Raising and empowering marginalised voices -
Calling for courageous and committed leaders.

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Introduction

• Aides: voices & experiences with research

• Focus on 3 Dimensions: Policy, Organisation (schools) and People (relationships)

• Role Concerns
What does it mean to be a teacher aide in a Prep class?
(4.5-5.5 yr old children)
Role of teacher aide

Pedagogical:
• individual, small and large groups
• support children with handling materials, toileting, organising possessions…

Organisational/clerical:
• prepare/clean/pack away resources
• maintain equipment records
• assist with compilation of children’s records
Research

• PhD phenomenological study
• Lived experiences of a small group of teacher aides working in Preparatory classes in Queensland Catholic schools (4.5-5.5 yr old chn)
• Metaphor: ropes as lived experiences
Imaginal experiences and metaphor

Rope cards: images
Rope work
Photos and drawings
Traditionally, cordage over 10mm in diameter is referred to as rope, while thinner cords, strings or twines are referred to collectively as *small stuff*.

To prevent ropes from fraying, *small stuff* (cords, lines, twine or string) is often whipped around the ends of ropes.
the ‘invisible elves of the school’  (Goessling, 1998, p.9)

“People don’t see, they think it just gets done, things just get done”

“Other teachers…a lot of them look as you as the aide. Only the aide and that really annoys me.”

“You don’t need to know about it, because you are a teacher aide.”
An ambiguous role

“Where is the list of duties? Where is the job outline? What are you supposed to be doing?”

“I felt I was thrown in the shark pit, that’s how I felt! … at the beginning I felt like my stomach was in knots and I went home every day and cried.”

“I felt like I didn’t know what I was doing…am I doing this right? Am I supposed to be here or am I supposed to be there?”
Limited access to knowledge

“I’ll say, you know I don’t mean to pry but how come it was done that way?”

“I don’t know if they think well, you don’t get paid for that, or it’s not your responsibility or why should you get to know about that because you’re not a teacher?”

“This professional development I think is very wanting. I haven’t seen anything…Maybe I’m not shown anything.”
“I feel like I’m drawing more on my experience as a mother working in the Prep classrooms than what I am as an aide.”
A mis-understood role

“The Principal would discourage a Prep aide from doing the Certificate III because he is saying a Prep job is a Level Two aide… and I’ve been told… “well, I don’t know what you are going to be doing because you are being overpaid.”

“Last year there was a change of Principal and this year when school first started, no aide hours had been allocated to Prep. Of course we’d turned up at the school but I wondered what would happen if we didn't when the Prep children arrived!”
“No-one comes down to check on how things are, what’s happening... at Prep no-one comes down, you don’t get anyone coming to see how you are going.”

Jacqui: “You know how teachers get feedback and the teachers get asked questions about how things are going? We don’t. We never get asked about how things are going from [the principal].

Bec: I don’t believe they know what our role is, about anything we do or are interested.
J: I think it would be nice to be asked
B: I still don’t think they know how important the role is.

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

B: Even if they asked what areas could be improved where you are working? You know no-one asks about what you have to put up with ... Or the other thing is, are you doing a good job with the kids? Is anyone saying ‘Well look, I think you should be doing this or trying this’. They just assume that everything is going really well.
An un-secure job

“There’s a line as an aide between what you can and can’t say ‘cause you don’t want to lose your job or hours ‘cause you never know when you’ve got a job from year to year.”

“If all we know is we’ve got our job for 12 months why would you be bothered doing too much?”
An un-safe job

• Children’s access to and use of toilets was an unresolved dilemma for the aides. Over the period of five years, many teachers and aides devised a variety of systems for supporting children’s use of the toilets; yet the aides were unsatisfied with the process.

• Key problems identified by the aides were safety issues and the amount of time toileting involved. Importantly, these issues pertained to the aides and teachers as well as the children.

• In addition, manual handling concerns arose.
Sally quickly twined the thin bright rope she chose to symbolise her teacher around the thicker rope she had chosen to represent herself. The teacher’s rope enclosed her own, encircling and securing it. It was as if the two ropes had become one. As she worked, Sally commented brightly: “We’re intertwined, yes, yes, we work as a team.”
Matching or mismatching expectations

• Both the aides’ expectations and the aides’ perceptions of the teachers’ expectations of their role significantly affected the relationships, duties and support that the aides offered.

• These joint expectations shaped what the aides could or would do, or not do, in relation to their work in the classroom.
“It’s hard too, being a teacher aide and understanding what outcomes she’s [the teacher] looking for. Like, why are you doing this … What’s your outcome?..’ so, I [am] trying to say to her I am interested why are we doing these things.”
“Sometimes you feel like even though you are more capable of doing a lot more responsibilities and stuff, you’re sort of tied up.”

“I’m actually quite capable of speaking to parents about the children’s development and all that but I can’t, so that’s tricky.”

Jacqui felt:
• she was overstepping her place by asking questions
• teacher possessed and protected information
• teacher controlled both her status as knowledgeable, and Jacqui’s status as uninformed or minor.
Knots and frays
The mooring
Adrift from the mooring
A safe mooring relies on the secure fastening of a bollard to a deck or pier. So too, the aides’ sense of security and safety is reliant on policy recognition.
Policy...

Role Recognition

**Recommendation:** the recognition of the specific nature of the teacher aide’s role in a Prep class in policy. Underpinning this recognition is the expectation of the completion of a Certificate III level qualification in Children’s Services or equivalent, alongside an increase in allocated aide hours to Prep classrooms to at least 25 hours per week.
Policy...

Role Conditions: safety & security
Regardless of the hours of work allocated, the aides, like all employees, have a right to feel safe and protected from harm at their workplace (*Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Qld)).

**Recommendation:** The provision of toilets for Prep classes no greater than 30 metres away from, and within sight of, Prep classrooms, as recommended by Early Childhood Australia (2008).

**Recommendation:** This research suggests that a Prep Year workplace audit procedure be developed in accordance with national safety codes. Additionally, a review of building provisions for future Prep Year classrooms is advised.

Crucial policy change, action and reform at the political level would ensure that the fixing plate of policy provides a solid foundation for the mooring bollard of organisation.
Recommendation: Teacher aides should be engaged in a review process to inform and build shared understandings of their role and identify professional development requirements. This increased awareness could contribute to the more consistent allocation of hours of teacher aides in Prep Year classes. This would benefit children, Prep Year teachers and parents, and potentially afford greater role protection and job security for teacher aides.
**Organisation...**

**Role protection**

*Recommendation*: In recognition of the role they play in helping young children to engage successfully and safely in school life, the place of qualified teacher aides in Prep classrooms requires protection.
People

Role satisfaction

• Many teachers feel ill-prepared for working with an aide
• Teacher aides must work to enhance effective partnerships with teachers.
• Teacher aides benefit from collaborative professional development opportunities directly related to everyday practice
People...

Role satisfaction

Opportunities for aides and teachers to construct and reflect on their understandings collaboratively may assist to create and promote ‘respectful, reciprocal relationships needed for effective teamwork’ (Jones et al., 2012). In turn, this might enhance classroom practice, professional capacity, staff morale and role satisfaction.

**Recommendation:** Prep teacher aides and classroom teachers should engage in joint professional development opportunities and discussions.
Further research

To strengthen the co-dependence of the bollard, fixing plate and rope

Explore ways to support the professional capacity of staff teams
..may shore-up more opportunities for professional engagement, leading to greater collaboration and participation- and less fraying of the ropes.

Shed light on potential conflicts between policy, provisions and practices, especially in regard to workplace health and safety concerns,
..may bolster the security and reduce the friction between the bollard (school as an organisation) and the fixing plate (policy). In turn, this will help to reduce the amount of small stuff (aides) lying adrift from the mooring.
Implications for leaders

Courageous and Committed leaders:

- **Act decisively**, empowering others to utilise their talents, remain focused and to make a difference.
- **Innovate boldly**, respecting tradition and remaining future-focused and relevant in the pursuit of a vision.
- **Make decisions fearlessly**, standing firm on what is important and what makes a difference  
  (ACEL, 2015)
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What’s your action?

How can you raise and empower marginalised voices?


