic Education Office (CEO) provides their MAG trial school with an ex-principal who works at the school providing school-based assistance. External support structures develop principals’ understandings of PI improving their ability to provide educational leadership and are available in government and private trial MAG schools. In both government and private schools:

One section in the Education Department specifically worked on MAG programs and early literacy projects and had people to contact and ask questions about. They had regular once a term meetings where we would all get together and discuss the issues. These ran for a full-day session and we would go through all the problems we were facing or discuss what we were implementing and share ideas. I found that valuable. (Principal 3)

We go to experts in the field. A junior primary consultant at the (name of school support)...There’s a MAG instructor, a lecturer and just people like that. We would draw from everywhere really. Even our peers at (names of two schools). We get together once a year and evaluate what we’re doing in MAG network. (Principal 5)

In other instances, PI teachers are released from teaching duties generally up to one half day a year, for the sole purpose of accessing other MAG classes, and learning from their

14 “Does this still occur?” (RP3).
structures and methods of operation. PI provides teachers with immediate access to an early childhood trained district officer who comes into classrooms and offers advice. Conferences provide principals, teachers and teacher-aides with up-to-date information, enabling them to keep their workbase up to date. Teacher-aides are included because,

The school supports the teacher-aide in making professional development opportunities available and encouraging her to attend conferences...and she has done that and gained a great deal out of it. We see it as not only supporting her work output but supporting her professionally and giving her opportunities to keep her work base up to date in a professional sense. (Principal 6)

**Internal supports**

PI also challenges principals to provide better internal support structures for staff. “You do the initial training. You get them started. Then you offer courses and build in some planning and preparation during school time for the teachers” (Principal 2). PI operates amidst collaboration and peer tutoring, unlike more traditional pre-primary and primary classes that mostly operate in isolation.\(^\text{15}\) Subsequently, PI demands that principals provide quality internal support to facilitate collaboration and peer tutoring. In one instance, a principal provided ongoing professional development, administrative team support, videos and visits to other schools. Therefore, “it’s an ongoing commitment. Not only do they need the professional development but they need the resources available” (Principal 2). Furthermore, “the next step is to look at the parent helpers who come in and the role of the teacher-aides. We need to make our teacher-aides para-professional. Some of mine have already been trained with a university course” (Principal 2).

PI challenges teachers to find solutions and trial alternative methods of instruction.\(^\text{16}\) As a PI team, early childhood teachers assist primary trained staff who have been recruited to PI classes with little if any knowledge or experience in ECE. They offer them guidance and assistance in the early childhood component of PI. Together, they

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\(^{15}\) RP4 indicated agreement with two ticks.

\(^{16}\) RP4 indicated agreement with two ticks.
programme, make decisions and monitor children’s work. The greater range of specialist staff minimise trial and error approaches, improve student learning and enhance the credibility of P1 in the eyes of others. Inexperienced staff can undermine the credibility of P1. Parents are less likely to query the way specialised staff are implementing P1 than they are non-specialised staff. For this reason, P1 requires specialist training from teachers qualified to teach children up to eight years. As a result,

> we were going to rely on this young person who had experience with multi-age grouping, had knowledge of multi-age grouping and had been trained in that and who also knew exactly about the needs of pre-primary children. (Principal 4)

Teacher-aides can also be a strong internal support. Their knowledge and experience in pre-primary often transforms them into surrogate teachers to become a strong internal support. Teachers proactively seek their advice and ask them to work with pre-primary children so they can concentrate on year one children. On a limited basis, school-based administrative teams (principals and deputy-principals) are an additional internal support who offer advice and provide some ongoing professional development.

**Curriculum development**

P1 provides teachers with more autonomy. It requires them to become curriculum makers rather than curriculum takers and challenges them to construct a developmentally appropriate curriculum for pre-primary and year one children that is flexible enough to meet the individual ability levels of children. In P1 classes, children develop at their optimum level in a stimulating environment. They work collaboratively with children of their own academic level and chronological age group. A supportive family environment is developed when P1 children have siblings in the same class.

The P1 curriculum enhances children’s social skills because it is based on peer tutoring and learning in mixed age groupings. Children mix with older and younger children, unlike their peers in pre-primary and year one classes. P1 offers a flexible curriculum where children are exposed to teaching teams of more than one teacher and teacher-aide.
Pl is of value to children with learning difficulties because it enables the pace of curriculum implementation to be varied. It allows them to experience success rather than failure. A child's struggle to meet expectations is not as visible in a Pl class because of the diversity of levels within the class. So,

It's great for children with disabilities. We have two of those in that team and it's been wonderful because one little guy has actually repeated pre-primary. Very, very academically advanced, but socially because of his disability, his autism, he wasn't capable of going to Year one...His social skills are now at the level where he can go up and compete with the Year two children on an equal level. (Principal 2)

Pl gives teachers two years to adjust curriculum to cater for children's needs and reduces pressure to produce outcomes within the one year. Pl gives teachers a thorough overview of children's progress over a two-year period. Consequently in Pl, children are not labelled as failures or removed from their chronological peers. Self-esteem improves with greater experiences of success rather than failure.

Pl enhances the learning of year one children because it provides a lower teacher/student ratio. For the whole of term one pre-primary children attend school only for four half days per week. Throughout the rest of the year, pre-primary children attend school for four days a week. Year one children are given individual teaching when pre-primary children are absent and instructed with half the student numbers of a year one class. Pl also provides year one children with greater human and material resources than a year one class. They have a teacher-aide for at least half the week, share the same resources as pre-primary children and access greater ranges of educational equipment. The quality of learning improves in Pl. Therefore, “I'm absolutely convinced of it. I really am...I'm convinced that the system that we're putting in operation here will improve all the way along” (Principal 2).

CONCLUSION

According to supportive 'composite' principals, Pl enhances their own self-interest and

17 "Not at (name of school). Only, the first fortnight and then Fridays off for preprimaries" (RP4).
student learning. In terms of self-interest, PI improves job success, job security, job satisfaction and job status. Of the four categories, the principals' see their job success as receiving the highest level of support from PI. They consider an even amount of support given by PI to their job security and job satisfaction. The instances in which PI improves job status are seen to be relatively few.

In terms of educational ideology, the supportive 'composite' principals see PI to be positively linked with school development, teacher development and curriculum development, all of which they regard as improving student learning. They cite no incidences in which PI enhances community development. For them, PI does more for teacher development than curriculum and school development, which are given equal weighting.

As mentioned earlier, these composites do not represent individual principal's constructions of PI. Instead, they are constructed from data offered by the six principals and presented collectively as 'composites'. The fact that principals' data appears scant, further supports the difficulties raised in trying to present data in another form. For principals, PI is one small aspect of their overall responsibility, an area in which they are not directly involved. Additionally, some principals remain more supportive towards PI than other principals.

The following chapter describes principals' reservations for PI. It is more detailed than their 'supportive' stance, because principals found it easier to document their reservations about PI. Furthermore, several principals in the group were experiencing problems and were keen to state their reservations in greater detail that others.
This chapter presents principals’ reservations about P1 through a ‘composite voice’. That is, the claims made about P1 are not those of individual principals but those of an aggregation of comments into a collective perspective. Again, self-interest and educational ideology emerge as strong influences, which impact on the way in which principals define P1.

P1 IMPEDES SELF-INTEREST

The critical composite principals’ definition of the P1 situation, is that P1 threatens the self-interest of principals because it obstructs job success, compromises job security and impacts negatively on job satisfaction. There are no instances in which principals’ report P1 is an impediment to job status.

Job success

According to critical composite principals, P1 impedes job success by failing to create conditions that make their job more difficult, failing to satisfy parents’ expectations and failing to attract support from school staff.
PI creates educational leadership dilemmas for principals. Dilemmas emerge because PI constitutes a new class combination for which principals and teachers are not trained. It relies on specialised early childhood knowledge that principal’s lack. It increases the complexity of school leadership because there are no policies or guidelines on how to construct PI programs. It comes with no explicit basis on which PI curriculum can be built. It leaves the principal feeling, “Maybe I should have become more involved than I had in the process. But again, I have a lack of expertise in that area” (Principal 1).

PI makes principals feel incompetent when teachers approach them for assistance and feel restricted by an absence of guidelines and support structures. PI offers few, if any, external support structures to principals and staff. Attempts to locate external structures are mostly fruitless. Internal support structures are difficult to construct when there are no experienced internal staff. Teachers cannot collaboratively team-teach when there is one PI class. MAG project schools find support is minimised or removed when the trial period is completed, leaving a, “limited amount but not a great deal” (Principal 3). Schools are left on their own to continue with the implementation of MAG classes.

Re-deployed cleaners range in ability from those who do not speak English to those who are trainable. Their training becomes the school’s responsibility. Until training can be arranged for these re-deployees, it is difficult to implement quality PI programs without assistance. In the meantime, primary school teacher-aides are relocated to assist PI classes at the expense of primary school teachers and children. This creates disharmony

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1 RP2 indicated agreement with three ticks.
2 "Teachers – ECE trained are trained for 0-8. This therefore, includes a PI training" (RP6).
3 "The Curriculum Framework is the basis now. At the time of PI there was a wide breadth of material South Australian based" (RP6).
amongst staff in schools and a not uncommon feeling of, “she is one of those” (Principal 3).\(^4\)\(^5\)

**P1 fails to satisfy parents’ expectations**

P1 does not satisfy parents’ expectations. Parents want their children to attend pre-primary classes at their local school, not P1 classes. P1 provides placements for pre-primary children in P1 classes, which triggers uncertainty and distrust between schools and the community because parents see P1 as economically motivated rather than educationally constructed.\(^6\) Parents demand documentation that proves P1 will work.\(^7\) Principals have no such documentation for parents. Even parents who are strong advocates of MAG classes from years one to seven remain unconvinced that their pre-primary children should be instructed with year one children. They see pre-primary as different to year one and believe vertical groupings are inappropriate when they include compulsory and non-compulsory years of schooling. They doubt teachers can cater for the wide developmental gap that exists between pre-primary and year one.\(^8\) In many instances, solutions are not reached, parents are not convinced and “parents actually left the school… and it was a profound problem. But there were a lot of other issues also. Even personal ones related to P1” (Principal 4).

**P1 fails to address staff expectations**

Staff are not convinced that children can be successfully instructed in P1 classes. They become resistant when colleagues report an absence of support structures and guidelines. They want written clarification of P1, its strengths and weaknesses. They fear that if P1

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\(^4\) Eastern States Specialist 1: It’s (re-deployed cleaners) a huge issue.
\(^5\) Eastern States Specialist 2: It’s (re-deployed cleaners) a big issue isn’t it? One that in (name of state) the teacher unions would have become involved.
\(^6\) “Yes, until explained” (RP4).
\(^7\) RP2 indicated agreement with two ticks.
\(^8\) RP2 indicated agreement with two ticks.
fails, significant others will perceive them as incompetent. They believe P1 entails too
great a risk and has the potential to threaten their self-interest.⁹

**Job security**

P1 creates a battlefield of diverse opinions on how young children should be instructed. This accelerates parent dissatisfaction and threatens job security. Differing philosophical beliefs emerge that are difficult to solve. Some parents insist their children be taught in a more structured way, while others conclude P1 classrooms are too structured. Not uncommon questions are: “Why isn’t my child doing the year one work?” Or “Why isn’t my child doing the pre-primary work?” They are looking for those benchmarks (found in traditional teaching) and what we had to constantly do was take them away from them and say they are not the benchmarks we are using” (Principal 4). Despite constant explanations and comprehensive marketing, parents’ ideas remain fixed and are rarely altered or modified. They not only demand to be given written proof that P1 is being implemented in the appropriate way¹⁰ but they constantly reiterate that they do not want their pre-primary children instructed in P1 classes.

Parent resistance intensifies to the point where they insist principals abandon P1.¹¹ They warn principals that if word spreads about their inclusion of P1 then future parents will reject P1, causing school numbers to decrease and schools to collapse. These parents believe P1 will have devastating effects on schools. The strongest opposition occurs in a school with a widely educated parent group. Abandoning P1, threatens job security because decreased student numbers can lead to school amalgamation, closures or reclassifications that require principals to do more classroom teaching.

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⁹ RP2 indicated agreement with a tick.
¹⁰ “Most of this relates to any year level, any class, any split. This is available video form as well from department” (RP6).
¹¹ “Yes there are examples of this” (RP2).
Job satisfaction

PI makes principals work less satisfying because it increases their workload, magnifies differences between the early childhood and primary sector and causes staff unrest.

*PI increases principals’ workload*

PI is a difficult change to lead and manage. There are no guidelines or supports, which create additional work and discomfort. When student numbers decrease, principals face the uncomfortable task of re-directing teachers to PI classes rather than offering them a choice.

PI increases the number of grievances principals need to deal with. Teachers express dissatisfaction with the additional workload, lack of guidelines, support structures and considerable lengths of time they have to spend guiding and training teacher-aides, particularly re-deployed cleaners. For instance, “I must admit I was really worried about her at the beginning because she was an ex-cleaner and has come across but she is working brilliantly. Come out of her shell and she now laughs and carries on. The pre-primary teachers speak very highly of her” (Principal 2).

PI increases the work of principals, as school budgets are re-modified so pre-primary children have access to appropriate resources. Therefore,

> The amount of consumable material to run a good pre-primary room is a lot higher than to run a traditional year one...your consumable budget blows out considerably and that’s a challenge for us next year to restructure our budget in such a way to give the staff the resources they need with the finances to buy whatever, to run the educational programme. (Principal 2)

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12 "Yes EDWA has no set policy on MAG – except ‘school choice’" (RP2).

13 “Many PI classes were placed into classrooms not adequately modified, that is, mostly regular primary classrooms” (RP2).
Pl schools do not receive additional funds. To cover the shortfall, principals spend considerable time approaching external agencies, such as the Lotteries Commission, for financial assistance:

The Lotteries Commission have been very good when we’ve wanted to provide physical equipment, puzzle equipment, they’ve been a very good resource for us. Without them, we would have had to have found the money. It may have been more stressful and we may not have found the money. (Principal 6)

*Pl magnifies differences between both fields*

Pl requires principals and teachers to construct and create a common curriculum for pre-primary and year one children. Teachers experience difficulties combining differences in teaching styles, curriculum and classroom management and linking the Pl philosophy to the school philosophy, which is not an easy task. Different philosophical beliefs slow down the change process, alter school cultures and make principals’ work more stressful and less satisfying. Principals and teachers look to employers for solutions and assistance. Employers, however, offer no solutions or guidelines.\(^{14}\) \(^{15}\)

*Pl leads to staff unrest*

Pl creates staff unrest. There are no guidelines on how to construct curriculum or relief from the additional workload. Pl classes cover a greater age span, which accelerates staff unrest. Teachers spend extra time planning collaboratively after school, during the holidays and at weekends. Realistically,

the work of staff is huge. It’s lucky we have dedicated teachers and I’m not just saying this for the interview. It’s huge and more than just a normal classroom. If you take this on you have to build in some support for the staff because it’s astronomical the amount of work if you program properly. Now with the MAG we program collaboratively. The three teachers of the classes get together and program together and need that time together. Consequently, for us finishing the time we do they have planning time every

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\(^{14}\) RP2 indicated agreement with three ticks.

\(^{15}\) "The Best Practice Guidelines for ECE released in 1998 also support teachers. These were available in draft in 1997. The Curriculum Framework is strongly developmentally based and the Early Phase includes K-3" (RP6).
afternoon and in the holidays and week-ends. They’re probably here six days of the week. (Principal 5)

Often teachers who teach collaboratively find it difficult to reach consensus on how pre-primary and year one children should be instructed. Teacher-aides are expected to cope with an added workload and act as mentors to teachers. In one case,

Her many years in pre-primary have been a great advantage because she was going to carry that side to the teachers and it was great to have her. It was interesting to see the settling down process where she has actually undergone a certain amount of stress in handling the situation because a lot does tend to fall on her in controlling these children when the teacher is trying to organize something a little bit more formal for the year ones...I’ve had to deal with the aide feeling a little bit disappointed with the whole system because of the complete change in role that she’s undergone from full time pre-primary to PI programme. (Principal 1)

In such instances, disharmony emerges and threatens the positive relationships that staff previously enjoyed.

P1 IMPEDES STUDENT LEARNING

Critical composite principals define P1 as an impediment to student learning. They have no direct evidence of the link between P1 and student learning, but hold views on the relationship between P1 and school development, teacher development, curriculum development and community development, all of which are intended to improve student learning.

School development

According to the critical composite principal, P1 impedes school development in three ways. It fails to unite the early childhood and primary sectors; does not permit principals to employ staff who are supportive of the school’s ethos and philosophy, and creates resistance and disharmony in schools.
P1 fails to unite the early childhood and primary fields

P1 challenges teachers to resolve their philosophical differences and work collaboratively with each other. It requires teachers to construct a curriculum that is developmentally appropriate to both pre-primary and year one children. Difficulties are encountered because there are no guidelines and, “P is such a unique and different level to year one” (Principal 5). Change instigators are unaware the pre-primary year is a specialised and distinct level of schooling to year one, in both philosophy and learning style. This makes it difficult for consensus to be reached amongst school staff.

P1 collaborative teams are not harmonious and supportive. They are combinations of early childhood and primary trained teachers with contrasting and unresolved beliefs on how young children learn, requiring continual intervention by principals. Unresolved differences of opinion between the P1 and year two/three teachers can create a situation where, “It was probably mainly third term that was a very difficult term. I have had to actually insist that she (P1 teacher) do some things differently...but she still did not want to implement them, so in the end I insisted” (Principal 4).

P1 does not permit principals to employ staff who are supportive of the school's ethos and philosophy

P1 requires teachers who are supportive of the school ethos, philosophy and organisation. This can be achieved by permitting principals to select school staff, but that does not occur. As a result, some P1 staff do not believe in the ethos, philosophy and organisation of schools they work in. Often, they comprise a mixture of early childhood and primary trained teachers with differing beliefs on how young children

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16 “Why is it? Is year 1 different from Year 2 etc?” (RP3).
17 “Who says the unique and different levels of schooling exist? Many of my year ones are at a pre-primary level until late in their year one” (RP4).
18 Eastern States Specialist 1: Our principals have more of a say in selecting their own staff because sometimes they can nominate specific positions that are open for advertisement and also at the end of each year they will write to our personnel area and say these are the needs of my school.
learn best, which are a barrier to collaboration, staff bonding and school development. New staff are unfamiliar with the type of Pl strategies used in individual schools. Indeed, Pl teachers are, “coming from different situations and different teaching backgrounds, therefore it took us some time for them to come to grips with what the program means for us in this school and to implement that whole MAG concept” (Principal 3). When teacher-aides are new they cannot act as an internal support for teachers.

*Pl creates staff resistance and disharmony throughout the primary school*

Pl threatens school development and student learning. It creates rifts between upper and lower primary staff. Upper primary school staff fear Pl will spread to other year levels and be implemented across the whole primary school. They oppose its philosophy and vertical grouping. They are aware that Pl is being instigated and supported by employers and principals as a developmental innovation that improves student learning. They are less than trusting of employers and wary of such promises.

Upper primary staff view Pl as a change of no personal value. Pl generates publicity and attention at the lower end of the school. They see this attention and the expertise of Pl teachers as drawing the focus away from their efforts. They believe a “clique” has developed in the lower end of the school that is a threat to staff relationships. They define this change as a threat to the school. For example,

> There were a lot of staff who had their noses put out of joint because it was felt that these people with particular expertise in Pl classrooms were showing them up and they felt threatened by that situation. Their comfort zone had been upset and they were really worried about it...there was a fair split between the upper primary staff and the lower primary staff. (Principal 3)

Pl threatens the smooth running of school activities. The inclusion of pre-primary children in school assemblies, concerts and other activities becomes a disruption. At the beginning of the year pre-primary children are particularly restless, require reminders to listen quietly and demand the continual attention of teachers. They find it difficult to sit for long periods of time and are clearly bored with the long drawn out process. When
year seven students are responsible for managing school assemblies they have trouble coping with pre-primary disruptions. Upper primary school staff see this as unsettling. They are not happy at having to modify the length of school activities to accommodate pre-primary children. As pre-primary children are now part of the primary school and in a class with year one children, they cannot be excluded from whole school activities.

Some school staff perceive P1 as a change that is of no educational value to children. They oppose the notion of developmental learning and the inclusion of pre-primary and year one children in the one class. They see the developmental gap as too wide and become increasingly doubtful of its ability to promote student learning. Problems and challenges are not always solved as a P1 team and teachers are hesitant in sharing their knowledge with other team members. Efforts to create an open line of communication, foster an environment of trust, encourage teachers to share their views and feelings and bring the whole primary staff together as a team becomes a long process that does not produce the expected results. This can make a principal become disillusioned with the performance of P1 teachers and say, “No, they’re still moving towards that point and I can’t see anything being achieved that we were happy about until next term sometime” (Principal 3).

**Teacher development**

P1 does not improve teachers’ specialised knowledge and experience because it fails to provide them with appropriate external and internal supports.

**External support structures**

P1 provides teachers with little if any external support structures. There are no induction courses for teachers of P1 classes. There are no professional development or inservice courses pertinent to P1. There are no university courses or written guidelines for

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19 “Bad luck!!” (RP3).
20 “How can they?” (RP3).
teachers to follow.\textsuperscript{21} External support structures are unsatisfactory and often removed too early. Schools assistance previously enjoyed during MAG trial projects are suddenly “withdrawn now. That’s sort of closed down” (Principal 3). This is despite the fact that MAG P1 classes still run with new teachers. Subsequently, I was a bit disappointed that we didn’t have, I felt, the support from within the Education Department. Last year we used to have lots of support, lots of meetings where principals would go to find out what MAG was all about and we didn’t really have that this year. (Principal 3)

Furthermore, principals who send their teachers to observe P1 classes at other schools are often disappointed because they do not employ MAG strategies and are far from exemplary. For instance, We sent her (P1 teacher) to three schools..one of them was a more conservative school in which the preprimaries were sitting over there and the year ones over there so it was not done in a MAG sort of way. (Principal 4)

Translating what teachers have observed into their individual class settings is difficult because of school-based teaching and structural restrictions. There is no network system for P1, there are few people available with knowledge and experience.\textsuperscript{22} Even school staff who are early childhood trained and knowledgeable of MAG experience difficulties. More specifically, Our P1 teacher knew about MAG and had done some reading in her training, but because it is such a controversial issue that she had difficulties theorising that with parents. So I would envisage that you would really need to have your thinking about it very clear because parents are questioning that all the time so you need to be able to talk about developmental learning and really have all the answers as to how it’s working. (Principal 4)

There’s not many experts. We are in fact probably the leading school in the state at the moment with that. Therefore lots of people are coming to us and we don't know the answers. You can see the videos that are done from the United States or wherever else they came from and their situations, we feel, are artificial because they have a full-time

\textsuperscript{21} Eastern States Specialist 1: You cannot really implement any pre-primary changes without implementing any very significant training and development. It must be sustained effort and placed against the foundation areas of learning. You don't just give people the document and you don't just orientate them to it but you have to talk about the methodology.

\textsuperscript{22} Eastern States Specialist 1: Because of our structure every district would have access to someone with early childhood expertise and someone with primary.
teacher-aide in a classroom as big as this gymnasium and it doesn't happen like that in real life in this school. (Principal 5)

For some non-government schools including pre-primary in their schools for the first time, there is minimal external advice. Advisers come out at the beginning of the year and give schools provisional registration, then return and complete the final review at the end of the second year. Advice needs to be provided at an earlier date so teachers can re-structure their practices.

Internal support structures

The challenge to construct internal support structures is unrealistic, as most principals have little knowledge and background in Pl. This is a message emerging, “loud and clear, no doubt” (Principal 1). Principals hold qualifications in primary education, not in early childhood education. Their teaching experiences range from primary, secondary through to tertiary teaching making it difficult for them to assist and guide teachers in the construction of Pl curriculum. A common feeling is, “my expertise is certainly not down at that level” (Principal 1). Furthermore, “leadership is seen as different in Pl to the rest of the school” (Principal 3). Rather than rely on principals, external experts who are active in the early childhood field should provide teachers with supports. Typically,

I would prefer rather than trying to develop my own expertise to know that I could call on expertise of others through District Office...I feel they are going to have far more expertise than I can pick up in that field. (Principal 1)

Without a background in early childhood, principals claim they lack the ability to evaluate children's progress. For example, “I don't have as thorough an understanding for me to, say walk in and be an effective evaluator of children's progress. So I seek advice from my expert which is my pre-primary teacher” (Principal 6). However, often Pl teachers hold no academic training or experience in instructing four to five year old children. As such,

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23 Eastern States Specialist 2: In fact there's no pre-primary leadership from within the schools.
A weakness (of P1) is the lack of expertise of teachers and I do feel that it is an area that if it’s going to be the way, then we’ve really got to look at it and make sure those teachers are really au fait with what they’re getting into. (Principal 1)

An absence of internal staff knowledgeable about P1 threatens the development of teachers. Many P1 teachers do not have the knowledge and experience to run P1 classes. When schools have only one P1 teacher and one P1 classroom, collaboration is difficult to implement. Teachers have little choice but to train their teacher-aides as ‘surrogate pre-primary teachers’.

**Curriculum development**

The P1 situation impedes curriculum development and student learning in three ways. First, it challenges teachers to construct a curriculum without guidelines or assistance. Second, it creates discrepancies in attendance days. Third, it does not offer appropriate resources and environmental conditions that are conducive to student learning.²⁴ ²⁵

*Insufficient guidelines for constructing P1 curriculum*

P1 teachers are not provided with insufficient guidelines for making changes in curriculum. P1 makes teaching difficult and time consuming, places teachers under stress, and impacts negatively on curriculum and student learning. Teachers adopt trial and error approaches to curriculum development and implementation. They often resort to whole group lessons redirecting pre-primary children to their teacher-aides so they can work with the year one children. The aide becomes a surrogate teacher, which is

²⁴ Eastern States Specialist 1: If we said to our schools tomorrow you have to take on any child that turns five by the end of November and you have to accommodate them in your schools with no extra resources, no buildings (appropriate), no nothing, just to take them in. They wouldn’t do it.

²⁵ Eastern States Specialist 2: They wouldn’t do it (adding to specialist 1’s comment above) our principals, and that is where the union would support them.
probably against regulations\textsuperscript{26} and leaves the pre-primary children, "hanging off the side" (Principal 1).\textsuperscript{27}

\textit{Differences in attendance days between pre-primary and primary children}

In term one, pre-primary children attend four half-day weeks while year one children attend five full day weeks.\textsuperscript{28} This means, pre-primary children miss out on three full days of schooling per week.\textsuperscript{29} In the remaining three terms of the year, pre-primary children attend four full days a week unlike year one children who attend five full days a week. This means, pre-primary children miss out on one day schooling per week. They are not placed in the same group as year ones, because they miss out on important aspects of the curriculum when they are absent.\textsuperscript{30} This encourages the segregation of pre-primary and year one children.

\textit{Insufficient resources to support curriculum development}

P1 requires greater funds for resources than other year levels. The annual budget can be almost double the expense of another classroom. Trying to restructure the school budget to ensure resources are allocated to P1 is a challenge. In the past, pre-primary parent committees were responsible for fundraising. Now pre-primary children are part of the school, separate fundraising can no longer continue. Often,

\begin{quote}
We had no luck whatsoever there, so in fact the only thing the pre-primary has gained that is any different to the rest of the school is they have gained the fridge that was in the pre-primary. The stove - we thought of bringing that up but it was a bit dilapidated so at present they're going without it and we may have to find school funds to cover that. The Department gave us nothing. (Principal 1)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{26} "Only if the teacher is not in the room" (RP3).

\textsuperscript{27} "I'd suggest care here. Most teacher-aides can do almost all that a teacher is required under duty of care. The planning would lie in the realm of the teacher, but once pronounced, the assistant should be able to implement" (RP4).

\textsuperscript{28} "This varies and is not happening at (school's name)" (RP4).

\textsuperscript{29} "Some schools phase in full days earlier than the end of term" (RP3).

\textsuperscript{30} "This is up to the teacher's planning" (RP3).
Pre-primary children require expensive pieces of equipment as part of their educational program and use more consumable materials than other primary school year levels. This is because pre-primary children pursue their own activities and are not restricted to workbooks. Currently, there are inadequate resources and equipment to run quality P1 programs for pre-primary children. Equipment is not as abundant as in a pre-primary class. In MAG trial schools, financial assistance diminishes when the trial project ends, leaving principals with the ongoing expense of P1. Principals need to maintain resources, as they are an integral part of the pre-primary curriculum.

In a P1 class, pre-primary children do not always have a full-time teacher-aide. Their peers in pre-primary classes benefit from the provision of a full-time teacher-aide. When the number of children in P1 classes drops, teacher-aide time is reduced. In pre-primary classes, reduced student numbers can be increased with the admission of four-year-old children, so a full-time teacher-aide is retained. P1 classes cannot be filled with four-year-old children.

Inadequate environmental conditions to support curriculum development

The external and internal physical layouts of P1 classes are inferior to purpose built pre-primary centres. There are no fenced outdoor enclosures, which makes it difficult to supervise children. Neither are outdoor areas in close proximity to P1 classrooms. Outdoor and indoor areas are small and lack the diversity of equipment that is traditionally part of a pre-primary class. Some P1 classes are in open areas surrounded with other year levels and do not have internal toilet facilities that are a standard part of pre-primary centres. Supervision becomes difficult when children need to access toilets not in close proximity to P1 classes. That is, "little children going out and around the corner to a toilet tend to get lost on the way back because they get distracted with

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31 "Yes, we are, when numbers are 10 year ones and 15 preprimaries. We made sure that 10 and 15 are firmly in place because of the teacher assistant regulations of employment. Not sure whether our assistant is employed 1.0 or 0.9, that is, Friday afternoon off" (RP4).
32 "Fences! I’d break them down. I’m told that there are no fences around the South Australian ECE centres" (RP4).
everything else" (Principal 1). Teachers or their aides\(^33\) need to escort pre-primary children to toilets and are therefore removed from the classroom.

**Community development**

P1 is a threat to community development because parents are not convinced of its educational benefit to children. This creates resistance that is difficult to eliminate.

*Parents remain unconvinced of P1’s educational benefit to children*

Parents see P1 as a change that is economically rather than educationally driven. They carefully monitor their children’s progress, do not tolerate misleading information and expect honesty. For principals, this means, “You field the questions honestly and openly. Don’t try and hoodwink anyone because they’re smarter than that. They won’t be hoodwinked” (Principal 2). Resistance accelerates when at the end of the year parents see their children have not improved academically. Then they confront principals:

They expected their children to still develop and some of them expected their kids to do better in that sort of a situation, which again could be an unrealistic expectation as you have to take into account a child’s ability level. They’re going to do as well as what their genes allow them. (Principal 3)

These situations place extra strain on school and community relationships. Furthermore, parents demand written proof that P1 is of value to their children. School staff cannot locate written information to confirm its educational benefits. They obtain information on First Steps and purchase books such as “Parents as Partners” for each parent’s use. However, these resources do not satisfy parents because they are not specifically related to P1. Independent consultants are also brought into schools in an attempt to satisfy parents’ desire for information. However, parents are set in their beliefs and, “it just goes in one ear and out the other” (Principal 4). Resistance intensifies in schools with well-educated parent groups who demand pertinent information. In one case,

\(^{33}\) Or parent helpers on the day (RP4).
It would have been good to have some more information for our parents because they would have gone and read about it and we could have passed on information...So that would have been a bit of an eye opener for those parents. (Principal 4)

P1 jeopardises existing bonds of trust between school staff and parents, which have taken a long time to develop. It places at risk school and community relationships. For example, if schools take a stronger advocacy on P1, this may have an adverse effect on school and community relationships. Independent schools are more wary than government schools of parental resistance and often believe they have little choice but to accommodate parent wishes without compromising school standards.

*P1 creates resistance that is difficult to manage*

P1 creates parent resistance that is difficult to manage. Parents have pre-set ideas on how their pre-primary and year one children should be instructed. They refuse to believe that P1 classes can accommodate their expectations. They exert pressure on principals and staff to construct and implement P1 classes in accordance with their beliefs. For example,

> Parents have a lot of say in this school. I’ve been a principal in a state school so I really appreciate the difference. Parents are always verbal and there was pressure from the pre-primary parents to make sure their kids were going to be able to play enough and there was always this concern from the year one parents that they were still going to have a bit of structure in their day and that has resulted in some conflict this term and we’ve had to really get together as a team, including some of the ancilliary teachers, part-time teachers, from the two teachers in these two groups and really work out how we are going to accommodate both points of view. (Principal 4)

Staff feel pressured and threatened by the strikingly different expectations of parents because, “they [parents] have a stereotype of what schools should be in their head” (Principal 2). Some pre-primary parents support an early childhood philosophy for their pre-primary children, while others believe their pre-primary children should be exposed to year one work. They justify their pre-primary children’s involvement in year one work by stating that they are part of the school and no longer in pre-primary. Parents also exert pressure for schools to maintain the pre-primary philosophy as it applies in
Some parents of year one children also become resistant to P1. They strongly believe an early childhood philosophy is inappropriate for their year one children. They believe that year one children need to progress academically and that a traditional primary curriculum is more appropriate. These parents are concerned that their children will be exposed to pre-primary work and be disadvantaged by an unstructured approach to learning. The expectations of P1 parents are so diverse that,

It was split down the middle. The pre-primary parents wanted it less structured and the year ones wanted it more structured and the year one parents were concerned that the pre-primary children were holding back and they were not making enough academic progress. (Principal 4)

Parents who demand their year one children be placed in a year one or one/two class, fiercely reject P1. They claim their year one children are unhappy in P1 classes and say they, “still felt they were pre-primary and not year one students” (Principal 3). Teachers are in agreement that towards the end of the year, older children have outgrown the younger children in the group.

Surprisingly, parents who are true MAG believers and have chosen to send their children to MAG schools, remain unconvinced about the value of P1. They strongly oppose the inclusion of pre-primary children and year one children in MAG classes because they believe the developmental range of this age group is too wide. They refuse to believe that two totally different areas of schooling can be successfully combined in the one class.  

School attempts to positively market P1 to parents seldom work. For example, “It just didn't work. When it came to the crunch when the parents were unhappy they couldn't care less about it. They just wouldn't believe it when it came to their child. A few did, a very few” (Principal 4). Parents even caution principals that if word spreads

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34 Eastern States Specialist 1: There are more and more parents appreciating the value of that pre-primary year in supporting children's social and emotional development and if they're in a classroom where there is no opportunity for that social interaction then they can see that that's not happening. And they also know their children, if they're just four, are nowhere near ready to take up a structured formal reading.

35 Eastern States Specialist 2: It is the issue of watering down a curriculum in order to keep those children occupied. And so those parents are rightly concerned.
into the community about the implementation of P1, then future parents will send their children elsewhere, causing school numbers to decrease and schools to collapse. In one particular case,

There were a few parents who were quite dogmatic and came and let it be known that they did not favour multiage grouping. Some of them said they would tolerate it and see how it goes but could we not mention this outside the school as they felt other people would be turned off the school if they heard that at the point of entry we had multiage grouping. The school might collapse as an independent body because we wouldn’t attract people. (Principal 4)

In the eyes of school staff, P1 provides schools with no solutions to their problems and in fact adds to them. 36 37 Parents do not resist the curriculum that is offered in pre-primary and year one classes but are critical of P1 curriculum. Despite numerous attempts by principals to satisfy parents, they remain fixed in their beliefs. Not surprisingly, parents feel, "it [P1] was not working and was hopeless. Everybody hates it" (Principal 4).

CONCLUSION

In this and the previous chapter, self-interest and educational ideology have emerged as the basis on which principals define the P1 situation. For each of these two broad dimensions there are two positions on the continuum, one supportive and the other oppositional towards P1. Principals’ supportive definition of the P1 situation was outlined in chapter four using a ‘composite’ approach. This chapter outlines the second position on the continuum – principals’ reservations about P1.

This chapter has shown that critically composite principals view P1 as a threat to job success, job security and job satisfaction. Of these three areas, they see job success as the area most affected by P1. They see job satisfaction as the next most threatened by P1 and can cite few instances in which P1 threatens job security. They do not see P1 as a threat to job status. In terms of educational ideology, the critically composite principal

36 Eastern States Specialist 1: All I can say in summary is that I don’t like that (P1) and I don’t wonder why the principals are confused.
37 Eastern States Specialist 2: You think it will remain and it’s not a mistake. We’re anonymous?
sees P1 as an impediment to school development, teacher development, curriculum development and community development. Their strongest concern is with P1 curriculum development. The weighting given by them to this area is greater than the remaining three areas combined.

In reality none of the six individual principals in this study fitted totally into one of the two composites constructed in this and the previous chapter. There were no instances in which any of them presented a totally supportive or totally critical definition of the P1 situation. In each school context, there was some instance in which principals claimed some aspect of P1 needed to be re-assessed.
6

PRINCIPALS’ MODES OF ACCOMMODATING P1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents principals’ voices through ‘composite responses’ to their definition of the P1 situation; that is, their modes of accommodating P1. The overall findings are as follows. Principals who define P1 as enhancing self-interest and improving student learning tend to become system supporters or promoters of P1. Those who perceive P1 as an ill-conceived or unwanted change that threatens self-interest and impedes student learning tend to become active opponents or resisters of this change. In the middle of these two types emerge the passive dissenter and the pragmatist. The passive dissenter is closely aligned with the active opponent and stands opposed to the introduction of P1. However the passive dissenter tends to pursue a policy of non-involvement and indifference, rather than open opposition. The pragmatist shares some of the views of the active opponent and the passive dissenter and willingly adopts this change if concessions and conditions are provided. The pragmatist wants assurance that P1 will not seriously threaten self-interest and student learning or any chances of promotion and recognition. These four modes of accommodation have been constructed, are ‘ideal’ types or tentative models. They are positioned on a continuum, as illustrated below (Figure 4).

Figure 4  Principal’s composite responses to P1

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<th>Complete Acceptance</th>
<th>Partial Rejection/Acceptance</th>
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<td><strong>Pragmatist</strong></td>
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<td>(negotiator)</td>
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<td><strong>Active Opponent</strong></td>
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SYSTEM SUPPORTER PRINCIPALS

System supporter principals defend PI because of its perceived capacity to enhance self-interest and improve student learning. They speak confidently of its strengths and express optimism for its future. They set about convincing employers, staff and parents it can be successfully incorporated in schools.

Employers

System supporters seek employers’ permission to include PI in schools. They provide outlines of their plans so that the, “superintendent knows what I’m doing. So it’s not a shock to him” (Principal 2). Once permission is granted they become autonomous enough, “to do what we see fit with the support of our staff and our community” (Principal 2).

For independent school principals, this process involves presenting their plans before a panel of government representatives. On application, a government representative inspects the particular school to ensure conditions are adequate to support early childhood programs. Provisional registration is then granted on the proviso that advice is implemented. The principal is then informed of, “certain requirements that we [the school] were short of, that is certain types of equipment and we had to build a fence and so on” (Principal 4). Once these are completed, government representatives visit classrooms and conduct final reviews. This process can last two years.

Staff

After permission is granted, system supporters focus on their next goal - the need to convince staff of the value of PI and have staff “committed to the ethos” (Principal 2). This is important because, “you need to have someone that’s preferably wanting to go into that field” (Principal 1) and who can positively market PI. System supporters continually monitor staff, locate appropriate external structures of support, develop
internal structures of support and ensure that lines of communication are operational. To them, these factors are important ingredients in ensuring staff remain supportive and proactive towards P1.

**Monitoring staff progress and providing assistance to staff when challenges occur**

As members of the school administrative team, system supporters seek to identify problems and initiate actions to overcome issues before they escalate. Avenues of support and problem solving such as collaborative decision making and administrative team input are employed to increase staff commitment and ownership of P1. System supporters then confidently project their successes to others and advocate this change in terms such as:

> I've been ecstatic with the process and the progress we've made (with P1). In actual fact, some of my leadership role, in the last term, has been hanging onto the reigns and pulling back to slow down the process of change so that the teachers don’t burn out before the end of the year. I think I’m right in saying the staff are still enthusiastic about it. (Principal 2)

**Locating external structures of support**

System supporter principals remain in control of P1. They contact employers asking for advisors to come to schools and assist P1 teachers. They also arrange for teachers to access other P1 classes and observe them. One strategy used to facilitate these changes involves arranging for replacement teachers. Another is to utilise existing teachers at the school. This means, “I'm going to organize with them...to go and visit a school in operation which has got a P1-2...we will send one year one teacher and the other pre-primary teacher will take the class on Wednesday” (Principal 2). This is possible because, at this school, there are no pre-primary children in attendance on Wednesday, so the other teacher can be released to visit the P1 class. Thus, external structures of support can be located and utilised.
Developing internal structures of support

In system supporter schools, administrative teams become actively involved in the teaching process and provide internal support to staff on all aspects of Pl. To take a case in point,

When you employ a new staff member that’s not trained in this area, you do the initial training. You get them started. Then you offer the courses. We also try to build in some planning and preparation during school time for the teachers. Because we feel it’s important that…we can’t match them hour for hour. But we can always try and support them in any way we can. So definitely building in support. (Principal 5)

Staff who experience difficulties, discuss possible solutions with members of the collaborative team. Decisions are formulated and alternative routes investigated. As long as staff can justify their stance, permission is given. They, “talk to the administrative team, but we won’t say ‘no’ if they can justify their educational stance” (Principal 2).

System supporter principals ensure that professional development is provided in the form of videos. Staff are given half an hour a week which also includes meetings and topics for discussion. More specifically, “we have given them (staff) the opportunity to work together with each team. Each team is expected to work at least once a week for a minimum of half an hour” (Principal 2). Other professional development occurs on the job as teachers are urged to collaborate with each other, re-define their situation and construct alternative solutions. A few system supporters take Pl groups for approximately one hour a week and rotate with teachers and children. They record observations and report to teachers as a group. They believe this internal avenue of support provides them with a deeper understanding of integrated learning and transmits a message that Pl is valued.
Ensuring lines of communication are open and operational

System supporter principals outline information to PI staff during interview sessions, or as soon as they are transferred to schools. Additionally they may provide them with information leaflets containing sample day timetables and phase-in concepts. Furthermore, they listen to staff, encourage them to talk about PI and maintain high morale. This is achieved by, “being patient, being supportive and building in safeguards so they don’t fail. Failure is fine. Failure is OK. We can accept failure. But build in things that they feel are succeeding” (Principal 2).

Parents

System supporter principals are swift to project a positive image of PI to parents by defending its inclusion and focusing on its educational strengths. They encourage their teachers to be conversant with PI, able to communicate information confidently and be prepared to answer parents’ questions.

We’ve involved parents. We haven’t kept any secrets and we’ve had parent meetings. We, as a staff, came at it and threw it on the table first and discussed it. Then we went to the parents and we were united in our thoughts. (Principal 5)

Children’s progress is then reported to parents and they are kept up to date on changes to the PI program.

PRAGMATIST PRINCIPALS

Pragmatist principals share some of the active opponents and passive dissenters’ definition of the PI situation. However, they accept that change is inevitable and are willing to support PI if satisfactory concessions and conditions are provided. Their strategy is to adopt a negotiating stance, ‘bargaining’ and arranging ‘trade-offs’ in the form of concessions. For them, it is important to become role makers, not role takers.
and seek re-assurance that P1 will not significantly threaten self-interest or student learning. Only then does their opposition decrease.

**Employers**

Pragmatists initiate a process of negotiation with employers prior to their acceptance of P1. This includes the right to recruit and select P1 staff and accept Rural Integration Program conditions not MAG. Only then, do they commit themselves to this change.

*Negotiating for the power to recruit and select P1 staff*

Pragmatists, who work in independent schools, select P1 staff after consultation with school boards. This means advertising the position, interviewing short-listed applicants and selecting staff who are in agreement with the school’s ethos, philosophy and organisation. Government school pragmatists negotiate with EDWA for special permission to select staff. In special circumstances permission is granted and an agreement constructed. Often, pragmatists discover this is not a clear-cut process because external constraints, such as industrial agreements, restrict their power. Usually a compromise is reached and local school-based teacher selection is instigated. In one case:

> The biggest obstacle I had initially was staffing when I was going to do merit selection of all staff. Under industrial agreements and problems I lost that. I jumped up and down and screamed and won it again and then I lost it again. That's all water under the bridge and then we got to a compromise situation as to what we had. Our system in relationship to staffing is terribly inflexible but given where we are it will change. (Principal 2)

Apparently, the stark reality of the situation is that at the end of the term of employment, not all school staff can retain their position, because this would invite criticism and suggestions of favoritism. A thorough and comprehensive process of selection is adopted. For example,
I have on staff seven people who are only here for the year...out of that I had nine positions...I advertised for nine...we ran the process to the letter of the law and people who achieved the best results of the process won. But that's got advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is I cannot be aggrieved by anyone because the process was straight down the line. It was probably over-done. It was probably done to the same standard as a Principals appointment. But given the environment which I'm in, I knew that if the seven got jobs, someone from outside would complain because it would look fishy. I knew that if the people in here didn't get jobs, they would be bitterly disappointed because they all need new jobs. But that's the process and we kept to it. (Principal 2)

Not all negotiations are successful. Government school pragmatists apply for temporary teachers to remain in schools to maintain the stability of programs. However, they also come face to face with industrial policy, which states that temporary teachers cannot be given priority over permanent staff members. Therefore, this is often a temporary concession. As a result, pragmatists sometimes have to accept new staff members who are not familiar with the MAG approach used in their schools. In these instances, 'closed' negotiations surface in which employers or pragmatists adapt the conditions of negotiation and later their agreed upon response.

A preference for RIP conditions rather than MAG

Some pragmatists seek prior confirmation from employers that if they adopt Pl it will be under RIP (Rural Integration Program), not MAG conditions. Their stance reflects a knowledge of staffing regulations that allow greater teacher aide assistance for RIP classes. For example, approximately 0.9 teacher aide assistance is allocated for RIP. If the school changes to MAG, it will be entitled to only a day or a day and a half of teacher aide assistance per week. Not surprisingly, principals argue for RIP status even when their school is located in the metropolitan district. For example,

The teacher aide situation in a school of this size, off the top of my head would be entitled to a day, a day and a half of junior primary aide at the most. Now with the RIP program the aide is point nine - I think they are the official figures. As our current pre-primary aide has in the past been employed full time they cannot drop her time down to the point 9 that she was supposed to have as an aide here. She stayed with us and came across to the RIP program. But because it's a RIP program it's entitled to more time than if we had gone into a MAG program. So we actually have gained a full time aide. (Principal 1)
This principal succeeded in reclassifying a metropolitan school into RIP prior to the acceptance of P1 and subsequently gained additional human resources for P1 staff. This move maintained harmony in the school and ensured a greater chance of success.

**Staff**

Without teacher support, principals’ capacity to implement P1 successfully is limited. Pragmatists employ several strategies to harness teacher support. First, they clearly communicate their goals and expectations. Second, they provide induction and mentors. Third, they develop a united team culture. Fourth, they develop internal support structures.

*Communicating goals and expectations*

Pragmatist principals continually keep the lines of communication open and respond positively to staff issues. Prior to employment, staff are informed of the ethos, philosophy and organisation of schools and the expectation that these will be nurtured in P1. A condition of employment is that staff will uphold school beliefs. In turn, pragmatists accommodate teachers’ concerns by including them as part of the negotiating stance. For example, to allay teacher apprehension about re-deploying cleaners as teacher aides, pragmatists pursue a range of options, such as: locating professional development for the re-deployees and approaching EDWA for permission to re-advertise the position and select another teacher aide.

*Staff induction and mentors*

For pragmatist principals the provision of internal induction and mentors for P1 staff becomes a priority. New staff are provided with initial courses of training and given extra guidance so they can understand what is expected. Pragmatists act as facilitators and became involved in ensuring that school visions are translated from theory into reality. For example they,
ensure whatever support is needed for the staff is acted upon accordingly. It’s my
decision to take things to the council and making sure that what the vision for that
program is can be implemented and I am involved in making that happen. So it’s a
process of facilitation than direction. (Principal 6)

Pragmatists also arrange for internal teachers to act as mentors. However, staff do not
always support the idea that teachers require the support of their colleagues. In one
school, for example, attempts by the principal to provide a P1 teacher with advice and
assistance failed. For six months, the teacher refused to consider suggestions made by
the principal, so the principal made the year 2/3 teacher at the school a mentor for the P1
teacher. The P1 teacher resisted this intervention but the principal insisted that advice be
implemented. The principal felt uncomfortable at having to pull rank but believed this
was in the school’s interests. According to the principal, the P1 teacher was adopting
insufficient MAG strategies. There was a need for more flexible grouping for language
and mathematics. The principal objected to the teacher’s strategies because the pre­
primary children were being instructed separately from the year one children, rather than
according to their developmental levels. The pre-primary children had their names
placed on their desks, which the principal believed was undermining MAG.

Developing internal support structures

Pragmatists organise weekly meetings and ongoing professional development for staff.
They reduce teachers’ workload by arranging for additional support time during school
hours. They negotiate with teachers when they are unsuccessful in acquiring additional
conditions from employers. They provide safeguards for staff so that they can
experience success. They are patient, supportive, wary of questioning staff in a negative
manner, encourage them to continue with their work and provide built-in support
structures so teachers do not fail. They believe that if teachers are happy and are
succeeding then P1 will succeed. If teachers fail then the P1 program will also fail.
Parents

Pragmatist principals believe that without parental support, the success of P1 is compromised. Before implementing P1, they canvas parents' attitudes towards P1 and attempt to de-mystify this change.

*Canvassing parents’ attitudes towards P1*

Surveying parents’ views prior to the inclusion of P1 is more apparent in independent schools than government schools because independent schools are more client-based and wary of antagonising parents. For example, one independent school principal instigated council level preparations for up to nine months prior to the inclusion of P1.

> I would say a good nine months of council level preparation had been undertaken and that was the process of implementation and sharing from the teachers to the council and a process that insuring that once we do start a program that we needed to remember what it meant for children in a year one to be with pre-primary and certainly for parents when they applied to come into the school what it means to have a pre/year 1 class. It was very much part of the communication structure between council and the community that we find ourselves in. Given an independent school is more a client-based operation, then we had to be very clear that the program was on offer and that the community heard about it so we could actually have a program running that was acceptable and an effective P1 program. (Principal 6)

In another non-government school, the prospect of P1 was discussed with the Education Committee, whose role was to make curriculum and planning decisions. The issue was then discussed with School Council before it was presented to the parent body. Parents were canvassed for their response and their reactions were documented and analysed.

> We were still open to parent suggestion and parent thought but we were clear in some directions, but we were quite happy to change and chop and change. We also didn’t stick steadfast to the rule –it had to be this way. We were quite happy to look at alternatives...The parents were very happy putting their trust in the teachers. (Principal 5)

At the school, attempts were made to gather parents and students’ perspectives on P1 and ascertain the degree of support parents would provide and the conditions they would
demand. If P1 was strongly resisted, then it would be abandoned. If parents were satisfied and willing to trial this change, then P1 was to be accepted.

De-mystifying this change

Pragmatists provide parents with information in an attempt to de-mystify P1. For some parents, one meeting is sufficient, unlike others who demand specialist verification and confirmation that P1 has been successful in other locations. Pragmatists tread warily in their efforts to negotiate and gain parent support. For example, one school released newsletters stating the Education Committee is considering the inclusion of P1 as a MAG entry point and that it makes sense that MAG classes begin in pre-primary because the school is already MAG from years one to seven. Generally, pragmatists are careful to use language which emphasises P1 is an extension of MAG, part of a whole priority area and included in the school development plan. They organise parent meeting where independent consultants run workshops to reduce parent anxieties.

Pragmatists know that some parents agree to leave their children in P1 schools but closely monitor their children's progress. They know that other parents are totally opposed to P1, unwilling to negotiate and immediately withdraw their children. And yet other parents remain secretive about P1, predicting that if word reaches the outer community, the school will collapse and fail to attract future clientelle who will then select alternative independent schools.

At another level, pragmatist principals are aware of parents who perceive some compromises as small. For example, permitting a few year one P1 children to also work with the year two/three class is used as a strategy to initially pacify parents. By the middle of the year, however, resistance grows to the point where it needs to be dealt with immediately. Overall, say pragmatists, some parents believe P1 is hopeless and unworkable. For example, as a final effort in negotiation and compromise, one pragmatist distributed a questionnaire to parents seeking their perspectives. The returns revealed half the parents were opposed to P1 and half were accepting. Despite a
principal's attempt at re-negotiation, the following year Pl was abandoned because parents were not willing to support it and send their children.

PASSIVE DISSENTER PRINCIPALS

Passive dissenters adopt a policy of non-involvement and indifference rather than open opposition. For example, they:

- display no initiative in making Pl work.
- take a ‘response approach’ intervening only when they believe it is necessary.
- develop strategies that enable them to respond in this way.
- rely on their teachers to construct and implement Pl curricula without their intervention.
- interact with teachers on Pl curriculum matters only when it is necessary.
- listen to teachers’ concerns and attempt to locate external assistance for them.
- are aware of the demands and expectations of significant others, particularly employers and teachers.

Employers

Passive dissenters adopt a ‘maintenance position’ when they are transferred to Pl schools for a one-year period. Employers direct them to maintain and not alter the current program.¹ For example, one passive dissenter was told, “it’s not for me to destroy or create what’s been going on” (Principal 5). Restrictions forced the principal, “to follow the program that is already in place at the school...without implementing anything new” (Principal 5). Passive dissenters accept they are powerless to make decisions that will alter Pl. In some cases, they construct a passive role to abide with the wishes of employers. As such, their stance is not one of indifference or passive

¹ “The picture of various situations outlines the importance of context – government versus non-government schools” (RP1).
resistance, but a strategy to safeguard their self-interests. They follow the current program taking care not to destroy or re-create it in any way.

**Teachers**

In dealing with teachers, passive dissenters adopt two strategies that enable them to embrace a policy of non-involvement. First, they delegate overall responsibility for the construction and implementation of P1 curricula, to teachers. Second, they monitor P1 classes from a distance, responding only when teachers approach them.

*Providing teachers with overall responsibility of P1*

Passive dissenters allow teachers take overall responsibility for P1, despite the fact that they are primary, not early childhood trained. This means for developing the P1 curriculum, deciding on the most appropriate learning strategies, monitoring and assessing student outcomes and evaluating the effectiveness of programs in relation to the school plan. Teachers are also given responsibility for training teacher aides to assist in the construction and implementation of the P1 program. Passive dissenters do not play a direct role in these areas. They take a ‘response approach’ to P1, intervening only when necessary.

*Monitoring P1 classes from a distance*

Passive dissenters maintain a policy of non-involvement and withdrawal unless their assistance is requested. For them, “the most important thing is that the teachers are happy with what they are doing” (Principal 1). They feel uncomfortable with their inadequate background in P1 and transferring teachers to P1 without choice. They are relieved teachers do not resist this move. Their reluctance or unwillingness to become involved is based on factors, such as:
No (involvement) except for the fact that it has been a new structure in its first year and in that situation you have to monitor a little bit more closely and occasionally solve problems that arise from the newness of it. (Principal 1)

I saw it as that teacher’s role to instruct the teacher aide as to what preparation needs to be done to make the class work. I don’t have direction and am confident it works well. (Principal 6)

I didn’t [become involved] because the program was already running here but I was available if they needed me. Now some people did come to me at the beginning and we discussed problems that were occurring with time and management and we overcame these problems the best we could, but no I didn’t (get involved) because of my role here. (Principal 5)

Passive dissenters take a minimalist role in the implementation of P1. In their view, expertise needs to be provided by external specialists in the early childhood field, not in-house principals.

ACTIVE OPPONENT PRINCIPALS

Active opponent principals define P1 as an ill-conceived and unwanted change that threatens self-interest and impedes student learning. They resist its future development by verbally criticising its existence, stating they will not implement it again and expressing support for a return to the old system. For example, one active opponent adamantly claims, “I would not choose to set up a P1 if I could help it” (Principal 1) and elaborates because, “I still think that the pre-primary children deserve as much individual attention as we can possibly give them and I don’t see the sharing of attention with Year one is giving them that attention” (Principal 1). Active opponents engineer re-modifications, “because we found the split too great for the children and the teacher to cope with the groupings” (Principal 5).

CONCLUSION

Data from the study reveal two broad dimensions, self-interest and educational ideology, that determine the way in which principals define P1. Each of these dimensions can be positioned on either end of a continuum, one supportive of P1, the other opposed to P1.
These two dimensions and four positions enable the construction of a matrix. Within each quadrant, four types of principals (satisfied, self-sacrificing, self-seeking and dissatisfied) can be conceptualised with respect to implementing P1. (See Figure 5 below).

Figure 5   ‘Ideal’ type principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P1 enhances self-interest</th>
<th>P1 impedes self-interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satisfied Principal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Self-sacrificing Principal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(+-)</td>
<td>(-+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-seeking Principal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dissatisfied Principal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(-+)</td>
<td>(-+)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Satisfied principals" define P1, in some way, as a change that enhances self-interest and improves student learning. As system supporters, they perceive the P1 situation as being of benefit to self, staff, children, parents, community and endorse it as being of educational value to students.

"Self-seeking principals" support P1, in some way, because it improves job success, job security, job satisfaction, job status and enhances self-interest. However, they remain unsure of the educational value of P1 and believe that children, staff and the community may suffer from the changes. For this ‘ideal type’ the personal benefits of P1 are ranked higher than the disadvantages.

"Self-sacrificing principals" see some aspects of P1 as a threat to self-interest but perceive it as having possible benefits for others and agree to embrace P1 for this reason.
Although P1 threatens job success, job security, job satisfaction and job status, for this type of principal, the “sufferance” is seen as worthwhile if other people and student learning is to benefit from this change.

“Dissatisfied principals” define some aspects of P1 as a threat to self-interest, and as a change that is in conflict with their personal educational beliefs and a threat to student learning in its present form. Open resistance or passive opposition is a characteristic of this type of principal.

In reality, there is no one principal who is fully ‘satisfied’, ‘self-sacrificing’, ‘self-seeking’ or ‘dissatisfied’. In fact, none of the principals fit completely into any one quadrant and are spread across all four quadrants. Their definition of the P1 situation is complex, multi-faceted and dynamic. They continually re-assess their definition of the situation as they interact with significant others. Principals move from one section of the quadrant to another as issues and changes emerge that impact on their self-interests and educational ideology.

Even though no principals in the study were identical, there were obvious similarities between some of them. For example, the responses of three principals fitted into the four sections of the quadrant in a similar way: the ‘satisfied’ quadrant provided the closest fit, followed by ‘self-sacrificing’, ‘self-seeking’ and ‘dissatisfied’ quadrants. Three principals were mostly supportive of P1, while the other three principals were more opposed to P1. The responses of the principals mostly opposed to P1 fell more into the ‘dissatisfied’ quadrant, followed by ‘self-seeking’, ‘self-sacrificing’ and ‘satisfied’ quadrants.

In practice, the more a principal was satisfied with P1 and believed it had enhanced self-interest and improved student learning, the more supportive they were of P1. These principals become system supporters or promoters of P1. The more a principal’s responses fell into the self-seeking quadrant and self-sacrificing quadrant the less accepting they were of P1 and the more prepared they were to negotiate with significant
others. These principals became pragmatists. The more principals were dissatisfied with P1 the more antagonistic and resistant they were to this change. When issues were on the extreme end of this negative side, then principals become active opponents. When issues were on the lower end of the negative side, they became passive dissenters. The way in which principals responded to P1 depended on how much of their definition of the situation lay in each of these four quadrants. Their response continually changed. When their equilibrium was challenged they redefined their situation and responded accordingly.

In short, there are strong links between principals’ definition of the situation and their mode of accommodating P1 (See Table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Determinants of ‘ideal’ types</th>
<th>‘Ideal’ Type</th>
<th>Stance Constructed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>P1 enhances self-interest (+)</td>
<td>Satisfied (++)</td>
<td>System Supporter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>P1 improves student learning (+)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>P1 obstructs self-interest (-)</td>
<td>Self-sacrificing (-+)</td>
<td>Pragmatist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>P1 improves student learning (+)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Passive Dissenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>P1 enhances self-interest (+)</td>
<td>Self-seeking (+-)</td>
<td>Pragmatist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>P1 impedes student learning (-)</td>
<td>Dissatisfied (-)</td>
<td>Active Opponent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>P1 obstructs self-interest (-)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Passive Dissenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>P1 impedes student learning (-)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Along with other school staff, teachers were excluded from the decision to implement P1 in WA. This study documents what they might have said if they were consulted. The data they provided is presented differently to principals. The reasons for structuring the analysis of principals’ comments into ‘composites voices’ does not apply to teachers. Because fifteen teachers participated in the study, enough data was provided to identify relationships and patterns across categories without fragmenting the experiences of individual teachers. The greater number of teachers also allowed their responses to be reported in a non-composite format that also safeguarded their anonymity. To emphasize that the analysis of the teacher stance on P1 is not based on a ‘composite’ approach, this chapter and the next is written in the past tense. The same applies to chapter nine.

The teachers had more to say about their definition of the situation than their response to P1. In order to reduce repetition and illustrate links between definition of the situation and responses to that definition, these two aspects of the construction of teachers stance on P1, have been combined.

In this chapter, teachers’ definitions of the P1 situation are analysed in terms of whether teachers thought P1 promotes or threatens their self-interests. That is, whether they thought it enhances or undermines their chances of job success, job satisfaction, job
security and job status. This structure is used not only to report their definition of the P1 situation but also to document their mode of accommodation to P1. As noted in chapter three, footnotes appear in chapters four to nine. These footnotes are not analysed or intended to occupy a central place in the thesis. They are included in recognition of the multiple voices that exist in relation to P1. At no time is their inclusion meant to alter, justify or question any aspect of a participant’s stance towards P1.

**JOB SUCCESS**

For the purpose of this thesis, job success refers to success in the eyes of significant others. Three patterns of response emerged from an analysis of the interviews with teachers, namely, a majority view and two minority views. The majority view was that P1 constituted neither a benefit nor a threat to teachers’ job success. One minority view was that P1 gave teachers an opportunity to present themselves as innovative, loyal and an asset to educational reform, which in turn was seen to accelerate their chances of promotion and success. A counter minority view was that P1 had a negative impact on the curriculum, and caused children’s learning to suffer, which made teachers look incompetent in the eyes of significant others.

**Majority view: P1 makes no difference**

Most teachers did not see their participation in P1 as being a benefit or threat to job success, for the following reasons. P1 contained no compulsory curriculum, guidelines or pre-set outcomes that pre-primary children had to achieve before being accepted into year one. Pre-primary children did not have to pass class tests or learn to read and write.¹ Pre-primary was a “non-compulsory” year of learning, unlike year one that was compulsory. The Student Outcome Statements written for WA children were not binding on the pre-primary year because it was not compulsory (ECTAWA, 1997). There were no ‘P1 experts’ who could appraise or evaluate teachers to assess whether P1

¹ “Although there may not be any standardised tests for pre-primary, they still need to attain certain levels (K-12 curriculum). Also, year 1’s make up a proportion of P1 classes and they have compulsory “guidelines”. All working towards Level 1 Student Outcome Statements” (RT3).
was educationally successful. There were no educational leaders in schools who could assess the success or failure of P1 from an informed base.

**One minority view: P1 makes a positive difference**

A small minority of teachers claimed P1 had the potential to strengthen job success by improving their image in the eyes of significant others. P1 enabled them to show principals they were loyal in terms of accommodating new government directives and an asset in terms of enhancing the school’s image as innovative. Principals relied on teachers to construct and manage P1 classes, because they lacked knowledge and experience in this sector of schooling. They placed no restrictions on the way teachers constructed and implemented P1 because there were no pre-set guidelines, the pre-primary year was non-compulsory and they were concerned staff would oppose P1 teaching duties. Therefore,

The principal is happy with what we are doing because he does not have any experience in the lower end of the school. He is happy with whatever we do. We were coming to him with our concerns and he was saying, “I think you are both doing such a wonderful job.” If anyone had to step in our shoes they would be wary. So he appreciated we were doing it and taking it on. (P1P1B)\(^2\)

P1 allowed them to show principals and parents they were successful in terms of making the school’s image more innovative. For them, this increased their chances of gaining favorable teaching positions. As one teacher said,

The principal is very pleased. Also, we have had quite a few parents phoning in to see if their children can come here because of the program. They have been ringing and saying, “Can my children come and cross boundaries?” (P2P1F)

**A counter minority view: P1 makes a negative difference**

Another small group of teachers took a counter view. They said that P1 did not improve job success, instead it created conditions that made their jobs more difficult. Even worse, P1 threatened the success they previously enjoyed when teaching other year

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\(^2\)“Not all principals are appreciative and/or helpful! Mine wasn’t” (RT3).
levels. These teachers felt strongly about not receiving appropriate human resources to implement P1. They cited, as an example, the appointment of re-deployed cleaners as P1 teacher-aides. The reason why so few teachers identified this as problematic was that it only applied to government schools, not independent schools. Of the three government schools in this study, two had re-deployed cleaners who were not formally trained in early childhood education and appropriate teaching practice, and yet were expected to assist teachers in improving student outcomes. Teachers believed employers should take responsibility for providing appropriate teacher-aide assistance, as P1 was a government driven innovation. They expressed concern about re-deployed cleaners being placed in P1 classes as teacher’s aides without induction.

From the teachers’ perspective, the risk here was that the redeployed cleaner teacher-aides might have a direct impact on the P1 curriculum, causing children’s learning to suffer and thus make teachers look incompetent in the eyes of significant others. The teachers saw this as a threat to job success because they were accountable for year one children’s learning. Year one children have a compulsory curriculum, guidelines and pre-set outcomes that must be achieved before they progress to year two. They need to pass class tests and learn to read and write. As one teacher lamented, “the greatest obstacle has been the teacher-aide and this has become a real problem” (P3P1A).

At Treebush Primary School (pseudonym) for example, the situation worsened. Teachers had been supportive of P1 because they were in a well-resourced MAG trial school. When a re-deployed cleaner was recruited to assist with P1 classes, one teacher’s initial response was dissatisfaction, followed by shock on discovering the teacher-aide did not speak English, used sign language to communicate with children.

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3 “Very important. Lack of human resources, resources and space, are most often causes of MAG becoming unworkable. (All cost money!). Unqualified teacher-aides a very big problem” (RT2).
4 RT3 agreed with this comment.
5 RT3 agreed with this comment.
6 “Exactly!” (RT3).
7 “Very important to have appropriate assistance”. (RT3).
8 “Yes” (RT3).
9 “This is actually against the beliefs of developmental learning!” (RT2).
10 “Exactly” (RT3).
and appeared to have little understanding of child development. For example, said one of the teachers at the school, the teacher-aide, “cannot speak English and when involved with the children in something simple like a drawing, will complete it for them” (P3P1A). The researcher observed the teacher-aide erase children’s work, communicate with sign language and complete it whenever mistakes were made. Apparently, in the teacher-aide’s culture, children’s work needed to be accurately completed and the end product needed to be of a high standard.

Considerable training failed to improve the teacher-aide because teachers were hampered by the recurring reality that, “we cannot get her to understand” (P3P1A). Consequently, it was difficult to include the teacher-aide as an active member of the teaching team. In fact, both teachers found parent help of more assistance than the teacher-aide. In desperation, the teachers approached the principal expressing concern that the teacher-aide’s performance was having a negative effect on job success and student learning. After a series of unsuccessful attempts in seeking a resolution, the teachers became increasingly concerned about Pl. As one teacher recalled, “I started discussing it with the principal in week 3...and it took until week nine for something to actually happen” (P3P1A). When the teacher altered her stance from negotiator to active critic, this triggered a more positive and speedier response from her employers and principal.

These teachers demanded quality support. In their view, a full term without teacher assistance had negatively impacted on their performance and students. One teacher adopted an assertive stance:

I rang up (the appropriate authorities) and I made huge waves. We documented everything and we finally got a guy from industrial relations...to come out and I gave him all my documented evidence and we had an hour with him and he said he would do something about it and he did. (P3P1A)

11 “My personal experience was: our new ‘re-deployed assistant’ was unsure of the pre-primary (activity-based) routines even after nine months of training. She was unable to take a group of children independently, did not know any kindy songs or how to control a group and found it very difficult to read a story to even a small group of children. Her English literacy skills were poor. Consequently, the programme had to be re-assessed” (RT3).
By this stage the teachers felt the principal was more appreciative of their situation. Previously, “we tried to bring the teacher-aide issue to his attention and he is now realising what we mean” (P3P1A). However, when a quick resolution failed to emerge and further delays were experienced through a series of misunderstandings, this created further concerns. For example,

We missed the last edition of School Matters (WA publication) because of a mistake, applications for the job closed on Friday for week 7 term 2, so we have a temporary (teacher) but we have to go right through the interview stage. (P3P1A)

The teacher became sceptical once again, declaring she was less trusting of the system and willing to be a part of the interview process. She informed employers that in a P1 class the teacher-aide is an important member of the teaching team and without positive conditions and support structures P1 would fail. For these P1 teachers, without proper teacher-aide support, P1 was an ill-conceived change that threatened their sense of job success and impacted on student learning.

**JOB SECURITY**

Job security here refers to the protection of one’s self-interest through gaining and maintaining employment. Recent government decisions in WA forced some schools to close down and others to amalgamate with adjoining neighbouring schools. Reclassified schools that became smaller resulted in teachers losing their teaching positions or being transferred to other schools. Amalgamating pre-primary and year one children enabled teachers to retain their positions in schools. Some teachers supported P1 because they were wary of being given an unwanted transfer. Other teachers were so opposed to the inclusion of pre-primary and year one children in the one class, that they resisted any form of participation in these classes.

Again, three patterns of response emerged from an analysis of teachers’ data, namely a majority view and two minority views. The majority view was that P1 posed little benefit or threat to job security. One minority view was that teachers rarely accepted P1
for job security. A counter minority view associated P1 with increased stress, burnout and resignation.

Majority view: Neutral

An overwhelming majority of teachers said P1 was of little benefit or threat to job security. Some of these teachers were permanent, close to retirement, temporary or so dissatisfied with P1 teaching conditions that they were happy to take on positions as relief teachers rather than continue as P1 teachers. For them, job security was not an issue, unlike job satisfaction. Teachers believed their jobs were secure because they held positions that very few teachers would compete for or wish to enter. On occasion teachers left their place of employment. “Last year we had another (P1) teacher who left to go and teach somewhere else…the workload was just too much” (P5P1B). However, most teachers responded to P1 with indifference because they did not have to support or patronise it in order to secure their job.

Minority view

Teachers rarely accepted P1 for job security. The few who did, needed a job and accepted a P1 position even though it was, “put on us without enough warning” (P1P1B). They were unhappy about their inclusion in P1 and reacted in, “absolute shock having taught for seventeen years but never having taught pre-primary” (P2P1F). However they were not prepared to refuse this employment given the prospect of an unwanted transfer and being looked upon unfavorably by employers. One teacher said, “I wouldn’t have said no in a fit…it’s another job and I am happy to have a job” (P2P1C). For a small minority of teachers, P1 was better than an unknown transfer to an unknown location.

Such teachers remained silent on P1 issues because they feared that being critical would have made it difficult for them to gain future employment. The fact that they were given fewer resources than pre-primary classes made no difference. They saw the emergence
of P1 as economically driven and as a change they held little control over. They believed they had little influence over employers’ actions.

**Another minority view**

For another small group of teachers, P1 was associated with increased stress and burnout. One teacher resigned before the year had completed, stating a preference to remain unemployed rather than continue in a P1 class. At the end of a one year period a further two teachers abandoned P1 to find employment elsewhere. They adopted an oppositional stance towards P1, openly criticising it to colleagues.

According to these teachers, principals had predicted there would be problems retaining teachers. For this reason they often preferred to employ temporary teachers who they perceived to be more flexible and less prone to resistance. Permanent teachers were seen as set in their ways and less able to adjust to P1, alter their teaching styles and compromise. As one P1 teacher warned, “someone who is set in their ways and won’t change would raise issues and problems” (P2P1A). This teacher went on to explain,

> He (principal) knows that if you are a permanent pre-primary teacher you have been teaching in a pre-primary for many years and he wasn’t given anymore pre-primary teachers...He told me he wanted it run in this way and explained it...I can see his reasoning. If one of my friends came I think it would be very hard because she would not compromise and would hold firm to your beliefs and views. You have to be able to take and give. (P2P1A)

For these teachers, unemployment was a better option than their continued employment in P1 classes. Their stance was oppositional and strongly portrayed in their rejection of P1 and verbal criticism of its continued existence.

**JOB SATISFACTION**

Job satisfaction here refers to success in one’s own eyes. It applies to teachers who become satisfied when their jobs provide them with a sense of achievement and personal worth. Two patterns of response emerged from an analysis of teachers’ data, namely, a
majority view and a minority view. The majority view was that PI impeded job satisfaction by magnifying the differences between pre-primary and primary teaching and by increasing teachers' workloads. The minority view was that PI at times enhanced job satisfaction in six specific ways.

**Majority view: PI reduces job satisfaction**

Of the fifteen teachers in this study, an overwhelming majority said that PI impeded job satisfaction in two main ways. Firstly, it magnified the differences between pre-primary and primary teaching and learning. Secondly, it increased teachers' workloads.

*PI magnified the differences between both fields*

For most teachers, PI magnified the differences between pre-primary and primary education. So great were these differences that the primary trained teachers generally experienced difficulties identifying learning in PI settings. This was because early childhood education is based on a constructivist approach to learning that is child-centered rather than teacher-directed. Learning is through exploration, inquiry and experimentation rather than pre-set teacher directed worksheets that most primary teachers were familiar with. In several teachers' words,

Yes there is a big difference in the philosophy and as a year one teacher I have had to change my thinking...A lot of the activities that happen and that are planned I don't see the learning that is going on in them and it has been explained to me that there is learning and I am slowly picking up on this understanding in bits and pieces. Whereas, the year one program seems to be a lot more structured. A lot more work is done in the year one, whereas a lot of this is play and requires less work. (P2P1F)

Yes I have come to use the pre-primary methods more in that they make something and do something and then we do a lot of writing or year one work from that thing that they have made. That is the pre-primary way of doing activities. (P1P1A)

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12 “Teachers with an ECE background adapt much easier, but inserviceing in the way children learn at five and six is vital before primary teachers take PI” (RT2).
13 “Agree” (RT2).
Although most teachers agreed that pre-primary children required some informality, they claimed this was difficult to achieve in practice, “because the (year) ones are so structured compared to pre-primary” (P2P1E). Their attempts to integrate early childhood philosophy into P1 classes were unsuccessful because they wished to retain a traditional approach for year one children while applying a constructivist approach for pre-primary children. These teachers found it difficult to reconceptualize and reinvent their teaching practice. Furthermore, they were unwilling to adopt a constructivist approach for both groups without guidelines and guidance. Those who fleetingly trialled a constructivist approach experienced difficulties and reverted back to a more traditional approach. Their jobs became stressful and less satisfying. As one teacher explained,

The philosophy that we have been listening to is that the prees should not be going off with the aide all the time and they should be mixing with the whole class all the time...but at the start of the year I could not have coped with that and it was too much. After having a formal straight class and teaching for twelve years following a timetable which was half an hour for one lesson, half an hour for another and having all this noise and children not knowing where they were going was bewildering for me. I reached the point where I said, “Stop” and the only way I could cope was to have the prees going out with the aide and I was dealing with the year ones. I know that is not how it is meant to be but it was how I could cope with things. (P1P1B).

Dissatisfied teachers either verbalised their opposition of P1 or responded with disinterest. There was no need to negotiate with employers for permission to implement P1 in a specific way, because there were few if any restrictions or external monitoring of their performance. For example, as illustrated in the previous quote, teacher (P1P1B) selected to implement a constructivist approach, redefined her situation, reflected and then decided to abandon this approach for a more traditional one. There were no instances in which this teacher felt threatened or required to negotiate for greater freedom.

14 "They don’t need to be so structured all the time" (RT3).
15 "I found this the only way to go" (RT3).
16 Prees is an abbreviated word used by some teachers to describe pre-primary children.
Differences also existed in the approach to programming adopted by most early childhood and primary trained teachers. Early childhood teachers tended to use developmental domains rather than subject areas. For this reason, the teachers had problems matching children’s performances onto a developmental continuum that was subject oriented. One said, “It was a learning curve for me to slot them into subject areas and have outcomes in terms of subject areas” (P6P1A). Likewise, primary trained teachers were accustomed to using subject areas rather than a developmental continuum.

In several instances friction emerged between early childhood and primary teachers over the amount of formality considered appropriate for P1. Often, teachers adopted an oppositional stance and were unwilling to compromise. For example,

Last year this was an issue as prees were pushed too soon and given no free time to explore. A few arguments developed and at the moment there is friction with the new teacher as she has no early childhood background. (P5P1B)

These teachers became decreasingly dissatisfied in their work. They chose to ignore philosophical issues because there was, “no extra time for dealing with differences in blending philosophies. That is how pre-primary children learn and year one children learn” (P2P1A). Also, “it is very hard to see when you are surrounded by children asking you for help at the same time (P5P1C). Interestingly, these teachers responded with indifference and withdrawal, rather than negotiation and collaboration. Few if any attempts were made to solve differences in philosophy because they did not define this as their responsibility.

**P1 increased teachers’ workload**

P1 increased the workload of most teachers because it required them to construct a P1 curriculum without guidelines and cater to a wider developmental age level.

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17 “With Outcome Statements in subject areas all teachers should be programming in subjects with an overriding domain understanding evident” (RT2).
18 “Continuums such as First Steps are subject specific” (RT2).
19 “Strongly agree” (RT2).
Determining the best method for combining pre-primary and year one children was a constant source of pressure faced by the majority of teachers. For example,

How to deal with two primary age groups. We are not pre-primary teachers and this has been a problem. In addition how to set up the room for both groups and know how to manage activities and get ideas for both groups. Managing both groups and teaching one was a concern. The solution we reached was if formal work was being done with the year one children, then we would use the support of the pre-primary aide who would take the pre-primary children in a small group of fours and fives and the rest would play. (P1P1A)

It is a huge culture shock for me and it was a very, very big change for me and I have to keep reminding myself that they are not year ones and not even close to beginning year one and they are at the beginning of a pre-primary year. (P2P1B)

Most teachers remained unconvinced of the value of P1 and spent considerable time trying to justify their own teaching position to themselves. When asked if the teacher felt she had been thrown in the deep end without assistance, the response was “definitely” (P5P1C). Furthermore,

I need more information on organisation in a MAG class, the theories on MAG, how other teachers have found it beneficial. I don’t find it beneficial personally and I prefer to teach in a straight class room but if I can have that evidence in front of me and see how a more experienced teacher has coped with it, it may help. (P5P1C)

One teacher reported how the developmental gap between pre-primary and year one was great enough to hinder the quality of learning in P1 (P2P1E). This view was confirmed by a second teacher who said,

Yes it is very stressful and you have to wonder, ‘Why do it?’ You would need organisational skills and would have to be super-organised. First thing in the morning you’ve got pre-primaries and all the mums that come in to help as well. You have teacher-aides and all these kids running around and you have to basically organise them and you have to give year ones the language. If you have them all on the mat you need to speak to all their levels otherwise the pre-primaries need to be doing something else and you need to organise that. (P2P1D)

Catering for the wider developmental levels of children was an additional workload for the majority of teachers and their aides. In several schools, teachers worked until 5.30

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20 "Yes. No support or guidelines were provided" (RT3).
p.m. every week day and one day on weekends. They defined P1 as being more work, longer hours and greater stress. In one case a teacher reported,

We have about three half days each with an aide and the aide will be working with children needing help in handwriting, phonics, reading and you can’t ask the aide to take work home as they’re not paid for it. My work at home has increased tremendously. Last year with P-1 teachers were working from 8am to 5.30pm at school every day and one day on weekends. It was a tremendous amount of work preparing things and programming for each child. (P5P1B)

To add to this growing workload, most teachers experienced difficulties managing pre-primary children who had not attended pre-school, were immature and unable to work alone. Most P1 classes in this study contained a mix of pre-primary children who had previously attended kindergarten or preschool and those who had not. For example,

We have some who only turned four right at the end of last year. So we have a big two year gap which is quite a huge gap at this age and a couple of the pre-primaries who were born in December have not had any formal kindy. (P1P1B)

No, so they are coming straight in and there is a little boy who still runs around the room madly. We have an autistic boy coming into our room next year with a full-time aide and he is a pre-primary child. What concerns me is that there is just a huge range and there is a range between pre-primaries who have just turned four and the ones who are just a bit older. Also not all pre-primaries have come from homes where they have been given the chance to develop basic skills. There is also a huge range in the year ones. (P1P1B)

Other teachers confirmed that the wide age range of children made it difficult to manage the P1 class. In these instances, their jobs became less satisfying in that,

In this room this year, there is a huge range between the prees and ones...you have an extra twelve months of ability levels to cater for. (P3P1A)

They (pre-primary) need your attention for help to go to the toilet, washing their hands, getting an apron on, sitting down with a reader book. (P5P1C)

Pre-primary children also had a much shorter concentration span than year one children. To keep them on task, teachers had to prepare additional activities. This increased their workload and made their work more stressful and less satisfying. For example,

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21 "Yes" (RT3).
Although we do a lot of ‘hands on’ with year ones there is a lot of structure there too and even when you give the kids a written activity to do and you get the pre-primaries to do it, their concentration span, compared to the year ones, is just enormous and you have to find a lot of other things to get the pre-primaries to do, while the year ones are working on the activity. So it makes a lot of extra work and you are conscious of all that all the time. (P2P1E)

The majority of teachers viewed P1 as a change that made their jobs less satisfying. Some found it hard coping with P1 classes after having taught in primary classes for many years. They became totally reliant on their teacher-aide for pre-primary guidance on the educational component of the program. As one teacher acknowledged, "Luckily our aide is pre-primary so she has had input in telling me what they can do" (P1P1B).

Not all teachers were comfortable interacting with other P1 teachers. For many years, they had become accustomed to teaching in isolation, therefore they found it difficult adopting a stance that involved negotiation and compromise. In their view, guidance and assistance was needed, especially in dealing with overpowering colleagues. Difficulties emerged in one case where,

Trying to come to a group decision because I have always been valued as being a teacher who will teach my children in my own little room and be independent. I have never been a team member before. That is a new thing to get used to and I hope that I have the right personal skills and people skills, especially having come from a background of a system where you just get in your little room and do your own little job. You need person skills and I feel people should be given training for this. (P2P1C)

Permanent teachers often proved to be unwilling to negotiate and compromise, resulting in feelings of frustration because, “you can’t get rid of them. They’re making children write their news at desks” (P2P1A). However, feelings of inadequacy prevailed even when teachers worked in isolation. For example,

The first week I had a pre-primary group I was left on my own with them doing a music, singing game kind of activity. The aide had gone with the other group and it was quite a shock. Even the different level of control that was needed to get them to a working level was a shock. I found it difficult to try and get them to stand in a circle. It was amazing. It took them so long to do that. I had to re-learn and think of how to approach it differently. The next week when I had a pre-primary group I was much more prepared. It was a bit easier and less of a shock. I had to cut one of my activities as it was too difficult for them. They can’t concentrate for as long or sit still for as long as Year ones. (P2P1D)
Minority view: P1 increases job satisfaction

However, not all teachers agreed that P1 impeded job satisfaction. A minority claimed that P1 at times enhanced job satisfaction, for six reasons. First, P1 made teaching more interesting and challenging. Second, it encouraged collaborative teaching and made teachers feel less isolated. Third, it enabled teachers to work with the same group of children over the longer time frame of two years rather than one. Fourth, it provided one day a week in which year one children could be instructed as a small group. Fifth, it decreased teachers' workload. And sixth, it provided greater human and material resources than other year levels.

P1 was interesting and challenging

For some teachers, teaching was more interesting and challenging in a P1 class.

It's interesting and you don't get bored. You're very busy and time goes very quickly. (P3P1B)

I find the challenge of having the P1s is fantastic and enjoy the range of developmental needs. I get the best of both worlds by having a P1. (P6P1A)

There is nothing written down about how to do this (P1) and so we are paving the way. That is part of the whole excitement of it. (P2P1C)

These teachers defined P1 as a challenge not a problem. They adopted a supportive stance because it made their work more satisfying and less boring.

P1 encouraged collaborative teaching

Collaborative teaching enabled workloads to be shared, which eliminated the isolation and stress experienced in other year levels. For example,

I find it is a lot less stressful than what I have been used to for the last five years because you have the input from other people and you don’t feel so isolated. (P2P1B)

22 "These are very important MAG beliefs!" (RT2).
I love the collaboration and the planning and team teaching and I find that very enriching. (P2P1C)

P1 reduced stress because, in collaboratively run P1 classes, managing disruptive children became easier. As teachers worked together they shared responsibility for making decisions. Put differently,

Behavior management is great and I don't have to hold it all on my shoulders and can share it with other teachers and share that child with others. (P2P1A)

That little pain can rotate to someone else and it may not be a worry to them and they can handle it in a different way and maybe their personalities match a bit better with other teachers. It has taken all that pressure off me and it is wonderful. I don't go to school thinking I have to deal with one child all the time for a whole year. (P2P1A)

Sharing disruptive children with other P1 staff meant that teachers did not have to cope with difficult children for the whole day. Children rotated amongst other P1 classes as they shared resources and participated in group activities.

**P1 enabled teachers to work with children over a longer time frame**

P1 provided exposure over a longer time frame, which enabled teachers to work with the same group of children over two years rather than one. As a result,

You really get to see the children progressing, especially when you see them for the two years. You get to know the children, where they are at and what problems they are having. It's very good for remedial work because you know the children so well. (P3P1B)

This longer time frame gave teachers the opportunity to help children develop to their optimal level, monitor their learning and assist them with remedial problems. Teachers adopted a positive stance towards this aspect of P1.

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23 Yes – a big plus (RT3).
PI provided one day a week for year one children to be instructed alone

Several teachers maintained that PI enabled them to spend more time with year one children. Government policy stipulated that all children turning five years of age be given the opportunity to attend a full-time pre-primary program for four days per week (ECTA, 1997). Teachers used the fifth day to comprehensively instruct year one children and compensate them for lost time when they were with pre-primary children. According to these teachers, pre-primary children were a distraction; the year one children could concentrate better on their learning when they were alone. From a teacher’s perspective,

A lot of teaching is done on the Wednesdays...I love Wednesdays and the ones love Wednesdays and it is like a relief and we are on our own and it is a good time to teach them things that we should be doing when the prees are there and we can’t. We can also model our routine and I will say to them this is how we should be doing things when the prees are here on other days. It might just be, ‘Remember you need to stay on task and concentrate on what you are doing when the prees are here.’ I just love Wednesday and so do the ones. (P1P1B)

The one day a week in which year one children were instructed without the distraction of pre-primary children was a relief and a rare instance in which PI provided job satisfaction. However, although, teachers became more supportive of PI, they were still unwilling to implement it as a ‘pure model’ of instruction.

PI decreased teachers’ workload

A minority of teachers found that PI decreased their workload because they duplicated programs and divided the workload amongst team members. This meant, for instance,

I haven’t had to write anything and all that work has been lifted of my shoulders and come onto everyone else’s shoulders and it is brilliant and I am using the programs I have used in the past so as to make it easier for all of us. (P2P1A)

I believe you do get more time one to one with children, but not just on the fifth day (RT2).
P1 also decreased their workload because different curriculum responsibilities were allocated to different team members. For example, they shared the responsibility of being in charge of mathematics, science, art or health for the total group of pre-primary and year one children. This strategy eased the programming workload and made the implementation process smoother. Lessons were constructed and duplicated with all children, often over one hundred and twenty in number. In the words of several teachers,

I find it has eased the load because we are doing it together and are responsible for one area of it and are not responsible for doing the whole lot. I will do one activity with a concept and I prepare for that and another teacher will prepare for the other activity. So the workload is shared. We do our planning together and help each other and this makes a huge difference. (P2P1B)

It’s much easier. In the past when I was first year out I was a pre-primary teacher and we had our own program and there were four pre-primary classes in the one school. I could ask other teachers for help. Then I was sent elsewhere and for two years was on my own in my class and I had to do all the programming and make all the decisions...and then I came to this situation. (P2P1A)

Yes definitely. It’s less because the collaborative and teaching planning makes it less. (P2P1C)

Teachers negotiated and compromised with each other in order to reduce the programming workload and maximise job satisfaction. They defined this stance as enhancing their self-interests and were able to adopt it because they faced few if any restrictions.

*PI provided greater human and material resources than other year levels*

A minority of primary trained teachers, who previously taught in classes where there was minimal teacher-aide assistance and resources, said that P1 provided greater human and material resources than other primary year levels. More specifically,

In a straight year one class I had access to one hour a week and now I have an aide for five of the days and this is wonderful. (P2P1B)

Yes (more support) year one but not in pre-primary. (P5P1A)
We have more aide time than if you had a year one before. (P3P1B)
For me that has really lessened my workload. (P2P1C).

These primary trained teachers compared the teaching resources, equipment and buildings available in P1 classes with their previous allocation in primary year levels and concluded that,

Everything I get excites me whereas a lot of people who are used to more complain they haven't got all these things that pre-primary children need. Because I don't know any different I just move along with it. And I find it is a lot better than what I have ever had. (P2P1C)

We are fairly lucky in that we have a good building to start with and there are a lot of schools who have been told to set up P1s and they haven't got the building. (P3P1B).

In terms of job satisfaction, such teachers constructed a supportive stance towards P1. In their opinion, P1 had in fact, enhanced self-interest and improved job satisfaction.

**JOB STATUS**

As mentioned earlier, job status in this study refers to occupying a position of prestige; that is, important in the eyes of the school community, particularly the staff. Two patterns of response emerged from an analysis of teachers’ data, namely a majority view and a minority view. The majority view was that P1 constituted a threat to job status. Teachers also expressed a minority view based on two reasons. Some early childhood trained teachers claimed there was a higher status teaching year one children, while other teachers believed P1 attracted a higher status because it was innovative.

**Majority view: P1 lowers job status**

An overwhelming majority of teachers defined the P1 situation as a threat to job status. For them, P1 had not provided professional prestige and good standing amongst their colleagues. Nor had it created an image of innovation and success. Instead of respect, admiration and commendation, P1 attracted mixed feelings of sympathy, amazement and disapproval within the school community.
P1 generated sympathy amongst colleagues. A common response was, “Oh gosh! That must be hard” (P6P1A). This was because there was, “a perception of it being difficult and you definitely get sympathy” (P6P1A). In some instances, teachers avoided informing their colleagues they were part of P1 and passively withdrew because they grew tired of the continual sympathy that was offered or criticism of their involvement. Teachers were seen as “crazy” or “mad” and verbally labeled them that at meetings and gatherings. Attempts to explain the benefits of P1 to colleagues often proved unsuccessful, leaving P1 teachers with little choice but to listen to negative remarks. For example:

They (colleagues) often comment, “Here come those crazy people!” (P5P1B)

(My colleagues say to me), “I could never do what you two are doing and I don’t know how you can do it and it would drive me crazy.” (P3P1A)

Staff from other schools who teach straight grades think you're mad and (say they) are either very supportive or wouldn't have a bar of it. (P5P1A)

Generally, teachers found that P1 created disapproval from colleagues that was difficult to manage. They claimed their status plummeted when colleagues approached them at teacher network meetings, inservices and conferences and requested a reason for their involvement in P1. Often colleagues voiced opposition to P1 and asked them to justify the value of this type of learning. Most of these types of colleagues were primary trained and unwilling to accept that year one learning could be maintained under P1 conditions. For instance, said one P1 teacher,

Even inservicing became a problem. At every meeting teachers would talk to us and tell us they were so much against MAG and they were jumping on us and saying, “How can you possibly get your year ones to be reading at the level and writing?” I was saying, I'm not and if they are not at that level then they are obviously not ready to be at that level.” They would be aghast and would say, "You can't do that!” I was wrong all the time and that was difficult because you start questioning what you are doing and feel you are not doing a good job as there are no guidelines. (P5P1B)

Even some early childhood trained teachers were unconvinced that P1 classes could be implemented in keeping with early childhood philosophy. A primary trained teacher captured the view of these early childhood trained teachers by saying,
A lot of the P1 or pre-primary teachers are in awe of this whole situation and very wary and frightened of it all and that is going to become part of how we work. It is different to what we are used to. (P2P1B)

For most teachers, P1 created an image that reduced the professional prestige and good standing they previously held amongst their colleagues. It did not provide them with an image of innovation and success. Their stance was either to defend their involvement in P1 or to inform colleagues that their involvement was not through choice but initiated by employers.

**Minority view: P1 increases job status**

A few teachers claimed that P1 increased job status. They offered two reasons. First, there was a higher status teaching year one children. They pointed out that year one attendance was compulsory, unlike pre-primary children’s attendance that was non-compulsory. One pre-primary teacher explained, "There is certainly credence given to the year ones being more formal and if you teach them you have a higher status" (P6P1A). Teachers with a pre-primary background found their status improved when colleagues discovered they were also instructing year one children. Second, a minority of teachers reported enhanced status because employers and colleagues perceived it as a new innovation worthy of a challenge. Therefore, “people will come in and observe your class because it’s P1 but they wouldn’t look at your straight class” (P5P1A).

**CONCLUSION**

A broad finding of the study reported in this study, was the lack of over-riding consensus amongst teachers that P1 either enhanced or impeded self-interest. Neither was there an equally divided stance on emerging issues. Instead, a majority/minority view prevailed that reflected differences in the teachers’ work contexts, personalities, perceived levels of power, pressures faced and relationships with others. What did

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25 “Shows the need for all early childhood educators to be “advocates” – to speak up and be heard – to let others know the whole ECE area – up to 8 years is vital and each level very important” (RT2).
emerge however, was a majority view that PL impeded job satisfaction, constituted a threat to job status and made no difference to job success and job security.

The teachers’ data, like the principals’, embodied definitions of the PL situation and responses that were complex, multi-faceted and dynamic, not static. The teachers’ conduct was ‘situated’ in their workplace and conditions of employment. For example, some teachers enjoyed well-resourced MAG trial schools while others struggled in transformed classrooms lacking space and resources. For a few teachers, well-trained teacher-aides were defined as an asset to the PL program, unlike a small minority of teachers who struggled while working with the assistance of re-deployed cleaners. As such, teachers’ motives and actions were grounded in their definitions of the PL situation. Their definitions of the situation, however, were more comprehensive than their chosen mode of accommodating those definitions.

This chapter has shown that teachers, like principals, constructed their definition of the situation partly on the basis of self-interest, prioritising the need for physiological and psychological fulfillment. For some teachers, the PL reform was interpreted as rational and in their self-interests, while for others it was defined differently. Despite such differences, a pattern began to emerge from the data. The more satisfied teachers were with PL within their definition of the situation, the more they adopted a supportive stance. The more dissatisfied they were, the more they adopted an oppositional stance. When their definition of the PL situation was altered or disturbed, teachers tended to react by re-defining the situation and adopting a revised stance. In these instances, they adopted numerous positions (opposition, withdrawal, isolation and/or negotiation) in order to safeguard and maintain their self-interests. Throughout the data analysis phase, self-interest emerged as a primary area of importance and a powerful stimulus on which stances were constructed.

Chapter eight focuses on how ‘student learning’ affected the way in which teachers’ defined and responded to PL.
TEACHER STANCE ON P1: STUDENT LEARNING

Teachers in this study found it difficult to gauge the impact of P1 on improved student learning. However, they commented on the relationship between P1 and four types of development aimed at improving student learning outcomes: school development, teacher development, curriculum development and community development.

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

In recent years P1 classes have been included in WA schools for educational or administrative reasons.¹ Employers directed schools to integrate the non-compulsory and compulsory areas of schooling in cases where there were insufficient numbers of children to run pre-primary classes.² ³ ⁴ As with many innovations, the expectation was that P1 would fit into the school structure. Recent educational reform has focused on the importance of school development in improving student learning. Two patterns of response emerged from an analysis of teachers' data, namely, a majority view and a minority view. The majority view was that P1 improved school development, while the minority of teachers claimed its inclusion in schools impeded school development and destroyed school unity.

¹ "This is the crux of the matter. For administrative reasons teachers are co-erced into it. For educational reasons they are usually more committed" (RT2).
² "The P1 class at my school was formed purely because of numbers. We had 1 ½ pre-primaries and 1 ½ year one classes so the principal had no real choice. He had very little, if any, knowledge or understanding of P1 classes or multi-age grouping" (RT3).
³ "Or too many for one class" (RT4).
⁴ Eastern States Specialist 2: What you are doing is what is happening in the UK.
Majority view: P1 improves school development

Most teachers’ claimed that P1 improved school development in three ways. First, it united two areas of education, early childhood and primary education and minimised the divisions that existed between both fields. Second, it created sympathy that bonded school staff together. Third, it enabled principals to employ staff who were supportive of the school’s ethos and philosophy.

P1 united the early childhood and primary fields

Most teachers said that P1 strengthened school development because it helped eliminate the physical and educational barriers that had existed since the government take-over of early childhood education in the 1970s. Pre-primary teachers and children were no longer seen as a separate entity because they were located on the school grounds and involved in school activities. Other school staff interacted with P1 teachers in the staff room or at school meetings and with pre-primary children when they supervised them or instructed them. For example,

The pre-primaries have always been a separate block and a separate everything, separate building, separate program and last year we did not see the pre-primary teacher as they could only come up here at lunch time. So they are seeing the pre-primary as being totally separate and not part of the school. They are all getting used to teaching the pre-primary, like the sport teacher and dealing with pre-primaries out in the playground. (P1P1A)

Normally we would not have much to do with the pre-primary. We now have to meet once a week and we do this collaboratively and work together on a Friday so we have more of a relationship so it is positive...With the rest of the staff the pre-primary teachers and their aides are always not like part of the staff. So this concept has definitely brought people together. (P2P1D)

Most teachers reported that P1 encouraged a closer bonding between early childhood and primary teachers that helped unite both fields. That is, pre-primary education was

5 “Strongly agree” (RT2).
6 “Strongly agree” (RT4).
7 “The only supporters of P1 in my school are the P1 teachers and the principal” (RT1).
8 P1 did help to achieve this (RT3).
no longer seen as a separate sector of the school but an important part of the whole school vision. For this reason, they adopted a supportive stance towards this aspect of P1.

\textit{P1 created staff sympathy}

The majority of P1 teachers across the six schools were primary trained with little, if any, experience in pre-primary. Most were transferred to P1 schools and classes, without choice and provided with little guidance or quality assistance. In this situation they turned to their colleagues as mentors for help and re-assurance. In a few instances P1 teachers were part of the school staff but transferred from one year level to P1. They were familiar with the running of the school and had a network of colleagues already established at the school. Either way, the P1 teachers claimed the lack of guidance and assistance that accompanied P1 not only earned them support from the other school staff but also helped heal the divisions that previously existed between both fields and bonded staff closely together.\textsuperscript{10}

Both groups believed teachers should be given a choice, about whether to move into P1 classes. As one teacher pointed out, “It would be awful to be forced into taking on this concept. You have to choose to do it and believe it is a good way of doing things” (P6P1A).\textsuperscript{11} Most P1 teachers found their school colleagues were compassionate rather than judgmental towards them because they perceived P1 as different and more difficult than other split primary classes. To them, the wide developmental gap between both levels and the combination of a non-compulsory and compulsory year level, was too great. Several teachers explained:

\begin{quote}
A lot of them say, “Yuck they would be too hard, those little ones.” Actually all of the staff feel that in this school. (P2P1A)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{9} “Strongly agree” (RT2).
\textsuperscript{10} “Agree” (RT4).
\textsuperscript{11} “This is very important” (RT3).
\textsuperscript{12} “Agree” (RT3).
There is a perception of it being difficult and you definitely get sympathy. In this school the staff have split classes and are still sympathetic. (P6P1A)

Evidently, P1 was seen to increase collegiality and bonding between pre-primary and primary trained staff as they pool their experiences and resources together in an attempt to deal with this new type of class. This definition of the situation triggered a supportive stance towards P1. Again,

The teachers are great and wonderful and trying because they wouldn't have had a clue how to begin or how to start these things...luckily I have that beginning and I don't want to imagine how it would have been like otherwise. (P2P1A)

**P1 employed staff who were supportive of the school's ethos and philosophy**

A majority of teachers in this study agreed that school development improves only when staff are supportive of the school’s ethos and philosophy. Therefore, a consensus of philosophy is necessary for collaboration to succeed. As one teacher explained, “If one of my friends came...it would be very hard because they would not compromise and would hold firm to their beliefs and views...I am much more open to change” (P2P1A).

Apparently, in the independent schools and some government schools that formed part of this study, teaching positions were filled on the basis of compatibility. That is, teachers were employed who supported the ethos and philosophy of the school. In these schools, the principals attempted to avoid or minimise any disharmony or resistance to P1 by selecting their own staff. Typically, commented several teachers,

The principal in our school wanted (P1) teachers who hadn’t been in one place for too long and could fit into the system he wanted to construct. The reason is because there is

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13 “Agree” (RT4).
14 “This is important. Ideally the pre-primary philosophy will continue into the junior grades” (RT2).
15 “The year one teacher and the pre-primary teachers were very helpful. The year one teacher gave me copies of some of her programmes and answered my numerous questions patiently. The pre-primary teachers included my 10 pre-primaries into their outdoor programme which gave me 2 x 1/2 hour sessions with only the year ones. I used this time for formal handwriting and/or reading lessons. The changes and improvements to the programme were made through collaboration with other supportive teachers, not through any help or support from the administration” (RT3).
so much change in the way this school is operating that he wants people who are not into comfort zones too heavily. (P2P1C)

We have been fortunate because most people have come into this set up by choice and none of us have been forced to do it. Also we are all new and chose to be involved and were given the opportunity not to. So everyone has come in knowing the theory behind it and willing to really give it a go...we were interviewed to be on the staff at the school so we did have the opportunity not to take it on. (P2P1B)

On a related matter, an overwhelming majority of teachers claimed that despite teachers projecting a willingness to be a part of the school’s ethos and philosophy, they still held strongly to their ideological views, which in turn determined whether they adopted a supportive or resistant stance towards P1. Furthermore, there were instances in which some teachers supported P1 but disagreed with the particular approach a school was using. For example, in one school, teachers were strongly supportive of a ‘trialled’ developmental program (TDP – pseudonym) and non-supportive of MAG. They justified their beliefs in TDP by saying, “This is why they should be grouped developmentally, not MAGS with a huge developmental difference” (P2P1A). These teachers disassociated themselves from P1 MAG classes and proudly stated that the TDP program was, “very un-MAG like” (P2P1A). Therefore, ideological views were still emerging as strong factors that determined these teachers’ stance on P1. To place these teachers in MAG P1 classes could be expected to cause resistance and disharmony.

**Minority view: P1 impedes school development**

A minority of teachers claimed that P1’s inclusion in schools impedes school development and destroys school unity. These teachers doubted the capacity of P1 to improve the school. They saw P1 as a threat to other year levels. In their view, P1 makes staff fear they will find themselves in the same situation as their colleagues, namely, transferred to MAG classes without any choice or warning. Ironically, some of these staff also expressed envy that they had not been asked to be a part of P1. More specifically, said one teacher,

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16 This is our situation (RT2).
They had a lot of trouble at this school with staff when it was first implemented...the other staff weren’t happy and were not inserviced to understand what it was. And there was a lot of negative feelings because the principal, who is not the same one who is here now, said at the end of the year that they would be having a MAG starting and they were going to bring in these two teachers who are really fantastic and everything and they all felt quite threatened and thought, “Why wasn’t I asked to do it?” This was fair enough and it really was not explained what a MAG class meant and there was a lack of understanding and it blew up from there. (P3P1B)

Teachers became oppositional when they defined PI in a negative way. Although, PI was strongly resisted on ideological grounds it also impacted on teachers’ self-interest. For some, the status they held within the existing school culture was threatened or undermined by the inclusion of specially recruited teachers. For others, there was the fear that this unwanted change would spread to other year levels. Divisions emerged between PI and the remainder of the school, despite the fact that primary trained teachers, not early childhood trained teachers were staffing these PI classes.

TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

An assumption underlying this thesis is that teachers develop greater expertise when faced with challenging situations and provided with quality support structures. Another assumption is that teacher development leads to improved student learning. Applied to PI, these assumptions mean that PI will improve teachers specialised knowledge and experience if it provides them with challenging tasks and if quality external and internal support structures are made available. For some teachers, PI met the first of these requirements. However, it was a radical point of departure from present pedagogical thoughts and practice that created disequilibrium. As such, it required direction and assistance.

Two patterns of response emerged from an analysis of teachers’ data, namely, a majority view and a minority view. The majority view was critical of the lack of external and internal support structures for teachers. The minority view briefly outlined some types of external and internal support structures that had in fact promoted teacher development.
External support structures for teachers

Majority view

A clear majority of teachers criticised the level of leadership and guidance provided prior to and during the implementation process. They claimed P1 had no external and internal support structures of value.\(^\text{17}\) With varying levels of success these teachers adopted trial and error approaches to learning, reflected on their performance and began to question their ability to succeed. By the middle of the year some were still uncertain about the pre-primary aspect of the P1 curriculum and had exhausted all avenues of assistance. As one teacher said,

> By this time of the year I am just getting there now. In terms of the year ones yes, definitely getting in there because we know exactly where we want to go with them, but with the pre-primaries we have not got a definite structure or set up and we are floundering there. (P1P1A)

Teachers saw the absence of support structures pertinent to P1 as an impediment to developing and improving their existing knowledge and experience.\(^\text{18}\) They had no access to university courses specific to P1, no induction, no PD and no District Officers experienced in P1. As one teacher with many years of P1 experience reported, “It is hard, it is frustrating and it is time consuming. Not a lot of people know a lot about it and there is no real support out there or resources” (P3P1A).\(^\text{19, 20}\) Teachers became increasingly opposed to P1 when they sought leadership and guidance and were

\(^{17}\) “I was given no help or support from the principal or deputy principal. They did not come into the class to see how things were going. In fact, I was told that “I was supposed to be a capable teacher so go and sort it out!” My requests for guidance and practical help were refused. I was told not to bring my problems to the principal because he did not want to know. I asked for common DOTT (duties other than teaching) time with pre-primary and year one teachers, but this was refused. I asked for relief time so that I could spend some time with the year one teacher discussing programmes, but this was also refused” (RT3).

\(^{18}\) “In the mid 90’s when MAG was in trial situation, excellent inservices were provided with teachers from Victoria and South Australia giving real “hands-on” sessions – usually “2 day series of workshops etc”. Teachers who experienced these PD sessions were in the minority – but all found them excellent” (RT2).

\(^{19}\) “I agree immensely” (RT1).

\(^{20}\) “Very true” (RT3).
unsuccessful. They recalled how principals could only offer limited assistance and responded by re-directing teachers to other sources.

At Redbush Primary School (pseudonym) teachers became so disillusioned with the absence of external support structures, they attempted to take control of their own professional development requirements. However, when they approached their employer for permission to visit a MAG school, their requests were refused without explanation. The teachers felt puzzled, suspicious, angry and abandoned. Their own inquiries found teachers at that MAG school were experiencing problems, that employers did not want publicised. According to one of the teachers,

This year we have had a lot more people saying to us: How can you justify what you are doing? We did not have anywhere to go to get back up. There was no one and no people to be on your team. There was only us and we were a bit isolated. The (employer’s name) only had (name of school) doing their thing down there and we were not allowed to go and see them. We actually asked if we could go and talk to the teachers but they were having problems which could have been shared and that was our argument. Let’s share our problems. But we were not allowed to and we were stuck here on our own. (P5P1B)

Teachers became critical and suspicious of employers’ intentions, their failure to provide external support structures and their unwillingness to acknowledge the existence of problems. They also criticised principals who failed to disclose employers’ expectations and left teachers uncertain of their P1 role. These principals rarely visited P1 classes, yet praised their efforts to others. According to one teacher, they were left alone to work out P1 classes,

He came up here once last term and said, How is MAG going? I don’t know what the principal’s outcomes or expectations are. I know he goes to principal’s meetings and states we are doing MAG and we’re doing well. (P3P1A)

In the view of these teachers, self-reflection was not sufficient to evaluate the success of P1. Teachers explained how they needed an outline of employers and principals’ expectations, specified guidelines, frequent visits to other P1 classes, educational

21 “Very important that principals see what is going on. Mine didn’t either” (RT3).
22 “Correct” (RT3).
leadership experience and open lines of communication. This viewpoint was not restricted to inexperienced teachers. Even teachers with practical PI experience in numerous districts for several years said there had been,

No awareness at District Office level from your K-3 person who I can guarantee knows nothing. The only one that I know of who knows something is at a District Office in (locality provided) or the MAG person at (locality provided). I can guarantee that every early childhood person I have been in contact with at any district office has never had anything to do with a PI and have not had the experience. So you cannot go to them for help as they do not have any idea. There definitely needs to be someone at District Office, there definitely needs to be ongoing professional development and support at Head Office and that is the sort that came from the MAG project. There definitely, definitely needs to be something such as a prac or ATP from university and you need to do programming and teaching experience because it is so realistic you will get a PI, especially with the local access policy. (P3P1A)

The teachers found that when external support was provided it was pre-primary orientated and of little value to PI. Workshops and network meetings were not pertinent to PI and focused on pre-primary learning. For example, one inservice, "had nothing to do with MAG and was for disadvantaged schools. We linked the two together" (P5P1A). However, most teachers found it difficult constructing quality links from pre-primary to PI. In their experience, PI required new knowledge that was different to pre-primary and this was why external support structures were vital. It required a reconceptualisation of their thinking, the provision of more than a pre-primary curriculum and the integration of pre-primary and year one children. Overall, the teachers expressed dissatisfaction that PI was implemented into schools without guidance and support. In their words,

(There has been no PD) to do with the concept of PI. I have had some to do with pre-primary. There is a pre-primary network meeting which deals with pre-primary through to year three. The teachers who attend these meetings are pre-primary to year three teachers so issues such as PI can be discussed at those meetings. However, these are not helpful. (P2P1C)

They (network meetings) are pre-primary meetings...Not a great deal (helpful for PI). (P2P1B)

23 "Strongly agree" (RT4).
24 "Strongly agree" (RT2).
25 "True" (RT3).
Well nothing has been available or given to us. Early childhood does have network meetings and I went to one last year when I had the year ones, but I felt it was geared too much towards pre-primary and it shouldn't be because it is K to 3. It is all geared towards K and early childhood is K to 3. I felt it is not helping and it is not for me, because it is all for pre-primary teachers. (P2P1D)

The Education Department have been of no help whatsoever...I found that really frustrating because the MAG project was focusing on P1 or P-2 and there are a lot of issues pertinent to P-3 that they did not even touch on. I got some joy out of them in regard to helping me set up the MAG but not a lot and there were quite a few things missing. In the case of this year in this new school I have not had anything from the Education Department and no support at all. (P3P1A)

A further issue raised by teachers concerned non-compulsory attendance at inservices. They defined P1 as requiring compulsory induction and ongoing professional development especially when teachers were asked to work collaboratively. Some teachers expressed disappointment that they have not been able to attend sessions and questioned the rationale for the conducting of inservices at times when few teachers could attend. They recommended a policy stating that a certain amount of inservicing be completed before teachers could teach in P1 classes. More specifically,

As yet we haven't managed to do inservices and there are two coming up which I want to go to and which may help me a little bit more and help me see this concept in a positive way...At present it has been my self-reflection on how I am doing. (P5P1C)

The majority of teachers were also dissatisfied with one-off observations of P1 classes. In their view, P1 classes had to be observed for a greater length of time if teachers were to fully benefit from this experience. Typically, commented one teacher,

You really need to go around and see some of the classes in action and to be there for a few days, not for an hour, and observe it and see the class and you only get a feel for it. To do it properly you need a few days. (P2P1E)

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26 “Yes” (RT3).
27 “Strongly agree” (RT2).
28 “Teachers need this type of PD in several stages. One, when preparing and planning to implement P1 (ideally the year before). Two, after they have been going for a while (they then know what to look out for – learn from etc). Three, after a year or two to consolidate and share” (RT2).
29 “True!” (RT1).
30 “Very important” (RT3).
This type of external support, however, was not accessible to all teachers because some
government schools charged for teachers to observe PI classes. Subsequently the
teachers felt uncomfortable approaching principals knowing that a fee was involved.
For instance,

We have had to pay to go and look at that classroom...the principal had to bring in relief
for us and pay half a day for the teacher at the other school, even though the teacher was
still teaching...so you could not do too many of those so this restricted the help we could
have got from that school. Yet it is so important for us to get into other classrooms.
(P1P1B)

Teachers found it hard to suggest avenues of support that would be of value and might
be accessible to other teachers. In their own words:

Beats me. I don't think or know of anywhere you can go. You have to find your own
way. There is not really any help out there. (P6P1A)

Books but we don't have time i.e. we have library DOTT time which is twenty minutes
so all you do is clean your room up and they are back again. You don't get a lot of time
or get a lot of professional development time through the (employer's name) but I wish
you did because a networking and sharing time would be wonderful. But I guess it is
trial and error. (P5P1B)\(^{31}\)

I guess by looking around and finding out where there are other PI classes which I have
not had time to do, being thrown in here. (P2P1F)

Hopefully you know of someone who does PI. (P2P1D)

I do not know the answer to that question. The only thing I can say is that they need to
approach and find someone who has that experience. (P2P1C)

I don't know. I would love to find out. (P2P1B)

I don't know and I have never heard of anywhere. (P2P1A)

We were not given in-servicing and it was put on us without enough warning and
ideas and skills we need. (P1P1B)

Most teachers regarded the absence of external support structures as impeding their
ability to acquire new knowledge and skills and consequently as having a negative effect
on student learning. In some instances, their response was panic, when told they would

\(^{31}\) "Definitely" (RT3).
need to construct and implement P1 curriculum. Furthermore, they were unsure of the content to be included in the pre-primary aspect of P1. As one teacher remarked, "I panicked and thought the pre-primary should be doing something else and I don't know what it is" (P3P1B). In most cases the feeling of panic remained with the teachers till the end of the year. Although they adopted an oppositional stance towards P1, they mostly voiced their criticisms to colleagues, rather than government and employers. They attempted to perform their jobs as best they could under such circumstances and felt safeguarded by the lack of accountability that surrounded P1 classes.

Minority view

Two types of external support structures assisted a small number of teachers to gain knowledge and experience: district office assistance and inservicing. According to one teacher, the district officer, "helped us by giving us programs and encouraged us and now she feels we don't need her anymore. She was great" (P1P1B). Primary trained teachers found this assistance helpful in acquiring new knowledge and experience. Furthermore, a small number of teachers, who were part of MAG trial projects, had been given temporary access to specific inservices relevant to MAG P1 classes. However, once the three-year trial period was completed, external support diminished. Furthermore, inservices were not regular. Some teachers reported waiting for periods of up to four and a half years for assistance. For example,

The office of non-government schools ran a MAG morning where we went to each others' classrooms to see how we approached MAG. None of the other schools ran full MAG classrooms but it was very helpful to see other people's classes. Mind you this was after I had had P1 for four and a half years. (P6P1A)

We had network meetings that have been okay through the district office and they have been of value. The areas they focused on were, timetabling at the start, themes, how to set up your classroom and how to integrate...We have probably gone to a couple of meetings and maybe two hours each. (P1P1B)

The MAG project was good but that was only a three year project and there needs to be that sort of support ongoing from the department definitely. (P3P1A)

32 "The district officer promised support and network meetings, but nothing came about in the 12 months I was teaching P1" (RT3).
One teacher cited as an additional source of external support, a draft document released by Good Start. The teacher claimed it was of benefit, “because it gave us guidelines and gave us a guideline of best practice in early childhood education and it was more like a draft” (P3P1B). There was an overwhelming consensus amongst teachers that external support structures were vital to the smooth running of P1 classes. They advised that these needed to be accessible to teachers, “because it is so realistic you will get a P1, especially with the local access policy” (P3P1A).

**Internal support structures for teachers**

*Majority view*

Most teachers pointed to a lack of adequate internal support in schools. According to them, few if any staff were qualified to provide pedagogical leadership in P1.\(^{33}\) Most of these teachers adopted a policy of partial or non-involvement by relying on the guidance of other early childhood trained teachers. Programs were copied and used to instruct all P1 children. For example, in one instance the only early childhood trained teacher revealed,

> we are using all my programs. The teachers...wouldn’t have had a clue how to begin or how to start these things. So we have used all my programming and once they get the idea they are great. Luckily I have that beginning and I don’t want to imagine how it would have been like otherwise. (P2P1A)

They took this stance because there were no internal teachers who could provide P1 guidance. For some it meant seeking out early childhood trained teachers from outside schools for assistance and guidance. One teacher said, “we have been going on previous experience of the teacher before and spoken to several pre-primary teachers” (P1P1A). It was teachers’ lack of knowledge or experience in this sector that inhibited a stronger oppositional stance. To cite a case in point:

> Probably because the pre-primary concept is new to me. I have had to adapt my ideas and if you have other strong staff that may become a problem. There are staff who have

\(^{33}\) Yes! (RT3).
taught pre-primary before and they are more dominant and at times I feel as though I have to go along with it all, whether I like it or not. I would be reluctant to disagree or express too many opinions at this early stage as I am really still finding my way. (P2P1F)

Some teachers became dependent on their teacher-aides for guidance and assistance, to the point where, “If I did not have a full-time aide who was very experienced and could guide me I would be very concerned” (P1P1B). In one instance, “the teacher-aide really helped us feel our way into the pre-primary a little bit more and told us what was best for us to be doing with the prees” (P1P1A). Also,

At present we are feeling our way and leaning very heavily on our aide and she’s pre-primary and has a lot of experience in this area. I tend to try and recall the way pre-primary children came to us last year after a year of pre-primary and I aim for that. (P1P1A)

This is a problem. Luckily our aide is pre-primary so she has had input in telling me what they can do. (P1P1B).

Minority view

Teachers in one school, said they benefited from exposure to comprehensive PD sessions in which, videos were viewed and information on a ‘trialled’ developmental program (TDP – pseudonym) released to school staff. The principal and the administrative support team had comprehensively planned for this change and assisted and guided teachers throughout the change process. Although, this was a change being implemented throughout the primary school, not just P1, the level of internal support was particularly helpful to teachers.

In another school setting, a collaborative learning supervisor was available to assist P1 teachers. Teachers participated, “in a new collaborative strategy every few weeks and report back about how it goes” (P5P1B). They reported to, ”a collaborative learning supervisor here who is the year six teacher and then she reports back to the Head Office” (P5P1B). In this case, the collaborative learning supervisor was an assistant principal religious educator. As part of her role she,
Teaches full time and has Tuesday morning to do her work. Every Wednesday afternoon we have a collaborative meeting where we try to share something we have done in the classroom that has worked or not worked and could be changed or modified. (P5P1B)

For these teachers, some benefit could be derived from internal professional support, although at times it was limited. In another school, the support teacher provided added assistance. Unfortunately, this was for a limited period of time before it was withdrawn. Teachers viewed this support as better than nothing. More specifically,

The principal gave us time with a teacher to help us down there for three mornings a week...She does support for the whole school and that time has been taken from us now. So we had it initially. (P1P1B)

In one school with a redeployed cleaner, the principal re-allocated the primary teacher-aide.

It's not every day and it's half an hour some days and it must be about four hours a week between the two P1 classes. (P3P1B)

Some principals provided common DOTT time so P1 teachers could share their knowledge and experience with each other.  

This proved to be an effective source of internal support. As several teachers explained,

The fantastic thing about this set up is that we have common DOTT time. We go sit down and we have a weekly outline for all the subject areas and we can plan it together by my taking science and she will take social studies and so on. We halve our extra programming and we do maths and language together so you always have extra ideas when you run out and you have reinforcement. (P3P1A)

When I first started here I spent a lot of time talking to (teacher's name) who is our year 2/3 teacher now and who was at the time teaching in another school in an integration program of P-3. I talked a great deal to her about how she ran her program and how she managed things. She was primary trained and I was early childhood trained but she came to me for advice on what to do with the pre-primary and I went to her for advice on what to do with the year ones and facilitate their learning within that classroom. I think mainly it has been my own teacher training and my own belief in early childhood that this is the best way. (P6P1A)

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34 “This is very necessary” (RT2).
35 “Would have been nice” (RT3).
36 “Big jumps and gaps between pre-primary and year one. Having P1 you don’t get DOTT time. Other teachers objected to supervising in P1 as they felt they weren’t qualified. They did in the end but they were unhappy” (RT4).
Principals attempted to construct internal support by encouraging teachers to work collaboratively. They promoted collegiality, arranged PD sessions and administrative support for school staff, utilised the assistance of a collaborative learning supervisor and provided additional teacher support. Even so, teachers identified PI issues that were not addressed by internal supports.

**CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

For the purpose of this thesis, curriculum development refers to the construction of developmentally appropriate curricula for pre-primary and year one children. Within this concept, ‘curriculum’ encompasses,

...much more than a syllabus. A syllabus normally outlines the content to be taught. Curriculum on the other hand is dynamic and includes all the learning experiences provided for the student. It encompasses the learning environment, teaching methods, the resources provided for learning, the systems of assessment, the school ethos and the ways in which students and staff behave towards one another...Particular attention is required to ensure that there is congruence between the various dimensions of curriculum. (Curriculum Council, 1998, pg. 16)

Most teachers prioritised PI curriculum development as important and one in which they expressed concerns. They felt responsible for all aspects of the PI program and for ensuring there was congruence between all dimensions of curriculum. During the period of data collection, teachers identified issues pertaining to curriculum construction, curriculum implementation, space and resources, assessment of children and the culture and climate of PI classes. The overall belief of teachers was that PI had in some way created problems that impacted negatively on student learning. Some of these teachers did, however, cite instances in which PI had enhanced some aspect of student learning. These are also included in this section.

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37 "Vital link. If they are truly supportive then this makes a huge difference" (RT2).

38 "Very little support given. My principal was very negative" (RT3).
Constructing the P1 curriculum

An overwhelming consensus existed amongst most teachers, that P1 had in some way obstructed them from constructing a developmentally appropriate curriculum that catered for pre-primary and year one children: the absence of P1 curriculum guidelines; the need for teachers to adjust their philosophy and explore different methods of curriculum development and implementation; differences of opinion between principals and teachers; the belief that teachers were more accountable for year one learning than pre-primary. As teachers took into account these reasons, they attempted to construct various curricula designs, reflect on them, re-define their stance and re-alter them. This was a long drawn out process that at some stage turned most teachers towards active opposition of P1.

The absence of P1 guidelines

An overwhelming consensus existed amongst the teachers that the absence of curriculum guidelines specific to P1 intensified the difficulty of their work and impeded student learning. At the time of data collection the only guidelines available to teachers were the syllabus document guidelines for kindergarten children, published in 1989. Teachers perceived these guidelines as inappropriate for P1.

For teachers, the task of developing a P1 curriculum was challenging, difficult and time-consuming. They saw the lack of structure and guidelines as an impediment to student learning. In particular, they reported being thrown in the deep end without assistance. For example,

having to find more information on organisation in a MAG class, theories on MAG, how other teachers have found it beneficial as I have not found this to be the case and prefer to teach in a straight class. I need to see that evidence in front of me and see how a more experienced teacher has coped with it and it may help. (P5P1C)

39 “All children in a P1 should be working towards Level 1 Student Outcome Statements or on Level 1. The trouble is you need prior experience to know how to reach these outcomes! This is what is lacking” (RT2).
By this time of the year (June) I am getting in there because we know exactly where we want to go with them, but with the pre-primaries we have not got a definite structure or set up and we are floundering there. (P1P1A)

Some teachers said the complexity of this task was such that P1 needed to have its own curriculum, constructed by specialists in that field, not classroom teachers. For example,

What is really difficult about a MAG class is the curriculum and it’s very, very difficult and needs its own curriculum. I really don’t know how you would go about planning the curriculum but I know what is available at the moment is not suitable for MAG. (P5P1B)

Problems emerged because the majority of teachers were uncertain as to how pre-primary and year one children would be integrated into P1 classes. Apparently, they were given no directions about what pre-primary children should be doing. This meant relying on personal experience and colleagues’ advice, rather than specialised guidance, and feeling indecisive, uncertain and uncomfortable with these feelings:

I wonder about it all and I am just wary of pushing them too quickly. That is, the pre-primary children who are able and can read and write. I don’t know whether we will start pushing them too quickly... not being forced to use a different sort of structure that needs to be formally assessed by somebody else and the children are under pressure to do what the other year ones do. I’m concerned we are going to switch the children off and make them too frightened to make their mistakes. I wonder if we are still able to cater for all these children who are developing further academically and still maintain that balance that they need with the social and emotional needs as a pre-primary 4 or 5 year old child... because we are all under so much pressure to have the children achieve in maths, language. (P2P1B)

That’s (pre-primary) new for us and we don’t know the expectations. (P1P1A)

You introduce your theme topic, then you plan maths and language activities from that theme or topic and everything will be integrated. I think. Then we work from that idea... however, we don’t know whether we should follow that because it is all trial and error. (P2P1A)

The concerns we have voiced are that the gap between pre-primary and year one is huge and the year ones have had that one year play experience. The pre-primaries have not... pre-primaries are really doing everything orally and year ones are writing and for example they are shown we start the letter S by going up and down etc... We don’t do that with pre-primary children because pre-primary children are not supposed to do that, as far as I know. (P2P1C)

We are guided in a way by them (other P1 teachers). I don’t program a lot for the prees as it’s not a compulsory year. (P1P1A)
Teachers felt uncomfortable with the growing uncertainty that surrounds P1 and the lack of direction that was becoming characteristic of this change. In desperation, they lamented, "there is not even a list around of what skills a pre-primary child needs. There is no guidance which says in term one do cutting with them and in term two do this. There is nothing and I don’t know" (P1P1B).

As a matter of survival, teachers adopted a pragmatic stance towards P1. This involved accessing all avenues of support in an effort to construct an appropriate curriculum. Rather than admit to employers they were experiencing difficulties, some teachers approached their children’s pre-primary teacher requesting access to their programmes and asking for assistance. However, even these avenues proved inappropriate because they did not have the knowledge and understanding of early childhood education to translate pre-primary teachers’ programmes into practice. They subsequently became pre-occupied with attempting to access teachers who were willing to share with them the reality of their experiences. This meant,

The pre-primary teacher where my children are has been giving me her pre-primary programmes but that still hasn’t got the skills in it. Even now I am half way through the year and I don’t feel I have a grip on the skills we should be doing and with pre-primary their language, maths etc could be in one activity, whereas in year one it’s maths time and not always in a craft activity. It may come up but it is not planned for. I’m really interested to see what other teachers in your study have found or are feeling. (P1P1B)

Determining the best method for combining pre-primary and year one children was a constant dilemma for these teachers. Their philosophical beliefs often made it difficult for them to alter their existing teaching practices and adopt new ones. For example,

We are dealing with two grades we have never done before and there is an extra workload in trying to find out how to do it and determining activities we need for both levels or grades. I have taught year one several times but have not had two grades together that are pre-primary and year one. That is where my extra workload is, trying to work out how to put the two grades together. (P1P1A)

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40 Eastern States Specialist 1: They're going to say to those people in the setting why are you doing this? Because it is not in the best interests of children. Because maybe that is because they feel powerless to make any changes because it has just been imposed. And again that gets back to leadership. In the field who is going to speak against it? Who is going to direct the change?
At some stage, teachers had opposed this aspect of PI because the lack of PI curriculum guidelines was resulting in trial and error approaches to teaching. Each of them had at some time constructed a PI curriculum that focused on the developmental ability levels of children, only to revert back to a separate curriculum for pre-primary children and a separate one for year one children. They were dissatisfied with both of these approaches, partly because, “It is a bit difficult when you get the ones and pre-primaries together because the ones are so structured compared to pre-primary” (P2P1E). For these reasons, they defined PI as a change that was challenging, difficult and time-consuming.

Interestingly, although teachers remained dissatisfied with PI most were hesitant to display open opposition, other than through the confidentiality of this study. Instead, along with a pragmatic stance, they sometimes adopted a ‘minimalist approach’ to PI by adopting a policy of withdrawal and indifference.

_The need for teachers to adjust their philosophy_

Most teachers had at some time found the adjustment from a traditional classroom curriculum to a PI curriculum too great to cope with mentally and physically. Mentally, they experienced difficulty adopting a constructivist approach to teaching and blending it with a more traditional approach. Their attempts to develop a more integrated approach to teaching were unsuccessful. Physically, they found the workload surrounding PI as huge and at times unrealistic. In other words,

> It is different mentally rather than physically…mentally I am finding it very difficult and different to what I have had in the past…having to cater for two levels of children, one being quite formal and one being informal. Trying not to put the formalities onto the pre-primaries and yet knowing that the year ones need that formal instruction and structure. (P1P1B)

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41 “The assumption here that all year one teachers have a “traditional” approach. Were there none, who like me, teach activity based?” (RT4).
I had to adjust to teaching the prees but I was a firm believer in developmental learning. I was not clear on their developmental domains because I was primary trained and experienced with primary children rather than younger children. (P5P1A)

Most teachers reported the need to continually adjust the P1 curriculum and alter their teaching. In order to cater for the range of student abilities and the added workload, one teacher feared the boundaries were being narrowed to make it easier to construct a workable P1 curriculum. As one teacher said,

When you say that you are catering for the range of abilities the point that worries me a lot is making sure the boundaries remain and that you are not trying to narrow them to make it easier to teach children. (P3P1A)

These teachers continually struggled to construct a P1 curriculum that was in keeping with their philosophical beliefs and those of the school and parent group. Philosophical dilemmas emerged time and time again. One teacher articulated a commonly held belief,

My greatest struggle has been coming to terms with how much am I going to formalise the year one program. Also how much am I going to say, 'Okay, in this case worksheets is the way to go.' I want to be able to stay true to what I believe in terms of early childhood development and I find that with the year ones that struggle is harder for me because I am having to question myself a lot more in terms of, "Is this way worthwhile?" or "Can I be achieving it better using another way and meeting the same outcomes in a less formal or more open-ended way?" Often I am having to make compromises with myself to be able to operate within the school, within the parent group, and class group. (P6P1A)

A small minority of teachers acknowledged that constructing a curriculum was, "a constant philosophical battle between your belief and your practice" (P6P1A). Few teachers reported being able to construct a curriculum that was in accordance with their beliefs. The few who did, had taught P1 classes for several years and had finally arrived at a curriculum that they believed catered for their own needs and those of the children.

42 “Strongly agree” (RT2).

43 “Strongly agree” (RT3).
Differences of opinion between principals and teachers

Some teachers resisted P1 partly because they considered principals' were making pedagogically unsound changes. This applied particularly in cases where principals had little if any knowledge and experience in P1. For example, one teacher actively opposed attempts to re-structure class groups that entailed the loss of more academically able children to other classes, while gaining less academically able children in P1 classes. On returning from long-service leave this teacher discovered the principal had made modifications to the number of children in her class. As the following comment indicates, the teacher felt powerless to reverse the principal's decision.

What we tend to do here is that there is a one/two at the school and they tend to send them up here if they are not doing very well. They think that because we are a P1 we can cater for a child who is not as able. We tend to get the extras although we always keep the preschool we had the last year as this is part of the MAG philosophy. But our principal does not understand that so much because just trying to get numbers into classes he would say, “Can’t you just chop five out and put them down as we need more ones over there?” I explained, “No and that was not the way MAG was supposed to work.” But while I was on long service leave this term, some not so able children got sent up here and the brighter children went over to the one/two class. (P3P1B)

Such experience$ transformed pragmatists into active opponents who expressed support for a return to the old system. Given a choice they would not be involved again in a P1 class. They believed MAG strategies and multi-ability groups can be applied in straight classes where the workload is not as huge and the differences in ability range not as wide. The reasons for this visible shift in teacher attitude away from P1 included: increased workload, perceived difficulties of teaching pre-primary and year one children in the one class, increased developmental span, inadequate assistance to teachers, lack of resources and inexperience of teachers. The following comments capture the stance of teachers opposed to P1,

I would prefer the children were in a straight classroom. I can see where they are, what level they need to be, have the time to monitor their work and then if they don't achieve that I can give them special help straight away. (P5P1C)

44 “I don’t class myself as an active opponent by any means, but!!! I’ve transferred to another school and am looking forward to implementing MAG strategies in a straight year 2 (would prefer a P1 – but we’ll see!!)" (RT2).
More than anything I would like to not teach prees. They are too young and can absolutely annoy the hell out of you, sometimes because they are so demanding and you can get some that are so young that they should still be at home. One problem I have at the moment is that I am a baby sitter and I did not go to university for four years to be a baby sitter. (P3P1A)

I’m sorry if I sound very negative, but these are my views on P1. We were not given in-servicing and it was put on us without enough warning and ideas and skills we need. I mean there is not even a list around of what skills a pre-primary child needs. There is no…There is nothing. (P1P1B0

At times, friction between teachers required resolution by the principals or their deputies. Solutions were often non-acceptable to all parties. In one case a deputy principal, “Suggested one person writes a daily work pad, we then speak about it collaboratively and photostat it for everyone’s use” (P2P1A). Some teachers, who silently withdrew and used their own teaching methods in their own P1 groupings, secretly rejected this proposal without acknowledging it to principals.

*Teachers more accountable for year one than pre-primary*

Most teachers felt more accountable for year one children's learning than they did with pre-primary. Year one was a compulsory area of schooling with clearly outlined expectations of student outcomes. Pre-primary was non-compulsory and was less outcome-based. The P1 curriculum was constructed primarily for year one children and adjusted to suit pre-primary children.

The teachers defined the P1 situation as having a curriculum for year one children that had to be catered for in the one school year whereas the curriculum for pre-primary children did not have pre-set compulsory goals. As a result, one teacher said,

I don’t feel like I am catering towards the pre-primary children at all, especially in having a curriculum that is suitable, because I feel my priorities are with the year ones

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45 “Why? Aren’t pre-primaries working towards Level 1 Student Outcome Statements?” (RT3).
46 “Less prescribed but still outcome based. Year 1 has a higher level of parent expectation. The pre-primary syllabus is usually projected as outcome based. Early childhood educators would claim that it always has been while primary schooling was in-put based” (RT4).
because they are a compulsory area of schooling... This concerns me... I feel trapped by all the things I need to get through with the year ones which is compulsory. (P1P1B)

Employers reminded teachers they were more accountable for year one learning than for outcomes at the pre-primary level. For instance, “The School Council had not been entirely happy with the running of the P1 and were keen for change which included more accountability in terms of year one learning” (P6P1A).

**The construction of P1 curriculum**

Teachers were divided in their beliefs of how P1 could best be constructed and implemented. None of the various curriculum models, were completely endorsed by all teachers. Some teachers supported a “pure early childhood model” based on early childhood beliefs. Others rejected this model and claimed that the year one component of P1 is compulsory while pre-primary is not, therefore P1 classes should maintain a “pure primary model” based on a traditional primary teaching approach. Most teachers, however, were of the opinion that neither an early childhood nor a primary model was suitable in a class structure that includes both pre-primary and year one children. In other words, teachers struggled in their attempts to determine how to best combine the pre-primary and year one levels. Those who could not collaboratively decide whether an “early childhood model” or “primary model” should be used, settled for a separate year level curriculum. Those who were willing to negotiate and interact with each other and construct a “collective model”, blended both philosophies and constructed either one curriculum for both year levels, or, two separate curriculums, one for each year level. They continually adjusted their teaching style when trial and error approaches failed and needed re-modification. In some instances they constructed an early childhood oriented model, or a primary oriented model, while in others they adopted a model that represented a combination and integration of both early childhood and primary philosophy.47

47 “Strongly agree” (RT2).
Throughout this process then, teachers altered their stance. At times they shared opponents' views of P1 but accepted that change was inevitable and were willing to support P1 if appropriate conditions and concessions could be negotiated. Some teachers negotiated for the power to become role makers rather than role takers. They pressed for concessions to help resolve the philosophical differences, curriculum issues and extra duties created by P1. When they were displeased with their efforts and lack of support, they altered their stance and became more verbally active in their opposition. When they were satisfied with their curriculum model they adopted a more supportive stance.

Separate year level curriculum

Some teachers used the state school syllabus documents for year one children and developed a separate curriculum for pre-primary children. As there was no compulsory curriculum for pre-primary children, most teachers experienced difficulty constructing the pre-primary curriculum. Without guidelines, they searched for books and references. As one teacher explained,

Yes we do follow the state curriculum for year ones. For the pres...we don't follow a curriculum as much because as far as we know there isn't one but we use books like, a big one which is spiral bound...and we use just different references like that. (PI1A)

In the absence of guidelines or resources a few teachers found it easier to slightly re-modify the year one curriculum and use that as a basis for the pre-primary curriculum. In this way they did not need to search for books and references. One teacher emphasised this point:

I use the state school curriculum for year ones. With pre-primary I am very conscious of the fact that the pre-primary do not have a compulsory curriculum...I am aiming at year one and making it a little bit simpler so that the pre-primaries can cope with it. (PI1B)

Overall, teachers experienced problems with this curriculum design. Insufficient teacher-aide assistance made it difficult to supervise both groups of children when separate curricula were used. Consequently they re-defined the P1 situation and
negotiated with other P1 teachers to combine P1 classes to share the teaching load. For example, some teachers instructed the total group of year one children on the mat while others instructed the whole group of pre-primary children.

Separate year level curriculum teachers separated children for mathematics and language because they believed subjects such as science and health can be generalized to cover a wider range of ability levels. An added bonus was that, “separating them into both class levels, minimises the distractions and the noise” (P3P1A). They adopted this strategy to cope with P1 classes that at times are half the space size of pre-primary classes.

One curriculum for both year levels

A second group of teachers redefined the P1 situation and altered the curriculum when separate year level curriculum became unworkable. They developed one curriculum for both pre-primary and year one children using the state school syllabus documents as a basis. Pre-primary and year one children were exposed to identical lesson content and instructed jointly as a whole group. In a representative comment, one teacher said, “I teach all subject areas to both Ps and ones” (P4P1A). In her P1 class, the content of the curriculum is, "Water - Wetlands, Antarctica, the ocean and are currently studying Australia, including Aboriginal history and legends, the First Fleet, animals, plants and Australian authors” (P4P1A). Pre-primary and year one children sit on the mat as a whole group and work on similar and sometimes identical activities in small groups.

Other teachers used the K–10 syllabus documents and the year one state school curriculum as a basis for P1 curriculum: “We blend the objectives from the K and one syllabus and come up with an activity that will cater for them all” (P3P1A). However, the teachers struggled in implementing this strategy all the time because pre-primary children were unable to sit on the mat quietly when year one children required direct instruction in subject areas such as mathematics, phonics and language.
These difficulties resulted in once again re-defining the situation and instructing year one children in isolation, while the teacher-aide took the pre-primary children to play outside.

We follow the syllabus for the year ones and there are times we do separate the children and work together with the year ones for subjects such as maths and phonics. The prees are given their outdoor time then and the ones do not. (P3PIB)

When children were completing activities in small groups, teachers used the one curriculum but modified the objectives to suit the ability levels of children. Modifications to lessons were simplifying worksheets, not content. The combined lesson was given to all children in the P1 class but different worksheets were designed for each year level. One teacher explained that,

Twos record cars in car park and different colours, ones do same thing but simplified and they look at bar graphs, whereas prees colour in a sheet with twenty cars and colour in eight brown cars. (P5PIA)

Teachers re-negotiated with each other and reached a consensus of opinion. They decided to teach collaboratively. One teacher instructed approximately fifty pre-primary and year one children in one group mat session while the other teacher observed or attended another task.

Most often we combine both P1 classes together on the mat for a mat session and we either team-teach or one of us teaches. For example health for the whole fifty kids and (teacher's name) backs me up and keeps kids in line, but I do the main presenting. (Teacher's name) does technology and I take a back seat. Or we team-teach and she will read the story and I will do the activity with the whole group. Depending on what the activity is, we send them back, year ones in that room and prees in that room, or we send them back to their own rooms, that is the P1s in this room and the other P1 group back in their room. (P3PIA)

P1 teachers were not happy with this strategy but believed that collaboration allowed them to make concessions for insufficient teacher-aide assistance. They could not cope with the added workload that emerged when they taught their own P1 classes with restricted teacher-aide assistance. They were not willing to jeopardise student learning but believed that without adequate resources that employers were letting them down.
Two curriculum for each year level

The third curriculum approach was developed and implemented on a trial basis in one school. Children were instructed in separate pre-primary or year one classes. The state school curriculum was used to teach year one children and a separate curriculum was developed for pre-primary children. Pre-primary and year one children were then divided into five academic developmental groups (P1) for one hour a day. The role of the P1 teachers was to collaboratively design and build a P1 curriculum for specific subject areas such as language and mathematics, health and science. Pre-primary and year one teachers met collaboratively to construct the P1 curriculum. The principal was involved in ensuring that the curriculum addressed the “philosophy, ethos and organisation” of the school. The curriculum for the P1 groups was based on the year one curriculum and the curriculum was developed for pre-primary children when placed in their chronological groupings.

The two curricular designs recognized the importance of both chronological grouping and academic groupings in the all round development of children. Children participated in separate year level curriculum and different ability level curriculum. Classrooms were referred to as homerooms. There were two year one homerooms and three pre-primary homerooms. Children in their chronological groupings were exposed to a curriculum which was age appropriate and were given the opportunity to work alongside children of their own age. The rationale here was that this aspect of learning is an important one that cannot be overlooked and that children need to be exposed to a system of flexible learning which is not merely dependent on chronological groupings. Flexibility occurred when children were in homerooms and teachers engaged in collaborative teaching with each other.

When children were streamlined into academic groupings the total group of over one hundred children came together for a whole group mat session at the beginning of the week and then children were allocated to one of five academic groups. In these smaller groups a teacher instructed children in an informal or formal manner, depending on the
group’s ability level. These groups ran for one hour a day. At the end of the week’s program the total group of children returned to a whole group mat session where children discussed what had been achieved and learnt.

**Implementing the P1 curriculum**

Virtually all of the teachers encountered some problems deciding the best way to implement P1. A heavy workload, limited teacher-aide assistance, different attendance times and insufficient resources exacerbated their task. To make their workload and implementation tasks more manageable, teachers continually re-defined their situation, altered their stance and adopted numerous trial and error approaches.48 These included team teaching, rotation of children and re-structured grouping practices. However, these strategies were further impeded by the different attendance times of children.

**Team teaching**

Some teachers decided to team teach in an effort to manage the extra workload. For example, classes were combined and instructed by one teacher while the second teacher assisted or left the room to prepare activities. As mentioned earlier in this section, some teachers believed that P1 was more manageable when whole group team teaching was used at the beginning and the end of each school week and children were dispersed in and out of P1 groupings. Within this structure, one teacher instructed approximately one hundred pre-primary and year one children for around twenty minutes before dispersing them into five developmental groups. They remained in those small groups for the week and returned again to their total group session at the end of the week.49 50

48 “Yes” (RT3).
49 “Would find this hard to justify as children of this age couldn’t be expected to learn in a group of this size! I know you are only recording what was happening, but it shocks me!!” (RT2).
50 “Horror!! Is this in one class!!! Or total in a school?” (RT4).
Rotation

In several schools, teachers decided to rotate classes to give all children access to limited curriculum and physical resources. Problems had emerged because,

we have only one set of blocks for the pre-primary children, that is, one set between three classes. That necessitated us to use our areas properly, allow the children access to the facilities we have, and put into place a rotation system. For example this room is for painting because there is no carpet. In my room we do cooking as there is a stove and (teacher's name) has the home corner so we can leave the other areas free for painting and collage. (P2P1C)

However, rotation was often unworkable. At the beginning, trying to rotate all these children together was extremely difficult because, “they (principal and administrative staff) wanted us to work together and they tried it but it was horrendous” (P2P1D). Moreover, “The vinyl was there for us to do painting and the idea was that they would be forced to move around and rotate and not stay separate” (P2P1D). However, there were further restraints,

We had the physical restraints that the pre-primary toilets are out where the year ones were and every time these people wanted to go to the toilets they had to go right through classes. Also the pre-primaries use the outdoor area a lot more and it made it physically restrictive just to get out to the outdoor. Especially disturbing when the year ones were working. (P2P1E)

After a period of negotiation and compromise a decision was reached whereby the year one children were prohibited from these areas. One teacher justified her colleagues stance,

We were really trying to work out how to get prees and ones together from the start, which nobody knew how to do anyway. The idea became clear that they couldn’t paint in the wet area every day on a rotational basis. We don’t have a wet area here and can’t do it. From day one if we started like that and had everyone moving, but with 120 children it was easier to say well we will be in here, but then everyone would walk in and it was impossible to do. Now we have the pre-primaries in the wet area and we can’t do painting or cooking. (P2P1E)

In reality, limited resources infringed on teachers’ abilities to provide quality learning experiences for children. For them, rotating children was an inadequate compromise.
Re-structured grouping practices

Groups were continually re-structured depending on the subject area being taught and teachers' abilities to generalise subjects for pre-primary and year one children. Most teachers considered that subjects such as Health and Technology could be generalized to cater for both pre-primary and year one children while subjects such as Maths and Reading needed to be taught separately to year one children and simplified for pre-primary children. Simplification took the form of modified worksheets and guidance from the teacher-aide. As explained by one teacher,

All the children are taught the same content on the mat and three separate activities are planned. One group may write, another group may do a diagram while another group such as the prees might paint or draw on the same topic. If the lesson cannot be modified then the prees would be given free play. The Ps would do all activities and follow with an art and craft. If it is maths and reading then the Ps would do work on a worksheet. (P5P1C)

Such strategies replaced child-centred and individually tailored curricula. However, despite teachers' efforts, to restructure group practices, problems emerged that impacted negatively on student learning. For example, an overwhelming majority of teachers expressed concern that pre-primary and year one children were difficult to manage together. They cited the problem of pre-primary children having a shorter concentration span than year one children and, when left unattended, disturbing the year one children. Also pre-primary children had to be given activities that were self-explanatory so they required minimal assistance from staff. As a case in point,

Last year yes we were splitting children into year levels and it didn't work and was totally ridiculous. We now use MAG with the children together, for example, prees have activity which is self-explanatory and doesn't need a lot of assistance and it's explained on the mat beforehand. Ones and twos have a different activity. (P5P1B)

For most teachers, P1 was easier to manage when pre-primary children were instructed on the mat with year one children. More specifically,

The pre-primaries would then be forced to work and you would be trying to do the same things with the pre-primaries and not expect them to take as long to do an activity. I

51 These strategies really frighten me! Child-centred! Integrated! (RT2).
guess you can put them on the carpet and get them to watch an activity and some of them may pick it up. (P2P1D)

However, in reality it was not always feasible to provide pre-primary children with an activity that was self-explanatory, because, "You can't just send them off to do something. You give them a picture to color in and they will do it in two minutes. It doesn't give you time for everything" (P2P1E).

**Different attendance times of children**

In Western Australian schools, year one was a compulsory year of schooling and children had to attend school for five full days a week. Pre-primary was a non-compulsory year of schooling and children were permitted to attend only four full days a week. Therefore, pre-primary children placed in mixed aged developmental groups missed out on important components of the curriculum for one full day a week. This disadvantaged their learning, especially during first term when many pre-primary children attended for four half days a week. The different attendance days of both year one and pre-primary children raised curriculum issues that were unsolvable and made it difficult to ensure continuity in both subject matter and skill development. In the words of one teacher,

> There is a big problem with the prees and year ones together in that the prees are here only four days a week and the year ones are here five days a week. So whatever you do developmentally if you have the prees and ones in the same group all the time, the day that the prees are not here makes it very difficult. (P2P1E)

In few instances, schools attempted to overcome this problem by encouraging pre-primary children to attend five days a week. However, attendance was not compulsory and, “Quite often pre-primary children were absent on a Friday! Parents often expressed they were too tired to attend” (P5P1C).

According to teachers, the underlying philosophy behind MAG and Pl was that children should be given the opportunity to develop at their own level. That is, children should be unrestricted by chronological groups and given access to all areas. According to the
teachers, the manner in which PI had been introduced in WA schools made this task
difficult to implement because the more able pre-primary children could only be given
restricted access to all tasks. For example, if they were placed in the same
developmental group as year one children, then they would be immediately
disadvantaged because year one children attended school for a greater length of time
than pre-primary children.

When pre-primary children attended mornings only, the timetable had to be adjusted to
allow the pre-primary children enough time to learn during a full term of half-day
attendance. Additionally, altering the timetable enabled pre-primary children to attend
school every day and remain home for two half days a week rather than one full day.
Pre-primary children could access instruction every day although they were still absent
from school for two half days a week.

**Space and resources**

Generally teachers defined the PI situation as impeded by an inadequate supply of
spatial, human and material resources. For them, these issues needed to be addressed as
they impacted on student learning.\(^{52}\) \(^{53}\) \(^{54}\) \(^{55}\) \(^{56}\)

*Indoor and outdoor space*

Slightly more than half the teachers saw their PI situation as deficient in space and,
therefore, as restricting the exposure of pre-primary children to various aspects of the

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\(^{52}\) "Yes, this was the case" (RT3).

\(^{53}\) "Strongly agree. This must be negotiated before PI is attempted" (RT2).

\(^{54}\) "Strongly agree. Re: space – I taught PI alongside a regular pre-primary. The other class (pre-primary)

had 50% more space" (RT4).

\(^{55}\) Eastern States Specialist 1: The other important thing, whilst you can run conversion courses for
teachers, it's the environments that are crucial too...the classroom structure, the space, the outdoor
space...we have a curriculum framework that relies on the environment where children have access to a
whole lot of equipment, outdoor area and a whole range of things and some people find it very difficult to
implement.

\(^{56}\) Eastern States Specialist 2: The feedback from teachers working in those settings (in their state) is that
no matter how rich their philosophy and ideas they cannot implement everything they want because of the
restrictions of the building, the environment and they find that very, very frustrating.
curriculum. Often the primary trained P1 teachers were unaware of the requirements of a pre-primary program. When they visited pre-primary classrooms they found the working conditions in their classrooms were inferior to pre-primary centres. In a representative comment, one teacher said,

When I went to a straight pre-primary to look I was astounded at what they have and where they get the money for it. So in that way we don't have what other pre-primary centres have got. We don't have the space at the moment which is a big thing but we have the same numbers as a pre-primary classroom if not more...Twenty-six children and two-thirds of the space a pre-primary centre would have so that's a big sore on our shoulder. (P5P1A)

Insufficient space challenged teachers' ability to provide quality learning experiences. They compensated by sharing classes and accessing other rooms. However, this restricted children's exposure to various learning centres. Typically teachers recounted that,

We are begging and borrowing. But maybe only because pre-primary have got lots of things. But our pre-primary classes are not as big in area as other pre-primaries. Everything has been cut and they are not even big enough. They are like small boxes and should be much bigger. (P2P1D)

Right now here, we have smaller classes than what they have in other schools. Normal classes even with these two year ones and small. This is why we open the classes together. (P2P1E)

The pre-primary classes are so small...It just means we need to use the other rooms, say for music and share more, to make the program better. (P2P1D)

Teachers were unanimous in their views that P1 makes the work of instructing children more difficult. The small classrooms magnified noise levels and interfered with the children's concentration. For example,

I feel if you have a P1 class all the time then you need to have lots of space. The noise level is high for pre-primary and they can only sit for a short time and if you have prees and ones the ones need to concentrate and think. (P2P1D)

We are finding the noise is high as we are getting more kids in here now. (P2P1E)

We do have one or two of the pre-primaries who come up to the year ones while they are working because they want to show us something and that is another reason why we have to separate the two groups (P1P1A).
Another problem was difficulty in extending pre-primary children’s learning. The teachers knew that pre-primary children required exposure to both the indoor and outdoor settings as part of their curriculum. However, their P1 classes often did not have enclosed play areas. This made extension of pre-primary learning to outdoor areas difficult to supervise. When provided, separate areas were often too small to accommodate year one children. At one school, year one children played on the school oval and pre-primary children played in a separate enclosed area. For the teachers this undermined the notion of developmental learning and constituted unacceptable segregation amongst children. The teachers mentioned an issue that added to this problem. When P1 classes included year two children and the P1 enclosed outdoor area was large enough to accommodate all children, the older children resisted their inclusion in P1 playgrounds.

Very few teachers defined the P1 situation as having sufficient space. Those who did were in vacant adjoining primary classrooms or in P1 purpose-built classes. Generally, accommodation such as this was only available in schools with a decline in student numbers where two empty classrooms became available, or if teachers were part of the trial MAG project. In an exceptional case, said a teacher, “We are fairly lucky in that we have a good building to start with and there are a lot of schools who have been told to set up P1s and they haven’t got the building” (P3P1B). However, in some schools, toilets were not in close proximity to P1 classes, which raised duty of care issues for pre-primary children. For instance,

Year two children were expected to take pre-primary children to the toilet (since the toilets were not inside the classroom). Towards the end of term, only one year two girl was left in my class. Obviously too distracting for her to take on this role, I found myself and the teacher’s aide running pre-primaries to the toilets during lessons. (P5P1C)

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57 “Strongly agree” (RT4).
58 “Yes” (RT3).
59 “Strongly agree” (RT4).
60 “If rooms aren’t modified or purpose built, teachers should refuse to take P1. It can’t succeed in cramped rooms” (RT2).
Human resources

As indicated by the following comments, the P1 teachers were given less teacher-aide assistance time than pre-primary classes.

We share a teacher-aide for the same time that one pre-primary centre would have been given an aide, so we have half the aide of a pre-primary centre. (P3P1B).

(We have) limited teacher-aide compared to a straight pre-primary. (P4P1A).61

The primary trained P1 teachers were less dissatisfied with this than their pre-primary trained colleagues because they received more teacher-aide allotment time than they previously received in other year levels. For example, said one such teacher, “In a straight year one class I had access to one hour a week and now I have an aide for five of the days and this is wonderful” (P2P1B). However, teachers were also aware that pre-primary classes have greater teacher-aide assistance.

(We have) more support now than in a straight year one class, but not more support than in pre-primary as they had a full-time aide. (P5P1A)

We have more aide time if you had a year one before and if you had a pre-primary then you have about half the aide time that you would have had in a straight class. (P3P1B)

Teachers who previously taught split classes reported they had less teacher-aide time than P1 classes. In one case, the previous allocation of a teacher-aide was, “Two and a half hours a week” (P2P1C) compared to a full time aide in P1.62

Insufficient human resources made it impossible to adequately supervise pre-primary children in the outdoor environment. In response, the teachers reduced the amount of time allocated to outside learning, a situation that left them in a position where they were unable to provide pre-primary children with the type of learning they would have in pre-primary,

61 “Strongly agree” (RT4).
62 “0.9 aide in pre-primary. 0.5 aide time in P1 if over 8 pre-primaries or 0.2 aide time if under 8 children. This is for EDWA” (RT3).
One thing that worries me a little bit is that the prees were used to going out more for games in the middle of the day and had more music than what I can possibly given them now in a P1 structure. More hands on activities and I can't have that because I don't have time to go out and play games every day or have music every day so they have to fit into our timetable. (P1P1B)

Teachers became oppositional towards P1 because of a range of P1 “complications” they cited as objects of their resistance.

**Physical resources**

Another common concern among teachers was insufficient material resources to effectively run P1 programs. They saw the provision of high quality programs for young children as dependent on appropriate equipment and resources.  

A comparison of physical resources between P1 and pre-primary

When teachers compared P1 resources and equipment to those for pre-primary classes they were amazed at the differences. For example,

We have been set up as one and a half pre-primary classes and not three pre-primary classes. I will be quite honest, we were given money for two classes and some of that was taken from us to set up the computing and we don't know whether we are getting it back. The money we have is nothing like a normal pre-primary. I have a friend who was given an X amount and we received one third of that for three centres. We have been given one set of blocks and it is not a full set and that is for three classes. (P2P1A)

At this stage we have only been set up officially as two centres so even though we only have three classes, we don’t have three sets of things and that causes problems...maybe the issue is we have the children but we don’t have enough of each particular piece of furniture or equipment. (P2P1B)

We need playground equipment and we have nearly 70 children out in the playground which is enclosed for pre-primary and we have very little playground equipment out

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62 “Activity-based learning is very heavy on consumables. This type of teaching must be adequately resourced” (RT2).

64 Eastern States Specialist 1: You can’t just suddenly take ten children and say you have twenty minutes with the blocks. The chances are they'll pull them out, they'll hit each other and they'll throw them.

65 Eastern States Specialist 2: There is no point in having the blocks if you don’t have the time and space to use them. You may as well not have them...children need completion, perseverance and a whole lot of things that you can’t complete.
there. We need sandpit things, bikes, swings, we have nothing like that. (P2P1F)

First coming to P1, the group was very poorly resourced – no puzzles, old blocks, a container of leggo, other games and a box of table games and that was it. (P6P1)

Teachers saw the reduced level of P1 resources as of a lower standard than that provided for pre-primary children in pre-primary classes. They believed that pre-primary children should be given equal opportunities whether they are in pre-primary classes or P1 classes. Furthermore, one teacher reported the greater use of worksheets was, “due to lack of resources, having to rotate them between three classes” (P5P1C).

Sources of finance/resources

Sometimes principals managed to access money from sources such as the Lotteries Commission. These avenues provided some financial assistance for P1 teachers but not as much as their pre-primary colleagues. A few teachers gained resources and equipment from the local pre-primary centre that had closed down. As one teacher confirmed, “When our pre-primary closed we got all their resources, so we have blocks from there so we have more equipment than what we ever had and I think that is enough for us to do our job” (P1P1B).

When money was withdrawn without explanation, some teachers’ private response was hostility but their public response was acceptance. As several teachers said,

We no longer get any more professional development...(we used to get) money for collaborative meetings to go to other schools who had MAG programs and you could go and visit other P1 schools if you were just starting out. (P3P1B)

The stance taken by teachers

Prior negotiations with employers for resources were unsuccessful, leaving teachers little choice but to seek alternative solutions. One alternative was to share resources with other P1 classes.66 For example, as previously mentioned in this section, when pre-

66 “I spent my own money!” (RT4).
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primary children were given insufficient blocks to work with, teachers compensated by sharing these blocks between three Pl units. This involved integrated planning and rotating children between classes. Teachers were dissatisfied with this procedure because it hindered their ability to provide children with ample exposure to important learning areas. In many instances they were left with little choice but to accept these conditions.

It was very difficult to share resources between three classes. After one lesson it was time to pass them on to the next class, making it very difficult to consolidate learning and have some continuity. (P5PIC).

Our one set of blocks had to be shared. Now we have two sets of blocks. We had to do open planning to share all of our resources. (P5P1A)

Teachers became increasingly dissatisfied and opposed to this aspect of Pl. Inadequate materials hindered their ability to construct and implement developmentally appropriate curricula for Pl children. Their reasoning here can be outlined as follows. Unlike primary classes, the pre-primary component of the curriculum is resource based. Early childhood practice does not condone the adoption of workbooks as developmentally inappropriate. Pre-primary children require choice and repeated opportunities with resources and equipment before progressing to a more formal learning structure. Pre-primary children are expected to work with equipment and educational resources so their experiences are primarily grounded in concrete learning. The timetable needs to remain flexible so children are not restricted by unnecessary time limits when completing their work.

These teachers felt there had been enough negotiation and compromise. For example, the highly structured Pl timetable restricted the amount of time that children could access important learning areas. Pre-primary children were offered no choice and allocated twenty minutes for block play, with the whole group of approximately twenty-eight children, and an incomplete set of blocks. At the end of that time period the children were forced to stop their work to allow the next class use of the blocks. This left the pre-primary children with insufficient time to complete an activity or the opportunity to leave block constructions standing until the following day. Such practice
was seen as developmentally inappropriate and in opposition to pedagogical beliefs about how children learn best. On a similar matter, explained one teacher,

At times we prefer to have our own group and finish the activity and think maybe we can paint our work. But you can't because they have to go home and that is what we have worked out as a group. It is not the product I am interested in but the process. But it would be nice to finish it off and to carry through lots of things, whereas it's "Wait time's up. You need to be over with that group." It's the management of the group. (P2P1A)

In a rare case, a teacher, who became unaware that pre-primary children should have access to greater resources, defined her PI situation positively by saying,

Yes we are resource-low compared to established pre-primaries, however because I have not worked in a pre-primary before and this is my first year my expectations are also different to the other people I work with in this school. Everything I get excites me whereas a lot of people who are used to more complain they haven't got all these things that pre-primary children need. Because I don't know any different I just move along with it. And I find it is a lot better than what I have ever had. (P2P1C)

The majority of teachers, however, felt they had insufficient resources such as indoor and outdoor space, human resources and material resources to run a high quality PI program. In their view, the provision of high quality programs for young children required buildings, play areas, equipment and resources of a size larger than PI provided.

When teachers first became involved in PI classes their immediate response was to assess the PI situation. They documented their observations and communicated their findings to employers. For instance:

When I first came to the school my class group was very poorly resourced. I had no puzzles, old grotty blocks and a container of leggo and other games and a box of table games and that was it. I had some furniture and one of the things I said to my coordinator was that I could not run a really good program on the amount of resources that I had. (P6P1A)

Most of the other things, if we have strong feelings about things the admin will listen. (P2P1E)

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67 “Yes!!” (RT2).
I personally have had a few moments of unhappiness as we have been going along and I went to the deputies and they sorted it out to my satisfaction. (P2P1F)

After defining the P1 situation as being poor in resources, they negotiated with principals for re-assurance that shortfalls would be addressed. Given the permanency of these teachers, principals had to be responsive and act as co-ordinators between teachers and School Councils, EDWA or the CEO in an effort to provide teachers with better conditions. In one case,

He (principal) went to our School Council body and said that the pre-primary needed resources. And they made a budgetary commitment to us and every year on top of my normal budget, because we all get a normal class budget. I get an additional budget of $100 for every pre-primary child. In that first year I got about $1,500 which meant I could really stock the manipulative games. And we applied with my co-ordinator’s support for a Lottery Grant and spent thousands on puzzles and outdoor equipment. (P6P1A)

Teachers mostly appreciated the principals’ support and willingness to transmit their needs to employers. They indicated that principals were often unsure of pre-primary children’s needs and the fact that the pre-primary component of P1 required additional resources. In their view, principals do not want problems and are understanding of teachers’ dilemmas and responsive to their needs. As long as the demands are realistic and can be adequately explained, principals are receptive to teachers’ requests and are trusting of their judgement. For instance,

When I came in and wanted to re-build the class I got a huge amount of support from everyone and the problem was that up until that point I don’t think it had been made clear that there was that need. To really run a good program we need the equipment. (P6P1A)

Teachers found principals willing to adjust their expectations and acknowledge that there would be difficulties in implementing P1. At one school the principals expected teachers, “To try our very best. He is very supportive and knows it’s very new to us and

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68 “Not all! A new principal decided in the first week that he could organise things ‘better’. He cut down the 0.5 time that the experienced assistant was working in the MAG class to one full day plus ½ day for preparation, and replaced her with the redeployed cleaner. Despite numerous discussions and requests from myself, a parent questionnaire and petition, and intervention from District Office, the principal refused to change anything. Consequently, the experienced assistant resigned and the redeployed cleaner was appointed to her job!” (RT3).
he has not put expectations and pressure. There is no pressure there at all” (P1P1A). When immersed in a school environment, in which trial and error procedures are acceptable, teachers felt comfortable and happy to take risks, rather than threatened by failure. For example,

I feel safe here in this school trying these things. The principal allows us to trial things out and it is a really healthy learning environment in that you don't fail you just look at it from another point of view and try something else. That is how all learning should be I think. (P2P1C)

Teachers preferred to be role makers rather than role takers and assume control of P1 rather than be restricted by a school philosophy inconsistent with their own. This conciliatory stance changed when principals could not cater for teachers’ needs. Teachers then objected to being told they will need, “to make do” (P2P1D) and showed a capacity and tendency to become increasingly resistant to P1 in the face of continued compromises on the part of school management.

Assessment of children

The teachers generally agreed that the added workload of P1 reduced the time available for assessing children. They pointed out that assessment was difficult and confusing because year one children were expected to be assessed in subject areas and pre-primary children needed to be assessed in learning domains. Some teachers’ completed assessments using subject areas and domains while other teachers reverted to subject areas for both pre-primary and year one children. For example, “I have been taught to assess children in pre-primary by domains but I now assess all children by subject areas” (P4P1A). The wider developmental levels in P1 classes also created difficulties in assessment. More specifically,

There is a difference in workload because you are covering a greater range of objectives than if it was a straight class. I guess it’s more time consuming and you have to pick up four objectives from one section as compared to two if it was a straight class with a

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69 “Yes” (RT3).
70 “Less time for assessment” (RT3).
smaller range of ability levels. Assessment in P1 is hard and confusing when compared to a straight class. (P3P1A)

For many teachers insufficient guidelines on P1 curriculum impacted negatively on assessment procedures particularly when it came to monitoring pre-primary children’s learning. Typically, said one teacher,

I have never taught pre-primary before so it has all been a matter of observing and seeing what they have been doing and it has not been any formal assessment...So there has not been any formal assessment...Yes sometimes it’s been difficult to see what pre-primary children are achieving, not being early childhood trained because the activity may just be an art activity and sometimes you are not quite sure where it is leading to and what learning is occurring. (P2P1F)

Formal assessment was undertaken for year one children but only informal assessments for pre-primary children. In the latter case, "other than observations with the prees and talking to the aide as to how they are going and what other sorts of activities we can do to improve cutting and things we are not formally testing" (P1P1B).

Heavy dependence on teacher-aides for assistance in assessment was a major concern for the teachers. On one hand they could not guarantee that their teacher-aide carried out observations accurately. On the other hand, they required teacher-aides capable of carrying out this task because P1 through its flexibility, wider developmental levels and workload restricted the amount of time that teachers could spend with children. The following comment captures this concern,

So I needed to rely on my aide in helping me cater for their needs. Also in terms of knowing what is happening with all the kids. It is much harder to keep track of them. Even though I have a small classroom it’s still where the kids are developmentally. There are times when I feel I am not getting enough access to both groups and ranges in the classroom. This would then have an effect on assessment...Ideally in an early childhood setting, observation is one of your main ways of assessing children and I needed to rely on (teacher-aide) a lot more for that. I am incredibly fortunate I have a fantastic teacher’s aide. (P6P1A) 

71 "Yes" (RT3).
72 "Agreed" (RT4).
Most teachers perceived teacher-aides as "surrogate" teachers who assisted in the instruction and assessment of children. They allotted pre-primary children to the teacher-aide because they felt more accountable for year one children's learning. Pre-primary children were expected to learn at their own developmental level, unlike year one children who needed to reach certain learning outcomes by the end of their first compulsory year of schooling.

**The culture and climate of P1 classrooms**

Most teachers regarded the P1 curriculum as having a more positive impact on children's social development than academic progress. They said that P1 enhanced the culture and climate of classes and this in turn improved student learning. For them, the learning environment included the way in which teachers and children interacted, which was an important part of the P1 curriculum development. As will be reported later, a minority of teachers strongly disagreed with this perspective. The majority view, however, was well developed and can be outlined as follows.

**Majority view**

P1 exposed children to a greater range of children and teachers. Children no longer needed to work with their own age group in one classroom with one teacher, instead they worked in a more flexible learning environment with a wider range of children and teachers. Children were given the opportunity to learn with their own chronological age group and were then extended in academic developmental groups. Moreover, "They are also exposed to different teachers and we have different personalities and some of the children in this stream will relate really well to me and some in my room will relate

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73 “Agreed” (RT4).
74 “Strongly agree” (RT2).
75 “Yes” (RT3).
76 “The children were able to work at their own level. Year ones experiencing a lot more “hands-on” type work and some pre-primaries learning to read and write” (RT3).
better to the other teachers than me” (P2P1A). Children adapted to this new concept and after a short time period they, “wander backwards and forwards and know they have three teachers and three aides and are comfortable” (P2P1B).

The P1 curriculum enhanced children’s social skills because it exposed them to peer tutoring. Children took charge of their own learning and assisted their friends. Also, P1 provided children with a greater range of models and an environment in which social skills could be developed. Children became more responsible for their own learning and generally eager to assist each other. The year one children modelled appropriate behavior for pre-primary children:

> They do get on very well and the ones do take the prees under their wings and look after them and one little boy who was a nightmare to start with, he has grown up a lot. He is sitting next to the ones and looking at what they do and I feel the prees grow up more in a P1 than what they would do in a pre-primary setting. (P1P1B)

The pre-primary have been role modelled to by the year ones a lot, and vice versa, in everything from the playground rules and how they go about their writing. (P1P1A)

Older children take younger children under their wings and are very supportive. (P6P1A)

Behavior has improved because more responsible for own learning. They help each other...If the prees need their shoelaces tied up then an older child will do it. (P5P1B)

They are very happy to mix and probably in a single level class they would be more inclined to stick to themselves. (P3P1A)

P1 classes that included sisters and brothers from the one family created a family atmosphere because,

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77 “Strongly agree” (RT2).
78 “Very important” (RT3).
79 “More flexibility when working with special needs children” (RT3).
80 “Extremely important” (RT2).
81 “A great advantage of P1” (RT3).
82 “Strongly agree. P1 seems to nearly eliminate behavior problems. Children always have something to do – not always waiting for whole group to finish etc. This point needs to be stressed” (RT2).
They (siblings) are very caring of each other and help each other. Because there are older and younger children and sisters and brothers then it is more like a family atmosphere and we don’t really have any problems. (P3P1B)

We really noticed that the kids just pull together and do so much for each other and because they work collaboratively their social skills are amazing. Not all the time and we still have the same problems that we normally have but they do tend to help each other and work together and explain things to each other. They’re not so egocentric they think of other people a little bit more than what they would in a straight P or year one class. They learn more and the motivation a child gets intrinsically from looking at a year two and having a go writing and reading all their words, they just learn from this and can’t wait to do it and take home reading files when they are four years of age. It’s great. (P5P1A)

Although the benefits of P1 were greater in the social than academic domain, there were instances where P1 created advantages equal for both areas. P1 was of social and academic value to children with learning difficulties. A P1 class disguised the efforts of struggling children and eliminated the need for children to repeat a year level. By the second year, the majority of immature struggling children had caught up to children in the group whereas in a straight class the procedure would have been for children to repeat a year. In other words,

You really get to see the children progressing, especially when you see them for the two years. You get to know the children, where they are at and what problems they are having. It’s very good for remedial work because you know the children so well. (P3P1B)

P1 was an advantage to teachers because it gave them a thorough overview of children’s progress over a two year period as opposed to pre-primary and year one classes that exposed teachers to children’s progress for only one year. Children settled into school and benefited from not having to move to another class at the end of the first year. Children were less pressured to achieve in P1 and had more time to develop at their own level. “Children were more self-motivated, more responsible for their own learning, no big pressure” (P5P1B).

83 “Strongly agree” (RT2).
84 “Strongly agree” (RT2).
Pre-primary children benefited from exposure to year one work because of their social contact with year one children. They began to read and become familiar with their sounds. Put differently, "The prees learn very quickly to be able to sit down and work than if they were in a pre-primary year. Some prees are starting to read and know their sounds so being with the ones helps them catch on quicker" (P1P1B).

**Minority view**

In contrast to the positive picture outlined above, a strong minority view existed amongst a few teachers. These teachers saw PI negatively impacting on the culture and climate of their class, and as a result on student learning. Their definition of the situation can be portrayed as follows.

Children who transferred from other schools, mid-year, often appeared stressful as they had to make a large adjustment to the different teaching and learning styles in PI and had to continually approach the teacher. For example,

> children coming in half way through the year find it hard to cope and come up to me saying they do not know what to do and find it stressful. I do not have time to give them one to one assistance as much as I would in a straight class. (P5P1C)

The gap between a straight year level and PI further widened when children were shy and reluctant to approach their teachers or their friends, "and that becomes a problem and needs to be monitored" (P5P1C), a task which further added to teachers' workload.

PI classes that included sisters and brothers from the one family did not necessarily provide an atmosphere that was secure and supportive. There were situations in which children from the one family were competitive and opposed their siblings' attendance in the same class at school. This had a detrimental effect on the culture of the classroom and children's willingness to work together in a supportive environment.

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85 "I believe the opposite!" (RT2).
86 "If pre-primaries weren’t ready to read, they used avoidance techniques" (RT4).
P1 at times created resentment. Some year one children resented the presence of pre-primary children in their class. They expected their own desk and did not want to work in group activities with younger pre-primary children. More specifically,

I think they would prefer to be in a year one (classroom) because everything is communal in P1, our pencils and our glue. When the year ones first came they thought they were going to have their own desk and their own things and they were looking forward to that and they were not happy they had to share with the prees. We couldn't do it any other way because we were having group activities and everything got put in the middle and the ones were not happy because it was not what they expected in their first year at school. (P1P1B)

Changes to the P1 timetable unsettled pre-primary children when they were placed in groups with year one children. For instance, “The pre-primary children have been unsettled since moving into five developmental groups. I'm hoping that as the groups continue and the children become more used to the set up that they won't feel as threatened” (P2P1B). After a period of time, the children would, "wander backwards and forwards and know they have three teachers and three aides and are comfortable" (P2P1B).

Often MAG strategies could be applied in straight classes because the culture and climate of a class was, "not due to a split class but the kind of classroom run" (P6P1A). There was a danger in thinking that MAG skills and strategies could only be applied in a P1 class.

I believe that because a single year level classroom has a range of levels and abilities you can still do peer tutoring and everything else we do in MAG. What I am saying is that you can gain all the benefits of MAG in a straight class. It would make it easier for a teacher if it was a straight class as compared to a P1. (P3P1A)

Finally, according to this minority view, the pre-primary and year one children should not be mixing with each other as much as they were. Assisting younger children had its advantages in consolidating what older children have learned but it also wasted teachers time.

87 “Needs to be addressed in advance – meetings, newsletters, visits etc” (RT2).
88 “Agree. The philosophy is what counts” (RT2).
The difference P1 has made to the quality of learning

Some teachers were unsure whether P1 improved children’s learning. Most of them, however, said that while year one children could cope in a P1 class, the pre-primary children were disadvantaged. They claimed that pre-primary children could be provided with higher quality learning opportunities in a pre-primary class than in a P1 combination. This conclusion rested largely on the observation that insufficient human and material resources made it difficult to provide pre-primary children with a wide range of resources and opportunities that were part of their curriculum.

Certain aspects of the P1 philosophy were not acceptable to some teachers. One was that children developed at their own level, yet no guidelines were given to teachers as to what base levels were acceptable. The teachers expressed concern that P1 children would become complacent in developing at a comfortable pace and not want to extend their own development. Another concern was that parents expected their children to improve and develop to a level required for high school or the workforce. In a representative statement, one teacher said,

The whole purpose of MAG is so that the children develop at their own level but that worries me that they should not be expected to be at a certain level. If I was a parent I would expect to be told my child is in year one...they need to know where their child should be at. Fair enough they can do this in primary school and it's great for their self-esteem to be able to develop at their own rate but when they get into high school there are those big expectations. That worries me because there are a lot of kids that may not be at that level and are not extended onto a high level and may feel content operating where they are at. (P5P1C)

The teachers believed children and parents need to be provided with information about their child’s developmental level in relation to the norm. For instance, one teacher reflected on the year's learning in these terms:

89 “From a pre-primary teachers point of view, I felt the pre-primaries missed out on the freer types of experiences – sand and water play, music, even blocks and home corner were restricted by time. I am not sure what the year ones missed out on, never having taught that year before” (RT3).
90 “I would like the opportunity to try a MAG class again some time, but with more professional support and guidance” (RT3).
I'm not happy I am achieving the quality of the learning that could be achieved in a straight class in just concentrating on their skills and what they need to achieve and reporting back to parents and saying okay this is what your child should be doing and if not they need extension and extra help. It is very hard to do that when you have so many different things going on at the same time. I would say that would be my main concern and concentrating on where children are at and what they should be achieving at that level. (P5P1C)

The withdrawal of money from MAG classes when the trial period ended, triggered opposition. Teachers saw the pre-primary component of P1 as expensive to run and teachers as in need of continual support to maintain their knowledge of this new structure. Removal of financial support also impacted on other learning areas and made it difficult for schools to pay teachers to observe P1 classes. At one school,

> We had people come here to look at how we set up ours and there was money for them to give us half a relief day and one of us would take them around. Now there is no money for any of that and it is at a stagnation. (P3P1B)

When MAG trial projects were first implemented teachers were given purpose built P1 classrooms and adequate support structures. These were subsequently withdrawn when the MAG project was completed. Teachers viewed the withdrawal of resources as a broken promise. This led to an oppositional stance because they were not willing to support P1 if appropriate conditions were not maintained.

Teachers became disillusioned when negotiations with employers were unsuccessful, but were still willing to re-negotiate in the hope that conditions would improve. They informed principals that inappropriate conditions prevented year one children from gaining the benefits of P1 classes. By making comments such as,

> We are not getting the benefits. Pre-primary have a music room which should be the other pre-primary and they use that and we can go in there as well and there is television. It is great to have but we have missed out on a stove because we can't cook. It doesn't give you the flexibility you need. (P2P1D)

At this school, the completion of the MAG trial project not only signalled the end of financial support, it also directly impacted on PD. For teachers, this meant,

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91 "This certainly caused a lot of opposition to developing P1" (RT2).
We no longer get any more professional development and there was also money for collaborative meetings to go to other schools who had MAG programs and you could go and visit other P1 schools if you were just starting out. (P3P1B)

Teachers warned, that when support is withdrawn, “those starting now who are not given the professional development and help will be treating P1 as a split class. If you don’t understand the philosophy behind MAG then it won’t be a MAG P1 class” (P3P1B). Another teacher concluded after six months into the year that she was still feeling inexperienced with prees, “I have not had experience in what a pre-primary is like over here. I don’t feel as though I am doing a great job and I must be honest. I don’t feel as though I am catering to the needs of the prees” (P1P1B). The same teacher later said, “having a P1 is removing the quality of learning away from the prees...I don’t think it is damaging year ones but I feel for the pre-primarvys” (P1P1B).

Teachers also expressed concern about four other matters: a push towards formal pre-primary learning; the fact that older year one children were sometimes held back and not extended due to the increased workload of P1; the added workload of P1 being more than some teachers can handle and the wide developmental levels of children. The wide gaps between pre-primary and year one was in the opinion of teachers hindering the quality of learning in P1 classes (P2P1E and P2P1D). Teachers feared that if restrictions on teacher-aide time were implemented then their workload would become massive and unrealistic, further affecting the quality of learning in P1 classes. In instances, where P1 classes included children with special needs, teachers advocated moving them to a straight class, for reasons such as,

There are the two children I have on ADD medication. I have another child that I think it autistic or has symptoms of autism. I have some other children who have been tested by the independent school psychologist...I look at these children and I think this is not fair...I can see they need help but I haven’t the time to help them enough and they would be better in a straight class. (P5P1B)

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92 “Strongly agree” (RT4).
93 “Agree” (RT4).
94 Eastern States Specialist 1: For our schools that have a mixed or vertical group they would be five and six year olds. In fact your (WA) classes have a mix of four, five and six year olds.
95 Eastern States Specialist 2: It’s too wide a developmental level to cope with (four, five and 6 year olds).
Towards the middle and end of the school year some teachers still remained unconvinced of the benefits of P1. For instance, said one teacher, “I have the groups together and the children are being silly and not doing it properly and you can’t monitor all the children properly. Maybe with more experience I will see the benefits of collaborative learning and MAG but I am yet to be convinced” (P5P1C).

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

As indicated in chapter two, community development refers to the construction and maintenance of closer positive ties between schools and parents. On this matter, the general consensus amongst teachers was clear: P1 threatened rather than enhanced community development. Two perceptions informed this view. One perception was that parents remained unconvinced about the educational benefit of P1 for children. Another was that P1 created strong and often unresolved resistance among parents. In some instance, schools were successful in resolving parent concerns, while in most they were not.

Parents not convinced of P1’s educational value

According to the teachers, parents perceived P1 as being more economically motivated rather than of educational benefit.96 This created parental anxiety and left teachers with the task of re-assuring parents that P1 was educationally sound.97 98 A teacher described a ‘typical’ parent’s initial reaction to this change in these terms: “At the beginning she was very apprehensive and wasn’t going to send her child here” (P2P1B). Eventually, the parent enrolled her child in a P1 class but monitored her child’s progress with disquiet and uncertainty. This problem did not exist in separate pre-primary and year one classes. These types of parental perceptions existed even in situations where pre-

96 “So true!” (RT3).
97 “Vital that this is addressed as a whole school approach and not left to individual teachers” (RT2).
98 “Strongly agree, although occurs with all grouped classes” (RT4).
primary classes were in keeping with early childhood philosophy and year one classes were tailored to suit student outcomes for that age level.

Several factors complicated teachers’ efforts to allay parental concerns. First, some teachers were also unconvinced of P1s educational benefits and were apprehensive of their own ability to manage this change. In the words of one teacher,

I know what my reaction was when I first went to a conference and the lady was speaking about MAG and she was showing us how she was doing it. My initial reaction was “terror” and it was a huge amount of preparation that she put in and she warned us about it. There were activities for the year twos, ones and pre-primaries and she had parent rosters and it sounded like a huge thing for one teacher to take on. (P2P1B)

Second, P1 had no written documentation that outlined its benefits, and at times parents demanded written evidence of the value of P1. Third, some teachers experienced difficulty projecting a confident belief in P1. Evidently,

This is quite an issue because if you are going to do something that is really different then you need to be strong in your beliefs and able to handle parents. You must be clear to parents about your expectations and your role and be very sure of yourself. (P5P1B)\(^{99}\)

**Parental resistance to P1**

Most teachers saw P1 as impeding school/community relations, for four reasons. First, P1 challenged parents to abandon traditional views on how young children learn, and adopt new ones. Second, P1 generated strikingly different expectations among parents that would not be found in straight classes. Third, P1 created parental uncertainty and anxiety about what pre-primary and year one children should be learning. Fourth, P1 was described or marketed in unrealistic terms and failed to deliver its promised outcomes.\(^{100}\) Further details of the teachers’ thinking behind each of these reasons and the basis for this thinking can now be presented.

\(^{99}\)“Strongly agree” (RT2).

\(^{100}\)“True” (RT3).
**PI challenged parents to alter their beliefs**

According to most teachers, parents had pre-set ideas on how their children should be instructed. They were wary of change and suspicious of PI’s sudden introduction in schools. They approached principals and teachers to clarify the kind of learning their children would be exposed to in this new class combination. They sought written confirmation from schools that this change had been trialled and proven to be successful. They became resistant when teachers could not provide them with written verification of its benefits.

**PI generated strikingly different expectations among parents**

PI generated strikingly different expectations among parents. Unlike pre-primary and year one classes, teachers reported it opened up a new arena as it eliminated the boundaries that previously existed between both year levels and attempted to merge them together. Teachers felt pressured and threatened by these strikingly different expectations. For example one group of parents wanted the informality of pre-primary to be maintained and early childhood practices to continue. Another group of parents (pre-primary) perceived PI to be a more formal class combination and wanted their pre-primary children to be exposed to reading and more formal work.

There are definitely parents who come thinking because it is a split class the pre-primary children will be getting formal work and in a way the pre-primary children are immersed in that environment and there are pre-primary children who read and write and that can be facilitated in this setting but not in a traditional year one way. (P6P1)

I have had a few parents who would like their pre-primary children to start bringing reading books home and parents place higher expectations on their pre-primary children than compared to a straight class. Overall the parents are still learning and working out their own ideas about MAG. (P5P1C)

On the other hand, parents of year one children strongly communicated to teachers their expectations that their children would be exposed to year one work. They often

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101 “Inservicing of parents very important. Then choice of group is idea but not always practical” (RT2).
remained unconvinced that this could be guaranteed in a P1 class setting. Teachers explained to parents that their pre-primary children were not at a developmentally appropriate level to read.\textsuperscript{102}

I would explain to the parents who want their pre-primary children to start reading that the child’s level is not there at present and they can sit down and read stories with their children but we don’t expect them to be able to read at pre-primary level. (P5P1C)

However, according to teachers, parents were not always responsive to this line of argument and became resistant to P1. In one school opposition escalated to the point where parents rejected schools beliefs and formed a strong pressure group. They refused to see the benefits of MAG in P1 and claimed it was an administrative initiative rather than an educational one. Indeed,

The parents are the only ones who have an issue with P1 classes. They think the ones aren’t doing enough and the Ps are doing too much. They do not want to believe the benefits of a MAG class…Part of the problem is that everyone knows MAG grouping is done because numbers are too low in one group so they take from another year group to make up the numbers. (P4P1A)

These parents were set in their beliefs and made the task of including P1 classes into schools, difficult and time-consuming. Without documented evidence of P1’s benefits, the teachers were unable to provide parents with proof. In the face of continual opposition from parents, teachers became frustrated with P1.

The teachers were adamant that the strikingly different expectations of parents could not be accommodated in P1 classes. They believed their only solution was to firmly communicate their expectations to parents and to hold firm to their philosophical beliefs.

Parental expectations need to be addressed. We need clear communication to parents about P1 and teachers’ expectations. We had a parent meeting in the first couple of weeks of the year and stated expectations and that pre-primary is not an early year one program but there is emphasis on early literacy, early maths, etc. (P6P1A)

Parents either accepted the advice of teachers or rejected it. Teachers blamed an absence of written guidelines that outlined the rationale behind P1 as the reason why parents

\textsuperscript{102} "True" (RT3).
expressed such a wide variety of expectations and the reason why it was difficult to convince parents of the educational value of P1.

P1 created fear and uncertainty

According to most teachers, many parents of year one children expressed concerns that their children would be doing pre-primary work and also would be distracted by the younger pre-primary children. For their part, parents of pre-primary children were uncertain of how pre-primary children would be instructed. They found it difficult to grasp how one teacher could possibly cater to two year levels whose philosophies were so different. They demanded information from teachers on how this would be achieved. In one instance, fear and uncertainty developed to the point where two separate meetings were held at one school; one meeting for the pre-primary parents and another for year one parents.  

Another observation made by the teachers was that P1 not only created fear and uncertainty about what pre-primary and year one children should be learning, but also caused anxiety about student performance. Apparently, parents carefully monitored events in P1 classes. They thought P1 aimed to extend children’s learning by allowing them to develop at their own pace and by eliminating year level divisions. Information they received from schools told them that children were not restricted by chronological age, only by performance and ability.

According to the teachers, the emergence of developmental groups in P1 classes became an immediate signal to parents of the presence of ability groupings. Parents approached teachers seeking confirmation of their child’s progress in P1. They sought information on whether their children were at a pre-primary level or year one level. As several teachers said,

That is the problem which is coming through in the whole of the school and parents are wanting to know why their child is in a particular group. Parents are asking if they

103 "Agree" (RT4).
should be concerned if their child is not in one of the other groups. I believe the developmental concept is brilliant...But parents are worried if they are not developing as quickly as the other children. I don’t want children to be labelled in this structure. (P2P1A)

They just wanted to know if their children were having difficulties and what group they were in. (P2P1C)

Teachers said they were reluctant to admit that groups were ranked in order of ability. They informed parents, "the groupings are learning groups. We have not stressed they are differing ability groups" (P2P1F). This pacified some parents, but not all.

*P1 was marketed in unrealistic terms and failed to produce its promised outcomes.*

Generally, the teachers cautioned against projecting P1 in an overly positive manner and communicating unachievable expectations to parents. In one instance, P1 MAG classes were marketed to parents with promises of increased learning opportunities and high student outcomes. Parents of year one and pre-primary children had been informed of the social and academic benefits of P1 and led to believe their children would achieve higher academic marks if they became involved in this new change. The aim at the time was to minimise resistance towards P1 and include it in schools. At the completion of that year, parents became disillusioned because their children had not achieved greater academic marks as a result of being in a MAG class. They approached the principal and teachers and registered their disapproval. The whole situation produced distrust in the school and damaged the chances of P1 succeeding as a new innovation.

Failure to produce satisfactory results occurred in another school. Most parents had been opposed to P1 but agreed to monitor its progress. Parental concern about P1 escalated when parents became more doubtful and dubious of P1’s ability to improve learning. Negative reaction in P1 spread to the point where no parents were prepared to enrol their pre-primary children in P1 in 1998. As a result P1 ceased to operate in that school after 1997.
CONCLUSION

Overall, there was no over-riding consensus amongst teachers that PI had completely enhanced or impeded student learning. Nor was there an equally divided stance on emerging issues. A majority/minority view prevailed in areas such as school development, teacher development and some aspects of curriculum development. A specific breakdown of these areas reveals a majority view that PI improved student learning through its impact on school development. On the other hand, community development was the one area in which teachers held an over-riding view that PI impacted negatively.

Furthermore, teachers had more to say about their definitions of the situation, than they did in terms of their behavioral response, to that definition. Teachers, like principals, constructed their definition of the PI situation partly on the basis of educational ideology; that is, on how much it enhanced student learning. PI was defined as a threat to student learning when it was introduced in schools without preparation, guidelines, supports and resources. It challenged teachers to disregard their traditional approach to teaching and adopt a constructivist approach. PI then further challenged teachers to use this constructivist approach and merge two different areas of education. The ‘non-compulsory’ pre-primary year where children attended school four days a week, and the ‘compulsory’ primary year where children attended school for five days a week. Teachers felt accountable for student learning. However, they were unwilling to change their philosophy and adopt PI because to them, it was an untested theory instigated for administrative and economic reasons.

Teachers were more willing to disclose their feelings and views of PI, than were principals. And, they were more concerned about the effects of PI on student learning, than its impact on their own self-interest. The comprehensive disclosure of teachers’ views on curriculum issues was not surprising, given their complete immersion in this

104 “I agree!” (RT2).
area and its status as a primary zone of their responsibility and accountability.\textsuperscript{105} \textsuperscript{106}

In some ways, teachers also responded differently to Pl, for several reasons. First, teachers had different definitions of the situation. Within those definitions they saw themselves as having varying degrees of power. Additionally, the pressures they were subjected to forced them to re-evaluate their definitions of the situation and focus on the projected costs of Pl and its benefits to themselves (self-interest) and others (their students). Also, the different kinds of relationships they had with others, became the basis for different responses to the same situation.

As was the case with principals, a matrix can be constructed to plot the different aspects of the teachers’ definition of the Pl situation. (See Figure 6). None of the fifteen teachers fitted completely into any one quadrant of this matrix. Each teacher held views that spread across all four quadrants.

![Figure 6. Teachers' definitions of the situation](image)

\textsuperscript{105} Eastern States Specialist 2: We would be able to say as a department that is not a philosophy that we would support.

\textsuperscript{106} Eastern States Specialist 1: I would be loathed to criticize another state government jurisdiction and that's not what I want to do, but I would say when you try and raise those issues that if we tried to do something like that in (state's name) (a) we would have a lot of resistance and (b) I don't think we would even try and do it because we don't believe it would be better for children.
Teachers’ modes of accommodating their definition of the PI situation can be positioned on a continuum. (See Figure 7). There is a clear conceptual link between the quadrant and the continuum. Generally satisfied teachers became system supporters, dissatisfied teachers became active opponents or passive dissenters, while self-seeking and self-sacrificing teachers became either passive dissenters or pragmatists. There were no instances in which teachers responded in only one way. In fact, teachers continually re-defined the PI situation and altered their mode of accommodation.

**Figure 7 Teachers’ modes of accommodation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complete Acceptance</th>
<th>Partial Rejection/Acceptance</th>
<th>Complete Rejection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X-------------------</td>
<td>X----------------------------</td>
<td>X-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Supporter</td>
<td>Pragmatist</td>
<td>Passive Dissenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(promotor)</td>
<td>(negotiator)</td>
<td>(withdrawer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active Opponent</td>
<td>(resister)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consistent with symbolic interaction theory, teachers became role makers rather than role takers. They constructed responses to PI according to their definition of the situation. They took into account other people’s definitions of the situation, foresaw the consequences of their actions and developed strategies that would enable them to manage PI classes.
INTRODUCTION

In addition to other members of the early childhood education profession, teacher-aides were also excluded from the policy making process leading up to the adoption of P1. This study sought to construct what they might have said had they been consulted.

In presenting the findings, this chapter integrates the teacher-aides' definitions of the P1 situation into an analysis of their modes of accommodating it. The teacher-aides had far less to say than the principals and teachers. It is more practical therefore, to combine their definition of the situation with their response to that definition. As noted in chapter three, footnotes are included to record the comments of reviewers, which provide an indication of the multiple voices within the profession. At no time is inclusion of the footnotes meant to alter, justify or question any aspect of a participant’s stance towards P1.

Four modes of accommodation emerge from an analysis of the data collected on teacher-aides, namely: system supporter, system conformer, passive dissenter and active opponent. For reasons which will become apparent later, three of these positions match those constructed by the principals and teachers. The position or role of negotiator could not be clearly identified from the data. However, the position of system conformist did emerge for teacher-aides, but not for principals and teachers.
SYSTEM SUPPORTER TEACHER-AIDES

System supporter teacher-aides defended P1 and supported its inclusion in schools. They were proactive because P1 enhanced their self-interests, improved their status and gave them a sense of professional worth. P1 required them to take greater responsibility in the learning process, which made them feel more valued as team members. However, while they spoke highly about the strengths of P1, they did not set about convincing employers, staff, parents and the community that P1 improved student learning.¹ In very few instances did they acknowledge P1 was of benefit in improving student learning. A few of them defined P1 as having some benefits for schools, teachers, parents and children but this was a minority view amongst the total group. Most supported P1 for enhancing their self-interests rather than benefiting significant others.

During the implementation of P1, most system supporters (nine out of ten) had at some stage defined it as a change providing positive conditions not often found in pre-primary and other primary year levels. For example, they welcomed P1 because they said it transformed them into “surrogate teachers.” In fact their additional responsibilities motivated them to succeed and increased their job status. External and internal assistance improved their confidence.² System supporters also enjoyed a more positive working relationship with principals and teachers. As a result, their job satisfaction increased, which in turn benefited schools, teachers, teacher-aides, parents and children. Their definition of the P1 situation however, was not static. When issues emerged that threatened their self-interest and student learning, they adopted other modes of accommodation, such as that of the active opponent, passive dissenter and system conformist. Additional responsibilities, extra assistance, positive working relationship and increased benefits to others, led system supporters to publicly praise P1 and defend its inclusion in schools.

¹ “To do so could be viewed as over-stepping the role and/or going outside the list of duties” (RTA1).
² “When our school looked like implementing P1, the principal actively ensured I was included in all PD on the subject. This did improve my confidence as I was aware of some of the underlying reasons” (RTA1).
Additional P1 responsibilities

According to some system supporter teacher-aides, P1 placed unrealistic demands on teachers. They claimed most teachers were ill prepared for P1, were not provided with curriculum guidelines and lacked the appropriate knowledge and experience to construct and implement the P1 curriculum. Also, most teachers in their previous teaching positions did not have to implement new curriculum and were specialised in the areas they taught. To cope with P1, teachers sought additional assistance from teacher-aides and increased their responsibilities.

System supporter teacher-aides were motivated and challenged by their expanded role in three ways. First, they became directly involved in the construction and implementation of P1 curriculum. Second, they were entrusted with responsibility for student assessment. Third, they felt enhanced as surrogate teachers.

The construction and implementation of P1 curriculum

System supporters experienced a greater sense of professional worth when they were asked to provide input into the pre-primary component of P1. In their previous teacher-aide positions they were primarily involved in cleaning, preparing teaching resources and supervising children. P1 promoted them to a closer partnership with teachers and transformed them into active members of the teaching team. It forced teachers to actively involve and include teacher-aides in the change process.

System supporters provided greater input into the pre-primary component of P1 when teachers were primary trained, particularly when the teacher-aides had completed

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3 "The duties of a teacher-aide have changed over the years. 'Partnership with teachers' and 'active members of the teaching team' are stronger in a P1 but also very evident in a straight pre-primary. Perhaps a lot less in Junior Primary, due to the role of the TA in spending limited time in so many rooms" (RTA1).
assistant courses and many years’ experience in pre-primary classes. In these instances, teacher-aides recalled,

Into the pre-primaries, yes, I do have input. I’m asked to offer suggestions as part of the planning. I assist with the collating and the preparation of what has to be done and help the students to be able to carry out the work that is allocated. (P2TA2)

I’m the teacher assistant but basically I look after the pre-primary children. I organise/prep their work and I will sit down with them and do it and look after them while the teacher looks after the other two year levels. (P5TA2)

Teacher-aides enjoyed the change in their teaching role and the input they were given into the program. One said that her teacher would, “just tell me we want to do an animal activity, whatever you can think of and I’ll just organise it” (P5TA2). Pl provided TAs with a challenge that was rewarding and more satisfying than their previous role. Non-Pl classes involved fewer interactions with children and more menial tasks.

In a few instances, system supporter teacher-aides were encouraged to work alone with small groups of year one children. Their previous work with groups of children in other year levels involved minimal responsibility in the teaching process. This was because teachers in other year levels did not have to contend with the increased workload incurred by Pl classes. That is, teachers did not need to assign teacher-aides as “surrogate” teachers to gain additional release time. For example, some teacher-aides were directed to supervise a self-explanatory fine motor program thereby releasing one of the teachers from student contact and allowing her to work on other aspects of Pl. As, one teacher-aide explained:

I have a fine motor group every Tuesday where I have eight children, so the pre-primaries go home. One teacher will have DOTT time and the other one will have the ones but I take eight of those for a fine motor group and the teachers have allowed me to work out exactly what I want to do. (P3TA1)

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4 Agree this is correct, unless a primary trained teacher has had experience in the country in a Rural Integrated Programme (RIP) where he/she has had pre-primaries (RTA1).
5 “On some occasions I have done small group work with year ones” (RTA1).
In these instances, system supporter teacher-aides solely provided input into the curriculum, became role-makers and reported to teachers only when they needed further direction or were uncertain of any aspect of their task. One of them said:

I asked them (teachers), "I've got this to do, have you got any ideas?" And one of the teachers that only comes in on Friday said, "Look (teacher-aide's name) just keep going with that line, top to bottom. Even though you think it's repetitive." She said, "That's all they need". (P3TA1)

The additional responsibilities and increased involvement in the construction and implementation of P1 motivated system supporters to succeed. P1 increased their job status and gave them a greater sense of professional worth. They preferred new tasks to the simpler non-teaching tasks they had previously performed in pre-primary and other year levels.

**Responsibility for student assessment**

System supporter teacher-aides also responded positively to P1 because they were entrusted with responsibility for student assessment. Their added responsibilities ranged from keeping files on children's progress to becoming actively involved in the assessment procedure. One teacher-aide said with enthusiasm, "I've got files on all those kids and (teacher's name) thinks that's wonderful and I love it" (P3TA1). Another said,

We've got a very good relationship where we often will talk about how the children are going, especially the preprimaries – how their cutting skills are going at the time or if so-and-so had trouble or with an activity or who can't tell you numbers or one-to-one correspondence. (P5TA2)

In a few instances system supporters were given additional responsibilities in assessing both pre-primary and year one children in various aspects of the curriculum. More specifically, said one TA,

It's quite a big role actually, especially at this time of the year. I have been taking children out individually and working with them and doing reading assessments and the preprimaries with their assessments on whether they know their colours, numbers and above, below and that sort of thing. So I've actually been taking that. (P5TA1)
For system supporters, this new role was seen to enhance their status in the eyes of parents. Evidently, parents sometimes mistook teacher-aides for teachers. For example,

I think sometimes they get confused that I am...a teacher and not just the assistant. So sometimes you've just got to back off a bit. There are some...like that lady came in and wanted to have an interview with me or (teacher's name). She hasn't realised that there is a difference. (P5TA2)

System supporter teacher-aides explained how in non-P1 classes, unlike P1 classes, “the roles are clearly seen” (P5TA2). They claimed that P1 had altered the responsibilities of teachers and teacher-aides, obscured the difference between their roles and narrowed the boundaries that previously existed between teachers and teacher-aides.

System supporters as surrogate teachers

According to system supporter teacher-aides, by adding to their responsibilities and changing their roles, P1 transformed them into “surrogate teachers.” This meant, “instead of taking the backward step as the aide behind the teacher and the leader, we've been fairly equal in actual fact” (P5TA1). These teacher-aides claimed their previous involvement in pre-primary classes entailed working closely with the teacher. But, in P1 classes the demands were greater and they were expected to work alone on activities that involved a greater level of instruction.

It is different because in the pre-primary you're involved with the teacher helping the students but usually it's a different sort of activity. You're only doing one thing whereas you're doing more than one thing in pre-primary, you're doing maybe two or three things with the (TDP pseudonym) groupings. (P2TA2)

These teacher-aides said they were directly involved in instructing pre-primary children. When pre-primary and year one children were combined and given the same activity, teacher-aides were expected to assist pre-primary and year one children. For example,

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6 “Yes, this does happen but it is easily politely and friendly adjusted” (RTA1).
7 “More of a working team. "Narrowed boundaries". Yes, obscured the difference”. No, the teacher is still the teacher. The TA the TA” (RTA1).
I just look around and I probably go more to the P’s because you need to scribe for them. It’s hard to say, because a lot of the one’s are finding it difficult to write as well, so you’re sort of trying to coax them all the time. What does that word start with? And helping them along that way. So yes, just really a move around the room and help who you think needs help. (P3TA1)

Also, P1 provided the challenge of working with a wider range of children, such as: “You’ve got the conversation with the Year 2’s that you don’t get with the pre-primary children” (P5TA2).§

System supporter teacher-aides defended P1 and agreed with its inclusion in schools because it enhanced their self-interests. P1 provided them with work tasks that were less menial, improved their status and gave them a greater sense of professional worth. It also provided them with a more innovative challenge than non-P1 classes: “It’s something different. A lot of teachers haven’t looked at it. A lot of schools haven’t looked at it and I think it’s a better way to go” (P2TA1). They enjoyed their added responsibilities, were challenged by their changing roles and felt uplifted by being entrusted to serve as curriculum developers, surrogate teachers and student assessors.

**External and internal supports**

The enthusiasm of system supporter teacher-aides for P1 was also nourished by the knowledge and confidence they gained from external and internal supports. These support structures proved beneficial because they provided insight into, “where the teachers are coming from and what they’re working on in the classroom and things” (P5TA1).

As outlined above, P1 made system supporters active partners in the teaching process. The teacher-aides commented that without quality support structures, their involvement in P1 would be limited to menial tasks and supervisory duties that were characteristic of their previous non-P1 responsibilities. They were, however, more alert to the fact that they needed deeper knowledge and understanding to cope with the additional

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§ “This does not apply as I have been in P1 and then 1/2 for one afternoon a week. Not a P/1/2” (RTA1).
responsibilities they held as teacher-aides of P1 classes. Therefore they were more motivated to utilise and learn from existing support structures than they were in non-P1 classes.

External supports

System supporter teacher-aides identified three types of external supports that provided them with knowledge and a feeling of confidence and security. These were university courses, conferences and professional development sessions. None of these supports were specific to P1 and were equally relevant to non-P1 classes. But as P1 staff they were more proactive in accessing these supports because their responsibilities now required additional knowledge and skills beyond their initial training.

University courses that focussed on the early childhood years gave these teacher-aides a deeper knowledge of child development and an understanding of the practicalities of their work role. Independent schools had for many years identified these courses as an important priority and gave employment preference to teacher-aides who had completed or were enrolled in such courses. System supporter teacher-aides found these courses provided insight into an area they held little knowledge about and enriched their background on early childhood philosophy and practices.

Well the Introduction to Child Care mainly covered 0-6 years. So it was a whole series of things on child development. A lot of the things we were taught.....you can look back and think, “Oh yes, I remember that sort of thing,” and leading away from the development was all the craft activities and I’ve made things and brought them in. Social aspects and there was even a section on setting up your outdoor area. Safety issues. (P3TA1)

At the time I got the job I was doing the course at Edith Cowan University, so I was studying when I applied for the position. (P5TA2)

9 “For MAG to work successfully, TA’s do need to seek more knowledge so they may be an active contributor as part of the team” (RTA1).
Additional knowledge came from conferences. Again, although not specific to PI these conferences covered pertinent issues. Thus teacher-aides proactively participated in them.

Yes we participated in the Teacher Assistant Conference which was a weekend in August. (P2TA2)

Teacher-aide conferences have all been helpful. (P6TA1)¹⁰

Professional development sessions, in the form of workshops, inservices and network meetings that ranged from one to two days, further nurtured teacher-aides' commitment to PI. For example,

I also went to a day workshop that teacher assistants put on last Saturday which was to do with Christmas arts and crafts, but it's all input and learning from the others. (P2TA2)

We've had lots of inservices and PD day...we have anything from music to art and craft, first aid, chart making, a great range. We are very lucky in this district. (P1TA1)

Inservices and network meetings...have all been helpful. (P6TA1)

These teacher-aides also attended the same professional development sessions as teachers. They said this shared learning was helpful because as PI staff, they were no longer restricted to their previous teacher-aide duties. They saw their inclusion in inservices such as First Steps as confirmation by the employer of their changed role. They also relied on past personal experience gained as parent helpers in their children’s pre-primary classes.¹¹

Before I even got into this, just working when my children were in pre-primary and going in as a parent helper and basically the teachers that I’ve been around have said, “It’s initiative”. You show initiative and you know what to do and that was what got me started. Where my son went, the teacher there was going on long service leave and she said, “(teacher-aide’s name) you should take over my job next year,” and that’s sort of what got me going and they’ve really encouraged me all the way. (P3TA1)

¹⁰“True of this whole section. I believe too, TA’s need to be included in school PD. One principal actively encouraged TA’s to attend staff meetings, and relevant staff PD days. Even though the level of understanding may not be the same as a teacher, information gleaned is very valuable. Unfortunately, our current principal does not have the same view. He does however, agree to requests for off-site PD” (RTA1).

¹¹“Being a parent helper is quite different to being on the job” (RTA1).
Finally, the teacher-aides gained confidence when teachers praised them for initiative and knowledge. They became motivated when teachers informed them that they would confidently entrust them with their class. This encouraged them not only to develop and improve as teacher-aides but also to take a positive stance toward P1.

*Internal supports*

System supporter teacher-aides said that their main internal source of assistance was other teacher-aides. This occurred through sharing knowledge and past experiences with each other.

She (other teacher-aide) was relieving in the P1 so knowing I was applying for the job and asking, “If I get it, what do I do?” Yes she’s been a big help and we did the course together. (P3TA1)

We’ve basically helped each other actually. It was a learning experience for all of us last year when we started it. Actually we’d sort of started it the year before when I was in the pre-primary where the latter half of the year the year 1 teacher and pre-primary teacher would trial how it would go and it didn’t formally go P1-2 until the beginning of last year and I basically think we just helped each other along as it went. It was a learning curve for all of us. (P5TA1)

There was a lady (previous teacher-aide) that I used to work with who isn’t here any more, she was a big help to me. Another assistant. The three assistants—we’ve got to work closely together and if one of us doesn’t know where something is, the other one may know. (P5TA2)

When employed in schools that had more than one P1 class, they received assistance from all members of the P1 team, including teachers. In non-P1 classes such collaborative teaching rarely existed. As a case in point, said one teacher-aide,

We are given a lot of assistance here because we work as a team. All the teachers and the aides that are involved in the team. We are really fortunate that we get on very well and we all help each other. So I really feel that we’ve achieved what we set out to do. (P2TA2)

On rare occasions the teacher-aides were given assistance and guidance from principals. This assistance was not specific to P1 but was given to all teacher-aides at the school.
who were involved in the TDP (trialled development program – pseudonym) project. For example,

The principal gave us a brief outline of TDP at the interview. PD followed with the principal for the first couple of days before the children came...he gave a brief outline and then we experienced it. (P2TA3)

System supporter teacher-aides gained knowledge and confidence from external and internal support structures. These were of value because they focused on the tasks that teacher-aides performed in all year levels. The responsibilities of teacher-aides involved the direct instruction and assessment of children, plus the less complex and more menial duties of non-P1 classes.12

More positive working relationship

System supporters experienced a more interactive working relationship with principals and teachers. Principals directed teacher-aides to support teachers, more so in P1 than in non-P1 classes. As a result teacher-aides felt less isolated in P1 classes than was the case in pre-primary classes, particularly when pre-primary classes were situated off the school site with minimal interaction with school staff. The personal worth of the teacher-aides increased even further when principals extended their responsibilities to include all aspects of P1. In some cases,

The principal has expectations of me being capable of coping with the changes that we didn't have last year and of supporting the teacher as well because she is a first-year out teacher. She's not quite as confident. (P4TA1)

Greater interaction now as the principal is more involved. In the past the pre-primary class was off site and there was less interaction. (P2TA3)13

Both principals have been extremely helpful and supportive. (P5TA1)

P1 teachers were more appreciative and dependent on the help of teacher-aides than were non-P1 teachers. This made the teacher-aides feel more valued as equal members

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12 Agree. Children can be actively involved in some tasks like wiping their own easel down (RTAI).
13 "The principal does visit us a lot now and we also encourage children to take work to the office. Off-site the latter is impossible (across road) and visits were rare" (RTAI).
of the teaching team. It enhanced their working relationship with principals and teachers and promoted a harmonious working culture. When system supporter teacher-aides were asked to indicate why P1 promoted a more positive working relationship than non-P1 classes, they said,

"I feel that they (P1 teachers) are quite happy in the way we are able to assist them in helping the children. They fortunately like us to be part of it. We are not a separate entity where, “there is a teacher and we’re the aide”. We’re made to feel that we are part of a teaching team. (P2TA2)

I feel I’m more supportive. I feel more equal...But here I think you support the teacher a lot more. (P5TA1)

We just seem to get on with it...I think because we get on so well together, we just jell in well. (P5TA1)

**Increased benefits to others**

Most teacher-aides were more concerned with the way in which P1 enhanced their personal self-interests than the benefits it provided to significant others. Only, a minority held the view that P1 was of benefit to schools, teachers, teacher-aides, parents and children. System supporters had a tendency to support most things and strove to see the benefits of change. These benefits became apparent when their previous experiences, as teacher-aides, were unsatisfactory. They were willing to view P1 through the eyes of significant others, were less concerned about self-interest and more focussed on the benefits of P1 to schools, teachers, parents and children.

**P1 benefits schools**

Most teacher-aides defined P1 as enhancing school development by bonding the pre-primary and primary fields together and increasing school’s profile in the community as an innovative institution. Pre-primary children in P1 classes were no longer a separate school entity and benefited from additional school facilities. P1 enabled schools to trial

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14 “Agree. Teaching Team: TA’s really whether in P/1, P or Junior Primary, want/need to be supportive, respected, co-operative, reliable, flexible and appreciated. This applies in reverse too. Teachers...then you have a Teaching Team. A teaching team is really needed for a successful P1” (RTA1).
new ideas, and promoted school harmony, bonding and working towards a common goal. In the words of several teacher-aides,

The prees are all in the classroom and they’re part of the school where normally they’re separated from school. So it brings them into the school. It gives them more of the school facilities. (PITA1)

(P1 raises the) quality of education and (gives) a higher profile for schools. (P2TA3)

**P1 benefits teachers**

System supporter teacher-aides saw P1 as benefiting teachers because it challenged them to construct new knowledge and apply it to new situations: “It stretches them…you have to be on your toes more” (P4TA1). P1 was seen by teacher-aides to allow teachers to restructure groups so they were less rigid and exposed to a greater range of children. That is, teachers could temporarily withdraw, observe children from a distance and collaboratively manage individual children within groups.

They get a different group of kids, like in the afternoon. I think it’s more refreshing sometimes. They’ve got a chance to see all the children. What one teacher picks up from one student, so if they had them all day, then another teacher picks up something else. (P2TA1)

**P1 benefits parents**

Many teacher-aides saw P1 to be an additional advantage to parents because it removed the physical boundaries that parents had experienced when pre-primary classes were off the school site. Also, “parents would see many advantages in that the overall staff of the school all worked together as a team” (P2TA2).

**P1 benefits children**

System supporter teacher-aides defined the P1 situation as being of benefit to children in three ways. First, P1 provided a flexible class structure incorporating a greater developmental range of children than straight classes. Second, it promoted more collaborative teaching and learning and greater academic input from a wider range of
teachers. Third, it was less restrictive and encouraged children to work according to their developmental capabilities rather than their chronological age.15

System supporters were pro-active towards P1 partly because the flexible class structure offered social and academic benefits to children. More specifically, they said:

Yes, I think there are advantages because the children that are in just a pre-primary situation then have the advantages of being able to work with some of the Year 1’s that are helping them to progress to an upper level that they are capable of. (P2TA2)

The brighter children or the more mature children have always got someone else that they can play with or talk to. (P5TA2)

Children’s needs are being met more individually. (P2TA3)

Pre-primaries are more open to different types of learning. Like, they’re learning part of what those 1’s are learning. So they must be picking something up along the way, or we’d hope so. And things like counting and all that. The structured side where they go to the table and get the crayons out and do a sheet, modified of course from the 1’s, I think that’s a benefit for them. (P3TA1)

I think academic as well. It’s fairly social I suppose, but in fact I actually think the academic helps more than the social. I do feel putting two children together...they’re more likely if they’ve got a Year 2 helping a Year 1, they feel easier, more comfortable with it. A child explaining things to them again rather than a teacher. (P5TA1)

P1 was seen to promote collaborative teaching and learning because teachers were able to provide expert knowledge on various aspects of the curriculum. The teacher-aides, and subsequently the children, benefited from this additional knowledge.

Yes, we get to know all the children and what their capabilities are by watching as well in groups and with the teachers. It’s talked about a lot more and I think you get to know the students and their values. (P2TA2)

Children can relate to some teachers more than other teachers. I think that’s a good advantage for children. (P2TA1)

According to these teacher-aides, P1 was less restrictive than non-P1 classes and encouraged children to work according to their developmental capabilities rather than

15 “Agree. Whilst formal work is done by Year 1’s it also enables them to ‘achieve’ with hands on pre-primary activities and as they are more open ended than traditional pre-primary, the year 1’s will extend and challenge themselves, whilst feeling good about being able to do something. Not all Year 1 learning needs to be with paper and pencil” (RTA1).
their chronological age. With regard to the value of PI, one teacher-aide said, “Smooth transition into year 1. Children’s age differences less of a problem. Children able to work according to their skills rather than their age” (P6TA1).

SYSTEM CONFORMER TEACHER-AIDES

Teacher-aides who adopted a system conformist mode of accommodation also defined the PI situation as a threat to their self-interests and student learning. They shared some of the active opponent and passive dissenter views on PI but their response was different. Unlike active opponents they did not verbally criticise PI in public forums, nor were they willing to create support for a return to a more traditional system. They differed from passive dissenters because they did not adopt a policy of non-involvement.

In practice, system conformist teacher-aides responded to PI with compliance, if not capitulation. They were unwilling to negotiate or bargain because they felt they lacked the appropriate powers to succeed and were not in a position to make demands. They refused to voice verbal opposition to PI to significant others because they were wary of losing their jobs. They feared that defiance would result in termination and this left them with no option but to adopt a policy of compliance. They believed their interests would be safeguarded if they complied with the directions of significant others.

Four reasons underpinned the system conformist teacher-aides dissatisfaction with PI. First, they were expected to spend the majority of their time with pre-primary children. Second, they disapproved of the way in which PI classes were constructed and implemented. Third, they were reluctant to over-step their mark and become too close to teachers. Fourth, they were unaware of the expectations of significant others.

Responsibility for pre-primary children

System conformists spent a greater deal of time alone with pre-primary children than they did in non-PI classes. Teacher-aides were expected to become totally immersed in instructing pre-primary children so the PI teachers could prioritise their time and
concentrate on year one children. The teachers’ rationale was that year one was compulsory while pre-primary was non-compulsory. System conformist teacher-aides questioned this directive because they believed teachers were responsible for instructing all children in their class. In their view, the role of teacher-aides was to assist teachers, not act as substitute teachers.\textsuperscript{16} Although teachers had some interaction with teacher-aides and pre-primary children during the school day the time they spent with them was minimal. Teachers were only directly involved with pre-primary children when they were placed on the mat as a whole group. For the teacher-aides, to take a representative comment, “I spend more time by myself with the children in a P1…I would spend all of my day with the pre-primaries and most of it by myself” (PITA1).

Unlike active opponents, system conformists were unwilling to disclose their views and practices with others, so they complied with the directions of teachers. They believed their work as surrogate teachers was inappropriate because they did not hold teaching qualifications or experience in this area and had not attended any PD sessions specific to P1.

\textbf{Disapproval of P1 classes in practice}

System conformists disapproved of the way in which P1 classes were constructed and implemented. They were experienced teacher-aides who had worked with a variety of early childhood teachers, in pre-primary classes, and had been exposed to a wide range of curriculum designs. Also, they were aware that early childhood strategies needed to be applied when teaching younger children. Thus, they became disturbed with the number of instances in which pre-primary children in P1 classes were exposed to formal learning or left on the mat with year one children and expected to sit still when the lesson content was not developmentally appropriate to their level. As one system conformist TA said,

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{16} Eastern States Specialist 1: If you have a group of children with very specific needs the teacher-aide is not trained to support the development of those children. The teacher-aide can do all those things on the edges but they are not trained to do that quite explicit teaching that may need to happen.
\end{quote}
I think it should be run more as a class together. Separate classes. They can’t spend all day together but I think they should spend more time together. I think they would both benefit from that...They’re always on the mat together...So they’re given the same content there. (P1TA1)

Although system conformists supported a return to non-P1 classes, they were reluctant to publicly say so. Instead,

I just think I could be able to help those children a lot more than being sort of all over the place...there’s bits going on here and bits going on there and they’re all working on something totally different. (P5TA2)

Thank God [the interview] it’s confidential. I would prefer straight pre-primaries anyway. Because it’s (P1) just like a two/three class. It’s more work for the teachers who’ve got to programme for the P’s and programme for the 1’s. It’s a lot more work. I would prefer straight P’s. (P3TA1)

In the view of these teacher-aides, primary teachers should not be running P1 classes if they were not early childhood trained. In some cases the teachers were unaware that they were implementing strategies that were inappropriate for pre-primary children. Therefore, “an early childhood trained teacher should be running the class” (P1TA1). 17

Another source of dissatisfaction for teacher-aides was the additional work required to assist primary trained teachers struggling with P1. In some cases, the teacher-aides had to provide total input into the pre-primary component of P1 and guide teachers. Despite the additional workload and stress, system conformist teacher-aides said they, “dared not comment” (P4TA1).

Reluctance to become too close to teachers

System conformer TAs were aware of the need to maintain a professional distance from teachers rather than over-step the mark and become too close. Although P1 encouraged collaboration and team teaching, these teacher-aides were convinced role distinctions still needed to be maintained. Teachers depended on teacher-aides because they had

17 “Early childhood training is a great advantage in a P1. We have one who is early childhood trained and one who is junior primary trained. A great mix!” (RTA1).
been thrown into Pl without guidelines and support. Nevertheless, they had more power and status than teacher-aides. Thus, said system conformists, teachers would not tolerate too many suggestions from teacher-aides.

Adopting this response approach required teacher-aides to have special qualities. One was a belief that without their compliance Pl would fail. For example,

I don’t think it (Pl) would be suited to everybody. You’ve got to be an easy going sort of person because sometimes you’ll have prepped (prepared) for an activity and things will get changed and you won’t be able to do it and then you’ve got to change it all around. So it’s not to get upset that you’ve put all this work into an activity that’s going to be shelved for a couple of weeks. Just easy going. Because there’s six of us that work together. We’ve all got to have a pretty good relationship as well. If we all didn’t get on I think it would be awfully difficult. Bit of conflict would cause a big problem. (P5TA2)

System conformists complied with teachers' directions and provided support when necessary. This applied not only to children but also to parents. For example, parents who became resistant to Pl monitored their children’s learning and continually confronted teachers about Pl issues. Teacher-aides who had been at the school for a longer period of time were directed by teachers to support them. One system conformist recalled that, “She (teacher) needs, wants backup, especially when she's talking to parents and if they've got a hairy situation going on” (P4TA1).18

Parents approached teacher-aides for confirmation when teachers were new and lacked confidence. They wanted verification that Pl was of value and not detrimental to their children. Parents were less trusting of teachers than they were of the teacher-aides: “They're asking her and they're coming to me and saying, is this what she's saying really?....Have you looked at that as well?” (P4TA1). System conformist teacher-aides became uncomfortable about having to verify teachers’ views to parents. They were wary of revealing their true thoughts to parents and chose instead to conform to teachers’ wishes.

18 “The principal should back the teacher in a hairy situation” (RTA1).
In non-P1 classes, teacher-aides became less directly involved with parents. For example,

I don’t deal with any parents from other year levels. They know who I am and they may ask me, do you know where something is, do you know where the paper is kept, do you know where the staples kept? (P4TA1)

System conformists complied with the directions of teachers even though they believed in principle that P1 left much to be desired. Their response to their definition of the situation is summed up in this comment: “I’m there to assist the teacher. To do really whatever they want me to do” (P1TA1).

**The expectations of principals and teachers**

System conformists adopted a passive role with regard to the expectations of principals and refrained from approaching them for confirmation of their role. Several teacher-aides commented that:

I think he has some expectations. You’d have to ask him that one. (P5TA3)

I think the expectations he’s got next year, I think we’ve got to do more teaching, like a small group, but I’m not too sure. (P2TA1)

In addition to rarely becoming involved with principals, often system supporters lacked knowledge of teachers’ expectations and were not directly involved in all aspects of the P1 program. In these cases, some teachers were reluctant to pass on responsibility to teacher-aides who were not trained or experienced in this sector as they felt accountable for children’s learning.

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19 “Principals often don’t understand the younger children or the teachers who teach them or the TA’s very well” (RTA1).
PASSIVE DISSENTER TEACHER-AIDES

Teacher-aides who became passive dissenter also defined the P1 situation as a threat to their self-interest and/or student learning. However, they adopted a policy of non-involvement and indifference rather than open opposition. They interacted with significant others on P1 matters only when it was necessary. They became role takers rather than role makers. Overall, they took a 'reactive' rather than 'proactive' approach to P1.

Passive dissenters were dissatisfied with the following four aspects of P1 but were reluctant to speak out publicly and actively oppose them: the increased workload that P1 generated; the negative impact of inappropriate P1 conditions on children's learning; the scheduling of PD sessions on days that teacher-aides were working; and the decreased involvement of parents on P1 roster.20

Increased workload

Passive dissenters were dissatisfied with their increased workload. Unlike non-P1 classes, P1 generated additional work that the teacher-aides found difficult to manage. Instead of programming identical activities for all children, greater input was required to create a variety of lessons and implement them in small groups. As one passive dissenter discovered,

There is a lot more work involved. Pre-primary, I thought, was quite busy until I came into one of these classrooms because it's not even like one age level or three age levels. It's more or less like six levels because you have a pre-primary who is just a very basic pre-primary and a Year two who is quite clever. You've got a huge difference between them. So you are involved a lot more with the children. In a pre-primary situation you're more or less really observing the children and just making sure that they're cutting out OK. So you're just watching them really, whereas you're more involved in what they're doing much more here. (P5TA1)21

20 "Parent Roster – Believe me, our pre-primary roster has been worse than our P1. We encourage parents to stay in the morning till around 11am. I believe the teacher has a lot of impact on the above and what they encourage the person on roster to do" (RTA1).
21 If teachers are working collaboratively and tasks are open ended then prep is no problem. There is no prep for formal writing lessons. Gone are the days when we pre-prepared for children heaps of pre-cuts etc. If it's too hard for them, then check who really needs the activity (RTA1).
In P1, the developmental groups were wider and the number of children the teacher-aides worked with, was often greater. In non-P1 classes one teacher-aide was responsible for assisting in a class of approximately twenty-seven children. In P1 classes, collaborative teaching and reduced teacher-aide time involved three teacher-aides working with, and preparing for, approximately one hundred and twenty children. According to one passive dissenter,

We're prepping (preparing) now for at least seventy in our pre-primaries for morning groups and 120 for our TDP (trialled developmental program – pseudonym) grouping. So that’s a lot of extra prepping to do. (P2TA2)

Passive dissenter teacher-aides claimed that the inability of teachers to fulfil their responsibilities was adding to their workload and impacting on student learning. As teachers struggled to manage their workload, “a lot of that was passed onto the teacher-aide” (P4P1A). Teacher-aides were not paid to take extra work home, neither were they trained to carry the additional responsibilities. However, they felt compassion and sympathy for teachers. Passive dissenters claimed the intensity of work for both teachers and teacher-aides made their work less satisfying and more stressful. They concluded that, “for the teachers…it’s very, very hard work as far as I can see” (P5TA1). They agreed that, “They (teachers) have to do more for sure” (P2TA2). Areas of immense workload were, “all the preparation…the planning” (P3TA1). The added workload was making it difficult to manage. As a result teachers and teacher-aides were unable to effectively cater for all developmental groups and monitor their progress.22

Part of this definition of the situation included the teacher-aides weak bargaining position and insufficient power to influence employers’ decisions. The teacher-aides took the view that their interests were better protected through compliance rather than open opposition. They disguised their true feelings and tolerated P1 by adopting a response approach to issues that emerged. This meant providing only enough input to safeguard

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22 “Mentally monitor the groups. There are ways of grouping and not always have the same children. Sure, keep track of all but monitor more closely those children of concern. One teacher used to do daily notes of all children. The other on those she was concerned about. The latter came out on top” (RTA1).
their jobs and an avoidance of additional tasks. Compared with non-PI classes, the P1 workload was described as,

Very busy! I know when I was in the pre-primary, I used to think I did a lot of work until I came here and I think I do ten times more work. It’s busier and I worked part time before as well, so for the last two years I’m full time. (P5TA1)

I’m doing more work but…it just happens, you do do a lot more work. I mean there’s a lot more cleaning up at the end of the day to do than in a pre-primary situation for a start. (P5TA1)

**P1’s impact on children’s learning**

Passive dissenter teacher-aides defined P1 as a change that negatively impacted on children’s quality of learning. Although they did not focus deeply on issues relating to student learning, their definition of the situation identified three problems generated by P1. First, the difficulty of managing the wider developmental level of children. Second, the exposure of year one children to less formal learning. Third, pre-primary children being pushed too quickly into a more formal learning structure.

According to the passive dissenters the wider developmental level of children in P1 classes magnified the teachers’ workload and made it difficult for teachers to improve student learning. Teachers could not plan one activity for large groups of children, but needed to cater for many diverse groups of children. Passive dissenters attempted to assist teachers but concluded that the wider gap between children was difficult to manage. They needed additional human resources\(^{23}\) to deal with children’s different cognitive, physical, emotional and social needs. The inclusion of several children with special needs into P1 classrooms further widened this gap. More specifically,

The workload is more broken in a P1, whereas in another year level you will have larger groups of children being at the same level as each other. In a P1 the levels are split a lot more...there is a wide gap between the abilities and where they are on the social scale. Also where they are emotionally and that all comes to the full in P1. There is a big gap of abilities. (P4TA1)

\(^{23}\) “Human Resources can be other children and year 1’s. They enjoy helping and it enhances their cognitive, physical, emotional and social needs” (RTA1).
On another matter, passive dissenters claimed that year one children in P1 classes were being unnecessarily exposed to less formal learning than their peers in other year one classes. They said that P1 teachers coped with the additional workload and the diversity of levels within P1 classes by compromising their pedagogy and partially exposing year one children to the informality of pre-primary learning. This strategy made it easier to manage and supervise both groups of children but exposing year one children to more play and less formal learning impacted negatively on their learning. Reductions in teacher-aide time added further difficulty for P1 teachers trying to manage learning for both groups of children. As a result,

Those [are getting a lot more free time and play time and activity time that they wouldn’t get if they were in a straight one class because they don’t do the cooking every day and the craft activities every day and then go out into the playground and play every day. (P3TA1)

On the other hand, said the passive dissenters, P1 pushed pre-primary children too quickly into a more formal learning structure. Some found the initial adjustment difficult to manage.

I feel that the pre-primaries don’t get the time that they need to be on their own in that situation…that is pre-primaries in with Year ones…They’re pushed enough through their life without starting off. I don’t agree with that. (P2TA2)

I don’t think the pre-primary children are given enough activities or time…for their own developmental levels, there’s not enough….which physically can’t be done because you haven’t got the time to do so. These children miss out…and it just goes on and on and on. (P5TA2)

Some children find it hard going from room to room, having different teachers. It’s quite an adjustment. But I feel that because the time’s taken in and it doesn’t happen till term three, they’re given the opportunity to take it slowly. (P2TA2)

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24 “Learning takes place in many ways and many places...Children’s confidence grows when they know they can succeed and then they will try something else – maybe it’s more difficult...In a P1 class children are not pushed but are encouraged to have a go. They will succeed when they are ready to become butterflies. Artificially pushed they may wither and never really blossom. Children are encouraged to feel good about their successes, not worry about their failures and to take charge of their learning. PLAY is learning. Cooking covers so many curriculum areas as can activities or hands on learning and outdoor activities” (RTA1).
Professional development on teaching days

Passive dissenter teacher-aides were critical of the amount of professional support they received. Unlike non-P1 classes, their additional responsibilities in P1 classes made this support imperative. P1 was a change that required professional development and guidance. Although some PD was available, teacher-aides were unable to access it due to work commitments. They were puzzled that PD should be scheduled at times when teacher-aides were working. They expected employers would make alternative provisions.\textsuperscript{25} Relief personnel could have replaced them or alternative PD sessions run. For some of them,

Our only problem is our PD days because of having the Wednesdays off when most of the area has the Friday off, so it seems unfortunate that we are not able to get to many of their meetings and they don't seem to want to change the situation. (P2TA2)

Evidently, an overwhelming majority of teacher-aides in government schools had not attended any PD for this reason. PD sessions were not specific to P1 and were accessible by all early childhood teachers. Independent schools organised PD on days teacher-aides could attend. Passive dissenters frequently commented that, "I haven't gone to an inservice on P1's" (P3TA1).

For passive dissenters, PD sessions were important in, "just knowing which way to go with the P1 class because there wasn't very much help for anyone in setting up and getting it going" (P1TA1). They believed their attendance at PD sessions was particularly imperative when teachers held no background in the pre-primary component of P1 and were dependent on their teacher-aides.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25} "PD is offered twice on the same topic in our district to cover the Wednesday/Friday problem. Having been a TA for 14 years I have worked where pres came 5 days and I was given ½ day relief for prep. I have worked pre-primary where we had Friday off and where we had Wednesday off. Then in a P1 where the pres don't come on a Wednesday. For this age group the latter is perfect. It also gives the 1's the day to themselves" (RTA1).

\textsuperscript{26} There are schools actively doing P1 and visits can be arranged (RTA1).
Reluctance of parents to participate on P1 roster

Another problem identified by passive dissenters was that while parents of children in pre-primary classes are allowed to come on parent roster, they cannot do so in P1 classes because they include year one children. Reportedly, some principals and teachers view younger siblings as a distraction to year one children. One passive dissenter compared a pre-primary class to a P1 class in these terms:

The other situation was where I was before, they were allowed to bring their little ones. So even though it was hard sometimes because the little ones would create havoc, at least you had the parents that would be happy to come and help, whereas here they’re not allowed to bring siblings and it makes it difficult for babysitters because some of them obviously can’t afford to pay. (P2TA2)

Allegedly, this impacted on teacher/parent interaction and destroyed the strong links that existed between parents, pre-primary teachers and teacher-aides. “Before, because we had so many parents on roster, I had wonderful interaction with the parents there” (P2TA2).

P1 was further criticised by passive dissenters for creating restrictions that parents opposed. This damaged parent school relationships because parents, “are so worried (about P1) that they take it outside the school” (P4P1A), they communicated their opposition to other community members.

ACTIVE OPPONENT TEACHER-AIDES

Active opponent teacher-aides were critical of the way in which certain aspects of P1 were implemented. However, they did not advocate for P1 to be dismantled nor resist its inclusion. The impact of student outcomes did not concern them because they saw this as an area of responsibility that belonged entirely to teachers.\(^{27}\) What, they did oppose were two aspects of the way P1 was implemented, which they believed could impact on

\(^{27}\) "Not entirely. If the TA is supporting the teaching by the teacher then they must feel some responsibility towards the outcome" (RTA1).
their job security and job satisfaction, namely, the re-deployment of cleaners as teacher-aides and the proposed reduction of teacher-aide time.

The re-deployment of cleaners into P1 teacher-aide positions

Active opponents strongly objected to the transfer of re-deployed cleaners as P1 teacher-aides and advocated that this policy be abandoned. They claimed that a theoretical background in child development was now required to fulfil the responsibilities of their work. For them, the teacher-aide's roles in P1 classes was not to be a cleaner but a ‘surrogate’ teacher. Re-deployed cleaners were seen not only a threat to job security but also a hindrance to teachers’ abilities to provide quality learning experiences for children.28

Active opponents were critical of the teacher-aide selection process in government schools, but supportive of the independent school process. In particular, they were critical of government school principals being forced to accept re-deployed cleaners, while independent school principals could select their own teacher-aides on the basis of the completion, or near completion, of a child development course. EDWA claimed that qualifications and experience were not necessary criteria for teacher-aides. This angered active opponents who felt threatened by the growing number of redeployed cleaners appointed to P1 positions. Of the three government schools in this study, two were sent redeployed cleaners as teacher-aides.

Active opponents became increasingly critical of the conditions EDWA placed on existing staff and its disinterest in monitoring changes such as P1. For example:

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28 "This area was a hot potato when school cleaning was contracted out. In 1997 I trained a re-deployee and was given a small amount of time to do so. Otherwise she became my shadow. She is now successfully employed as a pre-primary TA. Of three others who have just come in to be extra TA’s, one resigned two weeks after being placed in a center. The other two are still extra TA’s, but in my opinion will never be successful. The menial tasks they are OK at and prefer to do. Small group work, contributing ideas, holding discussions with children, assisting with writing etc – NO! They are very difficult to understand and can’t spell – even four letter words. It is not their fault they are where they are, but the Department should be more realistic about what is required to be a TA – not have their heads in the sand…most would never cope in a P1, but then not in pre-primary or junior primary either” (RTA1)."
The Education Department as such don't seem to get really involved in who's doing what. They don't have the interest or don't seem to have an interest in which school's are doing what and continuing on to see how they're going. (P2TA2)

Active opponent teacher-aides saw EDWA policy as a direct threat to their job security. They further questioned the credibility of a policy that rejected the need for early childhood assistant qualifications and experience. When their inquiries confirmed this was not a school-based decision but a mandatory directive from Central Office, they became increasingly critical of EDWA.

Government school principals were given little option but to accept re-deployed cleaners into their schools. Active opponents recalled incidences, in which they were interviewed, accepted and rejected for jobs in other schools. Principals apologetically notified them that they could not honor their agreement because a re-deployed cleaner had been sent to the school. The active opponents were sympathetic towards principals but actively opposed to EDWA's policy. They publically criticised this policy in the hope that it would be abandoned. In the meantime, they accepted employment positions in P1 classes because there was no longer a guarantee that pre-primary teacher-aide positions would become available. Under different circumstances most would not have accepted P1 positions because they were not advocates of MAG.

Active opponents also complained that this policy was not only affecting job security but also lowering their status in the eyes of parents. For example,

Some of them think we're just here to be the cleaners. Unfortunately I think that's a role that parents don't understand. What teacher-aides do and I also think sometimes the Education Department feels that's what we are too. (P2TA2)

The proposed reduction of teacher-aide time

During the period of data collection, EDWA stipulated that in 1998 teacher-aide assistance would be reduced. Reductions would only apply to P1 composite classes, not pre-primary year levels. The rationale behind this decision was that P1 classes did not
require full-time assistants because they included smaller numbers of pre-primary children. Principals were informed that, in future, children who attended PI composite classes would be provided with 0.2 teacher-aide time if there were between two and seven pre-primary children in the class or 0.5 teacher-aide time if there were between eight and fourteen pre-primary children in the class. EDWA re-iterated that this ruling only applied to PI classes, not pre-primary classes. 29

Active opponent teacher-aides claimed that EDWA’s decision to reduce teacher-aide time would impact on their job security and substantially reduce their income. They argued that teachers were barely coping and would find it difficult to run an integrated program without supervisory assistance. Indeed, “There would be lots of disadvantages because prees need constant playground supervision. They just need someone around them all the time, which is impossible with one teacher in the classroom” (PITA1).

Active opponents saw this as yet another example of a government policy that was more concerned with economic imperatives than educational advantage. They warned this policy would disadvantage children and intensify the heavy workload that teachers were presently experiencing. Several teacher-aides reflected on the situation in these terms:

The workload involved is so great that the teachers don’t have time to get to every child and help them. They do journal writing or something and the kids are trying to write – you can’t read it – but to get round and help each child, I just think that they need an extra pair of hands. I can’t believe that...they need an extra adult to be able to float around and help. It’s just going to be an extra workload for the teachers that they can’t cope with. (P3TA1)

I just feel that the pre-primary children that are put into that situation will be disadvantaged because they will be expected to be coping with what the Year 1 situation children are doing and they won’t be able to do that right from the beginning. (P2TA2)

Active opponent teacher-aides predicted that teachers would have little choice but to compromise the kind of instruction they were able to provide for children. They would

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29 "A full time pre-primary receives 0.9 aide time. If the TA is permanent and working 1.0 she is supposed to work 0.1 somewhere else. When she resigns, the allocation will go back to 0.9 – 25-27 children. In MAG, 8-14 children receive 0.5. There is also an allocation of aide time for the 1ls in that class. Adjustments can normally be done so that the one aide does the lot – easier on children and staff. For me it is 2 classes of P1, 0.5 each. The junior primary aide will come in for the time allocation for the 1’s but, she does not have to only work with 1’s” (RTA1).
be unable to provide direct instruction and would revert to inappropriate practices. As one of them said,

I think the pre-primary children would end up just being babysat, left to have free play or the Year 1’s wouldn’t be given the basics for starting off their schooling. (P5TA2)

Another concern was that further reductions in teacher-aide time would spark parent resistance. Parents were aware that if their pre-primary children attended pre-primary classes they were able to access full-time teacher-aide assistance. In P1 classes this would not be available and would be seen to disadvantage their pre-primary children. Active opponents had personally witnessed how parent resistance to reduced teacher-aide time for P1 classes had forced schools to immediately reverse their decision. In one school, “aide time increased this year because of parents” (P4P1A). However, the reversal came at a cost. The principal had little option but to re-allocate primary school teacher-aides to P1 classes to pacify parents, and this disadvantaged primary school children because they lost part of their teacher-aide time. More specifically,

The workload for teachers would be greater. Also if there is a smaller group of pre-primary children to a larger group of year one the expectations of parents would be higher for the pre-primary and this would be difficult for the teacher. So any reassurance that teacher was given that they were at the right stage of their development I think it would be harder for the teacher to do this. (P4P1A)

Active opponent teacher-aides raised strong concerns for duty of care. Their views were supported by the SSTUWA who opposed the move to decrease teacher-aide assistance time in P1 classes. By rejecting P1 and assisting in a pre-primary class they were able to secure longer working hours and better conditions. They perceived P1 to be inadequately managed and a threat to their self-interest and student learning.

30 "A developmental program with open-ended tasks so that all may have a go and the staff as a catalyst should mean teachers would not revert to inappropriate practices" (RTA1).

31 "If we are to survive we must encourage children to be involved in their own learning. Self-discipline. May be not as much molly-coddling and more peer tutoring is the way of the future" (RTA1).
CONCLUSION

Principals, teachers and teacher-aides’ definitions of the P1 situation contained some similarities and differences. Their responses to P1 were determined by their definitions of the situation. For example, school staff who defined P1 in a more positive way tended to become system supporters. Those who defined P1 more negatively adopted a less positive stance than did active opponents, passive dissenters and system conformers.

The findings reported in this chapter show that different teacher-aides responded in different ways to specific aspects of P1 as a result of different definitions of the P1 situation. This is illustrated for example, through the teacher-aides’ definition and construction of a stance towards their additional P1 responsibilities. Teacher-aides’ responses to this issue ranged from system supporters, system conformists through to passive dissenters. There were no instances in which additional P1 responsibilities led to active opposition. For example, teacher-aides who were motivated and challenged by their new expanded role became system supporters. They enjoyed their newfound responsibilities in the construction and implementation of curriculum, their involvement in student assessment and enhancement as surrogate teachers. Therefore they defined P1 as enhancing their self-interests resulting in their adoption of a more positive stance towards P1 as system supporters.

However, some teacher-aides defined their additional P1 responsibilities in less positive terms than system supporters. In their opinion, the role of teacher-aides was to assist teachers, not act as substitute teachers. They believed their added responsibilities were inappropriate because they held no academic qualifications or practical experience in P1, neither did they get equal pay, nor had they attended PD sessions specific to P1. They were angered by the fact that teachers spent minimal time interacting with pre-primary children and with teacher-aides and that teachers placed greater importance on year one because it was compulsory, rather than on pre-primary that was considered non-compulsory. This dissatisfaction stopped them from adopting a more positive stance. They were also wary of disclosing their views and practices to others, preferring instead
to comply with the directions of teachers and become system conformists. To them, defiance was a risk in terms of job security and self-interest.

There were however, teacher-aides who adopted a more negative stance and became passive dissenters. In their opinion, P1 had generated additional workloads that were difficult to manage. In fact, teachers’ inability to fulfil their responsibilities was adding to their workload, making their work less satisfying and more stressful. They believed they were in a weak bargaining position to make a difference, stating they held insufficient power to influence employers’ decisions. Therefore, they disguised their feelings and adopted a policy of non-involvement and indifference rather than open opposition. The more dissatisfied they were with their definition of the situation, the less likely they were to adopt a pro-active positive stance towards P1. The more satisfied they were with their definition of the situation, the more likely they were to adopt a positive stance towards P1.

Teacher-aides continually re-defined their situation and constructed different modes of accommodation towards P1 as they interacted with significant others and reflected on changes to their work contexts. (See Figure 8).

**Figure 8 Teacher-aides' stance on P1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complete Acceptance</th>
<th>Partial Rejection/Acceptance</th>
<th>Complete Rejection</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X---------------------</td>
<td>X-----------------------------</td>
<td>X---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Supporter</td>
<td>System Conformist</td>
<td>Passive Dissenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(promotor)</td>
<td>(complier)</td>
<td>(withdrawer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Active Opponent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The stance they constructed was not restricted to one specific area of the continuum. For example, one teacher-aide experienced a greater sense of professional worth when directed to provide greater input into the pre-primary component of P1. She became a system supporter because P1 enhanced her self-interests. However, throughout the change process there were instances in which this teacher-aide re-defined P1 and altered
her stance. For example, she began to disapprove of the way in which PI classes had been constructed, thus reflecting support for a return to the old system. This change was based on the belief that pre-primary children were educationally disadvantaged in PI classes. The teacher-aides’ stance here became that of system conformer. However, as her work in PI progressed, she expressed the belief that teachers were compromising their pedagogy and pushing pre-primary children too quickly into more formal learning structures. This new definition of PI pushed this teacher-aide towards a more passive dissenter stance. The teacher-aide adopted a policy of non-involvement becoming involved only when necessary. However, as the school year progressed, this teacher-aide adopted a more actively oppositional stance in response to government policy and EDWA’s reduction of teacher-aide time for PI classes. Actively opposing this change in the school workplace was not perceived as a threat to self-interest and job security because this was the shared view of most if not all staff at the school. Therefore, an active stance towards PI was not a threat to self-interest.

Self-interest was of primary importance to teacher-aides and became a powerful ingredient that influenced the way they defined PI. Educational ideology emerged as secondary to self-interest. The reasons why teacher-aides’ defined the PI situation in somewhat different ways to principals’ and teachers’ can be understood in context. Each of the three groups hold different PI responsibilities. Principals are responsible for the total management of schools of which PI is a small sector. Teachers are responsible for developing, implementing and assessing the PI curriculum. Teacher-aides are responsible for following the directions of teachers and principals. At times, some teacher-aides are given responsibility for PI curriculum development, implementation or assessment; however, this is left to the discretion of teachers. Teacher-aides’ definition of the situation is therefore driven more by the need to safeguard their self-interests than by educational beliefs. Their primary concern is job security. Unlike some teachers who gain security from their permanent status, teacher-aides have temporary status.
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CLOSING CONSIDERATIONS

INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the stance of school staff towards P1. It is based on the assumption that the conceptual and behavioral positions developed by school staff are critical to the change process; that school staff are indispensable agents of change, capable at will of enhancing or obstructing the success of P1. The early childhood teaching profession was excluded from the decision-making process that set up P1. Yet, currently, school staff are required to implement P1, despite concerns that government administration and curriculum expertise have not kept always pace with their professional needs.

Symbolic interaction theory was selected as the basis of this study, because of its primary concern with the 'self' and the interpretative and interactive process within the social system. This theory views the 'self' as the core of human behavior, the pivot point from which behaviors, judgements and goals are constructed. According to symbolic interactionism, individuals are proactive, in control of their lives, responsible for their actions and a critical part of any change process (van den Hoonnaard, 1997, Wood, 1982). Symbolic interaction theory also embraces the diversity of human nature and the impact of multiple voices and perspectives. The multiple voices in this study are those of principals, teachers and teacher-aides. Their perspectives are critical because they can act as agents of early childhood change and serve as representatives of the early childhood profession.
OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

An overall finding of the study is that most principals, teachers and teacher-aides lean towards opposing Pl in its present form. However, school staff did not say Pl has no future, but they did express a view that the success of Pl is conditional on the presence of certain factors. These include: the need for educational leadership, appropriately trained staff, the resolution of philosophical differences, the construction of Pl curriculum, the provision of quality support structures and the enhancement of school and community relationships.

In addition to the dominant staff view outlined above, two strong minority views emerged from the study. One view is supportive of Pl, endorsing its continuation in its current form. Advocates of this view claim that Pl enables them to become role makers, which they saw as enhancing their self-interest and student learning. In contrast, the second minority view calls for the abandonment of Pl. Opponents of Pl say they are not convinced of its educational value and express concern that children are disadvantaged in Pl classes. They reject the belief that MAG strategies can only be included in vertical groupings, claiming that these strategies can be equally effective in horizontal groupings, where a more manageable developmental age span exists.

The study found that while commonalities exist, the meanings school staff place on Pl also differ. School staff see themselves as having varying degrees of power within their different definitions of the situation. The pressures they are subjected to force them to re-evaluate their definitions of the situation and focus on the projected costs and benefits to themselves (self-interest) and others (educational ideology). Chapters four to nine document the stance taken by principals, teachers and teachers aides towards Pl in isolation from each other. The following account focuses on the stance of school staff in relation to each other.
School staffs definition of the situation: Self-interest

Job success

For principals, PI had more impact on job success than job security, job satisfaction and job status, unlike most teachers and teacher-aides, who conceded that PI made no difference. Principals and teachers claimed that PI enabled them to show employers they are innovative. Teacher-aides, on the other hand, were more intrinsically motivated by the additional teaching responsibilities that PI provided. Some principals claimed the impact of PI on job success was less than positive. They found a few aspects of PI to be innovative and challenging, but generally, barriers loomed large in the principals’ thinking. For example, they said that school staff lacked specialised knowledge in PI, which in turn created educational leadership dilemmas. PI came with no explicit basis on which curriculum could be built, thereby increasing their chances of failure. There was a lack of external and internal support structures, also support for MAG was withdrawn after the trial period ended. The recruitment of re-deployed cleaners as PI teacher-aides, at times created staff disharmony and resistance.

Amongst teachers there was a minority view that PI created conditions that made their work more difficult and threatened their success. For example, teachers cited inappropriate human resources, such as redeployed cleaners who at some stage became a hindrance to job success. Teacher-aides, however, were more concerned with the principals’ and teachers’ lack of direction and their failure to disclose their expectations clearly.

According to most teachers, PI made no difference to job success because it contained no compulsory curriculum, guidelines or pre-set outcomes pre-primary children had to achieve. Unlike year one, pre-primary was a “non-compulsory” year of learning. Accountability was difficult to implement because there were no ‘PI experts’ or educational leaders in schools who could appraise or evaluate teachers to assess whether PI was educationally successful.
Job security

The need to retain job security was particularly prevalent amongst principals and teacher-aides. Most principals indicated concern about the ultimate impact of P1 on their schools. To them, P1 had the potential to increase student numbers and, in some instances, prevent school closures. Principals were content in their school, did not want a transfer or wish to see their school closed because of decreasing student numbers. In several instances job security was threatened when parents became resistant towards P1 classes, and in one case, forced it to be abandoned. Unlike principals and teachers, most teacher-aides expressed dissatisfaction with P1’s impact on work hours. Previously, they had been employed in pre-primary classes for 0.9 time allocation. Although some had retained these hours, they were aware that the time allocation for P1 was substantially lower than for a pre-primary class. Therefore, they feared that decreasing pre-primary numbers would deprive them of full-time work and reduce their income. A minority of temporary and non-permanent teachers feared that refusing P1 would result in an unwanted transfer.

Unlike principals and teacher-aides, most teachers were not concerned about job security as P1 constituted no threat to their employment. These teachers were permanent, close to retirement, or at times so dissatisfied with P1 that they were prepared to take positions as relief teachers rather than continue as P1 teachers. They believed few colleagues would compete with them or wish to teach P1 classes. In their view, principals would find difficulty recruiting teachers to work in P1 classes, so they were always guaranteed of another P1 job.

Job satisfaction

The majority of school staff reported that P1 had at some stage increased and complicated their workload and impacted on job satisfaction. Role overload and the need to learn new knowledge and skills were common responses. Some principals believed P1 accelerated philosophical differences between the early childhood and primary education sectors. In their opinion, teachers found it difficult to construct curriculum appropriate for both year levels, which made the principals’ work more
stressful and increased the number of grievances they needed to manage. Accessing additional money to cater for PI needs intensified principals’ burden.

Most teachers agreed with principals’ observations on philosophical differences. They experienced problems reaching consensus on an appropriate PI curriculum, collaboratively programming and reconceptualizing and reinventing teaching practice. The early childhood teachers tended to use developmental domains rather than subject areas, which challenged formalising curriculum in PI settings. Furthermore, they remained unconvinced of the value of PI and spent considerable time trying to justify their own teaching position to themselves and others.

Some teacher-aides also reported increased workload and reduced job satisfaction. They were allocated greater responsibilities in PI than in non-PI classes and directed to spend most of their time with pre-primary children. For example, in a pre-primary class, one teacher-aide would assist the teacher, with a group of approximately twenty-seven children. However, in one school with PI groupings, three teacher-aides prepared for and worked with as many as one hundred and twenty children, making the ratio of staff to children much higher. According to teacher-aides, PI placed unrealistic demands on teachers who were ill prepared for this change. Teachers were not provided with curriculum guidelines and lacked appropriate knowledge and experience. To cope with PI, they sought additional assistance from teacher-aides.

On the supportive side, some principals reported that PI increased job satisfaction. For them, PI removed the physical isolation that previously existed in off-site pre-primary centers. PI enabled them to select their own staff, thereby minimizing existing differences between early childhood and primary sectors of schooling. PI inspired staff by making teaching interesting, challenging, collaborative and better resourced.

A minority of teachers agreed with the principals. For them, PI made teaching interesting, challenging, collaborative, and less isolated. They found that PI enabled them to work with the same group of children for over a year and provided one day a week to instruct year one children without pre-primary children present. For them,
P1 provided greater human and material resources than other year levels. Furthermore, it decreased their workload because P1 curriculum was duplicated, shared and followed systematically amongst teachers. This reduced work overload and stress and for these reasons P1 improved their job satisfaction. Some teacher-aides were proactive towards P1 because they enjoyed direct involvement in curriculum development, were entrusted with responsibility for student assessment and served as surrogate teachers.

*Job status*

Most principals could not cite any instances in which P1 became an impediment to their job status, and a few claimed that P1 provided an opportunity for educational leadership. Their schools became examples of best practice and a source of professional development for staff in other schools. In the eyes of most teachers, however, P1 lowered job status and attracted sympathy, amazement or disapproval. Some were verbally labelled ‘crazy’ or ‘mad’. At teacher network meetings, inservice sessions and conferences, colleagues asked them how they could justify their involvement in P1. A few teachers saw P1 as increasing job status because of the higher value accorded to teaching year one children and because P1 was new and innovative. Teacher-aides generally claimed that P1 enhanced their job status because it transformed them into ‘surrogate’ teachers. They felt more equal with teachers because they were part of the planning process and directly involved in instructing and assessing children. P1 made their work tasks no longer menial and it helped them develop a greater sense of professional worth.

*School staff definitions of the situation: Educational ideology*

*School development*

A majority of school staff claimed that P1 strengthened school development. For example, principals with sufficient power selected teachers who supported the school philosophy. Collaboration replaced isolation, as decisions were jointly constructed in keeping with school philosophy. This promoted a harmonious school environment and united the early childhood and primary sectors. Ironically, compassion bonded
school staff together. Colleagues sympathised with P1 staff because they had been given little if any support or guidance to run P1, which was seen as different and more difficult than other split primary classes.

A few school staff claimed P1 was an impediment to school development because they saw it as creating staff resistance and disharmony and altering school cultures. They said that P1 collaborative teams, rather than being harmonious, were made up of contrasting beliefs on how young children learn. Philosophically, pre-primary and year one comprised two very different constructions. Principals, who lacked sufficient power, could not select their own staff. Of particular concern were upper school staff, who were seen as generally non-supportive of P1 and as perceiving it to be a threat to their own interests and those of the school. They feared that MAG would spread to other year levels engulfing them in the change process.

*Teacher development*

Most principals and teachers regarded external and internal supports as inadequate for teacher development. They referred to lack of induction courses, PD, university courses, written guidelines or inservices pertinent to P1. They also pointed to other problems. For example, even in trial MAG schools assistance was withdrawn when the trial period concluded. When external advice did arrive it was late. Structuring internal support was unrealistic because some principals and teachers had no knowledge or background in P1, which made the absence of educational leadership a critical issue. Neither did they have an understanding of both elements of P1 (pre-primary and year one) that is necessary for translating new theories of learning into effective educational experiences for children. Without guidance they found it difficult to reconceptualize and reinvent the nature of their teaching practice.

Some staff remained supportive of P1 and the opportunities it offered to improve teacher development and student learning. In their P1 work contexts, they were provided with specialised knowledge and experience through external and internal supports. Principals or school administrative teams assisted or advised them. A small minority of teachers claimed that inservicing and district officer assistance had been of value. School staff from trial P1 MAG schools defined P1 in more positive
terms, until the trial period ended and support was minimised or removed. During the trial period, these teachers had access to adequate external support structures. MAG philosophy and guidelines were clearly articulated for staff and external advisers visited schools to advise staff. In one instance an external adviser was permanently based at a trial school. For these school staff, inservices and conferences were accessible. Some teacher-aides stated that inservices and PD days had been excellent.

Curriculum development

An overwhelming number of school staff defined some aspect of P1 curriculum development as a threat to student learning. Generally, principals were hesitant to discuss P1 curriculum issues in depth, acknowledging this as an area in which they held little expertise. However, more than half of principals expressed concern that the P1 curriculum lacked sufficient guidelines, resources and environmental conditions. A majority of teachers shared the principals’ reservations. They also worried about the philosophical differences between both fields and the belief, that as teachers, they were more accountable for year one learning than pre-primary and the difficulties in assessing the children’s learning. In their view, pre-primary children were disadvantaged because they attended less days than year one children, making continuity of learning difficult and unrealistic.

At times some teachers reported they were content with their programs, yet observations and in-depth questioning showed that programmes could be described as developmentally inappropriate for pre-primary children (NAEYC, 1991). In these classrooms, pre-primary children were expected to sit attentively in large groups as year one programs were presented to all children. In most instances, children were then directed to their desks where pre-primary children were given modified worksheets. Child-initiated learning was infrequent because it was difficult for teachers to manage a constructivist approach under P1 conditions. This finding is aligned with those of British studies in the 1980s where similar curriculum concerns were raised (Bennett & Kell, 1990; Cleave & Brown, 1992; Sharp, 1988). Although trial and error approaches were being implemented, in the majority of instances teachers reverted to more formal primary approaches and compensatory strategies,
such as shared teaching and amalgamation of children into large groups. These practices emerged as a result of an absence of leadership and monitoring of the implementation of PI classes. Teachers had to work very hard to construct appropriate PI curricula due to lack of guidelines and adequate support. So difficult was this task, that a few reported the need for PI curricula to be constructed by early childhood specialists, not classroom teachers. The teachers' difficulties with appropriate early childhood curricula, are not surprising, considering that eleven of the fifteen PI teachers were primary trained with no academic background or experience in early childhood education.

Interestingly, in the PI work context, there was strong solidarity amongst early childhood and primary trained teachers to support the adoption of developmentally appropriate programs, rather than use formal academically-orientated programs and curriculum-focused pedagogy. Primary trained teachers, who advocated traditional primary philosophy for year one children, agreed that this style was inappropriate for pre-primary children. More problematic was the reality that most schools and parents endorsed a traditional philosophy for primary children and an early childhood philosophy for pre-primary. Problems emerged in combining both approaches. Duplication of programs amongst PI classes was considered inappropriate because early childhood practice supports programs based on individual children's needs, which differ according to individual development, culture and context. Some teacher-aides also reflected dissatisfaction with the amount of time pre-primary children sat with year one children on the mat and were exposed to the same content as year one children. Furthermore, they stated that early childhood trained teachers should be teaching P1 classes and blamed their absence for the inappropriate strategies that were being used with pre-primary children. A lack of direction or guidance further magnified existing problems.

Some school staff noted that P1 enhanced curriculum development and improved student learning. These staff said that P1 enabled the pace of the curriculum to be varied, created flexibility and generated less pressure to produce outcomes within the one year. Children worked collaboratively with each other, participating in peer tutoring and enhancing their social skills. Teacher collaboration reduced workloads by sharing them amongst school team members.
Community development

Most principals and teachers reported that PI has the capacity to impede community development in some way. Mistrust and suspicion surrounded PI. Most parents defined it as economically rather than educationally driven. Community/school relationships became strained when parents demanded written proof and documentation that PI improves student learning. Staff could not produce written documentation for parents and some found it difficult to project a confident stance. As a result, parents pre-set ideas on how young children should learn could not be altered. Parent expectations differed and were difficult to accommodate. One principal in a final attempt to pacify parents approached them by pleading for some order. In written form, the principal told parents, that the PI teacher had been immersed in a range of contradictory requests, which could not be implemented in one classroom. PI even failed to convince some parents who were true MAG believers and had sent their children to school for a MAG education. They opposed PI on the basis that early childhood and primary philosophy were too diverse to be amalgamated. Parent and community resistance in these instances was a threat to school/community relationships.

Some school staff maintained that PI had no impact on community development. Although, there were initial concerns from some parents, these were removed through parent meetings and interviews. Some teacher-aides indicated that parents were satisfied when the whole school team worked together.

School staff responses to their definition of the situation

Principals, teachers and teacher-aides constructed their definition of the PI situation on the basis of self-interest and educational ideology. There were clear conceptual links between school staff definitions of the situation and their response. The more positive their definition of the PI situation, the more they adopted a supportive stance. The more dissatisfied they were, the more they adopted an oppositional stance. In between these extremes were the passive dissenters and pragmatists. The passive dissenters quietly withdrew and predicted that PI would soon disappear. The pragmatists tried to negotiate for better conditions. Teacher-aides were the only
group who became system conformers and did not adopt a pragmatic stance. They became dissenters in principle but capitulated and complied in practice. As such, they opposed Pl in principle, but were reluctant to disclose their feelings in practice. They believed self-interest was better served by compliance because they lacked the bargaining powers and resources to oppose P1.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings of this study have implications for the following three options with regard to the future of P1: that P1 continue in its current state; that P1 be dismantled and abandoned; that P1 incorporate the conditions that staff consider to be imperative for its future success.

The continuation of P1 in its current state

For P1 to continue in its existing state, policymakers and change managers would need to persuade school staff that negative definitions of the P1 situation are based on misconceptions or delusions. They would need to prove to staff that P1 was a change with which they should be able to cope. In so doing, “teachers’ difficulties in putting the theory into practice would be ascribed to individual deficit, and this would protect the theory from change” (Corrie, 1995, p. 2).

Symbolic interactionists however, would be doubtful of the success of such strategies. At the heart of symbolic interaction theory is the belief that humans do not respond to stimuli but act towards things (e.g., people, material objects, institutions) on the basis of the meanings they have for them (Waller, 1932; Wood, 1982). Although constructed through interactions with others, their meanings are therefore personal, not controlled by society. Ultimately, individuals determine what is considered significant, reflect on past experiences and link these to their cognitive and value systems (Wood, 1982). The meaning they attach to P1, their interpretation of this change, the way they symbolise and construct it as their reality, are the pivot point from which behaviors are constructed (van den Hoonaaard, 1997). Their self-concept, personality traits, priorities, needs, goals, knowledge, skills, experiences,
values and beliefs impact on the ‘self’ and their definition of the situation. Although the self, significant others, time, place, culture and structure are vital components of a ‘situation’ they only exist if school staff indicate to themselves that they are important (Blumer, 1969). School staff may select to ignore these in favor of their own perceived needs and those of children (Hewitt & Hewitt, 1986; Scott, 1995; Woods, 1996).

The conduct of school staff is ‘situated’ in their workplace and conditions of employment and best understood in this context. Most staff who defined Pl as positive were in schools where there was some kind of leadership, guidance, support structures and/or resources. Those who associated Pl with the lack of training, leadership, guidance, support, resources and/or choice tended to be less supportive of it. Within these two extremes were school staff who remained opposed to Pl on educational ideology grounds, despite the provision of appropriate conditions. Policymakers seeking endorsement for the continuation of Pl would have to persuade staff that Pl does not impede self-interest and student learning. Symbolic interactionists would argue that altering the position that school staff develop on Pl would be difficult, especially if they were to interpret this change as, “the rhetoric of theorists who may not have shown adequate links between theory and substantive practice and ‘who fail to take account of the voices of practitioners’” (Corrie, 1995, p. 2).

**Dismantling and abandoning P1**

Various sectors of the community are currently asking WA policymakers to justify P1 classes. Without comprehensive evaluations of P1 theory, policymakers may find it difficult to convince stakeholders that P1 will benefit staff and students. Although, there is support for multi-age groupings in the literature, their origins are primarily pedagogical rather than administrative or economic (Veenman, 1995). Sundell (1994b), for example, reminds practitioners of the dangers of inadequate evaluations prior to implementation and “instructional recommendations based on untested theories and extrapolations from personal experiences” (p. 390). Calls for evaluations prior to changes being implemented in work contexts are evident in the literature. The Senate Inquiry into Early Childhood Education in Australia, (1996)
prioritised the need for thorough evaluations of mixed-age groupings and called for an examination of its effects on teachers and its implications for support, resources and training.

In WA, on hearing that P1 would be introduced, the early childhood profession called for an evaluation. Tite (1995) reflected the concern here by saying, “little documentation (exists) which can tell us whether pre-primary children (in P1 classes) are getting the same quality education as they do in a straight pre-primary…or that year ones are being extended to their full potential” (p. 9). According to some WA politicians, P1 classes have been of value to children in South Australia. However, as Corrie (1998) points out, children entering P1 classes in WA are four years of age, unlike South Australia where they are five: “Policy makers in South Australia say that our P/1 classes are not equivalent to their MAG classes, but actually like K-1 classes, which they thought was unworkable and not in children’s best interests” (p. 11). Eastern states early childhood specialists, who reflected on these matters, confirmed Tite and Corrie’s observations. For P1 to be meaningful to stakeholders, changes must be informed by good theory, based on solid empirical evidence, focused on actual needs and carefully monitored (Walsh, 1989). If policy makers cannot provide documented evidence on P1s benefits, then they may need to have the P1 strategy dismantled.

Reforming P1

Rather than abandon P1, policymakers could explore the option of altering its current form in the light of the conceptual and behavioural positions taken by school staff. By incorporating changes to P1 recommended by school staff, policymakers would show they are not perpetuating the notion that, “existing knowledge and expertise of teachers is often ignored…and that teachers remain subservient to policy-makers and under tight government control” (Zeichner, 1993, cited by Corrie, 1995, p. 1). Policymakers pursuing this option would be in line with advocates in Britain who decided that,

LEAs must now begin to debate the issue of the four year old in school more urgently, and attempt to throw off the mantle of ambivalence and seeming indifference. If a decision is made to continue the system then it needs appropriate
resourcing, including adequate capitation, ancillary assistance and training. Too often, it would seem, political rhetoric hides classroom realities, and teachers are sacrificed to economic expediency. (Bennett & Kell, 1990, p. 88)

In order to respond to school staff positions on Pl, policy makers would need to examine issues pertaining to: leadership, staff, philosophy, curriculum, support structures, school and community relationships and community development/community capacity building.

Educational leadership

Leadership and capacity building are crucial components of managing changes such as Pl and they involve sensing the need for change, envisioning the future and enacting or transforming visions into reality (Elliott-Kemp & Elliott-Kemp, 1992; Lambert, 1998). Quality leadership determines the way school staff experience change (Katz, 1994). Leadership impacts on program quality, which is linked to effective leadership (Rodd, 1996). When staff lack the necessary training to perform their set tasks, the need for leadership is further magnified and prioritised.

The principal occupies a position of primary influence in determining school quality especially when new changes such as Pl are being implemented into schools. The Schools Council Papers (1992), which focus specifically on the Early Years, recognise the need for principals to be “dynamic educational leaders.” A sound understanding of the content and structure of curriculum for pre-primary and primary children is vital in ensuring quality educational leadership and success within schools (Caruso, 1989; Johnson & Snyder, 1986; Lyons, Hildebrandt, Johnson & Holdaway, 1987; McCormack-Larkin, 1985; Sergiovanni, 1984; Smith & Andrews, 1989; The Schools Council Papers, 1992). Indeed, “the most potential source of help or hindrance to the teacher is the school principal” (Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991, p. 143).

In WA, government school principals are, “responsible for working with their teachers and community to ensure that the curriculum offered is appropriate, relevant and balanced” (EDWA, 1997, p. 10). Principal leadership applies particularly to changes such as Pl. However, the findings of this study indicate that the provision
of educational leadership for P1 may still be as problematic now as it was in the past when principals reported early childhood leadership dilemmas (Stamopoulos, 1995).

Six years ago, a WA study (Stamopoulos, 1995) found that the majority of principals felt inadequate in dealing with pre-primary educational issues. A high number of principals (shown in percentage) responded “unsure”, “poor” or “very poor” in the following areas: diagnosing educational problems (66%), providing advice and support in curriculum development and implementation (62%), supervising of teachers (58%) and appraising and evaluating of pre-primary teachers (46%). The 1995 study concluded that most principals did not hold a sound understanding of the content and structure of the curriculum for pre-primary education. The majority of principals prioritised the need to mandate pre-primary training for principals, provide sets of materials that outline developmentally appropriate practices and provide professional development courses in ECE. A recent WA study by Barblett (2000) shed further light on leadership issues. She reported claims by early childhood teachers that, “the principals' leadership role in the pre-primary is weak or non-existent” (p. 254), and that principals were satisfied with teachers’ progress as long as no complaints emerged. Evidently, principals tended to measure the effectiveness of programs by, the ‘happiness of the children’.

The findings reported in the current study reveal gaps in educational leadership and suggest that some principals may be reluctant to become involved with P1. Inadequate leadership and the employment of non-specialised staff have serious implications for P1 program quality, accountability and student learning (Chalmers, 1992; Spring, 1996). The capacity of school staff to make key decisions about P1 and the knowledge base from which these decisions are derived are critical to the successful implementation of P1.

Inappropriately trained staff

As early as the turn-of-the-century, Cecil Andrews, the then Director of Education in WA, was advised about "the specialised nature of kindergarten education and the need for trained teachers and appropriate equipment and buildings" (Kerr, 1994, p. 20). Some 90 years later, the Senate Inquiry into Early Childhood Education (1996)
transmitted a similar message saying: “The Committee accepts the view that the nature of teaching in early childhood classes entails specialist skills and knowledge and should require a specialist qualification” (p. 87). The recommendation made by the Committee was that where “appropriately qualified early childhood trained teachers are available, they should be given priority over generalist teachers for appointments to positions at the junior primary school level” (p. 87). The current study found that of the fifteen P1 teachers in the six government and independent schools, four were early childhood trained and eleven primary trained. One out of ten government school P1 teachers was early childhood trained, while three of the five independent school P1 teachers were early childhood trained. Therefore, few teachers held a specialist qualification in early childhood education. Serious deficiencies exist in state government Education Department policy around the recruitment, induction and placement of appropriately trained teachers in P1 early year classes.

A similar situation had emerged in Britain in the 1980s due to the admission of four-year-old children in schools. Studies in that country reflected the consequences of employing inappropriately trained staff for young children who, when expected to run a differentiated curriculum in a vertical group setting, failed to do so. “Without the experience, resources or parental support to carry them out they thus fall back on stressing the 3Rs, thereby denying the four year olds the curriculum they need and desire” (Bennett & Kell, 1990, p. 7). Furthermore, they lacked an understanding of child development for four-year-olds and did not “know how children of this age learn, and failed to see the potential in the various activities and materials” (Cleave & Brown, 1992, p. 194). These findings were re-echoed by Sharp (1988, p. 82) who confirmed in her study that, “only six of the twenty five teachers interviewed had undertaken initial teacher training which prepared them to teach children below the age of five...they had found it difficult at first to adapt their teaching approach to meet the needs of the four-year-olds in their classes”.

The consequences of employing inappropriately trained school staff are clearly outlined in America where this practice has led to the deterioration of curriculum delivered to kindergarten children and the increasing number of principals and schools supporting formal academic achievement (Bredekamp & Shephard, 1988;
Elkind, 1988; Hitz & Wright, 1988; Kamii, 1985; Sava, 1989). This issue is considered important enough for The National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the International Reading Association to urge early childhood educators to resist the lure of formal academic instruction on the grounds that it is inappropriate for young children (Hitz & Wright, 1988; Sava, 1989). Kamii (1985), along with professional organisations and other educational writers, questions why such harmful practices continue to exist in early childhood education and concedes that, “one explanation is that administrators in education, who have the power to make decisions, are ignorant of child development” (p. 3). Additionally, “there are many primary teachers who lack the training and experience necessary to implement DAP in their primary grade classrooms...aspiring primary grade teachers learn the methods, techniques, and perspectives of elementary schooling rather than early childhood education” (Goldstein, 1997, p. 24).

The stance taken by policymakers towards staffing issues is critical to school staff positions on P1. The findings of this study raise concerns as to whether early childhood teachers will be employed in P1 classes or whether there will be resistance to their inclusion in primary year levels, as there has been in the past (Corrie, 1995; SSTUWA, 2000; Tite, 1995). Of the ten P1 teachers in the government schools only one was early childhood trained; the other nine were primary trained. This means pre-primary children are being instructed by teachers who hold no specialised training in early childhood.

On a similar matter, British studies have reported serious curriculum concerns as a result of an absence of full-time qualified assistance. These teachers claimed they could not provide an appropriate education for four year old children, and children of compulsory school-age, without adopting more formal aspects of learning in their classrooms (Bennett & Kell, 1990; Cleave & Brown, 1992). So great was this problem, that “courses have been granted national priority status” (Bennett & Kell, 1990, p. 4/5). Although changes have been prompted since 1997 (eg EECs), the scale of the problem of four year olds in the primary school system is so large it will take some time to resolve.
The resolution of philosophical differences

The beliefs held by school staff and the measures taken by them in constructing avenues through which the non-compulsory and compulsory years of schooling can be combined legitimately, are underpinned not only by self-interest but also ideologies of student learning. Beliefs and priorities create the link between the rhetoric and what is finally constructed and implemented within school settings. Teacher attitudes, traditions and philosophy are often judged as the biggest impediment of change (Williams, 1990, cited by French & Pena, 1997). An NFER study in Britain, on the admission of four year olds to infant classes found, “considerable difference in terms of philosophy and resources between nursery and infant class settings” (Sharp, 1988, p. 69). These findings were consistent with those documented by P1 staff, who claimed it was unrealistic for two such diverse sectors of education to be amalgamated and taught by one teacher in the one group.

Differences in philosophy need to be resolved if coherence is to exist in P1 classes. The lack of direction given by the early childhood directorate to staff on P1 issues is of growing concern (SSTUWA, 2000). Philosophical guidelines need to be clearly outlined, not left to the discretion of school staff. In a letter to principals, a senior EDWA officer stated, “The Education Department has no policy on multi-age grouping or on the formation of multi age group classes. Decisions regarding teaching/learning philosophy are made at a school level” (Bums, 1998, n.p). If schools are to ignore early childhood philosophy, then early childhood professionals may face little choice but to, “redraw their boundaries and abandon the kindergartners, first graders, and second graders housed in elementary schools?” (Goldstein, 1997, p. 25). Of added concern however, are findings indicating that early childhood trained teachers are hesitant to argue their philosophical stance (Barblett, 2000), which means they may be less likely to advocate the inclusion of early childhood philosophy in P1 classes.

The ability and willingness of staff to manage the ideological differences and beliefs that exist in schools, will continue to be a challenge, without guidelines. The principles and values guiding developmentally appropriate practice involve children making choices about their educational experiences. This notion is in direct contrast
to traditional primary philosophy, which values "conformity, uniformity, and
accountability" (Goldstein, 1997, p. 4). Such differences need to be resolved to
ensure school staff define P1 in a positive way. To date, a formal process has yet to
be articulated for dealing with the ideological differences and beliefs that exist in
schools with respect to early childhood and primary education. In some instances,
philosophical differences between early childhood and primary are so great that
teachers claim their work is neither understood nor valued by primary school staff.
Resistance accelerates to the point where teachers reject school development plans
because they fail to recognise differences between early childhood and primary
school philosophy (Barblett, 2000). Guidelines are needed to prevent the emergence
of opposing definitions of the situation and to promote the development of a common
vision for P1 classes.

The construction of P1 curriculum

The school staff in this study identified P1 curriculum as the biggest threat to student
learning. Tayler (1996, p. 4) illuminates part of the problem here when she explains,
"National curriculum frameworks are built around eight learning areas, not normally
used to construct early childhood curriculum...How we work with this trend and
maintain a commitment to high-quality effective early learning programs is yet to be
seen". In WA, further complications emerge as a result of the curriculum
framework documents and student outcome statements. Yeoward (1996, p. 99)
points out that student outcome statements and assessment profiles may push early
childhood programs towards the 'product' rather than 'the process' and calls for,
"research which examines processes in multi-age classes which are necessary for
evaluating the quality and effectiveness of programmes". According to Corrie
(1995) problems escalate if there is not, "a good fit between this theory and current
educational reforms, which place emphasis on learning outcomes, that is, the
product" (p. 3). The fact that issues pertaining to student outcome statements did not
emerge in this study may be due to the fact that at the time of data collection, the
curriculum framework document had not been implemented in all schools.
Subsequently, the SSTUWA has reported concerns by its members in this area.
Other studies indicate that teachers find it difficult to build a constructivist curriculum when they are not trained early childhood teachers. According to Charlesworth, Hart, Burts & DeWolf (1993, p. 14), “one of the dangers of flexibility and its nonprescriptive nature is that it may be hard to grasp by teachers who are accustomed to looking for a prescriptive curriculum”. For this reason, MAG is a common source of anguish for traditionally trained school staff because it requires a major conceptual change in belief structure (Miller, 1996). Therefore, “when teachers traditionally have been expected to teach a graded classroom and three to four groups based on ability, the challenge of teaching two or more ages…has been overwhelming” (Privett, 1996, p. 9). Often, staff become daunted because, “there is little current research to assist teachers and administrators with this transition” (Byrnes, Shuster & Jones, 1994, p. 15). In practice, “most studies provide no information whatsoever on the instructional practices employed in the classroom” (Veenman, 1995, p. 370). This may result in, “a degree of mismatch between task and learner” (Ghaye & Pascall, 1990, p. 5). Inappropriate practices accelerate when teachers feel more compelled to cover the curriculum content for year one because it is the ‘compulsory year.’ In such instances, they are, “driven more by a perceived need to cover curriculum content than by the developmental needs of the child” (Cullen, 1994, p. 3/4).

Early childhood programs are dependent on developmentally appropriate curriculum (Tayler, Perry & Lennox, 1999). Indeed, “the most appropriate curriculum for children in infant classes is an individual one that emerges from the child’s activity and interest” (Kernig, 1986, cited by Ghaye & Pascall, 1990, p. 5). ‘Under fives’ need to make choices, direct their own work and become involved in work and play. The push towards formalised curriculum emerges when the, “provision for four year olds in many reception classes suffers from...an inappropriate curriculum with unnecessary distinctions between work and play” (Staniland, 1986, cited by Bennett & Kell, 1990, p. 5).

School staff have called for guidelines and written documentation because of differences in philosophy that are, “derived from subjective beliefs, values and preferences supported by personal experience” (Rodd, 1994, p. 51). No longer can policymakers contend that the non-compulsory pre-primary sector of education folds
neatly into primary schools (Stamopoulos, 1995). If P1 is to survive and thrive, the manner in which school staff respond to P1 when they are confronted with the need to construct curricula that is contrary to traditional primary curricula needs to be examined and understood (Tayler, 1998).

**Provision of quality support structures**

There appears to be insufficient support to help school staff manage P1 classes. At the time of data collection for this study, principals did not even have the support of the ‘Guidelines’ document, which was later released by EDWA in 1998 (Corrie, 1997). This document provides an overview of early childhood learning and development, curriculum, teaching, assessment and accountability within a whole school philosophy. However, no reference is made to the way in which composite P1 classes can be constructed. Although the document contains three brief references (three paragraphs) to MAG, anecdotal comments from school staff reflect frustration and anger that it offers no assistance in respect to P1 classes.

A further source of frustration for school staff, identified in the current study, was the lack of induction and professional development pertinent to P1. The NAEYC warns how school staff may face difficulties when they attempt to apply early childhood philosophy in mixed-age groupings and recommends that, “teachers be provided with support and assistance in implementing mixed-age grouping because most current, sequential academic curricula do not support mixed-age grouping” (NAEYC, 1990, p. 37, cited by Alderson, 1992). This is because, “good early years practice is demanding and relies on comprehensive initial training, a high level of resources (including staffing), the opportunity to practice with colleagues and continuous professional development” (Trudell, 1992, p. 14). Within this context, all educationalists were puzzled by the use of re-deployed cleaners as teacher-aides and queried why the SSTUWA and professional early childhood organizations, had not opposed this aspect of change. However, at the time attempts by ECTA to adopt a stronger stance were rebuffed by the Minister for Education.

In British studies, head teachers were of the opinion that four year olds should be educated in nursery classes where qualified assistants and appropriate resources are
present (Bennett & Kell, 1990). Brenda Staniland, in an address at the National Association of Head Teachers’ Early Years Conference (Oct. 1986), said that, “The evidence from our inspection both of single institutions and of local education authorities shows that provision for four-year-olds suffers from inadequate resources and equipment” (Sharp, 1988, p. 76). Most teachers reported the need for full-time help from a qualified person so that the needs of young children could be met (Sharp, 1988). Small class sizes were also cited as an added dilemma that impacted on curriculum implementation. According to Stevenson (1987), “teachers of four-year-olds were very concerned about the provision available in schools compared with the provision made in nurseries” (p. 43). In the current study, WA school staff expressed concerns that insufficient resources, space and qualified assistance were disadvantaging pre-primary children in P1 classes.

Concerns for school and community relationships

To be successfully implemented, change needs not only to hold relevance for community members but also to satisfy their needs (Ridden, 1991). Often this did not appear to be the case with P1. Although this study did not involve direct contact with parents, school staff had views on the parent’s definition of the P1 situation. In their view, parents were set in their beliefs and unwilling to compromise and accept P1. Difficulties emerged when parents were expected to modify their attitudes, knowledge and expectations in order to accommodate a change that lacked guidelines and direction. According to school staff, parents had trouble understanding P1 and coming to terms with its complexity, without guidelines. Apparently, in most instances, parents rejected P1 because they perceived it as a threat to early childhood philosophy. Unlike other studies, they did not appear threatened by developmentally appropriate practice that was often seen as contradicting the traditional expectations of primary schools (Goldstein, 1997).

While there is a need to involve school staff in decision-making processes, develop communication networks, enhance the culture of a school, obtain support, establish feedback and sustain the change, there is also a need to involve parents (Ridden, 1991). School staff informed parents of changes in an attempt to minimise parental reaction against P1. However, in many instances, said the staff, parents were still
resistant and seeking written confirmation of P1s benefits. In one instance, P1 was abandoned the following year, after a year of strong parent resistance.

If P1 is to continue, the reformers will need to satisfy parents and the community, that this change is in the best interest of children. The satisfaction of consumers (parents and children) is increasingly being considered as an indicator of product performance (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). According to Tayler (1996, p. 10), “No effective early learning program in any country omits the importance of close collusion with parents and support of parents”. Without comprehensive evaluations of its impact on children, parents’ views may be difficult to alter.

**SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Recent worldwide trends point to the need for policy changes aimed at improving the quality of early childhood education and care. For example, a recent OECD publication, *“Starting strong: Early childhood education and care”*, advocates, as a matter of urgency, the need for:

- a systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation;
- a strong and equal partnership with the education system;
- a universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support;
- a substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure;
- a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance;
- an appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision;
- a systematic attention to monitoring and data collection;
- a stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation.

Of these, the OECD places high priority on improving the recruitment, training and remuneration of early childhood professionals. Furthermore, it proposes that a coherent link be established across different sectors of child care and education and that government recognise that quality early childhood systems require public investment (OECD, 2001).
If the implementation of P1 is to accelerate across the state of WA as a result of the new half cohorts, policy needs to be developed and the views of school staff taken into account. Comprehensive evaluations of P1’s impact on staff and children are required. Therefore, monitoring, along with an agenda for research and evaluation, will be critical to the change process. P1 will gain credibility only when school staff and parents are confident that evaluations of it are being conducted to protect the quality of curricula provided for young children. Public investment in the infrastructure is required so that resources will become equivalent to those for pre-primary classes. As such, pre-primary children in P1 classes will not be disadvantaged by their work context. Educational leadership and support structures need to be established so as to improve the quality of P1 classes. Furthermore, school staff cannot be expected to teach in P1 classes when they lack knowledge and expertise in early childhood.

Differences in pedagogy must be addressed and guidance given to change agents. The conditions required by staff need to be explored and included in the change process. School staff often contest and resist what they define as misinformed policy or change (Crump, 1992). Often ‘intended policy’ or ‘change’ faces competing ideologies as they are met by more than one interpretation (Crump, 1992). The gaps between theory and practice need to be bridged so as to prevent academic pushdown. Moreover, “the boundary between primary and early childhood pedagogy must be clarified in order to avoid an inadvertent drift from one pole (acquisition-based pedagogy) to the other (transmission-based pedagogy)” (Corrie, 1995, p. 4). There is also a need to align pedagogy, assessment and curriculum direction.

The central role of play in early childhood pedagogy, though not emphasised in the data, accentuates the problem of incorporating early childhood philosophy into P1 classes. Early childhood theories (Piaget, Vygotsky), support play as an integral part of the learning process. Generally, this is not endorsed in most WA schools as a priority for year one children’s learning. Therefore, there remains the fear that transmission-based pedagogy will over-ride acquirer-based pedagogy that focuses on process rather than product.
For Pl to succeed, school staff perspectives must be explored and considered. Failure to convince change agents will accelerate the belief that political and economic factors are powerful forces driving our educational system and that these have far greater impact than educational research. In order to gain support for Pl, policymakers will need to identify and acknowledge current dissatisfaction with Pl, include the early childhood professions and the community in the policy making process, and thereby assure the support of key power groups. Certainly, symbolic interactionists would argue the success of Pl depends largely on the conceptual and behavioral positions adopted by school staff.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

From some perspectives this study might be regarded as having certain limitations. For example, a quantitative paradigm perspective might regard the sample size (six principals, fifteen teachers and ten teacher-aides) as too small for generalizing the results beyond the thirty-one participants in the study. However, an attempt was made to address this issue. The addition of principals, teachers and a teacher-aide as reviewers of the findings, in the final phase of the study, provides an indication of how representative the participants’ views were of the broader membership of the profession.

From a structuralist perspective, symbolic interactionism is often criticised for overstating the power of human agency and understating the influence of external forces. This study explored participants’ interpretations of Pl and their interactions within the school system, on the belief that components of a situation exist only when defined as meaningful. It was assumed that the self, significant others, time, place, culture and structure are vital components of a ‘situation’, only exist if participants indicate to themselves that they are important. Structuralists would take issue with these assumptions.

From a pluralistic perspective, a third limitation is the restricted range of stakeholders included in the study. To keep the study within manageable proportions, participants were restricted to school staff; parents and pupils were not
interviewed. Their inclusion would have reduced the depth to which the stance of professional school staff could be investigated.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study has laid the foundations for further research. As indicated in the previous section, the scope of the investigation was limited to make its completion achievable. It is possible now, however, to identify seven directions for future research.

First, the voices, priorities and perspectives of students and parents, with respect to the development and delivery of P1 classes, need to be examined. Their conceptual and behavioural positions are crucial to the change process and the success or demise of P1 classes.

Second, there is a need to investigate what constitutes an appropriate curriculum for pre-primary children, and how to translate the principles of early childhood education into practice, within the constraints of a primary school environment. For example, further studies could determine whether developmentally appropriate practice and constructivism are social constructions in the minds of early childhood academics, rather than reflections of grassroots practice.

Third, an in-depth examination of policy making and its impact on school staff is required to deepen our knowledge of this area. Creating a balance between factors such as service delivery, multiple stakeholders, political efficiency and economic constraints is vital to any change process.

Fourth, a balance needs to be developed between providing autonomy to school staff, implementing P1 and providing future directions and support in the delivery of P1 services. There is a need to determine how influential the absence of support systems such as professional development, parent information dissemination, specialised training and opportunities for peer collaboration is in defining the stance of principals, teachers, teacher-aides and parents.
Fifth, further research is needed to determine the educational and/or psychosocial outcomes achieved by children in P1 classes. A related study could explore what stakeholders believe are criteria for success and how these can be achieved. These investigations would assist school staff who claimed that P1 accountability was difficult to assess when goals and outcome criteria were not articulated.

Sixth, the creation of P1 classes has created a new arena for the study of contestation between early childhood and primary school stakeholders. Therefore, a formal process for dealing with the ideological differences between pre-primary and primary education needs to be articulated. This would make collaborative practices easier to implement and help reduce the divisions that exist between the early childhood and primary sectors of education.

Seventh, little is known of the administrative and educational practice of primary school principals in early childhood contexts, especially during an era of profound change. The capacity of principals to make key decisions about P1 classes and the knowledge base, from which these decisions are derived, are critical to the change process.

**CLOSING COMMENT**

Throughout this century continual resistance has been mounted towards government intervention in the early childhood field because of mistrust and the fear that early childhood standards would be engulfed by primary philosophy. The findings of this study draw attention to this long standing problem. Perhaps most worrying, is that the various constructions of P1 curricula may signal the possible demise of early childhood practice and philosophy in WA.

Early childhood stakeholders, professional associations, the SSTUWA and WACSSO have continually raised concerns regarding these practices, yet have been ineffective, partly due to a lack of research. In their view, there is the distinct possibility that if P1 continues in its present form, early childhood philosophy and practices will be dissolved in the traditional primary school model. They point out
that the commencement of the new cohorts in 2001 will result in a larger number of P1 classes being implemented across WA for administrative, not pedagogical, reasons.

If P1 is left in its present state it will continue to provide a cost efficient strategy for including pre-primary children at local schools. On the other hand, dismantling P1 would mean that pre-primary children would have to be accommodated in other ways.

P1 is a change that challenges school staff to find a pathway through which the philosophical differences that exist between early childhood and primary sectors can be bridged. It further challenges school staff to construct a basis on which P1 curricula can be developed and implemented without compromising the integrity of early childhood philosophy and pedagogy.
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