



MONASH University

Leave it at the Door: How Teachers Manage Their Emotions As They Support Children During Prep Transition.

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Abstract

Authors acknowledge the importance of emotional well-being for children during the transition from pre-school to primary school, with the dominant body of research contending that children will adapt more successfully into classrooms where teachers promote a positive learning environment.

However, there is significantly less research focusing on the emotions of teachers around the time of transition. The purpose of this study was to discover how teachers manage their emotions in the classroom as they support children in their first year of primary school. Four preparatory grade ('prep') teachers from two different primary schools in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia, participated in this research project. Participants' conversations were audiotaped on two separate occasions and framed as narrative accounts using a Narrative Inquiry Method. An inductive approach to data analysis highlighted specific themes whereby teachers managed their emotions under specific conditions.

This study is a timely investigation of the emotional lives of teachers at a critical point in young children lives. Findings suggest that teachers are concerned about displaying negative emotions within the school environment for fear of projecting an unsuitable image and will suppress their emotions to continue to provide a positive learning experience for children.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The emotions are not a 'state within a state'. They cannot be understood outside the dynamic of human life. (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 333)

The Aim of this Study

This study is about teachers' emotions and children's transition from pre-school to primary school. It is an important and worthwhile topic of investigation because the consequences of an unhappy transition to school can have a profoundly negative impact on young children, not only academically but also socially and emotionally. While it is obvious that "children will do better in classrooms characterised by positive emotional climates than in less supportive ones", it is unclear how teachers manage to regulate their own emotions as they support children transitioning from kindergarten to grade preparatory school (Pianta, Cox & Snow, 2007, p 128).

In the state of Victoria, Australia, the term 'kindergarten' is typically the year children attend a dedicated sessional early childhood education service prior to going to school. It is government funded and all children who are four-years-of-age by the 30th of April in the same year are eligible to attend. Kindergartens operate in purpose-built buildings and can be managed by a range of groups from local government and parent volunteer committees to independent schools and local councils. The first year of primary (elementary) school in Victoria is known as 'prep'; an abbreviation of 'preparatory year' which historically meant the year leading into formal schooling.

However, with the recent introduction of the Australian National Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting, 2012), changes were made to some of the terminology used at primary schools. The prep year is now called *Foundation* in the National Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012), even though it is still commonly referred to as 'prep' in Victoria. For the purposes of this study, 'kindergarten' is defined as the year before school entry and will be used interchangeably with the term 'pre-school'; 'Foundation' will still be referred to in this thesis as 'grade prep' or 'prep', as the first year of primary school. This appropriately reflects the participants' interviews conducted prior to this name change (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Victoria, 2009) and references to "transition" for this study reflect a time period spanning from term four in pre-school to the end of term one, in grade prep at primary school.

Teachers' stories are a focus of this investigation and, accordingly, I have applied a narrative inquiry methodology. This qualitative approach, which will be expanded on in Chapter 3, is based on the assumption "... that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives ..." (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p 2). Not surprisingly, this approach is becoming more popular in educational studies.

My Personal Stance

My interest in prep transition began in January, 2006 when my daughter started her first year of school. Unfortunately we were not able to enroll her into the preschool which 'fed' into our local primary school and this meant she started school without any friends in her prep classroom. Most first-time parents hope their child is welcomed by a teacher who is friendly and nurturing (Dockett & Perry, 2004), and I was no exception.

My teaching qualifications did not prepare me for the rush of emotions I felt at leaving my five-year-old daughter crying and with no friends to console her, with a teacher who appeared to be unaware of the distress both my daughter and I were in. I was told to leave quickly otherwise I would make the situation worse. In most cases it *is* better not to prolong saying goodbye; however, there is an expectation by parents, that this separation process will be handled sensitively, with the class teacher comforting the child or using distracting techniques that may help to divert the child's attention from a parent leaving (Briggs & Potter, 1999).

My concerns were echoed by other parents whose children were also finding it difficult to settle in to school, and I couldn't help but feel that the process was not managed as well as it could have been; an issue highlighted by parents in Dockett and Perry's (2004) school transition study.

Parents are generally willing participants in their child's education and like to be involved within the school community. This involvement can range from covering text books at home and helping out in the classroom to making decisions at School Council. When it comes to school transition, parents put a lot of faith in teachers to initiate and orchestrate this process for them and their children (Briggs & Potter, 1999). They need to feel welcomed into the school community and feel confident that their child's class teacher will recognise their child's special qualities and will readily offer individual attention if needed (Dockett & Perry, 2004).

My initial encounters with my daughter's teacher had been disheartening. One's early experiences and contact with the teacher are significant and parents and children alike rely on a teacher's positive attitude. When this does not happen, there can be a loss of confidence in the teacher and the school (Fabian, 2000). Nevertheless, as a primary school teacher I was mindful of trying to understand this transition process from the teacher's perspective. Having reflected on my own teaching practice I began to wonder what my daughter's teacher's reflective practice encompassed. What was she thinking about and how did she feel during those first few weeks of settling children into a new school? Halfway through term two my daughter finally started to separate happily from me.

Most teachers begin teaching with a genuine desire to embrace all aspects of children's learning but over time languish due to the demands placed on them in an emotionally loaded school environment (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005). Through policy changes, new mandates, curriculum overload, children with behaviour problems and sometimes difficult parents, they are challenged by traditional notions of professionalism where there is an expectation to keep their distance from the very people (students and parents) into whom they often invest so much of their emotional effort. This is a tension discussed by Lasky (2000, p. 847), who states that, "the paradox is that teachers are expected to remain professionally distant on the one hand, while demonstrating emotional involvement through caring".

Even when teachers have predominantly positive relationships with students, parents and other staff members, there is an unspoken code learnt early in pre-service teacher

education that emotions, particularly negative ones, are not to be displayed (Meyer, 2009).

Meyer's (2009) investigation into student teaching practices demonstrates that, even at this early stage of a teacher's career, there are tensions in terms of what is expected of them at a professional level. On the one hand, student teachers are supported by their university supervisors and classroom mentors, who show sympathy and understand how stressful teaching can be but at the same time "urge students to manage their emotions and conform to professional expectations" (p. 74).

A critical part of understanding emotions from a teacher's perspective is to remember that emotions are socially derived. They are firmly embedded within us, physically and psychologically, and play out in the present through our personal experiences and histories (Lasky, 2000). On this basis I reject Goleman's (1995) claim that emotions are a collection of 'intelligences' that can be transferred from one emotional element to another. Without emotions, human understanding is limited. There are subtle distinctions when emotions are explored through the lens of emotional expression, between individuals who, for example, care deeply for each other, and for those who are merely acquaintances. Discrete differences like these cannot be applied to an 'intelligence' check list. According to Lasky (2000, p. 844):

Emotions are central to human interchange whether in the form of relationships that are more enduring in nature as with loved ones, or those that are brief, episodic interactions, e.g. the glance of a stranger that warms our heart, or

makes us cringe. They are integral to social meaning, support, security and recognition (or the absence of these) in our relationship with others.

To develop strong relationships we need to emotionally engage with each other and make emotions a crucial link in communicating effectively. When this works well teachers and students “learn to read each other over time” (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore & Manning, 2001, p 86). This is the impetus for my research: to unpack the interrelationship between prep teachers, their emotions and their students.

The Role of Emotions in Teaching

The role of emotions in teaching has rightfully emerged as an important and worthwhile topic. Whilst cognition, motivation and emotion are considered the three most essential categories of mental processing, psychologists have continued to heavily research cognition and motivation but have almost disregarded the role of emotion (Hargreaves, 2000; Schutz & Pekrun, 2007; Zembylas, 2005).

Oatley and Jenkins (in Sutton, 2005, p. 229), state that there is an underlying “suspicion among western culture that there is something wrong with emotions”. Past commentary on emotions tended to highlight this aspect of human behaviour as negative; however, further investigations have rejected this way of thinking and demonstrated that “emotions are an essential part of a productive adult life and are important in understanding the goals we attain” (Tice, Bratslavsky & Baumeister, 2001, p. 55).

Most importantly, research into this critical area is beginning to demonstrate that cognition is not separate from emotion but highly integrated with it and fundamental to our decision making process. According to Hargreaves (1998), emotions are impossible to overlook or under-estimate as they are a vital part of teaching:

Good teaching is charged with positive emotion. It is not just a matter of knowing one's subject, being efficient, having the correct competences or learning all the right techniques. Good teachers are not just well oiled machines. They are emotional passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy. (p. 835)

Even so, teachers rarely talk about these positive connections that they have with their students. They are encouraged to reflect on their teaching practice but often have very little time to do so. Opportunities to clarify or discuss their own feelings and understandings of their work are limited, as the organisational environment in which they work is often not conducive to encouraging dialogue about their professional practice (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005). Furthermore, even less information is sought from teachers about core issues such as educational policies, where their input could potentially be significant and valuable. "Yet despite all these difficulties teachers continue to care about their students and their work, to seek professional development and greater understanding" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005, p. xi).

A common theme throughout the literature on emotions and teaching demonstrates that, although emotions are ever-present and are often powerful and fundamentally necessary for social interaction, they are given a low priority within the school milieu.

While some authors have been encouraged by the recent interest in emotions and their impact on teaching (Hargreaves, 2000; Zembylas, 2009), others continue to be disheartened by the lack of emphasis placed on such a significant topic. Linston and Garrison (2003), perfectly address this by stating that:

For too long we have left emotions in the ontological basement of educational scholarship to be dragged up and out only when a particular topic necessitated it (e.g., classroom management, student motivation, or teacher burnout). That seems ill advised, and it is time to rebuild our academic house. (p. 5)

Earlier investigations about teachers' emotions "have mostly been ignored in educational research, professional practice and teacher education" (Pekrun & Schultz, 2007, p. 243). One of the main reasons for this is the low value that society places on emotions in a professional context. According to Zembylas (2004, p. 303), "emotions have typically been considered as feminine, private, and irrational thus, they are largely written out of the workplace, including teaching".

In this situation, being 'emotional' deems workers as irrational and therefore unable to make appropriate decisions and sound judgements. Jagger (in Bloom, 1989, p. 114) concurs, writing that: "in western epistemology emotion has been associated with the irrational, the physical, the natural, the particular, the private and of course the female". In a profession dominated by women and often characterised as being 'caring' or 'emotional', it is not surprising that research into teachers' emotions has lagged.

Fortunately, an increasing number of studies reveal that the discourse of emotion is starting to take shape and develop within the context of school culture and teaching. These recent investigations include a review of the literature that offers future directions (Sutton & Wheatly, 2003), teachers' emotions from a leadership perspective (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008), emotional practices of student teachers (Myer, 2009), and the emotional labour and dedication of teacher (Hargreaves, 2000). These studies confirm how important it is to further our understanding of teachers' emotions. One key area that justifies continued research in this field is the classroom or learning environment.

Creating a positive classroom climate is an integral part of teaching and learning but it is often more complex to maintain than we realise. Now more than ever, teachers worldwide are faced with insurmountable pressure to consistently test children, as parents and education departments demand more accountability. This, along with the stress of trying to work within the confines of a crowded curriculum, has been extremely difficult (Schutz & Pekrun, 2007).

It is, therefore, a crucial time for teachers to be 'tuned in', not only to their own emotional 'barometers' but also to those of the children in their care. Drummond (2003, p. 10) would argue that it is a duty of all teachers to have at the very heart of their teaching "a sustained and unshakeable interest in children's learning by looking closely at it and striving to understand it". Whilst the best interests of a child should be taken into consideration at all grade levels, there are certain, pivotal times in a child's life where they are more vulnerable and apprehensive.

The transition to a new educational setting is one such defining stage and for children beginning school, it can be a very challenging and emotionally taxing time. According to Brostrom (2005, p. 17), many children experience this event as a “culture shock”. Even the most confident and eager students will enter their first year of school with some trepidation and nervousness.

It is within this context that transition to school programs have been the subject of much debate and discussion over the last ten years (Brooker, 2008; Brostrom, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2006; Margetts, 2000). Whilst research in this area has been invaluable in presenting practical guidelines for effective pre-school to primary school transition, a review of the literature shows that there has been insufficient investigation into the emotional aspects of this transition, particularly from a teacher’s perspective.

In a recent paper highlighting students’ connectedness to school, the authors found that “among the most salient ‘school conditions’ are student experiences with teachers” (Brew, Beatty, & Watt, 2004, p. 2). In Blaise and Nuttall’s (2011) *Learning to Teach in the Early Years Classroom*, teachers are credited with the major role in influencing children’s school experiences:

Teachers manage time, space and other resources; they make immediate and longer-term decisions about the curriculum; they influence children’s behaviour and relationships; they shape the emotional climate of the classrooms in which they teach; and they make decisions everyday about the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will be condoned and promoted, and those that will be rejected or avoided. (p xxxiii)

Given the enormity of the challenges teachers and young children face within the first few weeks of school, I think it is vital to address this topic further. The aim of my research, therefore, is to discover how teachers' self-regulate their emotions in the classroom as they support children beginning their first year of primary school.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following questions:

- 1) How do teachers interpret their own emotionality as they support children through the transition to prep?
- 2) What does a successful transition mean to prep teachers?
- 3) How important to prep teachers is the emotional tone of the prep classroom?

The Structure of this Thesis

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction and brief overview of the study. Chapter 2 includes a discussion of the literature review and theoretical framework. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology, while Chapter 4 describes the findings in the context of teacher's narrative accounts and also includes a general discussion of the study's findings and their relationship to the research questions. Chapter 5 provides conclusions and implications drawn from the findings and my personal reflections as the researcher. To support confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for all the participants in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

People are their emotions. To understand who a person is, it is necessary to understand emotion. (Norman Denzin, 1984, p. 1)

This chapter begins with a discussion on emotions in history and how they have been viewed by society over time. It is included as a foreground to the topic under investigation but is a worthy addition as emotions are, by their very nature, difficult to define and describe. This brief introduction puts into perspective the difficulties researchers have faced in highlighting how important emotions are, particularly in the arena of teaching. Emotions are then discussed specifically in relation to teachers' lives and how the process of 'emotional labour' and 'emotional management' impacts educators daily. Children's transition to primary school is examined further, identifying key elements, as opposed to a text-based definition, for a successful transition and how teacher's emotions influence this significant time in a child's life. It is important to understand that successful transition is intentionally not defined, but, rather the participants are invited to provide their own interpretation of what this means to them in the context of teaching prep children through the transition stage. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the theoretical framework that underpins this research.

Emotions in History

Recent investigation into the function of emotions has been positive (Lehrer, 2009). Whilst this is a tremendous change from past attitudes, emotional understanding is still a very complex area to define. Virginia Wolff declared in *Jacob's Book* (1922)

The strange thing about life is that though the nature of it must have been apparent to everyone for hundreds of years, no one has left any account of it. The streets of London have their maps; but our passions are uncharted". (Woolf, 1922, p. 82)

If the essence of who we are lies in our emotional selves, why is it also the very part of us that has been traditionally so consistently maligned and criticised?

Throughout the ages emotions have been viewed as messy and primitive. Socrates and his student Plato believed that we went through life conflicted by two separate spheres of the brain. The first was the rational, pure part of our being which enabled us to make logical and sound decisions; the other was that part of ourselves that led to the wild, impulsive thoughts and actions that were influenced and steered by our emotions (Damasio, 1994).

Rene Descartes, 16th century philosopher, analysed the human brain in a similar way. He regarded emotions as generally dysfunctional; a part of human nature that should be reined in and controlled as much as possible. So strong was this belief about emotions that, over time, many leading and prominent thinkers tried to apply this insight in a more concrete way (Lehrer, 2009).

Francis Bacon and Auguste Comte wanted to re-organise society so that it reflected 'rational science'; Thomas Jefferson hoped that the American experiment would prove that men can be governed by reason and reason alone; Immanuel Kant came up with the concept of the categorical imperative so that

morality *was* rationality. At the height of the French Revolution, a group of radicals founded the Cult of Reason and turned several Parisian cathedrals into temples of rationality. There were no temples dedicated to emotion. (Lehrer, 2009, p. 18)

Freud echoed the same Platonic ideologies years later when he proposed his theory on the distinction between rational and emotional thought processes. While Plato used the metaphor of a wild, spirited horse and the in-control rider to distinguish between the emotional and rational spheres of the brain, Freud wrote similarly of the 'id' and the 'ego'. He believed the role of the ego was to preside over the id and guide this part of our being into behaving acceptably (Damasio, 1994).

Undoubtedly, the aforementioned scholars demonstrated a great amount of original thought and knowledge in many aspects of their work. Pointing out their obsession with rationality is not an effort to discredit their thinking but to illustrate that being emotional has historically been equated with behaving badly or making poor life decisions.

In the 1970s, in the era of modern science, another theory was offered: that the human brain was a computer. Whilst this generated some interesting and worthwhile scientific discoveries, its major flaw, not surprisingly, was that computers did not have feelings. Emotions could not be broken down easily into small, quantifiable bits of information, so to justify their positions, cognitive psychologists continued to focus on the idea of a separate rational brain. Emotions did not fit into this paradigm and once again were largely ignored (Lehrer, 2009).

Current neuroscience research, however, has demonstrated that earlier philosophical and evolutionary beliefs about emotions need to be replaced with the realisation that reasonable decision making is not always hindered by our emotions; they, in fact, play a crucial role. Emotions cannot be separated from thought.

Positive emotions, furthermore, enhance access to one's existing knowledge, imagination and creativity; whereas negative emotions can constrain one's thinking and reduce one's ability to access one's store of knowledge and skill in a flexible manner. Positive emotions are associated with optimism and hope for the future. (Leithwood & Beatty, 2007, p. 7)

A clear theme emerging from the literature on teachers' emotions shows both that positive and negative teachers' emotions not only influence the way students learn and feel in the classroom context but also affect how teachers see themselves in a role which is often emotionally charged (Hargreaves, 1998; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009; Sutton & Wheatley 2003; Wentzal, Buys & Mostert, 2009).

Studies of Teachers' Emotions

In teaching, emotions can take on different meanings. While it is important to acknowledge the role of emotions generally, in the context of this study it is also necessary to identify where emotions fit in, in terms of teachers' lives. "Emotions are a dynamic part of ourselves, and whether they are positive or negative, all organisations, including schools, are full of them" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). The

information emotions provide, therefore, has an enormous impact on the learning environments of both students and teachers (Sutton, 2005).

Almost 50% of teachers are thought to leave the education profession within five years of starting their career due to the emotional demands of teaching (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Meyer 2009, Schutz & Zembylas, 2009). If poor student learning outcomes and teacher attrition is consistently linked with the emotional labour of teaching then further investigation regarding teachers' emotions is not only worthwhile but clearly advisable.

The Concept of Emotional Labour

There are multiple meanings of emotional labour. Hochschild's research (1983) identified particular jobs and occupations where the employees were not just undertaking physical or mental work but also offering or selling a service. A deeper understanding of the personal exchanges or active emotional interactions between employees and their customers led Hochschild (1983) to coin the phrase 'emotional labour'. Her work with flight attendants illustrated the difference between a job, which relies purely on physical labour, and one that also makes personal emotional connections. Take, for example, factory workers who may stand in the same position using their arms and hands to manoeuvre items on a production line, compared with flight attendants, who through many personal exchanges with airline passengers provide a service, a service involving emotional labour. According to Hochschild and in contrast to the factory worker example, "this labour requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper

state of mind in others—in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place” (1983, p. 7).

Whilst Hochschild’s (1983) research specifically focused on data from flight attendants, it is particularly pertinent to teachers and teaching. If emotions assist us to act in appropriate ways even in unpredictable conditions, then “on these grounds, it is hard to imagine a profession more dependent on emotions to guide action than the teaching profession” (Leithwood & Beatty, 2007, p. 7). It is not surprising then, that the emotional work of teachers has been investigated further not only in terms of the psychological costs to the teacher but also the learning outcomes of their students.

In trying to frame Hochschild’s (1983) work in a way that identifies and highlights the distinctive characteristics of teaching, some researchers have developed their own terms for emotional labour. Hargreaves (2002) invented the term ‘emotional geographies’, which refers to the collegial aspect of teaching; in Meyer’s (2009) study on student teachers, emotional labour is discussed as ‘emotional practice’. Morris and Feldman’s (1996) definition for teaching’s emotional labour is that it “involves the effort, planning and control teachers need, to express organisationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions” (p. 987). This was a particularly appropriate and forward-thinking definition, developed when there was less research into teachers’ emotions. It clearly conveys the difficulty teachers face daily to manage their emotions while interacting with children, parents and other staff members.

Recent research confirms that teachers believe they are expected to conform to appropriate ways of emotionally expressing themselves, particularly around students

and parents (Meyer, 2009). There is an implicit understanding that teachers should not only behave in a positive way around children but also suppress all negative displays of emotions. This underlying theme of hiding emotions is consistent with Leithwood and Beatty's (2007) intensive study with principals from six different countries, who all discussed how important it was to manage or hide their emotions no matter how chaotic the school day had been. A Canadian principal summed this up by stating:

I have caught myself in an emotional turmoil on occasion. Not so much displaying verbal discontentment, but utilizing body language that would indicate that I was not impressed with the situation. I am trying to alter that reaction as I feel that I need to remain calm and poised in all situations. I am still pondering this and no doubt I'll come back to it in the future. (p. 135)

Teacher participants from Sutton's (2004, p. 379) investigation into emotional regulation echoed similar thoughts. When a grade two teacher was asked about emotions and teaching her response was, "Don't show them, don't show them". Another teacher with seven years experience responded with, "Even if I'm not interested, I have to pretend. I have to put up a front that I'm extremely interested in what I'm doing". Even this small sample of comments demonstrates that teachers are making conscious decisions about how they will emotionally express themselves at school.

We know from recent literature on emotions that they are not separate from thought (Damasio, 1994; Hargreaves, 2001), so when teachers say they "have to pretend" or they "switch on and off" they are not referring to being 'emotionless'; they are making

a decision to behave in a certain way. It is a deliberate act to portray themselves in a manner which they believe is appropriate for a school teacher. Morris and Feldman's (1996) definition for teachers' emotional labour is very relevant in this context. When emotional labour takes place consistently, and where teachers are constantly planning or suppressing emotions, there is a risk to their emotional health. Emotional labour becomes emotional numbness and "such numbness threatens well-being and compromises the ability to connect emotionally with self and others" (Leithwood & Beatty, 2007, p. 137).

Before I delve further into the relationship between teachers and students in the classroom, it is important to address the role of transition and how young children encounter their first days at school.

Transition to Primary School

There are many factors impacting on children's learning while at school. The level of social and emotional maturity children demonstrate during the transition from kindergarten to the first year of school is one such aspect, and is seen as crucial in terms of their future success at school (Fabian, 2000). So too are the emotions of their teachers. Understanding teachers' emotional impact in the classroom is an important step in defining a classroom climate that best suits all children.

How teachers feel within the classroom environment will have a direct influence on their instruction. Research has shown that "children do better in classrooms characterised by positive emotional climates than in less supportive classrooms" (Hamre & Pianta, 2005, p. 129). Given children as young as three can determine

whether a teacher is “mean”, the encounters and relationships children have with their teachers are of paramount importance.

Children encounter many challenges when they begin primary school so it is no surprise that the prep transition program has been the subject of much debate and discussion over the last 15 years (Brostrom, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2006; Margetts, 2000, 2014).

The term ‘transition’, for the purposes of this study is defined by Brostrom, (2005) as:

... the process of change that is experienced when children (and their families) move from one setting to another. It includes the length of time it takes to make such a change, spanning the time between any pre-entry visit(s) and settling in to when the child is more fully established as a member of the new setting”. (p. 17)

Researchers in this field believe that an appreciation and understanding of how children feel and the challenges they will encounter is an important step in developing an appropriate transition program. The transition program itself must also contain key elements for success (Brooker, 2006; Brostrom, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2001; Fabian, 2000; Margetts, 2014).

What do Children Encounter When They Start School?

Being able to cope with change is an important skill to develop. A socially and emotionally ready child will be more accepting of the myriad of tasks he or she will

have to undertake, while those who lack confidence and a feeling of well-being within the school environment are less likely to fulfil their learning potential (Fabian, 2000). It is also necessary to consider the school environment. Often school buildings and classrooms are on a much bigger scale than the buildings and rooms most children have been exposed to previously. It can be a daunting experience for young children to negotiate their way back to their classroom from the toilets or the library, for example.

Meeting a lot of new people at the one time can also be a stressful event. In light of this, it is important to consider how children are first presented to their new school environment. According to Fabian (2000), “the critical link between two settings is the person who establishes the link in the first place” (p. 143). In this situation it is highly likely that a parent would provide this link and, in effect, connection for his or her child to both school and home, and hopefully impart a sense of security and safety within the new surroundings.

Children’s early social experiences will also often influence their level of motivation for learning. Forming positive relationships with other children is vital for children’s sense of belonging within the classroom and the school as a whole (Margetts, 2014). According to Pollard (1996, cited in Fabian, 2000), it is more difficult to encourage and guide friendships as children move away from the home; therefore, it is imperative not only for teachers to provide a classroom environment which fosters these opportunities but also for the teachers themselves to exude a friendly and welcoming manner as a role model for the children in their care.

The culture of school is an essential area to examine. Every classroom has its own culture which children become part of, through learning new terminology and following classroom rules, for example. Young children's ability to make meaning out of rules is dependent on their understanding of language at a fundamental level. During transition to school, children's lack of social experience and familiarity with school terms means they are often disadvantaged in trying to comprehend a verbal instruction given by a teacher (Donaldson, 1984).

Fabian (2000) suggests that, "by taking part in the life of school, children construct their own realities and meanings and adapt them to the system, thereby acquiring the school's ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling and carrying out discourse" (p. 144). Donaldson (1984) sees this as a complex and confusing process for children. Often teachers become so knowledgeable about certain things pertaining to 'teaching' that they are unaware that the language they use to describe something can be totally foreign and difficult for a young child to comprehend. For example, consider the child waiting for his 'gift' after his teacher said, "just wait there for the present" (Donaldson, 1984, p.17). When language and expectations between home and school are dissimilar it makes it even harder for children to adapt to the school environment. This is particularly true for children from diverse cultural backgrounds (Hill, Comber, Loudon, Rivalland & Reid, 1998).

Key Elements For a Successful Transition Program

It is now internationally recognised that a smooth shift into the first year of school is of paramount importance to children's social and emotional wellbeing and could even effect their later cognitive development. Unfortunately, the collaboration between

educators in the early childhood sector, primary sector and parents, as well as policy makers, has lagged behind these crucial research findings and some primary schools still do not seek to incorporate the wealth of valuable information available when planning their transition programs. Too often these programs have been based on one-off isolated meetings or information nights that do little to provide a platform for an effective program (Pianta, Hamre & Allen, 2012; Vessey, 2006).

This has now been remedied somewhat by the introduction of 'Transition Learning and Development Statements' (Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood, 2009). Early childhood educators (i.e. teachers in kindergarten classrooms) complete these transition statements for each pre-school student starting school the following year. They are sent to parents and prep teachers detailing information on topics such as children's sense of identity, connection with their community, sense of well-being, and how they see themselves as learners. 'The Transition: A Positive Start to School' (Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development) kit has been provided to all early childhood educators as a guiding document to facilitate a new approach to transition to school in Victoria and aims to "improve the sharing of information between children, families, early childhood educators, out of school hours, carers and Prep teachers". Additionally, prep teachers are also invited to the pre-schools from which children 'feed' into their school to discuss any further issues needing clarification (Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009, p 1).

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF), introduced in 2009, also provides a working document for all early childhood educators to facilitate children's

learning and acknowledge the significant input of families, as children transition from early childhood settings to the first year of school. This document focuses on providing quality education for children from birth to eight-years-of-age and offers early childhood educators pertinent information relevant to children becoming successful learners. As these documents represent recent government initiatives, any further interpretation of how successful they are will require research into this particular area.

Brostrom (2005) believes that the following key points should be addressed when developing an appropriate transition program. These are the:

... extent of the child's school readiness; support from parents, family and community, a system of high quality kindergartens for children aged three to five; a school teacher who is able to take the child's perspectives, interests and needs into account; and continuity in curricula, home-school communication and a welcoming environment for family and children. (p. 17)

The principles reiterated and expanded by other researchers as being essential elements of the transition program include: starting school with a friend; open and consistent communication between pre-schools and schools; greater parent involvement; and, genuine availability of funding and resources (Brooker, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2014; Margetts, 2000, 2014; Vessey, 2005).

It is worth noting that many of these central points are interdependent. Consider, for example, the key point of 'continuity in curricula'. According to Adams (cited in Moyles, 2005), a classroom that reflects a safe space, where students immediately identify with

a few familiar activities, is an excellent way to introduce children to their new classroom. Brostrom (2005) agrees, and proposes that children should be encouraged to bring in photos, kindergarten portfolios and drawings or shared stories, which link their pre-school days to their new surroundings. This would only occur through a two-way discussion between pre-school and primary school teachers. According to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2009), 'transition statements' and the development of the EYLF have been instrumental in opening up these lines of communication and have been positive steps forward in all aspects of children's educational transitions.

Margetts (2002) suggests that setting up the classroom with dramatic play areas, play dough and a construction area, for example, will help to lessen the anxiety of starting school and may further prompt discussion and collaboration amongst the pupils as they gather about each learning centre. This summary not only highlights the importance of open communication between kindergartens and schools but also emphasises how crucial it is to have teachers who are knowledgeable and understanding of the difficulty some children face when starting school and, furthermore, are able to demonstrate a genuine interest in alleviating these concerns by putting this knowledge into practice.

Successful transition to school and teachers emotions have largely been researched separately (Day, 2004; Hargreaves, 2001; Zembylas, 2007) There has been little evidence linking how important the relationship is between optimal learning and working environments for both students and teachers. According to Tharp and Gallimore (2003), this relationship has often been underestimated by school reformers

who acknowledge that the learning environment for students should combine nurturing with intellectual challenges, but tends to disregard the working environment of the teachers.

When teachers walk into a classroom they bring with them a myriad of emotions, value systems, differing dispositions and experiences that will challenge the way they teach on a day-to-day basis. Investigation into this area is beginning to highlight the difficulty teachers have in finding the balance between teaching in a way that is conducive to children's learning and at the same time the need, at times, to quell their own negative emotions within the classroom environment. Oatley (1992, in Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998) agrees, and suggests that teachers' negative emotions can threaten their sense of self and their desired goals in life. This is often an ongoing struggle for teachers, who begin teaching with a fierce commitment and responsibility to their students but realise that the teacher-student relationship can be at times fraught with aggravation. "Even under favourable circumstances, caring for students can be demanding and exasperating" (Goldstein & Lake, 2000, p. 863).

For these reasons it is imperative that teachers continually assess and gauge their own emotional state. This is different from my earlier claim where I discussed teachers' risk of emotional exhaustion and the effort needed to 'plan' or 'suppress' emotions. Being aware of, or keeping a check on their everyday emotional states in an occupation that is emotionally demanding is a very sensible thing to do. This is a positive step for teachers to take, as it is a way of protecting and nurturing a part of themselves necessary for their own emotional well-being (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Phillip & Schupbach, 2010; Sutton, 2004).

Given the enormous benefits of functioning in an emotionally receptive way, it is no surprise that the role of emotion in the workplace has rightfully taken centre stage (Goleman, 1995; Hochschild, 1993). Research has shown that critical teaching behaviours which promote social and academic success at school are: demonstrating a friendly and calm demeanour; speaking respectfully to students; and, fostering a classroom environment which engages student learning (Pianta, Snow & Cox, 2007).

Past research has tended to focus on cognition and motivation but further investigations by authors such as Damasio (1994), Hargreaves (2000), Meyer (2009), Sutton and Wheatley (2003), and Zembylas (2003), have shown that emotion is clearly and explicitly an intrinsic part of who we are. Our emotions are not “a state within a state” (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 333). They cannot be understood outside the dynamic of human life. The emotional processes acquire their meaning and sense within this context.

The Theoretical Framework Underpinning This Study

The sociocultural theoretical stance for this study relates directly to the highly social and collaborative nature of the relationship between teachers and their students. The work of L. S. Vygotsky, Urie Bronfennbrenner and Barbara Rogoff provides an understanding of how children and teachers engage with their social world. This understanding is beneficial in forming a framework for recognising how teachers' emotions not only influence their own behavior but also the learning outcomes of their students.

Teachers' emotions and children's transitions to school are both socially and culturally constructed. Neither occurs in isolation and both are profoundly influenced by human interaction (Graue & Reineke, 2014). Given the highly social focus of this topic, I have chosen to draw on sociocultural theory, particularly Rogoff's (2003) research pertaining to historical and cultural practices and their effect on human development, as the theoretical framework for this study.

Many young children experience transition to school as an intense learning phase where everything is new: the teacher, the classroom, school rules and designated play areas. There are unfamiliar noises, buildings and people and, while it can be exciting, it can also be fraught with anxiety. Saying goodbye to pre-school teachers and friends and farewelling a place that brought comfort and security can leave children feeling bewildered and nervous. For teachers too, there is an anxiety about how children will cope: Have the children been grouped properly to account for special needs? How will the parents react? (Blaise & Nuttall, 2011; Brooker, 2006; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007, Dunlop, 2014).

In those first few days of school there is a myriad of social situations to be encountered, with each past and new experience amalgamating into the next. The full spectrum of emotions takes centre stage as children are left happy, crying, excited, playing quietly, sad, or noisily moving from one activity to the next. Parents are also hovering, worried about leaving. Some of them are teary-eyed whilst others rush out the door, overjoyed that their children have finally started school. The prep classroom, like no other classroom, is visibly awash with emotions (Fabian, 2007).

The following graphic – **The Transition Twister** (Figure 1), visually represents the emotional turmoil teachers face during prep transition. The social, historical and cultural features of this process continue to spin around, impacting on teachers as they try to manage their emotions in the classroom setting.

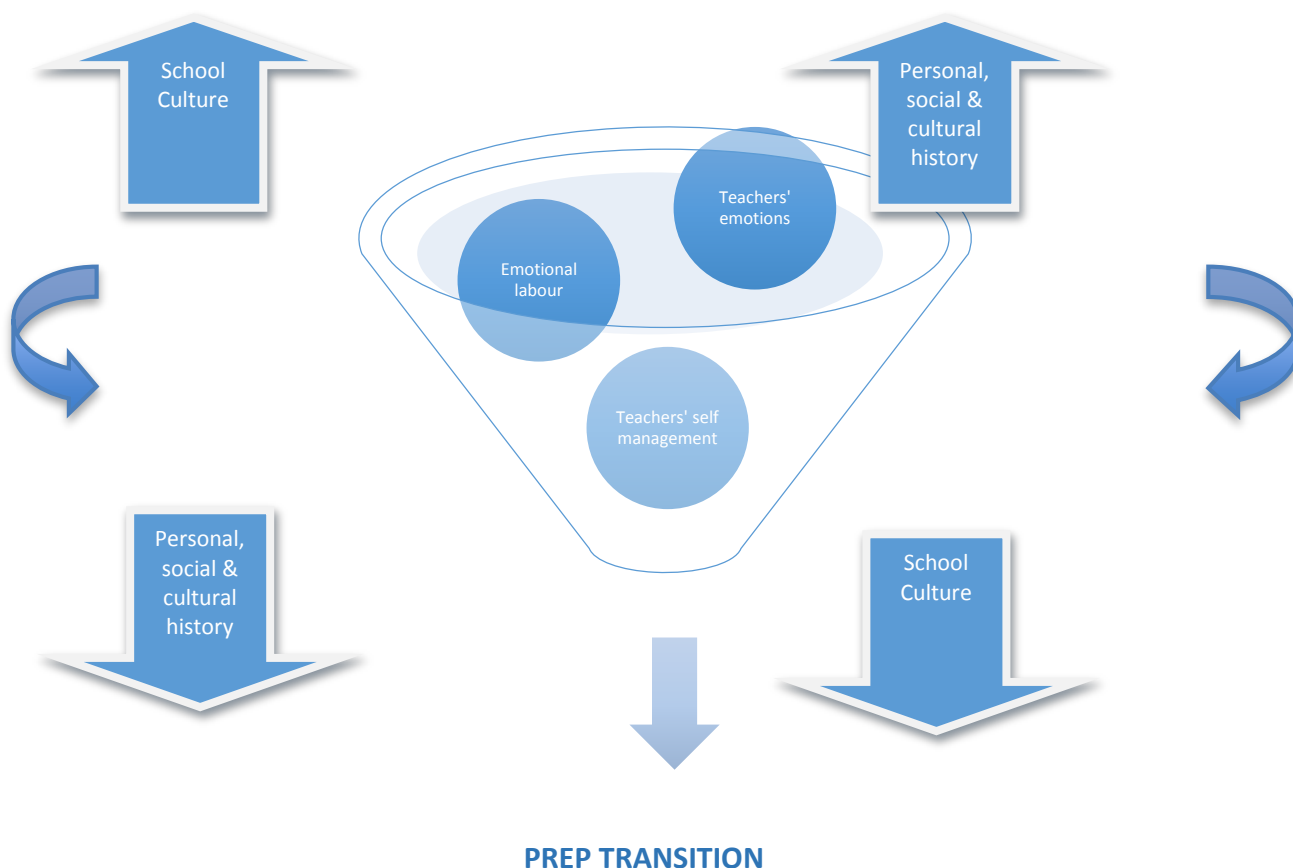


Figure 1: The Transition Twister

If emotions are socially constructed, and teaching in an emotionally responsive way is critical for students' learning outcomes and teachers' well-being, then understanding how children learn and teachers facilitate this learning process is an important step to conceptualising emotions within the student-teacher paradigm. To do this, we need to understand transition in relation to human development; hence the theoretical framework adopted for this investigation (Hargreaves, 2000).

Transitions occur at varying intervals in our lives. There are significant periods such as moving from infancy to childhood, or adolescence to adulthood, and within these stages are individual developmental events such as crawling, walking or starting pre-school. Rogoff (2003, p. 150) believes that “transitions across childhood can also be considered cultural community events that occur as individuals change their roles in their community’s structure”.

Transition to school is a cultural and community event affecting not only children, but families and teachers as well. It is a dynamic process which changes as the expectations and roles change within these relationships (Peters, 2014). Although the conceptual framework of this study is based on sociocultural theory, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model has contributed significantly to understanding this aspect of child development, and his transition systems are worth discussing as a means of further clarifying some of the complexities of this process.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) system is likened to ‘Russian Nesting Dolls’ where a small doll sits inside a larger doll and so on. The smallest doll represents an individual’s direct experiences while the outer dolls are examples of settings which impact on the smallest doll in a less direct way, as the interaction is with others and there is little participation from the smallest doll. Each nesting doll identifies with a system; the smallest doll represents, for example, the child’s home, school and prior-to-school settings and is termed the microsystem. The mesosystem is the next layer of interaction and constitutes the relationship between the microsystem settings, specifically in the case of this study the interconnection and influences of family at home, pre-school and school as the child begins school. The exosystem acts as a

framework for the mesosystem. It creates the link between the microsystem settings, in which individual children are directly involved, and the mesosystem settings that they do not participate in, such as parental work places. The macrosystem surrounds all three systems and comprises much broader cultural and social influences including government policies and social values (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dockett & Perry, 2006; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Rogoff, 2003).

Bronfenbrenner believed that positive human connections within a nurturing environment, potentially a child's microsystem, led to increased learning and development. This was possible through 'proximal processes' that refer to: "enduring, reciprocal, highly interactive processes between a developing organism and other individuals or objects in the environment" (Smith, 2011, p. 2).

Hamre and Pianta (2005 p ?) concur and state that "children are most directly influenced through proximal processes", and that this is therefore a key method whereby children learn and develop. The following is an example of this process, but I have also included the emotional aspects of the teaching taking place.

If a new literacy program was introduced into a school after being successfully trialed, the delivery of this program should provide excellent learning opportunities for children. However, the actual knowledge is transmitted at an instructional level via the teacher to the student. It is within this instructional mode that the teacher's and students' emotional moods will determine how this information is received. Of course, the emotional mood discussed here is the culmination of social, cultural and historical

factors and patterns formed prior to this one moment and played out in the classroom at the instructional level.

If the teacher is particularly anxious or seems annoyed then, understandably, the quality of the lesson will be diminished. Furthermore,

... if students feel uncomfortable or disconnected from the social environment in the classroom, or if classroom management is so poor that students find it hard to attend to instruction, the potential effects of the curriculum are unlikely to be realized. (Hamre & Pianta, 2005, p. 51)

When proximal processes flow in a reciprocally positive way, they provide an opportunity for positive learning outcomes. It is important, however, in relation to the present investigation concerning emotions, that the people (teachers and students) involved in this process, with their varied social, cultural and historical personality layers, are acknowledged in a way which shows the possible emotional impact they will have on each other.

Rogoff's (2003) concept of 'guided participation' is suitable for an investigation on teachers' emotions, as it considers a range of ways children learn. Within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, children are influenced by their outer cultural systems. This tends to assume people are separate from their environment and therefore "subject to its influences" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 49). Whilst Rogoff (2003) appreciates the important ideas, Bronfenbrenner (1979) has contributed to further our understanding of families and their movement through ecological settings, the concept of 'nested

systems' and 'proximal processes' can limit our view of how people relate to cultural processes.

Essentially, human transitions are dynamic complex practices, full of social and cultural activity. Social and cultural practices are interwoven between individuals and groups where interaction and activity occurs back and forth between the systems of transition, as opposed to a particular system impacting on an individual in one direction only. Rogoff's (2003, p. 50) theoretical position portrays transition as the "mutual relationship of culture and human development", not with one producing the other, but a combination of both. This approach is consistent with sociocultural theory where 'the efforts of individuals are not separate from the kinds of activities in which they engage and the kinds of institutions of which they are a part' (2003, p. 50).

Teaching and learning are embedded in a cultural context, so when teachers and students enter the classroom environment they bring with them personal values, beliefs and knowledge which will influence their interactions. Together they construct meaning and understanding, based on prior knowledge of themselves and others, and their lived experiences (Pianta, Cox & Snow, 2007; Rogoff, 2003). Based on this information, and looking through a sociocultural lens, teaching and learning comprise practices of 'scaffolding' and observations of children working through their 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD). Both these processes relate to Vygotsky's key principles of learning where social interaction is central to cognition, especially language acquisition.

When researchers of culture and cognition became aware of the benefits of collaboration in increasing cognition, Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development provided a source of inspiration. The ZPD is defined as the immediate range of tasks a child can achieve only with help from a peer or adult. Vygotsky argued that children's abilities should not be observed and assessed at one particular point in time but rather in relation to what they are capable of achieving with the help of another person (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Rogoff, 2003).

This interactive concept has long been practised in schools, specifically between teachers and students, but according to Rogoff (2003), although this concept is significant, it has tended to dismiss other ways of engaging children in learning. She proposed a process called 'guided participation', developed to broaden our ideas of the different ways children learn: "Guided participation provides a perspective to help us focus on the varied ways that children learn as they participate in and are guided by the values and practices of their cultural communities" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 284).

Both processes are valid and acceptable; one is particularly observed at school while the other includes a broader cultural and community perspective. However, they are equally collaborative in nature and, for the purpose of this school-based study, it makes sense to examine Vygotsky's ZPD further (Doucet & Tudge, 2007).

This aspect of guiding someone through their ZPD to increase their understanding of a particular concept is a crucial part of Vygotsky's approach and has been termed 'scaffolding' by some theorists. In keeping with the idea of social engagement in extending children's cognitive abilities, scaffolding is of paramount importance in

teaching children within their ZPD. During scaffolding, capable peers provide support to the child to help him or her accomplish more difficult tasks and then reduce this support as competence increases. Successful scaffolding incorporates the concept of 'intersubjectivity' which is defined as a mutual understanding between learning participants resulting in working towards the same goal (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).

The combination of social interaction with more knowledgeable peers and adults provides a learning environment conducive to children functioning at higher levels of cognitive processing. At this point of learning, the emotional position of the teacher comes into play. The transmission of information and the support given is influenced by what the teacher is feeling at that moment (Berk, 1994). The student's learning outcome, therefore, is potentially affected by the emotional behaviour of the teacher.

The following example of scaffolding demonstrates a successful outcome for students and their teacher. In a study conducted by Kern (2000), a prep teacher described an area she had set up as the 'peace table'. This table represented a space where children could safely negotiate any potential conflict situations. "Helping children verbalise what they want to do is the beginning of negotiation ..." and with this in mind, the teacher used puppets at first to role model how to use the 'peace table' (Kern, 2000, p 322).

Once these artefacts were in place she could invite children in conflict to join her at the table, where they identified a problem and worked at finding a solution. Throughout this process the teacher persisted in encouraging the children to use language appropriate to achieving a peaceful resolution. "Soon the children invite one another

to the table without the teacher and even act as mediators of conflict with others” Reference here. Setting up a collaborative opportunity like this is an excellent example of how scaffolding can work (Kern, 2000, p. 322; Sutton, 2005). Once again, however, as in Bronfenbrenner’s ‘proximal processes’ example, this is a significant point in time in the process of supporting students; a negative, emotionally charged response from the teacher can equally influence students’ understanding of how this process works. “Teachers (sic) abilities to support social and emotional functioning in the classroom are therefore central to any conceptualization of effective classroom practice” (Hamre & Pianta, 2007, p. 58).

While biological in nature, emotions are principally a social construct. While “there is a common basis for language in all people” (Lasky, 2000, p. 845), different cultures rely on their own distinctive ways of saying and doing things; they have a vocabulary that is familiar, and unique emotional patterns that result from specific societal customs.

Teaching too has its own culture with norms and expectations to which teachers strive to adhere. To do this they need to manage their emotions to construct a positive emotional climate in the classroom (Hamre & Pianta, 2007). This study’s research questions focus on these issues and look to clarify how teachers interpret their own emotionality as they support children through prep transition, what teachers believe a successful transition to prep means, and the importance of the emotional tone of the classroom. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4: Findings.

“In short, emotion is embedded in socially established structures of meaning” (Lasky, 2000, p. 845), and is the reason why Rogoff’s extensive investigations into culture and its influence on human development, along with Vygotsky’s theory of development, and Bronfenbrenner’s transition systems form the basis of my theoretical framework.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Experience happens narratively. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 118)

This research investigation focused on four preparatory grade teachers from two separate state primary schools located in Melbourne, Victoria. Research questions addressed the issue of how the teachers managed their emotions during young children's school transition and employed the qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry, where teachers' rich descriptions of their socially and culturally created lives and experiences emerged in the form of stories. Looking through a sociocultural lens, the work of Vygotsky, Rogoff and Bronfenbrenner underpin the theoretical framework by emphasising the highly social construct of emotions. This chapter discusses qualitative research, its history and key features, narrative inquiry design, data analysis and interpretation, and ethical considerations.

The History of Qualitative Research

Researchers need to determine the most suitable mode of research design in relation to their specific topic, which is rarely easy. Qualitative research is a domain of inquiry that is used in human science disciplines to study vast and diverse subject matters. The sheer volume of literature published over the last decade seeking to define qualitative inquiry demonstrates an overwhelming desire to increase our understanding of this approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

Creswell (1998) pondered the multitude of research design options under the umbrella term of 'qualitative inquiry'. This led to the publication of his book *Qualitative Inquiry*

and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions, in an effort to clarify the complexities of how the tradition of qualitative inquiry shapes the design of a study. In 2005, after publishing their third *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. vii), stated that while “the field of qualitative research was still defined primarily by tensions, contradictions and hesitations”, it has provided a plausible, alternative method of human inquiry which has become enormously popular in recent years.

Qualitative research has been historically challenged as a less accurate and truthful way to research. In fact the word ‘qualitative’ was always viewed as a ‘slippery term’ (Freebody, 2003, p. 35). Preceding the 1980s, a strong positivist and objective stance to research was considered the most authentic and exact way to generate new knowledge by a majority of researchers. In establishing the historical connection between educational research and qualitative research, Lichtman (2006) would argue that there is not one person or leader identified with the conception of educational research. Instead, she felt it was a discipline which “developed after universities became involved in advanced training of those going into education” (Lichtman, 2006, p.40).

During this period, educational research was unfortunately heavily influenced by psychology and testing methods, which guided researchers’ topics of investigation. An example of this was the highly specialised testing carried out during World War II on military personnel. After the war, potential space travel and the extensive use of computers ensured that statistical analysis and deductive processes were consistently employed. There were also very few women who contributed to educational research

at this time, as traditional, scientific ways of researching continued with male researchers dominating the field.

This is not to say that qualitative research was not being conducted prior to this period, but it was considered outside the realm of what was considered to be genuine research. For example, ethnography was popular and anticipated later principles of qualitative research, but was not considered to equal the more rigorous, scientific framework of quantitative analysis. In reality, the “development of research on human activities, then, appeared to involve a shift only of topic rather than of methods for finding out” (Freebody, 2003, p. 19).

It was not surprising that in the second half of the 20th Century, educational researchers strongly debated the way quantitative research had been conducted thus deeply and passionately questioned whose interests were served by the dominant paradigm. Feminist scholars also echoed these same sentiments, and argued for a more transparent and clear way to present their research (Lichtman, 2006, p. 42).

The idea that there was only one dominant way to investigate social topics began to change as educational researchers set in motion new ways to acknowledge and clarify alternative ideas of thinking about research, and creating new knowledge (Bogden & Biklen, 2005).

Key Principles of Qualitative Research

A key feature of qualitative research is the significant role of the participants, whose worldview, within the context of the phenomena being studied, is central to forming an

insightful and descriptive analysis for discussion. Essentially, it is the meaning-making which participants socially construct for themselves that allows researchers to grasp a particular experience; in this case prep teachers' emotions around the time of school transition. Qualitative data is gathered in many different forms including observation, personal documents, memos, diaries, field notes, interviews, video and photographic images. According to Lichtman (2006, p. 22), qualitative research is a "way of knowing that assumes that the researcher gathers, organises, and interprets information (usually in words and pictures) with his or her eyes and ears as filters". Quantitative research, by contrast, reduces data to numbers and exact statements.

Bogden and Biklen (2007, p. 5) believe qualitative researchers should be 'nitpickers' when it comes to deciphering data. Most of us go about our lives not cognisant of the impact of our daily social interactions or behaviour on others and are often unaware of our own physical environments. Things like "gestures, jokes, who does the talking in a conversation, the colour of the walls and the special words we use and to which those around us respond" (2007, p. 5) are not always observed on a day to day basis.

Qualitative research, particularly at the point of collecting descriptive data, requires a level of examination which will reveal human insight beyond what is usually noticed and "that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied" (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 5). Another important feature of qualitative research is that the source of data occupies a natural setting and the researcher plays the role of the key instrument. Qualitative researchers will work with participants in the setting in which the social phenomenon

under study is being observed. This can include places such as kindergartens, schools, hospitals, family homes and neighbourhoods.

For this study, I chose to interview the participants in their classroom; firstly, because this was more convenient and time effective for them, and more importantly, because I wanted to immerse myself in the setting where the teachers' experiences take place. Qualitative researchers rely on natural settings to collect data to provide context for their study. "They feel that action can be best understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs", making it distinctly different to quantitative research where data does not need to be captured in a specific setting (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 4).

Throughout the process of contacting and interviewing my research participants, I was guided by the key principles of qualitative research, as outlined above. Once my semi-structured interviews were transcribed I called upon another distinguishing feature of qualitative research: an inductive approach to data analysis. This method helped me highlight themes or patterns within the data as I integrated one aspect of the data with another. Bogden and Biklen (2007, p. 6) explain: "You are not putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts". This technique moves from concrete to abstract information unlike deciphering quantitative research data, which usually occurs in the opposite direction.

Authors who write about qualitative research (e.g. Bogden & Biklen, 2005; Creswell, 2005; Freebody, 2003; Lichtman, 2006) discuss how expansive and all-encompassing it can be in terms of the complex paradigms it contains under the one broad heading

and the many different subject areas it covers. It was difficult for me, to sift through the many layers and definitions of qualitative research. Applying it to my topic of investigation became easier as I understood more fully its key characteristics.

The principle that resonated with me most was that of 'meaning'. What *sense* did the prep teachers make of children moving from kindergarten to school and how did this affect them emotionally? According to Freebody (2003, p. 35), many educational researchers have come to believe that "research activities structured through the logics of quantification leave out lots of interesting and potentially consequential things about the phenomenon".

Postmodernist views demonstrate that qualitative research is an acceptable research methodology. It is primarily focused on furthering our understanding of human life and is often dynamic and fluid (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative researchers ask 'why', 'what' and 'when' questions, seeking out information on how human behaviour plays out in certain settings, cultures and communities to gain insight into "the complex emotional layers that drive our desires and shapes (sic) our dreams" (Stallworth-Hooper, 2011, p. 163).

Narrative Inquiry as a Qualitative Research Method

My research focused on prep teachers' emotions during prep transition. I was concerned specifically with how prep teachers managed their own emotions in the classroom environment, during a critical time in children's lives. A crucial element of the research process was to decide on methods which best suited the research problem (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008). From this premise I referred to Denzin

(1990), who argued that emotions must be studied as lived experiences. I chose narrative inquiry in this investigation because this approach embraces the notions of human experience and the stories emerging from this experience. Culturally and socially derived, people's life stories are naturally emotive and can provide valuable information about a specific group, in this case prep teachers.

As a neophyte researcher, I spent many hours reading about qualitative research approaches, trying to decipher the best option for my investigation. When I started thinking about how I came to formulate my research question, I realised at the very beginning that there was a story: the story of my daughter's transition to primary school and its effect on us as a family. This, along with my own teaching background, only increased my interest and understanding of a narrative approach in investigating the topic of this study.

I chose narrative inquiry to provide a way of exploring and understanding human behavior, emphasising the significance of the research problem through narration of personal experiences. It resulted in a literary text which, "when well done, offers readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42).

Unlike other qualitative approaches, narrative inquiry places the researcher's own social, historical and cultural influences and experiences within the context of the research problem, allowing both researcher and participants to become characters in each other's stories. This is a defining aspect of a narrative inquiry and an important point to remember. Qualitative research is interpreted in many ways and it is

impossible to remove the researchers' beliefs and feelings from within this process. There is more than one voice in a narrative inquiry and the researcher's voice is as important as that of the participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005).

Therefore it is not surprising that, just as the template of qualitative research design has changed over the years, the way of presenting academic texts has also evolved. In qualitative research, the scientific, authoritative approach has been replaced with a more personal style of academic writing. According to Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2010, p. 10), "the neutral research report, scripted into a 'smooth scientific narrative', which denies our investment in the research process, is giving way to a new mode of representing research". Eisner (1991, p. 4) concurs emphatically, stating: "I want readers to know that this author is a human being and not some disembodied abstraction who is depersonalised through linguistic conventions that hide his signature".

Narrative inquiry lends itself well to educational research and to researching teachers' lives by utilising a mode of eliciting information which is already universally understood and rehearsed. According to Clandinin, Pushor and Murray Orr (2007, p. 21), "part of the appeal is, no doubt, the comfort that comes from thinking about telling and listening to stories".

Whilst I believe a narrative inquiry method is particularly apt for research about teachers' emotions, it has had its fair share of criticism and scrutiny. Unfortunately the act of "storytelling" has been viewed (Freebody, 2003) as an easy approach to

researching that simply involves 'telling stories'. However, for many authors, (e.g. Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Connelly, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Ellis & Bochner, 1996), narrative inquiry involves complex and challenging dimensions which engage researchers in a way that forces them to be aware and alert not only to specific elements but to the subtle nuances of a narrative inquiry design. In fact, it is the kind of inquiry that "requires particular kinds of wakefulness". (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 21). Through the process of narrative inquiry, human emotions, thoughts and experiences are revealed.

Variants of Narrative Inquiry

There are different ways to approach a narrative inquiry. Holistically, narrative inquiry is interdisciplinary and relies upon an individual researcher's specific domain of inquiry to steer and shape a particular narrative theme. For the purpose of this research project I have employed Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) 'commonplaces of narrative inquiry' as a guide to my inquiry about teacher's emotions at the time of children's transition to primary school.

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) developed three domains as checkpoints for these commonplaces of narrative inquiry research. The first one, *temporality* refers to transition. People are always in a state of motion or change and the events they experience in the past, present or may experience in the future. The second is *sociality*, where personal and social conditions bear on an individual's circumstances. Personal conditions tend to refer more to the "feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). The relationship between researcher and participant(s) is also important in this particular

commonplace as the connection between them places them in each other's lives at the time of inquiry. According to Connelly and Clandinin, "we cannot subtract ourselves from relationship" (2006, p. 480).

Finally, *place*, refers to the specific concrete location of the inquiry. If all events take place somewhere then recognising and acknowledging this aspect of the research is crucial in determining how events are experienced in certain places. Physical changes in location can alter experiences and stories and researchers need to be mindful of this process (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 481).

In summary, this study is based on a sociological foundation where participants' conversations unfold through the interaction between researcher and narrator. Personal experiences are understood as influenced by cultural and historical forces and were communicated linguistically in a way that helped make meaning of prep teachers' realities and everyday practices.

Method

The participants.

This investigation involved participation by four preparatory teachers from two separate government primary schools. Each of these schools is located in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, approximately four kilometres apart. The student and staff population and participation profiling of this investigation is as follows: the larger of the two schools has 802 students, 50 staff members and provided three participants for this research; the other (smaller) school has 375 students, 22 staff and provided one participant for this research.

At the start of this investigation ten schools were selected, primarily because of their close proximity to each other, which made them easily accessible. Although each school was initially enthusiastic about participating, with meetings organised for either the Principal or Deputy Principal for all ten schools, ultimately work-loads and time constraints meant that eight schools did not participate.

Purposive sampling is a process of selecting participants who are unique to a particular study. In this case, prep teachers of each of the schools were asked to participate. Because the teachers needed to have sufficient experience of prep transition to contribute to this particular investigation, prep teachers considered 'information rich' were expected to have taught grade prep across two years consecutively to ensure the whole transition process from pre-school to primary school was fully understood and experienced (Patton, 2006, p. 46).

I had hoped to interview six teachers from six different schools but only four teachers from two schools agreed to participate. Whilst busy teaching schedules and after-work commitments made it difficult for many of the teachers to participate, studies (Burnaford, Fischer & Hobson, 2000; Wilson, 2012) have shown that there is often a gap between the actual craft of teaching and an interest in and access to research literature that informs good teaching practice. Historically, teachers have not always believed that educational research will be particularly helpful or supportive of their teaching practice or work environment, so there is less impetus to participate. This could be one reason why some of the teachers did not readily involve themselves in this research investigation.

Data collection methods.

To address the research questions and objectives of this inquiry, data were gathered through individual interviews, a focus group interview, and informal observations and discussions with the teachers. The individual interviews took place at the primary schools, while the focus group interview was held at the school with the most participants.

The first 20 minutes of each of the individual interviews was informal and took place in each of the teacher's classrooms, after school and at a time convenient for the teachers. There had only been email correspondence up until this time and I did not want to launch immediately into recording our discussion as I hoped this time without recording would help build rapport and make the participants feel more comfortable (Creswell, 2003; Lichtman, 2006). Each individual interview and the focus group interview were one hour in duration.

However, even during this informal, introductory stage I was alert to the body language, tone of voice and gestures of each of the participants before asking any of the interview questions (Appendix 5). These sorts of observations are important when it comes to interpreting data; observing is a key feature of qualitative research design in terms of gaining a holistic view of the participants (Bogden & Biklen, 2005). The interviews continued to be conversational in tone and, in upholding narrative inquiry principles, the shift was made from researcher to listener and participant to narrator, where the teachers were the experts about their own experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006). According to Chase (2010, p. 660), "the goal of in depth interviewing is to transform the 'interviewer-interviewee-relationship' into one of narrator and listener".

Chase (2010) discusses this shift in light of researchers missing valuable information when participants 'get off track' from the questions being asked and the researcher then panics about how to direct the participant back to the question. In her own work on female superintendents and their career histories, this example was highlighted when one participant started talking about her family and even showed some family photographs. At the time, Chase (2010) may have viewed this as a digression from this person's work narrative but later would have realised it was a crucial part of her story and integral to her reasons for moving away from a very stressful, albeit prestigious, position.

There is a paradox in narrative inquiry which can make interviewing difficult. On the one hand it seems researchers must be open to listening and deciphering dialogue, even when it seems like part of the interviewees' stories are not so worthy and don't seem to fit the research questions. However, this does not mean that there should be less preparation in the sorts of questions which are asked. On the contrary, "a researcher needs to be well prepared to ask good questions that will invite the other's particular story" (Chase, 2010, p. 220). Van Manen (1990, p. 67) would argue that "as we interview others about their experience of a certain phenomenon, it is imperative to stay close to experience as lived. As we ask what an experience is like, it may be helpful to be very concrete". Here again is a reminder about the complexities of this particular methodology and it is a challenge for researchers who are new to narrative inquiry to be alert to its nuances (Clandinin et al., 2007).

For the individual and focus group interviews I made observational notes about each teacher in the introductory part of the meeting before asking any questions. For the group interview I was concerned about the dynamic of the group as one of the participants was from a different school and was joining in with a trio of prep teachers all from the same school. It took place in a classroom, which is a natural setting for them, and I was immediately put at ease as they all started talking after being introduced. At this point I felt we were co-researchers in this study, as we swapped teaching stories even before the interviewing began.

I had prepared my questions carefully, having rewritten them several times to hone in on what my investigation was trying to address. However, once the interviews were well under way I found myself, at times, a little annoyed and sometimes overwhelmed at where their stories were heading; I was reminded of Chase (2010, p. 660), and her warning of not to be 'impatient' or 'thrown off track' by the interviewees' stories.

Sometimes the conversations led to topics that seemed completely unrelated to the questions but later resulted in enhancing the stories in subsequent analysis. This was particularly true for the group discussion as teachers added their own part of their story in response to each particular question. Like steps on a staircase, each step was not only an addition to the story but changed it in some way too. Instinctively I started making choices about whether I let a story unfold or directed responses back to a particular theme or issue with another question. Chase (2010, p. 210) believes that good interview preparation helps you understand what is "story worthy in the narrator's social setting".

Approach to data analysis and interpretation.

This section describes two separate but related processes: data *analysis*, which precedes interpretation and refers to the stage where information is appropriately collated and organized, which enables the secondary process of *interpretation* to proceed. Following this process, these interpretations are presented in a meaningful way, which is relevant to the research at hand.

Data analysis requires the researcher to sort and sift through often volumes of observational notes, audio recordings and transcripts. Interpretation of the interviewees' stories is then used to transmit claims via contextual themes related to a particular topic, in this case teachers' emotions around children's transition (Lichtman, 2006). In a narrative inquiry, meaning is made through both the participants' and the researcher's actions and events over time. "Unlike a chronology, which also reports events over time, a narrative communicates the narrator's point of view, including why the narrative is worth telling in the first place" (Chase, 2010, p. 656).

Once the data were gathered, I concentrated my efforts on listening and re-listening to the recordings and re-reading the transcripts over to identify themes within the dialogue. Each individual teacher's story was highlighted. However, it was the tensions and common threads between all four participants which became intriguing and required particular 'wakefulness' to ascertain the most effective way to construct meaning. Coffey and Atkinson's (1996, p. 80) definition of narrative data analysis was particularly pertinent at this point:

There are no formulae or recipes for the 'best' way to analyse the stories we elicit and collect ... Such approaches also enable us to think beyond our data to the ways in which accounts and stories are socially and culturally managed and constructed. That is the analysis of narratives can provide a critical way of examining not only key actors and events but also cultural conventions and social norms.

Reference to the theoretical framework, research questions and the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry were significant guideposts for the process of analysing and interpreting data for this study (Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Murray, Orr, & Pearce, 2006).

At the core of narrative inquiry, authors agree that the essence of meaningful analysis and interpretation is being able to understand people's thinking and values and how they have made sense of these in relation to their experiences and the events in their lives (Riley & Hawke, 2005). The researcher's role is to identify and analyse recurring themes and patterns through the medium of stories where people "draw on, resist and/or transform discourses as they narrate their selves, experiences, and realities" (Chase, 2010, p. 659).

To ensure I adhered to this process I consciously and actively listened several times to the teachers' voices, not just tone or pitch, although these are important, but to what Chase (2010, p. 657) identifies as "narrator's voices": "The word voice pertains to what and how the narrator communicates as well as the social contexts from which the narrator speaks" (Peterson & Langellier, 2007, p. 207). The story is edited accordingly

to allow for the narrator's voice to be emphasized and, in doing so, moves away from the facts of the story and focuses, more importantly, on the rich descriptions of life's experiences through the telling of the story.

Chase (2010) provides an appropriate description of 'typologies of narrative strategies', targeted towards the understanding and accurate representation of interpreting narrator's voices. Indeed, Chase's emphasis on the importance of noticing the narrator's voice concerning, in this instance, teachers' management of their emotions, is a useful and appropriate reminder of how important this particular practice is in the process of narrative data analysis and interpretation.

To ensure the narrative accounts were correct, I consulted with each teacher after each of the interviews to confirm that what I had interpreted from their responses was accurate. Once the transcripts were completed I also shared these with the teachers to further confirm that I had reflected their intended meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Ethical considerations.

Ethical considerations were an important part of this research. Approval was obtained from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (CF09/2071-2009001176 - Appendix 1) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (000637- Appendix 2). Principals in a number of eastern metropolitan region schools were approached and invited to explain the purpose of the study to their teaching staff in preparatory classes. Teachers who voluntarily expressed an interest in participating communicated directly with the researcher. The teachers were given a detailed information sheet (Appendix 3) outlining the purpose of the study and were assured that all information would remain confidential. All teacher consent forms

(Appendix 4) were signed before data collection began and every care was taken to conduct the interviews in a way which was not stressful or detrimental to the teachers.

The next chapter focuses on each of the participants in this study and is presented as teachers' collective narratives. Challenges and tensions are highlighted and analysed in relation to the theoretical framework of this research. Finally, Chapter 5 will conclude with a discussion on the practical implications which may be drawn from this study as well as reflections about the research process.

Chapter 4: Findings

Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. Robert Mckee (1997, p. 31)

The Participants

The four female research participants in this current study had varied teaching experiences. Each participant included in the sample had to be teaching prep in the year the research interviews took place, as well as the year prior to this. This was a significant factor in recruiting suitable participants, as prep transition begins during preschool. Most schools invite students to take part in a transition process towards the end of the year; usually consisting of one session a week for two hours over approximately five weeks. This is an important time for prep teachers as they meet the students and families who will become part of their school community the following year. This transition process provides prep teachers with valuable information about the children, which is essential for making decisions about which class each child will be placed in for their first year of school (Dockett & Perry, 2001).

To ensure ethical principles were followed, participants' names were changed to protect their privacy in accordance with confidentiality guidelines. The participants were: Daphne who had been teaching for six years, with two of these years in a prep classroom; Alice with 14 years' experience as a junior primary teacher, ten of these in a prep classroom; Eliza, who had only graduated recently and had been teaching for three years, including two years as a prep teacher; and Neve, who had been teaching for 30 years with 20 years as a prep teacher. Neve, Alice and Daphne were teaching

at the same school and made up part of the Level One teaching team in prep; there were six grade prep classes at the school altogether. Eliza was working with one other prep teacher at her school.

Storytelling seems like a natural way for teachers to make meaning of the experiences they encounter in and out of the classroom. According to Meier and Stremmel (2010, p. 2), “as teachers relate their stories, they relive and understand their lives as a series of ongoing narratives, with conflicts, plots, characters, beginnings, middles, and endings”. This thesis is a story about researching teachers’ emotions during children’s transition to school. The four characters in this study are introduced individually as the story begins and unfolds around a series of themes conveying rich descriptions of their lives as prep teachers. They tell narrative tales of wanting to provide their students with the best transition to school, while feeling conflicted at some of the challenges they face in terms of regulating their own emotions. Collectively they position themselves definitely as part of a special group within a school social structure, and their narrative accounts and anecdotes highlight common threads and tensions. Through shared experiences, the theme of emotional labour weaves its way around their narrative accounts, clearly showing the contradictions they negotiated as they continually tried to balance the emotional wellbeing of their students, as well as preserve and nurture their own emotional health.

From the beginning of this investigation I positioned myself as a co-researcher along with the participants. I needed their help to unpack the often-silent discourse around teachers’ emotions, particularly around the time of children’s transition to school (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005). Stories offer an opportunity to understand others within a

social context. This is an advantage for the researcher as it adds greater clarity to the topic being studied (Clandinin et al., 2007; Meier & Stremmel, 2010).

The following themes are presented as collective narrative accounts and include: It's not just a job, Of course I care, The parent paradox, Leave it at the door, Timeout, and A friend in need is a friend indeed. These titles are characterized by participants' quotations.

Theme 1: It's Not Just a Job

Neve expressed herself during the interviews as a confident, articulate and jovial lady with an unwavering conviction about why she is a teacher. A veteran of the teaching profession spanning 30 years, her faith in God and Christianity reinforces her beliefs about teaching as a vocation, rather than a professional career, and underpins how she uses spirituality to help her teach in a way that is caring and optimistic. Neve's response to me when I asked her about fostering a positive classroom environment in relationship to her own emotionality was,

Well I am a Christian and I have faith in God and I believe this has been a calling for me rather than just a job so I would call upon that to help me create a positive classroom environment and that is really important to me.

While the majority of teachers enter the profession with a strong desire to provide a social service, teachers like Neve can use their faith to sustain them in times of high stress (Marsh, 2008).

Teachers employ other character strengths or strategies to help them remain positive in the classroom and at school. Neve's colleague Daphne reflected back to a time in a different school, where the environment was problematic. She said, *"I had awful staff around me, senior management were not supportive and there was no sense of community but you still try to create a positive and happy place in your in own classroom, no matter what"*.

Alice, a prep teacher for ten years, reiterated this sense of providing for her students at all costs. She seemed adamant that this was standard transition practice in the first few weeks with prep students:

Any waking moment they're at school we're with them for that first couple of weeks pretty much. We don't have our own lunch breaks just toilet breaks, so (long pause), yes they really see us every day all day which I think is very important and I'm not complaining about missing out on a lunch break ...

I noted that Alice paused after she said "so", as if it was a moment of realisation for her that the personal investment here was possibly extreme. I wanted to ask her why she paused but this seemed too private to pursue; sometimes during an interview the right thing to do is to remain quiet and not ask any more questions (Chase, Xu & Connelly, 2010; Lichtman, 2013).

Creating a positive classroom climate is not always easy, particularly in a school environment laden with high expectations and complex emotions, emanating out from teachers, students, parents, colleagues and principals. However, teachers continue to strive for the best experience for their students, regardless of the organisational

demands placed on them (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005). This was the case for Neve, who viewed the first year of school as a “*very special year*” and felt that it was her responsibility to provide a setting conducive to fostering confidence and a sense of belonging. Smiling, she said to me, “*You spend a lot of time telling them how wonderful they are so their experience of school is one of success. For me it means children coming in (to the class) happy and relaxed and keen to be there*”.

Daphne, who was friendly and forthright, was even more direct about this challenge, stating:

... you invest so much of yourself into this job. The number of times my husband has said to me, don't do it, they're not paying you enough, you're killing yourself over nowhere near enough money ... but if I don't do it the kids miss out. I'm not just doing it for job satisfaction; I'm doing it because I don't want my kids to miss out. I want them to have a great year, have really good experiences and I want them to be positive about school and be happy so that's why you do it.”

Eliza too, the least experienced of the group, also felt that you must do the best you can for the kids “*... at all times, because they are so young*”.

For the teachers in this study, there were clear and recurring notions of determination and doggedness to provide the best possible start for prep students, regardless of the emotional costs to themselves. I was reminded here of Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) checkpoint of 'place' in a narrative inquiry that determines how events are experienced in certain places. The place in this context is the prep classroom and the teachers' experience is the practice of striving to provide a happy and safe learning

environment for their students. Whilst this is an integral part of teaching, the literature on emotional labour would confirm that, for many teachers, this is done under an enormous amount of stress (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005; Hargreaves; 2002, Sutton, 2004).

Theme 2: Of Course I Care

According to O'Connor (2006, p. 117), "caring is primarily defined as those emotions, actions and reflections that result from a teacher's desire to motivate, help or inspire their students." Noddings (1984) argues that true caring is reciprocal and must be a part of a give and take process, and is not necessarily tied to a person's personality type or disposition. I would challenge Nodding's assumptions of care in this particular investigation, based on Neve's narrative account of caring. Her stories reflect a genuine wish to provide the children in her class with the best start to primary school regardless, I believe, of whether her students reciprocate this care.

During her interview, Neve's description of her desire to be seen as approachable and kind made me recall my own children at the time of transition, and I made a comment about young students needing a hug sometimes. Neve responded with, "*Which is what a mum would do and in a way I think prep teachers are that step between mum and when they hit grade one*". This was clearly an important issue for Neve—that of caring and mothering—because she referred to this again in the focus group interview after one of the other participants spoke of the personal investment that goes into teaching. Neve replied, "*I think infant teachers particularly, in this process, even more so because you do have a motherly sort of role because of the age of the children*".

This conflation of teaching and mothering described in James' (2010, p. 526) study, examining teaching and caring discourses, highlights some of the pre-conceived notions many teachers share about what teaching entails. One of the reasons teachers may identify with mothering within the realm of teaching,

... point[s] to the connections between teachers' efforts to care for students and the ways teachers themselves were mothered, suggesting that the professional work of caring is informed predominantly by our personal, familial experiences of mothering relationships outside the school.

Teachers bring to school each morning emotions from their personal lives, so it is reasonable to expect that past social, historical and cultural relationships and events influence the manner in which they go about teaching (Hargreaves, 1998; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

Rogoff's (2003, p. 284) work on human development as a cultural process, would highlight prep transition as a practice carried out by communities. In this way, the key players—teachers and students—participate in shared sociocultural activities to enhance meanings of the process of transition, where new roles and responsibilities are assumed. This occurs through a process of guided participation, where “learning is a process of changing participation in community activities”; it is a reciprocal endeavour and one that requires “mutual understanding between people in interaction; it cannot be attributed to one person or another” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 285).

The following narrative account, although from the teacher's point of view, reflects not only the mutual connectivity between teachers and their students, but how students

are negotiating their new roles and responsibilities in their new school. When I asked Neve to think back to the first few weeks of school and tell me about the students in her class she responded enthusiastically. Moving herself forward in her chair and grinning at me she appeared eager to tell me about the students in her classroom. *“The children always bring you joy and make you laugh, the funny things they say and their excitement, the pride in their achievements”*. Neve also talked about some of their apprehension and the differences between their personality types as they tried to connect socially with their teachers and make new friends. She noted that, *“They can be very excitable but they can be very shy too, I think we get the whole gamut”*. Daphne appeared eager to talk about this also:

There’s a massive difference between some kids, some of them are terrified, some will have separation issues from mum or dad. Other kids are very excited about what’s happening and will come in and find something to do and [are] happy to start taking ownership of the classroom. They are usually on their best behavior ... that’s why they fall apart at 3.30pm because they’ve tried so hard all day ... [there’s] certainly a whole range of behaviours.

As the interviewees spoke more about their students in the first few weeks of school, I came to understand just how turbulent and hectic the prep classroom could be. This is consistent with the discourse on transition that argues that prep transition is an extremely challenging and taxing time for young children. However, it is just as taxing for teachers. As discussed previously, teacher’s emotions are heightened as they think about things like class groupings, students with special needs, and how students will cope in the first few weeks of separating from their parents (Blaise & Nuttall 2011; Bostrum, 2003; Brooker, 2006; Dunlop & Fabian, 2007). The ‘transition twister’ graphic

in Chapter 2 enhances our understanding of this process by visually depicting the personal, historical and cultural forces brought to bear on prep teachers during this critical but tumultuous time.

Daphne talked about the early days in prep as “*wonderful and overwhelming*”, Alice also demonstrated this contradiction of emotions when she said,

I feel confident but I am also a little bit scared because I know, (pause) like, I'm confident about what I know about myself and how I teach but I know it could all turn pear shaped in a heartbeat, whether it's somebody crying or my activity doesn't work, which I'm totally comfortable about it doing, but then you always need a plan B so I feel confident in myself but utterly, well, not terrified, but a little scared because I know it won't go to plan no matter how well I plan it.

Emotions are socially derived and play out in our everyday lives. Teachers understand the need to engage emotionally with their students, in order to build strong relationships and communicate successfully. For the participants in this study, providing a positive classroom experience is paramount. As Alice said, “*Oh it's huge, yes it's everything, it's everything*”. Even though the participants described a mix of emotions, as in the examples above, teachers typically strive to sustain a positive learning environment for their students (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Lasky, 2000).

While the participants expressed frustration and anxiety around some children's behaviour, Neve appeared to accept this as the reality of prep transition. Perhaps also her many years of experience and time spent with young children and their parents

had shaped her feelings about the early days in a prep classroom. Reflecting back, and with a resigned manner and tone, she said,

You will have some who will watch everything's that's going on and they take a lot of encouragement to open up and join in the group. Often their behaviour in the first week is different to subsequent weeks as they find their feet and some of the more volatile ones will express that and some will be very anxious and some can be really sad, particularly with separation issues with their mother.

Although the other participants didn't discuss teaching in relation to mothering as Neve did, they certainly all spoke of the delights of teaching prep children, with statements such as, *"I don't think I've laughed so much since I came into prep"*. All of them nodded in agreement when Neve said it was a *"special year"* but, more than this, they all expressed gratitude for the experience. Daphne summed this up by saying,

Well my role is to make it so that it is a happy and positive transition by making that link with the child, making them feel comfortable, especially in term one ... and I know on the whole they will like school and I have a role to play in that so it's nice, not everyone gets that experience".

Teachers often portray themselves defending and protecting the children entrusted to their care. For the participants in this study, curriculum content was important but the students' wellbeing was paramount (Newberry, 2013).

Theme 3: The Parent Paradox

The topic of parents generated a lot of discussion and emerged as another challenge under the theme of emotional labour, for all participants. According to Hargreaves

(2001, p. 506), “although classroom responsibilities are at the core of teachers’ work, it is relations with other adults that seem to generate the most heightened expressions of emotionality among them”.

In the year prior to their children starting school, parents are typically welcomed to the school for information evenings and open nights. For prospective prep parents, there is a lot of information to consider. All the interviewees felt that parents were more anxious than their children so prep transition was just as much for the parents as it was for their children. As the prep coordinator at her school, Neve played a significant role in welcoming and reassuring parents. She articulated this by saying,

The transition for us is starting now [September] so I think being available to parents—that can be difficult. Trying to have clear and simple information for the parents so that they’re not anxious because that can be communicated to the children. We work hard to have a really good transition and generally speaking we have only a few children who may have real issues. I think it is the building of the relationships with the parents initially and then with the children and I think we do that quite well.

There was however, ambivalence about how the participants related to parents.

This was a challenge that struck a chord with each of them. Eliza felt that some parents didn’t think she was a suitable candidate to be teaching their children. She said, *“It makes me feel nervous and I don’t look forward to prep transition because it feels like they [parents] are wondering whether you are good enough for their child. I don’t know really if that’s what they’re thinking”*. Neve interjected and said, *“Well, I’m sure some*

parents do think that! I have been teaching prep kids for years and I would still say that I find it difficult because you do know they are looking at you". Daphne joined in quickly with, *"I don't doubt that they do!"* Agitation about parents continued with discussions of how invasive they could be and how hard it was to cope with unrealistic expectations. Eliza found many of the parents annoying: *"... they don't realise you're trying to settle them in. Parents at this school expect you to be teaching reading and writing right from day one ... they can be very pushy".* Daphne confirmed this and added, *"But they also want us to baby them and not ever let them fall over or hurt themselves so they want it both ways ... they want a smart baby".*

While working out formal groups for the students during transition, the three participants who taught at the same school were also in the practice of 'grouping' the parents. Neve explained that, *"Because parents don't want you to feel badly about their child, sometimes I would ask the kinder teachers—are there any problem parents? Are there parents we need to be aware of? Because that can really mess up transition".* Alice continued, *"And that comes into your mind when you're placing kids into classes as well. You know these are students with certain issues but also these are the parents with issues too".* Eliza said, *"We don't do that at our school"* and this comment shifted the tone of the discussion slightly, because the flow of the conversation changed, almost as if the three teachers who worked together felt guilty for their comments about parents; their responses after this were about justifying why they split the parents. Neve commented, *"Well I think if you know you're going to have a situation where a parent will hassle you almost daily ...".* Her comment was unfinished when Daphne interjected,

If you know a parent is easily frustrated and high maintenance then you don't want them all in one classroom because they feed off each other and that makes it really hard for the class teacher, whereas if you spread it out and you've only got one or two, the class teacher can contain it and reassure them, where if you have five or six anxious parents then this is really difficult.

This part of the interview was difficult because I felt as if the teachers were straying from the focus of the research. In an attempt to change the direction of the discussion, I acknowledged that there were issues with parents and asked another question to turn the conversation back to what I thought was the core of the inquiry. It wasn't until I looked back over the interview transcripts and made connections with the focus group transcript that I realised that perhaps I had missed the point. Chase (2010) warns that it is sometimes better to refrain from directing the story, and instead to continue to be patient and listen. I realized the teachers were not simply complaining about the parents. This was clearly another important thread, very much pertaining to prep teachers' emotions and surfacing out of their collective narrative accounts. Studies have shown that teacher-parent relationships can be fraught with tension even when the common goal is happy, contented children who enjoy being at school. When Alice said, *"I always try and think I know more about teaching than they [parents] do so ... you know I'm right"*, it touched on the ways in which an unspoken balance of power between teachers and parents can be a source of stress and worry (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Sutton, 2004).

This level of emotional labour in managing a multitude of relationships within the school landscape is unappreciated. The challenges and tensions already discussed in this

small-scale study show how teachers navigate their way through what can sound like an emotional minefield. Moreover, none of this takes place in isolation (Newberry, 2013; Zembylas, 2009). A meaningful way to bring context to this concept is to juxtapose key dynamics from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) 'Russian Doll' system: Firstly, teachers walk into school and their classrooms with a range of emotions, already infused with past cultural, historical and social influences. This can also be said for parents, students and colleagues. These nested environments include the microsystem, the most inner system, referring to each individual's setting; the culture of home life is often a big part of the microsystem. When two microsystems collide with all those emotions in play, as in the example of parents and teachers in this inquiry, then interactions and relationships can become strained. If there is a disconnect between teachers' and parents' expectations and beliefs about how children learn best and this is happening frequently, it is the teacher-parent relationship around this particular tension which contributes to emotional labour and exhaustion (Newberry, 2013).

In one study on effective transition (Dockett & Perry, 2001), some parents reported feeling alienated at their child's new school. These parents had been involved significantly at the pre-school committee level, but found the organisational and administrative structures of school vastly different in terms of having contact with the teachers. This was not the fault of the teachers, of course, but situations like these where parents do not yet understand new school processes, and teachers are not aware of how they are feeling, can hinder parent-teacher relationships.

The challenge of encountering parents continued to surface in the focus group. The participants' frequent daily experiences with parents, past or present, played out in their stories, underscoring the temporal nature of their narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Alice, for example, was concerned that parents observed the close relationship she had with their children as an invitation to know personal things about her too:

Parents know a lot about me. When I think about my friend who has a desk job, her clients know nothing about her ... this is giving of your whole self which is great because you get so much back from the kids but sometimes parents think they have a right to know more as well. You just have to be firm sometimes and some can appreciate that and some just don't.

Later in the interview, however, the interviewees swapped tales of positive relationship with parents. Neve commented, "... *and then there are the parents who are really lovely, really supportive and encouraging and will go out of their way for you*". Eden too, smiled when she said, "*Even now when I go out after school, it's lovely to catch up with all the families that have been in my class in previous years*". Teacher and parent relationships can be extremely rewarding. Neve summed up the ambivalence the participants sometimes felt by saying, "*Sometimes parents can be your best ally and sometimes they can be hard work too*". Reflecting on my own teaching experiences, I had to agree.

Theme 4: Leave it at the Door

Meyer (2009) reported that teachers begin their career adhering to an unspoken code of hiding their emotions, particularly negative ones. The difficulty teachers face, as

they practise these strategies to stay calm, cheery, or composed, for example, can be at odds with how they really feel, hence the intensity of emotional labour. There is an inherent contradiction facing teachers daily which was clearly evident in the findings of this research.

Neve spoke about this paradox in her narrative account as she explained the guilt she felt over displaying negative emotions in front of her students and reacting in a way that, according to her, was not appropriate:

I know there have been times when I thought I shouldn't have reacted like that because that's my problem but it's sometimes in the heat of something ... not that that excuses it but preps can be difficult in this instance because they can be very demanding and they don't always understand, but I think what I probably try and do is, after, I will actually apologise to the kids and say something has happened that has made me feel bad. Sometimes, in retrospect you realise that you haven't managed it well.

As a poignant illustration of her desire to provide a positively charged classroom, Neve stated early on in our interview that, “*Anger is not something that they [students] will experience in my classroom.*” This underlines findings from past studies that have shown teachers only disclose certain emotions within the school environment (Gallant, 2013; Hargreaves, 2001; Meyer, 2009). Neve elaborated by saying,

I don't want them to be scared, they are so little and it's a big new world. There would be times in any grade that the teacher will be cross. To me that is different from being really angry. I want to be approachable. I'm happy for cuddles, so if they are sad I can physically connect with them as well, so I show I'm kind.

According to Newberry (2013, p. 26), “teachers often make daily attempts to achieve emotional neutrality, allowing them to deal with frustrations, disappointments and other emotions that accompany working with students and colleagues”. Moving on from a discussion about creating a positive classroom environment, I was eager to explore how the teachers in this study made this possible in relation to their own emotionality.

After listening and re-listening to the taped interviews and reading and re-reading the transcripts, I was under no illusion as to how much emotional work was being carried out on a day-to-day basis by the participants. It was particularly intriguing how the participants made sense of what they were doing. Alice said, “*You have to leave it at the door*”. She was referring to her emotions but *only* if she felt it wasn’t appropriate for her students to see her cross or distressed, for example. Eden backed this up with, “*You do want them [students] to know you feel things ... I’m allowed to be angry or sad but I’m not going to throw myself on the floor in front of them because I had an argument with my husband*”. Teachers shared accounts of their teaching practices that revealed an unwritten code whereby they followed certain rules for disclosing their emotions. This practice is consistent with other studies that found teachers regulate their emotions to conform to expectations about how teachers should behave at school (Leithwood & Beatty, 2007; Meyer, 2009; Sutton, 2005).

Each of the participants worried about showing negative emotions because they felt that their students’ learning environment was diminished. When Alice said, “*I don’t want to take it out on the kids, they don’t need to know that someone has upset me at the staff meeting*”, Daphne quickly added, “*It depends what you’re upset about*”.

Daphne frequently took this role in the collective narrative. In this chapter I have applied the 'staircase' metaphor to narrative, where each step is like another narrative experience; as Daphne added her experiences one on top of the other, this fuelled the discussions further. The narrator's voice (Daphne), as Chase (2010) defines it, was clearly heard. This created a strong structure for collaborative storytelling and, during data analysis, provided me with the clarity I was seeking.

Daphne went on to say,

If it is a private matter then it is the same as any other day, you could have a bad start to the day but you walk in at 9am and you've got 25 five year olds there so it doesn't matter what's happened before because you are 'on' from 9 until 3.30pm and they do see what you are feeling and they know if you're not happy and some of them will worry if you look like you're worried, so it is really important that if it is something private you do set it aside because you need to be in the classroom tending to the students' needs but if it's really exciting and I could share it with them I would!

Daphne clearly articulated the process she follows in relation to regulating her emotions. When she said, *"It doesn't matter what's happened before"*, she was referring to how she is feeling the moment before walking into her classroom. Earlier that morning she may have had an argument with her husband, she could have heard some sad news, or a staff member may have been dismissive of her; there is a myriad of emotionally charged scenarios that could have played out before she began teaching at 9am. When Daphne enters her classroom she is then faced with students', and perhaps parents', emotions too.

Regularly suppressing emotions like this is exhausting for teachers. Furthermore they are not only responding to their own emotions, but to the fused congregation of emotions bouncing off students, parents, and colleagues, leading to high levels of emotional labour. According to Newberry (2013, p. 35), “the ability to regulate emotions in order to neutralise potentially negative or emotionally harmful situations is the hidden curriculum for teachers”.

Some of the discussion regarding displays of emotion revolved around the topic of grief. Eliza spoke sadly of her boyfriend dying in a car accident. She was in her second year of teaching and came back to school only a week after he died. She explained how she coped and the strategy she applied to spare the students from seeing her anguish:

A couple of years ago I lost my boyfriend in a car accident. I came back to school after losing him and that was very, very difficult. I found if I was upset I would cry before school started but once I was in the classroom, I could switch off and keep myself in the mind frame of teaching during the day and as soon as the kids left for the day I would be really emotional again. I don't know how I did it; it was a strategy I developed where I would switch off that part of my life so they did not see those emotions”.

As explained in Chapter 2, emotions are not separate from thought. When teachers say they ‘switch off’ or ‘put it aside’ their emotions, they are making a purposeful choice to behave in a way they deem appropriate for a school environment, but it does not mean that teachers are emotionless.

Neve found out her grandmother was dying when she was in the classroom teaching. Although she was with older students at the time she remembered feeling disconnected from the class for a long period of time. When we were discussing regulating emotions she said, *“I find that particularly hard and I don’t think I do it very well”*. This is an interesting comment because it confirmed Neve’s view about how important it is to regulate emotions and, in this case, she was rating herself as underachieving in this area of her teaching practice. Similar to findings in other research on teachers’ emotions, teachers feel pressured to display only those emotions that are expected of them within the culture of teaching (Schutz & Pekrun, 2007).

Alice felt that it was appropriate for her students to see her display emotions but only if it could relate to them in some way. After her dog died, she told her students what had happened and why she was feeling sad:

I have no problem sharing my emotions if it’s to do with them or I think it’s something they should know about. You know a couple of years ago my dog died. I didn’t want to tell them too much but I did say how sad I was, but other things, or teachers in the school, they don’t need to know about. If it’s something they can relate to, then it’s OK.

Alice reiterated this message again in the focus group interview, when she remembered a period in her life when her father was ill and she felt comfortable sharing this with her students. Daphne responded with, *“Yes the kids might be able to relate*

to this". Alice said, "If they understand, they will give you a hug and that makes things better".

Daphne also discussed a time when her brother and sister travelled overseas and she shared this with her students:

I know when my brother went overseas earlier this year and my sister moved overseas as well and that was in my diary writing so the kids knew I was sad because I wouldn't see them for a while.

The participants also made clear about what they wouldn't talk about. Laughing, Alice said, *"You're not going to write 'Mr. G [principal] won't buy me a new whiteboard and I'm really annoyed'".* Daphne added, *"Or my husband and I had a fight last night and now we're not talking".*

However Daphne also defended her decision to disclose *some* of her private feelings to her students: *"Sometimes it helps them too [students], because a child's pet might die or grandpa dies and the kids know you feel sad too".* At this point in the focus group I wanted to check with the participants to make sure I understood what they were trying to convey in terms of regulating their emotions. It was not surprising to me that there was a considerable level of tension. The participants were eager to talk about their experiences, so much so that they regularly finished each other's sentences. In fact, in this part of their shared account, it was difficult for me to complete my questions before one of the participants starting talking over me. When I said,

So what I'm hearing is, is that there are these rules of disclosure in terms of your emotions ... that there are some things you can talk about and some you

can't and some emotions are OK to show and some are not. Have I got this right?

a chorus of responses followed:

Alice: Yes, you definitely hold back because you don't want to make the kids sad as well. You might let them know a little but then go too far and make them upset.

Neve: Well it depends on what it is. I think if you are excited it is probably easier because it's more of a positive emotion. If it's something negative I think it's harder and you have to be a lot more conscious of what you are doing because it is that different emotion, it's easy for your mind to be on that and not focused on what the children are doing.

Eliza: I have to hold it together.

Daphne: It's the same in the staffroom too, you're not going to blurt out private details in front of all the teachers either so it's the same for the classroom.

Eliza: And you'll only share with some staff, some things.

This exchange reflects the construction of a joint narrative account about displaying emotions, signaled by the way the participants include the word 'you' while sharing their examples. The use of the second person creates a narrative scene that they are

all part of and which encourages them to expand further using their own experiences to add to the story of the generally accepted rules of disclosure. In this instance they are a small community of prep teachers, who confidently use the word 'you' in relation to their individual experiences because they strongly believe these same experiences are happening to the other teachers who are part of their special group. In Doecke et al's (2000, p. 339) study of beginning teachers, teachers "use of the second person, is a condition for telling the stories and anecdotes that they subsequently relate to one another, a way of establishing the narrative situation that will give point to their stories".

Eliza's circumstances were notably and tragically different to the other participants when she revealed that her boyfriend had died in a car accident. Saying, "*I have to hold it together*" in the exchange above was, I believe, a response to her strategy of 'switching off'. Clearly responding in the *first* person, she signals awareness that this is not an experience everyone can relate to. Furthermore, although she was a prep teacher who had experienced prep transition, she had not gone through this experience with the other three teachers in this study.

Theme 5: Timeout

If it was not possible to 'switch off' emotions, the participants in this study used what I have termed a 'timeout strategy'. In this case they gave themselves permission to stop teaching and set up an activity or task where their students worked independently. Neve described this strategy:

If I do come into the classroom feeling really cross or upset about something then I would ask the children to do something quietly just for 10 minutes, just to give me a bit of space so I don't start teaching with that issue in the forefront of

my mind so to give myself a bit of time out, so yes I know that's what I've done for some issues in the past. I think we need to acknowledge that we are human and the children need to know that too, that things can make your teacher cross but you can deal with that without getting angry.

Daphne too explained her 'time out' strategy:

I probably need time by myself but I can't do that with 21 kids so I probably have to change an activity so they are back at their tables straight away without me teaching basically. I know that sounds a bit selfish ...

This process is about masking or disguising emotions in the classroom in front of students. Teachers can go to great lengths to hide their feelings, as in Sutton's (2004) study of teachers' emotion regulation. When teachers were asked about their emotions they emphatically agreed they were not to be viewed by students and that they would make conscious decisions about how they could either 'switch off' their emotions for a certain period of time or use other strategies like a 'timeout' to ensure students did not see them angry or upset.

Alice's justification for employing the 'timeout' strategy was that she felt it was impossible to alter her emotional state instantly:

I just don't think you can switch on and switch off, you can't just flip and be happy all of a sudden; it takes a bit of transition time. It is to give me either a few minutes to compose myself or, guys, we're going to scrap that activity ... come and make me happy, let's have a dance or something like that.

It is interesting here that Alice also invited her students to ‘cheer her up’.

During the focus group conversations, each of the participants agreed that a timeout strategy was necessary because of the intensity of their emotions at certain times.

Alice reiterated this practice:

Sometimes it means I need no kids talking to me, no teachers talking to me and it might be that the kids will not be doing their activity sheet for a few minutes ... ‘Look kids, just go away and have a play’, and I don’t think that’s a selfish thing. I think it’s good for them, the outcome is better ... it’s better than flying off the handle.

The implication here is clear: teachers will use strategies to conceal their negative emotions to continue to provide a positive classroom environment. Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development concept and the practice of scaffolding, as discussed in the literature review, are relevant here.

Teachers know that cognition is enhanced through collaborative teaching methods. When Neve said, “*So I don’t start teaching with that [negative] issue in the forefront of my mind*” or when Alice responded with “*It’s better than flying off the handle*”, both teachers were invoking the significance of social interactions between teacher and student/s. They know this is a vital part of the learning process for children and they don’t want to enter this process feeling angry; hence the timeout strategy (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

Theme 6: A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed

Much of the participant commentary in this study demonstrates the use of second person pronouns, supporting the notion that the teachers in this inquiry felt they are part of a teaching community that shares similar (individual) experiences. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) commonplace of 'sociality' is also a reminder that personal circumstances such as feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions are part of teachers' experiences, played out within a social setting; in this case, a school environment.

The participants in this study spoke highly of their friendships with colleagues and discussed how important these relationships were in terms of helping them through stressful times. "One of the primary ways in which emotional understanding is established is through developing long standing, close relationships with others" (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 508). Teachers appreciate positive feedback and can delight in receiving thanks for their efforts. Prep students are not always forthcoming in this area, given their own emotional and social immaturity. Compliments from parents are welcome but can be infrequent, particularly in secondary school, so, according to Hargreaves (2001. P. 509),

... one of the likeliest sources of recognition, reward and appreciation for teachers, therefore are their colleagues. Teachers and their colleagues work in close proximity and, to a degree at least, pursue the same objectives and share similar troubles.

Neve encapsulated this concept by saying,

Over the last few years we've had some great prep teams who have worked really well together and we've had strong personalities but we still got through

together but that has not been the case this year. It has been difficult to the point where I may not be teaching prep next year for a variety of reasons but that has had an influence. I have really noticed the difference of not having supportive relationships this year and missing the cohesion between all the teachers. I think a supportive boss too is very important as well as developing relationships with the parents, as hard as that can be sometimes. I think your support network outside of the classroom is critical and if you don't foster that you won't last very long in this job.

Alice reiterated the importance of collegiality:

From some of my team mates, I do feel very close to them. I see them out of school hours as well so they know a lot about my life anyway and I know, no questions asked, they will take my kids and will give me some time, and with the senior members of the staff, I do feel like they support me because I think I tell them enough about what's going on and there are no secrets with me really unless it's important, so I would say, yes, I am supported.

This comment suggests that colleagues are sometimes employed as part of the 'timeout' strategy. In this way, teachers rely on each other to either talk things through or step into each other's classrooms and teach, providing a colleague with the opportunity to remove themselves from a stressful situation or take five minutes to compose themselves. During this part of the discussion, I probed further and addressed all of them, "So what you're saying is, just give me 10 minutes and I'll be ok?" This is how they immediately responded:

Alice: *Yes, and things will be back to normal and I'll be good to go or if I'm not OK I'll go and say, Daphne and I blurt it out and then I'll come back and I'll be OK.*

Neve: *You see I think that's really important. I don't know how prep teachers do it on their own. To have another adult that you can go to and vent, and say well I'm OK now.*

Alice: *And to laugh about it.*

Eliza: *Where I work we can go and let it out and release the pressure.*

Daphne: *Having a good team means that even if you have the worst grade ever, you can still muddle your way through knowing you have that support, however, you can have the best grade and not a good team and then you're really on your own.*

Alice: *You try and leave it at the door but I also rely heavily on my team like something might happen and I cannot teach the children, I cannot be with them and I know the other team members will say, "I'll have your kids for ten minutes – you go and have a drink of water" or something like that and I would do the same for them.*

Neve: *I think it really does highlight how important it is to get along because prep is a special year and I don't know how I would do it without them.*

Teachers need to connect closely to colleagues for effective teaching to take place, so working conditions fostering a shared recognition of teachers' emotional needs are critical. Often, teachers "draw on emotional understanding when they reach into the past store of their own emotional experience to interpret and unravel, instantaneously, at a glance, the emotional experiences and responses of others" (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 508). I understand this claim to be evident in the participants' comments above, as they demonstrate not only the importance they place on maintaining close bonds with their colleagues but also how much they rely on their support in emotionally stressful situations.

In the concluding part of this chapter, I return to the recurring theme of teachers' emotional labour.

Emotional Labour

The teachers' emotions about prep transition were described through their individual and collective narratives. There were a number of tensions that emerged out of their stories and this chapter has identified these under separate headings. But the enduring presence of emotional labour is evident throughout each of these threads. Although Hochschild's (1983) research was based on the work of flight attendants, it can be convincingly applied to an inquiry about teachers. The nature of teachers' work is similar to other professions with high levels of interactions with other people, with many daily, personal exchanges with a variety of people. To reiterate, the nature of emotional labour within the school landscape includes teachers' suppression of their emotions to ensure that students and parents feel suitably comforted, because they

believe this creates an environment conducive to teaching and learning, in a positive and optimistic way. When emotions are consciously and consistently regulated, emotional labour is experienced (Hargreaves, 2002; Meyer, 2009; Zembylas, 2009).

I have identified three areas of emotional labour applicable to this inquiry on how teachers manage emotions. Firstly, while there is personal investment in teaching, often leading to emotional labour, there is also a broader emotional investment in teachers' work because they are attempting to share values that are significant to teachers, and they wish to share, foster or role model these to their students; this is reflected in the way they teach. Teachers develop and implement actions pertaining to particular values and the outcomes they hope their students will achieve or demonstrate behaviourally. When students don't meet these outcomes, or colleagues are not respectful of what teachers value as part of their teaching practice, this demands emotional work. Secondly, teachers engage in 'switching off' their emotions to protect students and parents, in some cases, from the reality of how they really feel. These two claims, which I expand on in the final sections of this chapter, drive the mental and physical exhaustion teachers sometimes endure during prep transition.

Emotional Labour Arising From Teachers' Investment in Values in Their Work

Neve invested a lot of her time in the value of 'caring', and promoted this part of human behaviour in the classroom, just as she would any other cognitive task. In Neve's dialogue with me and the other participants, she demonstrated how well she knew her students and how important this process was. In the following example, Neve talks about having a close relationship with her students and how this is reflected in the way they respond to her. *"We do the You Can Do It' program here and one of the strategies*

is to take three breaths when you are angry and I had lost something and I was really frustrated and one of the children said, 'Just take three breaths'. So, yes, children do react to you, some children really take it on board. Earlier this year, I hurt my back and one little boy said, 'I will pray for you', so he picked up on that, I think. Particularly with preps, if you develop a close secure relationship they will pick up on it a lot quicker and give you a hug, they know if you are sad."

Alice and Eliza talked about how important it was for their students to 'have a go'. At one point Alice was worried when a child wouldn't involve himself in a dancing activity that she did regularly with prep students. Her comment was, *"I started to freak out thinking I've got the whole year to dance."* She went on to say, *"I want my kids to have a go and we still talk about it now – that it's okay to make a mistake, so I want all kids to have a go at an activity. I want all of them joining in on a silly dance. So I want everyone to have a go and I don't want to leave anyone out. I want everyone included in every activity, trying their best and I guess creating that ... just giving them the confidence that it's OK when they do fail at something."*

Eliza added, *"I think it's a big deal that they try their best no matter what and will always have a go, not give up."* In O'Connor's (2008) study on teachers' emotions and professional identity, teachers listed teaching students to develop empathy as a significant part of the teaching work that they value. In this case, Neve is focused on the value of caring, and Alice and Eliza fostered activities that instilled in students the confidence to 'have a go'. When students don't demonstrate these attributes – the very attributes teachers espouse – the teachers feel responsible and emotions are stirred.

The Emotional Labour Required to ‘Switch Off’ Emotions

In the following exchange, Daphne, Eliza and Alice’s experiences of emotional labour revolve around their display of emotions. Daphne began with,

Especially at the start of the year, they [prep students] need you constantly. You know they will cry if they can’t see you on the playground, they just need you. Sometimes you mean everything to them and sometimes putting a smile on your face can be hard but you have to do it.

Neve: I don’t think it’s a conscious thing you do.

Alice: When you get in the classroom you just switch on and you just go, go, go.

Daphne: Once you’re in the classroom I don’t think about it, until they’ve gone home and then you collapse in a heap.

Studies by authors such as Morris & Feldman (1996), Sutton (2004), Meyer (2009), Leithwood and Beatty (2007), have argued that teachers will ‘switch off’ their emotions in order to conform to behaving in a way they deem acceptable for the school environment. The teachers in this inquiry were no different, and the narrative accounts above, support this finding. The challenge with ‘switching off’, or consciously changing emotions, is the emotional work necessary to achieve this. When it is a consistent act, as it is during prep transition, it becomes exhausting. This is evident in Daphne’s comment about switching off her emotions when she steps into the classroom but, once the students had gone home, she is left absolutely fatigued. As discussed in the

literature review, this can lead to a level of burnout that is a key motivation for teachers leaving the profession.

Again, the discussion includes the use of the second person pronoun. In using this 'voice' the participants believe these experiences and the emotions are happening collectively to prep teachers during transition. This is an important part of teachers' work: that they positively connect not only with students and parents, but with their colleagues. Emotional labour will always be a part of teaching but it is also a relief for teachers to know their colleagues are going through the same emotional labour as themselves. This was evident in the focus group interview when the participants agreed how important these shared experiences are in terms of supporting each other through stressful times (Hargreaves, 2000).

Emotional Labour as a Personal Investment

In the following discussion, the participants spoke about the mental and physical exhaustion they felt during prep transition. The personal investment they described is intense and extreme. When teachers say they are hungry or haven't had a chance to go to the bathroom because of the time they need to spend with their students, then emotional labour is actively occurring.

Alice: Being with them fulltime, they're not always willing to join in on anything and they are just in your face. Those first few days are just so full on that you cannot get enough energy, like you crash by the time they go home, you can't talk to your team mates—you just want to sit down.

Daphne: *In that first week where they finish at 2pm and we have a meeting, it just hits you and we're all sitting there in silence. And half the time you're starving because you haven't had any time to get something to eat or you're busting to go to the toilet—and that's when you're working in a supportive team. I know I can say to Neve, 'Can you have my kids for 10 minutes?' but you just don't have the opportunity at the start of the year.*

Alice: *Yes, it's pretty much that bad, but then you get in the swing of things and it all starts to get better but those first few days are very full on, no down time, very hard emotionally. I don't have a social life for the first couple of weeks actually because I'm just too tired ... It's extremely draining.*

Daphne: *A lot of it is very time consuming. It's stressful because there is a lot of pressure to get it [transition] right. You don't want to give the wrong information and you don't want to leave anyone [students] by themselves and you've got to do all this while you're doing normal teaching, and then on weekends you're doing reports, so it's a really horrible time of year. It's a good two months that's really stressful and hard work.*

Eliza: *It's hard to give of yourself 24 hours of the day and be nice to the kids. I mean being nice is easy but when you're not feeling good ...*

It is interesting that Eliza talks about “giving of herself 24 hours of the day”, when compared with the school day, which involves 6.5 hours of contact time. The emotional labour for Eliza during this time is distinctly apparent. She regards these contact hours

as being so emotionally consuming that it makes demands on her for the full 24 hours each day. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998, p. 53) argue that the impact of emotional labour on conscientious teachers can lead to burnout. The long-term consequences of negative emotions are serious: “Prolonged stress is bad for your immune system, your mental health, your capacity to care for yourself and others and can even be fatal”.

The findings from this inquiry show that emotions and emotional labour are a central part of prep teachers’ work. Problems can arise when teachers make a large personal investment in their teaching practices, have high expectations of how a ‘good and caring’ teacher should act at school, and consistently regulate their emotions to ensure students, parents and (some) colleagues are spared from seeing how they really feel. The negative impact of emotional labour on teachers is significant. Once teachers feel exhausted for a considerable time, it is difficult for them to find the energy and motivation to find new resources or strategies to help them cope emotionally at school and thus, sadly, many move out of the profession (Philipp & Schupbach, 2010).

The final chapter of this thesis includes a discussion about the conclusions and implications resulting from this study, as well as my reflections as a researcher.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Understanding teacher emotions would seem to be at the heart of understanding why teachers act as they do. (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008, p. 7)

This small-scale study, employing a narrative inquiry methodology, argues that teachers' emotions are socially, historically and culturally embedded within their lives and are played out within the school landscape. Prep transition is a particularly turbulent time for all stakeholders, and teachers put a lot of effort into making this process as smooth as possible. This poses problems for prep teachers in terms of managing their emotions, as they navigate their way around student dynamics, high parent expectations, and collegial support. Historical and personal beliefs about how a 'good' teacher should act within the school environment also places enormous pressures on them (Hargreaves, 2002).

The literature review (Chapter 2) describes the context for teachers, who are challenged with the real and difficult assignment of managing their emotions. It is revealing to discover how many authors acknowledge that teacher's emotions have been ignored historically. Much research has focused on cognition and motivation in relation to teaching and learning, but the impact of emotions has not been as highly regarded. This is not only disappointing, but also surprising given that cognition is enhanced through learning experiences that are relational and interactive. Oatley, Keltner and Jenkins (2006, p. 260) provide a persuasive argument for the effect of teachers' emotions on their teaching practices:

Emotions have principled, systematic effects upon cognitive processes and ... lead to reasonable judgements about the world. ... Emotions structure perception, direct attention, give preferential access to certain memories and bias judgment in ways that help the individual to respond to the environment in ways that we recognise as valuable aspects of our humanity.

The participants in this study were very aware of providing their students with “both caring sensitivity and intellectual challenge” (DiPardo & Potter, 2003, p. 318), and would foster this to the point of emotional exhaustion. Unfortunately, school reformers and educational theorists tend to underestimate the significance of teachers’ emotions and focus purely on the learning environment of the students, separate from the working environment of teachers.

This is in direct contrast to the theoretical framework on which this inquiry is based, which highlights the collaborative nature of teachers’ work. Human transitions are dynamic, complex practices full of social activity. Teaching and learning are embedded in a cultural context and teachers and students co-construct knowledge and meaning together (Rogoff, 2003). Newberry (2013, p. 26) suggests that, “we might benefit from a more holistic examination of teacher-student relationships that not only includes the personal factors of the teacher, the factors of the organisation or the interplay of them both, but the matter of multiplying those issues simultaneously in the context of the classroom”.

A narrative inquiry investigation has allowed me to more fully comprehend teachers’ emotions during prep transition. Through rich descriptions, they narrated their lived

experiences. Their shared narratives gave meaning to their emotion management strategies to provide the best possible start to school for their students.

Research has shown that teaching is inherently stressful and teachers' working conditions can be emotionally taxing. However, the findings of this study imply something more pressing: teachers feel responsible for the wellbeing of the students entrusted to their care and will go to great lengths to nurture and protect this. Their narrative accounts exposed the extent to which the participants manage their emotions to spare their students from observing them angry or upset. Teachers make conscious decisions about how they will express themselves emotionally at school; however, when they are consistently planning or suppressing their emotions they risk the negative effects of emotional labour (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). Ongoing emotional labour is detrimental to emotional health and one of the major reasons teachers leave the profession. Schutz and Pekrun (2007, p. 236) argue that, "without looking into the nature and process of emotional labour, we cannot really understand how teachers construct emotions and why they express emotions the way they do".

The limitations of a small-scale inquiry mean there is a limited opportunity to generalise findings to a larger teaching population. Nevertheless, the function of a case study is to show significant insights, in this case into teachers' emotional work, and this information can be applied accordingly. There is clearly a compelling argument for school reformers to further research the emotional working lives and environments of teachers, including during prep transition.

Teacher education programs and teacher employers would also benefit from these initiatives. Pre-service teachers should be given the opportunity to discuss and learn strategies in establishing, negotiating and managing relationships. Teachers are graduating from courses based on improving only curriculum content knowledge, competence, and expertise, who may be ill-prepared for the emotional demands of a teaching career. We need to,

... ensure that beginning teachers are equipped in their preparatory studies with the skills and strategies to be able to cope with the considerable demands of the work they are called upon to undertake, and find a satisfying emotional balance which ensures they can engage in the relational work that is central to teaching children and adolescents. (Richardson, Watt & Devos, 2013, p. 249)

It is also imperative that school leaders create an organisational culture that accepts teachers as people with genuine and unique emotional needs. This claim is logically connected to my concern about the identified, but largely unaddressed, gap in knowledge and recognition of prep school teachers' emotional needs at a critical point in young children's school lives.

Reflections as a Researcher

According to Doecke et al.'s (2000, p. 343) study on the role of storytelling, and the beginning of teachers' professional knowledge, "Teacher talk has long been devalued as in-house chatter". Granted, not all conversations are likely to be engaging and insightful, and do not necessarily reflect teachers' overall educational wisdom. However, there is a role for teacher talk and it is an important way for teachers to share

their experiences and understand more fully the complex nature of their work. This was made clear to me after my interviews with the four participants from this study. Although a small sample, it was an ideal number of participants for a first-time, narrative-inquiry researcher because of the way it made it easier to sustain a deeper focus on the participants' lived experiences.

I tried to be a conscientious interviewer, checking in with the participants regularly to make sure I understood what they meant so I could honour their personal accounts when I was ready to write about their experiences. I noted in the findings that I felt at one point they were going off track, but after looking at the transcripts I could see this was indeed a challenge they were facing in terms of managing their emotions. This problem is well documented in the research on narrative inquiry. Clandinin et al. (2007, p. 21) for example, discuss "certain kinds of wakefulness" that are required of a narrative inquiry. I didn't understand this notion fully until the interviews were over. On reflection, I believe I could have used more 'probing' questions. For example, "Why did you pause there?" or "Can you explain that further?" These are insights I will take into future interview-based narrative research.

As I embarked on the findings chapter, I anticipated I would write individual stories for each participant, but this proved to not be possible due to the limited amount of historical career narratives I invited from each participant. A possible strategy for the future would be to invite the participants to write a journal or a personal narrative account about themselves, but inexperience with this method of inquiry and time constraints made this difficult in this study. Fortunately, the process I chose offset these concerns to some degree. The collective narrative account co-constructed

during the focus group meant that each of their voices were heard at the same time, which also served to emphasise the challenges and difficulties they faced during prep transition. I could also compare and contrast ideas and opinions directly between the participants as they added more information or responded to each other. The process of drawing all the participants together also demonstrated clearly the idea that they felt they were part of a 'special' group of teachers, albeit connected to a wider teaching community, a concept that may not have been obvious had I written about them individually.

During one of the individual interviews, Eliza confided in me about her boyfriend's death and the anguish she felt. I know what it is like to grieve, and on reflection, felt I could have offered her more support in that moment. Perhaps because I had started recording the interview that I felt uncomfortable but after listening to the recording, I now know, that at the time I did not give this part of Eliza's narrative the attention it deserved. I continue to have strong feelings about this. In a narrative inquiry, the researcher brings his or her own personal, historical, and cultural experiences to the inquiry, and I wondered if I was hiding or suppressing my own emotions when Eliza told me about her situation. I know I felt sad when she told me, but I didn't say anything.

Research validity can be a significant issue in narrative research. I was 'wakeful' (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 21) to check with the participants to confirm my understanding of what they were trying to explain in their narrative accounts; an important aspect of a narrative inquiry investigation. However, my departure from writing individual stories was challenging for me, as I tried to identify the best way to honour the participants and their experiences of prep teaching. I found the concept of

‘negotiated honesties’ to be helpful here: “Negotiated honesties reflect the idea that there needs to be a sense that what counts as trustworthiness and truth is negotiated in the research” (van Niekerk & Savin-Baden, 2010, p 31). I believe this is what took place in my research, but what resonated with me most was that this concept acknowledges research as fragile, highly complex, and messy. This is exactly how I would sum up my journey writing this thesis.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics approval

Appendix 2: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development approval

Appendix 3: Teachers' information sheet

Appendix 4: Teachers' consent forms

Appendix 5: Interview questions



Human Ethics Certificate of Approval

Date: 6 January 2010

Project Number: CF09/2071 - 2009001176

Project Title: Teacher narratives about child and teacher emotions during transition to school

Chief Investigator: Dr Joce Nuttall

Approved: From: 6 January 2010 to 6 January 2015

Terms of approval

1. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to MUHREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. **Failure to provide permission letters to MUHREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.**
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.
3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):** Requires the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC. Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.



Professor Ben Canny
Chair, MUHREC

Cc: Mrs Maxine Ewens



Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Office for Policy, Research and Innovation

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East Melbourne, Victoria 3002
Telephone: [REDACTED]
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Melbourne, Victoria 3001

2010_000637

Mrs Maxine Ewens
59 Williams Road
BLACKBURN 3130

Dear Mrs Ewens

Thank you for your application of 31 May 2010 in which you request permission to conduct a research study in government schools titled: *Teacher narrative about child and teacher emotions during transition to school*.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. Should your institution's ethics committee require changes or you decide to make changes, these changes must be submitted to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for its consideration before you proceed.
2. You obtain approval for the research to be conducted in each school directly from the principal. Details of your research, copies of this letter of approval and the letter of approval from the relevant ethics committee are to be provided to the principal. The final decision as to whether or not your research can proceed in a school rests with the principal.
3. No student is to participate in this research study unless they are willing to do so and parental permission is received. Sufficient information must be provided to enable parents to make an informed decision and their consent must be obtained in writing.
4. As a matter of courtesy, you should advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director.
5. Any extensions or variations to the research proposal, additional research involving use of the data collected, or publication of the data beyond that normally associated with academic studies will require a further research approval submission.
6. At the conclusion of your study, a copy or summary of the research findings should be forwarded to Education Policy and Research Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Level 3, 33 St Andrews Place, GPO Box 4367, Melbourne, 3001.



Faculty of Education

Teacher narratives about child and teacher emotions during transition to school
SCERH project number: CF09/2071-2009001176

Explanatory Statement

My name is Maxine Ewens and I am a student in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, completing a Master of Education by Research. I am conducting this research project under the supervision of Dr Joce Nuttall. The focus of my research is how teachers negotiate the interplay between their own emotions and the children in their care during transition into the preparatory grade. For this study, I am seeking participants who are primary school teachers currently teaching grade Prep who have also taught this year level in the past.

Participation in this project will involve you in an interview which will take up to an hour. This interview will be audio taped and will be taken during working hours on school premises. You have the liberty to not answer any question which seems too personal or intrusive. There will also be a follow-up focus group interview with all six teachers participating in the project, also held during working hours and at a mutually agreed venue. The findings of this research will be useful for teachers and educators who are interested in the connection of teachers and children's emotions and the influence this has on a classroom environment, at a time which is particularly important for young children.

I do not anticipate any risk to you as a result of your participation, beyond the normal experience of everyday life, but please note that your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, every effort will be made to protect your identity. The results of the study will be published in a de-identified form and your participation will be known only to the researcher and the other teachers in the focus group. Fictitious names will be used instead of your real name to ensure confidentiality. At your request, I would be very happy to provide you with a copy of your interview transcript and the results of the study after they are collated. I can be contacted by phone or email as indicated below. Data from this study will be retained up to five years and then destroyed using a secure disposal system in our Faculty.

If you have any concerns, questions or complaints about the project, you can contact the Chief Investigator, Dr Joce Nuttall, telephone [REDACTED], or email [REDACTED]. You can also contact the secretary of the Human Ethics Committee by telephoning 9905 2052 or emailing [REDACTED]. Alternatively you may write to:

The Secretary
Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans

PO Box 3A
Monash University
Clayton
Vic 3800

If you would like to participate in this study, please read and sign the attached Consent Form and email me [REDACTED] so I can collect your consent form and make further arrangements. Please keep this Explanatory Statement for your own reference.

Yours Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Maxine Ewens



RESEARCH PROJECT:

Teacher narratives about child and teacher emotions during transition to school
SCERH project number: CF09/2071-2009001176

CONSENT FORM

I agree to take part in the Monash University research project described in the attached Explanatory Statement. I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I have kept for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to be interviewed for up to one hour individually, and up to one and a half hours as part of a focus group, and that these interviews will be audiotaped with my permission.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interviews for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

I understand that data from the interview/audio-tape will be kept in a secure storage and accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after a 5 year period.

Please sign this form and email me [redacted] for collection.

Name...

Signature.....

Date.....

School name:

Telephone:

Email:

Interview Questions

Prep Transition

Tell me about your experiences of prep transition:

- What strategies do you use to connect with the children in your class in the first few days of school?
- What does a successful transition to school mean to you?
- How do you feel about your role in this process?

Teachers' Emotions

Tell me about being emotionally aware while you are teaching:

- What words would you use to describe how you feel when you walk into a classroom ready to teach "new" prep children?
- What do you try to convey to your students about your self?
- If you were feeling really upset about something or really excited, how do you alter your teaching practice to accommodate these feelings while you are teaching? Is this important? Why?

Children's Emotions

Tell me about the children in your prep class:

- What are some of the behaviours you observed from children in the first week of school?
- What would make you laugh, feel joy, sadness or feel really annoyed?
- Do you have an example of a child/children reacting to your feelings or mood?
- How did you respond?

Emotional tone of the classroom

Tell me about your classroom:

- How would you describe the emotional tone of your classroom generally?
- How significant is a positive classroom environment?
- How do you foster this in relation to your own emotionality?