

**“Eat, play, go, repeat”: Researching with older  
primary-age children to  
re-theorise School Age Care**

Ian Bruce Hurst

M. Ed. (University of Melbourne)

ORCID ID: [orcid.org/0000-0003-4238-384X](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4238-384X)

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## **ABSTRACT**

School Age Care (SAC) is a setting that is little researched and the research that has been conducted has not often sought the perspectives of older children. This research used a combination of participatory methods and ethnography to gain a deeper insight into older children's experiences of SAC, seeking their views about how to successfully program for this age group.

Older children in SAC are commonly spoken of as rebellious, bored, disruptive and unsuited to SAC. The poststructural and feminist poststructural theories of Foucault (1977, 1980) and Butler (1990, 1993) are used to challenge the normative developmental discourses that circulate SAC. The data shows that older children have access to these developmental and maturational discourses and actively engage with them to perform themselves as more mature and separate from younger children. Their multiple performances of age intersect with gender and time as they both resist and work within the care practices that are experienced as a form of power over children's bodies.

Whilst the Australian Framework for School Age Care conceptualises SAC as a site of play, leisure and education, this research invites a re-theorisation of SAC for older children. It demonstrates that older children's engagement with SAC includes ongoing acts of identity work, waiting and emotional labour that make play and leisure less free and more work-like. The findings suggest that practitioners should be aware of how developmental discourses are both enacted by the children and reinforced through programming design, and consider the impacts of segregating routines and practices on children's play and leisure. Implications for programming in SAC and other settings include addressing the reality that waiting is unavoidable in SAC, and should be programmed for in the same way that play and leisure activities are planned. Whilst this research does not 'solve' the question of older children in SAC, it unsettles dominant understandings, therefore inviting practitioners to imagine new programming approaches that might improve SAC for older children.

## DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

- This thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy.
- Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other materials used.
- This thesis is no more than 100,000 words in length exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Bruce Hurst

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## **KEY TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

**After School Care (ASC):** Care, leisure and play provided in the hours after school has finished.

**Before School Care (BSC):** Care, leisure and play provided in the hours before the commencement of school.

**Certificate IV of School Age Education and Care:** An Australian vocational qualification that prepares practitioners for work with children in School Age Care settings.

**Diploma of School Age Education and Care:** An Australian vocational qualification that prepares practitioners for day to day management of School Age Care settings.

**Framework for School Age Care (FSAC):** The current Australian curriculum framework for School Age Care services.

**National Quality Framework (NQF):** Government regulatory framework that provides uniform standards for all Australian childcare services including School Age Care.

**National Quality Standard (NQS):** Minimum operating standards for all Australian childcare services including School Age Care.

**Older children:** Children in the latter years of primary school, broadly aged 9 to 12 years.

**Outside School Hours Care (OSHC):** Commonly used Australian term for School Age Care.

**Practitioner:** Person who works with children in a School Age Care service.

**School Age Care (SAC):** Services that provide care, leisure and play for children aged 5 to 12 years in the hours before school, after school and during school vacations.

**United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):** An international agreement outlining civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for people aged 18 years and under.

**Vacation Care (VC):** Care, leisure and play provided during school vacations.



# **CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH TOPIC AND PROJECT**

The research described in this thesis is a poststructural investigation of a rarely questioned ‘truth’ in Australian School Age Care (SAC) services. In Australian SAC, it is commonly held that older children (aged 9 to 12 years) are a problematic cohort unsuited to and uninterested in the programs that SAC provides (Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2004). In this research, I take up the task of unsettling the things that have been held to be true, as suggested by Foucault (cited in Gordon, 1994) and question the presumption within SAC that older children are more difficult to work with than others. In the process of unsettling this ‘truth’ I trouble a number of other taken for granted assumptions including the understandings of childhood that inform the ways older children tend to be positioned in research and in care services more broadly.

The research described in this thesis was conducted in Melbourne, Australia. The topic of older children in SAC is one that has interested me for much of my career. I have worked with SAC services for over 25 years in various roles including practitioner, manager, and ‘expert’. During this time, I have had many discussions with others about how to solve the ‘problem’ of older children.

SAC is an institution that performs an important social function for large numbers of Australian families. SAC services provide care, education and leisure for primary school aged children (age 5 to 12 years) in the hours before and after school, and during school vacations (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2014; Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2011). Children’s school days in Australia are often shorter than their parents’ working days. In the state of Victoria where this research was conducted, primary schools generally operate from 9.00am until 3.00pm (Victoria State Government, 2016). In contrast, parents’ working hours can commence as early as 6.00am and finish as late as 7.00pm (Australian Government, 2016). SAC services are tasked with filling the gaps and providing care whilst schools are closed and parents are still working or studying. In 2014, approximately 297,000 Australian children per day attended SAC (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS),

2015). Despite its importance, SAC is a social institution that is rarely researched (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014; Cartmel & Hayes, 2016; Simoncini, Cartmel, & Young, 2015). It is therefore not as well understood as other more researched institutions like schools and early childhood education settings.

The oldest children in SAC, those aged 9 to 12 years, are believed to be a special case. They are often spoken of by care providers as too old, unsuited to, and unwilling to attend SAC (Hurst, 2015). Consequently, older children are frequently believed to be more difficult to program for than other age groups. Despite years of government investment in reports, learning frameworks, training programs and written resources, the question of how to program SAC for older children has persisted for over two decades. The research project documented in this thesis therefore investigated these two questions:

What do children aged 9 to 12 years consider important in the provision of School Age Care?

What conceptualisations of childhood and care are evident in older children's understandings of ways to provide School Age Care?

I investigated these questions for a number of reasons. I wanted to satisfy my own curiosity about what might be better ways to provide SAC for older children. In contemplating this question, I was most interested in the opinions of older children themselves. Throughout my career, I have had many opportunities to hear the views of practitioners and other adults. I am also aware that of the small amount of research literature available on older children, very little of it considers the perspectives of children. I therefore wanted to learn from older children themselves how SAC could be programmed. The research method, described briefly later in this chapter, was designed to capture older children's views.

Whilst deciding what question to investigate was obviously important, equally important in this research was my decision to approach the research through a poststructural theoretical lens. Early in this research, I became curious about how older children could be considered so problematic in SAC and yet held to be relatively benign in other settings. Poststructural thinker, Michel Foucault's ideas about power and knowledge provided me with one way to make sense of this apparent

contradiction. Foucault (1980) theorised the production of truth as a social and political process, and argued that the knowledge societies come to accept as true can be contradictory and change across contexts. In seeing truth as a social production, Foucault's theories assign social spaces a role beyond being just spaces we inhabit. They become sites where truths and knowledge are produced through the exercise of power. Foucault's theories are also particularly helpful in understanding the production of knowledge that allows people to be grouped and categorised.

Researching poststructurally had implications for every aspect of this research, including the sort of work the research did and the knowledge it produced. It changed how I thought about both SAC and older children. I was able to consider that the problematic older child was not necessarily a universal fact and something intrinsic to older children. It was perhaps instead a socially constructed age category, and an expression of a social setting unique to a time in Western cultures where there is a particular need for somebody to care for the children of working adults. Following Foucault's argument that truth is socially produced, I began to see the operations of SAC settings differently. As well as places where children played and were cared for, they could also become places where adults and children organise children into categories like 'older' and 'younger', and inherit and re-construct truths about those categories. Foucault's theories of power and knowledge permitted me to consider that in a different setting with different social structures, discourses and histories, 9 to 12 year old children might be understood and worked with differently.

Viewing this research through a poststructural lens also influenced how I engaged with existing SAC research and literature. I endeavoured not to take for granted historically dominant ways of conceptualising children and the programming approaches that flow from them. I instead endeavoured to view these knowledges as social productions unique to particular theoretical disciplines or settings. This did not mean that I necessarily discounted or dismissed these existing works, but it did mean that I considered their claims through a critical lens and in relation to the context within which they were produced.

As poststructural research, I intended that the knowledge it produced would unsettle some of the things that are taken for granted in SAC. In particular, I set out to trouble the rarely questioned belief in SAC that older children are more difficult to work with.

However, my findings have also shaken other beliefs that I have long held, which are also widely accepted about the purpose of SAC. It has prompted me to consider whether as well as performing the broadly accepted function as a place of care, play and leisure, perhaps SAC also does, or needs to, perform other functions that are perhaps not noticed, acknowledged or even silenced. The research has also prompted me to consider whether children's maturation and development, something that is commonly accepted as a biological process, might also be socially constructed, with children and programming practices playing an active role in how older children are understood as developing subjects. Each of these re-theorisations of older children, SAC and its practices opens the possibility of new ways of programming that might produce better outcomes for older children.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE METHODOLOGY**

This research required a methodological approach that complemented its poststructural ontological assumptions. I therefore investigated the research questions using a qualitative approach, which provides methodologies well suited to capturing complex social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The research was conducted at a single SAC service in the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia with a small group of ten children aged 10 to 12 years. I was immersed in the SAC setting for 6 months in 2015. Data was collected using a combination of participatory methods and ethnography. The ten children were positioned as co-researchers rather than as research subjects, a role that is more common for children in research (Burman, 2008; Kellett, 2010a). The children were given the task of producing a project that communicated their opinions on the research questions. The projects were a way for the children to form their views and also to communicate them in ways that felt comfortable (Clark & Moss, 2001; Lundy & McEvoy, 2012). During my long immersion in the setting, I also acted as an ethnographer, recording observations of events, both the common and everyday, and those that seemed significant and worth further exploration. Upon completing their projects, I interviewed each child individually about their project and my observations. The combination of children's project work, ethnography and interviews produced rich, descriptive data that helped me to understand how the participants experienced SAC, what they thought was

important in providing it, and the theoretical ideas they drew upon in forming those opinions.

The question of how to better program SAC for older children is an important issue that affects a significant number of over 100,00 older Australian children every day (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2015). Some of these children spend over 20 hours a week in SAC. Whilst it is possible that older children are more difficult to work with than others, it is also possible that SAC services experience difficulty catering for older children. New knowledge about how to provide SAC has the potential to improve SAC and therefore the lives of large numbers of older children, their families and SAC practitioners.

## **BACKGROUND ON THE RESEARCH SETTING AND TOPIC**

In order to introduce this research effectively it is important for readers to have further background on the research setting and topic. In Australia, there are three main types of SAC. Before School Care (BSC) services operate for approximately 1 to 2 hours in the morning prior to the commencement of school. After School Care (ASC) services operate for approximately 2 to 3.5 hours after school has ended for the day. There are also Vacation Care (VC) services, which provide full day care during school vacations. Operating hours vary from service to service, and tend to reflect the requirements of families that use the service. My experience of SAC is that services will operate for longer hours in communities where parents are more likely to have long commutes to and from work.

In Australia, SAC is broadly considered a universal service that cares for children whilst parents work or study. Services operate on a user-pays basis with fees subsidised by a means-tested, Australian Government funded rebate. To access the rebate parents must satisfy work, study and training criteria set by government. Australian SAC operates as a market, with parents encouraged to choose the service that best meets their needs (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012b). Despite being considered a market, most parents likely choose the SAC that is based at their child's school.

Although all SAC services are different, there are functions common to most. In Australia, the hours outside school are broadly considered children's leisure time.

Therefore services are required by government to provide a range of activities and resources that support children's participation in play and leisure (DEEWR, 2011; Early Childhood Development Steering Committee, 2009). In my experience, SAC services often meet this requirement by providing experiences like sporting activities, outdoor play, art and craft activities, dramatic play, games, television and video games. The experiences each service provides varies depending on a range of complex factors including physical location, financial resources, the structure of indoor and outdoor play spaces, the availability of play and educational equipment, school and community cultures, expertise of SAC practitioners and children's interests. Providing meals is also often an important component of SAC. My experience of SAC is that most ASC services provide an afternoon snack, whilst many BSC services will provide children with breakfast.

Whilst Australian SAC is regarded primarily as care for children of working parents, it has recently been re-positioned by government (Cartmel, 2007; Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). In 2010, the Australian Government introduced the country's first curriculum framework for SAC, *My time, our place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia* (FSAC) (DEEWR, 2011). This document re-positions SAC as a site where, in addition to leisure, play and care, children also engage in education. The shift towards education in the FSAC is one of a number of changes that have taken place in how SAC is defined. I will provide a deeper exploration of the purpose of SAC in Chapter Three.

Australia is not the only country to provide SAC. There are similar services in other locations including the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Germany and Switzerland. In Australia, SAC is most commonly referred to as Outside School Hours Care, or Out of School Hours, depending on the location. However, in other countries, similar services may go by other names including School Age Child Care in the U.S.A. and Canada, Out of School Care in the U.K., Leisure-time Centres in Sweden and Denmark, After School Programs in Norway, Japan and Korea, All Day Schools in Switzerland and Germany, and Student Care Centres in Singapore. Additionally, the term 'School Age Educare' is increasingly used in SAC research literature. For consistency, I will refer to all such services, regardless of jurisdiction,

as School Age Care. It is a term that has been used increasingly by the Australian Government and is used in the current Australian FSAC.

Australian SAC is commonly provided at, or close to primary schools. Services are often located in school gymnasiums, converted classrooms, portable buildings or community centres. Australian SAC is commonly delivered by a range of providers including schools, corporate entities, local governments and community organisations (Cartmel, 2007; Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). The mix of providers is changing with increasing numbers of services being operated by corporate entities. Operators of SAC are required to participate in the National Quality Framework (NQF), a regulatory program overseen by the Australian Government, which provides minimum operational and curriculum requirements. Services are required to meet the curriculum standards outlined in a recognised learning framework, which for most is the FSAC. SAC services are assessed against the standards in the NQF every 1 to 3 years, and are given a rating that is publicly available (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), 2016; Victoria State Government Department of Education and Training, 2016).

SAC is an important site of care, play and leisure for increasingly large numbers of Australian children. The number and proportion of children using SAC has increased steadily over the last two decades. Attendances have grown from approximately 85,800 children attending SAC across Australia in 1993 to 398,730 in the September quarter of 2015 (ABS, 1994; Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2016). In 1993, 6% of school-age children used SAC, compared to 12.5% in 2014 (ABS, 2007, 2015). Children who attend SAC do so for an average of 11.7 hours per week (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2016).

Although SAC plays an important role in the lives of many children, it is generally regarded as 'less' than schools, kindergartens, and other educational services (Simoncini & Lasen, 2012; Winefield et al., 2011). A range of factors evidence its low level of cultural importance. SAC commonly operates from shared or makeshift, rather than purpose-specific spaces. Practitioners who work in the services usually have less education and training than classroom teachers, are regarded as low status, and often appointed on the basis of cost rather than their capacity to perform the job

(Cartmel, 2007; Pálsdóttir, 2010; Simoncini & Lasen, 2012). Additionally, parents are more inclined to choose a service on the basis of availability rather than educational or developmental outcomes for the child (Winefield et al., 2011). Seen as ‘care only’, SAC is unlikely to be regarded as important as school, a setting considered more critical in determining a child’s life outcomes.

The question of older children has occupied Australian SAC practitioners since at least 1991. The earliest reference I found to older children in SAC was in a report by Gifford (1991) for the Australian Capital Territory Government on the topic of why older children were less likely to attend SAC. In Australia, older children are commonly understood to be problematic and unsuited to SAC. However, this understanding seems unique to SAC. In other settings, older children seem to be regarded as similar to other primary age children. In Australian SAC, older children are a minority and approximately half as likely to attend SAC as children aged 5 to 8 years. Although they are a minority, there were still 105,600 older Australian children per day in SAC in 2014 (ABS, 2015). It is difficult to understand why older children have a negative reputation in SAC. There is very little research into SAC and less that addresses the topic of older children. My proposition, that older children are considered special in SAC is drawn partly from my experiences working with SAC practitioners, and also exposure to a range of industry literature that references older children.

There are many factors I have outlined in this introduction that make this a topic worthy of research, including the social importance of SAC to large numbers of children and families, both in Australia and internationally. SAC is also a setting that is rarely the focus of research and therefore not well understood. Finally, the prospect of contributing knowledge that may improve SAC for children aged 9 to 12 years also makes this a topic worthy of study.

## **A SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS AND THEIR CONTENT**

In this final part of this introduction, I provide a summary of the different chapters contained within this thesis.

In Chapter Two, I introduce the poststructural ontology that informs this project and explore how it has influenced the conduct of the research and the knowledge it has



produced. I use Foucault's theories of power and knowledge and Butler's theory of performativity to inform not only the analysis of the research data, but also as a lens through which I reviewed previous SAC research and policy literature. This chapter provides a rationale for how use of these poststructural ontological concepts can make a valuable contribution to developing knowledge about older children in SAC.

The next three chapters provide a comprehensive background of the field within which the research question is located. In order to begin thinking about what SAC might look like, it is important to first understand the purpose of SAC. Hence, Chapter Three provides a discussion and analysis of the contested and changing purposes of SAC over three decades in Australia. The work done in this chapter includes exploration of the ways in which the somewhat competing constructs of *recreation*, *leisure*, *play* and *education* have been understood and applied in relation to SAC, and the associated programming implications that have influenced provision of SAC.

Chapter Four explores whether there are other fields of research beyond SAC in which children aged 9 to 12 years, or 'older children' are understood as 'challenging' or problematic. This chapter demonstrates that whilst older children are problematised in SAC, they are conceptualised differently elsewhere. Whilst older children are considered unique in some settings, in others they are not considered a separate category of child. Chapters Three and Four provide important connections with the poststructural ontology presumed in this research. In demonstrating how shared understandings about the purpose of SAC can shift over time, and understandings of older children can shift across contexts, these chapters build on Foucault's (1980) position that truth is multiple, contextual, and a product of history and culture.

In Chapter Five, I review the limited research and policy and programming literature relating to SAC so as to summarise what is currently 'known' about SAC and older children. There is only a small amount of research relating to SAC. Consequently, as well as drawing upon peer-reviewed research, the review also analyses other data sources such as government reports and industry publications. The review provides a background to the project by comparing SAC in Australia with approaches used in Sweden, the U.K. and North America. The review looks critically at literature that addresses how to program in SAC, and particularly for older children. In reviewing

this literature, I have been careful not to overstate the significance of what are sometimes minor findings. Despite the small amount of literature, the chapter provides a fairly complete picture of what is known about older children in SAC and how to program for them.

Chapter Six describes the project methodology and the theoretical framework that informs the research. The research employed a combination of participatory methods, ethnographic observations, and interviews with children in order to capture a deep understanding of children's views about SAC and the social processes by which those views are formed. This chapter discusses the way in which poststructural theories inform the choice of methods and provides a detailed description and justification of each component of the method. In addition, I also acknowledge the complexities of collecting data through participatory and observational methods.

In Chapter Seven, I provide a poststructural analysis of some important complexities that emerged during the conduct of the research. Poststructural theories conceptualise social settings as complex sites where power is exercised and knowledge produced. In this chapter, I explore how power relations operated during the conduct of research, in particular how the child participants and researcher negotiated their roles and identities. I also discuss the difficulties I experienced maintaining a poststructural worldview when expected challenges emerged during the project.

The work of introducing and analysing the project data is done in Chapters Eight through Eleven. These chapters provide a poststructural analysis of the participants' interviews and projects, together with an analysis of the observational data exploring the questions:

What do children aged 9 to 12 years consider important in the provision of School Age Care?

What conceptualisations of childhood and care are evident in older children's understandings of ways to provide School Age Care?

The analysis in each chapter focuses on a different aspect of a typical day in SAC. In Chapter Eight - "Eat", my analysis focuses on activities observed within a separate room at the research setting that was provided for older children during meal times.

Foucault (1977) proposes that one way power creates truth is through the categorisation and classification of people. For the participants in this project, being treated as ‘older’ was an important element of their SAC experience. The older children’s room was important to the participants in that it created a physical division between older and younger children. In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which the children categorised each other based on age without needing the governance provided by physical barriers. I examine the multiple social dividing practices older children engaged in to determine and maintain membership of different age categories.

Chapters Nine – “Play” and Ten – More “Play” continue the work of exploring age-based dividing practices. This part of the analysis centres on the most active time in SAC, when children are playing. These chapters aim to capture the physicality of the children’s play, and explore how their construction of age categories was an embodied process. I adopt key ideas from Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity to conduct the analysis. Butler (1990, 1993) argues that people physically perform gender in response to socially generated norms. Again working from participants’ suggestions that being seen to be older is important, I identify different places that older children can access knowledge of age-based social norms. Following Butler’s argument that gender is performative, I work with the data to investigate whether the participants also perform age categories in response and with reference to understandings of developmental norms. These chapters also begin to examine the implications of the findings they present and whether work-like acts of category maintenance prompt a re-thinking of the degree to which SAC can be seen as simply a place of play and leisure.

Multiplicity and complexity are important concepts in poststructural theory. Poststructural theories try to account for the complexities intrinsic to our societies. Chapter Eleven - “Go,” adds a final layer of complexity to the analysis. The chapter focuses on the time late in the afternoon when many children have left SAC. Late in the day, SAC is very different to earlier in the day, which highlights that SAC can be experienced in multiple ways. This chapter also looks at the category work that older children do. Specifically it investigates how the performances of age explored in Chapters Nine and Ten, and dividing practices from Chapter Eight can differ in

response to the passing of time, which is marked by the departure of key friends or altered programming practices employed by adults. “Go” also revisits earlier work done in Chapter Three about the purpose of SAC. Just as the purpose of SAC can shift across locations, it can also shift across time within one location. This chapter raises the question whether we also need to accept that as a liminal space between school and home, SAC may be a place of waiting, as well as one of play and leisure.

In the final chapter, I bring together all of the findings developed in the body of the thesis and discuss their implications for how to program SAC for older children. This conclusion grapples with each of the findings, in particular the main finding that the participants desire to be seen and treated as older, and actively construct themselves as a separate category of child. Additionally, I consider the implications of the time children spend waiting for SAC programming. As a piece of qualitative poststructural research, I do not presume to provide universal solutions to the research question. What I do provide is a series of provocations and questions that practitioners can apply to their own unique contexts and use to inform a critical evaluation of their programming practices.

## **SUMMARY**

In this introduction I have provided a concise summary of this research project. The project aimed to learn from children their views on how best to program SAC for children aged 9 to 12 years, a group who, for at least 25 years, have mostly been accepted as difficult to cater for and unsuited to SAC. To investigate the research questions, I worked in partnership with older children. The project operated from the poststructural assumption that truth is socially produced. I therefore confronted the possibility that the ‘difficult older child’, something that is often considered a truth in Australian SAC was also a social production. Extending on that proposition, I also considered that there are programming practices and other features unique to SAC that play a role in constructing older children as difficult and separate.

The following chapters provide a detailed account of how the research was conducted so that the reader can make an informed judgment about the findings and knowledge claims made throughout the thesis. In keeping with the poststructural ontology adopted for the project, I accept that the findings emerging from this research are also

socially produced and therefore only one of many ways of thinking about SAC programming for older children. Regardless, they offer new ways of thinking about working with older children in SAC that unsettle and run counter to practices that have been historically dominant. In doing so they offer the possibility of new pedagogies that can improve older children's experiences of SAC.

This work begins in the following chapter, where I engage more deeply with the poststructural theories that underpin every aspect of this project.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORISING OLDER CHILDREN AND SCHOOL AGE CARE POSTSTRUCTURALLY**

When I first commenced this research, I already had pre-formed ideas about the theoretical concepts I thought would assist me in making sense of this topic. I had begun theorising this research topic well before I ‘officially’ became a PhD candidate. I have been interested in older children and SAC throughout my career and had already spent many hours thinking about the topic. During my previous masters study, I had developed an interest in Foucault’s theories, particular those that addressed discourse and social dividing practices. Foucault’s theories about the social construction of knowledge seemed a good match to this topic, which is focused on what appeared to be a socially constructed category of children unique to a particular setting.

As the project has progressed, I have continued to find Foucault’s theories helpful in theorising SAC differently and developing a methodology. However, the ways in which they have been helpful has changed as my knowledge of his work has deepened. In addition, I have found the work of other poststructural theorists useful in understanding this topic, in particular, Judith Butler.

This chapter explores the conceptual framework adopted in this project. As well as describing these theories, I also provide a rationale for their application, detailing how they have assisted in addressing the aims of the research. Poststructural theory was not just a means of analysing the research data in this project. It was a lens I carried throughout the research. It influenced all aspects of this research, including my reading of SAC research and other texts, my interpretation of ethnographic observations, the development of the research methodology, and my understanding of what constitutes ethical conduct during data collection. This chapter will explore the poststructural ideas important in this project and account for the role each has played in the conduct of the research and the type of knowledge it produced.

## **TROUBLING THE ‘TRUTH’ OF MODERNIST THEORIES OF CHILDHOOD**

In undertaking a review of SAC literature at the commencement of this research, one of the first things to capture my attention was the prominence of ideas from developmental psychology within early SAC texts from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The earlier texts I reviewed often took the form of SAC practice manuals. They relied heavily on the application of developmental stages as a way of predicting the activities children want to do in the hours outside school (Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre, 1992; Tarrant & Jones, 1996). Programming was considered a matter of understanding which activities would likely correspond with a child’s level of development. These texts are reviewed in more depth in Chapter Four.

The predictive ways these texts apply presumptions derived from developmental psychology is indicative of developmental psychology’s theoretical lineage. Developmental psychology is an example of a modernist theory of childhood and part of the enlightenment tradition of knowledge that seeks to apply scientific method to the study of the world. Enlightenment thinking emerged during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and reflected a world view that being able to understand and control nature would lead to a better society (Habermas & Ben-Habib, 1981). In this tradition, developmental psychology aims to reveal universal laws that govern child development and establish developmental norms against which children can be measured (Rose, 1985). In this way, the ‘rules’ of development are sometimes assumed to be predictive of children’s interests and abilities.

Theorising differently informs an approach to the research question that permits examination of the influence of power and discourse. Drawing on a poststructuralist heritage in the hope of revealing new ways of thinking about older children and to reveal how taken for granted ways of thinking work to govern practices. Adopting a different theoretical position opens the possibility of a different approach to investigating my primary research question:

What do older children consider important in the provision of School Age Care?

Theorising differently might inform other approaches to the research question that instead examine the influence of power and discourse. Drawing on a different theoretical heritage allows me to conceptualise children differently, giving their views more primacy in the social production of knowledge than modernist theories, which are more inclined to privilege the interests of adults (Cannella, 2008; Foucault, 1977). Thinking poststructurally also supports me methodologically to include observations of governing and dividing practices.

In recent decades, a body of scholarship has accumulated that is critical of modernist theories of childhood, their claims to truth and impacts on the lives of children (Burman, 2008; Cannella, 2008; MacNaughton, 2005; Walkerdine, 1984). Much of this criticism is founded on postmodern and poststructural paradigms. Postmodernism is a critique of the modernist enlightenment belief that science is objective and can reveal fundamental truths about the world. Postmodernists instead argue that scientific truths cannot be separated from the political (Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2000; Hughes, 2010; MacNaughton, 2003). Postmodern theory has a broader societal focus than poststructuralism. Poststructuralism, whilst also concerned with connections between truth and the political, often focuses on the individual. Poststructuralism theorises the individual subject as something unstable rather than predictable and knowable (Hughes, 2010).

It is important to note that poststructuralism is a broad term that encompasses a complex mix of theories from many different theorists across a number of fields of study (MacNaughton, 2005). I use the term *poststructuralism* throughout this thesis, but do so recognising the range of theories it includes. In using the term, my intent is to reflect a broader worldview that sees the production of truths about societies and individuals as a social process.

In this thesis, I draw more specifically on the theories of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler whose works are frequently positioned as poststructural. When considering whether there are alternatives to modernist theories of childhood like developmental psychology, Foucault's thoughts on the nature of truth provide a way forward.

‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements.



‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth. (Foucault, 1980, p. 133)

Foucault’s ideas about power and truth contrast with those of modernism. Modernists believe that in the same way that disciplines like mathematics and physics can uncover the natural laws of the universe, the application of scientific method can also reveal universal, natural laws that govern every part of our world, including the behaviours and development of humans (Cannella, 2008; Hughes, 2010; MacNaughton, 2005). The knowledge produced by modernist disciplines like developmental psychology has assumed the status of ‘truth’ in Western cultures through its association to science and claims of rationality (Cannella, 2008; MacNaughton, 2005).

Foucault’s theories invite us to see ‘truth’ differently. Rather than conceptualise truth as natural, universal and discoverable, Foucault (1980) argues truth is produced socially via ‘regimes of truth’. He argues that these truths exist in the form of discourses, which are socially produced, shared ways of talking about a phenomenon (Foucault, 1989). The discourses that a regime of truth produces are a consequence of how power operates and is distributed within that regime. Foucault (1980) sees the production of truth as a circular process. Discourses attain the status of truth through their repetition and embedding in social and political structures.

One implication of Foucault’s theories is that truth no longer remains fixed and immutable. Political structures and distributions of power can change across time and settings. Therefore regimes of truth, and the knowledge they produce can also change. Truth instead becomes something that can be unique to particular cultures, periods of history or even professional settings. Consequently, using Foucault’s theories, truth becomes something that is constructed, shifting and contingent.

Foucault’s theories have been employed in critiques of developmental psychology and its claims to truth. Burman’s (2008) analysis proposes that developmental psychology is an expression of a regime of truth that privileges the voices of adult, white, Western males. She describes how the child study movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that spawned developmental psychology ignored the

perspectives of women, children and non-Westerners. Women were considered too emotionally bound to children to be as objective as the male. Similarly, non-Western subjects were discounted as primitive. Cannella (2008) disputes the objectivity of the knowledge claims of developmental psychologist, Piaget. She describes how some of his theories mirrored dominant cultural values present at the time that privilege intellectual over physical prowess, and autonomy over connectedness. Lichtman (cited in Cannella, 2008) describes how Piaget's stages corresponded with social and schooling structures that already existed in Europe prior to the development of his theories. Their analyses show how the truths of developmental psychology and other modernist sciences of childhood are not separate from, but entangled with culture and centres of power.

It is not enough for truth to merely be spoken into existence. Its believability comes from repetition and circulation by "systems of power" (Foucault, 1980, p. 133). MacNaughton (2005) explains that in Australia, educational institutions, government and peak representative bodies have sanctioned developmental psychology as the correct way to understand and teach children in early childhood education. These endorsements and associations compel practitioners to embody theory in their work, making it seem natural and 'true'. SAC participates in the same discursive regimes that dominate early childhood education. In Australia, SAC and early childhood education are overseen by the same federal government department, are subject to the same regulatory requirements, and have historically used very similar curriculum documents. For example, in Australia, SAC services are expected to found their programming on a curriculum framework developed by the Australian Government, the FSAC (DEEWR, 2011). The FSAC was adapted from the equivalent early childhood curriculum document, the Early Years Learning Framework. Similarly, the FSAC's predecessor, the Quality Practice Guide, was also adapted from the early childhood education equivalent. SAC practitioners are also trained using similar qualifications and course content to early childhood educators. Some qualifications are identical, whilst others share subjects containing developmental knowledge. These various systems are examples of how developmental truths are bound up with government policy and practice. Their connectedness to sites of power reinforces their claims to truth and aid in their distribution.

Drawing on Foucault's theories about multiple regimes of truth does not mean that developmental psychology should be seen as 'wrong' and something to be ignored. Foucault's theories instead conceptualise developmental psychology as one of many truths about childhood, and one that privileges a particular perspective. Consequently, Burman (2008) does not believe that developmental psychology is completely without value, or that the knowledge it has produced should be ignored. She asks instead that its claims be considered in light of the criticisms against it, in particular which perspectives it privileges and ignores. Walkerdine (1984) argues that whilst developmental theories are important, what is more important is how those theories are taken up and used. I will take a similar theoretical stance. I do not intend to use this research to try and debunk the truth claims of developmental psychology. However, I will use a theoretical lens to question its presumptions and its role in producing particular approaches to working with older children in SAC settings. Foucault's theories open the possibility that there are other 'truths' that may emerge about the experiences of older children in SAC, and different programming implications that may arise for practitioners seeking to cater to their needs, preferences and capacities.

## **POWER AND THE PRODUCTION OF TRUTHS ABOUT CHILDREN**

Foucault argues that power plays a critical role in the production of truth. His conceptualisation of power was a radical departure from previous conceptualisations. Rather than seeing power as a relationship of oppression where one party dominates another, Foucault asserts that the distribution and application of power was more complex.

In defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power, one identifies power with a law which says no, power is taken above all as carrying the force of a prohibition. Now I believe that this is a wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception of power, one which has been curiously widespread. If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces

discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault, 1980, p. 119)

Our societies are laced with relationships of productive power. Power is not just exerted by bosses over workers, governments over citizens or adults over children. Power operates and produces in multiple ways and at multiple sites (Foucault, 1980). Particularly important to this thesis is what Foucault sees as the productive nature of power. Power produces knowledge through disciplinary networks that are embedded in our societies, and these networks were made possible by growth in use of prisons during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Foucault, 1977, 1980). The systems of surveillance and control that are integral to the functioning of prisons and designed to produce compliant prisoners took hold in other areas of our societies to have broader application. Populations that resided outside the main sites of political power have become particularly subject to disciplinary power. It led to the development of institutions like schools and asylums intended to regulate the conduct of specific groups like children and the mad. Disciplinary surveillance also became part of our systems of government (Foucault, 1977).

These disciplinary institutions went beyond physical control. They also instituted dividing and categorising practices, and produced data about the individuals who resided within them. This made possible the study of particular groups of people, including children. Foucault (1977) proposes that it is the categorisation, segregation and disciplinary surveillance of children that has made possible human sciences like developmental psychology. These sciences turned children into objects of research who could be “described, judged, measured, compared” (Foucault, 1977, p. 191). Piaget produced developmental stages that provided a framework for adults to classify and compare children (Cannella, 2008). Other theorists like Erikson, Freud and Kohlberg developed their own frameworks that organised children in particular ways (Berk, 2013; Duska & Whelan, 1977; Erikson, 1964, 1968; Freud, 1962; Kohlberg, 1969). Commonly applied categories of childhood like *adolescence* and *infancy* that are applied to categories of children are the product of the child study movement (Walkerdine, 1984). Foucault’s work goes beyond describing how these sciences emerged. It also questions the validity of the knowledge they produce. His ideas about

power and knowledge raise the possibility that these truths are not unshakeable but instead socially constructed and an expression of the political and cultural structures that spawned them (Foucault, 1980).

One implication of Foucault's theories is that individuals play an active role in the production of truth. Power is distributed through complex networks that connect everybody (Foucault, 1980). Rather than something that is imposed upon people, truth is something that individuals have an active relationship with. People can recirculate, redefine or resist truths. In the case of developmental theories, institutions, practitioners and children are also engaged in their production. Government and educational institutions circulate theories through policy, regulatory frameworks and educational content (MacNaughton, 2005). Practitioners can enact childhood theories through their planning, practices, discussions and engagement with institutions. Children can engage with these theories through practices in educational, care and other institutions, and conduct themselves in relation to expectations and desires created by these theories and their associated norms and practices. Walkerdine (1984) highlights the active role subjects play in distributing developmental truths. She describes how people are selective in the aspects of Piaget's work they attend to and how they apply it, and that this differs from Piaget's actual research. How people engage with truths is complex and multiple. It can vary across different individuals and contexts (Foucault, 1980).

The use of Foucault's theories of power and knowledge in this thesis provide the opportunity to approach the study of older children in SAC from a constructivist perspective. The possibility that truth is socially constructed disrupts the claims of modernist theories of childhood to universality and naturalness. It also raises the possibility that there can be more than one truth about older children in SAC.

Foucault's theories conceptualise truth as multiple. Therefore, rather than being restricted to a singular truth, we are able to choose which truths we use. In doing so, we can unsettle more dominant truths (Foucault, 1988a). Foucault (1980) refers to this disruption of dominant truths as "a battle 'for truth', or at least 'around truth'" (p. 132). In doing so, he argues that we are not seeking to determine which truth is 'more true' than another. We are instead contesting the status afforded to different truths. Foucault's theories allow me to engage in a battle around truths about older children. I

can disrupt dominant, developmental truths by elevating other possibilities and allowing them to also be considered.

Foucault's theories of power and truth also inform the methodological decisions taken in this research that place greater emphasis on the involvement of older children. Developmentalist theories were produced by a regime of truth that privileged the perspectives of adult, Western males and made the children the objects of research (Burman, 2008; Foucault, 1977). Foucault (1980) argues that truth cannot be completely separated from power because it is power that produces truth, but truth can be uncoupled from the various hegemonies that operate within a regime of truth. Drawing on Foucault's assertion, that we can disrupt the connection between the production of truth and hegemonic influences, this research includes children in the conduct of research, a role historically reserved for adults. In doing so, I hoped to unsettle, in a small way, the hegemonic influence of adult, Western males on research about children.

The attention poststructural theory draws to less heard perspectives compels me to seek a range of perspectives by both observing and asking. It is a paradigm that allows me to invite older children into a conversation about SAC programming, something that Burman (2008) suggests our applications of developmental psychology have failed to do. I hope that privileging the voices of children disrupts the power imbalances traditionally present in research about children, possibly producing new knowledge about older children in SAC that is more reflective of their perspectives. Poststructural theory also allows me to speak about SAC programming differently and ask my questions in different ways. The connection between the Foucault's theories and the project methodology is explored in more depth in Chapter Six.

## **POWER, BODIES AND IDENTITIES**

Foucault did not believe that power's effects were just restricted to the production of truth. He also argued that there is an intimate relationship between power, discourse and the use of bodies. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) explored the evolution of disciplinary surveillance and how it has become a form of power over people's bodies. To explain his ideas about power and bodies, Foucault used the

concept of the panopticon, a prison designed by Jeremy Bentham in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The panopticon was designed so that each prison inmate would be highly visible to a guard stationed in a central tower. The presumed effectiveness of the panopticon as a control over prisoners' bodies was attributed to the fact that prisoners were aware of both their own visibility and the likelihood that they were being watched. Prisoners had to continually monitor and moderate their behaviours in case they were being observed (Foucault, 1977). Foucault argues that this combination of visibility and surveillance is present in contemporary societies in structures like hospitals, asylums and schools. However, disciplinary surveillance is present not just in architectural forms but also in the structure of governments and societies.

Earlier I described how disciplinary surveillance made possible the human sciences and the measurement and categorisation of human subjects, in particular children (Foucault, 1977). These sciences led to the creation of social and developmental norms against which individuals were measured and compared, enabling people to be grouped and categorised. Foucault argues that panoptical surveillance did not just rely upon the authority of teachers, physicians and scientists. Its effectiveness was derived from the ways in which subjects monitored and disciplined themselves. He explains, "It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection" (Foucault, 1977, p. 187).

Norms provide benchmarks against which individuals measure and conduct themselves. Subjects are aware that if they behave contrary to normative expectations then their difference will be visible and result in correction and sanction. However, norms do not exist only in the form of scientific benchmarks and categories. They also take the form of social and cultural discourses. Self-policing in response to social norms is a form of power that influences people's speech and use of their bodies.

Judith Butler built upon Foucault's ideas about power, discourse and bodies to develop her theory of performativity. Butler thought similarly to Foucault that subjects conduct themselves in relation to dominant discourses, but applied her theory to the subject of gender. Like Foucault (1978), Butler (2006) argued that normative gendered discourses are also a cultural construction and act to support human reproduction. Butler's conceptualisation of gender as something that is culturally constructed is provocative as gender is often considered to be naturally determined.

Butler proposes that gender is a type of performance.

Because there is neither an “essence” that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction “compels” our belief in its necessity and naturalness. The historical possibilities materialized through various corporeal styles are nothing other than those punitively regulated cultural fictions alternately embodied and deflected under duress. (Butler, 1990, p. 190)

Butler argues that subjects perform their genders in response to a dominant, pre-existing, heterosexual discourse that circulate their cultures. The assumed normality of heterosexuality is a shared “cultural fiction” that subjects perpetuate through the ways in which they talk and think about gender. It is the shared nature of understandings of gender that give the fiction its appearance of being natural. Discourses of heterosexual genders as natural also gain the impression of truthfulness through countless repetitions over time. Discourses are repeated so often and so universally that their truthfulness is accepted as a given. However, Butler believes that in addition to being distributed and reinforced by words, gendered discourses are also recirculated through performance. Dominant discourses of gender compel the use of bodies in normative ways because of the punitive consequences of performing non-normatively. Transgressive performance of gender can attract prohibition, marginalisation or even physical harm (Butler, 1993).

Butler (1990) argues similarly to Foucault (1980) that power relationships with normative discourses are more complex than just relationships of oppression. Subjects are not just limited to performances that match normative expectations. They have multiple ways of performing gender available to them. However, performances of gender are not entirely free. They are constrained by discourse and the consequences attached to non-normative performances. Discourse only makes possible certain repeatable performances. Butler (1993) points out the distinction between



performativity and theatrical displays of gender. One-off acts are not capable of constructing gender.

As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. (Butler, 1990, p. 191)

The repeatability and everyday nature of performances gives them their power. Countless iterations of a performance make it appear normal and natural, as do the everyday nature of those performances. Butler assigns subjects an active role in the construction of their gendered identities. Individuals have a constrained freedom to not just inhabit particular roles, but to modify them. Rather than merely reproduce performative roles, individuals engage in resistances that reinscribe and redefine the roles they inhabit (Davies, 2006). Although Butler assigns subjects agency in taking up performances, the agency she describes is not completely free. The freedom to adopt a role is constrained by discourse, social norms and the threat of sanction (Butler, 1993). Whilst Butler's theory does not place limits on the choices available to the subject, their choices are constrained because discourse only makes certain roles viable (Davies, 2000).

## **CONSIDERING PERFORMATIVITY AS A WAY OF UNDERSTANDING OLDER CHILDREN IN SCHOOL AGE CARE**

Given that Butler's theory of performativity is concerned with the social construction of gender, I am beholden to explain why I have chosen to use this theory in relation to understandings of age and development. Although concerned primarily with gender, Butler's theory accounts for the physical relationship people have with dominant discourses and how they govern the use of their bodies. As well as gender, there are other aspects of identities that are forged in relation to cultural expectations. Cultural expectations with respect to politics, religion, family and lifestyle all play a role in governing people's conduct. Butler's theory prompts me to contemplate that other facets of identity might also be performative.

I explained previously that developmental psychology has played a dominant role in informing programming practices for older children in SAC. In the same way that dominant understandings construct gender as something that is naturally and genetically determined, developmental psychology constructs children's development in a similar way. Just as Butler argues that gender is culturally constructed, scholars like Burman (2008), Cannella (2008) and Walkerdine (1984) have deconstructed developmental psychology to demonstrate how the truths it produces are also a product of culture and belong to a particular regime of truth. The poststructural ontology adopted in this thesis allows me to contemplate that if developmental discourses of childhood are socially constructed, then children might also construct their development performatively.

## **SUMMARY**

Foucault (quoted in Gordon, 1994) says that one of the tasks of researchers is to trouble taken for granted assumptions.

The work of an intellectual is not to form the political will of others; it is, through the analyses he does in his own domains, to bring assumptions and things taken for granted again into question, to shake habits, ways of acting and thinking, to dispel the familiarity of the accepted, to take the measure of rules and institutions and, starting from that re-problematization (where he plays his specific role as intellectual) to take part in the formation of a political will (where he has his role to play as citizen). (p. xxxiv)

By orienting this paper poststructurally, I seek to do as Foucault suggests and trouble assumptions that have become comfortable and unquestioned. I have done this in multiple ways throughout this research. I have applied a poststructural lens to my readership of research and other literature relating to older children and SAC. I have brought a critical eye to their claims, recognising their connection to sites of power, acknowledging what perspectives they privilege, silence or ignore. This included a critical reading of texts that draw on developmental psychology, a school of theories so familiar in Western cultures that it has been taken for granted (Cannella, 2008).

I have made methodological decisions that invite the children's contributions, a group whose perspectives are less heard in research and SAC programming. Seeking

children's views allows me to find the 'truths' that children hold, and introduces another perspective to that of adults. It enables me to seek less comfortable ways of thinking about research and programming SAC for older children. Seeing truth as a social production also requires me to recognise the exercise of power, including privileging and silencing in the knowledge produced by this research, recognising that it too is only one of many truths. Drawing on poststructuralism required a long immersion in the research setting so that I could capture repetitions and patterns, and observe the effects of dividing and governing practices.

Conceptualising poststructurally during analysis of my data has also made possible a reading of older children and SAC that often runs counter to much of what is assumed true about primary-age children and the settings they inhabit. Foucault and Butler's theories enable conceptualisation of SAC as a site where power is exercised in ways that has multiple effects. The application of power produces and reinscribes knowledge in the form of cultural norms. It allows for the classification and categorisation of children. It also governs the actions of those who inhabit SAC. A poststructural ontology understands the acts of children and practitioners as being governed by power and cultural norms rather than as the product of natural laws.

Using poststructural theories to unsettle the taken for granted is more than a conceptual exercise. It is also about informing new programming practices in SAC.

In thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives. (Foucault, 1980, p. 39)

Foucault argues that power, and hence the knowledge it produces has physical effects. Theories of childhood are therefore not inert. Theory is enacted through the work of practitioners, which therefore has practical implications for children. It exerts power over adult bodies and those of children. In re-theorising older children in SAC, I hope to see what can be made visible and therefore useful to practitioners. In doing so, I am not seeking to replace one socially constructed truth with another. I instead hope to

utilise other ways of thinking about and researching with older children, and therefore make possible other ways of understanding SAC programming.

I now move my discussion to a review of literature relating to older children in SAC. The literature review is spread across three chapters. In the first of these, I conduct an investigation into the purpose of SAC. I look at the shifting understandings of the purposes of SAC and also investigate the definitions of terms that are commonly deployed in defining SAC. In doing so, I do not ‘check my poststructural hat at the door’ and pick it up again when I begin my analytical work later in the thesis. The poststructural lens I bring to this project also plays a role in my readership of the research and other literature.

## **CHAPTER THREE – RECREATION, CARE, LEISURE OR EDUCATION? THE SHIFTING PURPOSES OF SCHOOL AGE CARE**

In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined the primary social purpose of SAC in Australia as a site of care for children of mostly working parents in the hours before and after school. This appears to be a concise and straightforward definition of SAC. However, the reality is that the purpose of SAC is not exactly straightforward. The purpose of SAC in Australia is not fixed and has often changed. Over time, community demands and government have redefined SAC. At various times, SAC has been regarded as a recreation service, care for children of working parents, and most recently as a care service that is additionally tasked with providing leisure, play and education.

The slippery task of defining SAC is evidenced by current literature from the Australian Government, the national body responsible for the registration and regulation of SAC services. On its national web portal for parents and care providers, the Australian Government defines SAC as “care for primary school aged children, before and after school... during school holidays and on pupil-free days” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012b). Yet the FSAC, the current, national curriculum framework for SAC, defines SAC as services that “provide play and leisure opportunities that are meaningful to children and support their wellbeing, learning and development... to extend their life skills and develop dispositions towards citizenship” (DEEWR, 2011, p. 5).

Whilst the Australian Government’s website overtly positions SAC as a site of care, in the FSAC, care is a purpose that is rarely mentioned and mostly implied. The FSAC assigns SAC a more diffuse purpose as a site of leisure, play and education.

This chapter explores in more depth what SAC actually is, or is supposed to be. It investigates terms like recreation, leisure, play, care and education, and how their application can influence what people understand SAC to be. This chapter explores these terms in a historical fashion, following changes in how Australian governments have defined SAC since the 1970s. However, this historical, linear exploration of the

topic is done for narrative convenience rather than to suggest that SAC has undergone a neat evolution. I trouble any perceptions of linearity later in the chapter.

## **SCHOOL AGE CARE AS A SITE OF RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

In her Doctoral thesis, Cartmel (2007) provides a brief history of Australian SAC. She documents the emergence of SAC in the 1970s in response to women's increased participation in the workforce. However, these were not the first after school programs. After school activities have been provided in Australia for children for over 100 years. Rather than care programs, these were recreational activities, and only had loose connections to the schools that children attended (Cartmel, 2007). As recreational activities, these would have had a very different look and purpose to contemporary SAC programs, which provide care, leisure and play. Defining *recreation* helps to underline these differences.

Dictionaries broadly describe recreation as activities that individuals pursue for enjoyment and relaxation in the hours outside work (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2012; Oxford University Press, 2011). However, leisure theorists offer a more nuanced definition. Best (2010) defines recreation more narrowly, suggesting it does not necessarily encompass all activities that take place outside work. Recreation activities are often considered those that replenish and refresh an individual, contribute to their wellbeing, and also benefit the society. Recreation is also more institutionalised and organised, and would therefore be unlikely to include leisure activities whose societal benefits are considered debatable (Taylor, 2011). There is comparatively little literature exploring recreation as a concept. Most writing explores recreation via definitions of leisure, even though such literature considers the two to be different.

Early recreational after school programs were operated mostly by providers of cultural and recreational activities in community playgrounds and community halls (Cartmel, 2007). These activities likely included music, visual arts, sports and games, all of which would be considered beneficial to children. Such activities would also have been perceived to be of benefit to the society, promoting active lifestyles, social interaction, cultural enrichment, and keeping children out of harm's way. This focus

on the productive use of free time is consistent with modernist views of leisure, that promoted the pursuit of ‘useful’ recreational activities (Rojek, 1995).

## **SCHOOL AGE CARE AS A SITE OF CARE**

Increasing numbers of women in the workforce in the second half of the twentieth century created a greater need for care of school age children rather than recreation programs (Cartmel, 2007; Finlason, 1993). The first care programs for school age children began to appear in the early 1970s and gradually increased in numbers, size and professionalism throughout the 1980s as a consequence of increasing interest and funding from government (Finlason, 1993).

Taken at its most literal, *care* means the “Provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance and protection of someone” (Oxford University Press, 2011). However, in the context of caring for children, the interpretation of terms like health, welfare, maintenance and protection determines what care is considered to be. Does being healthy mean children are merely fed, hydrated and kept clean, or does it also extend to their social and emotional wellbeing, and the nutritional value of the food provided? Does being protected mean that children are kept in an environment free of all risk, or does protection also include supervision and guidance by adults who can support them to recognise and manage risk? Is protecting children the only function of the service, or are other functions implicit in providing care?

The 1982 Australian Labor Party’s (ALP) children’s services platform provides some insight into how government defined care in the early years of SAC. The ALP argued SAC should provide a safe environment, coupled with developmental and social activities that meet the requirements of children and families (Finlason, 1993). In an early professional development text, Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre (1992) make a similar point that SAC,

Is not a baby sitting service in which children are merely supervised and kept safe; it assumes that the children will have ample opportunities to pursue their hobbies, to develop new skills and interests, to develop independence and survival skills, to relax and have fun, to mature. (p. 5)

These statements indicate that some groups regarded care as more than safekeeping, and that it also included the provision of activities that supported their wellbeing. However, this is only one perspective. Following Foucault's (1980) assertion that truth is contingent and contextual, how care is defined in practice likely varied across communities, families, and within families. Shifting definitions of care are a function of individual cultures, politics, histories and theories of childhood.

Designating SAC as a site of care would have likely influenced the types of activities provided. As care programs, the motivations for children to attend SAC would have differed from those attending purpose-specific recreational programs. Children or families using recreational programs would have had a shared interest in the activity being provided. In contrast, children's participation in care programs would likely be motivated by the parent's desire to find care, and to a lesser extent a unifying interest in a specific activity. Without a shared interest in a single activity, children would therefore be more likely to present to care programs with a wider range of interests. Consequently, the curriculum focus for care programs would need to be broader than for the narrow focused recreational programs discussed previously. Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre (1992) evidences this by stating that children require choices in activities at SAC. However, it is likely that Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre's perspective on SAC programming was one of many. My personal recollection of the early 1990s was that many programs, including the one I operated, had a recreational flavour to them. In my service and many others I knew, it was more effective to market on the strength of the most universally appealing activities rather than on availability of choice.

Less visible in early descriptions of care in the earliest SAC texts is attention to the social and emotional aspects of the care environment. Caring, warm and loving relationships with parents play an important role in children's development helping to promote emotional wellbeing, better education outcomes and protect against suicide and substance abuse (Bond et al., 2007; Resnick et al., 1997). Promoting positive connections with school and positive relationships with other important adults are similarly important in supporting resilience and social and emotional wellbeing (Bond et al., 2007; Johnson, 2008; McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002; Resnick et al., 1997). In providing care for working parents, SAC practitioners are proxy providers



of those same elements of love, warmth and care. SAC is a significant site in many children's lives and an extension of the school community. It therefore follows that the work of SAC practitioners is important in contributing to children's social and emotional wellbeing.

It is interesting that despite widespread contemporary acknowledgement of the importance of supporting social and emotional development, it is something that does not feature prominently in early SAC texts. Whilst they do not entirely ignore the role of relationships in practitioners' work with children, these texts are largely focused on activities (Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre, 1992). This is an interesting contrast with how more contemporary SAC texts regard social and emotional care. The FSAC, identifies "secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships" (DEEWR, 2011, p. 10) as one of its five central principles. Likewise, its predecessor the Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance (OSHCQA) Quality Practices Guide has a similar focus on creating positive relationships with children (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003). These texts indicate a movement from recreational, activity-focused understandings of children's care needs, to more holistic understandings that incorporate social and emotional dimensions.

When reviewing these early SAC texts, I was drawn to how they make readers think about school age children. Discourses are shared ways of talking about particular subjects that construct knowledge about the subject at the centre of the discourse (Foucault, 1989). Consequently, these texts go beyond defining what care looks like. They also construct shared understandings of the school-age child subject. These early texts seem to regard school age children as simple, easily understood subjects whose only requirements in the hours outside school are to be kept safe, out of trouble and entertained. More contemporary SAC texts provide a more complex portrait of the care needs of school-age children (DEEWR, 2011; Early Childhood Development Steering Committee, 2009; Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2004).

## **SCHOOL AGE CARE AS A SITE OF LEISURE**

More recently, SAC has become regarded as a site of leisure and play, as well as care. Just as the transition from recreation to care marked a change in SAC curriculum, so too has the transition to care, leisure and play. The inclusion of leisure and play in

Western understandings of children's needs is likely due, in some part, to the increasingly popular position that children possess a set of widely agreed to human rights. Contemporary understandings of children's rights are expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989) The UNCRC proposes a set of universal rights to which all people under 18 years of age are entitled. The idea that children are rights holders began to gain more currency during the 1970s and 1980s and was, to some extent, formalised by the ratification of the UNCRC in 1989, which has now been ratified by most member countries.

Included in the UNCRC is Article 31, which promotes a child's right to engage in leisure, play and culture (United Nations, 1989). Whilst the re-positioning of SAC as a site of leisure cannot be attributed directly to the ratification of the UNCRC, it is reasonable to suggest that both reflect changing cultural understandings of children's entitlements in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In order to understand the implications of redefining SAC as a place of leisure, it is important to devote some time to defining *leisure*. Leisure is commonly understood to be time away from work (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2012; Oxford University Press, 2011). This contrasts with the term recreation discussed earlier, which is loosely understood as the activities undertaken during leisure. Leisure is therefore a broader term that would logically be inclusive of more uses of time than recreation. However, leisure seems to be more complex than just non-work time.

Aristotle's definition of leisure focused on the sorts of activities that one pursued in their free time. In *The Politics* (1997), Aristotle makes the distinction between *leisure*, *occupation* and *play*. Of the three activities, he considered leisure the more noble and more worthy activity. Aristotle considered occupation, or work, a necessity in order to secure resources with which to pursue leisure. In contrast, he believed leisure as a time to engage in virtuous pursuits such as philosophy and other "cultured pursuits" like music and education (Aristotle & Simpson, 1997, p. 203). Aristotle characterised less virtuous activities in free time as wasteful and merely play. He regarded play as a form of relaxation, and necessary, but far less worthy than leisure (Oksnes, 2008; Owens, 1981; Rojek, 2010). However, Aristotle's definition reflects cultural practices particular to that period of history that render it problematic in contemporary Western cultures. Aristotle's definition of leisure emerged from a culture that relied upon

human slavery to create the social conditions that allowed those with sufficient financial and social capital to engage in the noble pursuits of philosophy and the arts. Aristotle's leisure therefore relies on the existence of a slave or labour class that can do the menial work necessary to allow others to pursue leisure. It is a problematic definition that only makes leisure available to the elite and relies upon the exploitation of a less advantaged majority (Rojek, 2010).

Rojek (1995) argues for a more complex definition of leisure, proposing that defining leisure, as simply non-work time, is reflective of modernist theories of leisure that simplistically bound leisure as the binary opposite of work. According to such definitions, leisure is a time free of the compulsions of work where individuals are blessed with the freedom to choose how they spend their time.

Rojek (1995) draws on Foucault's theories to complicate leisure, arguing that it is impossible to bound leisure so clearly. He identifies ways in which this idealised view of leisure is compromised by the realities of life. Is it possible to say that leisure is ever truly free of work? When people engage in leisure activities, they are often accompanied by mobile phones and the ever-present possibility that work or some other part of our non-leisure selves will intrude on our leisure time. Are people ever free of thoughts about families or jobs? Rojek questions whether it is possible to separate leisure activities like shopping from ethical concerns about the origins of products, the use of third world labour and possible damage to the environment. Additionally, whether some activities are viewed as leisure can vary across perspectives. Whilst for some shopping might be considered leisure, for others it might be work.

Another issue that blurs the definition of leisure is that of deviant leisure experiences. If leisure is intended to benefit the individual or contribute to self-development, what then is to be made of activities like alcohol consumption, gambling or pornography? These are certainly free time activities that may be freely chosen and considered fun by some, but their social efficacy would likely be contested. A modernist view of leisure would likely reject such activities as illegal and non-beneficial (Rojek, 1995). However, Rojek suggests that issues concerning deviant leisure are more complex. The individuals who engage in deviant leisure likely have a different view of their activities compared to an outsider.

This discussion of ‘deviant’ leisure is relevant to the topic of SAC for older children. There are activities that children might engage in outside SAC that could be perceived as unhealthy, undesirable, or unsuited to a mixed-age setting. For example, despite the prominent role they play in many children’s lives, there are still concerns about how healthy video games and digital media are for children (Buckingham & Willett, 2010). At home and in other settings, it is common for children’s engagement in digital activity to be monitored and controlled by adults (Rideout, 2010). It is also possible that older children might view ‘deviant’ activities differently to practitioners. Activities like rough or aggressive play might be perceived as unsafe by adults whilst considered fun by children. The status of particular activities as deviant or sanctioned can change according to different perspectives.

Also implicit in modernist theories of leisure is the notion that leisure activities are freely chosen. However, Rojek (1995) applies Foucault’s thinking on technologies of the self to argue that leisure choices are never truly free. Foucault (1988b) argues that technologies of the self are the ways individuals police themselves to control how others perceive them, and they perceive themselves. Drawing on Foucault, Rojek (1995) proposes that leisure inexorably incorporates ongoing acts of identity formation that fatally compromises any claims to leisure being a space of complete freedom:

The question of what impression we make on others gnaws at us; we fret about using our free time wisely; we worry about drinking too much, or becoming too set in our ways. Foucault’s sociology denies the possibility of leisure as a ‘realm of freedom’. (p. 60)

Drawing on Rojek, the leisureliness of SAC for older children would also be similarly compromised. SAC is subject to governing influences in the same way as other social settings, therefore making it possible that older children in SAC would also engage in self-governing. Acts of identity construction would influence children’s activity choices. When deciding what leisure activities to engage in, it is likely that children consider whether an activity might be fun. However, they may also weigh up how that activity makes them appear and whether it is a valid choice for their desired subject position.

Juniu and Henderson (2001) also question the role of choice and freedom in definitions of leisure when individual understandings of leisure are bound up in culture and class. They argue that western understandings of leisure can have little meaning in some cultures. Juniu and Henderson also add that the choices available to different classes are not the same. If people with low incomes do not have the same leisure choices as the wealthy, can it be said that they genuinely have choice? Therefore, differences between SAC services in different locations may also mean that children's leisure choices can be constrained by class, culture and access to capital. Not all SAC services have equal access to resources and capital, and therefore do not offer the same choices to children.

In response to criticisms like those raised by Rojek, and Juniu and Henderson, Stebbins (2005) instead prefers to use the term *uncoerced* instead of *choice* to define leisure. Whilst accepting that choice is problematic in definitions of leisure, Stebbins argues that it is still a central concept in understanding leisure, and more research is required to understand better the role it plays in individual leisure experiences. However, defining leisure is more complex than choosing between *choice* and *uncoerced*. Complexities like social inequality, deviant leisure and identity construction are as integral to understanding leisure as words like freedom and choice (Rojek, 2010).

The complexities raised in this section have implications for how I theorise older children's leisure in this thesis. As argued by Rojek (1995), children's leisure, like all other social spaces, is governed by power relationships. Children's leisure is therefore more complex than an activity totally removed from schoolwork. Consequently, when considering whether SAC is a place of leisure, I need to allow for the possibility that children's leisure choices may not be entirely free. They can be constrained by shared cultural discourses about what are appropriate activities for children, but also children's own perceptions about what their leisure choices say about them.

## **SCHOOL AGE CARE AS A SITE OF PLAY**

Previously, I described how SAC has recently been positioned as a site of leisure and play. So far though I have only explored the meaning of leisure. Play is believed to have a central role in children's lives, being a fundamental activity that children

engage in during their leisure time and an important vehicle for learning (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; Smith, 2009). The idea that play is the means by which children learn was popularised by 19<sup>th</sup> century early learning theorist, Froebel and has been widely adopted in Western cultures (Cannella, 2008).

As with the other terms explored, definitions of play are contested. Many definitions bear similarity to those of leisure explored earlier. Modernist conceptions of play position it as the binary opposite of work. They consider play fun rather than laboured, and something that children do through choice (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). Aristotle had a binary conceptualisation of play, also regarding it as the business of children, whereas work is the business of adults (Oksnes, 2008). Piaget also made the distinction between work and play, but not necessarily as a binary. Piaget believed that as children got older their play became increasingly rule and purpose oriented, and in a sense, more adult or work like (Smith, 2009). If we apply Piaget's conceptualisation of play to SAC, does it follow that for school-age children, in particular the older child, that play is less important?

Play appears to be difficult to define. Eberle (2014) argues that play is something that we can recognise when it is occurring, but find difficult to define. This slipperiness is reflected in Eberle's definition, which is comprised of six definitional elements and 48 terms that he uses to try to quantify the nature and intensity of a play experience. Smith (2009) agrees that play is hard to define; arguing that what is considered play is often contingent on the viewpoint of the individual. Smith finds it easier to say what play is not, suggesting that play is not exploration, work or games with rules. Lester and Russell (2014) further complicate definitions of play, arguing that definitions are culturally situated. Most definitions though share the view that play is characterised by freedom, intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, flexibility and a sense of being removed from the real world (Eberle, 2014; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; Lester & Russell, 2010; Smith, 2009).

Similar to Rojek's troubling of modernist conceptualisations of leisure, Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) complicate popular conceptualisations of play and the associated discourses of freedom and enjoyment. They argue that children's play is not immune to the complexities of life. Can play truly be free, particularly in SAC, where children's play choices are limited by budgets, facilities or community perceptions of

risk? Do the actions of practitioners limit the amount of freedom in children's play? Grieshaber and McArdle also question whether play is always fun. Not all children play fairly or in friendly fashion. Bullying, racism and other forms of violence can accompany play rendering it problematic for many children. Play may also not be available to all children. The authors trouble the dominant Western view of play as a universal right, arguing that mere survival has primacy for some children. Additionally, play does not have the same cultural primacy in some cultures as it does in the West. Grieshaber and MacArdle also blur the distinctions between play and work, suggesting play is often used as a motivational tool to encourage children to do work-like tasks. Play-like experiences are not unique to children and can be a feature of adult leisure, or are used to motivate adults in the workplace. Play is also sometimes considered a child's work. It therefore seems contradictory to talk of play as both an expression of freedom and a form of work.

Thus far leisure and play appear to be very similar terms. However, the two are not the same. Play is a term most closely associated with childhood (Cannella, 2008). There are many activities associated with adulthood and childhood we would consider leisure that would not necessarily be considered play. Such leisure activities may provide limited freedom, be bound by rules or embedded in the realities of our working worlds, which discount them as forms of play. In SAC, there are many common activities enjoyed by children that would be considered leisure rather than play. Activities like sport, watching movies, video games, or art and craft are staples of Australian SAC programs, but seem more like leisure rather than play. Although I have not found any literature that defines the terms as such, it appears that play can be a type of leisure. However, not all play is necessarily leisure. According to Lester and Russell (2014), play can occur outside leisure because children are also able to introduce play into work-like activities. Therefore, play can be something that children engage in during their leisure, but it is only one of the things that children choose to do, and can also occur outside of leisure.

As with leisure, elements like freedom, fun and removal from work are qualities shared by play. Consequently, the poststructural complications raised by Rojek (1995, 2010) in relation to leisure would also apply to children's play. Just as leisure is never entirely free of identity work, ethical complications or thoughts of work and family,

neither would be children's play. Rojek also complicated leisure by introducing the troublesome existence of deviant leisure. Grieshaber and McArdle (2010) do similarly by pointing out that children's play can also be deviant and unfair. Therefore, when considering whether play is an important component of SAC, I will complicate the meaning of the term in the same way I have already complicated understandings of leisure.

## **SCHOOL AGE CARE AS TIME AWAY FROM WORK**

If SAC is a site of leisure and play, what sort of leisure or play experience does it provide? Using modernist definitions of leisure and play, it is time away from work, or for children, time away from school. School is one form of children's work, particularly since school is an enforced activity for Australian children (Alderson, 2008b). However, there are complexities that render SAC far from a 'pure' leisure or play experience and not the binary opposite of school.

For many Australian children, SAC has a physical connection with the schools they attend. SAC is commonly conducted at the child's school. Even though children make a transition from school to a leisure setting, they are still physically 'at school'. Children would therefore be engaging in leisure and play in a space that they also associate with work. Even if the SAC setting has a dedicated space, such spaces are commonly converted classrooms. I have visited many SAC settings, and despite the valiant efforts of the practitioners to change the aesthetics of a space, they still feel like classrooms and the spaces where children work at other times of the day. Oksnes (2008) argues that children's play in SAC evidences the social connection between school and SAC, with children's play in SAC often reflecting their classroom activities.

Foucault (1977) argues that many public buildings, including schools, are designed for surveillance of subjects. In Australia, schools are also buildings that are designed for the classification and categorisation of children according to age and ability. Situating SAC in these buildings can make children's leisure visible to disciplinary figures like teachers and principals in the same way as their classroom activities. Similarly, their leisure and play may occur in spaces that at other times are designated as spaces for particular categories of activity or child. Therefore, if as suggested by



Taylor (2011, p. 17), leisure is partly a “state of being” or a feeling, it is reasonable to wonder how children’s leisure and play is affected by locating it in a facility more commonly associated with work and categorisation, or where children are aware of being under surveillance by adults. It is also interesting to consider whether outdoor spaces at SAC also carry a governing legacy. Although outdoor spaces are more likely to be organised as spaces for free time and play, they should not be romanticised as free of discipline and governance. They are still spaces where children can be supervised by adults and categorised according to age.

SAC can also include work-like activities. Children often participate in activities such as packing away equipment or assisting with food preparation. None of these would commonly be regarded as play or leisure. Yet many SAC texts, including the FSAC regard such activities as beneficial to children, supporting the development of physical, social and life skills (DEEWR, 2011; Commonwealth of Australia, 2003). Another work-like activity sometimes present in SAC is homework. SAC programs sometimes provide spaces for children to do homework. In addition, I have participated in many conversations about whether, as notionally a place of play and leisure, SAC services should encourage children to do homework. Despite its absence from the FSAC, some practitioners I have met experience pressure from families and school staff to include homework in their programming. Even if it is not present in program content, homework can still be a looming, future presence for children and practitioners. The existence of tasks like homework and helping activities make it difficult to argue that SAC is ever time completely away from work.

## **SCHOOL AGE CARE AS A SITE OF FREEDOM AND CHOICE**

I discussed earlier in this chapter that children’s leisure is not completely free but instead constrained in various ways. Leisure and play in SAC may be constrained by self-policing and acts of identity construction Rojek (1995). Class and access to resources may also limit children’s choices (Juniu & Henderson, 2001).

There are other contextual factors unique to SAC that should be considered when deciding if it is a space of choice and freedom. Firstly, many Australian children do not attend SAC as a matter of choice. Over 45% of Australian parents choose SAC based on its location, compared to less than 10% who choose based on the child’s

happiness (Baxter, Hand, & Sweid, 2014). The primary purpose of SAC is to care for the children of working parents, making it a matter of necessity for the parent and child. Whilst this does not discount the possibility that children may enjoy SAC, for many it is not a place they necessarily choose to be. Older children sometimes regard SAC as something they are compelled to do and express a preference for spending their leisure time at home (Hurst, 2013).

The right of children to choose their activities is a well-established feature of SAC curriculum and has longstanding acceptance. It is a principle promoted by the FSAC, and also its predecessors (DEEWR, 2011; Commonwealth of Australia, 2003; Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2004; Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre, 1992). However, as suggested by Rojek (1995), children's leisure choices in SAC are complicated by a number of complexities. There are physical and social factors that limit the choices available to children in SAC. The facilities available at SAC would likely place restrictions on the types of activities that are able to take place. Indoor space, outdoor space and the materials available would all play a role in determining activity options.

Operating from shared spaces would also impact on the choices available to children. Australian SAC services sometimes operate from spaces that accommodate other school activities during the day (Cartmel, 2007). Services can operate from spaces that are also used as libraries, gymnasiums or classrooms. Operating in a shared space restricts practitioners mostly to experiences that can be set up and packed down easily and swiftly. Materials that are difficult to move or complex to set up would likely not be used. Likewise, operating in a shared space limits the access children would have to long-term projects since leaving such projects in the shared space may impact on other users. In addition to these examples, there are likely other constraining factors both structural and political that differ from venue to venue and have the potential to influence children's leisure choices.

Social factors can also affect children's choice and freedom in SAC. The FSAC advocates that children have "choice and control" over their leisure and play (DEEWR, 2011, p. 5). However, adults govern children's choices in SAC. Mayall (2011) argues that children define free time as time spent not under the control of adults. Australian government regulations require adults to operate SAC services for children. This means that all activity choices available to children within SAC are, to

some extent, overseen, sanctioned and moderated by practitioners. Adults also intervene in children's leisure and play governmentally. Instruments like the FSAC and regulatory standards work to standardise and limit leisure and play activities (Rojek, 1995). Irrespective of whether adult control is necessary for the safety of children or the financial viability of the SAC, children rarely experience total freedom in SAC.

Leisure and play choices would also be subject to social influence. Activities such as watching television, using the internet, and playing video games, which might be commonplace and accessible at home, are often the subject of vigorous community debate about their suitability for children (Buckingham & Willett, 2010; Stephen, Stevenson, & Adey, 2013). Consequently, practitioners may choose not to provide them in response to opposition from parents or other stakeholders. Practitioners too can have strongly held views about the suitability of electronic media for children. These shared views about what is appropriate for children can have a normalising influence on curriculum decisions, limiting the choices available to children.

Finally, children's choices of whom they are able to share their leisure with are restricted. In June 2014, only 12.5% of Australian children participated in formal SAC (ABS, 2015). This means many children attend SAC without their best friends. Those children will necessarily choose to play with the best people available, rather than their best friends. This would be even more noticeable for the 9.4% of children aged 9 to 12 years who attend SAC (ABS, 2015). These low participation rates mean that there will be older children who do not feel they have any suitable friends at SAC.

I have drawn attention to a number of considerations that complicate perceptions of SAC as a place where children have freedom in making leisure choices. In doing so, it is not my intent to argue that SAC is in some way 'less' than other leisure and play spaces, in particular home. Drawing on Rojek (1995, 2010), the likelihood is that all leisure and play spaces are compromised in similar ways. Even at home, children's leisure may be constrained by adult surveillance, limited resources, spatial restrictions, cultural norms or identity work. My intent is to draw attention to these complications and highlight how they might appear in a SAC context.

So, can SAC be a site of leisure and play where children have choice and freedom? As well as being enjoyable, play can also be unfair, coerced and work-like (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). Rojek (1995) argues that the whole concept of leisure is problematic, and that positivist understandings of leisure as a clearly bounded space imbued with choice and freedom are a fantasy and unattainable. So as it is with all other leisure and play settings, it also appears to be with SAC. Defining SAC using positivist conceptions of leisure and play promises much for the children who attend and the practitioners who are appointed to provide it. However, promises of freedom and choice in SAC are compromised by many factors including makeshift facilities, inequalities, limited resources, absent friends, identity work and the influences of adults. These complexities do not make SAC 'less' than home or other leisure settings. All leisure settings are imperfectly free, but in different ways.

### **A MESSY TRANSITION**

So far, I may have given the impression that SAC in Australia has undergone a linear transition, progressing from recreational activities prior to the 1970's, to a predominantly care service, and finally a leisure setting. I might give the impression that government has taken a leading role in defining SAC and that practitioners, schools and families have implemented that vision. However, the reality is far messier.

In deploying terms like care, leisure and play to define SAC, government services communicate their intent for what they think SAC should be. However, government's vision for SAC is not universal. The reality is that different groups and individuals can understand and practice SAC differently. Foucault's (1980) thinking about regimes of truth helps me to understand how government's current definition of SAC is one of many. Foucault argues that dominant truths privilege particular points of view whilst silencing and marginalising other truths. In the case of SAC, whilst government builds and circulates discourses about its purpose, others may hold different truths about the purpose of SAC. For instance, during the 1980s and 1990s, government positioned SAC as mostly care. However, some authors from that era viewed SAC differently, seeing it also as a site of recreational activities that supported play, learning and relaxation (Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre, 1992; Tarrant & Jones, 1996). The children who attended SAC may also have defined it differently. Whilst

some may have seen it as a place of safety, fun, or a proxy home, others may have seen it as a place to mark time before going home, to socialise or engage in new experiences. My own recollections of that time reinforce the idea that SAC in the 1990s was more than just care. SAC was also a place of recreational activities pre-planned by educators, and a place of leisure where children had some freedoms and sometimes, the right to choose. SAC was also a place where differing ideas about its operation were contested by practitioners, children, parents and management. SAC can have multiple meanings for one group or person. For children, it is possible that SAC can be many things at once. It could simultaneously be a place of play, friendship, homework and waiting for parents.

Government sanctions a particular set of truths about the purpose of SAC, but I have described how this is only one perspective. Drawing on Foucault (1980), children, schools, practitioners and families can all carry different, multiple truths about SAC. The truths they carry influence the activities that occur in SAC. Consequently, many activities that take place in SAC fall outside these sanctioned definitions of care, leisure or play. These are the multiple, silenced activities and truths about SAC. They disrupt the façade of a linear narrative in the history of the purpose of SAC in Australia.

## **SCHOOL AGE CARE AS A SITE OF EDUCATION**

The final possibility that needs to be explored in this chapter is that SAC may be an educational service. It is an idea that gained prominence in Australia with the release of the FSAC in 2011, which regarded SAC as a site of leisure and play, that also supports children's wellbeing and development (DEEWR, 2011). In this way, the FSAC re-positions SAC as an educational setting where play and leisure become less the purpose of SAC, and more the vehicles by which learning occurs. The FSAC redefined SAC practitioners as 'educators' and their practices as 'pedagogy'. These are terms that do not appear in previous Australian SAC texts. In this section, I discuss how SAC is positioned in respect to other sites of education for Australian children, and thus try to understand what sort of educational service it may be. If SAC is a site of education, it has important implications for how children experience SAC.

Childcare is recognised as a site of education in some Nordic countries, New Zealand and Slovenia, and falls under the same government administrative bodies (Moss, 2013). However, the Australian Government Department of Education and Training, which is responsible for both childcare and schools, sees SAC and schools differently. There is little question that school education is regarded as the primary educational instrument for Australian primary-age children. Attendance at school is compulsory, whereas participation in SAC is voluntary and user-pays. Government currently sees school education's purpose as "to ensure Australia's future prosperity and to remain competitive internationally" (Australian Government Department of Education, 2014b). It is a purpose consistent with neoliberal ideologies that task education with producing self-governing, capable and productive citizens who are able to contribute to the economic success of the state (Moss, 2014). SAC is assigned a different educational purpose, that of providing care, and "extending and enriching the wellbeing and development of school aged children" (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2014, p. 26).

The government therefore does not assign SAC the same level or type of responsibility for productivity and citizenship as school education. The primary role of SAC is to care for school age children so that parents can work and be productive (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014). School education is instead expected to provide children with the skills necessary for economic participation. So, whilst SAC has a role in driving economic prosperity, it is deemed less important in the production of good citizens. Its job is mainly to safeguard them for future citizenship.

However, the educational status of SAC is contested. Whilst the FSAC positions SAC as site of learning, other government texts underplay those credentials. One example of this is a recent Australian Government Productivity Commission report, which proposes dismantling some of the recent SAC reforms, in particular, the requirement that SAC provides individualised learning programs for children (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014). This apparent contradiction may be a reflection of the recent changes in Australian government. The centrist Rudd and Gillard Labor Governments from 2007 to 2013 introduced the FSAC and the embedded idea that SAC is an educational service. Alternatively, the Productivity

Commission report was commissioned by the more right wing, neoliberal Turnbull and Abbott Coalition Governments from 2013 to present, which purpose SAC primarily with supporting economic productivity.

Although government plays a central role in helping to define the purpose of SAC, there are other views on whether SAC is an educational service. Only a small percentage of children of non-working parents use SAC, and SAC is most commonly chosen on the basis of location (Baxter et al., 2014). Less than 10% of parents choose SAC on the basis of it having a formal program, which does not reflect a universal desire for an educational program. These results suggest that most parents see SAC as primarily a care program. Of course, parents' perceptions of SAC can only be inferred from this data, and their perceptions appear to be far from homogeneous. Likewise, they provide no indication of whether parents believe SAC has other benefits outside its capacity to provide a safe space for their children.

So, is SAC a site of education? It appears that the practised core purpose of SAC is as a site of care rather than education, but that does not mean that children do not learn in SAC. Both the FSAC and its predecessor, OSHCQA required practitioners to provide a planned program that supports development and is linked to individual children's interests and abilities (DEEWR, 2011; Commonwealth of Australia, 2003). However, neither regulatory instrument monitors children's progress with respect to predetermined learning outcomes in the way that compulsory school education in Australia does. This seems to reflect a cultural perception that SAC is a place where learning occurs and is possibly supported by the actions of practitioners, but education is not its core purpose. That is a role reserved for compulsory school education.

The other important view of whether SAC should be a site of education is that of the children who use it. As with much SAC literature, the voices of children are absent on this question, but that is the purpose of this research, to begin to understand what children think SAC should be.

## **IS IT POSSIBLE TO DEFINE SCHOOL AGE CARE?**

In this chapter, I have explored the possible purposes SAC might serve. I have investigated the terms care, leisure, play and education that are currently used by government in Australia to define SAC. This involved applying poststructural ideas to

theorise these terms. This work has demonstrated that understandings of the purpose of SAC are not static or singular. How SAC is purposed has changed over time, but the change is not linear or neat.

In theorising the purpose of SAC I have drawn on Foucault's theories about truth. Power is not a system where one idea dominates another, but instead a network where power operates in ways that allow for multiple truths (Foucault, 1980). Therefore, even though government services or experts define SAC as leisure, play, care or education, these are only their perspectives on what SAC is. Practitioners, parents or children can all purpose SAC differently and contest those definitions.

I have troubled romantic definitions of leisure and play, and therefore SAC, as sites of pure choice and freedom for children. Leisure choices can be restricted by structural and physical factors such as facilities and access to capital. A poststructural reading of these terms also means that children and adults are caught up in webs of power that make children's leisure and play less free. Practitioners can limit children's choices by enacting shared cultural understandings about what are appropriate uses of children's free time. Children can constrain their own leisure choices through acts of self-policing. Their leisure choices can be an expression of how they desire to be seen, and therefore a form of identity work that makes leisure and play less free and more work-like (Rojek, 1995, 2010).

This chapter plays an important role in supporting my investigation. It allows me to consider that children's views about the purpose of SAC are valid, and may differ from those of government and other adults who exercise power in defining SAC. It also opens the way for complex analysis of terms like leisure, play and education that are currently used to define SAC. It allows me to contemplate that there may be multiple purposes for SAC that can be enacted in ways that are complex and contextual. Beyond that, there may be other purposes for SAC that have yet to be acknowledged or considered.

So far, I have focused my investigation on the possible purpose of SAC. In the following chapter, I look at the other significant element of the research question by investigating the phenomenon of the problematised 'older child'.



## **CHAPTER FOUR – CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDREN AGED 9 TO 12 YEARS**

In this chapter, I explore different understandings of children in the 9 to 12 year old age group. This thesis investigates the experiences and views of older children in SAC, a setting where they are often believed to be a difficult group to work with. Given this group's problematic reputation, I have set out to examine whether children aged 9 to 12 years are regarded similarly in other fields. Is there something about children in this age group that makes them inherently challenging, or is the problematised older child unique to SAC? As I searched through the SAC, child studies, school education and marketing literature, I found that there was very little agreement across disciplines about how older children are regarded. The developmental theories reviewed do not specifically identify older children as unique. They instead included older children in *middle childhood* a category that broadly understood as being 'easy' to work with. However, two disciplines where older children were singled out for special attention are marketing and schooling. Retailers and marketers consider the *tween* as a distinctive target market. Some education researchers also regard older children as belonging to a category called *young adolescents* that require specialist *middle schools*. In this chapter, I investigate these different understandings of older children. I consider whether there is one common understanding about older children or if understandings of older children can change across settings.

### **CHILDREN AGED 9 TO 12 YEARS IN CHILD STUDIES LITERATURE**

I begin this investigation into different understandings of children aged 9 to 12 years with literature from developmental psychology. In Western cultures, developmental psychology is the set of theories most commonly used to understand children (Cannella, 2008). Developmental psychologists have provided a set of standards or stages by which human growth and development are measured (Burman, 2008). Arguably the best known of all child development psychologists is Piaget. Piaget's theories included the idea that humans pass through a series of four stages of cognitive development from infancy to adulthood. These were; the *sensorimotor* stage

from birth to 2 years, the *preoperational* stage from 2 to 7 years, the *concrete operational* stage from 7 to 11 years, and the *formal operational* stage for 11 years and older. Piaget considered these stages universal, in that all individuals with normal development will proceed through those stages at relatively similar ages (Berk, 2013; Halpenny & Pettersen, 2013). Piaget's stages are reflected in how many facets of children's lives are understood. Communal understandings of terms like infancy, toddlerhood, middle childhood and adolescence, whilst named differently, often bear resemblance to Piaget's stages.

In the sensorimotor stage, Piaget and Cook (1952) argue that very young children are extremely limited in their cognitive capacity to engage with problems, and instead do so through their bodies and their senses. In the preoperational stage, Piaget proposes that children develop the ability for symbolic representation where they can use language, drawing and dramatic play to understand and communicate about their real worlds (Berk, 2013; Halpenny & Pettersen, 2013). In the concrete operational stage, he posits that children develop the ability to think more logically and flexibly, particularly with respect to things that they can perceive directly. However Piaget argues that concrete operational children are still incapable of the sophisticated, abstract, complex thinking that characterises adolescence and adulthood. These skills are developed during the final, formal operational stage (Halpenny & Pettersen, 2013; Inhelder & Piaget, 1958)

When you examine Piaget's stages, children aged 9 to 12 years as a distinct group are mostly absent. Older children mostly fit within Piaget's concrete operational stage, which includes children from 7 to 11 years, but they are not identified as significantly different from other children in the concrete operational stage. Other 'stage' theories of childhood are organised around similar age groupings and also do not regard older children as distinctive. The age ranges for Kohlberg's Conventional stage, Freud's Latency stage and Erikson's Industry versus Inferiority stage all correspond closely to Piaget's Concrete Operational stage and what is commonly practised as middle childhood (Berk, 2013; Erikson, 1964; Halpenny & Pettersen, 2013; Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Markman Reubins & Reubins, 2014).

Freud proposes that children pass through five stages of psychosexual development during which they respond to different sexual and psychological drives. He argues

that developing a healthy personality depended on children learning how to manage these impulses (Thurschwell, 2009). Older children belong to the *latency* stage, which Freud conceptualises as respite between the more sexually active preschool *phallic* stage and the adolescent *genital* stage (Freud, 1962; Markman Reubins & Reubins, 2014). Freud (1962) argues that sexual instincts diminish during latency. This stands in contrast to the phallic stage where children enjoy genital stimulation and grapple with sexual desire for their parent of the same sex, and the genital stage where adolescents experience puberty and increased sexual activity (Freud, 1962; Thurschwell, 2009). In Western cultures moral concern often accompanies discussion of childhood sexuality (Robinson, 2008). Freud's latency stage therefore offers some space from sexualised behaviours, making it seem a relatively safe stage of development.

Kohlberg's theory of the development of moral thinking consists of six stages. Kohlberg's stages are divided into three levels founded on Piaget's cognitive stages of development (Kohlberg, 1969, 1981). Similar to Piaget, Kohlberg considers children's moral development a progression from simple reasoning about moral problems to sophisticated and abstract reasoning (Berk, 2013). Older children belong to Kohlberg's *conventional level*, which conceptualises middle childhood as a time where children are compliant with a desire to be seen as 'good'. This contrasts with the *preconventional level* where Kohlberg argues younger children comply with moral codes out of self-interest and through external reinforcement. The *conventional level* also differs from the Kohlberg's *postconventional level*, which supposes that adolescents and young people are more likely to question cultural rules and norms (Duska & Whelan, 1977; Kohlberg, 1969). Kohlberg's conventional level depicts middle childhood, and hence the older child as somebody with strong respect for law and order, is responsive to expectations of their family, peers and country, and derives pleasure from the approval of important others (Duska & Whelan, 1977; Kohlberg, 1969).

Another stage theorist, Erikson also regards middle childhood as a stage relatively free of difficulty. Erikson proposes eight stages of psychosocial development that are characterised as a series of internal conflicts to be fought by the individual (Erikson, 1964). Each battle is considered essential in the development of the individual and

their formation of identity. Older children belong to Erikson's *Industry versus Inferiority* stage, which depicts middle childhood as a time where children pose few challenges. Erikson (1968) states, "at no time is the child more ready to learn quickly and avidly, to become big in the sense of sharing obligation, discipline, and performance" (p. 122). Erikson regards this stage as a 'struggle' where the child develops either a sense of worth through productiveness, or a sense of being inferior to others. Erikson's middle childhood is constructed as a stage where critical relationships with parents, peers and other important adults can produce either an industrious or troubled child (Berk, 2013; Erikson, 1964). Erikson's theories create a binary opposition where industrious, productive children function as a desired norm, and troubled children are less desired and outside the mainstream.

The theories of Piaget, Freud, Kohlberg and Erikson have each been influential in forming Western understandings of childhood. Each of their theories informs understandings of different developmental domains. Piaget's theories provide knowledge of cognitive development, whereas the works of Freud, Kohlberg and Erikson provide understandings of psychosexual development, moral thinking and identity formation respectively. When applied together, these theories construct middle childhood as a fairly benign and passive stage, where children are considered eager to please, capable, industrious, compliant and respectful learners who are free of sexualised behaviours.

It is difficult to reconcile these benign profiles of middle childhood with the problematised depictions of older children in SAC literature. Is middle childhood an actual 'stage' in children's lives, or something that is socially and contextually constructed via the dividing practices of social institutions? In order to accept the claims of these theorists as scientific, it is reasonable to expect that the age ranges that define these stages were arrived at objectively. However, Cannella (2008) argues that Piaget's stages were based on socially constructed life stages that were commonly applied in Europe at the time that he did his work. She also argues that Kohlberg's work reproduces Piaget's age ranges. Similarly, Erikson's psychosocial stages are founded on Freud's psychosexual stages (Berk, 2013). It is therefore reasonable to wonder whether children between 7 and 11 years really do share a set of unifying characteristics. To what extent is the age range for middle childhood something that is

socially constructed and institutionally driven, or using theories or a governing knowledge gleaned from the ideas of their predecessors?

## **CHILDREN AGED 9 TO 12 YEARS IN SCHOOL AGE CARE LITERATURE**

So, how does the ‘trouble free’ older child of developmental psychology compare with depictions in SAC literature? There is no definitive scholarship on older children in SAC, and little peer-reviewed research. To construct a picture of how older children are understood in SAC in this section, I rely on texts from a range of sources. Whilst some are peer-reviewed, I also include practice manuals, postgraduate theses and SAC industry publications. My review of these texts demonstrates that there are consistencies in how they depict older children. Much of this literature portrays older children as difficult to work with, unsuited to SAC, and in need of specialist pedagogical approaches (Gage, 2000; Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2004; Longobardi, 2001; Maheux, 1998; Musson, 1994).

Many Australian texts take the form of practice manuals. In *Shared Visions*, a government-commissioned guide for Australian practitioners, older children are described as developmentally distinct from children aged 5 to 8 years (Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2004). The authors identify older children as “a particular challenge”, suggesting they may be more like adolescents, resentful of being in SAC, rebellious and interested in things which “may not be compatible with the OSHC service values” (p. Factsheet 15). In response, the authors provide a range of pedagogical strategies especially for older children, and dedicate a separate *Factsheet* to managing older children; something not considered necessary for other age cohorts. The suggested strategies include consulting with older children about what they want from SAC, giving them special privileges not available to younger children, providing opportunities to adopt leadership roles, providing resources that reflect their interests, more relaxed supervision, and also resisting the temptation to universalise older children. This selection of strategies constructs older children as distinct from other children and a group with different care requirements. Kennedy and Stonehouse imply that although all older children are different, as a category, they are more mature, more capable of self-care, and ready to assume adult-like responsibilities.

Older children might also be considered more difficult to work with in the United Kingdom and Canada. In a practice guide from the United Kingdom, Musson (1994) identifies older children as more challenging than younger children. Maheux (1998) investigated why older children drop out of SAC in Canada. In her literature review, Maheux suggests that older children in Canadian SAC display problematic behaviours, are difficult to care for, and can refuse to participate in SAC.

Other practice manuals offer more positive depictions of older children. In an early practice manual, Australian authors Tarrant and Jones (1996) provide a more positive interpretation of developmental understandings of older children. They propose that older children have more retentive memories, and greater capacity for logical thought, close friendships and empathy. However they also list negative attributes, in particular older children's assumed tendency to be critical of adults. Likewise, Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre (1992) position older children as developmentally different. The authors of this practice guide construct older children as aspiring adolescents, and attribute them many negative behaviours normally associated with adolescence. Although these texts treat older children more positively, they still construct them as a separate, developmentally distinctive category that requires specialist pedagogies.

A number of conference and professional development programs also construct older children as a group with a challenging reputation that require specialist programming strategies (Abel, 2011; Community Child Care Association, 2009, 2016; Ellem, 2011). Approximately 6 years ago, I was responsible for a state wide professional development program and conducting a needs analysis to inform its content. One of the training topics most requested by SAC practitioners was how to provide SAC for older children (Community Child Care Association, 2010). The desire for training on older children expressed by practitioners indicates that they find working with older children challenging. Qualitative research from Smith and Barker (2000a) indicates that older children may also be considered challenging in United Kingdom SAC services. The project investigated how children engaged in resistance against practitioners' supervision practices and the allocation of space. For example, the researchers describe how some older children who are dissatisfied with program content assumed control of spaces and devised their own activities. Older children who resisted the allocation of space in this way were described by practitioners as

challenging and “in need of control” (Smith & Barker, 2000a, p. 328). The researchers found that describing older children in this way contributed to a perception that their actions were out of place in a SAC setting.

My reading of these research reports, manuals and training programs leads me to conclude that many adults in SAC consider older children problematic and inherently different to younger children. One of my initial reactions to these texts was that they appeared to describe older children in ways similar to common descriptions of the adolescent life stage.

Adolescence is considered a life stage when young people make the transition from childhood to adulthood, and seek to break free of the control that adults have over their lives. This transition is associated with conflict with adults, or rebellious behaviour (Berk, 2013). Berk reasons that adolescent conflict is also related to a young person trying to establish her or his own identity. Erikson (1964, 1968) proposes similarly that adolescence is the stage where young people explore and form their adult identities. Adolescence is also a time of significant physical growth. Adolescents greatly increase in size and strength during their growth spurt (Berk, 2012, 2013). Kohlberg proposes that because of their increasingly sophisticated cognitive abilities, adolescents take a more critical approach to moral questions (Duska & Whelan, 1977; Kohlberg, 1969). Consequently, adolescents no longer show unquestioning adherence to the rules of their parents and society. Instead they are believed to be more questioning of such rules (Berk, 2013). Finally, adolescence is the time when young people develop sexually. They develop their primary and secondary sexual characteristics, and become capable of reproduction (Berk, 2013). Freud (1962) argues that developing the capacity for reproduction is accompanied by a desire to propagate and seek sexual pleasure with a heterosexual partner.

The descriptions of older children in SAC texts correspond more closely with descriptions of adolescents in developmental texts than with descriptions of middle childhood. Some SAC texts characterise older children as a challenge to adult authority, increasingly independent and wanting to test limits (Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2004; Longobardi, 2001). It is a characterisation that seems closer to that of adolescence than Kohlberg’s compliant middle childhood child who derives pleasure from being good (Kohlberg, 1969). Some also describe older children as

subjects approaching sexual maturity (Longobardi, 2001). This marks older children as near adolescent and a contrast to sexually dormant child of Freud's latency stage. Although the SAC texts do not name older children as adolescents, they construct them as subjects on the shoulder of adolescence, beginning to dabble in resistance and sexualised behaviours. Although developmental theorists portray development as a series of discrete stages, these SAC texts blur the boundary between the developmental stages of middle childhood and adolescence. Older children occupy this blurred boundary. Technically, they are considered part of middle childhood but are also recognised as being ready to move on to the next stage.

In constructing older children as 'near-adolescent', SAC texts position them as Other to younger children (Hurst, 2013). The Other is an important idea in poststructural theory. Derrida (1997) argues that Western cultures create meanings through the use of binary oppositions in language. In a binary, two terms are opposed and each gains its meaning from the other. In the instance of this research, 'older child' can only be understood by contrasting it with its opposite, 'younger child'. In a binary, one of the two terms has greater cultural value and constructed as superior, whilst the other is inferior or Other (MacNaughton, 2005).

SAC texts mark older children as different and opposite to the younger children who attend SAC, who are constructed as easy to work with, and more representative of normative understandings of middle childhood. The size and strength of older children mark them as a physical threat to younger children. Their perceived independence and rebelliousness make them a moral threat, and the looming approach of puberty poses a sexual threat. In this way, these texts construct older children as non-normative, minority, problematic and Other (Hurst, 2013). Douglas (2013) argues that socially constructed categories are unstable and that those who inhabit the margins of those categories are seen as dangerous. So it appears to be with older children who inhabit the socially constructed boundary between middle childhood and adolescence. It is their uncertain social status as a subject who is neither child nor adolescent and who appears ready to move on to high school that may contribute to them being seen as problematic in a SAC context. These factors conspire to position the majority, middle childhood, and younger child as the norm in SAC, leaving the older child as an outsider who is too old for SAC and a potential threat to others.



## CHILDREN AGED 9 TO 12 YEARS IN SCHOOLING LITERATURE

Given that older children are considered a special case in SAC, I thought it likely that I would also find reference to older children in research relating to school education. At first, my search was mostly fruitless. Australian school age children seemed to be divided into two age groups: primary and secondary<sup>1</sup>. These seemed to be cohesive categories, not compromised by sub categories. My literature search revealed few references to sub categories like *upper primary* or *lower secondary*. Primary was primary, and secondary was secondary. However, I eventually encountered literature on *middle schooling* for 10 to 15-year-olds, and with it, the possibility of another setting where older children might be seen as a special group.

There is a growing body of literature that questions whether the current, two-tiered structure of Australian schooling provides the best outcomes for 10 to 15-year-olds, or *young adolescents*. These authors advocate for the development of a third type of school, *middle school* for young adolescents (Chadbourne & Australian Education Union, 2001; Knipe & Johnstone, 2007; Pendergast, 2010; Smyth & McInerney, 2007). Their arguments are often founded on research that suggests that traditional schooling for young adolescents is characterised by boredom, disengagement, behavioural concerns and poor academic performance (Chadbourne & Australian Education Union, 2001; Knipe & Johnstone, 2007).

Although not common in Australia, middle schooling is, or has been, an established feature of the education system in some other countries. The U.S.A. has a long history of middle schooling. For much of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many jurisdictions in the U.S.A. had a three tiered school structure of elementary (Grades Kindergarten to 6), junior high (Grades 7 to 8) and senior high schools (Grades 9 to 12). Junior high is not generally regarded as middle schooling, as it often employed the same pedagogical approaches as senior high school. Middle school for Grades 5 to 8, or 6 to 8, began to proliferate in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in response to the perception that adolescence was beginning earlier than in previous generations. However, middle schooling in the U.S.A. is now in decline after having been found to be less effective than hoped (Clark & Clark, 1993; Mizell, 2005). Some researchers

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<sup>1</sup> Children in Australia most commonly attend two types of school: primary (aged 5 to 12 years) and secondary (aged 12 to 18 years).

suggest that many middle schools failed in the U.S.A. because whilst they adopted a three tiered schooling structure they failed to embrace the pedagogical practices and philosophies also considered essential to middle schooling (Hough, 2005; Mizell, 2005). As an alternative to separate middle schools, some elementary schools are extending their age cohorts to Grade 8 and embedding middle school practices in their work with older age groups. Advocates believe this approach to be effective because it provides children in Grades 6 to 8 with smaller class sizes and therefore more attention. It is also believed to expose children to less peer pressure from older adolescents (Hough, 2005; Mizell, 2005).

Middle schooling has also featured in education systems in New Zealand and England. A significant percentage of New Zealand children aged 11 to 12 years attend separate middle schools before transitioning to high school (Andrews & Bishop, 2012; Crouse & McGee, 1989; Dowden, Bishop, & Nolan, 2009; New Zealand Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2015). As in the U.S.A., the efficacy of New Zealand middle schooling is debated and not universally accepted (Crouse & McGee, 1989; Dowden et al., 2009; Ward, 2000). Questions about its efficacy in New Zealand are reflected by a drop in participation from 72% in 1976 to 46% in 2006 (Dowden et al., 2009). England has also experimented with middle schooling, although the practice was never widespread and has been in decline since 1982. Middle schooling does not appear as common in Europe. Many European countries have an acknowledged 'lower secondary' phase of education, but this doesn't take the form of a separate school and is embedded in a regular secondary school (Seymour, 2012).

The middle school literature reviewed for this paper does not single out 9 to 12-year-olds as a distinct and separate age group. However, it does include them in a broader 'young adolescent' stage. In the context of an Australian primary school setting, being identified as a middle school student would position 10 to 12-year-olds as members of a life stage separate to that of younger students. In some ways, the classification of 10 to 12-year-olds as middle school students echoes the marking of 9 to 12-year-olds in SAC as difficult. In both instances, the middle school child and older child in SAC are constructed as not belonging and suited to a different setting.

In education research, middle school children seem to be constructed less homogeneously, with researchers differing on definitions of the category. Some define middle school developmentally, arguing that young adolescents differ developmentally from younger children and older adolescents, and therefore require a different approach to schooling (Chadbourne & Australian Education Union, 2001; Crouse & McGee, 1989; Dowden et al., 2009; Finnan, 2009; Knipe & Johnstone, 2007; Vagle, 2012). Others seem to draw upon a range of theoretical perspectives and not just developmental theory, and argue for a more complex theoretical approach to understanding young adolescence (Bahr, 2010; Kemmis & Johnstone, 2007; Vagle, 2012). Bahr (2010) and Kemmis and Johnstone (2007) believe that as well as acknowledging development and maturation, educators should also acknowledge the unique social and cultural complexities of young adolescents' lives. Vagle (2012) argues that people conflate the biological reality of puberty with socially constructed generalisations of adolescence, and that these generalisations are used to perpetuate universalised approaches to the education of young adolescents. This diversity in opinion is evidenced in research by Garrick, Keogh, Pendergast, and Dole (2012) who sought data on how early career educators conceptualise middle school. They reported that whilst some educators conceptualised young adolescents developmentally as a single group with shared characteristics, others acknowledged the complexities of young adolescent lives in their work, although they were unsure whether these complexities were reflected in their practices.

These different perspectives indicate consensus that the middle school child is a life stage that occurs around the early stages of puberty. Where these authors differ is in the centrality of developmental theory in conceptualising young adolescents. Some authors conceptualise middle school children primarily through a developmental lens, arguing that their unique educational needs are the result of biological changes. Others argue that as well as the biological realities, there are social practices and institutions that have formed around puberty and pre-puberty that also inform their different social and learning needs.

It therefore seems that middle school is broadly conceptualised as a type of education that meets the social and learning needs of children who are in a particular life stage. In characterising middle school as a life stage, it seems almost inevitable that many

adults will draw on developmental theory to inform their understandings. In New Zealand and the U.S.A., developmental theory was a primary driver in developing middle schooling (Crouse & McGee, 1989; Dowden et al., 2009; Mizell, 2005). Vagle (2012) argues that developmental theory is used so routinely to conceptualise adolescence is because “It is strong, clean and dependable. It lines up with time. It can be measured and tracked” (p. 32). Therefore, although many advocates use critical approaches to inform a nuanced understanding the learning needs of middle school children, others will likely still draw primarily on developmental theory and schooling traditions. This has the effect of reinscribing traditional approaches to schooling (Vagle, 2012).

Australian middle school advocates argue that it is a life stage that is not currently catered for well by traditional schooling (Chadbourne & Australian Education Union, 2001; Knipe & Johnstone, 2007). In Australia, middle school is a relatively new conceptualisation that only emerged once researchers and educators drew attention to the problems some young adolescents experience in traditional schooling. There is little reference to middle schooling in Australian education research outside of advocacy literature (Chadbourne & Australian Education Union, 2001). This suggests that advocates of traditional school structures do not regard this age group as particularly unique, or subscribe to the notion of a middle school stage of childhood.

There are parallels between conceptualisations of the older child in SAC and young adolescents in schooling. Both represent similar age cohorts, and developmental theory also plays a central role in how each group is conceptualised and engaged with. Both groups are sometimes understood to be unsuited to traditional schooling or care settings. Whilst the two conceptualisations are similar, they are not identical. The differences between these two categories might be evidential of the socially constructed nature of truth proposed by Foucault (1980) and how differently structured social settings can produce different truths about similar groups.

## **CHILDREN AGED 9 TO 12 YEARS IN MARKETING LITERATURE**

Other than in SAC and school settings, I encountered one other major setting where older children are regarded as a distinct category, that of marketing. Marketers regard

9 to 12-year-olds as a separate, valuable target market for the sale of food, clothes and toys. They refer to this age group as *tweens*.

Tweens are broadly defined as preadolescent children around the ages of 9 to 12 years (Prince & Martin, 2012). Tween was a term developed by marketers to describe preadolescent children. In the 1960s, when the term first emerged, marketers understood tweens to be white, middle-class, future heterosexual females between the ages of 9 and 12 years. However, the definition is changing, highlighting its socially constructed nature. Males are now also targeted by marketers (Cook & Kaiser, 2004). This definition of tween means it is not an identity available to all 9 to 12 year olds. Only children who possess sufficient financial and social capital are sought by marketers and able to participate in the tween economy. The tween phenomenon accelerated in the 1990s with an increase in aggressive marketing aimed at 9 to 12-year-olds (Cook & Kaiser, 2004). Whilst there is broad consensus about the meaning of the term, its meaning is nonetheless unstable. The contemporary definition has expanded to include 7 to 15-year-olds (Cook & Kaiser, 2004). Although the term tween had its origins in marketing, it is now being adopted more widely. It is now used in parenting publications to construct all preadolescent children as near adolescents rather than just consumers (Moore, 2010; Rodgers, 2011).

Ultimately though, to be a tween is to be a consumer. In a guide for marketers, Siegel, Coffey, and Livingston (2004) argue that tweens play three roles: as present day consumers, future consumers and influencers of other people's consumption. Marketers consider tweens particularly susceptible to peer pressure, therefore making them an attractive possible market (Prince & Martin, 2012; Siegel et al., 2004). Constructing 9 to 12-year-olds as tweens credits them with more power and agency than traditional developmental understandings. Developmental theories position children as 'future beings' who acquire agency in adulthood (Cannella, 2008). Rather than a future citizen, tweens possess financial and social capital in the present, and can purchase goods that satisfy their own desires and influence the economic activities of others.

As well as a capitalist construct, tween also appears to be an identity or role that children can adopt and embody. Rather than define tween chronologically, some authors argue that it is the state of being in between child and adolescent (Prince &

Martin, 2012; Siegel et al., 2004). To describe tween as a 'state of being' implies that it is performative, social, and something that you 'do' rather than something that is genetically or developmentally determined. Cook and Kaiser (2004) however argue that tween is not just a role that children adopt, but also a confluence of many things:

The figure of the Tween girl and her predecessors are inseparable from their inception in, and articulation with, the market exigencies of child-hood. These commercially constructed market personae represent sites where gender, sexuality and commercial relations intersect to renaturalize and remoralize this age-circumscribed demarcation of middle childhood. The case of the tween girl underscores, more generally, how social persons, cultural positions and consumption cannot be conceptualized as separate entities that occasionally come into contact with and influence each other; rather, they mutually constitute each other in multiple ways. (p. 223)

Tweens are a developmental cohort, defined as preadolescents who occupy an ambiguous space between middle childhood and adolescence (Cook & Kaiser, 2004). In addition they are also purchasers and enactors of adolescence. Marketers believe adolescence is something that tweens aspire to and that tweens represent a desire to transition from preadolescent to a more mature identity. In response, marketers make available to tweens a range of products that they believe embody an idealised, adolescent lifestyle. So, whilst adolescence may be chronologically unattainable to tweens, marketers promote adolescence as something that can be purchased and embodied (Cook & Kaiser, 2004).

Whilst researching for this chapter, I spent an afternoon watching tween television on Australia's Nickelodeon and Disney cable channels to directly experience tween marketing. It corresponded closely with a content analysis by Gerding and Signorielli (2014), who report that tween dramas were geared mostly towards girls and featured characters who were older than the tween viewers. The authors argue that tween television depicts predominantly hetero-normative gender roles with a focus on physically attractive female characters, and frequently portrays adults as unintelligent and immature. They report that tween television aggressively markets products associated with their shows. Whilst watching tween television, I observed regular advertisements targeted at tweens, and depictions of aspirational, affluent, Western

adolescent lifestyles. The physically attractive characters I observed in shows like *Victorious*, *Lab Rats* and *iCarly* were often older than tweens, lived independent lives free of adults with ‘good’ fashion, engaged in acts of heterosexual courtship and dating, and lived in spaces populated by desirable consumer products. These programs were outwardly aspirational, depicting lives that are likely unattainable by their tween viewers. However, they provide a clear template for tweens to enact, and the advertisements direct them to the products that enable their embodiment of tweenhood.

The tween is an example of how 9 to 12-year-olds can be understood differently. In SAC texts, their impending adolescence marks older children as ‘too old’ and unsuited to being in care. However, marketers see an opportunity in the gap between middle childhood and adolescence, and position older children as capable and influential consumers with unique needs and desires. Tweens are independent and astute, economic participants, and the embodiment of the neoliberal child citizen.

The tween television I watched positioned older children as consumers of mostly toys, food and fashion. It is interesting to consider whether older children could also become consumers of care and leisure. I visited the websites of Camp Australia and OSHClub, two of the largest corporate providers of SAC in Australia, to investigate how they marketed SAC. Both businesses target their marketing at parents, assuring them that children will be safe, educated and entertained at an affordable cost (Camp Australia, 2016; OSHClub, 2016). I wonder if SAC programs were added to the suite of products marketed to tweens, whether it may contribute to change in the relationship between older children and SAC. It would require SAC providers to become more responsive to the adolescent desires of older children, perhaps resulting in different program content.

## **CHILDREN AGED 9 TO 12 YEARS AND TOY AND MEDIA CLASSIFICATIONS**

Cook and Kaiser (2004) argue that commerce took advantage of tweenhood as a rite of passage not marked by clear social guidelines and conventions. I also investigated if there were other ‘rites of passage’ that might mark older childhood as a socially significant life stage. One possibility I considered was Australia’s classification

regime for media and toys. In Australia, government provides guidelines for parents that help to define what are acceptable activities and products for children of various ages. There are separate classification systems for toys, movies and video games, all of which are a feature of most Australian childhoods.

Toy classification guidelines are developed by Standards Australia, a body commissioned by government to develop safety standards. There is little in the standards that distinguish older children from others. The standards are founded on children's physical and cognitive development, citing the importance of children's physical capacity to manipulate toys and their intellectual capacity to understand how to use them. 8 years is a critical age in the guidelines, with no recommendations provided for children over that age. The standards identify this as an age at which children can comprehend written instructions and cautions (Standards Australia, 2002). The standards suggest that 8-year-olds are more capable of identifying and responding to physical risk, although the standards also encourage parental supervision of play with toys approved for 8-year-olds.

Whilst toy standards regard older children as capable of managing physical risk, Australian television, film and video game classifications consider older children less capable of managing other types of risk. According to the *Guidelines for the classification of film 2012 (Australia)*, 15 years is considered the critical age for consuming visual media. There are three rating categories that are relevant to older children. A 'General – G' rating means content is suitable for all children regardless of age. A 'Parental Guidance - PG' rating suggests that some of the content may be confusing and distressing for children under the age of 15 and that parents should supervise engagement with the content. A 'Mature - M' rating identifies the content as unsuitable for children under 15 years, citing violence and nudity as content that pose a risk. The guidelines for PG-rated media, do not mention violence or nudity, but mild violence and nudity are explicitly mentioned in the guidelines for M-rated media. This implies that the guidelines do not regard older children as significantly different to younger children in their capacity to understand, and respond to violence and nudity. These classifications likely draw on understandings from social learning theory, which suggests that children are more likely to reproduce violent and sexualised behaviours that they observe (MacNaughton, 2003).



Toy and visual media classifications, do not appear to consider older children a special case. There are no apparent age restrictions on toys for children over the age of eight, and older children are subject to the same guidelines as younger children for visual media. It is interesting that mild violence and nudity are believed to pose a greater risk to children than toys with an element of physical danger. However, it is unsurprising given that there is often heightened community concern about the effects of media on children (Grieshaber, 2010). It is possible that there may be 'rites of passage' associated with toys and media that correspond to the 9 to 12 year age group, but government does not direct these. Such rites of passage are likely to be localised practices that vary between families and communities.

## **MULTIPLE CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF CHILDREN AGED 9 TO 12 YEARS**

Nine to twelve-year-old children do not enjoy a good reputation in SAC and are problematised as more challenging than other children in middle childhood. This chapter investigated how older children are regarded in other fields of research and social settings to investigate whether older children are considered unique elsewhere. This investigation included literature from child studies, middle schooling, marketing, and media classifications. Of these, only middle schooling and marketing seem to regard older children as unique. In middle schooling literature, older children belong to a larger group called young adolescents, who it is believed require specialist approaches that recognise their developmental uniqueness and other complexities (Bahr, 2010; Kemmis & Johnstone, 2007; Pendergast, 2010; Vagle, 2012). In marketing literature, 9 to 12-year-olds are considered a unique, preadolescent market segment that aspire to, purchase and enact adolescence (Cook & Kaiser, 2004; Lindstrom & Seybold, 2003).

In the other research fields and social settings investigated, older children appear to be regarded as developmentally similar, and little different to other younger children in middle childhood. Movie and video games censors apply the same rules to older children as they do younger ages. Toy standards provide older children with access to more complex toys, but some younger children have the same access.

This chapter also investigated the theories of influential child study theorists Piaget, Freud, Erikson and Kohlberg. Although they work in different domains, none of these different theories consider older children a unique category. They all include older children in middle childhood. In different ways, each constructs middle childhood as a relatively trouble-free stage of life. Of particular interest are the similarities between how these theories construct the adolescent subject and how SAC literature constructs 9 to 12 year olds. The ways that SAC literature problematises older children as rebellious, sexualised, and a physical and moral risk to younger children, bears close similarity to how Freud and Kohlberg conceptualise adolescents.

The conclusion I am drawn to at the end of this investigation is that there appears to be no universally accepted wisdom on this age category. In different settings and institutions they are variously understood as problematic, consumers, unsuited, adolescent and unremarkable. There are a number of questions that emerge from this work. How do I reconcile that one age category can be conceptualised so differently in so many different settings? How is this work useful to me in answering my research question?

Foucault's theories on disciplinary power and the role it plays in the production of knowledge provide one way of understanding how there can be more than one way to conceptualise a single group. In Chapter Two, I discussed Foucault's (1980) assertion that truth is multiple, and can vary with changing social settings and political structures. Foucault (1977) proposes that disciplinary power acts to categorise and classify people in ways that allow them to be organised and policed. Following from Foucault, each of the different conceptualisations of older child explored in this chapter can be understood as a way of categorising and understanding older children that is unique to that social setting or research discipline. Although no other social settings were investigated in this chapter, it is likely that there are others that conceptualise older children in even more ways.

In SAC, the problematised older child has likely emerged from a complex combination of social phenomena. SAC is a care service, seen as mostly for young children, that has been imposed on an existing schooling structure. Australia's schooling system means that at approximately age 12 years, children make the 'leap' from primary to secondary schooling. The transition age of 12 years is a social

practice that categorises children into two distinct groups. In the context of SAC, being 12 years old means a leap to a new type of schooling, and also a leap to a category where care is deemed no longer necessary. As the oldest in SAC, older children might therefore be considered ready to make multiple ‘leaps’ to secondary school, self-care and adolescence. It is therefore possible to see how they can be constructed as ‘ready to move on’ and no longer suited to SAC. Proportionally large numbers of older children begin to drop out of SAC at 9 years old (ABS, 2015). Those few remaining might therefore be considered to be lingering when others have already moved on.

Similarly, marketers have also constructed 9 to 12 year olds as subjects ready to move on and make the leap to adolescence. Foucault (1988b) argues that subjects are active in constructing their identities in relation to social expectations and desires. The tween is similarly agentic. They are encouraged to embody a role as consumer and take up products and ways of being that allow them to perform Western constructions of consumerist adolescence. In marketing literature, children’s agency in constructing themselves as consumer subjects is particularly visible. However, drawing on Foucault’s (1980) argument that power traverses all points in a society, it would therefore also be expected that older children in SAC would also be agentic in constructing themselves as ‘older’ and ready to make the leap to adolescence.

Following the work done in this chapter, this research operates from the poststructural assumption, that the problematised older child is something that appears unique to SAC, and one of many socially constructed truths about this age group. There are multiple social phenomena active in SAC settings that likely act to construct older children as separate and problematic. Older children are not removed from this construction of knowledge about them, but actively engaged in it. Therefore, when addressing the research questions, I need to account for the social construction of multiple truths assumed in this research, and also the possibility that older children play a role in problematising their age category.

The work done in this chapter is also deeply connected to that done on Chapter Three on the purposes of SAC. Just as it is possible that older children might be active in the construction of truths about themselves, they might also be active in the construction of knowledge about the purpose of SAC. The complex distribution of power proposed

by Foucault means that I need to consider that these two processes are connected in multiple and complex ways.

In the next chapter, I extend the discussion to a third body of literature, that relating directly to SAC. My intent is to bring together the two discussions conducted so far on the purposes of SAC and understandings of older children. The chapter investigates research that provides insight into effective SAC programming, particularly for older children.

## **CHAPTER FIVE – SEEKING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PROGRAMMING FOR CHILDREN AGED 9 TO 12 YEARS IN SCHOOL AGE CARE**

School Age Care is a unique setting different to other major children’s institutional settings in Australia. As discussed in Chapter Three, whilst arguably an educational setting, it serves a different purpose to formal school education. In Australia, the dominant programming structure is play-based, and similar to play-based approaches employed in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings. However, SAC provides for older children than most ECEC services and operates in different physical and organisational settings. This chapter provides a summary of current literature relating to this unique setting and 9 to 12-year-olds. More specifically, this chapter focuses on knowledge relating to how providers should program SAC for older children. There is currently only a small amount of peer-reviewed research on SAC to draw upon in compiling this chapter, although the body of research has grown over the last few years (Cartmel, 2007; Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014). There is far less research on older children in SAC. Consequently, as was done in previous chapters, I will necessarily draw on additional texts including SAC practice manuals, government texts, industry publications, and research from related settings. Many of these refer to older children only fleetingly, resulting in a review of SAC literature that pieces together a jigsaw of what is currently ‘known’ about programming for older children in SAC, albeit a jigsaw with many missing pieces.

### **WHAT RESEARCH HAS BEEN CONDUCTED IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOL AGE CARE SETTINGS?**

Notwithstanding its importance in many children’s lives, there has been little research conducted in SAC (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014; Cartmel & Hayes, 2016; Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014; Pálsdóttir, 2010; Simoncini et al., 2015). Understandings of SAC pedagogy in Australia are informed significantly by research into early childhood development and the influence of play-based learning environments in ECEC. This is evidenced by the FSAC, which was based on, and bears great similarity to the Australian Early Years Learning Framework and draws heavily on ECEC research

(DEEWR, 2009, 2011). Klerfelt and Haglund (2014) argue that practices in SAC are unique to the setting and therefore require specific research that accounts for that uniqueness. There are institutional similarities between SAC and ECEC in Australia. Both currently operate under similar funding arrangements, are overseen by the same government departments, and commonly use play-based programming approaches. However, there are many differences. Children in SAC are mostly aged 5 to 12 years, whereas those in ECEC are aged 0 to 5 years. SAC sessions are generally shorter. BSC and ASC sessions each commonly have approximate durations of one to two hours, and three hours respectively<sup>2</sup>. SAC practitioners are less likely to have education qualifications (Australian Government Department of Education, 2014a). Additionally, whilst ECEC services operate from purpose-specific facilities, SAC services frequently have to make use of shared or makeshift spaces (Cartmel, 2007; Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014). These differences highlight the uniqueness of SAC and a need for more research into children's experiences of the setting. Similarly, Klerfelt and Haglund (2014) call for more SAC research that seeks children's perspectives.

Much Australian SAC research has been commissioned by government and tends to relate to statistical data, economic considerations and quality monitoring systems (Cartmel, 2007). However, there now appears to be increasing academic interest in SAC. Since commencing this research in 2013, I have noticed an increase in the amount of peer-reviewed research, especially from Nordic countries, and in particular, Sweden. There is also a small emerging body of research from Australia. This section discusses this Australian SAC research and examines its relevance to my research question.

One of the few papers to seek children's views was a qualitative study by Simoncini et al. (2015) that sought the opinions of 164 Australian children about SAC. The children, aged 5 to 13 years, responded to a survey using a combination of conversation, drawing and writing. The children were asked about six aspects of SAC including: the experiences they enjoy most, how SAC could be improved, making friends, what can they do at SAC but not elsewhere, and what they do not like about SAC. They reported that doing activities, engaging in play, and making friends were

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<sup>2</sup> The times provided are not universal. There are variations between individual services.

the things they enjoyed most. Activities were the most important response (52.4%) and were distinguished by the authors from play. Activities were defined as things like board games and practitioner-directed experiences, as opposed to play, which was defined as free and child-directed. It's a definition of play consistent with those explored in Chapter Three. The children identified practitioners' programming and safety practices as the thing they liked least. The authors make particular mention of risk-averse practices that constrain physical play. Interestingly, the authors found no significant difference in opinions across different age groups. Whilst this research had a relatively large sample, it only provided broad responses about what children do and do not like. It did not develop insights into why children hold those views. Although not conclusive, the findings of my research address this gap by providing a deeper reading of children's views and how those views are formed.

Cartmel's (2007) PhD thesis uses a critical ethnography to investigate practitioner and management perspectives on tensions in relationships between SAC services and school management bodies. Cartmel used a combination of observation, document analysis, and interviews with SAC practitioners, school principals and management representatives. Cartmel's research demonstrates SAC practitioners can feel isolated and marginalised through their relationships with other key stakeholders such as school principals. This research points to the low status accorded to SAC in Australian culture and the effects this has on practitioners' capacity to provide care for children. In the context of my project, Cartmel's research demonstrates that successfully providing SAC is not as simple as providing the correct food and activities. There are intricate relationships and hierarchies that make SAC provision more complex.

Simoncini's (2010) PhD thesis investigated a possible correlation between participation in SAC and problematic behaviours in children. The researcher compared results from children's behavioural assessment questionnaires completed by parents, children, SAC practitioners and school teachers, with data on SAC attendance patterns. Simoncini proposes that children who spend a lot of time in SAC exhibit more problem behaviours than those who are afforded mostly parental care or a combination of parental care and SAC. She infers from her results that spending a lot of time in SAC may be linked to poor educational and developmental outcomes.

The research points to an interesting correlation between the amount of SAC children attend and adult assessments of their behaviours. However, there are important complexities the research does not account for, in particular other structural complexities that might also inform ‘challenging’ behaviours. In the context of my research, Simoncini does highlight the importance of programming for children who spend a lot of time in SAC. She identifies SAC as an important setting for children who attend, and raises the prospect that programming can influence children’s developmental outcomes.

Of great relevance to this research is the industry commissioned study of Gifford (1991), which until recently was the only research to explore the issue of older children’s experiences in Australian SAC. Gifford was commissioned by the Australian Capital Territory Government to report on low levels of participation in SAC by children aged 10 to 12 years. The study employed surveys and observations to gain the perspectives of 403 children aged between 10 and 13 years, and 86 parents. Many children reported that they held negative attitudes towards SAC, with some writing unsolicited, negative comments such as, “I just don’t like them (SAC)” and “I hate them” (Gifford, 1991, p. 30). These powerful responses betray much about what some of the sample thought about SAC. Only 8% of boys and 11% of girls indicated that they would like to attend BSC and ASC. The children cited “boredom”, “lack of control over content of program” and younger children as common things they did not like about SAC (Gifford, 1991, p. 32). Parents also had mixed views about SAC. 47.6% of parents expressed a preference for separate SAC programs for older children, and 52.3% believed that the model of SAC provided was only ‘somewhat suitable’ for older children. Gifford’s research provides an indication that many parents and children question the suitability of SAC for older children. Gifford’s data demonstrates that programming for older children has been a concern for at least 26 years. However, the study is 26 years old and as discussed in Chapter Three, models of SAC delivery have likely changed over that time, reflecting changing understandings about the purpose of SAC. As with Simoncini’s study, Gifford’s research seeks children’s views but does not provide a deeper reading of how those views are formed.



There are also a number of minor Australian papers. Winefield et al. (2011) interviewed a small sample of thirteen parents about their perceptions of SAC. They found that SAC was important in supporting these parents' participation in paid work. The authors also reported that parents were most concerned about location and availability of SAC, and had less interest in program content. Their findings are similar to those of Elliot (1998) who interviewed the parents of a sample of 98 children about their care patterns. The researchers found that the majority of parents chose SAC on the basis of availability. Elliot's research also provides a small insight into requirements of older children, reporting that children aged 9 to 12 years preferred active, outdoor play, although this finding needs to be considered in light of the small sample size. Thompson, Cooper, Flanagan, Crawford, and Worsley (2006) investigated nutrition practices and the types of activity provided at 426 SAC services. They concluded that SAC was a key site for promoting healthy eating and physically active lifestyles. I must also make mention of my previous masters thesis, which I will introduce later in this chapter (Hurst, 2013).

In addition to the Australian research cited in this section, there is a growing body of international SAC research from countries including the U.S.A., U.K., Sweden, Iceland, Norway and Canada. Of particular relevance to this project are the theses of Canadian researchers, Gage (2000) and Maheux (1998), who investigated questions relating to older children. This thesis will necessarily draw on that research, but it is important to acknowledge that there may be significant differences in how SAC is delivered in these locations that influence the relevance of their findings.

## **INVESTIGATING WHY CHILDREN AGED 9 TO 12 YEARS DO NOT GO TO SCHOOL AGE CARE**

This research project investigates children's perspectives about how SAC should be programmed. It is therefore important to attend to existing research that provides knowledge about what older children might want from SAC. In this section, I discuss research that provides some insight into what SAC for older children might look like. In particular I consider whether current models of SAC provision work for older children.

Older children are a minority in SAC and significantly less likely attend than younger children. In Australia, children aged 5 to 8 years are approximately twice as likely to attend SAC as 9 to 12-year-olds (ABS, 2012; 2015). The situation is similar in Canada, U.S.A. and some European countries, where researchers also report low utilisation by older children (Adema & Whiteford, 2007; Audain, Leadbeater, & Shoolbread, 2006; Gage, 2000; Haglund & Klerfelt, 2013; Maheux, 1998; Plantenga & Remery, 2013; Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996; Smith & Barker, 2000a). In Sweden, children are less likely to attend SAC after 8 or 9 years of age (Boström, Hörnell, & Frykland, 2015). Only 27.2% and 4.2% of Swedish 10 and 12-year-olds respectively attend SAC, compared to over 80% of 6 to 8-year-olds. In Denmark, participation drops similarly from over 80% of 6 to 8-year-olds to 13% of 11-year-olds (Plantenga & Remery, 2013). In response to these low levels of participation, the papers reviewed in this section ask the question, why do older children not go to SAC?

### **Maybe older children can look after themselves?**

One possible explanation for low participation rates is that older children may be more capable of self-care, with parents happier to leave them unsupervised once they reach 10 to 11 years of age (Mullan, 2013). However, some researchers question the willingness of parents to allow older children to care for themselves. Gifford (1991) argues that parents are unwilling to leave older children for more than a short period, making some form of care necessary. Data from McNamara and Miranti (2012) supports Gifford's assertion. Drawing on a sample of approximately 13,000 Australians, McNamara and Miranti report a significant drop in participation in SAC from 10.8 % of 10-year-olds to 2.5% of 12-year-olds. However, the drop in participation in other types of care for the same age cohorts (from 23.9% to 19.6%) is not as dramatic. This exodus of older children from SAC but not other sorts of care could indicate that Australian parents do not believe SAC provides the sort of care suited to older children, or that older children object to attending SAC. However, in the absence of data addressing this question, my suggestion is only inferred.

There is also evidence suggesting that older children leave SAC because of circumstances that change as family members age. The arrival of new children in families can alter work and care patterns (McNamara & Miranti, 2012). Data from McNamara and Cassells (2010) indicates that 50% of mothers of 11 to 14-year-olds

choose to work part-time in order to care for their children. Mullan (2013) believes that children with older siblings are also less likely to participate in formal care.

That many parents prefer informal or self care arrangements for older children raises the question of whether there is a demand for SAC for older children. If older children do not need SAC, perhaps it should not be a problem if they do not attend. However, other research raises the possibility that there are features of how SAC is provided that make it unsuitable or undesirable for older children.

### **How well does School Age Care provide for older children?**

One possible explanation for older children's low participation is that SAC does not cater well for them. There is a small amount of evidence to suggest that older children perceive SAC negatively (Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, 1997; Gifford, 1991; Smith & Barker, 2000a).

Prior to this PhD research, I completed a masters research project that also investigated older children in SAC. In that project, I used a combination of photography and semi-structured interviews to seek older children's views about their experiences of SAC. The children spoke of the ways in which practitioners sometimes used normative programming strategies to privilege younger children (Hurst, 2013, 2015). Although the project only had a small sample of ten children from three services, seven of those children provided detailed accounts of how practitioners employed decision-making practices, selected materials, and structured activities in ways that privileged the requirements of younger children. The practices they described are likely a reflection of younger children's majority presence in SAC, which would make younger children's needs most visible to practitioners. Privileging younger children was most obvious in settings where practitioners used a 'whole of group' approach to programming. In doing so, they programmed for the 'norm', being the younger child, which positioned older children as subjects with requirements outside the mainstream.

Research from the U.K. and Canada also supports the assertion that SAC caters better for younger children (Barker et al., 2003; Maheux, 1998; Smith & Barker, 2000a). Smith and Barker (2000a) propose that U.K. practitioners' training equips them better for work with younger children, rather than older children with whom they have less

experience. Similarly, Lalonde-Graton (Cited in Maheux, 1998) found that only 44% of Canadian practitioners in their research elected to work with older children, with many excluding and not welcoming them. It raises the possibility that practitioners, expecting to work mostly with younger children, may see older children as a secondary concern. However, Maheux (1998) found differently, arguing that 76.7% of practitioners chose to work with older children. Whether these findings can be applied to the Australian context is debatable. Australian practitioners have a wide range of qualifications and backgrounds. In 2006, 52% of Australian SAC practitioners had no qualifications, making it difficult to argue that their educational background alone would lead them to see older children as ‘not their job’. Similarly, in 2010, 37% of Australian SAC practitioners held Diploma and Certificate level qualifications (McNamara & Cassells, 2010). These are vocational qualifications, which qualify the holder to work in educational and care settings, including SAC. These include the Diploma and Certificate IV of School Age Education and Care, which are SAC-specific qualifications (see Glossary). It is reasonable to expect practitioners with SAC-specific qualifications to be more prepared to work with older children.

### **Does School Age Care offer older children enough same-age friendships?**

Many researchers suggest that the presence of same-age friends is important in how older children regard SAC (Barker et al., 2003; Elliot, 1998; Fink, 1986; Gage, 2000; Haglund & Klerfelt, 2013; Hurst, 2013; Londal, 2010; Maheux, 1998; Oksnes, 2012; Shernoff & Vandell, 2007; Smith & Barker, 2000b; Strobel, Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2008). Barker et al. (2003) consulted with children, parents and practitioners through a mixed method study to investigate how SAC impacts upon the lives of children in the U.K. and what they consider ‘quality’ SAC to be. The researchers concluded that being able to make and have friends was critical to successful SAC. They found that many older children lacked same-age peers, which negatively affected their enjoyment of SAC. Similarly to my masters research, those children with limited choice in same-age peers found themselves in environments dominated by younger children. The researchers’ findings however were not universal and reported that some older children enjoyed helping to care for younger children.

Maheux (1998) argues that having access to friends is important for older children in Canadian SAC. Maheux's PhD research investigated factors that contributed to older children dropping out of SAC. The research consulted children via questionnaire and parents via interview and questionnaire. She found that older children were more likely to remain at SAC if friends were also present at the service. Gage (2000) undertook a similar study, providing questionnaires to older children in Canadian SAC. She suggests that the presence of friends is also critical to older children's enjoyment of SAC. Although the results were not significant, there was a trend in Gage's data suggesting a correlation between the number of same-age peers in a service and the likelihood that older children would enjoy SAC. The importance of same-age peers is also touched on by Elliot (1998) who reported that older, Australian children felt that attending SAC restricted their ability to play with preferred peers who do not attend SAC.

Londal (2010) explored the ways that physical play is important to children in Norwegian SAC. The importance of peers in physical play was one theme to emerge from the children's narratives. Londal's participants considered it important to engage in play with familiar peers, and in ways that allowed them to influence each other's play. Londal's qualitative analysis makes for interesting comparison with Maheux and Gage's quantitative work. Maheux and Gage both conceptualise friendships as a variable in a linear relationship that can help predict the effectiveness of a particular SAC service. However, Londal theorises differently, touching on the nature of friendships and the quality of play that friends engage in. Londal's research suggests that the mere presence of peers is not enough, and that the qualities of friendships should also be considered.

Strobel et al. (2008) conducted focus groups with 120 children and young people attending North American SAC. The researchers found that for many participants, spending time with friends was the primary reason for going to SAC. The participants also highlighted the importance of the age of the available peers. Whilst the study did not use the age group of 9 to 12 years in their analysis, they reported that secondary students had little interest in socialising with younger children, and conversely that primary students were not interested in socialising with older children. Whilst not

conclusive, it provides support for the idea that older children in SAC may also prefer to socialise with same-age peers.

In my masters research, the participants spoke of the importance of having friends in SAC and the qualities of those friendships. Those that seemed to enjoy SAC most were those with strong groups of friends at the service. Those who enjoyed SAC least often cited the absence of friends. Some participants alluded to a friendship hierarchy where SAC friends were positioned as 'less' than school friends or best friends. Some participants saw SAC friends as the 'only' or 'best available' friendship option (Hurst, 2013). Gage (2000) further alludes to friendship hierarchies, arguing that the peers should be best friends, and that practitioners should create an environment that facilitates the development of friendships. Barker et al. (2003) propose that friendships formed in SAC often do not survive outside SAC. Providing peers for older children is obviously difficult for practitioners when you consider that proportionally less older children use SAC (ABS, 2015). However, more thought needs to be given to whether the absence of older children results from a failure of SAC to meet the requirements of older children or some other factor. Certainly, increasing the number of same-age peers increases the likelihood of older children finding suitable friends, and would also provide older children with greater numerical influence over programming decisions.

### **Do structural and cultural factors make it more difficult to care for older children?**

I have so far discussed research suggesting that programming practices, the presence of same-age friends, and the capacity for self-care are possible reasons why older children do not attend SAC. In addition, some researchers also identify a number of structural and cultural factors that may impact on practitioners' abilities to cater for older children and therefore make SAC more attractive. Karlsudd (2012) found that the employment conditions of Swedish practitioners could negatively affect the care they are able to provide for children with additional needs. It is a finding that may be relevant to Australian SAC where older children are sometimes thought to have needs outside the mainstream and practitioners often operate in difficult work environments (Cartmel, 2007; Hurst, 2013).

The amount of professional support available to practitioners may also be important. Simoncini and Lasen (2012) propose that Australian practitioners with low levels of internal and external professional support are less successful in providing high quality SAC. The researchers undertook a study with seven SAC programs, exploring possible relationships between the amount and type of professional support accessed by each research site, and the quality of SAC provided. The results are not conclusive given the small sample size, and also should be considered in the context of how the researchers measured quality. Simoncini and Lasen used data from the now defunct OSHCQA scheme (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003). However, the effectiveness of quality schemes like OSHCQA as a measure of provision is not without criticism. Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2007) argue that such schemes seek to simplify what are, in reality, very complex social settings. Additionally, despite their claims to objectivity, the criteria they use to measure quality are contestable, and an expression of only one world or political view.

Cartmel (2007) highlights other structural barriers that can impact on the capacity to provide SAC. Cartmel argues that critical relationships between SAC practitioners and the school management or principal can impact on space allocations, work conditions, professional support and community perceptions of the SAC program. Cartmel and Grieshaber (2014) argue further that this relationship has a direct impact on the quality of program that practitioners are able to provide. Another situation that can make practice more difficult for practitioners is the use of shared spaces where programs must share space with other school activities (Cartmel, 2007; Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2004). In conversations I have had with practitioners, operating from shared spaces can limit the range of activities they are able to provide.

Whilst no research establishes links between these structural factors and the capacity of services to provide for older children, it at least creates the possibility that such links may exist. It seems a reasonable proposition that a service with space and resource restrictions may find it more challenging to provide for a diverse age range. Similarly, it is reasonable to propose that practitioners experiencing difficulty in providing for older children might benefit from access to professional support. However, as reasonable as they appear, links like this need to be further tested, and fall outside the scope of this research.

## **Summarising what is known about older children's participation in School Age Care**

My review of the literature pertaining to how well SAC caters for older children suggests that there are elements of SAC provision that may not meet older children's requirements, including the privileging of younger children, the lack of same-age peers, and the skills of practitioners. However, these studies provide no conclusive knowledge about why older children do not go to SAC. The research I have investigated instead presents a list of possible factors that might influence a SAC service's capacity to provide for older children. This list of factors highlights the complexity of the relationship between SAC as a setting and older children.

The poststructural ontology brought to this research provides me with a different way to conceptualise these complexities. For example, some of the research alludes to a causal relationship between older children's participation in SAC and the number of same-age peers present. Conceptualising the relationship as causal constructs older children as simple subjects with an innate desire to be with same-age peers.

Foucault's theories instead understand the desire for same-age peers as the product of complex relationships of disciplinary power that circulate societies. The desire for same-age peers therefore might instead be understood as an expression of cultural dividing practices that normalise same-age grouping of children. Consequently, older children might be enacting cultural expectations that it is 'normal' to desire SAC settings with same-age peers, just as they do in these settings during the school day. A poststructural reading does not reduce the possible importance of same-age friendships, but it does change why these might be important to older children, and therefore how this is reflected in practice.

Thinking about the research presented in this section poststructurally also does not mean that I discount its findings. The factors these papers discuss may be important for many different communities, services and children. However, the complex, contextual distribution of power relationships means that I am unable to see them as universal, but instead as representative of School Age Care's social complexity. The factors raised in this section might be important, but a poststructural reading sees their importance is contextual and contingent.



## **INVESTIGATING DIVERSE UNDERSTANDINGS OF SCHOOL AGE CARE PROGRAMMING**

One of the possibilities I considered in the previous section was whether or not SAC programming meets the requirements of older children. In this section I review literature that addresses different programming approaches to SAC. The approaches discussed are not always the same. Perspectives on what SAC should accomplish differ across locations, and have also changed over time. My aim in discussing this literature is to gain some insight into what SAC programming for older children might look like.

### **School Age Care has not always looked the same**

In conducting this review of programming approaches, I accessed a number of Australian SAC practitioner texts (DEEWR, 2011; Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2004; Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre, 1992; Tarrant & Jones, 1996). There are no axiomatic certainties on which SAC practices are founded. As discussed in Chapter Three, understandings of the purpose of SAC have changed over time. Whilst the purpose of SAC has changed, so too have the theoretical allegiances that practitioners draw on to inform their programming approaches.

The earliest texts I reviewed draw substantially on developmental psychology and make an interesting comparison with the FSAC, the current learning framework for SAC (DEEWR, 2011). I discussed the historically dominant role of developmental psychology in SAC in Chapter Two. These early texts used developmental psychology in a predictive fashion and as the foundation for programming approaches (Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre, 1992; Tarrant & Jones, 1996). They provide practitioners with lists of activities and strategies founded on developmental understandings for different age cohorts. Cannella (2008) questions applying developmental knowledge in this way. Cannella argues that it oversimplifies knowledge of children, ignores complexity and reduces children or stages of development to “listings of functions” (p. 40). One way that Tarrant and Jones (1996) do this is to propose that older children should be given adult-like roles and responsibilities. This approach exemplifies the discourses of mastery and progression inherent in developmental theory (Burman, 2008). The authors apply developmental

theory by making adult-like roles available only to the oldest children. One intriguing suggestion from Tarrant and Jones is that practitioners reproduce their program plan in a secret code suggesting that older children will enjoy the cognitive challenge of breaking the code. It is a direct application of Piagetan theory, that older children are capable of more sophisticated thought and will therefore be engaged by the challenge of a difficult puzzle (Berk, 2013). These authors do qualify their approach, stating that children develop at different rates and developmental theory should not be used to inform universalised approaches to curriculum. However, the ways these strategies are presented encourage their universal application.

In *Shared Visions for Outside School Hours Care*, a practitioner resource manual, Kennedy and Stonehouse (2004) introduce the use of socio-cultural theories in SAC programming. In a significant shift from earlier texts, the authors propose that children's relationships and social environments play an important role in producing positive programming outcomes. Kennedy and Stonehouse also draw on critical theories of childhood, positioning children as individuals with a right to be consulted in programming decisions. The authors are less prescriptive in applying developmental theory, paying greater attention to a range of contextual factors that may influence children's development.

The current FSAC draws more on contemporary theories of childhood than previous guides. In addition to developmental, behaviourist and socio-cultural theories, the FSAC refers to critical and postmodern ideas. These ideas are expressed through encouraging practitioners to recognise children as rights-holders, complex subjects, capable decision-makers, and constructors of knowledge and identity. The FSAC outlines five broad practice principles fundamental to programming. These are: having positive, respectful relationships with children, working in partnership with children, families, school and communities, having high expectations for children's capabilities, respecting diverse cultures and abilities, and demonstrating a commitment to ongoing professional learning and reflection (DEEWR, 2011). The broad range of theoretical ideas deployed in the FSAC is loosely reflected in these principles.

The FSAC offers no guidance on how to enact these theories and principles in everyday practice. It encourages practitioners to interpret and enact them in ways that

account for their individual contexts. This approach does not account for the possibility that practitioners may not be familiar with critical and poststructural ideas. Practitioners might interpret or enact these theories in ways inconsistent with the intent of the theory. I described in Chapter Three how definitions of terms like leisure and play can vary. It is likely the same with concepts like ‘agency’ and ‘rights’ that are used in the FSAC but left for practitioners to enact based on their own interpretations.

The FSAC is enforced by government legislation and intended to be a significant influence on practices, but there is currently no research investigating whether it has encouraged the application of new theories. A comparison of the FSAC with other practice guides, demonstrates how Australian understandings of children in SAC have changed in policy (Kennedy & Stonehouse, 2004; Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre, 1992). However, it is unclear whether they have changed in practice.

In this section, I have detailed how over approximately 20 years, Australian writers have moved away from the application of developmental theory as the foundation for SAC programming. For some the prescriptive use of developmental theory in earlier SAC curricula may seem archaic, but at the time such understandings of childhood were considered best practice and likely seemed self-evident and beyond contest (MacNaughton, 2005). This shift in theoretical orientation can be understood through Foucault’s (1980) argument that regimes of truth can change across contexts. These changes demonstrate that what is held true about children and the practices those truths inform can change over time. Also implicit in Foucault’s theory is that understandings of SAC programming can change across cultures, and is something that is explored in the next section.

### **School Age Care does not look the same everywhere**

Understandings of SAC programming can also shift across locations and differ from country to country. As discussed previously, the FSAC mandates leisure, play and education as the central purposes of SAC in Australia. Australian regulations also require services to use the FSAC in tandem with the National Quality Framework (NQF), a national scheme that provides uniform safety standards for SAC (ACECQA,

2016). These documents assign Australian SAC a focus on safety, leisure, play and education that does not necessarily apply in other locations.

In the U.S.A., there is no singular consensus about how to provide SAC. SAC varies according to the values and needs of the different communities that it serves.

Approximately 35% of American SAC services have an educational and redemptive focus, aiming to provide additional academic support to children from disadvantaged communities. Others have a more recreational focus (Haglund & Anderson, 2009; Hall & Dilworth, 2005; Huang, La Torre Matrundola, & Leon, 2014; Mitchell, 2005).

In the United Kingdom and some European countries, SAC looks similar to Australian SAC with a familiar leisure focus, operating at similar times and catering for a broader section of the community (Moss & Petrie, 2002; Plantenga & Remery, 2013). However, not all European countries provide SAC in the same way. A comparative study by Plantenga and Remery (2013) reveals great complexity in European SAC provision. They describe differences in operating hours, regulatory standards, practitioner qualifications, delivery models and utilisation levels. For instance, in Poland, school hours are longer, matching common working hours for parents, therefore eliminating the need for SAC.

Swedish SAC is more homogeneous and more professionalised with children's leisure as its central purpose (Haglund & Anderson, 2009). Similarly to Australia, Swedish SAC is considered a site of education (Haglund, 2015). Unlike Australia, in Sweden older children are sometimes regarded as a distinct group who require a different model of SAC. Although not universal, some Swedish jurisdictions offer different models of SAC specifically for older children which allows them more autonomy and appears founded on the belief that older children are more capable of self-care (The National Agency for Education, 2007).

In 2015, I visited a Swedish SAC service for older children. Many of the practices I witnessed indicated that older children are viewed differently in Sweden. Compared to Australian programs I have experienced, the children at this program had deeper input into program content, and greater responsibility for their own safety. For example, in the Swedish service, older children decided for themselves when they left the service and took themselves home. In Australia, national regulations require a

formal transfer of custody where the child's parent or other authorised adult physically assumes responsibility for the child. These practices reflect contrasting understandings about who is responsible for children's safety and children's capacity for self-care. Of course, I am unable to draw any sound conclusions on the basis of visiting one service, but the differences between this and any Australian programs I have observed were distinct. Beyond these countries, there are many other models of provision too numerous to explore in depth here (Plantenga & Remery, 2013). Following from Foucault's argument that knowledge is contextual and socially produced, these diverse approaches to programming are likely a product of history, politics and different cultural understandings of childhood.

### **Not everybody sees School Age Care in the same way**

Given that shared understandings of approaches to SAC can change across times and locations, it is logical to suggest that individuals and groups can also see it differently. The existence of the FSAC and NQF, and the support they are afforded by government, suggests a uniform approach to SAC in Australia. However, the purpose and nature of SAC is contested. The focus on learning in the current FSAC is relatively new and may not be something that is universally accepted. There are groups and individuals in Australia with the view that positioning SAC as a site of education overcomplicates it (Cartmel & Hayes, 2016). For example, a recent Australian Government Productivity Commission report into early childhood services advocated for a reduction in regulatory requirements for SAC and a focus on "care and recreation rather than education" (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014, p. 19). In light of the work presented in Chapter Three, this would appear to advocate a return to an earlier conceptualisation of SAC.

In my work with SAC over the last few years I have heard many practitioners express similar views about the FSAC. These practitioners expressed a desire for a return to programming approaches as they were prior to the introduction of the FSAC. Their views contrast with those of peak bodies and SAC advocates who argue for an elevation of the cultural and political status of SAC. Each of those expressions seeks to redefine and reconstitute SAC. It seems reasonable to suggest that in addition to these, there exist other views about what SAC should be like, with children's views not the least of those. Foucault (1977) argues that this is how truth is produced,

through the application of power that flows through all subject positions. Truth is not passed down from those in positions of dominance and merely reproduced by the less powerful. It is contested and resisted in multiple ways. These multiple resistances mean that SAC programming can look different across services despite the normalising intentions of government policy.

There is only a small amount of research that sheds light on what children think should inform SAC programming approaches. SAC research involving children more often seeks their perspectives about the sorts of activities they like to do. There is a lack of research seeking their views on its broader purpose. In Chapter Three, I explored the definitions of terms like *leisure*, *recreation*, *education* and *play* and their implications for SAC practice. It seems adults are more comfortable asking children about activities rather than these broader philosophical concepts. My hope is that the methodological approach taken in this research will reveal some insight into how children think SAC programming should be approached.

These different programming approaches discussed in this section demonstrate that there is no single approach to SAC programming. Approaches to programming can look different depending on the different ‘truths’ held by different cultures, time periods and perspectives. As such, no approach is necessarily more ‘correct’ than any other. Each is a reflection of different understandings about the purpose of SAC, beliefs about childhood, and what a society and culture should look like.

## **INVESTIGATING SCHOOL AGE CARE PRACTICES FOR OLDER CHILDREN**

Given the small amount of SAC research, there is not a large body of knowledge about how best to provide SAC for older children. However, this does not mean that the available research and SAC literature provide no knowledge at all about programming for older children. This section explores research relating to programming practices, and its implications for older children in SAC. This discussion is organised around a number of common themes such as: the types of activities that should be provided, relationships between child and practitioner, consulting with children about programming, responding to time and temporality,

separate spaces for older children, and the use of quality measures in guiding programming.

### **Considering whether the activities provided at School Age Care are important to older children**

The activities provided at SAC appear to be important to older children. In my masters research, many of the participants spoke of a desire for activities that provided for their physical and cognitive abilities (Hurst, 2013, 2015). Most participants did not enjoy SAC, and described how practitioners engaged in risk-averse programming practices. They described how practitioners modified or avoided activities that posed a physical or social risk to younger children. These participants regarded ‘low risk’ activities as boring and instead desired activities that provided a physical and cognitive challenge. Those participants who did enjoy SAC also expressed similar desires, but their responses described less risk-averse programming practices. They instead suggested that they liked the activities provided because of the physical and cognitive challenge they provided. The participants enacted their desire for challenging activities in multiple ways. They spoke about wanting active play that allowed them to use their greater strength and coordination and desired more skilful, same-age or adult partners to share those activities. Many participants found playing with younger children frustrating. The participants also desired more mature visual media and more complex art activities. Simoncini et al. (2015) found similarly that children did not enjoy risk-averse programming practices.

Other SAC texts work from different theoretical orientations to argue for challenging play. Kennedy and Stonehouse (2004) approach the issue developmentally, suggesting that activities should reflect older children’s more advanced development and need for more complex and difficult play. Similarly, Elliot (1998) uses a developmental lens to argue that the abilities of older and younger children are different, and asking them to share can have a negative effect on their enjoyment of activities. In contrast, Lوندal (2010) argues that challenging, physical play that children manage themselves contributes to wellbeing, enjoyment and identity formation. The FSAC adopts a similar position, arguing that providing challenging play supports wellbeing, identity-formation and engagement in learning (DEEWR, 2011).

Some researchers are more prescriptive in their findings, providing lists of activities deemed suitable for older children. Maheux (1998) believes that older children enjoy sports, excursions and computers. However, Maheux's sample was too small to be representative and as research that was conducted 18 years ago, it is possible that the activities that appeal to the current generation of children will have changed.

Similarly, Audain et al. (2006) propose that in Scotland sports, meals, pool, darts, air hockey and active games are preferred activities. However, their results are derived from a survey with predetermined activity choices. It is unclear how these choices were derived and if they acted to limit the research subjects' responses. Maheux (1998) uses a combination of open-ended questions and predetermined activity choices in her survey. For both papers, it is reasonable to question how well their data represents children's opinions. They may be more representative of what adults think children want. These papers may have yielded different results had they afforded children more time to consider the research topic, or involved them more deeply in research design.

### **Considering whether older children's relationships with practitioners are important**

Some research points to positive interactions between children and practitioners being important. Strobel et al. (2008) consulted with children and young people via focus groups and found that children most valued the roles that practitioners play as mentors, confidants and mediators. The participants also valued the informal nature of the relationships they share with SAC practitioners. The researchers pointed out that not all participants enjoyed positive relationships with practitioners, but they still judged those relationships through those three roles. The transferability of their findings need to be considered contextually, given that the services involved were focused on social and academic support for disadvantaged students. This marks these sites as having different goals to Australian SAC.

Barker et al. (2003) consulted British children and found that they valued practitioners for their capacity to facilitate play experiences and support in responses to conflict. That British children may value different qualities in SAC practitioners when compared to North American children may be explained by differences in the primary aims of SAC in the two locations. It is possible that children are aware of the purpose



of their SAC service and judge practitioners on the basis of these aims. Of course, further research is necessary to understand the criteria by which children assess practitioners and how they form those views.

Rosenthal and Vandell (1996) investigated the social climate in American SAC through a combination of child questionnaires and service observations, and produced results that have programming implications for older children. Operating from the assumption that positive relationships with practitioners were important, the researchers identified a number of factors that impact on practitioners' capacity to engage positively with children. The authors argue that child to staff ratios, numbers of children, qualifications of practitioners and flexibility of curriculum all influenced interactions between children and practitioners. Of particular relevance was the finding that older children receive less support from practitioners, a view that is also shared by Barker et al. (2003). Consistent with earlier discussion in this paper, Rosenthal and Vandell propose that this finding may be related to SAC practitioners privileging the needs of younger children. The poor relationships between older children and practitioners reported by these researchers might also be related to older children's problematic reputation.

Whilst these papers investigate American and British contexts, practitioner-child relationships are also considered important in Australian SAC. They are a focal point of both the FSAC and its predecessor, the OSHCQA Quality Practices Guide (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003). The FSAC states, "Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships between children; between children and adults; and amongst adults provide the foundation upon which the community in school age care settings is established" (DEEWR, 2011, p. 10). It promotes positive engagement between children and practitioners as a foundational principle for SAC delivery, suggesting that positive relationships contribute to the development of self-esteem, wellbeing, social competencies and a sense of belonging. As a curriculum document drafted by adults, the FSAC represents the sorts of relationships that adults think older children want. Given the primacy of relationships between adults and children in the FSAC, it will be interesting to see if the children who participated in this research project feel the same way about relationships with adults, or if they consider them important at all.

## **Considering whether children have the right to be involved in programming decisions**

Another possible key to successful SAC may be to involve older children in making programming decisions. This section investigates research that discusses children's participation rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and whether children have the right to be included in curriculum decision-making (Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007; Shier, 2001; United Nations, 1989). Whilst some of this research is not specific to SAC, it is still relevant and informs Australian SAC and early childhood curriculum frameworks. The models of participation discussed in this research can differ. Participation in decision-making is not a binary of 'involved – not involved'. There are many possible ways of shared decision-making depending on the distribution and application of power (Hart, 1992, 2008; Lundy, 2007; Shier, 2001). Children have less power in the conduct of societies than adults. Decisions that affect children have historically been made for them by parents or other adults in positions of authority (Hart, 1992).

The United Nations sought to mitigate the lack of decision-making power experienced by children with the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989). The UNCRC proposes a set of universal rights possessed by all people under the age of 18 years. The UNCRC includes Article 12 (1), which conceptualises children's involvement in decision-making as a universal human right. Article 12 (1) states that:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (United Nations, 1989)

Article 12 has given rise to a number of models that help to conceptualise the different ways in which children can be involved in decision-making.

Hart (1992) and Shier (2001) each produced a model that seeks to capture and classify the different ways in which children can participate in decision-making. Hart's model is conceptualised as a 'ladder' with eight different 'rungs', each depicting a different way of engaging children in decision-making. The ladder creates a hierarchy of involvement beginning with *manipulation*, where children are positioned as actors but

are manipulated and used by adults to achieve adult aims. It culminates with top rung, *child initiated and shared decisions with adults*, where children have the power to trigger decision-making processes and share power with adults in making and acting upon decisions. Shier's model builds upon Hart's and sets up a similar hierarchy of involvement but ignores Hart's bottom three rungs, which Shier characterises as *non-participation*.

Practitioners can use both models to identify and classify the ways they involve children in decision-making. Both models have been cited widely in participatory research but not without criticism. Some such criticisms have been addressed by Hart, who suggests that his Ladder was not intended to be an evaluative tool, and nor should the top rung of his Ladder be regarded as the ultimate aspiration in all situations (Hart, 2008). Therefore, when thinking about how older children should participate in decision-making in SAC, it should not be assumed that the ideal position is for older children to 'be in charge'. Other arrangements where power is shared between practitioner and child should be considered. It should also be acknowledged that each level in these models is quite broad and will likely not capture all possible types of children's participation. However, these models can provide a useful platform for thinking about children's participation in curriculum decision-making.

Welty and Lundy (2013) developed an alternative model comprised of four dimensions. The authors argue that positioning a decision-making process within each of the four dimensions, can help individuals better understand children's involvement in decision-making. The first dimension, *space*, refers to whether or not children have the opportunity to express a view, and if those views are sought in an inclusive way. *Voice* refers to how, or if, children are supported to form and express their opinions. *Audience* asks who is listening to children's opinions and the capacity that person has for acting upon those ideas. Finally, *influence* describes how children's opinions are acted upon and the ways children are informed about, or involved in, those decisions. When you consider that there are multiple ways children can communicate, can be supported to voice those views, and have their views utilised, the model helps to understand the multiple ways to involve children in decision-making. Unlike the earlier models of Shier and Hart, Welty and Lundy's model conceptualises children's

participation in a less hierarchical way that allows for greater complexity and a broader range of consultation approaches. Welty and Lundy take a rights-based approach to children's participation arguing that adults have an obligation to actively support children to form and express their views, and that taking a passive approach is not sufficient.

Many SAC researchers and authors also advocate for child participation in curriculum decision-making. The strategies they propose show allegiances to particular theories of childhood. Older texts that draw on developmental theory propose models with more limited engagement of children that would sit lower on Hart and Shier's hierarchies. Some advocate that children should be able to choose from a range of activities determined by adults (Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre, 1992; Munton, Blackburn, & Barreau, 2002; Strobel et al., 2008). Others believe children can contribute to a shortlist of activities with adults bearing the ultimate responsibility for choosing (Tarrant & Jones, 1996). These models share a common faith that adults are experts in the needs of children and can produce a smorgasbord of activities that will appeal to, and support the development of children. The role assigned to the child is to choose from those activities selected for them. Cannella (2008) identifies this as an approach consistent with the use of developmental psychology, and one that positions the child as deficient and in need of adult guidance.

Much contemporary SAC literature advocates for children to be more deeply involved in curriculum planning. Typically, these texts argue for children's involvement on the assumption that children are rights holders and capable of meaningful participation (DEEWR, 2011; Lindstrom, 2012; Närvänen & Elvstrand, 2015; Oksnes, 2012; Pálsdóttir, 2010). However, these texts can be non-prescriptive, leaving it to practitioners to decide how best to engage children in decision-making. This makes it likely that individual practitioners could interpret such calls for children's participation differently. Interpretations would likely be a consequence of existing conceptualisations of childhood and their current practices.

Despite the belief of many authors that adults should involve children more deeply, practitioners sometimes prefer to maintain control over curriculum decisions (Barker et al., 2003). Barker et al. (2003) sought the perspectives of practitioners and children in British SAC. Their research provides some evidence of how practitioners can

interpret children's participation rights differently. The researchers found that despite practitioners claiming to consult with children, their consultations are often superficial. It is a view that the children in the study seemed to share. Some children did not recognise practitioners' actions as consultation. Others complained that practitioners paid lip service to the notion of consultation, but rarely followed up on their suggestions. Lindstrom (2012) conducted research into Swedish practitioner attitudes to child participation in citizenship practices. Lindstrom found that in addition to children's participation in programming decisions being supported by government policy, practitioners were also supportive, believing children's participation had positive educational outcomes. However, Lindstrom acknowledges that practitioners may respond more positively to the survey in a desire to please the researcher, therefore exaggerating the amount of consultation children actually experience.

Närvänen and Elvstrand (2015) found that Swedish SAC practitioners typically enacted children's participation rights in three main ways. Practitioners gave children input into programming decisions through democratic structures like children's committees and meetings. This type of decision-making was seen differently to the daily, routine decisions children make about what activity to do. There were also some practitioners who viewed participation as a privilege rather than a right, and something that children earned for performing sanctioned behaviours or tasks. Despite broad cultural acceptance of children's participation rights, the authors found that practitioners differed in their interpretations of what those rights looked like in practice. Some adults excluded children from some curriculum decisions, by enacting a belief that children did not always display the capacity to decide in their own best interest.

In a small, ethnographic study of one Swedish SAC, Haglund (2015) found that how practitioners enact children's participation rights can depend on the type of activity they are programming. Haglund collected data using a combination of observation, informal conversations and 'walk and talk' conversations with practitioners and children from one service (Klerfelt & Haglund, 2015). Haglund observed that during 'free play', practitioners allowed children to direct their own play and make decisions about the activities they engaged in. However, during the planning of adult-directed

activities that were deemed more ‘educational’, practitioners were inclined to give children less input into decision-making. Haglund calls these ‘thematic activities’ and are common practice in Australian SAC services. Haglund’s research raises the possibility that adults are content to give children power over ‘non-serious’ activity like free play, but are more inclined to exercise control over activity deemed more educational.

Saar (2014) conceptualises children’s participation in decision-making differently, using the theories of Deleuze and Guattari. Saar argues that children have greater influence over program content when they are free to follow the flows and possibilities that emerge during play. He proposes that when adults try to impose structures and limitations on children’s play, that they also limit children’s input into programming. Saar argues that practitioners can support children’s input into programming by sharing the flow of children’s play. Although it approaches this topic from a different theoretical perspective, Saar finds similarly to other researchers that the actions of practitioners have implications for how children participate in decision-making.

That children should have input into decisions about matters that affect them is a widely accepted idea in SAC. In Australia, its acceptance is evidenced by its inclusion in the FSAC. It is also the focus of some of the current SAC research emerging from Nordic countries explored in this section. The research discussed demonstrates that there is no singular approach to supporting children’s participation in decision-making. How practitioners understand and enact a term like *participation* can vary, resulting in different outcomes for children. My research project is also interested in whether children’s participation in decision-making is important in SAC programming. The participation models discussed in this chapter will inform my research. It will seek older children’s ideas about what children’s participation in programming should look like, and if children even think it is important at all.

### **Considering the role of time in School Age Care programming for older children**

One other aspect of programming I want to consider is that of time. In the first drafts of this chapter, I did not write about time. However, as this project progressed, I realised that time would be important to this research. Whilst it is a topic that rarely

appears in SAC literature, time is mentioned in the FSAC. The FSAC asks practitioners to think of time from a range of perspectives. It identifies time in SAC as leisure time; an idea that establishes a clear purpose for children's time outside school hours, and was explored in more depth in Chapter Three. The FSAC also asks practitioners to think about how time is organised and used, suggesting that children that should have some control over how they use their leisure time (DEEWR, 2011). These occasional references in the FSAC did not allow for a deep exploration of the topic, so I extended my search to other fields of research.

When I first began investigating time I was inclined to think of time through a Newtonian lens, as something that was constant, linear, measurable and the means by which daily activities are timetabled. However, I had a rudimentary understanding of Einstein's theories of time and suspected that he, and many other physicists, likely do not regard time as linear. I discovered that time has long been a concern of philosophers. When investigating the nature of time, Hoy (2009) makes the distinction between 'time' and 'temporality'. Hoy broadly regards *time* as mathematical or universal time and something that is objectively measured with hours, minutes and seconds. In contrast, he defines *temporality* as lived time, or the time that people experience in their lives. For example, people can be aware of the passage of time through the passage of the seasons or the beating of their hearts. Adam (1990, 2004) makes a similar distinction using the term *clock time* to describe mathematical time. She draws attention to the social nature of time, highlighting social practices that form around time. Adam argues that for centuries time has been measured through things like the seasons, lunar cycles, life cycles, rituals and celebrations.

Some scholars trouble the benefits of the universal application of clock time. Adam (2004) describes how prior to the development of clock time in the Middle Ages, time was counted differently across cultures and often in ways that were more connected to social practices and nature. She argues that as clock time's use became more widespread it revolutionised human lives. The economic application of clock time has led to the commodification of time and its transformation into something that could be quantified and traded (Adam, 2004; Nuttall & Thomas, 2015). During the industrial era, time also became a disciplinary tool and a means by which an individual's

activities and output could be monitored (Adam, 2004; Foucault, 1977; Rose & Whitty, 2010).

Clock time is also a dominant influence on life within educational institutions (Westman & Alerby, 2012). Therefore, time is also part of the fabric of SAC. Time is the reason SAC exists. The Australian Government currently purposes SAC as an institution that frees parents' time to enable their participation in the workforce. As such, SAC is an institution that re-purposes children's leisure time. In SAC, children's leisure time no longer just provides them with enjoyment, freedom and play; it also contributes to economic productivity.

The influence of time on the work of SAC practitioners is also inescapable. The arrival and departures of children, provision of meals, daily routines and staff rosters are all governed by clock time. Early childhood practitioners speak of time as something that is also experienced through the need to be productive and the pressure to do more (Nuttall & Thomas, 2015). This would also apply to Australian SAC practitioners who participate in the same regulatory regime and a similar professional culture as early childhood practitioners. The number of practitioners in SAC services is determined by child to staff ratios, limited funds and therefore also time. As the afternoon passes in SAC, and more children leave with their parents, so too will practitioners leave in order to reduce labour costs. Being governed by clock time may also affect the ways that practitioners do their work with children. Rose and Whitty (2010) argue that practitioners can experience conflict between their values and desires to do the best for children, and productivity and scheduling pressures. They cite one case study where the removal of clocks from an early childhood service led to practitioners spending more time with children and in consultation with other adults. Their findings have relevance for SAC settings, particularly given the importance the FSAC assigns to respectful and positive relationships between practitioners, children and other professionals (DEEWR, 2011). Whilst the findings are not of sufficient significance to justify removal of clocks from SAC, they do encourage SAC practitioners to reflect on how they conceptualise and use time, and the possible impacts this has for children.

How time is used in SAC might also impact on children in ways beyond their relationships with practitioners. Christensen, James, and Jenks (2001) argue that how



practitioners conceptualise and implement time influences the sort of program they provide for children. They argue that rigid application of clock time can shift the focus in early childhood services from play to curriculum. The authors define curriculum as something bound with notions of productivity and educational outcomes, whereas play has a certain freedom that is removed from temporal concerns. This is of particular relevance to SAC, which is commonly understood as a site of leisure and play.

The literature on time is complex, and only a small amount addresses curriculum in SAC or similar play-based settings. There appears to be some consensus that humans measure and experience time in multiple ways, and that many of these ways are social and natural, rather than just mathematical and objective. The small amount of curriculum literature casts a critical eye over the efficacy of clock time and provides some cause for practitioners and researchers to reflect on whether their use of clock time has the potential to influence relationships within SAC and the leisureliness and playfulness of their programming.

### **Considering whether older children need their own, separate School Age Care**

One possible programming solution I have discussed often with Australian practitioners is whether older children need their own spaces in SAC, or perhaps even their own SAC services separate from younger children. It is a possibility that has also been considered by some researchers. Maheux (1998) argues that being developmentally distinctive, older children require their own SAC services with unique pedagogies. Providing older children with their own space would allow programming of activities suited to their stage of development. Gage (2000) argues similarly, proposing that mixed-age groupings contribute to inequity for older children. Gage proposes that when younger children are present in greater numbers, their requirements are privileged above older children's. Consequently, Gage believes that separate spaces for older children would allow practitioners to program specifically for older children. It is an idea worthy of exploration and already in practice in Sweden, where some schools provide a different model of SAC for children aged 10 to 12 years (Haglund & Anderson, 2009). In the remaining Swedish SAC programs that cater for all primary-age children in one setting, approximately 46% provide a separate room for older children (Boström et al., 2015).

Whether older children need separate spaces is also a lingering question from my masters research. One of the three research sites in that project had a separate program for older children and yielded notably different data. The participants from the third research site spoke more positively about SAC and provided evidence of more equitable outcomes for older children (Hurst, 2013). However, separate spaces are an idea that is not universally accepted. Kennedy and Stonehouse (2004) propose that mixed age groups are a unique and valuable feature of SAC, believing that practitioners should balance the needs of different age groups within mixed age groupings. Despite their differences, all of these authors agree that SAC curriculum should not be universal and should have the capacity for individualisation, whether it be in separate groups or not.

### **Using ‘quality’ rating systems to define School Age Care programming**

So far, this discussion about SAC programming for older children has examined specific elements of programming. I have discussed the possible importance of the activities provided, children’s relationships with practitioners, children’s participation in curriculum decision-making, the management of time, or giving older children their own spaces. As well as looking at specific variables, some researchers use quality rating systems as a means of understanding and quantifying successful SAC practices. Quality rating systems are existing tools that seek to provide objective measurement of social services that enable consumers to make decisions about whether a service can produce the desired outcomes, or provide value for money (Dahlberg et al., 2007). SAC quality tools claim to measure the ‘quality’ of a SAC service by combining measurements of a range of different variables believed to constitute ‘good’ programming.

Canadian researchers, Maheux (1998) and Gage (2000) used the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS), an American quality rating tool to measure the effectiveness of SAC for older children (Harms, Jacobs, & White, 1996). Australian researcher, Simoncini (2010) used data from the Australian Government’s OSHCQA scheme, which operated from 2004 to 2011 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003). Both ratings schemes are similar. They use trained, ‘objective’ assessors to rate SAC services against a range of predetermined criteria such as: programming practices, the types of resources provided, safety procedures, policy documents, and interactions

between practitioners and children. Although the ratings they produce rely mostly on the views of a trained assessor, both schemes also make some allowance for representatives of the SAC to contribute their opinions to the assessment. These schemes also work on a checklist format that attempts to identify for the assessor and SAC practitioner precisely the standards of practice to be demonstrated during the rating process.

There are differences between these schemes. SACERS draws more heavily on developmental theory than OSHCQA. For example, SACERS provides clear guidelines for the types and amounts of resources to be provided for different developmental cohorts. OSHCQA makes no distinction between different developmental categories, and instead universalises all primary-age children as a single group. OSHCQA does however require practitioners to recognise children's individual differences. OSHCQA also seems to make greater use of critical theories of childhood. It requires practitioners to view children as rights holders and does so by stipulating that practitioners collaborate with children to plan the program. SACERS appears more prescriptive, offering more certainty for assessor and practitioner, but also less flexibility to judge practice that falls outside the standards set by the tool. For example, SACERS sometimes stipulates minimum numbers of particular types of equipment, or the frequency with which new skills are to be taught. Alternatively, OSHCQA does not stipulate minimum numbers for equipment, instead stating more broadly that "programs include a variety of experiences" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2003, p. 45). These two schemes, which are externally assessed, differ fundamentally from the FSAC, which makes greater allowance for practitioners to interpret curriculum standards. However, it is uncertain whether these quality assessment tools provide an effective measure of SAC for older children.

Dahlberg et al. (2007) argue that quality systems are the embodiment of a political desire to produce a universal standard against which children's services can be measured. However, in seeking a universal standard, quality measures strip knowledge of pedagogical practice of its context and complexity (Moss, 2014). Therefore, despite good intentions, quality measurements can produce a narrow perspective on early childhood curriculum, ignore structural factors that affect outcomes for children and are not universally regarded as a robust measure of

complex social settings (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Fenech, Sumsion, Robertson, & Goodfellow, 2008; Moss, 2014). SACERS, in particular, largely ignores more contemporary theories of childhood and consequently provides a rating that privileges a narrow view of what is of most benefit to primary-age children.

In the case of both SACERS and OSCHQA, their origins pose questions about their effectiveness and relevance to SAC for older children. Although SACERS makes use of the small amount of SAC research available, it also draws frequently on Western early childhood research. Similarly, OSCHQA was a direct descendant of the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System, a quality regime for Australian early childhood services. It is reasonable to question whether a curriculum assessment tool founded on education research for children aged 0 to 8 years is an adequate measure for children aged 9 to 12 years.

Interestingly, both Gage (2000) and Maheux (1998) found that older children were more likely to leave a SAC service if it had a high SACERS rating. Both studies looked for correlations between data on older children's opinions of SAC obtained via survey and SACERS ratings of the services they attend. However, there are concerns about both studies that need to be considered. As quantitative research projects, Gage and Maheux's projects had relatively small samples of 111 and 54 children respectively, which weaken any claims of significance. Also, both studies used questionnaires that appear to be founded on adult understandings of what older children may want from SAC and do not allow the child participants much opportunity to impose any views that the researchers had not considered. Despite these limitations, their combined results raise some doubt about whether quality rating systems, and SACERS in particular, are effective measures of SAC for older children. In particular, Gage questions whether a rating tool founded on understandings of providing care for pre-school children is an effective measure of care for children aged 9 to 12 years. When their concerns are added to those raised by Dahlberg et al. (2007) and Moss (2014) earlier in this section, it adds additional doubt to the effectiveness of quality ratings tools as a means of determining how to program SAC for older children.

## **Investigating more complex understandings of older children**

Before concluding this chapter, I want to visit one more piece of research, that of my previous masters research, which provides a foundation for this project (Hurst, 2013, 2015). I have already touched on some of the findings, in particular that older children are sometimes frustrated by practices that do not provide them with sufficiently challenging activities, and that the older children who had their own separate spaces were more content with SAC. There are other findings that need to be addressed. One purpose of that research was to test the notion of the difficult older child. I proposed that, rather than a truth, the problematised older child is a social construction that positions older children as ‘near adolescent’ and correspondingly rebellious and difficult. My analysis of the children’s interviews revealed older children to be more complex and diverse than the developmental characterisations circulated discursively by adults. Behaviours associated with rebelliousness, risk-taking and boredom differed across participants and were influenced by contextual factors like the physical setting, presence of peers and programming practices. Rather than governed by their development, the participants showed themselves to be strategic, political and capable of occupying multiple discourses.

The child participants were active constructors of knowledge, drawing on the same developmental discourses as practitioners. Many of the participants constructed themselves as more sophisticated and physically superior to younger children. Adults instead used the same developmental discourses to construct older children as problematic and inferior.

In disrupting the simplified ‘truth’ of the problematic older child, my masters research has implications for SAC programming. It suggests that rather than planning for older children as a single, inherently difficult group with shared characteristics, attention should be paid to complexity. Older children are instead a diverse population who act in response to context. That research raised the possibility that perhaps it is how SAC is programmed that is problematic, instead of, or as well as, older children themselves.

## SUMMARY

This chapter investigated the relatively small body of research available on SAC to get a deeper understanding of what is known about programming for older children. The research reviewed indicates that in Australia and some other locations, older children are less likely to attend SAC. Older children and their parents are more inclined to seek other forms of care. One implication of this is that consideration needs to be given to the possibility that SAC programming does not meet the needs of older children. If SAC were made more attractive to older children, then it is possible that more children may attend. The chapter investigated a range of programming elements that may be important and potentially improve SAC for older children. The available research suggests that older children might want activities and materials suited to their levels of development, the presence of same-age peers, positive relationships with practitioners, greater input into curriculum decisions and possibly, a SAC service of their own, away from younger children.

In addition to these programming elements, I introduced the possibility that time might be important. I did so partly in response to Foucault's call for poststructural researchers to trouble the comfortable. Questioning ideas that are comfortable makes way for ideas that are new and feel less easy. The role of time in programming is little discussed and something that may be useful later in this thesis.

This chapter provides a list of possibilities that might improve SAC for older children. However, I am reluctant to use it as a set of answers to the question of how to program SAC for older children. Drawing on my poststructural ontology, I firstly need to remind myself of the contextual nature of this knowledge. I have demonstrated in this, and previous chapters, that knowledge of how to provide SAC changes over time and location. Much of the research reviewed is from other countries where SAC is conceptualised differently. Little of the research reviewed in this chapter investigates older children. Additionally, most of the research that deals specifically with older children is now over 20 years old. I discussed in Chapter Three that SAC was conceived differently 20 years ago and had different guiding principles. The SAC that older children did not want to attend 20 years ago was likely different to the SAC they do not want to attend now. This raises the possibility that it is not

necessarily SAC programming that older children reject, but also possibly SAC as an institution.

Given the small amount of research into this topic, there are many gaps that this research thesis could have filled. Little of the research reviewed investigates older children's experiences of SAC from a poststructural paradigm. None of it draws on Foucault's theories of power and knowledge or Butler's theory of performativity. Another gap in the existing research is the extent to which it represents children's views. Whilst some papers seek to represent children's views, they are limited in how those views are analysed. Reporting of children's views is often descriptive and limited to lists of things children do or do not want to do at SAC. There is an opportunity for research involving a longer immersion in the field, which would permit deeper analysis of why older children desire the things they want from SAC. There is also an opportunity to understand children's views about how SAC should be conceptualised and what purposes it should serve.

This research described in the remainder of this thesis addresses both of these gaps. I investigate children's views, and observe their actions in a way that provides deeper analysis of how those views are formed, and what works to influence those actions. The poststructural theories of Foucault and Butler, so little used in SAC research are well suited to inform my approach to this task. They address the nature of knowledge and how it is produced. The multiplicity of knowledge implicit in both theories, something that was explored in Chapter Two, provides justification for seeking children's perspectives and engaging in prolonged observation. There are some truths that are less often heard (Foucault, 1980). In SAC and Western cultures more broadly, children's perspectives fall under the banner of those less often heard (Alderson, 2012).

Poststructural theories also account for complexity and connectedness of knowledge. In much of the research already investigated, the category of older child is assumed. The programming strategies they provide are a direct response to the assumption, that older children are separate and inherently different. Poststructural theories therefore address what appears to be another gap in this research, the possibility that category of older child is not natural but a social production. This raises the possibility that both the category of older child and understandings of how to program SAC are the

products of complex power relations, and consequently connected in complex ways. This is something that has not been considered in previous research.

In the following chapter, I move discussion to the physical conduct of the research project and how I addressed the gaps in existing research about older children. I accomplish this by providing a detailed account of the project methodology and how the research was conducted.



## CHAPTER SIX – METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the way the research was conducted. It is divided into two main sections. The first section details the project methodology. It examines the theoretical concepts that underpin this project and how I deployed them to inform the method. The second section describes the method, and deals with the practicalities of how data was collected and analysed. Although this chapter treats these aspects of the project separately, it is important to recognise the vital connection between theory and method. There is a direct line of connection between a researcher's ontological assumptions and the resultant project method (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013). A researcher's ontological assumptions inform their epistemology, which informs their methodology, and therefore the practicalities of their method. St. Pierre (2000) explains this connection by stating that in order to understand or critique a method, you must understand the philosophy underpinning it. Hughes (2010) explains the relationship similarly, suggesting that the research paradigm, or how researchers make sense of the world, is much like a picture frame. In the same way that different picture frames can influence how pictures are seen, research paradigms influence how research topics are viewed. This project method was informed by poststructural theory, a school of thought that questions the objectivity and claims to truth of positivist social sciences like psychology and sociology. Rather than see truth as objective and divorced from the social, poststructural theory sees the production of truth as embedded in social processes (Foucault, 1980). It was therefore important that the methods I employed in this study with children were consistent with the poststructural ideas underpinning them. Rather than search for singular truths about SAC and older children, at arms length from social entanglements, this project used methods that reflect a poststructural view of knowledge. This research instead saw the participants and researcher as socially embedded in the research process and sought to recognise the roles they play in the production of knowledge about older children.

## **POSTSTRUCTURAL THEORIES OF TRUTH, POWER AND IDENTITY**

This was a qualitative research project where methodological decisions were informed by poststructural ideas. There are many poststructuralist thinkers and theories (MacNaughton, 2005). As discussed in Chapter Two, this project and its methodology draw largely upon the theories of poststructural thinkers, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. This section describes how I used some of their theories in this study of older children in SAC. I also explain the methodological implications of positioning the research poststructurally.

One important area in Foucault's work was the nature of power and its relationship to the production of truth. As discussed in Chapter Two, Foucault (1980) proposed the existence of regimes of truth.

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (p. 131)

Foucault saw truth as something that was socially produced. He believed that cultures have social and political structures that facilitate the production and reinforcement of those truths, and determine what each culture considers to be true or false. In Australian SAC, one widely practised truth is that older children are developmentally disposed to being more difficult to work with and ill suited to participation in SAC (Hurst, 2013). I have deployed Foucault's ideas about regimes of truth by using methods that are capable of capturing the social production of truths about older children.

Foucault (1980) identifies large social structures like politics and education that drive the production of truth. He regarded these institutions as part of a disciplinary web that sought to produce compliant citizens or *docile bodies* (Foucault, 1977). The use of the phrase docile bodies might imply that Foucault saw individuals as passive in

relation to power, being merely shaped by it in unidirectional relationship. However, Foucault did not consider individuals powerless in these processes. Particularly in his later writings, he conceptualised individual subjects as actively engaged in the production of knowledge about themselves and others (Danaher et al., 2000).

Like Foucault, Butler (1990, 1993) also ascribes individuals an active role in the production of truth. She proposed that people conduct themselves physically in relation to dominant truths, or discourses. Discursive truths provide subjects with socially accepted ways of understanding themselves with respect to gender, and that they are active in choosing how they conduct themselves in relation to those discourses. Butler (1990) also points out that gender performances are repetitive, and it is the repetition that gives a dominant discourse its power.

Following Butler's argument that gender is constructed performatively, other aspects of identity might also be performed in relation to other dominant discourses. In Chapter Two, I wondered whether children might also construct age or development performatively. In the same way cultures make available particular gender roles for repetition and reinforcement, they might also make available particular ways of conduct according to age.

This research investigated the question of how to provide SAC for older children using these poststructural ideas and children's perspectives. In SAC, the answers to such questions are commonly informed by developmental psychology, a positivist discipline that proposes universal truths about how children grow and develop and hence universalised pedagogies founded on ages and stages (Cannella, 2008). I instead engaged with poststructural ideas to offer a different reading of children's ideas about SAC programming. My methodological choices were made from a poststructural position, that knowledge about older children in SAC is discursive and socially generated, and older children and others are active in its production. My methodology therefore sought to capture the multiple, contextual mechanisms that produce and circulate discourses of older childhood, and the ways that children participate in those discourses to form their ideas about SAC programming. This provides a deeper reading of the desires and engagement with discourse that informs children's views and therefore a reading of SAC programming that goes beyond simple lists of children's activity ideas. In doing so, I aimed to unsettle a 'truth' often

assumed in SAC, that understanding the ‘laws’ of development is the secret to successfully programming SAC for older children.

To capture this social production of truth, I employed qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are better suited to producing rich, descriptive data capable of capturing the complexities of the social settings where truths are forged and contested (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Engaging with the theories of both Foucault and Butler, I employed methods that could capture not just the verbal in the construction of knowledge, but also the physical. This required using a variety of data sources that was capable of recording verbal, written and visual data. One important source of verbal data was the views of the subjects who are situated within the discourse of the difficult older child, in particular older children themselves (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). To capture the physical construction of knowledge, I relied also on ethnographic recording methods. These methods aimed to capture multiplicity, an important concept in poststructural theory, and therefore the variety of ways in which older and younger children, practitioners and researchers participate in the construction of discursive truths.

Researching poststructurally had implications for how I conceptualised the research endeavour and the events it produced. Research itself is a complex social setting that is also part of disciplinary networks and a site of the application of power. As in all social settings, Foucault (1980) assigns everybody a role in the production of truth. My method therefore accounted not just for children’s contributions, but also my own. It accounted for my own subjectivity, my presence in the research, and the role they played in the production of the findings about SAC and older children.

Adopting a poststructural methodology also has consequences for the sort of knowledge this research produced. St Pierre and Pillow (2000) argue that the purpose of poststructural research is not to replace or correct modernist theories:

Poststructuralism, then, does not assume that humanism is an error that must be replaced... It does not offer an alternative, successor regime of truth, it does not claim to have ‘gotten it right,’ nor does it believe that such an emancipatory outcome is even possible or desirable. Rather, it offers critiques and methods for examining the functions and effects of any structure or grid of

regularity that we put into place, including those poststructuralism itself might create. (p. 6)

Following St Pierre and Pillow, with this research I did not seek to reveal a new truth to be put in place of developmental psychology. Nor did I expect to produce knowledge that will ‘fix’ SAC for older children. I instead hoped to provide a contextual account of what older children want from SAC whilst acknowledging their participation in the production of discursive knowledge about themselves. As suggested by St Pierre and Pillow, this research also provides insights into what the effects might be for older children when discourses of older childhood are enacted through SAC programming.

### **SEEING CHILDREN AS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH**

My methodological decisions were also informed by a child rights paradigm, which seeks to involve children more in the conduct of research. In Western cultures, children are often understood through the lens of an adult-child binary (Cannella, 2008). This binary informs theorising about children and leads to children being seen as inferior to adults. Whilst adults are conceptualised as mature and fully developed, children are instead conceptualised as immature, incomplete and less capable. One way this binary has been enacted is through the roles that children have traditionally been assigned in research. Children have long been the subject of scientific curiosity and have historically found themselves the objects of research (Burman, 2008). However, children rarely act as researchers or participants in the research process (Kellett, 2010a). These are instead roles that are reserved for adults. Children are more likely seen as “simply the passive subjects of structural determinations” rather than subjects with a voice (James & Prout, 2015, p. 4). In adopting a child rights paradigm I sought to disrupt children’s traditional roles as the objects of research, instead positioning them as active participants in research (Alderson, 2008a).

One way children can participate actively in research is by supporting them to express their ideas on research questions. Children can offer a different perspective on their lives to that provided by adults, and have the most knowledge about matters that affect them (Clark, 2007). Supporting children to express their views is also supported by the UNCRC (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012). Article 12 of the UNCRC proposes that

children have the right to express their opinion about matters that impact on them and have that opinion taken into account (United Nations, 1989). On the most basic reading, Article 12 provides justification for methodologies that seek children's views about SAC. SAC is an important site of leisure for a large number of Australian children. Children can spend up to 25 hours per week at SAC, establishing it as a matter on which they should have an opinion. However, Lundy and McEvoy (2012) argue that enacting children's participation rights in research goes beyond merely allowing children to express their views. Their analysis of Article 12 proposes that adults also have an obligation to support children to form and express those views. I engaged with scholarship on children's participation rights to devise a method that supported them to form and express their views. The method accounted for individual differences and the varied ways that children feel most comfortable expressing their views (Clark & Moss, 2001).

Kellett (2010b) goes further, suggesting that as well as being able to provide their perspectives, children can also act as researchers. She argues that historically children have been regarded as immature, underdeveloped or incapable of acting as researchers. Kellett proposes that instead of being biologically incapable of conducting research, children are inexperienced, having previously been denied the opportunity. Although participatory research is becoming more commonplace, children are most often used as sources of information. However, they are also capable of working in partnership with adults to have deeper involvement in tasks like research design and analysis (Alderson, 2012; Kellett, 2010a). My planning and execution of this methodology was therefore also informed by a respect for children's capacities to be capable researchers. This included recognising that children are capable of making and sharing methodological decisions and valuing those contributions.

There are important connections and inconsistencies between poststructural theories and participatory research methodologies that support and trouble my use of both in a single project. Poststructural theories trouble the existence of universal truths. This is at odds with the idea of a set of universally agreed rights for children, which seems to operate as a set of truths. However, both paradigms share the same concern with the distribution and application of power and its effects for children. Foucault (1977)

identifies children as a marginalised group subject to the disciplinary gaze of adults. He argues that the disciplinary gaze has allowed adults to exert power and control over the lives and bodies of children. Adult-led research is one way that a disciplinary gaze has been directed at children (Burman, 2008; Cannella, 2008). In research and Australian culture more broadly, adults are more powerful than children (MacNaughton, 2005). Participatory methodologies seek to address this power imbalance. In adopting these two methodologies, I employed a Foucaultian conception of power, that power is not something that can be possessed and handed to another (Foucault, 1980). I instead sought to respond to the power imbalance by engaging in a resistance against a dominant discourse that makes children less powerful and the subjects of research. I also sought to disrupt another dominant discourse that marginalises older children in SAC.

Foucault's conception of power also needs to be considered in the context of a methodology that seeks children's voices. In the same way that Foucault's theories trouble research that claims objectivity, so too would they trouble research that claims to objectively represent children's views. In using this combination of methodologies, I acknowledge that children are also subject to disciplinary surveillance and consequently, their contributions will also be influenced by self-monitoring and management.

Acknowledging the complexities raised, in using these two methodologies in tandem I aimed to resist a discourse and that has multiple effects in research, SAC, and society more broadly. In doing so, I have not sought to unmake and remake SAC. To do so would merely try to impose my own truth over another. At the very least, I hoped to be a minor annoyance, momentarily disrupting accepted ways of thinking about older children in SAC, and research with children.

## **METHOD**

For this project I adopted a qualitative methodology. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explain that qualitative methodologies are best suited for projects like this that seek to provide understandings of complex social settings.

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the

situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. (p. 10)

Denzin and Lincoln's statement supports the use of qualitative methods in poststructural methodologies. Qualitative methods are capable of providing insight into complex social settings, power relationships and the connectedness between participants, setting and researcher.

The method for this study was a combination of participatory methods and ethnography. In the participatory component, each participant produced a project summarising views they formed on the research question. The participants were then interviewed about the content of their projects. Kellett (2010a) describes this as research *with* children, where children act as participants or co-researchers in the research process. Whilst the participants worked on their projects, I also engaged in ethnographic observation to add additional perspectives to the children's data. To support the participants' project work and allow time for observation, I was present at the research site every afternoon for approximately six months. The method also included introductory focus group activities, and collection and recording of artefacts from the research site. Each element played an important role in the research. The focus group activities provided participants with important space to think about the research question. The artefacts added depth to analysis of observations and participants' interviews.

This section provides details on each component of the research project. It examines how the research was conducted, a background of the research site and participants, and matters relating to the credibility of the research.

### **Finding a research site and participants**

The participants for this project were a group of children aged 10 to 12 years from a single SAC service in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. I chose a small sample on the basis that I wanted to produce rich data from a small population rather than shallower data over a large population (Patton, 2002). Being able to research the topic in great depth was necessary in order to address the research questions and support the poststructural methodology adopted in this project.



The primary question of what older children want from SAC could arguably have been answered with a quantitative approach. A large sample could have provided an understanding of the activities that older children like to participate in. However, I hoped for a deeper understanding of the factors informing those choices, and insight into the discourses that children draw upon in engaging with SAC and formulating their understandings. In addition, I sought a deeper understanding of SAC as a social setting and how older children engage with its complexities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The time and resource limitations of this being a PhD research project conducted by a sole researcher also meant that I was unable to capture a larger sample over more sites.

The research site needed to be able to support the project requirements. My interest in performances of identity necessitated a setting that allowed long periods of observation capable of capturing repeated performances. The research also needed a space that offered some degree of privacy for the conduct of interviews and focus group activities. The SAC practitioners in the setting needed to be relaxed about the possibility of disruption to normal activity. Whilst I endeavoured to minimise disruption, it was inevitable that the project and children acting as researchers would affect service operation.

The research site was recruited with the assistance of the Community Child Care Association (CCC). CCC is the peak representative body for SAC services in Victoria, Australia. Their sound reputation and close engagement with SAC lent credibility to the project and made finding a research site easier. CCC provided me with access to one of their regional practitioner network meetings where I introduced the project and invited attendees to express an interest in participating in the project. Attending the meeting allowed me to discuss the project in detail with practitioners to support informed decision-making about whether or not to participate. This was a form of typical case sampling that sought a SAC service that was representative of the greater population (Patton, 2002). Two SAC services expressed interest in the project. One service was rejected on the basis that it is well recognised in Victoria as an example of 'best practice' and would consequently be harder to classify as 'typical'. The eventual site, Banksia Gully SAC, was therefore chosen on the basis that it appeared closer to an 'average' service. It is important to note the subjective nature of

this selection and the difficulties in judging one complex social setting as more ‘typical’ of an ‘average’ SAC service when no such measurements exist. Ultimately, I relied upon the broadly held perception that the other site was ‘exceptional’ and therefore less likely to be ‘average’. At the time, my decision was guided by the belief that a ‘typical’ SAC service would also strengthen any claims to representativeness made in the study. However, given that the sample consisted of only one research site, any claims to representativeness would be negligible.

Once the research site had been chosen, I met the coordinator of Banksia Gully to discuss how we would conduct the research project. Recruitment of the participants did not begin immediately. For the first two months of the project, I was present at Banksia Gully two or three afternoons a week as a volunteer and not a researcher. Volunteering at Banksia Gully is explored in more detail later in this chapter and in Chapter Seven. After volunteering, the SAC coordinator was provided with Plain Language Statements and Consent Forms for children, parents and the service. Children in the target age range were invited to participate via the SAC coordinator, who distributed Plain Language Statements and Consent Forms to the children’s parents. This element of the recruitment was negotiated with the coordinator. The coordinator decided that her familiarity and existing relationships with the children and their families positioned her as the best person to approach them about the project. Ethnographic data collection, focus group activities and children’s projects did not commence until after participants had been recruited.

### **Service profile – Banksia Gully School Age Care**

The research was conducted at Banksia Gully SAC. Banksia Gully was located at a private school, but also drew participants from a neighbouring public school and nearby specialist school for children with disabilities. Banksia Gully provides three different components of SAC: after school care, before school care and vacation care. Background information on Banksia Gully was obtained via a Service Questionnaire at the commencement of the research (Appendix A). The three different components of care cater for an average of 27, 46 and 34 children per day respectively. Although Banksia Gully provides three different components of SAC, I only conducted research during after school care. Only two of the participants attended before school care, and not all attended vacation care.

Older children are a minority at Banksia Gully. 10.6% of children were aged 11 to 12 years, and 22.9% were aged 9 to 10 years. When combined, this means that 33.5% of children at the research site were 'older children'. This figure is consistent with national figures, which indicate that an average of 36.4% of children at SAC are older (ABS, 2015).

### **The participants**

Ten participants were recruited for the project. I had allowed for up to fifteen participants and was therefore able to accept the involvement of all ten. The participants were all in Grades 5 or 6 (aged 10 to 12 years) at the time of the research. In Chapter One, the introduction, I define older children as those aged 9 to 12 years. However at Banksia Gully, older children were practised as those in Grades 5 and 6, so I selected participants consistent with the service's definition of 'older'. All participants are referred to by a pseudonym I allocated to them for the writing of this thesis. In the following section, I briefly introduce the ten participants. A more detailed description of the participants follows in the data analysis chapters.

Apple was in Grade 6 and only attended SAC once a week. Whilst at SAC, she preferred to spend time with Tiger and Sky, both girls in Grade 5 who attended most days. Most of the time these three girls would engage in quiet activities. They enjoyed eating together, drawing, conversation and playing netball (a game similar to basketball).

Cleo was in Grade 6, but contrastingly spent most of her time alone. She was always amongst the first children to go home. It was unusual for Cleo to engage in activities, and she seemed to prefer to wait to go home.

Kevin, Klay and Stephen were a group of three sporty Grade 5 boys. In contrast to the girls I have introduced, they were boisterous and highly visible. They all attended SAC on most days and spent much of their time playing basketball. They were sometimes joined on the basketball court by Michael, a Grade 5 girl and keen basketball player. Whilst Michael was not a friend of the boys, she was skilful enough for them to include her in their basketball games.

The remaining two participants did not have many same-age friends at SAC. Penny was a sporty Grade 6 girl who attended most days. She sometimes played basketball with the three boys, but most commonly spent her time practising cheerleading with a friend from Grade 4. The final participant was Seamus, a Grade 6 boy, who along with Tiger was usually the last child to leave SAC. Seamus spent most of his time with a group of Grade 3 and 4 boys, and engaged with a wide range of activities that included soccer, video games, handball and a version of dodge ball popular at Banksia Gully.

Not all participants commenced the project at the same time. Whilst eight participants commenced the project on the 'official' first day, Apple and Klay entered the project in the second week. Apple was not told about the project by her parents, but decided she wanted to participate after speaking to Tiger and Sky. Klay was initially unsure about participating, but decided to join after speaking to friends Kevin and Stephen. Given that it was early in the project, I welcomed both participants. The additional participants had no impact on the project timelines or the work of the original eight participants, and contributed two more valuable perspectives to the data.

### **What did the project look like?**

This was an ethnographic and participatory research project that entailed a 6-month immersion in the field and culminated in each participant and I engaging in a semi-structured interview. The interviews, projects and ethnographic observations were the primary data sources. This combination of sources was essential in ensuring that the method was consistent with the theoretical positioning of the project by honouring the rights of the participants to form a view on the research question, express that view and provide an account that details some of the complexities of life in SAC for older children. It also allowed for a combination of perspectives, including mine.

This section provides a detailed, sequential description of the method used in this project. I began with a well-documented plan that I thought reflected its theoretical positioning well. However, the method I began with differed significantly from the method that was eventually implemented. I took a flexible approach, allowing the method to change in response to unexpected occurrences and suggestions from the participants. A flexible approach was consistent with the decision to adopt

participatory methods. It respected the rights of the participants to voice their opinions about the method and have those views taken into account. This description of the method is delivered sequentially so that the reader can gain an understanding of the trajectory of the project.

### **Entering the field – Volunteering at Banksia Gully**

Prior to the main business of the participants' project work and interviews, I elected to enter the research site, Banksia Gully SAC as a volunteer. This phase served multiple purposes. One was to become familiar with the setting, staff members and children; in particular the older children who I hoped would become participants in the project. Building familiarity helped me to learn about the social rules of the SAC and begin to develop trustful and respectful relationships with the children and practitioners (Mazzoni & Harcourt, 2013; Patton, 2002).

In addition to developing trust with the participants, entry to the field also includes negotiating with gatekeepers (Patton, 2002). I approached the setting as though there were two types of gatekeepers, the practitioners and also the older children. My relationship with practitioners was important in gaining access to resources and the participants. However, it was most important in assisting me to fit into the setting. Had I not conducted myself in a way that reflected the culture of Banksia Gully, it is possible that I would have been excluded from particular aspects of life in the setting. The older children also acted as gatekeepers. I regarded participants as having the right to choose whom they spent their leisure time with. In this way, they were able to either include or exclude me from their spaces and activities. Their consent to having me in their spaces was as important as the consent of the practitioners.

In addition to building familiarity with practitioners and older children, it was also important to do so with the younger children. Whilst volunteering at Banksia Gully, I spent much of my time playing with and talking to older children. However, at times when older children were not interested in spending time with me, I spent time with younger children. In using poststructural theories, it was important to acknowledge the complexity of the social setting I was investigating. Even though this research focuses on older children, younger children are part of the complex social make up of a SAC service. I therefore made the decision to also involve myself with younger

children so that they too were comfortable with my presence. As the project progressed, even though I was researching only with older children, I realised that engagement with younger children was inevitable and they would also be visible in the data. The participants often spoke about younger children during play and in conversation with me. I also observed important interactions between older and younger children that I suspected would feature in the data analysis.

In building familiarity with the participants whilst volunteering, I hoped that the trust I had built with the children would make it more likely that they would agree to participate in the project (Kellett, 2010a). It appeared to be an effective strategy as most of the older children at Banksia Gully became participants in the research. Many older children exhibited a great deal of excitement when I announced the project and asked questions in a way that seemed unlikely without the level of familiarity we had developed. This was a successful outcome and indicated that the participants found my positioning as researcher believable and felt comfortable enough to participate in the project.

### **Preparing the participants for the project**

After volunteering at Banksia Gully, Plain Language Statements and Consent Forms were distributed to parents and children. Initially, I had recruited eight participants. The first step in the project was to brief the participants on the project. One of the main barriers to children participating in research is their lack of knowledge and experience participating in research (Kellett, 2010a). The briefing was provided the participants with some of that knowledge. This included an explanation of the research question, a rationale for the project, a description of the methodology, the participants' roles in the project, and explaining how the research would be used. I allowed time for the participants to ask as many questions as they wanted.

It took two weeks to arrange for all eight participants to be at SAC at the same time for the briefing. Not all participants were at SAC on the same days, some were only at SAC for short durations, and it was common for parents to cancel their child's registration at short notice. The participants all responded differently to the briefing. Stephen, Penny, Kevin and Seamus were all noisy, visibly excited and occasionally disruptive. In contrast, Tiger, Cleo and Sky were much quieter and attentive. After the

briefing, I spoke individually with each participant to ensure that they understood the content presented as they may have been overwhelmed by the amount of content in the session (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2011). Despite my concerns about the rowdiness of the meeting, all participants I spoke to displayed a sound understanding of the project, and some had begun to think about their projects.

One element I considered for the briefing session was how I wanted to conduct myself during the research and what sort of role I wanted to adopt. When I commenced the project, I intended to position myself as a *different adult* to the practitioners who controlled events at Banksia Gully with the aim of creating a less hierarchical relationship (Folque, 2010). As an adult different to the practitioners, my job was not to monitor behaviour and enforce rules. Instead, I assigned myself the lead responsibility for the research project, a role that is commonly identified as adult. My positioning also allowed me the freedom to engage in, and enjoy play. In Western cultures, play is discursively positioned as a child's activity and not the business of adults, something that I explored more deeply in Chapter Three (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). I regard my positioning as *different adult* as different to that of *least adult* that is sometimes adopted in qualitative research with children. Adopting the role of *least adult* equates with performing 'child' and concealing adulthood to seek the participants' acceptance (Folque, 2010). I did not think it possible to escape my adult status, and if I were to do so, my positioning would seem unrealistic and not entirely accepted by the participants or practitioners (Mayall, 2012). Even performing different adult sometimes left me feeling visible and suspect. This was unsurprising as it can be common for qualitative researchers to experience ambiguity and uncertainty about their role (Mannion, 2007).

### **Forming a view - Exploring the research question**

Another key element of preparing the participants for the research was to get them thinking more about the research question. Lundy and McEvoy (2012) explain that researchers need to do more than merely ask children questions. Children need to be supported to think about questions so that they can formulate their opinions. To assist the participants to think more about the research questions, the next phase of the project was to conduct a one-hour session with two focus group activities. These activities were a way of exploring the question that was fun and enjoyable and not too

work-like (Gibson, 2012). Although data was collected in the form of audio and visual recordings, the primary purpose of these activities was to encourage thinking about the research question.

In the first activity, I divided the participants into two groups of four children. The use of small groups ensured that each participant had a better opportunity to participate in discussion (Hennessy & Heary, 2005; Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, & Britten, 2002). Each group was given a large sheet of paper and coloured markers. One group was randomly assigned the task of designing the ‘world’s best’ SAC for older children, and the other the ‘world’s worst’. Drawing was selected on the basis that it is an activity that is familiar to most children and a means by which they can construct knowledge (Cox, 2005). Drawing also made the activity less stressful for children who were not comfortable with verbal communication (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). Working in groups also allowed the participants to discuss the task, which would have assisted in formulating ideas (Cox, 2005). It also allowed for the sharing of tasks, something that would help to relax any participants who were not confident in their drawing abilities (Buckingham, 2009). The activity was presented to the students in a way that encouraged them to perform the role of SAC designers. In adding an element of performance to the activity I hoped participants would think outside the realities of their normal SAC and begin to imagine other possibilities (Norris, 2000).

The second activity was a ranking exercise. The participants worked as one group and were asked to brainstorm and write on cards the most important things that older children want at SAC. They then worked together to classify all of the different elements as *most important*, *less important* and *least important*, with an equal number of elements in each group (Hill, Laybourn, & Borland, 1996). This activity was designed to build on the drawing activity by getting the group to prioritise their ideas about what was most important, something that was not required in the drawing activity. Both activities were conducted at a table that participants could use for support and to make them less self-conscious. Participants selected their own seating so that they felt comfortable (Hennessy & Heary, 2005).

This activity differed from the drawing exercise in that I was more involved with the group. I facilitated the brainstorming and ranking processes to provide all participants



with input into the outcome. Where there was disagreement about the ranking of a particular activity, participants voted for their choice and the decision was awarded to majority position. Majority driven processes like this can be problematic as they can marginalise minority voices (van Dyk, 2006). However, this activity's purpose was to support participants in thinking about the research question and not contribute greatly to the data. As such, the representation of all views in this activity was less critical.

These introductory activities served the purpose for which they were designed. In their interviews, a number of participants suggested they found the focus group activities helpful. These participants expressed that it was a way for them to commence thinking about the research question, something many of them said they had not thought about previously.

### **Forming a view – Doing project work**

After the introductory activities, the participants then engaged in their primary role in this research, an exploratory project followed by an interview. The individual projects were designed to further the work commenced in the focus group activities. They provided a space and means for participants to think about the research question and formulate their ideas (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012). The use of projects was drawn from the Mosaic Approach, which uses the idea that there are many ways in which children form and communicate their ideas (Clark & Moss, 2001). Each participant was asked to produce a project that communicated what she or he thought SAC should be like for older children. They were informed that we would speak about the contents of the project in an interview.

Each participant chose their own medium for their project. This enabled each participant to choose a method with which they felt comfortable and capable, and would make the project more enjoyable and less work-like. I tried not to offer participants predetermined options for their project method, as I did not want them to feel limited to my own preferences. I adopted the role of facilitator for this phase of the research. My tasks were to provide the resources participants required and respond to any ideas or challenges they were concerned about (Kellett, 2011). Allowing participants to select their own medium recognised that children are expert in their own worlds, and in this instance, how they feel most comfortable working (Clark &

Moss, 2001). There were financial and practical limitations to the resources made available to the participants, in particular access to the Internet, which was not readily available. In the instances where participants made requests that I could not fulfil, I worked with them to arrive at a solution that was acceptable to both of us. These instances were rare, as participants mostly had modest requirements.

The development of each participant's project followed a different trajectory. Some participants, like Kevin and Penny had well-developed ideas about their project before the focus group activities were completed. Cleo needed support to arrive at a method. Others like Seamus, Michael and Tiger trialled a variety of methods before finally settling on one they were happy with. It is unsurprising that many of the participants found it difficult to settle on a method. All were unfamiliar with being an investigator on a research project. Whilst the participants would have performed project work as part of their school education, they had not done so in a research context.

One development I surprisingly had not anticipated was that participants would want to work in pairs or groups. Kevin and Klay first approached me with the idea of collaborating on their projects. They were both taking photographs for inclusion in PowerPoint presentations. I had noted that they were both taking photographs of the same things and worked closely together when doing so. When the idea was first suggested, my primary concern was that the participants would be forming a shared view, rather than their own view. I decided that it was fine for Kevin and Klay to collaborate. After all, they were already working together, even though they were completing separate projects. They were already engaged in discussion about what photographs to include in their presentations and hence the exchange of ideas. In making this decision, I again returned to the theoretical positioning of this research, that childhood is a socially constructed category, and that rather than immature and primitive, children are capable (MacNaughton, 2005). I wondered if I would have the same fears about children developing shared views if the participants were adults. Just because two children have worked together on a project, it does not necessarily follow that they will develop identical views. Children, like adults, should be capable of sharing the same experiences whilst still developing different ideas. The data for this project allayed any fears of a method producing shared views. Those participants who

collaborated with others, sometimes interpreted their work differently, and occasionally voiced quite different views from their co-researchers. After news spread about Kevin and Klay's collaboration, another group of friends, Tiger, Sky and Apple also chose to work together. The details of the participants' projects are summarised in Table 6.1.

<b>Participant Names</b>	<b>Project Type</b>	<b>Materials Used</b>
Kevin Klay	PowerPoint presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital camera</li> <li>• Laptop computer</li> </ul>
Stephen	PowerPoint presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital camera</li> <li>• Laptop computer</li> </ul>
Michael	Photo album and written statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital camera</li> <li>• Photograph album</li> <li>• Paper</li> <li>• Pencils</li> </ul>
Cleo	Photo album	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital camera</li> <li>• Photograph album</li> </ul>
Penny	Drawing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper</li> <li>• Pencils</li> <li>• Markers</li> </ul>
Tiger Sky Apple	Collage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital camera</li> <li>• Photographs</li> <li>• Paper</li> <li>• Pencils</li> <li>• Origami paper</li> <li>• Glue</li> </ul>

Participant Names	Project Type	Materials Used
Seamus	Diorama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shoe box</li> <li>• Markers</li> </ul>

Table 6.1: Summary of participant projects

The projects differed in more than just the methods used. Each took different lengths of time to complete and presented its own unique complexities. Prior to commencing, I expected that the complexities of SAC would require a flexible approach to time lines. I anticipated that all participants would work at different paces, have different attendance patterns or might experience interruptions. I also wanted to minimise the impact of the research on the participants' lives. I wanted to respect the participants' schedules and did not want to compel them to work on projects on days when they were more interested in play (Ely, 1991). I expected for instance that participants would be more inclined to work on their projects when the weather was poor or their friends were absent. I again wanted to honour the child rights framework for the project and the belief that the participants are capable of making informed decisions about when to work on their projects.

Despite my commitment to having flexible time lines, I frequently found myself unsettled by the slow pace at which some participants worked. My response to these situations was informed by my positioning as different adult. If participants had not worked on their project for a while, I tried not to intervene. If I did speak to a participant, it took the form of a gentle reminder. I was always cautious not to appear as though I was compelling the participants to work. The participants communicated that I handled these situations respectfully. A more detailed exploration of how I managed the social complexities of managing the participants' projects is provided in Chapter Seven.

### **A methodological shift - Coming to ethnography**

The project phase of the research lasted approximately four months. When I commenced this project, I conceptualised it as mostly participatory, culminating in interviews. I expected that during the participants' projects I would spend most of my

time supporting their work. When they did not need me, I expected that my job would entail documenting their progress, and socialising with them to maintain positive relationships. I had not contemplated conducting ethnography. If I am to be honest, my limited understanding of ethnography meant that I saw it as counter to my participatory methodology. My understandings were coloured by ethnography's early history and associations with colonialism, which positioned research subjects as curiosities and Other (Edwards, 2010; Erickson, 2011; Villenas, 2000). Seeing older children as Other was something I hoped to disrupt.

Early in the research, I realised that I was not playing an active role in many projects. If they were working on projects, the participants mostly did so independently, and only occasionally approached me with questions or requests for resources. There were plenty of days where no project work was done at all. I used this time to record observations of the participants' project work and continued to be available to all of the children, and not just the participants, as a play companion. These reflections on the project work provided valuable insights into my emotional involvement in the research and how it contributed to changes in the method (Ortlipp, 2008).

Although I had not fully acknowledged it, I had begun to work as an ethnographer. It occurred to me that as well as making observations related to project work, I was also making observations about life in Banksia Gully. I was drawn to incidents, patterns and practices that I thought related to the research question. I was particularly excited by observations that bore a strong connection to the poststructural ideas underpinning this research, in particular children's performativity and the application of power. At this time, I would speak excitedly to my supervisors about observations I had made, although I still was not recording them in a journal, unlike my observations about project work. Gradually, as I spent more time in the field, I came to accept that ethnography was not just part of my method, but it was central to my method. The time I spent in the field and the data that flowed from it informed the interview questions that I asked the participants and added important depth to my understandings of their projects, their experiences of SAC, and responses to interview questions. I gradually repositioned my researcher self from participatory researcher, to participatory researcher and reluctant ethnographer, and finally participatory researcher and enthusiastic ethnographer.

Throughout my coming to ethnography, I began to engage more deeply with ethnographic literature so that I could better understand the discipline and my own practices. I discovered that ethnography had moved beyond its colonial history and was considered a methodology suited to understanding the experiences of subjects who are often silenced, and disrupting discursive truths (Britzman, 2002; Madison, 2005). I realised that I could combine ethnography with participatory research and still represent the participants and their views fairly (Madison, 2005). I also encountered researchers who believed ethnography was suited to poststructural research in that it was capable of capturing multiple perspectives of the complexity and contradictions of educational settings like SAC, and the performances of identity that occurred within it (Britzman, 2002). I was then more knowledgeably able to identify that what I was doing was ethnography. Each afternoon, if the participants permitted, I entered their SAC worlds. I would play alongside them, experience the same activities, participate in conversations and operate under the gaze of the practitioners. Being able to play allowed me to experience closeness to children's leisure, the main business of SAC. It also allowed me to observe and experience the performances of identity that Rojek (1995) argues complicate leisure and play. Ethnography allowed me to immerse myself in events at Banksia Gully and learn about what SAC is like, particularly for older children (Patton, 2002). Although participating alongside the participants gave me a closer view of older children's lives in Banksia Gully, my understanding was still from an outsider's perspective. As an adult, it is difficult to understand completely the experience from the perspective of a child (Patton, 2002).

Banksia Gully was organised in a way that facilitated observation. Even when I was not involved directly with the participants, I was able to conduct broad observations of their activities. These more distant observations allowed me to witness events that sometimes differed from the ones they involved me in. Being distant also meant that I could avoid imposing myself on the participants' activities (Patton, 2002). In addition, they occasionally allowed me to experience the conduct of older children from a younger child's perspective.

I increasingly came to see the value of my observations as a data source. If I relied only on the participants' interviews, I would have only had a singular perspective on

the research setting. The observations introduced additional perspectives to my account (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). The observations focused on critical events that occurred at Banksia Gully that related to the research topic. Sometimes these were isolated events that seemed indicative of a particular failure or success in programming for older children. Such events often felt like a rupture in the normally smooth operation of Banksia Gully (Mannion, 2007). Fujii (2015) describes this as *accidental ethnography* where the researcher captures unanticipated events that seem to capture the essence of the setting being researched. Accidental ethnography is a term that best describes my earliest observations when I was still coming to terms with my role as ethnographer. As I embraced the role, I became more systematic in my collection of observational data. I began to observe particular events that seemed notable and might not have appeared in the participant's project (Patton, 2002). For example, none of the participants distinguished between early and late afternoon in their projects. Yet my observations suggested those participants who were there late experienced SAC differently. Observation also alerted me to 'secret' activities engaged in by some participants. As well as looking for significant events, I also looked for events and behaviours that were repeated (Mannion, 2007). These observations, even though they might appear ordinary gained significance through their repetition and were often indicative of the culture at the research site. Repeated observations were also important theoretically given the centrality of repetition in Butler's (1990) theories of performativity.

As I embraced ethnography, my recording became more rigorous. I began to record all observations, including those that until that point had only been committed to memory. My eventual method saw all observations recorded in a journal. Brief notes were taken as soon as possible after the event occurred to ensure that they were recorded accurately. If necessary, these notes were added to as soon as possible after leaving the research site (Mannion, 2007). For some observations, more detailed narratives and reflections were recorded in a secure, electronic document.

Even after accepting my role as ethnographer, I was concerned that these particular observations might be seen as covert and conducted without the knowledge of the participants (Patton, 2002). However, I conducted them openly and with the full knowledge of the participants. A number of participants expressed interest in the blue

notebook I wrote my observations in. I was honest about the book's purpose. Although none ever accepted the offer, I had told them they were able to read any of the observations I had recorded specifically about them. The decision to give them access to observational data was done to build trust and reinforce their status as co-researchers rather than subjects.

As my research became increasingly ethnographic, I extended the range of data to include documents and artefacts (Patton, 2002). I collected photographs of objects in the setting that had connections with key observations or the participants' interviews and projects. I also collected documents that related to SAC programming, the focus of the research question. This included copies of program plans and photographs of children's art works and displays. Some of these documents introduced perspectives on the SAC program that might be different from those of the participants or myself (Patton, 2002). They also provided an insight into how SAC is planned at Banksia Gully.

Although it took some time to recognise my research as ethnographic, its central importance to this research needs to be recognised. Ethnography deepened my understanding of the research setting. It meant that when it came to interviewing the participants, I had a richer understanding of Banksia Gully. I used this knowledge to individually target interview questions and support a deeper, more critical interrogation of the participants' accounts. Without this additional perspective, the project data would have been less rich and provided a less complete understanding of the research site and the participants' views.

### **Expressing a view – Interviewing the participants**

Once they had completed their project, each participant engaged in a semi-structured interview (Appendix B). Each interview lasted no more than 45 minutes to allow for the possibility that participants may experience fatigue (Patton, 2002). These interviews were conducted as soon as possible after the completion of their projects, so that each participant had a clear recollection of their project. Even though some participants collaborated on their projects, their interviews were conducted individually. The decision to interview participants individually was made on the basis that participants could collaborate on a project, and emerge with different views.



I used semi-structured interviews on the basis that my questioning would be guided by the participant's project and my observations, but also allow me flexibility to follow any unexpected topics that emerged during the discussion (Galletta, 2013; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Prior to every interview, I reviewed the participant's project and any relevant observational data. This ensured my questioning reflected as closely as possible the project content and my own ethnographic observations. The purpose of the questioning was to give meaning to the participants' projects. It aimed to understand what motivated each element of their project and its relation to what the participants understood SAC for older children should be like (Clark, 2011; Dockett et al., 2011; Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011).

Interviews were conducted in the best available space at Banksia Gully, the Grade 5/6 room, a space that was reserved for older children. Interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder, which allowed for an accurate record and made it easier to respond respectfully to the participants' cues (Patton, 2002). Interview spaces should ideally be quiet and free of interruptions (Patton, 2002). From this perspective, the Grade 5/6 room was an acceptable interview space. The room was a smaller, separate space adjacent to the main activity area. It was familiar to both the participants and me, which helped to make participants feel more comfortable and relaxed. However, the room did not have a door and therefore did not offer complete privacy. There were occasional appearances by other children, practitioners and parents that sometimes interrupted the delivery of a question or a participants' answer. For each interview, I rearranged the furniture to provide greater privacy, moving two chairs and a table to the rear of the room and out of immediate sight from the open doorway. In doing so, I likely undid some of benefits of using the familiar space. The room felt more formal, and a few of the participants commented on the room being different. It is unclear whether the more formal feel of the room impacted on the participants' data. However, it is likely that leaving the furniture in its normal position would have affected the participants more as it would have required interviews to be conducted in full view of other children and practitioners.

I endeavoured to make the interviews feel welcoming and comfortable. The room was large and allowed for the free movement of participants who felt fidgety and might have found a smaller space restrictive (Gibson, 2012; Irwin & Johnson, 2005). Three

of the participants were very mobile throughout their interviews and may have found a smaller space uncomfortable. Being able to move did not appear to constitute a distraction for those participants. I also provided participants with fiddle toys like balls and pens to mitigate some of the stress they might have experienced (Gibson, 2012). Some of the participants said this was a strategy they used in their classrooms and felt familiar. In addition, I sought to demystify the recording equipment. Before and after the interview, I allowed participants who were interested to handle and use the voice recorder (Gibson, 2012). Most were happy just to pick up the recorder and touch it, although a few wanted to record their voices and listen to the recording. At the conclusion of each interview, I recorded a reflection in my journal, recording any occurrences or observations that seemed important (Galletta, 2013). This helped to acknowledge the social nature of interviewing and, in particular, any emotional impacts experienced by participant or researcher.

Not all interviews progressed smoothly. I experienced significant complications with two of the participants, one of who did not complete their interview. These experiences are explored in greater depth in Chapter Seven.

The interviews produced critical data for the analysis but were limited in what they could provide. Interviews only provided a partial picture of how older children experienced SAC, and what they thought programming should be. Children can also speak differently about research questions outside formal interview settings. Their answers can also be influenced by power relationships and concerns about confidentiality (Folque, 2010). Interviews also only capture verbal information and not physical performances of identity. These limitations were partly addressed by the other data sources important to this research, in particular the participants' projects and ethnographic observations.

### **Returning to the participants. Conducting member checks... or not**

The participants' involvement in the research ended after the interviews. I did not intend this to be the case. I had planned to conduct member checks during the data analysis. I wanted to reinforce the children's positioning as active participants in the research and provide them with an update on the progress of the research and input into the data analysis. I hoped member checks would be an opportunity for

participants to confirm or contest the views expressed during the interviews. They would also be an opportunity for the participants to contribute additional opinions, withdraw their consent for particular statements or clarify responses (Cho & Trent, 2006). The checks would also afford participants some control not just over which of their data was used, but also how they were represented in the research.

The member checks did not proceed. None of the children accepted the invitation to participate in this part of the research. The participants' reasons for not participating were not asked for, but are likely multiple and something that is explored in Chapter Twelve. I respected their decisions not to participate. Participants were reminded frequently that they could withdraw from the project at any time. To try and compel participants to attend a member check would run counter to the ethics of the project and my commitment to the participants' rights to say 'no'. Conducting member checks would have added to the credibility of the research. However, in their absence, I feel compelled to think more carefully about how I have analysed the participants' data, and whether they would agree with my representation of their contributions.

### **Matters to do with ethics**

This project was conducted in a way that sought to minimise risk to the participants and other stakeholders, and protect their welfare and rights. It met the requirements of the Australian *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (National Health and Medical Research Council, 1999). Ethics approval was gained from both the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee and the Victorian Government Department of Education and Training. An ethical framework summarising the principles described in this section was established prior to commencement of the research (Appendix C).

Informed consent for the children to participate was obtained from the participants, and their parents or guardians. Consent for the research to be conducted at Banksia Gully was also obtained from the Coordinator of the service and the Victorian Government. Children, their parents and the Coordinator were all provided with separate Consent Forms and Plain Language Statements (Appendices D-H). It was important that participants understood what participation in the project entailed and any possible risks (Coady, 2010). The content of Consent Forms and Plain Language

Statements were delivered to the participants verbally so that they could better understand their role in the project and ask questions. In approaching children's consent, I tried to be aware of power relationships between adults and children, and that children may feel compelled to participate, or reluctant to ask questions. Participants had the right to withdraw from the project at any time, even after giving consent. Throughout the project, and particularly at important times like the beginning of interviews, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw. I recognised that once involved, participants would understand the project better, and may change their mind about participating. Seeking ongoing consent also meant watching for indications that participants may be experiencing distress or discomfort as a consequence of their participation.

Attention was also paid to confidentiality. It was communicated clearly to participants how their contributions would be used both during and after the research (Giordano, O'Reilly, Taylor, & Dogra, 2007). To assist in protecting his or her identity, a pseudonym was used for each participant. Knowledge of which participant was associated with a given pseudonym was only available to the researcher. The use of pseudonyms did not offer complete protection from identification. It is likely, given the small sample size and the detailed analysis conducted in this research, that practitioners from Banksia Gully could identify participants. With this in mind, practitioners were reminded of this possibility throughout the research, particularly during their interviews. Participants who made sensitive statements during their interviews were offered the opportunity to revoke permission to use those statements.

Throughout the project I endeavoured to be sensitive to the time commitments this project imposed on the participants, in particular its effect on children's play and leisure. My long immersion in the research setting meant that the participants had approximately four months to complete their project and were able to exercise control over what days and times they worked. For example, Apple, Sky and Tiger only worked on their project when they were all at SAC together. Conversely, Klay and Kevin preferred to play when they were both present, and instead worked when the other was absent. Stephen usually worked late in the day when his friends had left, whilst Seamus worked at home. Responding to the participants' leisure requirements, illnesses or changing schedules often required last-minute changes. I also

endeavoured to be flexible and responsive to children's individual rhythms. For example, for reasons that I still do not fully understand, no participants were ever interested in researching on Fridays.

In addition, I sought to minimise the impact of the project on other children and the staff at Banksia Gully. Where possible, the scheduling of project activities took into account normal routines and practices at the service. Interviews and other activities were scheduled outside meal times and used spaces that were not required for program activities. The timing of project activities was sensitive to children and parents' schedules. In addition, research activities sometimes had to be suspended to account for inclement weather or special theme days that were important parts of the SAC or school calendar.

It was also important that the research was conducted in a way that recognised the decision to position the participants as co-researchers. As lead researcher, I still retained ultimate control over any methodological decisions made. However, I conducted the research as a partnership, responding to children's ideas and concerns in a manner consistent with contemporary understandings of children as competent actors with a right to be consulted about matters that affect them (United Nations, 1989). This involved going beyond merely listening to the participants, but also providing them with input into decisions about methodological matters that affected them (Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001).

The attention to research ethics described above, whilst earnest, could never completely protect participants from possible harm. There are realities about the setting in which the research was conducted and unequal distributions of power between child and adult that can never be entirely mitigated (Coady, 2010). However, the respectful, flexible and responsive approach taken to confidentiality, informed consent and children's rights meant that children's wellbeing was protected as best as possible.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

In undertaking this research project, the participants and I produced a significant amount of data. Ethnographic data and transcripts of the participants' interviews were subject to detailed analysis. Recordings of the participants' interviews were all

transcribed personally. Although time consuming, it facilitated immersion in the data (Patton, 2002). Building closeness with the interview data had significant benefits. Whilst transcribing the recordings I was often able to recall non-verbal data from the interview, in particular the participants' movements whilst they were speaking. This was only made possible by listening to the recordings myself (Green et al., 2007). It allowed me to use my insider knowledge of the setting and SAC to decipher statements that were unclear. There were many statements that were unlikely to have made sense to another transcriber. Other data in the form of photographs of the research site, video recordings of focus group activities and artefacts from the participants' research projects was used to either reinforce or trouble the major themes that emerged in the interviews.

In the first phase of the analysis, I conducted a thematic analysis of the ethnographic and interview data. The interview data was analysed first. This thematic analysis involved a number of stages similar to those identified by Green et al. (2007). The first stage involved identifying every statement relating to the research question and coding those statements. In the second stage, any significantly similar coded statements were then grouped together into categories. In the final stage of theming, I revisited the data relating to the most significant categories and conducted a deeper reading to identify the underlying themes and different ways in which the participants spoke about each of these statements. For example, whilst all participants spoke about the importance of friendships, not all of them spoke about friendships in the same way, and some of them spoke about friendships in multiple ways. Many spoke of the importance of friends in SAC, whereas some spoke the qualities of a good SAC friend, and others used the presence or absence of friends as a way to measure time. After the coding the interview data, I undertook a similar process with the ethnographic data, conducting a thematic analysis where statements and actions were coded

When coding the data, I took an emergent approach to identifying the major themes that I hoped would best reflect the concerns of the participants. However, the coding was also informed by ideas that I had begun to develop during the research. Analysis is not linear and my analysis began from the moment I entered the research setting (Green et al., 2007). Prior to the interviews, I had conducted observations, taken notes

and reviewed the participants' projects. Consequently, I had already begun to theorise about topics that the participants would discuss in their interviews. The themes to emerge from the analysis were therefore driven mostly by observations and the participants' interviews, but also my emerging theorising about Banksia Gully.

Once the major themes had been identified, the research data was subject to a poststructural analysis. Following Foucault's theories of power and knowledge, the analysis examined all of the data to explore patterns and inconsistencies in the ways in which power operated in the research site to constitute the older child in SAC as a distinct category of child. Guided by Butler's theory of performativity, the analysis also sought to identify evidence of the ways in which the participants were able to access performances of the older child, and the different ways in which they were active in both replicating and redefining those performances. The analysis sought to make visible the ways that knowledge is created about older children in SAC and how that knowledge acts to position older children as separate and distinct from other children.

Although this analysis was informed by poststructural theories of power and knowledge, I do not regard these theories as separate from the project's central concern of SAC programming for older children. How adults conceptualise and theorise about children has material effects on the lives that they create for them (Cannella, 2008; Mayall, 1996). Consequently, the notion that older children represent a distinct category of child, and that adults and children play an active role in reproducing that category has direct implications for adults developing SAC curriculum.

## **CREDIBILITY**

When I commenced writing this thesis, I was unsure about how I was going to approach writing a section on rigor and trustworthiness. In adopting a poststructural methodology, the use of terms like *rigor*, *validity* and *trustworthiness* become problematic. St. Pierre (1997) argues that such terms carry with them the baggage of their positivist history. When used in their positivist contexts, such terms are used to determine whether or not the research is able to participate in the production of fundamental truths (Kvale, 1995). In contrast, poststructuralism concerns itself with

troubling the existence of fundamental truths and laying bare the ways in which the pursuit of scientific truths can adversely affect the lives of marginalised groups (MacNaughton, 2005; St. Pierre, 1997). Similarly, positivist measures of credible research are also bound up with the need for researchers to demonstrate their objectivity. However, poststructural theories see research similarly to any other social setting, and infused with power, making it impossible for any researcher to claim objectivity, particularly using my methodology, which brought me into regular, close contact with participants (Kvale, 1995). Patton (2002) uses the term *credibility* to describe qualitative research that has merit, and suggests that particularly the newer methodologies, including the poststructural, will have their own measures of credibility. Therefore, in this section I draw upon the work of poststructural researchers to establish any claims I think I may have to producing credible research.

One of the fundamental tasks that qualitative researchers seek to accomplish is to capture complexity (Tracy, 2010). The small sample size supported the aims of the research in that it enabled me to produce thick data that represented the variations and complexities of participants' experiences and understandings of SAC. By spending approximately six months in the field, I arrived at a more nuanced understanding of the research setting and the multiple ways in which the participants engaged with it (Tracy, 2010). There were many instances where interview questions or analysis of interview data were informed by observational data collected in the field.

Credibility was lent to the research by being reflexive and acknowledging my presence in the research setting (Preissle & deMarrais, 2015). In operating from the position that the researcher is part of the social complexity of a research setting, credibility was lent to this research by recording, acknowledging and analysing my influence. I have consciously positioned myself in the written account of this research, and included in the analysis how my presence may have influenced the type of data collected and its analysis. This includes any experiences, biases or pre-existing ideas that I brought to the project (Harrison & MacGibbon, 2001; Preissle & deMarrais, 2015). Conversely, just as the researcher can influence the research process, so too can the research process affect the researcher (Preissle & deMarrais, 2015). These instances were recorded in a reflective research journal, which provided



transparency in how the method and my conduct changed throughout the course of the project (Ortlipp, 2008; St. Pierre, 1997).

The flexibility built into the method also contributed to credibility. In allowing participants to choose their own project, I was able to work positively with each participant's strengths and preferences. This supported participants to communicate their views more effectively using a method that suited their abilities (Clark & Moss, 2001). Another way the projects contributed to credibility was that they gave the participants time to think about the research question and form their views. It is a position supported by a number of participants, some of whom said that they had not really thought previously about what a SAC program should be like. Lundy and McEvoy (2012) argue similarly, that children should be provided with ample time and support to form their views about new questions. The use of projects and focus group work meant that the participants' opinions were more likely to be well formed and considered, contributing to more reliable data.

During interviews, there were a number of measures I took to ensure that participants' responses best represented their own opinions and were less influenced by the views of others. Interviews were conducted individually and used open-ended questioning that limited the possibility that my own biases might intrude on the questions asked (Kellett, 2010a). When required, further clarification was sought for answers that were unclear or required further exploration (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Despite the above steps, it needs to be acknowledged that participants' views expressed during interviews were likely influenced in multiple ways. During the project, the participants had access to the views of others through having spent multiple years attending a SAC that reflected the views of the practitioners. They would also have had access to the views of peers, practitioners, parents and myself both within and outside the research project. Rather than see this as a limitation of the study, allowing for the influence of others is consistent with theoretical positioning of the paper, that knowledge is socially constructed and negotiated (Foucault, 1980).

Rigor during data analysis also lent credibility to the research. All interviews were transcribed consistently and systematically, including pauses and intonations to deepen understandings of the participants' responses (Dowling & Brown, 2010). The coding and analysis was detailed and systematic allowing it to represent the richness

of the data (Patton, 2002). For transparency, the raw data and working analysis documents will be archived and available for audit.

Whilst I have highlighted the strengths of this research, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. I have sought to make these limitations visible throughout the thesis, so that readers can consider these in relation to any knowledge claims made. The small sample size in particular restricts claims to generalisability and transferability (Kvale, 1995; Patton, 2002). Consequently, all knowledge claims made in this research are reasonable and realistic.

## **SUMMARY**

This research project used a combination of children's project work, interviews, ethnographic observation and focus group activities. It drew on a child rights framework that positioned children as active participants in the research process. It was also informed by poststructural theories of power and knowledge that see truths about older children and SAC as multiple and socially constructed.

Adopting this method aimed to produce rich data that supported deep analysis of children's views and experiences of SAC. Focus group activities were conducted to introduce the research question to the group and give the group space to begin thinking about the research question. Individual and group projects provided a means for the participants to think more deeply about the research question, and form and express their views. The projects and focus group activities gave participants time and a way of thinking about a question that many had not considered until engaging in the research. Ethnographic observations were conducted to provide valuable detail to support analysis of interview data, in particular children's performances of identity. Observations also informed the development of individualised interview questions that informed deeper exploration of the content of their projects and observational data.

This method was not without challenges. Conducting participatory research with children in a care and leisure setting required flexibility and a preparedness to respond to the unexpected. I sought to respect the participants' rights to prioritise leisure over research, which along with shifting attendance patterns, illnesses and the unique characteristics of life in SAC required patience. These factors often conspired against

participants working on the research, making the method slow and sometimes complicated. This method also positioned children as experts in SAC. In doing so, I sought to unsettle the traditional dualism of researcher and research subject. There were many times where I felt personally unsettled by this shift in power. The messiness and unsettling effects of this methodology will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN – METHODOLOGICAL COMPLICATIONS AND MESSINESS**

In Chapter Six, I provided a sequential account of the project method. I described and justified each component of the method by drawing on methodological literature. In writing this thesis, it is tempting to leave the account of my methodology there, at the end of Chapter Six. To do so would give the reader the impression of a relatively sequential methodology where each phase of the project was clearly bounded and distinct, with its own separate rationale and objectives. However, the linearity of the project is an illusion. The method was instead complicated and messy. My poststructural positioning compels me to provide an account of the complexity of the project. There were times when each component would blur with another, or more than one other. There were also occasions where my identity as researcher and adult was disrupted, and I felt less ‘adult’ and less in control. As an adult and teacher, I was used to having authority and being in control of children. Instead, my methodology resulted in a shift in power and control. Such occasions proved personally unsettling and sometimes shook my faith in my methodological positioning. This chapter explores some of the moments during the research where I had to navigate discomfiting or uncertain territory as a poststructural, participatory researcher with children. I investigate how these moments affected me personally, and also their implications for the research.

### **ONE THING BLEEDS INTO ANOTHER. THE IMPOSSIBILITIES OF BOUNDING ROLES AND PHASES.**

**“Are you from the government?”**

One important component of the method was the time I spent volunteering at Banksia Gully prior to recruiting participants and commencing the actual research. I was a volunteer at Banksia Gully for approximately two months. At this stage of the project, I was presented to the children as a volunteer worker and not a researcher. I had some concerns that not presenting myself as a researcher misrepresented my reasons for being at the service. However, volunteer was a description that best captured my involvement with the children at that time. I was not recruiting participants and was not involved in data collection. I hoped that formally shifting my identity to

researcher later would help to clearly bound the project for the participants as something that began the day they were briefed on the project and ended on the day they did their interview. However, I was mistaken in thinking that I could assign myself a singular identity, or jump from identity to identity. Instead, my identity was never entirely one thing or another. I had multiple identities that continually shifted and changed. Even at this early stage in the project, where I defined myself as a volunteer, I was never ‘just’ a volunteer.

Whilst volunteering, I positioned myself as an adult play companion. As a volunteer, I did not have to be responsible for safety or the enforcing of rules. Being a play companion gave me a rationale for being at Banksia Gully and the opportunity to build positive relationships with the children. It was a role more closely aligned to my positioning as different adult later in the research. I thought I had performed the role of adult play companion well. I kept myself engaged in play whenever children were interested. However, it was a role that may not have been authentic.

Toward the end of the volunteer period, two children who would become participants in the project, Klay and Kevin approached me and asked, “Bruce are you from the government?” When I asked about the reason for their question, they told me that they did not understand why I was at their SAC. I decided it was most honest to tell these two participants about the impending project and my role. This exchange suggests that my adopted role, volunteer, was not one that was recognisable to the children. I was the only volunteer working at the SAC. My presence would have been more understandable had I been a practitioner, school principal, parent, or from the government. These would have been more identifiable roles for an adult. Research participants judge a person’s entitlement to a particular role by the ways they behave rather than the title they carry (Patton, 2002). It is possible that there was an aspect of the way I performed that the children found inconsistent with being a volunteer. Perhaps my training and experiences as a practitioner and teacher were visible in the way I conducted myself and betrayed me as something other than a volunteer. It may also have been that being an adult who only played and did not engage in other ‘adult’ tasks such as the monitoring and control of children was inauthentic.

In this example, Kevin and Klay engage in what Foucault (1980) considers a resistance against a dominant discourse. In Western cultures, adults are more

powerful than children, a relationship founded on developmental discourses (Cannella, 2008). I used my adult power to reinforce my claims to being a volunteer. In institutionalised settings like SAC, adults can define their own roles and children are expected to accept the roles adults assign themselves and the power over children that accompany those roles. However, Klay and Kevin were not powerless. They resisted my adult power and self-characterisation by questioning whether or not I was actually a volunteer.

In the space of two or three minutes, Klay and Kevin had re-positioned my role at Banksia Gully. I was no longer just an adult play companion; I had become a researcher, whose role was possibly still unclear to Klay and Kevin. This became more than just a change in name. It changed the way I spoke to the children. We now discussed my redefined role at SAC and the possibilities of the yet to be announced research project. The reality was that even though I had liked to think so, my adult identity was never entirely one thing or another. Even when I was acting as a volunteer, I still thought like a researcher, was constantly theorising about incidents I had witnessed, or was thinking and rethinking my methodology. At other times, I was also an ex-practitioner who sometimes felt compelled to engage in play with children in a teacher-like way and look for 'teachable moments'. It is impossible to know, but it is also likely that other participants also questioned whether or not I was just a volunteer. The reality was that I had multiple identities and often at the same time.

Klay and Kevin also redefined themselves. Whilst they were still my play companions, they had also become detectives and insiders, with knowledge that enabled them to make better sense of my presence. I'm unsure what the insiders did with their knowledge. They were free to share it with the other children, but I never learned whether they conducted themselves as informants or confidants.

Davies (2000) describes situations like this, highlighting the mutual nature of how subjects are positioned.

Positioning, as we will use it, is the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines. There can be interactive positioning in which what one person says positions another. And there can be reflexive positioning

in which one positions oneself. However, it would be a mistake to assume that, in either case, positioning is necessarily intentional. One lives one's life in terms of one's ongoing produced self, whoever might be responsible for its production. (p. 91)

When asking me if I was from the government, the participants sought to re-position me in a role that was more understandable. However, I was not passively re-positioned by them. Instead, I verbally redefined my role to define myself in a way that did not just make sense to the Kevin and Klay. It also reflected how I wanted to be seen, as co-researcher, and redefined the role in a way that made sense to me.

The outcome of this exchange was not inevitable. I did not have to reveal my researcher status to the participants at this time. It was just as possible for me to exercise power and tell Kevin and Klay that they were incorrect and maintain my positioning as volunteer. My response was guided by the project methodology. Participatory methodologies endeavour to disrupt a discourse that commonly reduces children to roles as objects of research (Alderson, 2008a). Soon these children and I were likely to engage in a research partnership. To continue to insist that I was only a volunteer felt like a dishonesty and contrary to my assertion that the children were genuine partners in the research. Earlier I stated that I was concerned that positioning myself as 'just a volunteer' might affect the trust I had built with participants. Had I conducted myself counter to the methodology in this situation, it is difficult to see how the participants would not view my actions as dishonest and a breach of trust.

### **Doing adult differently**

Previously in this chapter, I explained how after being asked if I was from the government, my role was redefined by two of the participants. Throughout this research, I adopted the role of different adult. In doing so, I consciously adopted a role that was inconsistent with accepted ways of being an adult with responsibility for the care of children. Consequently, it felt as though I was constantly engaged in identity work, where others and I sought to redefine my multiple identities within the project. However, I was not the only one doing identity work. The participants also engaged in contesting and redefining their own identities. In this section, I provide an account of how identities can be multiple, and shift and change during research.

One of the first instances I became aware of identity work in the research was during the focus group activities early in the project. In the first activity, the participants were randomly divided into two groups. Michael, Seamus, Sky and Tiger were in one group and tasked with drawing the world's best SAC for older children. Kevin, Klay, Penny and Steven were in the other group and asked to draw the world's worst SAC. The task of which group designed a *good* or *bad* SAC program was allocated by drawing their task 'out of a hat'.

The participants enjoyed the drawing activity. During their interviews many of the participants named it as an enjoyable part of the research. One notable aspect of this activity was the different ways in which the two groups conducted themselves. The *good SAC* group had ordered discussions about what to include in their drawing, and worked quietly and diligently on their task. They were self-contained, with all group members remaining in their seats for the duration of the activity. The *bad SAC* group, on the other hand, performed very differently. Bad SAC were out of their seats, very loud and shouting their ideas with lots of raucous laughter. Bad SAC constantly tested and burst through the boundaries of their workspace. Stephen left his seat numerous times to inspect good SAC's work and loudly reported his observations to the rest of bad SAC. Penny and Kevin pulled faces in front of the video camera and screamed. Bad SAC dominated the research space aurally and physically.

It is difficult to say whether the two groups performed good and bad in response to the task instructions or were simply being themselves. There were likely elements of both in their performances. Throughout my time at Banksia Gully, the members of bad SAC were often the loudest, and most likely to break SAC rules. Likewise, most of good SAC would be regarded as 'good' children, an idea that will be explored later in the thesis. However, there was a freedom in the way that bad SAC went about their task. They seemed released from normal social conventions about good ways to care for children and were energised by the task of devising more ethically questionable practices. In contrast, good SAC seemed bound by their goodness and the need to produce the 'correct' answers. They embodied restraint and seriousness, the sort of conduct I might expect from a 'good' SAC practitioner. This contrast is further highlighted by the two drawings the group produced (Figures 7.1 and 7.2). Good





Figure 7.2: *Bad SAC's* drawing of a bad SAC program

In the second focus group activity, the groups were disbanded and the participants worked together to list and rank the things they thought most important in providing SAC for older children (Hill et al., 1996). In this activity, the participants, especially those from bad SAC were quite disruptive. They were noisy and gave nonsensical answers. It was one of many moments where I had to make informed decisions in response to an occurrence that threatened my positioning as different adult. In this instance, I decided that maintaining my status as different adult was more important than correcting the nonsensical suggestions from the participants.

I was never entirely comfortable inhabiting the position of different adult during these activities. Foucault (1977) argues that we govern ourselves in relation to dominant discourses about acceptable forms of conduct. Consistent with Foucault's argument, I often felt highly visible and compelled to act in more 'adult' ways. I felt as though I was acting in ways that were different to the other adults at Banksia Gully and did not reflect accepted social rules for an adult with responsibility for children. I was not conducting myself as a good role model who reinforced cultural norms about civilised behaviour. Instead I allowed situations where participants were sometimes ill disciplined and off-task, or engaged in behaviours that were normally discouraged by the practitioners. These focus group activities generated a great deal of noise, which was unusual for Banksia Gully and the Grade 5/6 room. I suspect that noise is something the practitioners attended to as an indicator of possible misbehaviour or trouble. Practitioners too appeared to engage in self-governance. They often appeared at the entrance to the 5/6 room to identify the cause of the noise, sometimes with concerned looks.

At one point, I was surprised to see a practitioner enter the research space and sit down with the participants to investigate their activities. From the moment the practitioner sat down I was concerned about the possible effects on the research. One of the methodological aims of this project was to create a method that supported participants to express their views about their SAC program with some degree of confidentiality. I was concerned that the presence of a practitioner would discourage participants from speaking openly. However, it would be simplistic to think that by merely keeping practitioners from the room during one activity would mean that they

had no influence over participants' data. Banksia Gully was a complex social setting with participants and practitioners interacting in multiple ways numerous times each day. It would be impossible to monitor each interaction with each child for a six-month period. Practitioners had contact with participants outside the SAC program where they might discuss the research. Practitioners often told me about occasions where they would run into children and their families at the local supermarket. They would also have contact with children during other school activities. Foucault (1977) asserts that subjects do not have to be under direct observation to feel and act as though they are under surveillance. An acknowledgement of the possibility that practitioners might be watching or able to access their contribution is enough to influence the things that a participant may say or do. Regardless of this, the physical presence of a practitioner, even though she was only there briefly, and did not seek to influence children, had the potential to influence what views participants were willing to express.

I experienced the consequences of performing different adult beyond the focus group activities. There were many occasions where I was aware of being monitored by the practitioners. Spaces in which I was present increasingly became the focus of supervision. Psychological disciplines construct children as immature and irresponsible and the binary opposite of adults (Mackay, 1973). In positioning myself as different adult, I marked myself as more childlike, less mature and responsible, and therefore a possible risk to children. As an adult male, I also presented a different type of risk as a possible sexual predator. There is a perception that male teachers present a high risk when working with young children (McWilliam & Jones, 2005).

Consequently, male educators can experience the suspicion of being a paedophile (Jones, 2007). Practitioners likely found that my positioning as different adult sat uneasily alongside my status as researcher and SAC 'expert'. Being a researcher, I was often left alone and given more license to allow child-like behaviour. I suspect this was a tension for practitioners. Their frequent presence around my activities indicated a concern about my conduct, but on no occasion did they intervene or correct me. Instead, they managed the possible effects of my errant behaviour by controlling the participants.

When stationed near my interactions with children, the practitioners were more than a visible presence. My mother would have said, “I could feel their eyes burning a hole in the back of my head”. Expressed poststructurally, I would say that I both felt and understood their presence as a disciplinary gaze, or the exercise of power. The disciplinary gaze influences how subjects conduct themselves and use their bodies (Foucault, 1977). The practitioners’ presences were wordless expressions of childhood immaturity and vulnerability that led me to reassess my actions in relation to the children. I continually questioned my performance of researcher, each time either modifying my conduct or at least questioning it in a way that I did less frequently when practitioners were elsewhere.

The participants also responded to my positioning as different adult. Some participants and I developed relationships that were less formal than those they had with other adults. Later in the project, as they became more familiar with me, Seamus and Stephen would often sit beside me during meal times and rub the top of my head. Penny would call me “Brucey”. In one interaction when I asked if she intended to work on her project, she openly communicated her intent to resist by saying, “good luck with that Brucey”. Late in the project Kevin and Klay sometimes called me “Brucey Bogtrotter”, a character from Roald Dahl’s “Matilda”. These interactions could be understood as expressions of familiarity, but the reality was that they were much more familiar with the practitioners than me. They were most likely an indication of a shift in power, where the boundaries between adult and child had become slightly blurred.

### **Doing child and adult differently**

So far in this chapter, I have described some of the identity work the children and I engaged in during the project, particularly with respect to my performance of different adult, and how this positioning rubbed against common understandings about accepted ways to conduct myself as an adult. Another type of identity work that occurred was the ways in which the participants and I interacted to define the roles of lead researcher and participant.

I most keenly felt a sense of doing this sort of performative identity work during the participants’ project work. To allow for individual differences, the participants could

set their own timelines for their project work. Despite my stated commitment to flexible timelines, the slow pace at which some participants worked frequently unsettled me. I had prepared myself for participants like Apple and Michael who attended irregularly, or groups like Sky, Apple and Tiger who were not always at SAC at the same time. Their reasons for not working were observable and seemed reasonable. However, it was more difficult to come to terms with situations where participants seemed to regularly choose play over research. At the time, their actions felt like a rejection of the project and me. It appeared they were not as interested in the project as I had hoped.

I had to walk a fine line in achieving a balance between supporting the participants' right to play and meeting the tight timelines for the project. My response to these situations was to maintain honest communication with these participants. When I was unsure about a participant's intentions, I would ask them at the beginning of the afternoon if they planned to work on their projects that day. I endeavoured to keep a friendly tone to these conversations, consistent with other conversations and my positioning as different adult. I tried to limit these interventions as they had an unavoidable, corrective element to them, involved the application of power available to me as an adult, and therefore repositioned me each time as 'slightly more adult' than I was the day before. I am unsure if the participants interpreted these conversations in the same way, but at their heart was the uncomfortable fact that I did not trust some participants with this project as much as I hoped I would. The difficulty I experienced in striking a balance between play and research highlights the tensions I experienced in occupying multiple subject positions. At all times, I sought to be visible as an advocate for the participants' rights to play and a support to their exercising decision-making power. However, I could not escape the reality that I was also a PhD candidate and lead researcher who had to meet project timelines.

It became apparent that participants usually had reasonable justifications for not researching. Even though they were working together, Kevin and Klay often saved their project work for days when their partner was absent. Stephen preferred to work later in the day when his friends had left. Penny mostly prioritised play over work, but on what basis was I judging this as poor justification for her actions? As an adult, I frequently prioritise leisure over work. Deadlines however, are unavoidable when

undertaking a PhD. After about three months of project time, I asked those participants who had not completed their projects, if they would be able to finish in a month, providing them with a clear deadline around which they could manage the work involved in finishing their projects.

In each of these interactions, the participants and I engaged in a negotiation of the roles of participant and lead researcher. Each time I tried to motivate the participants to work on their project, I re-positioned them as less capable, less responsible and less equal. In reassuring me about their work, they would shift the balance in the other direction, reclaiming some of their researcher status. These re-negotiations were not always verbal. They sometimes came in the form of silent resistances or expressive body language. Penny had a particular smile that she saved for days late in the project, when she was sure that I was anxious about her work. This particular smile made clear that she understood my anxieties, but also that she had no intention of working that day. Kevin, Klay and Stephen communicated a similar message differently. They would avoid engagement with me during meal time and then silently slip outside to play basketball. As well as re-positioning themselves in exchanges like this, they also re-positioned me. In these moments, I inevitably felt less adult and less powerful. Even though these shifts in power were something that I sought through my methodology, as an adult used to having more power, I often found them unfamiliar and unsettling.

The other knowledge emerging from these conversations about work was that even though the participants were not visibly researching, they were still thinking about their projects and the research question. They sometimes told me about new ideas they had, or when they were next planning to do work. Such exchanges reminded me, that my attempts to limit any intrusions on the participants' leisure time could only ever be partially successful. Leisure is never free of work-like elements, including work-related thinking (Rojek, 1995). Just by involving these participants in the research, I had compromised the leisureliness of their time in SAC. My routine checking and questioning served to make their leisure more work-like.

During their interviews, I asked participants how they felt about my actions in keeping the projects 'on schedule'. Their responses were positive, suggesting that I

had achieved a good balance between giving the participants their freedom and keeping the project on track.

**Bruce.** *What do you think about the way I approached it, where I let you guys play if you want to play and work when you want to work? Good or bad?*

**Penny.** *That was good because ... we get to decide when we want to do something, and we know that it has to be done and so, we know that not to leave it until the very last minute, but we know that we can also do it when we feel like wanting to do it.*

**Bruce.** *Did you feel like I was ever nagging you?*

**Penny.** *Mmm*

**Bruce.** *You can say yes if I was.*

**Penny.** *Half half. Because every day you would say, "project (unclear)?" And I'd say, "ahh no". But you didn't like nag me very much.*

It is possible that the participants' responses on this topic were influenced by the greater power resident in my adult status. In Western cultures, children are commonly positioned as inferior in comparison to adults (Cannella, 2008). This is particularly the case in school or research settings where adults are positioned as teachers and experts. It would be a particularly forthright child to openly criticise an adult and relative stranger in a position of authority. Some participants stated that my reminders were necessary because, if left unsupervised, children would not be capable of the discipline required to complete their projects. Such statements raise the possibility that children might also engage in discourses of children being incomplete and inferior. I do not use these statements to dismiss the possibility that I gave the participants sufficient control over the research, or struck a good balance between leisure and work in overseeing the projects. However, taking into account how power operated in the research setting means that the participants' statements cannot be viewed as entirely objective.

## **METHODOLOGICAL COMPLICATIONS – RESEARCHING WITH A CHILD WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER**

So far in this chapter I have reported some of the methodological complexities that arose from adopting a poststructural, participatory and ethnographic methodology. There were other complications during the research that presented difficulties for me as lead researcher and for some of the participants. These complications could foreseeably have occurred using other methodologies. However, my responses to these situations were complex and evidence the role my methodological positioning played in responding to those situations. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore two incidents that occurred during project work and interviewing that warrant further exploration.

Although the preparations for each interview were identical for each participant, late in the project I was provided with information about one participant Michael that caused me to reassess the research method. One afternoon towards the end of my time at Banksia Gully, I suspected tension between Michael and the other participants. The Coordinator informed me that Michael had experienced a difficult day at school. In the context of that discussion, I was told that Michael was diagnosed as having Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and required a full time support worker in the classroom. This new knowledge about Michael was surprising. I had worked with many children with ASD diagnoses in my career, and it never occurred to me that Michael might have ASD. In the days following the ‘diagnosis’, I engaged in a frenzied re-evaluation of my method. To this point, I noticed that Michael had struggled to find a method for her project and had displayed a short attention span. She had experimented with different projects that copied other children’s methods. Some of her photographs were exact copies of other children’s photographs and she expressed frustration when her work did not replicate theirs. Suddenly, these characteristics were transformed from methodological challenges to confirmation of her diagnosis. Were these evidence of an ‘autistic’ child? Did Michael need specialised methodologies and techniques?

Attempting to be a ‘good’ researcher, I plunged into scholarship on researching with children with ASD, although there is little literature on consulting with children with ASD in research settings (Barrow & Hannah, 2012). ASD is broadly characterised by



individuals who experience difficulty with communication and social interaction and have a narrow range of interests (Wing, 1993). Consequently, children with ASD can be considered difficult research subjects (Beresford, Tozer, Rabiee, & Sloper, 2004). Their condition might limit their interview responses to short phrases and single words, making their data less useful. They may also experience social discomfort during interviews (Preece & Jordan, 2010). In response to the challenges of researching with children with ASD, some researchers make use of visual and communication supports like computers, social stories and cards (Barrow & Hannah, 2012; Preece & Jordan, 2010).

I began to question whether I needed a different approach with Michael, but was uncomfortable adopting a specialist approach for a participant who had not required one until now. My discomfort was partly epistemological. In the same way that SAC seems to universalise older children, was I also about to universalise Michael as a child with ASD? I took comfort from my existing methodology, which allowed for flexibility and the participants' different communication preferences. I was also reassured by research from Beresford et al. (2004) who used Clark and Moss' (2001) Mosaic Approach to inform their research project with children with ASD. Some of the features of their research such as preparing children to alleviate their social anxiety, and the use of photographs and artwork, were already features of the method for this project and my work with Michael. I decided to persist with my original method with Michael whilst also paying extra attention to any possible discomfort she might be experiencing.

The decision to maintain my methodological approach was successful. With support, Michael completed her project, settling on a mixture of methods borrowed from other participants' projects. I tried to ease her anxieties about comparing her work to that of others, indicating that I was pleased with her project. Michael's interview proceeded without incident. It was shorter than the other participants' and she was often quite restless. As suggested by Preece and Jordan (2010), many of her answers were brief or consisted of single words. However, the brevity of her interview and some responses did not render her contributions worthless. She offered valuable insights that differed from those offered by other participants.

The following story summarises well the uncertainties I experienced researching with Michael, but also her capacity to provide a valuable contribution to the research. One particular afternoon, Michael asked me to assist her in taking photographs. She was particularly keen to replicate a photo taken by other participants of a basketball hovering above the ring. We spent approximately 30 minutes perfecting the photograph (Figure 7.3) before Michael was happy with the finished product.



Figure 7.3 – Michael’s photograph of a basketball above the ring

During her interview, I was interested in what Michael would say about this photograph. Was the photograph just an example of mimicry, or had she also used it to develop an insight into the research question?

***Bruce.** I was going to ask you about this photo*

***Michael.** Yeah*

***Bruce.** And you may not know why, but remember we worked really hard to get a photograph like that with the ball above the ring?*

*Michael. Yeah*

*Bruce. Why did you want the ball above the ring?*

*Michael. Because it shows how much fun that you could have outside.*

Michael answered my question instantly to confirm that even if she had mimicked another photograph; she had still used the photograph to form a considered, valuable opinion. She communicated effectively that physical play outdoors, particularly basketball, was an important activity at SAC. In providing this example, I do not seek to romanticise Michael's contribution to the project. It is likely that the depth and quality of her answers were affected by her having ASD. As predicted by Preece and Jordan (2010), her answers were often brief and not as rich as those provided by the other participants. However, when paired with observational and other data, Michael's contributions were important to the final findings.

I have thought about my initial response to Michael's diagnosis often whilst writing this thesis. I immediately engaged in a search for 'truths' about children with ASD. I described earlier in this thesis how the methodology was designed to allow me to work with children in ways that did not universalise them and accounted in some way for multiplicity. The method was intended to allow for differences between children, and also that one child can present with multiple identities. My initial response to her diagnosis was to universalise Michael and assign her a singular identity, that of a child with ASD, and search for a universal solution to working with children 'like her'. Ultimately, I returned to the worldview adopted in this project and worked with Michael in the same way as the other participants. I still experience discomfort at the possibility that perhaps I thought only 'normal' children were capable of inhabiting multiple identities, but am not surprised that I responded in this way. Even though this research attempts to unsettle dominant, modernist discourses of childhood, I still operate within these discourses. They circulate my culture and I have lived them and enacted them throughout my training and career. St Pierre and Pillow (2000) argue that poststructural research takes place at the edges of modernism. This story is an example of that and how, despite my best efforts, I was unable to completely step outside my history and modernist ways of thinking.

## **METHODOLOGICAL COMPLICATIONS – LOSING A PARTICIPANT**

Another unexpected incident occurred towards the end of the research with one participant, Stephen. Proportionately, I had spent a lot of time with Stephen. We often played basketball and video games together when he was at SAC late. Together, we engaged in covert play in the 5/6 room. Under the pretence of doing project work when other children had left, we would play mini golf on my laptop. I also provided him with a lot of support in completing his project. He would often seek my opinion about the content of his project and sometimes needed encouragement to work on the research. Stephen and I had developed a warm, friendly relationship.

It therefore came as a surprise, when at the beginning of his interview; Stephen became silent and emotionally distressed. He buried his reddened face in his hands and there were tears visible on his cheeks. I stopped the interview immediately and tried to comfort Stephen. It was a difficult task given his refusal to communicate verbally. I sat with Stephen in the silent interview room for 35 minutes, trying to find out how Stephen wanted me to respond to his distress. Occasionally, he would uncover his eyes and nod or shake his head in response to a question. We would not proceed with the interview. He did not want me to get a practitioner or a friend. He wanted me to stay with him. He was worried that other children would find out about this incident. After 35 minutes had expired, I told Stephen that this was how long other interviews had lasted and that if he left the room now, nobody would think anything unusual had occurred. He silently left the room.

I discussed the incident with the Coordinator and Stephen's parent, who informed me that this was unsurprising and had occurred previously in other stressful situations. After the incident, I began to think about the role that I had played in causing Stephen's distress. I had endeavoured to ensure that the participants did not feel pressured to participate in the research. Despite consenting to participating in the research, I acknowledged that participants' attitudes might change as the research progressed and they learnt more about the project (Lambert & Glacken, 2011). Participants were therefore regularly reminded throughout the project and before their interview of their right to take a break or withdraw consent. I was also careful not to pressure the participants and respect their right to play. I also sought to alleviate any

stress the participants might be experiencing about their interview. Once their interview date had been set, I talked to participants about their interview and ask if they had any questions or concerns. They were also encouraged to discuss the interview with other participants who had already completed the project.

Stephen's significant stress indicates that children's anxieties about participating in research cannot be addressed purely by providing them with information about the research purpose and method. The social complexities of the research setting should also be considered. Despite my positioning as different adult and our friendly relationship, I cannot ignore the power that passes through my status as adult and researcher (Kellett, 2010a). Regardless of offering Stephen the opportunity to withdraw, it is possible that he felt unable to tell an adult that he did not wish to continue. It is also likely that Stephen was under the scrutiny of other participants. Most older children at Banksia Gully participated in the project, including his two best friends. Would a failure to participate in, or complete the project, position him as an outsider and failure in a setting where participation in the research was the norm?

A few days after the aborted interview, Stephen asked when we were going to try again. As I had done a number of times since this incident, I told Stephen that we could conduct the interview whenever he wanted, but we would only do the interview if he wanted to. We continued to engage in play together, but Stephen never indicated that he wanted to complete the project. It was disappointing to lose a participant who had been so actively engaged in the research, but it seemed unethical to place Stephen in what was likely to be a distressing situation for the second time. Stephen's story highlights the limitations of my practices regarding informed consent and drawing mainly on a child rights framework. Had I paid more attention to the distribution and application of power, I may have been more prepared for Stephen's possible stress and been able to ensure that his views were including in the research.

One possible alternative methodology that might have been more effective and has been used before in SAC settings, is *walk and talk conversations* (Klerfelt & Haglund, 2015). Rather than conduct interviews in an interview 'room', the researchers conducted interviews on the move in children's play settings. Similarly to this project, Klerfelt and Haglund used photographs the participants had taken to guide their questioning. Conducting Stephen's interview in this way may have shifted the

distribution of power in the interview setting and made the interview less intimidating.

The incidents involving Stephen and Michael also raise questions about whether there is any benefit in social researchers having access to knowledge about participants' medical conditions that may affect the conduct of the research. I designed the method to avoid universalising children, providing flexibility to account for their individual differences. In Michael's, the method was effective, allowing her to explore the research question and express her view. However, Stephen's case, some prior knowledge of his anxieties may have facilitated a different interviewing method. Something like Klerfelt and Haglund's (2015) walk and talk approach may have helped to ease Stephen's anxiety about the interview, allowing his voice to be added to the research.

## **SUMMARY**

I wrote this chapter as an extension to the methodology chapter. I was concerned that my description in Chapter Six depicted the method in a way that was unrepresentatively clean and sequential. I did this deliberately, as it allowed me to summarise the combination of methods in a way that was clear. However, it did not entirely capture all of the complexities that emerged during the project, or the completeness of my immersion in the field.

In this chapter, I have provided a number of theorisations of the complexities of participatory research. I have described how two participants, unsatisfied with my adopted role of volunteer engaged in resistance and repositioning of our roles. These negotiations were not just limited to researcher and research participant. Other people in the setting also influenced how I performed 'researcher'. In positioning myself as different adult, I found myself the object of surveillance by practitioners concerned that I posed a risk to the participants and other children. At these times I felt compelled to be more adult. I also described how participants engaged in various resistances when I sought to impose timelines on their project work. I also provided an account of how despite my efforts to make research participation easy; children can find the experience stressful and distressing.

Poststructural theories see research spaces the same way as other social spaces, as settings infused with power and discourse where knowledge and identities are constructed through the application of power. Whilst the project had identifiable phases, these are examples of how participants and I contested and redefined those phases in individual ways. Instead of being universal, the phases differed between individual participants or could occur out of sequence. Similarly, the roles of researcher and research participants were not as clearly defined as it may appear. The boundaries of research phases and researcher/participant boundaries were also shifting and contested. I performed 'researcher' differently with every participant and changing contexts. Therefore, whilst research methods can be described in ways that seem straightforward and sequential, the reality is likely much more complicated.

In the next chapter, I examine further research data from this project. I begin analysis of the research data, and detail the first of the research findings.

## CHAPTER EIGHT – “EAT”

This chapter is the first of four where I present an analysis of the project data. These chapters explore data from the participants’ interviews and projects, observations, documents and artefacts. As the author, I have clear recollections of this data and the settings in which they occurred, which makes it easy for me to contextualise the stories and narratives. However, a detailed description of the setting can assist the reader to contextualise the data and understand it better (Patton, 2002). So far, I have provided little information on the research setting, Banksia Gully. I have stated that I believe it the one of two possible research sites that best represents a typical SAC setting, and is located in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne. However, whilst readers may have an awareness of SAC and its purpose, it is a setting whose operations may be unfamiliar. To begin my analysis, I provide a description of a typical afternoon at Banksia Gully. This description is based on my observations and the participants’ descriptions of life at SAC. It is intended to provide a broad understanding of ‘typical’ activities at a SAC setting and assist in contextualising the data analysis that follows.

### “EAT, PLAY, GO, REPEAT” – LIFE AT BANKSIA GULLY SCHOOL AGE CARE

To commence this description of daily activities in the research setting, I refer to an exchange I had with one of the research participants.

*Bruce: So can you tell me, what have you learnt about after school care for older kids do you think?*

*Seamus: That it’s ... like um eat, play, go, repeat... but it’s like, oh like there’s more than that, there’s like, there’s this, there’s that. Yeah.*

*Bruce: What like different things to do?*

*Seamus: Yeah different things to do. I thought it was like... cos I usually just play outside, on the computers, spit (a card game). But there’s like more than*



*fifty games out there, like play equipment for the little kids, and like actually there's board games for the older people.*

In this exchange, Seamus provides a concise description of what I observed over six months to be a typical afternoon at Banksia Gully SAC for most children. He identifies three distinct phases, “eat”, “play” and “go”. I analyse each of these phases in more depth later in the thesis, but for the purpose of this description, Seamus’s three phases provide a good place from which to commence.

### **“Eat”**

Each afternoon at Banksia Gully began in much the same way. Shortly after school classes finished for the day, children arrived at SAC from one of three local schools: a private, religious primary school, a government primary school and a specialist school for children with additional needs. Children from the private school walked themselves to SAC, which is located on the school grounds. Practitioners escorted children from the neighbouring government school on foot, whilst those from the specialist school arrived by bus. As they arrived, the practitioners greeted the children whilst checking their name against an attendance list. For most children, eating the afternoon tea provided was the first activity of the afternoon. Children lined up to select from a range of snacks that they ate at tables shared with other children. The snacks changed each day and included pasta, sandwiches, soup, flavoured noodles, dips, homemade pizza, nachos, or fresh fruit chopped into small portions. The snacks provided were intended to be healthy, a regulatory requirement for Australian SAC programs. Individual children chose whom they ate with. The children were mostly positive about the food provided. Apples, pizza and nachos were the most popular snacks, although many participants preferred ‘real’ pizza, and thought that the food was better before the government discouraged the serving of junk food. The children often returned for a second helping of some foods, although they were required to wait until all other children had had the opportunity for a first helping.

SAC was housed in a large, portable building. While most of the building was available to all of the children, part of the rear third of the building is a room reserved specifically for older children during meal times. The participants called this room the “Grade 5/6 room” or “5/6 room”. Older children had the option of eating in the 5/6

room with only other older children, or in the main room with younger children. In my observation, it was rare for an older child to eat in the main room. They usually only did so if they have been excluded from the 5/6 room for some sort of disciplinary infraction.

### **“Play”**

Once they had finished eating, children were free to engage in play and leisure activities. In the main room children had access to a range of art materials, board games, dress ups, toys, books, computers and construction materials. The main room was cluttered with furniture and resources, and required children and adults to navigate the space carefully. Frequently used were two couches separated by a coffee table topped with a chess set. Often there was a group of younger boys on the floor in front of the television engaging in imaginative play with action figurines and dinosaurs. This space was the only area in the main room where children were able to play on the floor. Just outside the 5/6 room was a small *home corner* with a dolls house, domestic toys and dress ups that was popular with mostly younger girls. There were two small, circular tables and some chairs with board games, although these were often unused, unless an adult made himself or herself available to play. Additionally, there was one long table that accommodated unsupervised art activities, usually drawing and colouring in. The main room also hosted one practitioner-directed art or craft activity chosen by the practitioners, who provided guidance and instruction. The practitioner-directed activity usually involved some sort of mess that needed to be contained and supervised. Younger girls mostly participated in the art and craft activities, although younger boys and older girls sometimes participated, particularly when the weather was poor.

In contrast, the 5/6 room was a mostly empty space. There was a table at one end of the room where older children ate, and couches for children to sit on. The room also had two large storage shelves against the wall that contained games that did not fit in the main room. There was also a small shelf of older children's books. In my time in the setting, I never observed an older child using the bookshelf.

Banksia Gully had a lot of outdoor space. Close to the building there was a small paved area with basketball and netball rings, and the 'senior' playground that was

available only to children in Grades 3 to 6. There was a second and much larger 'junior' playground, available to all children, but the junior playground could not be seen from the building and was not always available for use. Adjacent to the paved area was a large, grassed sports field.

Leisure and play at Banksia Gully mostly followed a familiar pattern. The outdoor spaces were the most popular. There were often children playing cricket, Australian football or soccer on the sports field, and a group of older girls on the margins of the oval practising gymnastics. The basketball court had two rings and was always busy. At times, one ring seemed like the exclusive territory of the older boys. The children had a preference for the 'good' ring, and only used the other ring if there was no other option. Girls and younger children played on the good ring mostly when the older boys were busy elsewhere. There was also a netball ring that was relegated to an inferior position on the court and was rarely used. The paved area hosted other impromptu activities such as skipping, play with hoops, and games of handball. On the senior playground, older children would sometimes play tag games or just sit and socialise. The junior playground was popular with children of all ages, but not used every day. Because of its position at the other end of the school, it was only used when sufficient were practitioners available to supervise its use. Practitioners supervising the junior playground were equipped with walkie-talkies that kept them in touch with practitioners in the main room. The walkie-talkies were mostly used to monitor children's movements between the junior playground and the main room.

The indoor areas of Banksia Gully were less busy in the early afternoon and usually populated with younger children who mostly participated in dramatic play, art, board games and computer games. In the early afternoon, the 5/6 room was often empty. It was reserved for older children until 4.30pm every day, although they rarely used it after they had eaten. Unless the weather was inclement, older children mostly played outside. At 4.30pm, the 5/6 room became available to all children, and would often be the venue for multi-age group games like dodge ball and a popular game called Ga Ga Ball, which appeared similar to dodge ball.

## “Go”

Another significant feature of life in Banksia Gully was the steady trickle of children leaving the SAC. Whilst a small number of children stayed the entire session at SAC from 3.30pm until 6.30pm, there were others who left within the first half hour. Play every afternoon was punctuated every few minutes by the calls of practitioners telling individual children that their parents had arrived and it was time to go home. As more children went home, life in Banksia Gully changed. When their preferred friends went home, children would seek new play companions. Games and the groups playing them constantly changed as people entered and left. There was a gradual migration of children from outdoors to indoors as the afternoon progressed. Children moved inside seeking quieter play experiences or solitary activities when the last of their friends had left.

Late afternoon was much quieter as the number of children dwindled. At 4.30pm, the PlayStation was switched on and instantly colonised by Seamus and boys from Grades 3 and 4. There was also a bank of older computers in the main room with older video games, but these seemed less popular than the PlayStation, which had more current and sophisticated games. At 5.00pm, the outdoor spaces were closed down and all activity moved indoors. Some children would lie on the couches and watch television, whilst the practitioner-led art activity briefly became more popular until it was packed away at 5.30pm. The move from outdoors to indoors was rarely completed by 5.00pm. There was usually at least one child who would delay the move inside as long as possible in order to eke out a few more precious minutes of outdoor play.

The trickle of children going home continued during the afternoon and was mostly complete by 6.00pm. There were usually only two or three children present during the last half hour. These few children usually watched television, played video games, or engaged in solitary play whilst waiting for family members to collect them. Practitioners were generally busy packing away equipment and cleaning in preparation for the end of the day.

## **“Repeat”**

Whilst this is a description of a typical day at Banksia Gully, no two days were exactly the same. Children left at different times or were absent on days when they would normally attend. Weather would sometimes intervene, limiting activities to indoor spaces resulting in very different activity patterns in spaces like the 5/6 room, television and PlayStation areas. The children present each day also differed. Not all children attended SAC five days a week. Some only attended one or two days, and sometimes not always the same days. The practitioners would also change from day to day. These changes in personnel influenced the mood and feel of Banksia Gully.

Despite variations in activities, personnel and weather, as Seamus has suggested, there was a sameness and routine structure to every day at Banksia Gully. To an outsider with a fleeting knowledge of Banksia Gully, each day may indeed appear the same and easy to characterise. However, my long immersion in the research setting facilitated a deeper knowledge of life in Banksia Gully. It enabled me to understand more deeply the complexities of children’s meal and play times. Eating is not just eating, play is not just play, and going home is not just going home. These are complex social activities infused with power and discourses, and experienced by children and adults in multiple, contradictory ways.

## **INTRODUCING THE DATA ANALYSIS**

I still remember the moment that Seamus told me his three phases of SAC, “eat”, “play” and “go”. We were in the middle of his interview and I felt a quiet excitement that I have experienced occasionally in other interviews with children when they say something that I expect will be, not just a great quote for the research, but also something that might be an important part of the analysis. As my analysis and writing progressed, Seamus’ observation took on greater significance in the research. After completing the initial analysis, whilst trying to make sense of the data and the major themes, I began to see close connections between the analysis and Seamus’ three phases. When I grouped the analysed data into three possible chapters, I realised that these three chapters coincided largely with Seamus’ three phases. Consequently, the analysis of the research data, which follows in this chapter and Chapters Nine, Ten and Eleven, is structured around these three phases. In this chapter, “Eat”, I focus my

analysis on the social construction of the category of the older child, something that was particularly noticeable when the participants were eating their afternoon snacks in the 5/6 room. Chapters Nine and Ten, “Play” and “More Play”, are concerned with the time in the middle of the afternoon when most children played. It was also a time when I observed the participants engage in the performative construction of the category of older child. In Chapter Eleven, “Go”, I explore matters to do with time and its role in the lives of older children in SAC. “Eat, play, go” has provided me with a useful way to organise my discussion that matches closely my observations of the setting and the participants’ descriptions. In the discussion that follows, I go beyond these broad descriptors, and provide a detailed analysis of older children’s lives in SAC during each of the three phases. Through this discussion, I produce knowledge that addresses the research question of what older children think is important in providing SAC.

## **“EAT”**

### **Having a separate space for older children is important**

Although this chapter is titled “Eat”, I do not address the consumption of food. Instead, I focus the analysis on the place where the participants ate their food each day, the Grade 5/6 room. As I spent more time at Banksia Gully, the Grade 5/6 room became of increasing interest to me as a site where dividing practices that distinguish older from younger child were readily observable. Not only was it sanctioned by adults as a space for older children, the participants also engaged in a range of practices in and around the 5/6 room that categorised older children as distinct from younger children. The participants’ interview data also suggested that the 5/6 room was a site of dividing practices.

According to the participants, the Grade 5/6 room was the most important part of meal times. All nine participants that were interviewed indicated that having a separate space for older children was important.

*Sky. The Grade 5/6’s own room, which we have, which is the back room...I think it should be like better... um if like, maybe it could just like be personalised to us, and not be open to other people. Like maybe the younger*

*kids could have their own room... And then like we could have one room all to share...*

**Bruce.** *What about the fact that here you don't get the room to yourselves after 4.30?*

**Sky.** *Yeah... I think we should like get it for the whole day that we're here.*

**Bruce.** *Okay. So in a perfect world, in an OSHC program with your own space, and it's personalised, what would you do in there? What would you use it for?*

**Sky.** *Well we could play games and talk and stuff*

**Bruce.** *Yeah. So you said you'd play games, but why would it be different playing games in here to playing it out there with everyone else?*

**Sky.** *Well if we had our own games, cos we're older and we're more mature, I don't think lots of the pieces and stuff would get lost... And it won't be as noisy with people like running around rushing and stuff.*

**Bruce.** *... Anything else you would want to do in your own room, or you think is important about your own room?*

**Sky.** *Um I think that we should write on the walls and stuff that we should design them, like to ourselves, not let the younger kids do it. I mean they can do it in their own room if they have one.*

In this exchange, Sky provides a summary of some of the main ways in which the participants considered the 5/6 room to be important. Sky suggests that older and younger children should have their own spaces, with activities and materials that are suited to their interests and abilities, and reflect their greater maturity. She believes a separate space can isolate older children from the behaviours of younger children, including poor care of resources and behaviours like noisiness, which she regards as immature. Sky also suggests that an older children's space needs to reflect the older children who use it, and not be accessible to younger children.

Sky and the other participants' ideas about what older children's spaces should look like are supported by the FSAC. The FSAC suggests that SAC spaces should be exciting, vital and reflect the lives and identities of the children who use them (DEEWR, 2011). As an older children's space, the 5/6 room at Banksia Gully accomplished little of this. It was a largely empty room with one table and some chairs where the older children ate. The room also had some couches and storage shelves for general equipment. The walls of the 5/6 room were used to display children's art works, but these were works produced by children of all ages and not just older children. As such, it mostly failed to reflect the identities of the children for who it was intended. Another notable observation about the 5/6 room was how little older children used it outside of meal times. During meal times, the room was well utilised and buzzing with activity. The participants all sat at the table eating afternoon tea whilst conversing and making jokes. There would be jokes about what happened in school that day, what the food looked and tasted like, or for the basketball boys, jokes about farting. Occasionally, some of the boys would leave their seats and engage in minor transgressions out of sight of the practitioners. However, once meal times had ended, the participants mostly went outdoors to play and the space would be empty. The participants did not indicate why the 5/6 room was empty outside meal times. It is possible that, despite saying otherwise, they had no need of their own space. However, it is also possible that Banksia Gully's 5/6 room was empty because it was not an effective leisure space for older children.

The statement in the FSAC, that SAC spaces should reflect the identities of the children who use them, partly informs the following analysis of the participants' beliefs that older children need their own space. The remainder of this chapter investigates how the participants identify themselves as a separate category of child and the role the 5/6 room played in informing their identities as older children. I draw on poststructural theories of power and knowledge to identify the sites and ways in which power operated in the 5/6 room, and the knowledge it created. I discuss the ways that the participants used the architecture of the room, manipulated its contents and blurred age boundaries to separate themselves from younger children and establish themselves as a separate category of primary-age child.



## **Reinforcing the boundaries of older childhood through architecture and action**

Foucault (1977) argues that disciplinary power and surveillance are part of the structure of modern societies. They function as a system of correction that establishes and maintains norms. In establishing norms, disciplinary power serves to homogenise, providing standards or ways of conduct against which individuals are measured and compared. However, as well as homogenising, disciplinary power also highlights difference and makes visible subjects who do not correspond with established norms. Foucault suggests that in this way, power and surveillance opened the way for the creation of sciences that make it possible to measure, classify and categorise people based not just upon their similarities but also their differences. It is those subjects who differ from the norm that are most often the subject or focus of the human sciences.

As argued previously, in SAC older children are often believed to sit outside the norm of the typical SAC child, and consequently a separate category of child. This observation about older children leads me to wonder whether the existence of the category of older child is also a product of disciplinary power and surveillance, and whether spatial organisations like a separate room for Grades 5 and 6 can play a role in the formation of that category.

This section investigates the ways power relations operated around the 5/6 room. Foucault (1977, 1994) addresses the possibility that physical spaces play a role in categorising children. He argues that architectural structures of institutional facilities like schools can facilitate the distribution of power and the truths they create. However, spaces do not just distribute discursive truths, they are also shaped by those same discourses (Murdoch, 2006). At Banksia Gully, the discourse of older children as a separate category, circulated in and around the 5/6 room. It was clearly evident in the naming of the space as the 5/6 room, which openly designates the room as a space for older children. The naming of the space reinforced the discourse that older children are different to other school age children, and have leisure needs that cannot be met in a space shared with others. However, discourses of older childhood were present in more than the name of the room. Murdoch (2006) proposes that discourses can inform the physical formation and functioning of institutional spaces, and that such spaces act upon the bodies of the subjects who inhabit them. My analysis identifies the role discourse played in forming the 5/6 room, and how the conduct of

the participants in that space served to define, redefine and resist the discourse of older children in SAC.

### ***Policing and self-policing to divide older from younger***

Foucault (1980) links the application of power to the production of truth. The 5/6 room provided a physical barrier that made visible the application of power and established older children as a separate group. During meals, you were unlikely to see older children outside the 5/6 room. Even after meals, when all older children were outside and the 5/6 room was empty, the room still presented as a way of separating older and younger child. Younger children would be present in all other parts of the building but not the 5/6 room. There was no door isolating the room from the rest of the SAC, nor was there a boundary marked in any way. The fact that it remained empty marked younger children as Other to the older child and not able to enter the space. The empty room was evidence of the production of truths about the differences between older and younger children. The ways in which younger children complied with the rules and positioned themselves outside the room is evidence that younger children actively participated in the production of truth about older children. Truth can act as a form of power over people's bodies, influencing the way they carry and position themselves (Foucault, 1994). The way younger children adhered to restrictions on the 5/6 room evidences how truths about the differences between the two groups influenced the use of their bodies. Power over young children's bodies was observable during times when older children were in the 5/6 room. At such times, younger children often clustered at the entrance to the room, toeing an invisible line and looking in. Their status as younger required them to organise themselves neatly at the entrance in a way that marked the sharpness of the boundary between the two spaces.

Whilst the entrance to the 5/6 room functioned as a physical boundary, the participants also engaged in social acts that further marked the distinction between older and younger child. These social acts can be understood as examples of "category maintenance work" (Davies, 2003, p. 31). Davies uses the term category maintenance work to describe the ways in which children in early childhood settings discipline each other to preserve their gender categories. This includes correcting subjects who deviate from normative performances of gender. This has the affect of

alerting non-normative subjects to their transgressions and also reinforces the correctness of subjects engaging in category maintenance work. In the instances described here, the participants sought to reinforce the socially constructed category of older child and correct those children who compromised its boundaries.

In the 5/6 room, category maintenance work took place at the boundaries between age categories in a number of ways. Occasionally, younger children would try to enter the 5/6 room before 4.30pm. In doing so, these younger children disturbed the socially accepted conventions in Banksia Gully about who was an older child and had access to the room. When a younger child entered or attempted to enter, Penny, Kevin, Stephen, Klay and Seamus responded quickly and assertively telling the younger child to leave. Apple, Tiger and Sky usually said little, but did not need to given the assertive responses of the others. Those participants who were concerned about breaches of the room's boundaries seemed to regard it as a matter of some gravity. In instances where younger children refused to comply with their requests, the participants would draw on the practitioners and their status as significant adults. They would draw practitioners' attention to the presence of the younger child, co-opting them into reinforcing the boundary by ejecting the younger child. If they were unable to find a practitioner, participants sometimes sought to use my adult authority, although I tried to maintain my status as different adult by resisting these overtures and leaving participants to respond to these incursions in their usual ways.

### ***Dividing older from younger is a form of work***

Another example of category maintenance was the use of a sign the participants had made (Figure 8.1).

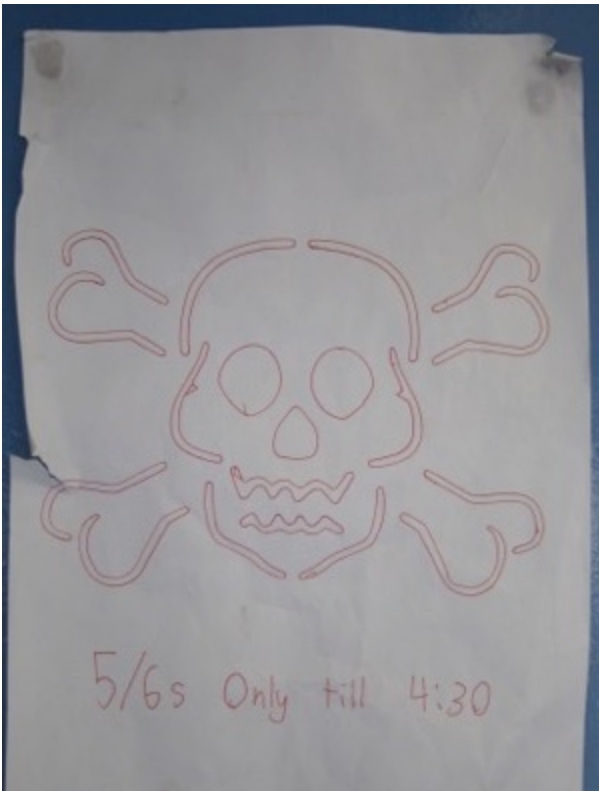


Figure 8.1: “5/6’s Only” sign at entrance to 5/6 room.

The sign was made by the participants and posted at boundary between the 5/6 room and the main program space. Its purpose was to remind younger children that the 5/6 room was the older children’s space. The sign featured an image of the skull and crossbones, which is an easily recognised image associated with piracy, danger and lawlessness (Kuhn, 2010). The use of that image sought to communicate the importance of the boundary and imply that grave consequences await those who cross without being entitled to.

Some of the participants desired measures to divide older and younger children that they hoped would be more effective than the sign.

***Bruce.** And you said you want a door to the room.*

***Michael.** Yeah a door with a lock on it so they can’t get in.*

*Bruce. So who can't get in?*

*Michael. The juniors*

*Bruce. Why don't you want the juniors in?*

*Michael. Because it's only Year (Grade) 5/6's allowed.*

*Bruce. But why can't they come in Michael?*

*Michael. Well they can but they have to knock on the door.*

*Bruce. Why don't you want them in?*

*Michael. Because it's like a 5/6 area.*

Foucault (1977, 2001) argues that the physical arrangement of space is one example of a dividing practice that separates different social categories. Foucault describes how asylums were used to separate the sane from the insane, or prisons to separate the law-abiding from the criminal. In this exchange, Michael suggests that a door and lock are required to keep younger children out of the 5/6 room. Using a locked door to separate the two groups of children would be more aggressive than posting a sign, and make it more difficult for younger children to cross into the older children's space. Michael's locked door would create a clear physical boundary between older and younger. Poststructural theory explains that when enacting particular subject positions, we can internalise the desires associated with that subject position (Davies et al., 2001). Michael's proposed use of a lock is an example of how, in inhabiting the subject position of mature, older child, she is expressing an internalised desire to disassociate herself from younger children. The lock would also assist in actualising her desire to be older and separate.

Michael's lock and the sign are also evidence of the work-like nature of category maintenance, and maintaining the boundary between older and younger child. Both require physical work to produce and place. The older children placed the sign in the hope that younger children will read it, police themselves and not enter the 5/6 room. A locked door requires labour and financial resources to realise. The sign and locked door are efficiency measures intended to reduce the work involved in policing the

boundary. Older children hope that the sign will lessen the likelihood that they will need to engage in discussion with younger children about the rules. The locked door aims to remove completely the need for any such discussions. The work described here is not performed solely by older children. Whilst the arrangement of spaces and physical barriers like locks are exercises of power that reinforce social categories through the physical arrangement of bodies, Foucault (1977) argues that subjects also self-police to maintain their categorisation without the need for physical boundaries. Therefore, there is also work done by younger children engaging in self-monitoring to maintain the categories of older and younger.

The exchanges between older and younger children that took place in the 5/6 room were often work-like. Exchanges were sometimes emotional, and younger children would not always comply with requests to leave. Such instances typically resulted in the participants suspending their conversations and any play activities taking place. In Chapter Three, I discussed how Rojek (1995) regards acts of identity construction as a form of work that blur the boundaries between leisure and work. Rojek describes how acts of identity construction are more work like and can compromise the freedom of play. Acts like posting the sign, erecting a door and ceasing talk to ask younger children to leave are very much bound up in the construction of aged identities and seem more work-like than playful. These acts affirm the participants' status as older children and their entitlement to their own space. These exchanges between younger and older children are therefore not only a form of work, but also interrupted older children's play and leisure.

### ***Drawing on developmental knowledge to divide older from younger***

There were other ways in which category maintenance occurred around the 5/6 room.

***Bruce.*** *So what do you think of this Grade 5/6 room? Good? Bad? Like it? Don't like it?*

***Kevin.*** *There's a part about I don't really like it because even though they don't come until 4.30, it's still kind of annoying cos they named it the 5/6 room for a reason, and it's annoying having them coming in while we're having private conversations.*

**Bruce.** *Yep. So how would it be different if they couldn't come in here?*

**Kevin.** *We could talk about things that we want to talk about... Cos some of the stuff that they would hear might be a bit inappropriate...*

**Bruce.** *So it's more that there are things that you guys do in here that you don't think are right for a Prep or Grade 1 or 2?*

**Kevin.** *Yep*

**Bruce.** *... Ah is there anything else you'd be able to do in here if it was just your space?*

**Kevin.** *I reckon, Klay and all that will probably agree, have a um, one of those soccer tables*

**Bruce.** *Oh like a foosball table?*

**Kevin.** *Yeah...*

**Bruce.** *Anything else you'd be able to do if this was just yours?*

**Kevin.** *I would put more stuff in here. All we've got is seats... And a table.*

**Bruce.** *So what would you put in? Foosball table? What else?*

**Kevin.** *First of all I'd get rid of all these train tracks and all that... it doesn't have to be toys, but like a miniature TV or something.*

Kevin seeks to reinforce the boundaries of older child. He argues that he considers it inconsistent and frustrating to call the room a '5/6 room' whilst younger children are permitted to access the room after 4.30pm. He believes the presence of younger children in the room at any time weakens its status as a space for older children. In the same way that older children at Banksia Gully seek to evict younger intruders from the 5/6 room prior to 4.30pm, Kevin wishes to remove them from the room completely.

In addition, Kevin states that a 5/6 room is necessary because older children might engage in conversations that are "inappropriate" for younger children. He believes

that such activities may put younger children at risk. In doing so, Kevin positions himself as a more mature subject who is better able, and more entitled to cope with more adult subject matter. Children are able to make sense of themselves through developmental theories (Hauge, 2009). Children can be aware of their increasing age, the anticipated changes in their development and some of the behaviours that are associated with particular stages of development. They can access these understandings from family, peers, social institutions and media. In this instance, it is likely that Kevin recognises himself as a subject approaching adolescence. As such, he would anticipate that he would begin to engage in practices commonly associated with adolescence. In positioning himself as a moral threat, Kevin is likely aligning himself with the common discourse that adolescents, or in this case, near-adolescents represent a moral threat to younger children (Wyn & White, 1997). He argues that the activities of near adolescents, like him, are a risk from which younger children need to be protected.

Kevin also suggests that the resources available in the 5/6 room are not consistent with the interests of older children and that the room needs to be populated with activities that he considers consistent with his own view of what older children enjoy. Kevin cites a range of activities including private, 'adult' conversation and foosball (table soccer) as typical leisure practices with which he aligns himself and deems unsuitable for younger children. In Western cultures, adults and children are viewed dichotomously. Children are positioned as immature, innocent, weak and vulnerable. They are the opposite of the more desirable subject, which is the mature, knowledgeable and strong adult (Cannella, 2008). In desiring a 5/6 room populated with older children's resources, Kevin may seek to move himself away from the subject position of child and closer to the more desired position of adult. To do so allows Kevin to separate himself from his childhood and the vulnerability and incompleteness associated with being non-adult.

Penny suggests similarly, that older children are a singular group with shared interests different to those of younger children.

***Bruce:** What would you do to make OSHC more attractive to 5's and 6's?*



*Penny: Probably have a separate area where just 5's and 6's can be and they can do their own things... and I think that would be good having just a place where just 5's and 6's can hang out by their selves with other people who know like sort of have the same hobbies and interests as they do cos they're the same age.*

Penny states that children's leisure interests are a function of age. Categorising and universalising children according to age is one way that Western cultures enact developmental theories (Cannella, 2008). Adults use these developmental predictions to match play and leisure experiences to particular categories. It is therefore unsurprising that Kevin and Penny identify particular activities and games as being specifically for older children. In Chapter Four, I described how in Australia, toys and games are often accompanied by governmentally defined age recommendations based on developmental norms (Standards Australia, 2002). However, age recommendations are not the only way activities are aligned with particular ages or developmental stages. Marketers of toys and games commonly target their promotions at specific age groups, including *tweens*, who are considered a distinct market (Prince & Martin, 2012). Marketing to tweens is one way that children can access knowledge about not only what toys and games are suitable, but also what ways of conduct are normal for adolescents and pre-adolescents. Tween marketing is often closely tied to television shows that provide templates of affluent, western, heterosexual, teen lifestyles (Gerding & Signorielli, 2014). The purpose of making this link between the participants' accounts and tween marketing is not to suggest that Kevin and Penny gained their understanding of typical tween behaviour from marketing and television. More so, it is to suggest that knowledge of this sort is easily accessed by older children and can provide templates for normative ways of being a pre-adolescent.

Desiring a 5/6 room populated with activities and games recognised as suitable for older children makes the room more identifiable as an older child's space. This would provide further justification for excising younger children from the space. Davies (2003) argues that the purpose of category maintenance work is not to redefine social categories, but to reinforce them. This is precisely what Kevin seeks to do in this exchange about the 5/6 room. He seeks to make the room more reflective of shared

understandings of older childhood. In doing so he reinforces the boundary between older and younger child.

### “Pig”

When the 5/6 room was empty, there was little to suggest that it was a space intended for older children. The walls were populated with art produced by younger children and the storage shelves were filled with resources that looked like they would appeal more to younger children. These traces of younger children were an annoyance to some participants. As well as seeking to keep younger children from the 5/6 room, these participants also sought to remove other visual traces of younger children. Some participants drew my attention to the imprints of younger children on the 5/6 room, particularly in the form of art work. These participants indicated that they would like the 5/6 room to be more identifiable as an older child’s space. They drew attention to the fact that most of the works on display in the room belonged to younger children and that they had a desire to mark their own presence. However, in addition to being frustrated by their absence from the walls, these participants were keen to see younger children’s work removed. This was exemplified by how some of them responded to one work of art on the walls, “Pig” (Figure 8.2).



Figure 8.2: “Pig”

### ***Marking 'younger' using ridicule***

I first noticed Pig one afternoon whilst joining the participants for afternoon tea. Klay interrupted his snack to remove Pig from the wall and relocate it elsewhere in the 5/6 room. His actions generated laughter and statements of support from other boys as Klay played to his audience, publicly acting out the search for the worst possible place to put Pig. I wondered at the time what had motivated Klay to move Pig. Now that I was more aware of Pig, I began to notice on subsequent visits to Banksia Gully that Pig was being moved quite often. One afternoon I asked the boys about Pig. They told me that it was a terrible drawing and that they hated it.

As a rough representation of a pig with a line of grass that separates land from sky, Pig was typical of a younger child's drawing (Anning & Ring, 2004). In cultures similar to Australia, where literacy and numeracy are given elevated status in schools, it is representational drawing that is valued the most, being seen as more adult and developed (Anning & Ring, 2004). It is possible that Klay and his friends objected to Pig as only roughly representational and identifiable as the work of a much younger child. Previously, I explained how the participants used the boundaries of the 5/6 room to position the bodies of younger children outside the room and hence mark them as belonging outside the category of older child. Moving Pig in this way performed a similar function. Pig was a metaphor for younger childhood. The older children regarded Pig as primitive and unsophisticated. By moving and ridiculing Pig, the participants publicly marked its creator and all younger children as illegitimate presences in the 5/6 room and therefore not welcome within the category of older child.

### ***The shared exclusion of 'younger'***

Re-positioning Pig was a shared task. Although Klay performed the physical task of moving the picture himself, his peers involved themselves in the task from a distance. It is one example of the shared, social nature of discourses and the various ways in which they are reproduced (MacNaughton, 2005). The moving of Pig was conducted as a public spectacle. Klay played to the audience of his same-age peers and was affirmed by the laughter and assent of the other boys, and Penny who also contributed commentary about Pig's crudeness and babyishness. The assent of Klay's peers

functioned as a form of policing that reinforced the category of older child. It rewarded Klay for his performance, but also communicated to other older children what criteria determines membership of the category of older child.

Whilst thinking about Pig, I did wonder whether this incident might instead have been an act of cruelty directed at a specific child, “Stella” whose name appeared on the artwork. This did not appear to be the case. During the months that I was at the service, there were no children called Stella who attended. In addition, the participants were secretive in the ways that they treated the picture so as not to attract the attention of practitioners or younger children. If this were an act designed to hurt “Stella”, it would likely have been unsuccessful as there were never any witnesses. These were repeated acts of display and resistance that were intended for just older children.

Pig is one example of the ways the participants engaged in boundary work. Moving Pig resisted the officially sanctioned practice of the 5/6 room not only belonging to older children, but also to younger children. In some ways, it was a silent resistance and occurred seemingly without the knowledge of practitioners. Although invisible to practitioners, it was a public act of boundary work, in that it was performed for the assent of same-age peers. The treatment of Pig reinforced the boundaries of older child by both strengthening the participants’ own statuses as older children and weakening any claims that younger children may have to the category of older child.

### **When is an older child not an older child? The blurriness of boundaries.**

At Banksia Gully, there was a clear definition for older child, and who belonged to that category. Older children were those in Grades 5 and 6 and access to the 5/6 room was decided on that basis. Banksia Gully even had a graduation ceremony at the end of each school year, where Grade 6 children departing for secondary school were farewelled, and Grade 4 children were ceremonially granted access to the 5/6 room. This would appear to be a concrete definition and easily enforceable because of its clarity. However, in practice, the boundaries of who could use the 5/6 room were less clear. I observed two examples of how the definition of older child was blurred. In one instance, a Grade 4 child, Miranda, was sometimes accorded the status of older child because practitioners deemed her more mature than others her age. In the other,

practitioners ‘demoted’ those children who were deemed ‘not mature enough’ to occupy the 5/6 room.

### ***Promoting the ‘mature’ to older***

At Banksia Gully, access to the 5/6 room functioned as a marker of a child’s natural maturity. It was a maturity that was believed a consequence of each child’s increasing age and development. Such a belief, that children mature as they grow older and approach adulthood is embedded in developmental theories of childhood.

Developmental theory sees development as a unitary progression with universal markers that ignore other factors like culture, gender and class. Children who seem to be developing quickly or slowly are seen as an aberration and outside the norm (Burman, 2008). The practitioners at Banksia Gully governed access to the 5/6 room in this way. Children were deemed old enough when they achieved the designated age marker. However, practitioners appeared to believe that some children demonstrated ‘maturity’ at an earlier age than was considered ‘normal’. At Banksia Gully, one such child was Miranda, a Grade 4 child who was not a participant in the project. In Miranda’s case the immutability of age markers as a means of gauging maturity was abandoned.

It is possible to see how Miranda might be considered more mature than other children her age. She was an athletic, physically attractive child with an erect posture and was always well groomed. Miranda seemed less frivolous and more serious than other children. These are qualities that are often associated with socially popular preadolescent girls (Adler & Adler, 1998). Her play commonly revolved around her sporting and artistic pursuits, which were popular with the older children, and at which she was highly skilled. She would often position herself as an authority, instructing her same-age peers and some older children. Despite her small size, Miranda seemed less childlike than other children. Girls who are precocious or have more advanced verbal communication skills can also viewed more favourably by adults (Adler & Adler, 1998). Miranda evidenced this by engaging in ‘mature’ conversation with practitioners more often than other children her age.

My assessment of Miranda is subjective, but maturity is a marker that is commonly measured subjectively (Cannella, 2008). On a number of occasions during the project,

practitioners at Banksia Gully allowed Miranda to join the older children in the 5/6 room prior to 4.30pm. There were occasions when she was allowed to eat with the older children. Most commonly, she and Penny were permitted to practice cheerleading skills in the 5/6 room after the meal had concluded.

When I first began to think about Miranda's situation, I considered whether practitioners were governing access to the room using criteria that extend beyond strict adherence to developmental stages and age ranges. I wondered if practitioners were taking into account additional, more complex social and cultural factors that marked Miranda's difference from other younger children. I thought perhaps it was a blurring of the boundaries, or bending of the rules of development when they proved to be inconvenient. However, as I returned to Burman's (2008) critical reading of developmental psychology, I reconsidered that what I was observing might also be an enactment of developmental discourses. The practitioners did not apply a universally flexible approach in governing access to the 5/6 room. They instead made an exception for one child who did not correspond to the normal parameters of development. The qualities that Miranda exhibited, such as her aesthetics, sportiness and seriousness, seemed to afford her higher social status, but might be also valued within Banksia Gully as markers of advanced maturity and development. All other Grade 4 children were deemed 'normal', and their access to the room was determined by age. Foucault (1977) explains that this is how normalising judgment operates. It marks non-normative subjects for their difference, which serves a dual purpose of isolating the difference and also reinforcing what is considered normal and desirable.

In Miranda's instance, it was not just the practitioners who were involved in assessing her maturity.

***Bruce.** You realise, you know, when you make that room with bars on the windows, you're putting Miranda in there?*

***Penny.** Yeah (laughs).*

***Bruce.** Poor Miranda*

***Penny.** Poor Miranda. Maybe. Maybe each 5/6 would be allowed to invite one other... from the younger grades... to come spend a day with us... two days a week...*

***Bruce.** So like a negotiation... like a middle ground*

***Penny.** Yeah*

***Bruce.** So do you think Grade Fours are different to Grade Fives and Sixes?*

***Penny.** Not as much as younger grades. They're just not as older, or maybe not as mature. Except some of them are mature. Miranda is mature.*

***Bruce.** So what does mature look like?*

***Penny.** Well knows what they're doing and when it's bad and when it's right or wrong... Um not being stupid or silly... And knowing when you have to stop something or do something to make something right.... knowing what you're doing.*

Penny, who is in Grade 6, and I discuss the perception that Miranda, who is in Grade 4 and her friend, is somehow more mature than other children her age. I did so in response to Penny's drawing of a good SAC for older children, which placed younger children in a barren room, devoid of comforts and with prison-like barred windows (Figure 8.3). I wanted to challenge Penny's assertion that all younger children should be treated cruelly, even if it meant administering the same punitive regime to one of her best friends.

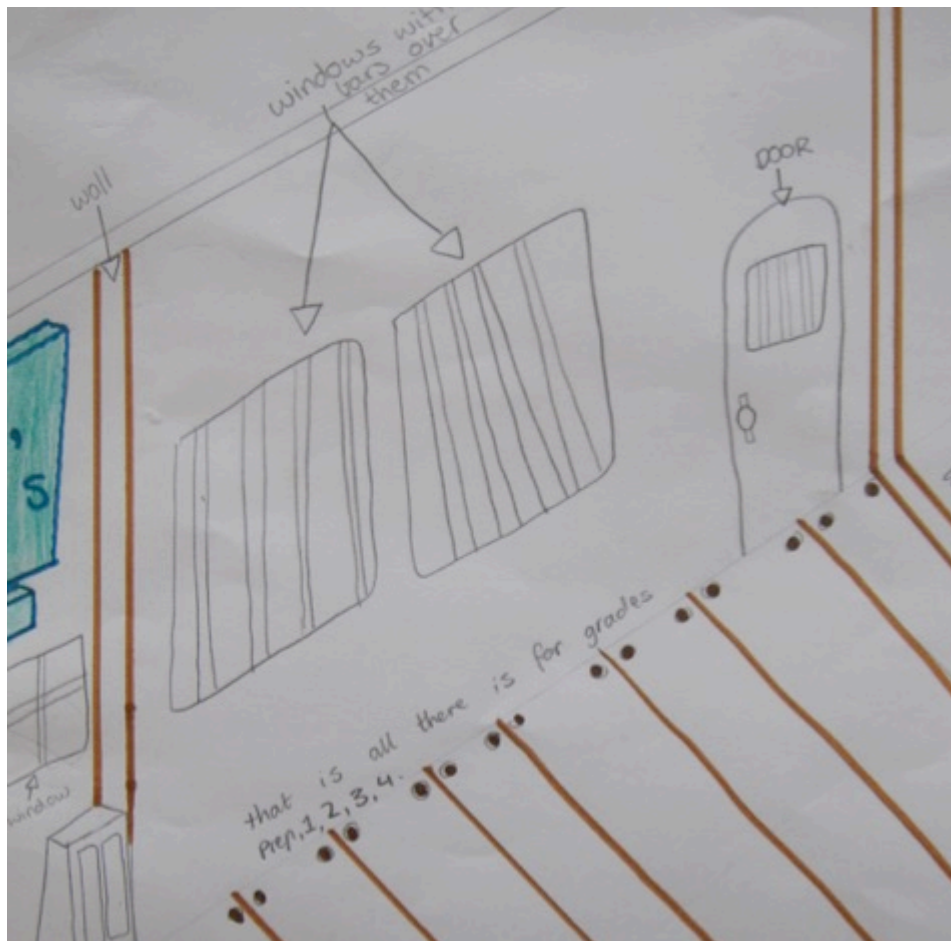


Figure 8.3: Penny's punitive SAC for younger children

Initially, Penny sought to apply a blanket, age-based definition of older children, which classified her friend Miranda as a younger child, and condemned her to attending Penny's punitive SAC for younger children. However, Penny then changed her position, granting Miranda access to the 5/6 room on the basis that she is more mature than other younger children. Penny describes maturity as knowing right from wrong, and not being silly. This is a definition of maturity that may not offer much clarity for an outsider seeking to apply the same criteria in determining whether a child is mature enough to use the 5/6 room. However, it is a definition of maturity is likely little different from one that an adult may produce. Cannella (2008) describes maturity as a "developmental construction used to regulate children every day, a value-laden norm masked as natural fact" (p. 61). Penny uses maturity in this way. She describes it in a way that reflects her own values and broader cultural values of what constitutes a good older child, citing things like knowing right from wrong, and behaving less like a child and more like an adult. Her definition of maturity also



seems focused on morality and behaviour, and alludes to Kohlberg's and Piaget's widely used theories of moral development. Penny's definition seems to correspond to Kohlberg's conventional morality stage, which sees individuals as having internalised social rules and prioritising the needs of the group over the needs of the self (Duska & Whelan, 1977; Kohlberg, 1969). Piaget and Gabain (1932) define similarly in their third stage of "consciousness of rules" (p. 56), which regards autonomous policing and internalisation of cultural rules as characteristic of more advanced development. Penny describes this as somebody who "knows what they're doing and when it's bad and when it's right or wrong... and knowing when you have to stop something or do something to make something right". Penny uses her definition of maturity to control Miranda and decide what areas of the SAC she can access. In this hypothetical example, Penny describes a way of assessing development and maturity to allocate age-based privileges in much the same as the practitioners do in her SAC.

### ***Demoting the 'immature' to younger***

Miranda's story was not the only example of how practitioners at Banksia Gully would sometimes bend the rules about eligibility to occupy the 5/6 room. One afternoon, I noted that Kevin and Klay were eating their meal in the main room with the younger children. Kevin and Klay had apparently broken the SAC rules. As a consequence, the practitioners had denied the two boys access to the 5/6 room for a number of days. When discussing the incident with the practitioners, they described use of the 5/6 room as a "privilege" that could be revoked. Christensen et al. (2001) describe a similar practice that applied to similarly aged child in their research, which suggests that according privileges based on age is a strategy not restricted to Banksia Gully.

In forcing Kevin and Klay to eat with younger children, the practitioners did not just revoke their access to the room; they compromised their status as older children and communicated that younger children were not suitable play companions for older children. The two participants no longer had a physical boundary that reinforced their status as older children. This pedagogical approach again draws on developmental discourses that position the adult as superior to the child (Cannella, 2008). In barring the participants from the 5/6 room, they are physically and metaphorically positioned

as subjects more distant from adult status than same-age peers who did not transgress. Cannella (2008) writes that subjects with more advanced development are accorded more privilege and status than those below them. The 5/6 room is an example of this. For breaking SAC rules, Kevin and Klay were demoted and required to join younger children who occupy a lower level of development, and with it experience a loss of status and privilege.

It would be an overstatement to suggest that Kevin and Klay lost their status as older children. Their punishment only extended to their use of the 5/6 room and did not impact on other aspects of the SAC, where they could distinguish themselves as older and different. Power relationships are not a unidirectional relationships of power and oppression (Foucault, 1980). Resistance is also a form of power. Kevin and Klay demonstrated resistance during their exile from the 5/6 room. Whilst eating meals with younger children, they engaged in overt and insincere displays of happiness, which I suspect were intended to communicate that they were enjoying themselves and unconcerned with their punishments. There were other small resistances where they sought to reclaim their status as older children despite being outside the 5/6 room. When eating meals or engaged in play, Kevin and Klay would sometimes refer to younger children as “little guy”, drawing attention to a child’s status as less developed. When meals were over, they would play with same-age peers and engage in strategies to exclude younger children from their play. These actions, whilst sometimes suggesting that they were happy to comply with the directions of practitioners, also suggested that Kevin and Klay valued their status as older children and the associated privileges.

In the instances of both Miranda, and Kevin and Klay, practitioners drew on developmental discourses to govern access to the 5/6 room. For a child displaying advanced maturity, they granted access to the room when it was denied to other younger children. In contrast, ill disciplined children had their access to the room revoked and their status as older children challenged. In doing so, the practitioners positioned themselves as experts in childhood with the power to divide younger from older. However, the practitioners were not in a position of total power. The participants demonstrated their own engagement with localised practices of younger and older childhood. Penny participated in shared practices with practitioners that

positioned Miranda as advanced. Kevin and Klay, on the other hand, engaged in resistance to keep the boundaries of older child intact. These examples highlight the important role the 5/6 room played in contributing to socially constructed boundaries of older childhood. That it was positioned as a privilege and status symbol is a reminder of the room's worth to the older participants, but also more broadly the value that Australian culture places on maturity and adulthood.

### **Is there any point to an empty room?**

I discussed earlier, how aside from meal times, the 5/6 room was often empty. The room was vacant despite all participants declaring that having their own room was particularly important. So are older children entitled to their own space if it is going to sit unused? Is there any point to having an empty room in a SAC setting?

In contemporary Australian culture, child care services like SAC exist within a neoliberal discourse that assesses their viability through a market model concerned with the ability of SAC to achieve outcomes, satisfy consumers and be financially viable (Moss, 2009). The FSAC and NQF provide standardised outcomes for Australian SAC services. The FSAC charges practitioners with responsibility for providing vibrant spaces populated with experiences that contribute to children's learning and development (DEEWR, 2011). It seems unlikely that an empty room at a SAC would satisfy neoliberal criteria of productivity and value. In the absence of any children or practitioners it would be difficult to argue that the 5/6 room was a vibrant learning environment. An economically successful SAC would ensure that the space was either more active in the education of children, or was used for some other means of generating income.

Despite not always being vibrant and active, the 5/6 room was effective as a marker of the social value apportioned to being older. The participants understood the value in being recognised as more mature and adult. They performed continuing boundary work to stake their claims to a 'more mature' status. This boundary work was performed for a range of audiences, including same-age peers, younger children and practitioners. Their reward for this work came in the form of a room set aside for them, at least for a portion of their days. Miranda exemplified the work-like nature of demonstrating maturity. She was rewarded with access to the 5/6 room outside the

usual conventions because she performed herself in a way that embodied accepted standards of maturity. The fact that the room was often empty did not detract from its effectiveness as a marker of maturity. It is possible that its emptiness made it more effective as a marker. At times when the main program space was crowded and space was hard to find, the emptiness of the 5/6 room was all the more noticeable.

However, it is possible to argue that the 5/6 room was a successful learning space. One of the five learning outcomes of the FSAC is that “Children have a strong sense of identity”. It asks practitioners to support children to “learn about themselves and construct their own identity” (DEEWR, 2011, p. 19). This chapter has detailed a number of ways that the 5/6 room played a role in supporting the participants to construct their identities as older children. The naming and presence of a 5/6 room helped to reinforce the discourse that older children have an identity distinct from that of younger children. In addition, observational data and the participants’ narratives provide examples of how they actively participated in the construction of their aged identities.

The participants stated a desire that the room reflected their identities and was populated with their own resources and works. They manipulated the contents of the room to marginalise younger children’s presences and claim ownership of the space. The participants also endeavoured to control the movements of younger children, keeping them out of the 5/6 room. They accomplished this through their interactions with younger children or enlisting the support of practitioners. Finally, the participants engaged in definitional work to identify who was classified as an older child and could have access to the room.

In this chapter, I do not seek to make a deliberation on whether a mostly empty room at Banksia Gully met the parameters of a successful learning space outlined in the FSAC. The FSAC is only one set of measures by which the effectiveness of a SAC space can be judged. Using just the FSAC as a guide, it would appear to not be effective. The room did not reflect the identities of the children it was intended for and was often unused by that group. Despite these shortcomings, in drawing on poststructural theories, it is possible to argue that the space provided a site for older children to define, redefine and contest their identities as older children. The participants also successfully communicated their belief that they should have their

own space within a multi-age environment. When these factors are considered together, they raise the possibility that having a separate space might be an important aspect of SAC curriculum for older children.

## **SUMMARY**

The 5/6 room at Banksia Gully was an important space to the project participants. During meal times, the room was alive with conversation and laughter. At these times, it was a space that clearly belonged to older children. In and around the room, they engaged in a range of practices founded on shared understandings of maturity that bounded it as a space for older children. The participants policed the space to ensure that younger children stayed away. They also engaged in work-like activities such as the drawing and posting of signs, and the manipulation of artwork to highlight the visual presence of younger children.

The participants did not perform these tasks alone. They policed each other to encourage behaviour that reinforced the boundaries of acceptable conduct for older children. Practitioners also played an important role in setting conditions of access founded on age and developmental criteria. However, despite the concrete appearance of these conditions, practitioners would sometimes bend the rules to accommodate children who they deemed more adult or mature. The rules were not merely imposed by practitioners. The participants and other children also participated in them. Older children were complicit in sanctioning access to the space for those children deemed mature enough. Younger children also participated in defining the 5/6 room as an older children's space, by self monitoring and restricting their movements to areas outside the room even though no physical boundary existed.

Despite the importance the participants placed on the 5/6 room, and the work they invested in defining it as an older children's space, it was not always used. Outside of meal times it was frequently empty. Despite its frequent emptiness, the room was still an effective marker of the social privileges afforded to the more mature.

Observational data and the participants' accounts also show that it was effective as a space where the identities of the participants as older children were constantly reinforced and contested.

In this chapter, my analysis focused on the acts of category maintenance that took place in the 5/6 room during snack times. However, these acts were not limited to meals. They occurred throughout each afternoon, in particular the times when the participants were at play. In the next chapter, I focus my analysis on Seamus' second phase of SAC, "Play", and other spaces at Banksia Gully outside the 5/6 room. I also broaden my application of poststructural theory to include Butler's theory of performativity to consider whether children's acts of aged category maintenance might also be performative.

## CHAPTER NINE – “PLAY”

In this chapter, I move my analysis from snack time and activities in the Grade 5/6 room, and focus my analysis on the Seamus’ second phase of SAC, “play”. Each afternoon, once most children had finished eating, the practitioners would open the doors, allowing children to play outside. At this time, Banksia Gully became busier and noisier. Most children, in particular the older ones, played outside. Most children would split into groups with their friends, whilst a few played alone. The discussion in this chapter includes the types of play the participants engaged in, the sites at which play occurred, and the equipment they used. It acknowledges the work done earlier in thesis about definitions of play, in particular the common conceptualisation of play as something that is free, immersive and divorced from work. The analysis uses data from my observations, and the participants’ interviews and projects. In “Eat”, my analysis drew on Foucault and Davies’ theories of power and knowledge to propose that children and adults play an active role in socially constructing the category of older child. In this chapter, I extend the theoretical range of my analysis to include Butler’s theories of gender performativity.

Butler (1990, 1993) argues that gender is socially constructed through the performative reiteration of recognisable, pre-existing gender roles. Although Butler’s theory is concerned specifically with the construction of gender categories, in this chapter I discuss how it can also apply to the construction of age categories. Gender does not exist in isolation from other aspects of our identities. It intersects with other social complexities like class and race so that they are performed simultaneously (Connell, 1995). In Chapter Eight, I demonstrated the multiple ways that participants in this project were actively engaged in forming their aged identities as older children. If age is also a part of a child’s identity, then we can expect that it too intersects with performances of gender, class and other complexities.

In this chapter, I use Butler’s theory of performativity to discuss some of the ways that participants performed their identities in relation to dominant discourses. However, my analysis is not solely restricted to gender. I show some of the ways that performances of gender intersect with performances of age or developmental

classifications. That age or development can be performed is the central idea in this chapter.

There is not a lot of research exploring the performative construction of age or development. Developmental literature typically concentrates on cognitive development or the physical growth of bodies but does not address how the body is acted upon by developmental discourses (Hauge, 2009). Hauge (2009) explores the possibility that children may performatively construct their stage of development. Butler (1997) argues that in order for subjects to perform gender, they must be able to access gendered discourses. Drawing on Butler, Hauge (2009) argues that children are also aware of, and position themselves in relation to shared developmental discourses. She proposes that children are aware of developmental and cultural milestones linked to age, such as the transition from child to adolescent, and either choose or ignore bodily practices that align with a particular stage. Whilst Hauge's research is isolated and not conclusive, it establishes a base from which I can contemplate the possibility that older children in SAC actively constitute themselves in relation to developmental discourses.

The analysis that follows has been structured to reflect two key elements of Butler's theory of performativity.

Power acts on the subject in at least two ways: first, as what makes the subject possible, the condition of its possibility and its formative occasion, and second, as what is taken up and reiterated in the subject's own acting. (Butler, 1997, p. 14)

The first element of Butler's theory is that dominant discourses within a culture make available to each subject a number of recognisable ways in which they can understand and perform their gender. The second element relates to the ways that subjects engage with these roles. Butler argues that individuals play an active role in which roles they adopt and also the ways they are reiterated.

Therefore, the two central arguments of this chapter are firstly, that just as with gender, knowledge about how to belong to different age categories is knowledge that older children can access in their SAC settings and culture more broadly. Secondly, that older children engage actively with these discourses to constitute themselves as a



distinct age category that is recognisably different from the other younger children at SAC. I argue that as well as being a biological and chronological inevitability, older childhood is performatively constructed.

In the first part of this analysis, I investigate the first element. I describe some of the different understandings and ways of performing of aged and gendered identities that were available to participants in this SAC setting. As well as identifying the understandings themselves, I discuss the places where the participants were able to access this knowledge. In the second part of the analysis, I examine the multiple ways that the participants performed their identities. This includes the intersections between performances of age and gender, and the ways that power relations work to constrain, reward and sanction different performances.

In this chapter, I present my arguments in a linear fashion. To accomplish this, I have split Butler's theory of performativity into two distinct ideas. Firstly, that subjects are able to access certain ways of performing age and gender. Then secondly, that subjects are able to take up and reiterate those performances. It is important to acknowledge that the linearity I have imposed on the structure of this chapter clashes with the poststructural ontology adopted in this thesis. Butler (1997) confirms this conflict by arguing that the roles made possible by discourses cannot be neatly separated from acts of subject formation. As well as providing choices of possible subject positions, these different roles are also active in forming the subject. The linearity I have imposed on this paper was done to support me in expressing my arguments. The reality was that when writing this analysis, it was sometimes impossible to separate how the participants accessed discourses of age and gender, from how they performed them. This will be evident in this chapter when, despite my efforts, I occasionally break from linearity and slip back and forth between discussing acts of accessing and performing discourse. Consequently, I have used linearity in this chapter as an argumentative device, but not to disguise the complexities that were integral to this research and the research site.

## **UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT IS TO BE AN OLDER CHILD**

Building on Butler (1997), it can be argued that children will express their gender identities performatively, because they are immersed within already determined

gender roles that are informed by dominant, cultural discourses. If gender-based categories can be expressed and created performatively, then it follows that older children can also access and perform into already determined age-based roles. My data analysis shows that there appear to be a number of aged roles available to the participants by which they can understand themselves as developing subjects. Some of these are broader cultural narratives about maturation and development, whereas others exist in the form of local practices. In the first half of this chapter, I discuss the different ways that the participants were able to access knowledge about available age-based roles.

### **Drawing on developmental discourses to define older childhood**

One important way the participants were able to access age-based roles was through developmental knowledge. The participants indicated that they were aware of developmental categories, knowledge and standards. They used these developmental concepts of maturity, and physical and cognitive development to position themselves and younger children at different points along a developmental trajectory.

All participants spoke about themselves as developing subjects. One important way they did this was using the concept of maturity.

*Bruce. What would you call an older kid?*

*Sky. Um like kind of threes (Grade 3) and up.*

*Bruce. ... So what makes an older kid different?*

*Sky. Well they're more mature hopefully. And... they see things differently because... I haven't explained it but um they see things differently I reckon.*

In this exchange, Sky, aged 10 to 11 years, explains how she conceptualises maturity as a progression linked to age. She draws upon the idea that as an older child, she is more adult-like, and capable of more sophisticated thought. Sky's belief that older children "see things differently" resembles Piaget's theories of cognitive development. Piaget regards children as subjects whose cognitive functioning becomes increasingly sophisticated as they age (Berk, 2013). Sky alludes to a belief that she is able to see complexity in the world in a way that younger children cannot.

Piaget believed also that cognitive development is not gradual, but instead children progress through stages, and cannot make the leap to the next stage unless they are developmentally ready to do so (Halpenny & Pettersen, 2013). This notion of staged development as a series of leaps is reflected in Sky's statement. Sky does not seem to consider that a child's cognition could be partially developed. If you are capable of complex thinking, then you have made the leap to older child. If you have not then you are still a younger child. Sky is able to identify a specific age at which she believes children become older. Her choice of Grade 3 (approximately 9 years) as the age at which children become older is interesting. It does not correspond with the juncture between Piaget's Preoperational and Concrete Operational stages, which occurs at age seven (Halpenny & Pettersen, 2013). Nor does it correspond that closely with her school's local practices of age classification, which define older children as Grade 5 and above. Sky appears to draw on other factors, which are unclear in this research, in defining 9 years as the age at which the leap is made.

Whereas Sky used cognitive development to define maturity, Kevin, aged 10 to 11 years, draws more on concepts of physical development.

***Bruce.** So are there any other ways you think you're different from younger kids?*

***Kevin.** Um well bigger I guess... and we have more muscle... We build muscle. We build bone. We get stronger and stronger by the second. And that increases our power.*

Kevin's alignment of maturity with the physical is founded on a desire for strength and power. He indicates these are attributes that are sought after. Adults possess the most of these qualities, making the adult the most desired subject position. Strength and power are important in how male children understand development and increasing age. Sport is one way to exhibit strength and therefore an important way for boys to measure development and masculinity (Swain, 2003). Kevin was a keen and skilled basketball player. He often spoke about representing his region in basketball and his desire to play professionally as an adult. Playing professionally represents a desired end point that he moves towards incrementally as he ages. Succeeding at sport also provides a measure of physical prowess that helps older

children to distinguish themselves from younger children. There is social status attached to being skilful at sport, particularly for males (Swain, 2003). This would enhance its currency as an accepted way of measuring development.

### **Comparing yourself to the Other to define older childhood**

In Sky and Kevin's accounts, they do not just define themselves developmentally; they also define themselves in comparison to younger children. Comparing social groups is one way that social knowledge is created. Derrida (1997) argues that one of the main ways Western cultures compares different groups is through using language to create binary opposites. Summarising Derrida's ideas on binaries, MacNaughton (2005) says that opposing two terms imbues them with their meanings, and that neither term has any meaning without the other. For example, the term *male* only has meaning when considered in relation to the opposing term, *female*. If there were no opposing term, male would cease to have any meaning. The effects of binaries go beyond the mere opposition of terms. Binaries create hierarchies, where one term is constructed as superior to the other. In poststructural theory, the inferior half of a binary is sometimes referred to as the Other (MacNaughton, 2005). Derrida (1997) argues that binaries are practised socially in ways that repress the Other. The Other is often seen to have what Derrida calls a *lack*, or an absence of a desired attribute. It is the lack of the attribute that marks the term as inferior (Derrida, 1997).

Sky and Kevin see themselves and younger children as binary opposites. Both regard children in SAC as belonging to one of two groups, older or younger, and that younger children are inferior. Both identify a particular lack that characterises younger children. Sky believes that younger children lack maturity and sophistication of thought. Kevin believes younger children lack physical strength.

Sky and Kevin were not the only participants to understand themselves by comparison to younger children. In the following examples, Penny also alludes to an older/younger child binary.

*Bruce. So it looks like you've been pretty mean to the preps to Grade 4's*

*Penny. (laughs)*

**Bruce.** Why are you being so mean to the Preps to Grade 4's?

**Penny.** Well, they're not old enough to get what we get, so

**Bruce.** What do you mean?

**Penny.** ... we're more responsible, and we're older, and it means that we're getting more mature, sometimes more silly, but... we deserve more things than they do.

In this exchange, Penny and I discuss her project, a drawing that depicts a SAC building divided in two (Figure 9.1).

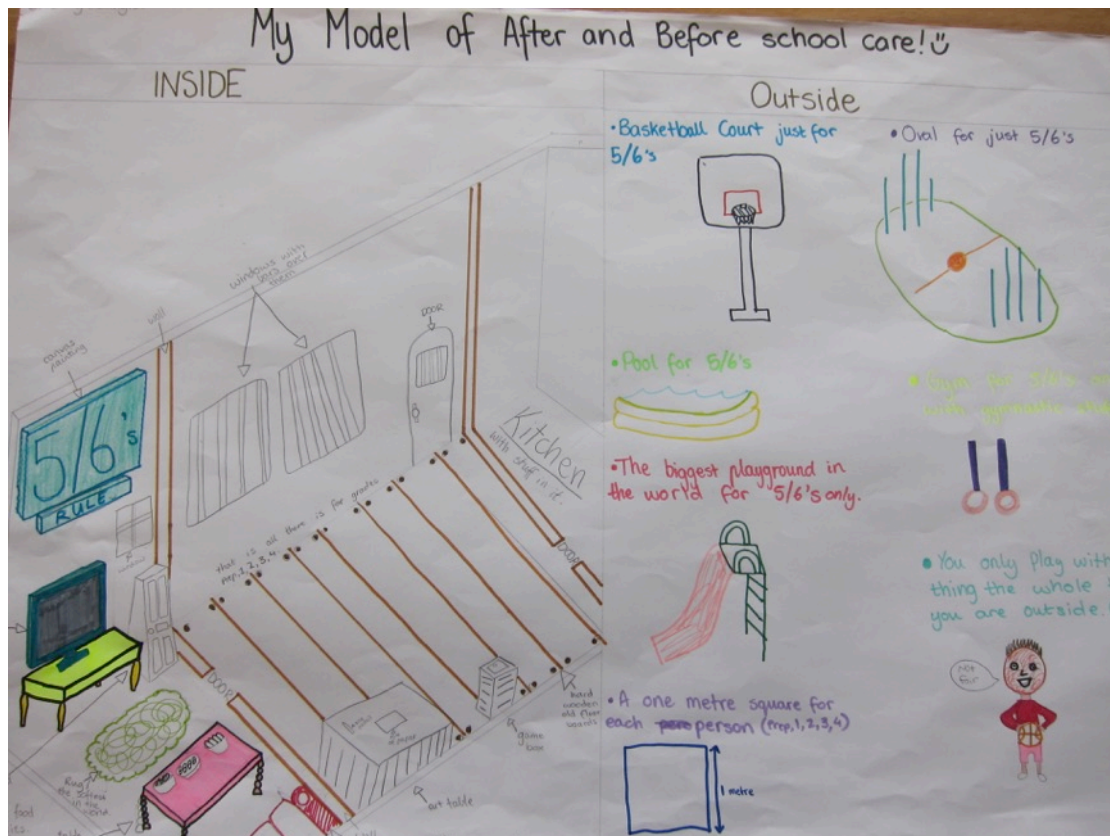


Figure 9.1 – Penny's SAC program

Penny enacts an older/younger child binary through her drawing. She privileges the superior subject position, the older child, by providing them with a luxuriously appointed program space. Older children's half of the building is fitted with comfortable furniture, a plush rug, sushi and cable television. The other half of the

building, intended for the Other, the younger child, is more austere, with bare floorboards, few resources, no food, and bars on the windows and doors. Later in the interview, albeit with a sense of humour, Penny says the space is intended to be awful, and the bars are required to prevent younger children from escaping.

Similarly to Sky and Kevin, Penny refers to a lack on the part of younger children, who she believes lack responsibility. The attributes of responsibility, maturity and strength cited by these three participants are some of the same attributes that adults use to describe themselves in comparison to children. Adults use these same developmental ideas to form an adult/child binary, where adults are constructed as opposite and superior to the primitive, developing child (Cannella, 2008). In these examples, these participants use developmental language to signify the Otherness and lack of younger children, positioning older children as the ‘most adult’ in their setting and the superior term in a similar, older/younger child binary.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) also theorises about binaries, but in the context of gender. She argues that binaries act to stabilise a subject’s identity through their positioning against the opposite. Subjects internalise external discourses in ways that makes these discourses appear natural and part of the subject’s pre-existing essence. They perform these internalised desires to not only constitute themselves, but also exteriorise their binary opposite. The interiorising of developmental discourses is evident in Penny’s drawing and narrative. She identifies maturity, a developmental characteristic, as an essential characteristic of older childhood. Penny then enacts her internalised desire to be mature and older through her drawing, which both consolidates her subject position as older child and rejects the subject position of younger child.

When examining Penny’s drawing of a desired SAC program, it is difficult not to draw parallels with Foucault’s (1977) work in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault describes how surveillance and power are applied to populations to individualise those who deviate from the norm. Once identified as Other, the deviant are subject to correction and punitive practices designed to bring them closer to the norm. These ideas are writ large in Penny’s drawing. Whilst acknowledging the humour present in her work, she proposes a corrective institution not dissimilar to a prison or asylum. It is a place where her binary opposite, the immature, irresponsible, weak, younger child

can be isolated and kept separate. In doing so, she is able to make sense of the older child as superior subject and more entitled to privilege. Her drawing is not a work of complete imagination. The building she has drawn is very similar in structure to Banksia Gully. The proportion of the spaces is similar to the real spaces she inhabits. At Banksia Gully, older and younger children are already segregated. In reality, she has merely added some finishing flourishes to an existing structure. This suggests not only that the participants understand themselves as the binary opposites of younger children but are also assisted to do so by the architecture and dividing practices already present in SAC.

In addition to the examples provided, there were other ways that participants drew upon development and maturity to differentiate themselves from younger children. Participants often spoke of younger children as dependant on adults and older children, vulnerable, interested in make-believe play, lacking creativity and less able to care appropriately for games and equipment. In speaking about themselves and younger children in this way, the participants demonstrate that they also participate in the use of developmental language and can access knowledge about possible ways to be, or not be, an older child.

### **Children's use of media classification to define older childhood**

The participants were also able to access knowledge about development and maturity through a number of social and cultural institutions. One of these is Australia's media classification ratings system, which I described in Chapter Four. Australia's classification system uses developmental measures of age and maturity to prescribe guidelines for parents when selecting visual media for children. 'General' or 'G' classified media are regarded as safe enough to be consumed by all children, regardless of age. However other classifications, such as 'PG - Parental Guidance Recommended' or 'M - Recommended for Mature Audiences' impose age and maturity restrictions and recommend the guidance and supervision of mature adults (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012a). These guidelines broadly apply and reproduce developmental ideas, that as children age they develop sufficient cognitive sophistication to be able to understand and contextualise 'adult' material. They also apply behaviourist theories that consider children as prone to repeating unsuitable adult behaviours seen on-screen. These messages about development and access to

depictions of adult behaviours are implicit in the classification system. Children are aware that as they move through classifications, they are gaining incremental access to more 'mature' material.

Social institutions like schools play an active role in distributing knowledge about gender (Connell, 1995). Similarly, as an apparatus of government and a widely practised social institution, the media classification system likely plays an important role in distributing knowledge about age and development. Children are active participants in the classification system. For those children with sufficient financial capital, seeing the latest Disney or Pixar films is a common recreational activity in Australia, and a regular feature of many SAC programs. The children at Banksia Gully consumed films and video games as part of the regular SAC program. The participants were aware of movie classifications and used it as one criterion for assessing media content. For many, being able to consume PG or even M-rated material served as marker of their growing maturity. It provided a concrete way of marking their developmental progress compared to that of younger children.

Being allowed to watch PG-rated material was important to the participants. Movies and television shows were shown most days at SAC, but were restricted to G-rated material. Six of the nine interviewees communicated their dissatisfaction with G-rated material.

***Bruce.** Is there any way that you think you could make OSHC better for the times when your friends have gone? Is there anything here that would make the time pass more quickly?*

***Kevin.** Probably... being able to watch like ABC3 and all of that... Cos the kids, the little ones always want to watch Frozen and all that... And the older kids... we don't really want to watch Frozen or Willy Wonka... We just want to watch normal TV shows.*

***Bruce.** Yep. So ABC3 is your example of the sort of stuff you want to watch?*

***Kevin.** Yeah.*



**Bruce.** *So... I do watch a little bit of ABC3. I've got a niece and nephew. So why isn't that any good for little kids?*

**Kevin.** *Well there's some shows that are rated PG, that somehow we don't allow them... Um and also cos some of us like me and Klay and Stephen, we're allowed to watch M shows.*

Access to PG-rated material seems to be a rite of passage for some participants and a way of distinguishing themselves from younger children. Kevin explains how he and his friends have access to PG and M-rated content at home. He suggests that SAC would be improved if older children could watch ABC3, a children's television station provided by Australia's publicly funded broadcaster. ABC3 has material intended for children aged 6 to 15 years and shows mostly G-rated but also some PG material (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2015). Kevin displays an awareness of media ratings and uses them to distinguish between older and younger children's material, but also to position himself as older and entitled to more 'mature' material.

That Kevin is able to distinguish between older and younger children's programming is unsurprising. In Chapter Four, I discussed how marketers target tweens as a distinct market segment (Cook & Kaiser, 2004). Marketers work in partnership with producers of children's television shows, similar to those on ABC3, that are aimed specifically at tweens, to cross-promote products. Products often appear within shows or are advertised during breaks and provide a template for desirable, aspirational, affluent, heterosexual, tween lifestyles (Gerding & Signorielli, 2014). Older children like Kevin are able to recognise tween shows as something intended for them. Through watching tween television and the associated marketing, older children have access to knowledge about normative, pre-adolescent performances of identity.

The participants used media classifications to perform their difference from younger children. Many described G-rated material as being for younger children. As Kevin did, they sometimes singled out particular films like Disney's *Frozen*, associating them with younger childhood. *Frozen* was shown at least once a week at Banksia Gully. Tiger also singled out *Frozen* as younger children's media declaring, "I don't like it any more". In doing she expressed a desire to be seen as older and separate from her younger self. However, not all participants saw all G-rated material as bad.

Kevin considered ABC3 acceptable despite most of its content being G-rated. Some participants also named specific G-rated films that they regarded as suitable. This suggests that whilst the participants use media ratings to mark age categories, they might also draw on other information in marking specific films as older or younger. What the other factors might be is not clear. One likely possibility is whether a particular film is visibly popular with younger children. This seemed the case with *Frozen*, which was frequently requested, watched and sung along to mostly by groups of younger girls.

I observed the participants use media ratings during snack times. They sometimes spoke about movies and television programs they had seen or wanted to see. In these instances, they sometimes talked about the rating of the material. Such conversations provided a point of comparison for others in the group and served to define what is desirable content for older children.

Some participants enacted their greater maturity by drawing on a contemporary western discourse that constructs young children as vulnerable (Cannella, 2008). They argued that younger children might be scared, or unable to understand mature content. In positioning younger children as vulnerable, it follows that they require protection provided by their binary opposite, the more worldly and capable adult. Many participants suggested that younger children could be protected by denying them access to ‘mature’ content, whilst older children should have privileged, unsupervised access to these materials. In this way, these participants assume the adult role of protector.

Media classifications in Australia are socially sanctioned practices that can carry significant relevance in children’s lives. They provide a framework by which children can measure their increasing age and maturity. That these guidelines afford them access to materials deemed unsuitable for younger children adds weight to older children’s perceptions of themselves as more mature and different.

### **Local segregating practices as a means of measuring maturity**

So far in this chapter, I have detailed broader cultural discourses and practices that the participants accessed to gain knowledge about themselves as maturing subjects. In addition to these global practices, there were also localised practices within the school

and SAC service that participants drew upon. The most obvious of these were the organisational structures of the service and host school, which recognised children in Grades 5 and 6 as a separate stage with greater maturity and physical abilities. School staff members and SAC practitioners referred to children in Grades 5 and 6 as *seniors*, and all other children as *juniors*. The SAC service attached privileges and responsibilities to their senior status. One of these was the 5/6 room discussed in Chapter 8. In addition, the service had two playgrounds. There was a junior playground available to all children, and a senior playground available only to Grades 3 to 6.

When discussing the 5/6 room and senior playground, the participants displayed a shared understanding of the developmental concepts underpinning the practice of seniors-only spaces. In justifying their ‘right’ to a separate 5/6 room, many participants cited their increasing maturity. Some cited their perceived need to engage in conversations with mature subject matter that may pose a moral risk to younger children. When speaking of the playgrounds, they highlighted equipment and play that required greater strength and presented a physical risk to younger children. In reserving these spaces for older children, the SAC service communicates that older children are cognitively, socially and physically more advanced, and adult-like.

Another way the participants learned about their status as older children was through the service’s mentoring program. The service had a number of formal activities that encouraged older children to adopt adult-like roles. Older children were sometimes asked to model ‘appropriate’ behaviours, run group activities or provide support to younger children.

***Bruce.** So who tells you, or who suggests to you that you should be a good influence on younger kids? ...*

***Kevin.** Every adult....*

***Bruce.** ... do they have different expectations for you do you think?*

***Kevin.** Definitely*

**Bruce.** ... So what does it mean for them when they say you've got to be a good role model? What do you think that means? ...

**Kevin.** Well, first of all, don't be like them (younger children)... So don't be all running... just don't like knock anything over, break things, slap things, hit people... It's basically respecting people... Having reverence and wisdom. I guess.

In this vignette, Kevin describes the central role that adults play in communicating a range of desired behaviours to older children. In the following conversation, Penny explains similarly that teachers and practitioners expect older children to perform responsible behaviours.

**Bruce.** So is being a role model something that's expected of you, that you're supposed to do?

**Penny.** Yeah

**Bruce.** So who talks to you about that?

**Penny.** Well, my teacher at school... She tells us that the Grade Sixes are supposed to be role models to all the younger students at our school. And Robyn tells us here um that we're supposed to be responsible and show the other kids how to act.

**Bruce.** ... So how do you feel about that?

**Penny.** I feel it's good, seeing that they're looking up to me and to all of my friends.

Both participants indicate how practitioners and schoolteachers use mentoring programs to position older children as more mature and different. Kevin specifically identifies behaviours and qualities that adults require of older children. He suggests that adults regard older children as subjects who can possess wisdom, a quality often associated with adulthood (Cannella, 2008). He also regards respecting others as adult behaviour. In summarising what being a role model looks like, Kevin also defines it as what it is not. Being responsible and a role model are to be more adult and not like

younger children. Role model is a status that is only available to older children. Implicit in this is the discursive knowledge that younger children are the binary opposite of older children, and presumably incapable of wisdom and respect. This constructs younger children as less civilised and more primitive. It is a concept of childhood similar to that proposed by 19<sup>th</sup> century recapitulation theorists, who regarded children as a manifestation of an earlier evolutionary stage (Lesko, 2012).

The more mature older child is a discourse that is easily accessed and performed. As Kevin and Penny suggest, practitioners and other important adults communicated the discourse to them. Adults present a sanctioned template of 'adult' behaviours for older children to perform and reproduce. In one example, one afternoon the participants, along with other older children, were asked to devise and lead a series of group games for younger children. During the planning and execution of the activities, the older children operated under the supervision of practitioners, who offered advice and positioned themselves nearby, ready to intervene if necessary. This mentoring experience provided older children with an adult-like role that they could inhabit. However, occupying the role did not accord older children full adult status. They were never fully trusted with full responsibility for younger children. They were instead positioned as apprentice adults, and offered restricted, sanctioned ways of performing adult under adult surveillance. Nonetheless, the mentoring program circulated local truths about older childhood as a stage distinct from younger childhood. These truths were reinforced by sanctioned activities that made public older children's greater maturity, positioning them as 'not yet adult' but 'more adult' than younger children.

These examples from the participants' narratives represent some of the ways that older children can access knowledge from their SAC service, school and broader culture about how to be older children. Developmental concepts like maturity and physical change are central to how adults and children speak about childhood and adolescence. These developmental concepts are also embedded in legal, social and pedagogical practices like media classifications and mentoring programs. Children participate in these practices, and therefore the discourse of the developing child, and the notion that as they get older, they become increasingly adult.

## **PERFORMING THE OLDER CHILD**

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced a possibility raised by Hauge (2009) that in addition to gender, age categories might also be performed. So far, I have shown some of the ways that the participants were able to access knowledge about how to perform the role of 'older child'. In the second half of this chapter, I describe some ways in which I observed the participants inhabiting and performing that role. My discussion focuses mostly on the performance of aged identities but also necessarily includes gender. In much of the data, the performance of gender intersected with the participants' performances of age. The participants' narratives and projects, and my observations document how, particularly during play at Banksia Gully, they engaged actively with developmental discourses and constructions of the older child, often in gendered ways. I argue that categories of age or development intersect with gender, and can be performed in multiple ways.

### **Reinforcing the boundaries of the 'good' older girl - Apple**

Apple was one of the oldest children in the project. She was 12 years of age, in her final year of primary school and was a School Captain. To be selected as Captain, Apple needed a strong academic record and also be seen to embody the school values, which included respect, responsibility and empathy. In discussions I had with practitioners and other children, it was clear that Apple was regarded as a 'good' child and a positive role model for other children. Whereas the majority of participants were only at SAC for short periods of time on the days they attended, Apple was often at SAC quite late. She was one of the few older children who attended morning care and was sometimes among the last children to leave at the end of the day.

That Apple presented as good is unsurprising. Good is often a desirable a subject position for girls, and often means being well behaved and a successful student. This contrasts with naughtiness in boys, which is often associated with assertiveness and agency (Walkerdine, 1990). Of the six female participants, Apple, Sky, Tiger and Cleo all presented as 'good girls', but in different ways. Sky, like Apple was a diligent student. Being docile and helpful is also a desirable subject position for girls (Walkerdine, 1990). All four of these participants consistently performed themselves as docile and helpful. These girls were mostly quiet and never engaged in the

naughtiness displayed by some of the boys. Cleo, in particular, was almost ghost-like in that she spoke in whispers, and would quietly slip unnoticed in and out of spaces. Practitioners often spoke of Cleo’s goodness and what a ‘nice girl’ she was, citing her engagement in community work and willingness to assume a carer role with younger children.

One example of these girls’ ‘goodness’ was their response to a shortage of netballs at Banksia Gully. Netball is a predominantly female sport, popular in Commonwealth countries. In their shared project, Tiger, Apple and Sky had a photograph of a basketball ring with a caption that said, “more netballs” (Figure 9.2).

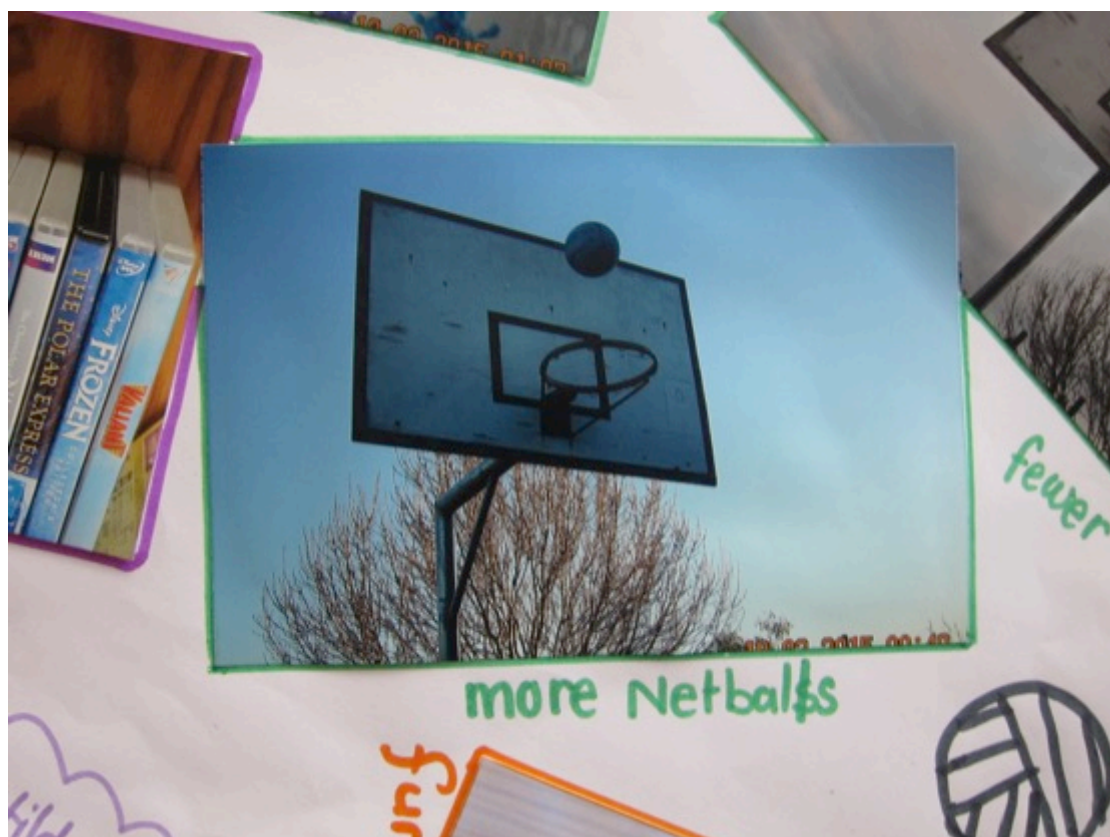


Figure 9.2 – The girls’ poster requesting “more netballs”

I asked each of the three girls about this photograph and why it was important. They each indicated that they would like to play netball, but that SAC had no netballs. Banksia Gully had plenty of basketballs, but basketball was a sport that was dominated by boys. Their claim, that there were no netballs, surprised me, as I had sometimes seen the girls playing with a netball. Apple informed me that this was Tiger’s personal netball that she had brought from home. Bringing their own ball

contrasts with the boys' approach to securing basketball equipment. Klay explained that the boys secured new basketballs by asking practitioners to buy them. Walkerdine (1990) explains how in performing nice, girls will sometimes avoid engaging with authority. Whereas boys can be rewarded for assertiveness, girls can be marked as too forward (Walkerdine, 1997). Rather than be assertive like Klay, the three girls adopted the role of nice girl. They brought their own equipment to SAC rather than be seen as assertive or disruptive. One reason this act was surprising was that it was uncommon for children to bring their own equipment to Banksia Gully. The girls had been deliberately secretive to avoid detection and contact with practitioners. Butler (1993) argues that gendered discourses do not provide subjects with unlimited ways to perform gender. Discourse instead constrains the choices available to individuals. In this instance, in order to maintain their status as good girls, Tiger and her friends had limited options available to them. The best choice was to avoid being visible, and instead provide their own equipment.

It is tempting to assume that as a good girl, Apple simply adopts and re-enacts the role prepared for her by teachers, practitioners and the mentoring programs they provide for children. However, the reality is more complex.

*Bruce. I've noticed here that the boys, the Grade 5 boys kind of dominate the basketball court.*

*Apple. Yes.*

*Bruce. Yeah. How do you feel about that?*

*Apple. Well they're excluding people. Like people ask, can we share the court, can we play with you? And they always say, no. They just like it though, which I find really bad and quite excluding, which is bad.*

*Bruce. ... So you wouldn't do that?*

*Apple. No*

*Bruce. ... What if a preppy, let's say Grade 2, what if Savannah came up and said, can I play basketball, can I play netball with you?*



*Apple. I'd go, yeah, and then we'd give them an easy job and show them how to do it, and make it easier for them.*

In this vignette, Apple performs the good older child in a manner that appears consistent with the expectations of her school. She questions the boys' ethical conduct in excluding younger children. When I test her 'goodness' by putting her in the same situation, she maintains her positioning as good child. Rather than exclude younger children, Apple adopts the role of teacher and nurturer.

However, elsewhere in her interview, Apple suggests that she does not always perform as inclusively.

*Bruce. If you had a choice between being on your own, or hanging out with the Preps, Ones and Twos... what's the order there?*

*Apple. On my own.*

During this exchange and the one preceding it, Apple explained that she has a hierarchy of suitable playmates with same-age peers and best friends at the top, and very young children, as unsuitable playmates, at the bottom. So, although she aspires to kindness in responding to play requests from younger children, Apple does not seek younger children out in her play, practising a form of exclusion. Butler (1993) argues that subjects do not merely replicate the roles they inhabit. She suggests instead that such performances are "echoes" (p. 172) of the actions and performances that precede them. So it appears to be with Apple. Whilst she takes up the role of the good older child, the way she performs the role varies depending on circumstances. Her response to the overtures of younger children may vary depending on a range of factors, including the presence of same-age peers and other more desirable play opportunities. Apple's performance of the good older child is likely contextual and not an exact replica of how teachers or practitioners expect her to perform the role.

Although Apple performed herself as the sort of older child who would please adults, she also performed herself in ways that maintained her status as more mature and sophisticated. One way in which she accomplishes this is through physically distancing herself from younger children.

*Bruce. So when do you do origami here? ...*

*Apple. Mostly in the mornings.*

*Bruce. How come in the morning?*

*Apple. Well I don't really have anyone... to play with there. Like it's more the younger kids who go to before school care... So I kind of just like to go off on my own and get an origami book and start folding paper. Or finger knitting. I love finger knitting.*

Apple describes how she engages in solitary activity during morning SAC when there are no same-age peers present. Three of the four participants who spent long hours at SAC, all commented on a lack of age-appropriate play options at such times. One afternoon, I sat with Apple as she produced metres of finger knitting whilst waiting for her parent. In choosing solitary play over play with younger children, Apple established physical and social distance between herself and younger children. Her actions help to define the boundaries of what is acceptable conduct for older children. The planned activities provided at SAC, identified by most participants as 'little kids' activities', are marked as unsuitable and excised to a space outside the boundary of acceptable activity for older children. Similarly, Apple's conduct also excised younger children, who were not permitted inside the play space and marked as unsuitable play companions.

It is important to note the intersection between age and gender in Apple's performance. The activities she names, origami and finger knitting, are notionally feminine pursuits and differed from activities like video games and sports, which were preferred by boys. In adopting activities marked as feminine, she performed more mature in a gendered way that preserves her positioning as good girl. The intersection of age and gender in Apple's performance reinforces the poststructural positioning in this paper, that identity and performances of identity can be multiple and complex.

In this example, Apple reinforces the construction of older girls as more mature and different to younger children, and also boys. She inhabits and reiterates a pre-existing role. It is a role that gains validity from cultural acceptance of development as a way

of understanding children and its underpinning discourse of progress being natural and good. It is a role that is also informed by normative expectations of gender. Apple experiences a “forced choice” (Davies, 2000, p. 60). Although technically, she has the freedom to play with younger children or engage in ‘male’ activities, Apple’s choices are limited by what her culture considers appropriate behaviour for older girls. To choose otherwise and perform differently would mark her as aberrant and deviant.

### **Reproducing the boundaries of the ‘sporty’ older boy – Kevin**

Kevin was aged 10 to 11 years during the project. Although younger than Apple, Kevin was an influential and visible presence at Banksia Gully. Kevin was a gifted athlete, school Sports Captain, and popular with other boys. Kevin was an athletic and physically attractive child, which likely contributed to his popularity. Children who are popular and powerful are often so because of their appearance (Gallas, 1998). At SAC, Kevin was arguably the leader of the ‘basketball boys’, a group that spent much of their time colonising the basketball court, a space that often seemed to belong only to older boys. Like Apple, Kevin sometimes spent longer hours at SAC than many other participants.

Whereas Apple maintained her status as older child through performing herself as good student, role model and nice, Kevin performed older child more through acts of mastery and physicality. In doing so, he performed older child more aggressively and in ways that sometimes pushed the boundaries of what was considered acceptable behaviour at SAC.

***Bruce.** You three, love basketball and you pretty much rule the roost don’t you...*

***Kevin.** Yeah*

***Bruce.** ... on the basketball court? So how do you do that? How do you control the basketball court so no one else gets on it unless you’re not using it?*

***Kevin.** Well you’ve just got to make yourself look controllable (sic).*

***Bruce.** What do you mean?*

*Kevin. ... well first play King Court, because that takes up, not the whole area, but that ring... So then if someone comes, you say, can you please play like at whatever ring? Um yeah, and you just always play, it makes it look like you rule basketball.*

In this narrative, Kevin describes one way in which he performs older male child. He uses his athletic mastery to claim the basketball court as an older boy's space and identifies the choice of game, King Court, as important in securing the space. He also explains how maintaining constant activity in the space is a good strategy. However, Kevin had other strategies that I observed in my time at the service. At the beginning of the afternoon, even before they were allowed outside, one of the basketball boys would secure and hide the 'best' basketball from the younger children. Securing the best basketball seemed to strengthen any claims to ownership of the court.

As was the case with Apple, Kevin's performance of older child cannot be separated from gender. Being successful at sport is one of the main ways that boys perform their masculinities (Paechter, 2006; Swain, 2003). This was evident in the central role basketball played in how Kevin presented himself. When I first met Kevin, one of the first things he told me was that he played representative basketball. Kevin's performance of successful basketball player went beyond speech acts. His performance was also bodily.

Connell (1995) argues that "Sport provides a continuous display of men's bodies in motion. Elaborate and carefully monitored rules bring these bodies into stylized contests with each other" (p. 54). The stylised movements of men's bodies during sport described by Connell were evident in the way Kevin played basketball. He had trained his body to move in particular ways that were instantly recognisable as 'basketball moves'. I spent a lot of time playing basketball 'one on one' with Kevin. He had a particular feint that he would apply in these games to give himself an open shot. He must have practised this move countless times. Repetition is fundamental to the performance of gender (Butler, 1990). Kevin seemed aware of its potency both as a way of scoring a victory against an opponent but also as a way of marking himself as a skilled basketball player. I learnt to recognise his feint. It began with a dip of his left shoulder and was accompanied by a trademark grin, intended to issue the

challenge, let me know that his trick was coming, and that there was little I could do to counter it.

As well as a way of performing their masculinities, sport is a way of boys performing their increasing age (Hauge & Haavind, 2011). As boys age they increasingly use concepts of physical mastery to describe their activities rather than play, and link their physical mastery to a chronology of age. I observed some of the ways Kevin linked his physical mastery to increasing age. Earlier in this chapter, I highlighted comments from Kevin where he associated strength and power with increasing age. Kevin did not regard younger children as suitable basketball opponents. He described older children as “stronger than the little ones” and more powerful. The connection between mastery, gender and age was also evident in the way he controlled the basketball court. Kevin only played basketball with those he considered skilled enough. This offer was only extended to same-age, male peers who played basketball, me and occasionally, Penny and Michael. Kevin discriminated on the basis of mastery, age and gender.

Kevin performed his age, gender and mastery on the basketball court. He sought to dominate younger children physically. Whilst playing King Court, Kevin continuously patrolled and guarded the margins of the basketball court. If a younger child attempted to enter the court, he swatted their ball away repeatedly until the child relocated. Sometimes, at the urging of practitioners, the basketball boys were encouraged to include a younger child in the game. In these instances, Kevin dominated play in the hope that the younger child would give up in frustration and humiliation. Kevin controlled the ball to deny the younger child possession. He employed exaggerated feints to slice past the younger child and give himself a shot at goal that was clear of pressure and declare it ‘too easy’. When it was the younger child’s turn to take possession of the ball, Kevin defended space to keep the younger child a ‘safe’ distance from goal. It was a distance that was too far for the child to have a realistic chance of making the shot but not so far that it seemed unfair. When the younger child took the inevitably unsuccessful shot, Kevin would offer faint encouragement saying something like, ‘nice try’ but with a hint of laughter in his voice that betrayed his insincerity.

Kevin's actions were intended to show that he was faster, stronger and more skilled. One Grade 4 child, Samuel frequently tried to join the older basketball boys on court, but was only allowed when there was a shortage of same-age players. Samuel also played basketball outside SAC. He was tall and athletic but still deemed unworthy of inclusion. On the occasions that Samuel was allowed to join in, the older boys complained in ways that highlighted their greater mastery. They complained to each other that Samuel's play was crude and that including him was putting them at risk of injury. He was spoken of as though he was not there, but was still able to hear the derogatory comments. Samuel was not skilful enough. He was ruining the game. There was no point playing if he was there. Samuel was treated as Other. In excluding and dominating younger children, Kevin's same-age peers affirmed his actions. Their affirmation served to strengthen a developmental discourse that positioned older children as stronger, desirable and more masterful.

It is interesting to contrast Kevin's actions during sport with Apple's. Apple felt that the basketball boys were unfair to younger children and said that in the same situation, she would elect to support and teach younger children. These contrasting subject positions reflect normative gender roles where it is acceptable for boys to perform their sporting mastery, whilst it is more acceptable for girls to adopt a helping role (Connell, 1995; Walkerdine, 1990).

Some of Kevin's strategies when playing basketball were likely considered unacceptable behaviour at SAC. Kevin appeared aware of this, as most of his actions were executed subversively. Although, it is possible that his performance might have been interpreted as assertive, a quality that is valued in males (Walkerdine, 1990). Kevin's performance might also have been tolerated because it was seen to exhibit autonomy, a quality that is valued in children as they get older. Whether an act is identified as deviant may rest on adult interpretations of the act as autonomous or not (Claiborne, Cornforth, Davies, Milligan, & White, 2009). It is unclear whether Kevin's more dominant displays of physical superiority were ignored by practitioners or instead went unnoticed.

Repetition is at the heart of a discourse's power. For a performance to produce the subject it must be repeated. Butler (1993) asserts that isolated acts are powerless and incapable of producing the subject. Repetition is a feature of Kevin's gendered

performance of the older child. Every day he enacted the same strategies to control the basketball court. This required countless micro actions. Batting away the ball, verbal barbs, dominant physical displays and aggressive behaviour were all deployed routinely in order to perform his advanced development and physical superiority, and distance himself from younger children.

So far, the data I have presented might suggest that Kevin performed himself in a singular way, and consistently performed himself as physically masterful. However, poststructural theories see the production of identity as an ongoing process. Davies (2003) states, “The individual is not so much a social construction that results in some relatively fixed end product, but one who is constituted and reconstituted through a variety of discursive practices” (p. xii). Davies argues that in theorising poststructurally, we accept that individuals can adopt multiple, changing and sometimes contradictory subject positions. How individuals perform themselves can shift as settings and discursive regimes change. This was the case with Kevin and the other participants. I observed that Kevin performed himself in multiple ways that changed depending on many complex factors including: which peers or practitioners were present, what type of surveillance he was operating under, the types of activities he was involved in, the weather, the physical space, and when his parents were due to arrive. As well as physically masterful and older, Kevin could also be good, naughty, compliant, rebellious, kind, unkind, secretive, funny, and many other things. Whilst for this analysis, I have chosen to focus on how he used his physical mastery to perform his age, it is important to acknowledge these other complexities.

### **Blurring the boundaries between older and younger – Seamus**

Seamus was aged 11 to 12 years during the project and one of the oldest children at SAC. Of all the participants, he spent the most time at SAC. Seamus was often the first child to arrive at BSC, and the last to leave ASC. Seamus was an outsider amongst the older children and did not get on well with the other boys, who were all best friends. Seamus had recently arrived in Australia from the United Kingdom and had only been at SAC a short time compared to the others, who had been attending for most of their school lives. Seamus’ poor cultural fit was evident in his sense of humour. He liked to make jokes, but his humour was often absurdist and not always well received by other children.

Despite being one of the oldest children, Seamus rarely played with other older children. Most afternoons, he would play a sport other than basketball with Grade 3 and 4 children until 5.00pm when they would move their activity to the PlayStation. Earlier in this chapter, I described how during play, Apple and Kevin aligned themselves with older children whilst distancing themselves from younger children. They constructed a clear boundary between older and younger child. The boundary between Seamus and younger children was less clear.

***Seamus.** Would you rather... be kicking a ball by yourself or like with the older kids... and like have people that are evenly matched, or be like mwah ha ha ha ha (sinister movie villain type voice) or have like fun with the kids, and make them laugh and stuff?*

***Bruce.** ... So you think it's all right to be out there with the little kids?*

***Seamus.** Yeah*

***Bruce.** Yeah? Cos um in my last project, when I talked to older kids about SAC, some of them said they really hated the little kids, and they didn't like having them around. You don't feel like that?*

***Seamus.** (shakes his head) Sometimes I don't want to be away, but yeah, having a room is good because you can be away and you can be with them.*

Seamus describes how he prefers to play with younger children at SAC. He explains his preference as the better alternative of two possible choices. On one hand, he can seek play with other older children, risk rejection and end up “kicking a ball by yourself”. He prefers to have fun with younger children and “make them laugh and stuff”. The programming at Banksia Gully made play with younger children accessible for Seamus. Although younger children could not access the 5/6 room, there were no restrictions on where Seamus played or who he played with. However, earlier in the interview, he explained that the conventions at his school were different. Seamus told me he sometimes played with younger children during lunchtime at school, despite school rules that restrict who he is permitted play with.



*Bruce. So is that a school rule that you can't play with the younger kids?*

*Seamus. Yeah... I can't play with four (Grade 4) or below.... but like most of my friends, if football's not on, I play on the bars. But sometimes the bars are slippery, and the football's not on because the field is muddy, usually I just break the rules and play with Aidan and stuff.*

Seeking play with younger children is a different performance of the older child, and a transgressive act. In Seamus' school, like most Australian schools, children are grouped into same-aged cohorts. This is done on the basis of efficiency, and the assumption that normally developing children all learn at approximately the same pace (Tyack & Tobin, 1994). The classification of children according to age also establishes normative categories to which children are assigned. In playing with younger children, Seamus broke school rules and stepped outside his assigned age category. At SAC, even though children were not divided into grades, Seamus would still be seen as leaving his age category. In playing outside his age classification, Seamus resists socially endorsed conventions about how older children perform themselves.

Foucault (1980) proposes that truth is socially produced. During this research, I observed, and participated in, some of the ways that truths about who are appropriate playmates for older children are produced and practised. The adults who operate Seamus' school divided children into age groups and made rules about what age child he can play with. The practitioners at Banksia Gully established separate spaces for older children. The participants also participated in the construction of truths. Even though they were not divided into classes at SAC, I observed that the participants used their school grades when talking about themselves. Similarly, I observed practitioners using age-based language when speaking about children. I have also described how participants like Apple and Kevin reinforced age classifications and status by choosing to socialise with same-age peers. I also participated in the production of truths by referring to children as younger and older, and conducting a research project focused on a specific age group.

These truths about who children can play with are not created solely by individuals within the SAC service. These local truths draw on broader, normative cultural

narratives of maturation and the developing child explored earlier in this chapter. Normative discourses make possible and reinforce what are considered acceptable ways for individuals to perform themselves (Butler, 1990). In Seamus' case, normative discourses of older childhood enacted in his school and care setting, provided him with a range of possible ways to perform the older child. However, normative truths are not simply imposed on older children. Individuals have an active relationship with the roles they perform (Davies, 2006). Older children choose what roles they take up. They also perform them in ways that are not exact replicas of the original role (Butler, 1993). In enacting a non-normative performance of the older child, Seamus is active in how he engages with a dominant discourse. He takes up a non-normative role that blurs the boundary between older and younger boy and disrupts dominant understandings of older childhood. He will not be the first older boy who preferred to play with younger children, but the way in which he performed the role of boundary crosser would likely be unique. His performances would reflect the complexities of his individual situation. His history, the histories of his peers and practitioners, the relationships he has developed and shifting daily events are factors that would ensure that his performances are never an exact replica of those that preceded his.

Butler (1990) argues that individuals who do not participate in the heterosexual hegemony are subject to punishment. We therefore might also expect older children who adopt non-normative performances of age categories to be similarly punished. This appeared to be the case with Seamus. He spoke of, and I observed, multiple ways that he experienced difficulties that might be related to his performance of older child. Seamus had to break school rules in order to seek friendships with younger children during breaks. In doing so, he would likely have felt that he was under surveillance whilst at play, and concerned about the possible consequences of being caught breaking school rules. This is one example of how power operates on the body. Individuals will modify their actions in response to surveillance or behavioural expectations (Foucault, 1977). Seamus would have felt compelled to comply with his school's behavioural norms and relocate himself to a space occupied by older children.

I observed that same-age peers refused Seamus' attempts at friendship. His overtures usually came in the form of jokes, but they were often ignored. Seamus would sometimes try to engage in play or conversations with the 'good' older girls, perhaps because they seemed kinder. However, they usually responded by physically distancing themselves, not wanting to be seen as being 'liked' by Seamus. Peers like Kevin reinforced their status as older children by distancing themselves from Seamus in the same way they distanced themselves from younger children. Kevin, Klay and Stephen would sometimes leave the 5/6 room when Seamus came in to eat. They excluded him from basketball in the same way they excluded younger children. He was never made welcome on the basketball court. On the few occasions that Seamus sought to play basketball, the others would complain about his lack of skill and finesse, just as they did with younger children. I only once observed Seamus play with another participant, and that was with Klay when Klay had no other same-age peers to play with.

Despite the detailed data collected for this project, the motivations behind Seamus' performances are unclear. He said he preferred the company of younger children, and gave the appearance of choosing to play with them in preference to older children. However, it is possible this was a forced choice because his same-age peers excluded him. It is unclear whether Seamus was punished for performing older incorrectly, or he performed this way because of prior social exclusion. Either way, Seamus was constrained in which performances of older childhood he was able to take up. If he took up this role because of social exclusion, his choices were constrained because he was denied normative performances of age and gender. If he was enacting a preference for younger companions, his choices were still constrained by normative expectations.

Although Seamus sometimes experienced negatives consequences for his performance of older boy, there may have been benefits that resulted from preferring play with younger children. Seamus only found himself without a play companion quite late in the day, when most of the other children had gone home. The other participants, who would not play with younger children, in particular Kevin, found themselves without play companions more often. In these instances, Kevin performed

himself as visibly bored and without friends. Seamus, on the other hand, always seemed enjoyably engaged in play.

I have argued that Seamus blurred the boundary between older and younger boy. However, I do not believe that he adopted the opposite role of younger child. Although hegemonies reward normative performances, subjects have multiple performances available to them that sit between binary opposites (Davies, 2000). Seamus did not always perform older boy in the same way. During snacks, he always ate in the 5/6 room. If given the opportunity, he tried to be part of older children's conversations, particularly if they strayed into comfortable territory like video games or movies. Sometimes he seemed more restrained and mature in his conduct. In his interview, Seamus spoke of how he used the 5/6 room to get away from younger children when he needed a break. He also spoke about some younger children who were not his friends as Other, in the same way that other participants did. He referred to these children as annoying and deviant. That Seamus did not always perform older boy in the same way demonstrates that children can perform multiple aged and gendered identities. As contexts changed, the role Seamus took up could also change.

Seamus occupied a confused position and often performed older boy differently to other participants. He was less aggressive in his category maintenance than other boys and seemed more comfortable being socially closer to younger children. As Grade 6 child, program rules afforded him unquestioned access to the 5/6 room and other privileges of older childhood. He communicated that he valued these privileges and often took them up. Seamus also used the 5/6 room to distance himself from younger children, particularly at meal times. However, other participants often excluded him from conversation and play, complicating his membership of the category. Despite this, Seamus regarded himself as an older child. He was an example of the multiplicity and complexity of social spaces, and how subjects can perform their identities in different ways, even though they all reside in the same discursive realities.

### **Performing older child through the activities you do**

In this chapter, I have provided case studies of three participants and the different ways they performed older child. Apple conducted herself as a 'good girl',

academically successful and compliant. Kevin performed himself as a ‘sporty boy’. Seamus, on the other hand, performed older boy in a way that blurred distinctions between older and younger child. I also explained how some of their peers performed themselves similarly. However, these performances of age and gender were not universal. Central to Foucault’s theories is the idea that there is no singular truth, and that realities can be multiple, complex, contradictory and competing (MacNaughton, 2005). This was also the case with the participants in this study. There was no singular way of performing older childhood or gender. Instead, they performed older childhood in multiple ways. In this section, I explore some of the other ways that participants performed their age category.

One important way the participants constructed knowledge about older childhood was through the sorts of play and materials they engaged with. They did this primarily through identifying activities with either younger or older children. Often these associations between age and activity were made on the basis of developmental discourses of childhood.

***Bruce.** So what about the other stuff you do here...? You know like the craft activities. You know they do papier mache*

***Apple.** Erh (disapproval)*

***Bruce.** Or they might build things, you know. Um is that of interest to Grades Fives and Sixes?*

***Apple.** Um I don’t think so...I think we probably just like to do our own stuff... as you get older you get better at things, especially drawing. When you’re younger, you’re not that good at drawing, so I think a lot of the younger kids like to do arts and craft and follow the books. Whereas we just like to do our own thing and just make whatever we want.*

***Bruce.** So let me get this straight. So what you’re saying is that younger kids prefer to do things where it sort of comes out of a book*

***Apple.** Yes*

*Bruce. And they know what they're going to make at the end. So there's a picture and you make it?*

*Apple. Yep*

*Bruce. ... Whereas you guys...*

*Apple. Just like to think of ourselves as okay at doing stuff and we just like to make our own stuff.*

Aligning themselves with particular art activities was one of the key ways that participants performed older child. In this conversation, Apple summarises a view expressed by some participants, that older and younger children participate in different activities. Apple proposes that craft activities are of greater interest to younger children. At Banksia Gully, a permanent feature of the program was the craft table. Every day, a practitioner-led craft activity was provided at the craft table. These activities would change daily and often took the form of construction activities like papier-mache, or used specialist materials not available for general play. These activities were closed-ended, in that the children would recreate a defined end product using a set process. The children who participated in the daily craft activity were mostly younger girls.

Apple suggested that these craft activities were better suited to younger children because they need support from adults. She said that, "as you get older you get better at things", and that older children are able, "to do their own thing". It was a view shared by some other participants. Tiger believed that craft was for younger children, and was something she used to enjoy when she was younger. Tiger suggested she might occasionally engage in craft, but only if it was for a significant event, like Fathers' Day. Their views draw on developmental discourses that place value on autonomy and mastery (Claiborne et al., 2009). Developmental discourses construct children as dependent on adults (Burman, 2008). This establishes a developmental trajectory for children where across their lifespans they transform from the less desired, dependent child to the more desired, self-governing adult. As such, older children find themselves in a middle place, somewhere between dependence and autonomy. Developmental discourses position adults as more powerful and privileged than children (Cannella, 2008). It is therefore reasonable for older children to align

themselves more with the adult subject position as Apple and Tiger did in this example.

As well as autonomy, Apple spoke of mastery. She explained that older children have learnt how to draw and can do so on their own. She described how having learnt, older children “like to make our own stuff”. In seeing herself as masterful, Apple believed it set her free to be more creative and no longer reliant on practitioners to provide her with instruction or ideas about how to use her skills. In her account, autonomy and mastery were intertwined. Apple’s skilfulness strengthened her claims to autonomy.

SAC in Australia is broadly understood as a setting that promotes learning through play (DEEWR, 2011). Discourses of autonomy are embedded in child-centred and play-based curricula which promote leaning as voluntary and self-directed (Burman, 2008). Broadly speaking, play-based curricula offer children limited autonomy where they can select from a range of play experiences based on practitioners’ understandings of children’s needs (MacNaughton, 2003). The participants take up this opportunity to exercise the autonomy afforded them. In rejecting experiences they regard as practitioner guided and controlled, the participants use this available autonomy to perform themselves as more independent and adult.

I have explained that classifying activities according to age categories is one way that participants performed older. Another was the multiple ways the participants deployed developmental knowledge to classify the equipment available at SAC. In their interviews, most of the participants distinguished between older or younger children’s equipment. Seven of nine participants mentioned playground equipment as something that was classifiable by age. They proposed that older children’s playgrounds should provide greater opportunity for risk-taking. Tiger and Sky suggested higher equipment would be better suited to older children. Klay believed that equipment should also be “trickier”. Again drawing on his physical mastery, Kevin desired equipment like that seen on the television show, *American Ninja Warrior*, which depicts extreme obstacle courses for mostly male adults who possess elite strength and athleticism. Seamus said older children’s equipment should offer more variety and challenge than younger children’s equipment, which was more

boring. Each of these participants deploys their greater physical strength and knowledge of themselves as more developed to label playground equipment by age.

I also experienced another way of age-labelling equipment during the participants' project work. To support the participants' project work, I supplied coloured pencils and markers to use for drawing or writing. The markers were a well-known brand and marketed as suitable for children. When commencing their project, Sky, Tiger and Apple immediately rejected my markers. They instead approached the practitioners for permission to use a 'special' pack of markers that were kept in the Coordinator's office. Unlike my markers, which were chunky and had broad tips, these markers were narrower, had fine tips, and were not available for younger children to use. As their work progressed, these three participants began to bring their own markers. During their interviews, these participants indicated that my markers were unsuitable. Sky responded pragmatically, but when prompted said she remembered using markers like mine when she was in kindergarten. Apple said that 'black' marker came out green. Writing implements are another way that children can map their developmental progress. It is common in educational settings for children to use specialised 'children's' pencils and pens that are targeted at particular ages or stages of development. As children age they graduate to more 'adult' implements. Using young children's writing implements positions children as novices (Coles & Goodman, 1980). These participants were able to identify cultural signals in the form of branding, thickness and broad tips that classified the markers as younger children's implements and hence, unsuitable for older children.

The participants were alert to age coding in sports equipment. For the sporty children, securing the 'best' equipment was a matter of importance. Equipment size was one of the primary criteria deployed in judging equipment. The basketball boys demonstrated intimate knowledge of age groups and basketball sizes. They were only satisfied if they had a Size 6 basketball, which is considered best for males aged 9 to 12 years (Spalding, 2016). Anything smaller was labelled as younger children's equipment and either rejected or used for non-serious play. Kevin explained that ball size was important because it meant the balls at SAC matched those he used in junior sport. He also believed that having the wrong sized basketballs compromised his ability to execute skills with the correct technique. The participants' preference for the correct



sized equipment is therefore partly a rejection of equipment coded as younger children's but also about being seen as masterful.

It is possible that the various ways that these participants speak about, and engage physically, with craft activities, art materials and sports equipment might be performances of age categories. Butler (1990, 1993) argues that gender is performative and that individuals take up gendered discourses to actively perform their gendered identities in ways that a culture makes possible. In these examples, the participants describe some of the ways they take up aged discourses in the way they play. Apple and Tiger explain how they take up developmental discourses to perform their aged identities. In order to appear older, autonomous and skilful, they select activities they deem too complex for the less developed younger child. They reject those activities they believe are labelled as younger children's. Apple and Tiger also speak of craft activities in ways that are infused with developmental language, constructing younger children as unskilled and uncreative. Similarly, some participants to identified age coding of the equipment they play with and chose their equipment on that basis. Materials they understood as intended for younger children were rejected in favour of those for older children.

The FSAC echoes this by stating that children should have freedom and agency in choosing how they use their leisure time (DEEWR, 2011). These performances, which involve discriminating against activities and equipment on the basis of age coding limit the freedom the participants experience during play. Their shared understandings about what is suitable for older children creates boundaries around the sort of play opportunities they feel able to take up. Consequently, it constrains their choices, making their play and leisure less free. Theorising older children's experiences of SAC using Butler's theories provides a tighter conceptualisation of agency than that offered in the FSAC, which does not place discursive constraints on children's choices.

Butler's theories see identity construction as a process where subjects are active in taking up discourses to perform their identities. In these examples, the participants actively perform their aged identities. They discursively position themselves, by describing themselves as older and more capable. They also position themselves physically by using the choices available to distance themselves from activities and

equipment that are adult-controlled, coded as younger or populated by mostly younger children.

## **SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I have used Butler's theory of performativity to argue that older children's aged identities are performatively constructed. In order to perform age categories, children must be able to access existing, aged roles made available by normative discourses. The normative, aged or developmental discourses that older children require to perform aged identities are provided by developmental psychology. Much of how we understand children and how they understand themselves is informed by developmental psychology, or the idea that children are developing beings progressing on a staged growth trajectory. The language and concepts of developmental psychology have become commonplace in how we speak about children. Words and phrases like *maturity*, *delayed* or *advanced* are integrated in our understandings of childhood. So too is the way developmental psychology is deployed to organise children into stages and groups. These stages are used to produce developmental norms or expectations that we apply to children (Cannella, 2008).

I have demonstrated that children access developmental discourses of older childhood in a number of places. The participants were aware of developmental theory as a lens through which they could understand themselves. They also described a number of cultural practices they participated in that circulated discourses of older childhood, including mentoring programs and the media classification system. The participants also used binaries to understand themselves as the opposite of younger children.

This chapter also revealed some of the ways that participants performed their aged identities, and how those intersected with performances of gender. Apple performed herself as a good older girl, who conformed to program and school expectations whilst quietly establishing herself as separate from younger children. Alternatively, Kevin performed himself as a sporty, older boy, using his physical attributes to perform his age and masculinity. Seamus, on the other hand, was an outsider boy, involved himself more with younger children and sometimes disrupted normative expectations about who older boys play with. Additionally, the participants also

performed age through the activities they participated in, and the ways they spoke about those activities. The participants associated practitioner-led activities with younger childhood, and instead preferred activities that were self-directed, where they could demonstrate their autonomy and mastery.

The way I have conducted the arguments in this chapter may give the impression that how the participants performed their identities was reasonably straightforward. I have centred my discussion on age and gender, and performances that are often normative. However, one of the fundamental ideas underpinning poststructural theories is that social realities are complex, and identities can be multiple. I restricted my analysis to age and gender because these themes were most prominent in the data. Additionally, in many of the ethnographic moments that most captured my attention, age and gender were most visible. The reality is that these performances also intersected with other complexities, in particular those of class and race. Banksia Gully provided for children from both a public and a private school, making it likely that class was another factor in governing how the participants performed age and gender. Additionally, culture was important for Seamus, who was a relative newcomer to Australia and an outsider. However, the scope of this thesis means that I have restricted my analysis to the two most dominant threads of age and gender. Giving prominence to gender was particularly important given the prominent role Butler's theory played in the analysis. Had I been able to address these other complexities, it would have added greater depth to understanding how the participants performed their aged identities. Addressing other social complexities is something I hope to address in future work.

Thus far my analysis of older children's "Play" has been confined to children's performative construction of age. In the next chapter, there is one other aspect of "Play" that I want to explore. I analyse the function of surveillance in children's play and the implications this has for SAC as a site of play.

## CHAPTER TEN: “PLAY” OR WORK?

In Chapter Three, I explored definitions of play and leisure to gain an insight into the functions that SAC performs. The FSAC defines SAC as a critical site of play and leisure for primary-age children (DEEWR, 2011). Leisure and play are commonly understood as related terms that describe a time away from work that is infused with qualities like freedom and enjoyment (Eberle, 2014; Lester & Russell, 2010; Rojek, 2010). However, Rojek (1995) draws on Foucault to argue that it is too simplistic to conceptualise leisure as a time entirely free of work. Rojek conceptualises leisure as a complex social setting infused with power relationships. He therefore argues that leisure is never entirely free, and is instead compromised by surveillance, identity work, and concerns about work, family and society.

In this brief chapter, I build on the analysis done in Chapter Nine and my observation that during play, older children called on discourses of maturation, development and age to perform themselves as maturing and gendered subjects. Whilst writing Chapter Nine, I began to make important connections between children’s performances of age and Rojek’s (1995) poststructural theorisation of leisure. This chapter is only brief, but examines those connections. It investigates the implications of children’s performative construction of aged and gendered identities during play for SAC as a site of play and leisure.

In conducting this investigation of the intersection between performative acts, and play and leisure, I necessarily draw on my observations about the functions of surveillance. Surveillance plays an important role in poststructural theories about identity construction. Foucault (1977) argues that being watched, or feeling like we are watched, influences our conduct and the ways we use our bodies. Butler has similar theories about power and surveillance. This chapter therefore addresses both identity work and surveillance, and Rojek’s proposition that they have the capacity to affect children’s leisure. Does power, as Rojek (1995) suggests, introduce work to leisure? Just how ‘free’ is play when you are in a setting laced with power relations and discourses?

## LESS THAN PLAYFUL? – WORKING UNDER THE GAZE OF SURVEILLANCE

People conduct themselves in response to cultural expectations and the possibility of surveillance (Foucault, 1977). Surveillance was a constant feature in the participants' play at Banksia Gully and had real effects on how they conducted themselves.

***Bruce.** What do you think the educators who work here think about older children?*

***Penny.** ... I think they think that we're a bit... um have attitude sometimes... I think sometimes when we think we're doing something fun, they realise that it's not actually fun, it's actually a bit dangerous, so they want to stop us but we don't want to stop. That was like when myself, Klay and Kevin had a fun game of kicking the balls into the tree... and then trying to get it down and get stuck. They realised that it's not actually very fun. It's actually a bit dangerous, because if you hit a branch and it falls, if it lands on us, or we can't be watching and the ball hits us. So I think they just sometimes think that we're a bit, mm, annoying and don't listen... and we're not allowed, we just want to do our own thing...*

***Bruce.** ... Do you think you were being dangerous, or did you think it was dangerous?*

***Penny.** ... I don't think it was that dangerous. It's fun*

***Bruce.** Are there other things you get stopped from doing that you think aren't dangerous?*

***Penny.** Um we also had a game of when we would um throw the hula-hoops onto the goal posts... and them get them down...*

***Bruce.** How do you get them off though?*

***Penny.** You put them on and then you grab them and then you flip them up like that... and then the educators thought that wasn't very good, and if that*

*flips up or hits someone in the head or hits someone in the face, it could be dangerous, or can't get it off... so... we're just having fun.*

In this exchange, Penny describes two types of play that she and other participants engaged in. In the first, she describes a game where they kicked balls into a tree and then tried to get the ball down. There were countless times at Banksia Gully where I observed children trying to get footballs out of a large gum tree next to the football oval. It was one of the constants of life at Banksia Gully and happened most days. Until Penny's interview, I had not thought the event particularly important. When I was a child, it was common for footballs to get stuck in trees. It came as a revelation to discover that, for Penny and her friends, it was a deliberate game. Children at Banksia Gully were constantly under surveillance. There were always practitioners positioned near children's play. Most of them were governed by concerns about safety. They would frequently intervene in children's play to caution them about safety concerns. Penny describes some of these interactions, suggesting that practitioners cautioned her about falling branches or getting hit on the head by a football.

During the research, I became aware of other forms of conduct that the participants engaged in to navigate surveillance. Another memorable series of incidences came in the form of a beanbag game. For a number of weeks during snack time, Kevin, Klay and Stephen played a secret game with beanbags and a ceiling fan in the 5/6 room. When the practitioners were not looking, one of the boys would stand under the ceiling fan with a beanbag, and try to lob the beanbag in such a way that it came to rest on a blade of the fan. Initially, the game appeared to be focused on getting a beanbag on a blade without being detected by practitioners. However, the game metamorphosed over days and became all about getting as many beanbags as possible on the fan whilst still avoiding detection.

Surveillance played an important role in both of these games and governing the participants' behaviour. Penny did not describe it as such, but the 'football stuck in a tree' game was cleverly designed to avoid surveillance. The participants likely assumed that the practitioners would think, as I did, that the football in the tree was just a childish accident and not deliberate. In both games, avoiding surveillance was probably as much a part of the game as throwing and kicking. Foucault (1977) argues

that as well as being repressive, power can also be productive. In these examples, the thrill of playing under surveillance and risking detection may have added fun and excitement to the games. It also required participants to be inventive in formulating the rules of play. In Chapter Three, I referred to research by Eberle (2014) who identified creativity and fun as important elements of play. These games are therefore examples of how as well as restricting play, the application of power through surveillance also produced enjoyment, creativity and new forms of play.

These games are also examples of how surveillance governed the participants' use of their bodies. In the beanbag game, the boys had well practised systems for evading detection. One boy threw the beanbag in a way that concealed the activity. The other two boys would keep a lookout for practitioners whilst, at the same time, trying to look like they were 'just eating'. Children are able to use their bodies in ways that mask their involvement in unsanctioned activity (Christensen et al., 2001). Were the play sanctioned by the practitioners and not considered illicit, then the bodily positioning I observed would have been different.

### **LESS THAN PLAYFUL? - THE WORK OF PERFORMING OLDER CHILD**

As well as practices designed to avoid surveillance these secret games engaged in by participants were also performances of older childhood. The practitioners' surveillance practices described earlier responded in some part to the requirements of the FSAC and the NQF, which require practitioners to protect children from harm. These requirements are founded on Western conceptualisations of childhood that regard children as inexperienced, innocent and more vulnerable than adults (Cannella, 2008). Government instruments like the NQF can limit children's leisure activities (Rojek, 1995). At Banksia Gully, practitioners enacted these discourses by limiting the risk in children's play. In the previous chapter, I described how appearing masterful and skilful was an important feature of some performances of older child. In the above examples of the beanbag and football games, the participants performed themselves in transgressive ways so they could enact their mastery and capacity to manage risk. Penny enacted this through her conversation with me, where she explained that she understood the risks present in the 'football in a tree' game and disagreed with the practitioners' actions.

This is another example of a constrained choice. The participants have agency in being able to choose how they perform older child, but are restricted in the choices available (Davies, 2000). Practitioners would likely prefer older children to adopt a responsible adult-like role, consistent with the values provided in their mentoring program. For instance, older children could model compliance or ‘safe’ behaviours for younger children to repeat. Instead, Penny and the boys chose to perform older child differently. They performed themselves as masterful and critical thinkers who were able to take different moral positions to adults. However, they had to perform this role in ways that reflect the constraints of the social setting. In these instances, that meant performing themselves subversively and risking sanction.

Penny is aware of being seen as naughty. She says that practitioners can see older children as annoying and poor listeners. Kevin spoke similarly. When discussing the beanbag game, he communicated that his actions would be understood as naughty and that there was a risk of being caught. For boys, naughtiness is viewed more favourably than it is for girls (Walkerdine, 1990). When discussing the possible consequences of his performance, Kevin, like Walkerdine, believed that the sanctions for boys being naughty were not too intimidating. He told me that the fun of game justified the risk of being caught. If you were caught, you just “get told off and sometimes you just leave the room (5/6 room)”.

In Western cultures, developmentalism has been a dominant voice in how adults speak about and work with children (Burman, 2008; Cannella, 2008). A developmental interpretation of these stories might conceptualise Penny and the boys as subjects who are biologically predisposed to seek fun but lacking the maturity to fully understand risk and the consequences of their actions. In applying Foucault’s theories about regimes of truth, it becomes possible contemplate other ways of understanding these children’s actions. By conceptualising the participants as performative, older children instead become subjects who draw on developmental discourses, and desire fun whilst being seen as masterful. To have fun and be masterful, the participants must play in ways that negotiate the monitoring of adults, who are enacting local and broader cultural discourses of childhood vulnerability.

Conceptualising these stories as performative has implications beyond the interpretation of the participants’ actions. It also has implications for how SAC is



conceptualised as a site of play and leisure. As explained earlier, Rojek (1995) argues that contrary to modernist conceptualisations of play and leisure as spaces of freedom, they are never truly free of work. The beanbag and ‘football stuck in tree’ games are examples of this. In order to play these games, the participants involved had to engage in work-like behaviour to avoid detection by practitioners. I acknowledge that there were real safety risks present, particularly in the beanbag game. However, the work involved in negotiating adult surveillance meant that, to some extent, the enjoyment and freedom the participants might have gained from those activities was changed. Surveillance was a constant at Banksia Gully and its influence was felt beyond deviant activities like these. The participants would have been engaged in constant self-monitoring and self-governing during other sanctioned play activities in response to the disciplinary gaze of practitioners. Rojek (1995) proposes that this self-governing is a form of work that places limits on the leisureliness of leisure.

Although playing under surveillance might have made the play I observed more work-like, not all of its effects were negative. I have also described how surveillance added excitement and creativity to that play. Therefore, whilst the participants’ play was changed by surveillance, it was not always changed in a negative way.

Using the example of the panopticon, Foucault (1977) explains that surveillance does not have to be visible to influence how people use their bodies. The possibility of being watched is also a form of power that governs self-conduct. This self-governing as a form of work that compromises leisure (Rojek, 1995). Whilst at leisure, people are never entirely free of thoughts about how they are seen by others, even if those others are not even present. For adults at play, self-governance means they might question what they wear to the gym, what music they listen to, or how they dance. In Chapter Nine, I described some of the ways the participants govern themselves in response to shared discourses of older childhood. When playing basketball, Kevin is constantly at work to be seen as physically dominant and masterful. Apple does identity work to present as compliant and a good role model, whilst still maintaining a social distance from younger children. These are also examples of identity work done that have implications for how participants’ play is conceptualised.

## SUMMARY

It is common to romanticise children's play as a space unencumbered by adult concerns like work (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). However, the participants' accounts and my observations indicate that this may instead be a simplistic view of how older children at Banksia Gully engaged in play. In this brief coda to Chapter Nine, I have shown that children's play is not always free of work. Most of the time at SAC, the participants in this project appeared to have fun, but it is fun that was never entirely free. Just like adults, children's leisure is conducted under surveillance and they adjust their play accordingly. I have provided examples of how older children desiring physically challenging or illicit forms of play will engage in work-like acts to thwart practitioner surveillance. I have also argued that the multiple performances of age and gender described in this chapter and Chapter Nine are a form of identity work that also constrains play. Children's identity work, like the illicit play some pursued, is also conducted under disciplinary surveillance. The act of engaging in play under surveillance complicates children's play and leisure, meaning that it will never be entirely free, but instead compromised by work-like elements.

So far in this thesis, I have discussed the multiple ways that older children construct their aged and gendered identities. The analysis has focused on the busiest parts of an afternoon at Banksia Gully, eating and playing. However, SAC is not always energetic and busy. Late in the day, SAC can begin to slow down as children prepare for the act of going home. In the following chapter, I shift my analysis to late in the day, when children go home. I discuss some of the ways that SAC changes with the passing of time, and the effects that this has on children's construction of their aged identities.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN – “GO”

I structured the data analysis of this thesis around an observation by one of the participants. Seamus believed SAC at Banksia Gully has three universal phases, “eat”, “play” and “go”. I accepted his description of SAC on the basis that it matched my own observations of Banksia Gully. Although each participant experienced SAC differently, there was a clear pattern to how the afternoons were organised. On any given day, each child had the opportunity to eat, then play, and eventually go home. However, in conducting this analysis, I have dismantled the perception that SAC is a simple and universal experience for older children. Within each of these three phases, each child’s experience of SAC was individual and contingent on many complexities. In the previous three chapters, I explored some of those complexities. In “Eat”, I demonstrated that during meal times, the participants did more than just eat. They also engaged in multiple and varied acts of category maintenance to distinguish themselves from younger, primary-aged children. In “Play” and “More Play”, I added another layer of complexity, proposing that surveillance by practitioners and internalised discursive truths about gender and age acted as a form of governance. I showed that although children were at play, their play was complicated by the work of performing their identities, and resisting and negotiating surveillance. In this final data analysis chapter, I want to add one more layer of complexity to my account of SAC for older children. I want to discuss time.

During the “go” phase of SAC I became most aware of time and the varied ways that participants experienced its effects. As I discussed in Chapter Five, time is commonly understood through the lens of Newtonian physics. Time is seen as linear and is said to march on at a consistent pace. People are chained to time and unable to control it. However, during my long immersion in the research setting, I began to recognise that time was not inert. I noticed each afternoon, as time progressed, the SAC environment would change. The activities changed. The way the participants conducted themselves changed. Beyond that, the participants’ responses to time were not universal or linear. In the same way that participants performed age and gender in multiple ways, so did they experience the passing of time. Just as performances of age intersected with gender, so too did they intersect with time.

Time is integral to how we live our lives and needs to be studied in the same way as other social complexities (Adam, 1990). In this chapter, I look at time more closely. As I have previously, I bring a poststructural lens to my analysis. I trouble the assumption that children in SAC experience time in a linear or singular way. I use a combination of observations and the participants' interviews to identify particular moments in SAC where time is important. Many of these concern going home, or preparing to go home. This analysis investigates the ways time intersects with category maintenance, and performances of age and gender.

### **TIME AS POWER OVER BODIES**

In "Eat" and "Play", I investigated disciplinary power's influence over participants' use of their bodies. Foucault raises the possibility that time can also be an influence on bodies. Foucault (1977) argues the division of time into small intervals in educational settings has made possible a disciplinary control of children's bodies. Temporal discipline provides a way of measuring whether individual students or workers make productive use of their time, or of an employer or teacher's time. Temporal discipline is a form of power that compels subjects to use their bodies efficiently and in ways that convey an impression of industry. As paid workers, SAC practitioners are subject to the sorts of productivity demands identified by Foucault. At Banksia Gully, time influenced the practitioners' bodily practices, which had implications for how the participants experienced SAC. But is time a direct influence on how children use their bodies in SAC? Given that SAC is notionally a leisure and care setting, you would not expect children to be subject to the same time and productivity demands that they are at school. However, as Rojek (2010) suggests, leisure is complicated and not immune to cultural expectations about 'worthwhile' uses of free time. This is particularly the case with children where there is cultural anxiety about the effects of social environments on developmental outcomes (Cannella, 2008). In Australia, SAC is increasingly considered a site of education, which brings with it expectations about productive use of children's time. Whilst time in SAC is not as rigorously scheduled as it is at school, it can still govern how children use their bodies.

Using the following observations and interviews, I build on my previous analysis to investigate how time is another way that power operates in SAC. These practices of

time were multiple, contextual and intertwined. Rather than exist independently, practitioners' embodiments of time were entangled with those of the participants and bound up with neoliberal discourses of productivity and citizenship.

### **Visibly waiting**

Waiting was a noticeable way that time governed the use of bodies in Banksia Gully. The application of clock time means that waiting is inevitable in children's institutions (Rose & Whitty, 2010). At Banksia Gully, there were clear connections between clocked practices and the amount of waiting the participants did. The very reason for SAC's existence makes it a waiting space. Whilst SAC is a place where children play and receive care, it is inescapably the liminal space between school and home. At SAC, children must wait for family members to finish work, an activity subject to the application of clocked time.

Whilst waiting was universal, the ways that participants waited was not. There were multiple ways of waiting, especially waiting to go home. The amount of time they spent waiting varied. Each participant waited in unique ways. These results bear similarity to those produced by Klerfelt and Haglund (2015) who found that children in Swedish SAC also waited in multiple ways, and was often associated with boredom, and activities or tasks that children found unnecessary. The stories of waiting that follow detail some of the multiple and contextual ways that time acts upon the body. I show that rather than being separate, waiting practices intersect with the performances of age and gender explored in previous chapters. Although individual and contextual, the stories of waiting and time that follow in this section have implications for programming in SAC.

When thinking about the different ways of waiting I observed, there were some obvious examples that were easily recognised. Each day, a few minutes before 4.30pm, Seamus and his friends often waited by the PlayStation to play video games. They sat on the couch; perhaps discussing what game they would play, or would gather controllers and other equipment. There was no play. They were waiting. There was also obvious waiting when food was served at the beginning of each afternoon. On arrival, children sat at tables and waited until food was served at a central point. Then the children had to stand in a line and wait to receive food. Most children stood

in line immediately. Some remained seated, waiting until the line was shorter before lining up for food. These were a kind of collective waiting, where groups of children all waited for the same thing. However, there were also less obvious forms of waiting that I began to recognise after spending more time in the setting.

When he stayed late at SAC, Kevin sometimes looked like he was waiting. Kevin did not stay late often. Most days, Kevin left relatively early to participate in organised sport. When his parent arrived, he might shoot the basketball one last time and then leave the court to any remaining older children, or to the younger children that had been waiting to use the space. On these days, any waiting he did was not obvious. He appeared engaged in playing basketball and unconcerned by time. However on days when he stayed late and his friends had left, Kevin's waiting became more noticeable.

***Bruce.** So when do you get bored?*

***Kevin.** Probably when I'm one of the last here. Nothing to do...I've played everything... and you can't go outside.*

***Bruce.** ... So that tells me perhaps, so that when the others have gone, that having your friends here is pretty important.*

***Kevin.** Yep.*

Kevin identifies late SAC as the time when he typically gets bored, and identifies the absence of friends as one of the main reasons. In Chapter Nine, I argued that in order to construct himself as older and male, Kevin relied upon his athletic mastery. He preferred to perform this through athletic competition with same-age, similarly skilled peers. Boys rely on the assent of peers to maintain their status (Gallas, 1998). However, as his friends left SAC, Kevin gradually ran out of play companions and maintained his positioning differently. He did this without playing with younger children, who he did not consider skilled enough. Playing with younger children might have undone Kevin's category maintenance work and confused his positioning. Playing alone instead allowed Kevin to maintain his categorisation as older and skilled athlete.

Another significant time for Kevin was 5.00pm, when each day practitioners would call an end to outside play, requiring all children to move indoors. It was a programming decision made to reduce the number of practitioners required to supervise the diminishing number of children. As Kevin identified, this meant a cessation to sport. It also required another change to how he performed masculine and older. No longer able to play sport and perform physical mastery, Kevin's performance relied more upon keeping a distance between him and younger children. Kevin was usually the last child to move inside. He resisted practitioners' instructions by eking out a few last shots and making visible his status as skilled basketball player. Kevin's resistance demonstrates that the application of power is not unidirectional and just applied by adults over children (Foucault, 1980).

Once inside, Kevin engaged visibly in waiting. The activities available after 5.00pm seemed of little interest to Kevin. The 5/6 room was now open to all children, so he could not separate himself from younger children using that space as he could earlier in the day. There were materials available for art and craft, but in his interview Kevin did not list those activities as something he enjoyed. He possibly associated art activities with younger girls, the group who mostly used that area. Younger boys and Seamus dominated the PlayStation, and the games available were all 'G' rated. Similarly, the movies on the television were also G-rated. I discussed in Chapter Nine how being able to consume PG-rated media was important to many participants, particularly Kevin, as a way of marking themselves as older. Instead of participating in anything, Kevin instead withdrew from activity. He wandered around the room without engaging in play. Sometimes he would sit silently next to me, but resisted my offers to engage in conversation or play.

Davies (2003) argues that children position themselves discursively to maintain their categorisation. They position themselves in relation to others and using the possibilities a culture makes available. As social settings change, so too do the choices available to the child. In the above events, Kevin's social circumstances change. Two important means of performing his age and gender earlier in the day are no longer available. Instead he performs his category in ways that make the most sense in his new situation. Kevin finds himself in close quarters with mostly younger children and activities he associates with femininity and younger childhood. In this

new situation, Kevin's possible ways of performing are limited. To join in play with younger children or engage with younger children's experiences would confuse his categorisation. Instead, Kevin resists the power exercised by practitioners through their programming, withdraws from activity, and performs boredom. Resistance is one way power is exercised, and like other forms of power produces knowledge (Foucault, 1980). Resisting programming decisions by performing bored reinforces Kevin's status as older, male and unsuited to the changed circumstances.

Humanist theories construct individual subjects as unitary with identities that are continuous and coherent. Poststructural theories propose that individuals can occupy multiple, sometime contradictory subject positions (Davies, 1991). So far, it appears that Kevin did not perform himself in contradictory ways. Kevin's refusal to participate in play when there is no sport or same-age peer points to him possessing a singular identity that remains static regardless of a fluid social setting. However, Kevin's performance of bored, male, older child was not consistent. One late afternoon, Apple produced an impressive, metres-long snake of finger knitting. Although he did not participate in the notionally female act of finger knitting, Kevin was interested in the length of the snake and assisted with its handling and measuring. Briefly, Kevin abandoned 'bored' older male and brought himself physically closer to an activity discursively labelled as female. I also noticed that occasionally, even though he was performing bored, Kevin's attention drifted to the younger children's movie on the television. Even though he was on the other side of the room 'not watching', Kevin was nonetheless 'watching'. These actions carried with them a danger of Kevin disrupting his seemingly stable identity. However, even in momentarily adopting a contradictory discursive position, it still does not disrupt the perception of Kevin occupying a continuous subject position (Davies, 1991).

These examples show how Kevin's performances of older, male child are not fixed, but shift over time. When activity shifted from outside to inside, the performances available to Kevin changed. For the most part, Kevin adopted a position of bored, waiting and disinterested. However, particularly with the departure of his same-age male peers, other performances became available. For Kevin, it became less dangerous to adopt contradictory subject positions. Two ways in which he did this were by showing interest in a female activity like finger knitting or covertly watching



younger children's movies. It is difficult to contemplate that Kevin would have shown as much interest in these activities had his peers been present.

### **Visibly, but not so obviously waiting**

In contrast to Kevin's demonstrative displays of waiting, other participants waited more subtly. These other types of waiting were particularly visible was during late SAC. I use the term *late SAC* to describe the time late in the afternoon when most children had left and only a few remained. I became aware of the very different feel that SAC had between 5.30pm and 6.30pm, compared to the busy first hour. During late SAC, everything was quieter. There were rarely more than ten children left. All children were inside with most playing video games, cards or watching television. The remaining practitioners, whilst keeping an eye on the children, were also concerned with tidying up and cleaning. It contrasted with early SAC, which had large numbers of children, more noise, more vigorous play and more interaction between children. Whilst early SAC seemed to be mostly about play, late SAC seemed mostly about waiting.

Seamus and Tiger were the participants most likely to attend late SAC, whilst Kevin, Apple and Stephen sometimes attended. In the following exchange, I ask Tiger what late SAC is like.

***Bruce.** So who do you play the games with? Who are your preferred people to play games with?*

***Tiger.** Um I normally play with Sky if she wants to. Um Jasmin, Cleo, Apple...*

***Bruce.** ...What about when they've gone home? Who do you play with?*

***Tiger.** Um I normally just look around. See what to do and see if anyone's doing anything that I might like to do... But I don't really do anything.*

***Bruce.** You don't really do much then?*

***Tiger.** Yeah. I'm like there's nothing to do. I'm trying to think of ideas.*

***Bruce.** ... I've been here late with you sometimes, what's it like to be one of the last ones here?*

*Tiger. It's a little boring. Um but sometimes when... it's your first time being last you're like "yay, I'm last" and then you're like "wait there's no one else here". Then there's no one else to play with, and it's like "oh".*

Tiger's account of late SAC corresponds with my observations of that period. Early in the afternoon, Tiger, Sky and Apple would engage in shared activities and laughter, which all three of them called, "being silly". Most frequently, these activities took the form of drawing, conversation, jokes and netball. When her friends left, Tiger instead became quiet, solitary and listless. She sometimes wandered from space to space, without really engaging in one activity. Similarly, when with friends early in the afternoon, Seamus was physically active, playing sport, or assuming the role of video games 'expert', adjudicating on rules or offering strategic advice. Without friends, he too was solitary and quiet.

One of the aspects of Tiger's statement that invites investigation is the role that friends played in older children's experiences of time. Although clock time is the dominant way Western cultures measure the passing of time, Tiger instead uses the presence and absence of friends as the criteria by which she distinguishes between early and late SAC. For Tiger, late SAC starts when Apple and Sky have left and ends when your parent collects you. This is a form of subjective time, where the subject understands their present in relation to the immediate past and the expected future (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). It establishes the presence of friends as a critical marker of the junction between different phases of an afternoon at SAC.

Earlier, I described how Kevin performed older boy differently during late SAC. Tiger describes a similar situation, although her performance differs from Kevin's. Similarly to Kevin, Tiger withdraws from activities during late SAC in preference to playing with younger children. However, she uses her body differently. Whereas Kevin frequently appeared static, sullen and disinterested, Tiger's waiting took the form of wandering around the program space, passing from activity to activity, only occasionally joining in. Kevin seemed committed to performing bored. Tiger instead seemed more intent on concealing her boredom. Unlike Kevin, Tiger would still sometimes engage in activity. She was a capable artist and sometimes sat and drew. Like Kevin, Tiger desired to watch PG-rated movies. However, she was willing to sit

and openly watch some younger children's movies, whilst Kevin did so covertly and from a distance.

In concealing her boredom and avoiding the attention of practitioners, Tiger's performance during late SAC was consistent with her positioning as good girl. However, concealing boredom was only one way that Tiger performed good, older girl late in the day. Tiger enacted her desired subject position in other ways.

***Bruce.** What do you think the teachers who work here, the educators who work here, what do you think they think about Grade Fives and Sixes who come to OSHC?*

***Tiger.** Um they're probably um thinking that they're older and should know by then what to do and what not to do... like sunscreen, not really sunscreen but like hats...*

***Bruce.** And is that what they see when they see you guys at OSHC? Is that what you do? Or do you think they get surprised because you're not like that?*

***Tiger.** (laughs) Um well they're used to me because I really haven't broken any rules here and yeah. Being up the back (in the 5/6 room) is funny cos like um the boys normally do stuff that's funny and then they get in trouble normally cos they do something wrong. Like they did once and... they had to go sit at the front when we were actually sitting at the front... It actually didn't hurt, it didn't really be that great for them any more because they had to sit at the front two weeks.*

***Bruce.** Yep. But you don't get in trouble often?*

***Tiger.** Mm not really.*

Walkerdine (1990) says good girls avoid disciplinary engagement with adults and draw power from being well behaved, unlike boys, who see being naughty as a challenge. Like Apple and Sky, Tiger avoided trouble. She had seen Kevin get in trouble, and even though the consequences "didn't hurt", she preferred to avoid them as they would require her to sit with the younger children. I discussed the same

situation with Kevin, who made light of the consequences of getting in trouble suggesting they were “not that bad”.

During late SAC, Tiger maintained her status as good girl differently compared to when she was with friends. With friends, she engaged in “being silly” but not in a way that drew the attention of practitioners. In late SAC, her performance involved negotiating boredom without getting in trouble. Although there is power in being a good girl, it is a constrained position infused with self-surveillance (Reay, 2006). Tiger did not allow herself to be demonstratively bored. She instead slipped quietly from activity to activity, appearing to be engaged, whilst concealing that she is merely waiting to be collected.

This is an example of how time influenced Tiger’s conduct. Tiger identifies that her friends are critical to her enjoyment of SAC. As the afternoon progresses, friends are more likely to have gone home and SAC is inevitably more boring. How she negotiates boredom and engages in quiet but powerful resistance late in the day is consistent with her positioning as good, older girl. I was able to recognise, and she states that she was bored, but she performed bored in a way that did not draw the attention of adults. Her account shows that there are multiple ways to perform good, older girl that can change over time as contexts shift.

### **Waiting bodies**

In his examination of the application of time in schools, Foucault (1977) describes how schedules work in tandem with physical discipline to control students’ bodies. Scheduling controls the allocation of time to ensure that all time is accounted for and allocated to useful tasks. Physical disciplines work to ensure students perform sanctioned movements and adopt disciplined postures that indicate alertness and engagement. But does time contribute to a governance over children’s bodies in a care and leisure setting like SAC? In this chapter, I have proposed that SAC settings change as time passes, and that older children’s performances of age and gender adapt in response to those changes. The changes I have described relate mostly to the gradual departure of children, often leaving older children with altered choices of friends for play. In this section, I argue that practitioners are also disciplined by time and that their actions also influence children’s use of their bodies.

Foucault (1977) details how time is applied to produce well-disciplined labourers. SAC practitioners are subject to these same temporal pressures. Australian practitioners perform their work in settings governed by neoliberal discourses. A singular definition of neoliberalism is hard to pin down. Moss (2014) synthesises the writings of many scholars to propose that neoliberalism is many things, but is fundamentally an ideology that gives primacy to the idea that commercial markets are essential for free societies, and that competition is an important driver for producing markets capable of delivering high quality services and the best outcomes for citizens. Neoliberalism positions all citizens as consumers and competitors with the freedom to choose products that best meet their needs. Neoliberal ideologies are evident in Australian Government policy about SAC. Current government policy strives for a “flexible, affordable and accessible child care and early childhood learning market” (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014, p. iv).

The neoliberal imaginary places time and efficiency demands on practitioners to deliver competitively priced, institutional care of children that meets the needs of astute parent and child consumers (Moss, 2014). Neoliberal discourses are embedded in every aspect of Western lives (Moss, 2014). They are present in regulatory requirements that seek the provision of ‘quality’ SAC. Quality ratings for childcare are a hallmark of neoliberal governance. They seek to quantify what good childcare looks like so that individual services can be compared (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Regulatory measures of quality have moved practitioners’ work beyond just providing care and leisure, and introduced other tasks such as administration, documenting children’s activities, professional development and curriculum planning (Early Childhood Development Steering Committee, 2009). The FSAC, which is part of Australia’s regulatory system, has added the achievement of educational outcomes to the work performed by practitioners. It was only with the advent of the FSAC that the discursive shift of using the term *educators* to describe Australian practitioners was made (DEEWR, 2011). Adding education to practitioners’ work might be a way of adding perceptions of value and quality to SAC.

There were multiple effects of neoliberal discourses of productivity at Banksia Gully. Practitioners’ time was rigidly scheduled to ensure that many tasks required could be accomplished in the time available. Early in the afternoon, practitioners were

allocated specific tasks such as supervising play, preparing and serving food, transporting children or cleaning. Each practitioner seemed aware of, and performed their allocated role. Later in the day, practitioners were often busy cleaning. Practitioners also engaged in self-reflection and completing curriculum documentation, which are technologies designed to produce self-governing neoliberal subjects (Dahlberg, 2003). These tasks were sometimes completed at the same time as tasks like supervision in order to ensure that staffing resources were used efficiently.

Individuals who conduct their lives outside of clock time can still be influenced by the rigidities and schedules of those whose are governed by it (Adam, 1990). This situation existed at Banksia Gully. Practitioners' actions were governed by clock time and productivity demands to facilitate children's leisure, an activity that is commonly conceptualised as free of the demands of time and work (Rojek, 1995). However, the participants' leisure and play were influenced by the clocked practices of practitioners. Some of the important programming changes were driven by the application of clock time. For children at late SAC, the most important of these was the 5.00pm cessation of outdoor play. Kevin and Tiger both thought late SAC could be improved if children were able to stay outside beyond 5.00pm.

One observation I made was that after 5.00pm there was a change in the way participants used their bodies. Participants' play became increasingly solitary and sedentary. Apple often engaged in finger knitting or origami. Seamus played on the PlayStation until his friends went home and then watched television. As discussed earlier, Tiger wandered around or drew, and Kevin just sat and waited to go home. Participants' bodies moved less and were more likely to be seated or reclining. The practitioners' scheduling directly affected the choices available to children and therefore the ways they used their bodies.

Despite stating that they would rather remain outside, these participants seemed accepting of the requirement for quieter activity. Their willingness to put aside active play and instead engage in less desired, sedentary activity may be understood using Hochschild's (2012) concept of emotional labour. Hochschild argues that as well as doing physical and intellectual work, workers might also do the sort of labour that involves responding to a client's emotional needs to create a harmonious social environment. As well as adults, children can also engage in emotional labour. Penny

and Tiger explain what emotional labour after 5.00pm might look like from a child's perspective.

***Bruce.** Is there anything that you think Julie and the educators here could do to help you get less bored when people go home?*

***Penny.** ... I don't think so, cos it's not their fault that people go home"*

*"**Bruce.** Would it be a good thing if you were able to do it, art and craft, until later?*

***Tiger.** It would be better for kids but not really good for staff cos then if they go home then they have to clean up their mess.*

Penny acknowledges that practitioners face challenges in continuing to provide fun when numbers of children fall. Similarly, Tiger suggests that it would be good if children could do art and craft for longer, but it would be unfair for practitioners who need to prepare for the end of the day. Both participants engage in emotional labour by accommodating the constraints experienced by practitioners and shifting their expectations of what can be provided late in the day. I observed that children adopted a positive visage late in the day. Rather than respond demonstratively to reduced activity options or absence of outdoor play, they mostly sat quietly and engaged in whatever activities were available. Participants engaged in the suppression and management of emotions that Hochschild (2012) associates with emotional labour. Even Kevin and Tiger who were bored and did not engage in play, did so in ways that were unlikely to upset practitioners. Their work went beyond the emotional and extended to the physical. Children can adopt bodily positions that communicate engagement in particular types of activities (Foucault, 1977). The participants did this by adopting reclining postures by the television or a computer, creating an impression that they were content with the activity options provided.

Hochschild's (2012) concept of emotional labour sits comfortably with aspects of poststructural theories of power and bodies. Foucault (1977) argues that cultural expectations about acceptable ways of conduct act as a form of power over people's

bodies. Emotional management and being socially aware of others are culturally valued ways of behaving (Rojek, 2010). These cultural expectations compel people to act in ways that accommodate the emotional wellbeing of others. Early in the afternoon, when there were more practitioners, and workloads could be shared, participants were upright, active and mobile. Later in the day, participants were more responsive to the industrial pressures experienced by practitioners. They instead adopted sedentary postures, responding to practitioners' workplace demands, reassuring them that they are satisfied with the program provided.

### **Waiting from the moment she arrived**

One participant largely absent from these data analysis chapters so far has been Cleo. Cleo was aged 12 years at the time of the research. Like Tiger, Sky and Apple, she too performed the heteronormative role of good, older girl. In her interview, Cleo presented as docile, caring, kind and attentive to the needs of younger children (Walkerdine, 1990). In her interview, Cleo was consistently positive about everything at Banksia Gully. Despite my probing, there was nothing at SAC that she declared 'annoying', 'too young' or 'boring'. This contrasted with the other participants who were sometimes critical of SAC and sought to reinforce their status as older children. Whilst at SAC, Cleo was frequently quiet to the point of invisibility. She was from the public school and did not socialise with Michael, Apple, Sky and Tiger, who were all from the private school. Social economic status, and therefore the type of school they attend is important in who preadolescent girls form friendships with (Adler & Adler, 1998). Cleo also did not spend time with Penny, who although from the public school, was demonstrative and boisterous; qualities that Cleo would likely find uncomfortable.

Unlike other participants who adopted waiting postures late in the day, Cleo often appeared to commence waiting from the moment she arrived at SAC. Cleo did not usually eat the afternoon snack or engage in play. She instead wandered around SAC waiting to leave. Cleo rarely waited for long as she was always amongst the first to leave. Despite performing good girl in her interview and declaring that SAC was 'great', Cleo appeared to not want to be at SAC, something confirmed by her father who said Cleo did not want to go to SAC, but went because it was necessary. Cleo likely desired to be at home after school. In her interview, she spoke most animatedly



about her pets, family and home as things she would like to have in the hours after school. The finite nature of time segments in educational settings constrains children's activities (Ball, Hull, Skelton, & Tudor, 1984). This might explain why Cleo did not engage in the program. If she knew she was leaving soon, there would be little point in beginning an activity.

Cleo's waiting, like that of Kevin and Tiger is an example of the productive exercise of power. In performing good older girl, complaining or appearing unhappy were not viable subject positions for Cleo. Instead, she engaged in quiet resistance. Adults at Banksia Gully consistently referred to Cleo as a 'lovely' girl who was kind and helpful. Girls who are too assertive can be seen as too forward and precocious (Walkerdine, 1997). To be negative would be at odds with the consistent way that Cleo presented herself and compromise her positioning as good older girl. Cleo's goodness at SAC and during the interview is also a form of emotional labour. By presenting herself to me and other adults as comfortable and happy, Cleo was showing sensitivity to her parents, who needed to place her in SAC, and the practitioners she spoke of affectionately (Hochschild, 2012).

Cleo's performance was contextual. When speaking to me, Cleo professed to enjoy SAC. Yet outside the interview, Cleo acted in ways that suggested she found SAC boring and laborious. Other than saying "hello" to practitioners, she barely engaged with food, activities and other children. Cleo distanced herself from life in SAC. There was one exception to Cleo's usual performances. On Fridays, there were sometimes other older girls also from the public school present at SAC. On these days, Cleo engaged with food and activities. Similarly to other participants discussed in this chapter, it appears that friends were also critical to Cleo's enjoyment of SAC. These multiple ways of performing age and gender show that although she was consistent in presenting herself as a good older girl, Cleo did so in contextual ways.

Cleo's waiting at SAC was unique and contrasted with other children's waiting. Most days, Cleo began waiting as soon as she arrived. Cleo's data has implications for how we conceptualise SAC, its planning and also the structure of this thesis. I structured my data analysis around Seamus's three phases of SAC. My initial interpretation, that these three phases were universal for all children was mistaken. Cleo's experience shows that the phases are not universal. On many of the days she attends, Cleo does

not eat or play. Cleo's SAC frequently consists of two different phases, 'wait' and 'go'.

Cleo's story goes to the core of what the purpose of SAC is, or should be. The FSAC conceptualises SAC as a site of leisure, play, care and education (DEEWR, 2011). This is a noticeable contrast with Cleo's SAC, which is a site of waiting and emotional labour. Earlier in this chapter, I wrote about neoliberalism and its influence on the working bodies of practitioners. Neoliberalism's influence goes beyond markets and labour practices. It affects all aspects of our lives, including how we care for and educate children (Moss, 2014). Neoliberalism is therefore also an influence on the purpose of SAC. In recent years, government has added education to the list of functions that SAC performs. Whilst this might be an acknowledgement of the likelihood that children do learn things at SAC, it is also possibly an attempt to seek return for financial investment beyond 'just' the provision of play and care. In neoliberal societies, education is tasked with the production of good neoliberal subjects who can further the prosperity of market nations (Moss, 2014). These are subjects who are expected to emerge as autonomous, flexible and entrepreneurial (Ball, 2013; Popkewitz & Bloch, 2001).

Australia's FSAC seems to purpose SAC with producing the sorts of neoliberal child subjects described by Ball (2013) and Popkewitz and Bloch (2001). The FSAC expresses a cultural desire for children who are autonomous, entrepreneurial and productive.

Children in SAC settings have choice and control over their learning as they collaborate with educators to extend their life skills and develop dispositions towards citizenship. (DEEWR, 2011, p. 5)

Effective learners are also able to transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another and to locate and use resources for their own means. (DEEWR, 2011, p. 32)

There are many such references to the production of autonomous children throughout the FSAC. Children in the FSAC are responsible for their own learning, play choices and health outcomes. It constructs children as future citizens who can function independently with minimal intervention and support from the state.

When I consider the positioning of SAC as education, I wonder what the implications are for children like Cleo who do the work of waiting. Silin (2016) describes waiting as rebellious and a resistance by suggesting, “In today’s impatient culture waiting may be the ultimate transgressive act because it takes us out of time. Waiting challenges the demand for continuous progress and the unrelenting march of the linear” (p. 13). In SAC, waiting sits uneasily alongside the neoliberal desires expressed in the FSAC. The FSAC constructs SAC as a site of industry, where play is harnessed to the production of independent, future citizens. Children’s play in the FSAC is busy, productive and purposeful. It runs counter to Cleo’s waiting where she removed herself from the various acts of production and chose instead to let time pass.

Cleo’s unwillingness to engage with the program can also be understood as a type of silence. When invited to engage in dialogue with activities and people, she withdrew and remained separate. Silin (2005) says that silence is pathologised in cultures that value autonomous, literate subjects. This is evidenced by the FSAC, which is silent on waiting and inactivity; an indication that these are undesirable acts. Davies (2000, p. 85) encourages researchers to “read against the grain” of dominant discourses. Silin (2005, 2016) helps us to step outside the neoliberal discourse and read silence and waiting differently. He argues that silence is an undervalued form of communication that allows individuals to see themselves as distinct from the collective. Through being a silent participant in the SAC curriculum Cleo maintained a separate presence that enabled her to wait for family in a way that was effective for her but rubbed against culturally accepted ways for children to spend their free time.

After my immersion in the setting, I find it difficult to contemplate that practitioners could do much to stop Cleo from waiting. She rarely had friends at SAC and did not have to wait long for her parents. Even in uneven power relationships with adults, children can exercise their own power. Silin (2005) also reminds us that children have the right to not talk. So too should children have the right to not engage in activity during their leisure. Perhaps rather than see waiting and inactivity as pathologies of failed child or practitioner, we can see them differently. We can see waiting as a resistance against neoliberal curricula that compel engagement in productive play. Waiting might also be inevitable and understandable for some children. Whilst for

many children SAC services are places of play and engagement, for some they are merely waiting spaces. As well as programming for play and the production of autonomous, active children, perhaps SAC services could also program for children's waiting and emotional labour.

## **TIME INFLUENCES WHO YOU PLAY WITH**

In this chapter, my analysis has focused on time and its influence on children's bodies. In this section, I extend my analysis to time's influence on friendships. Earlier I proposed that Tiger marks the passing of time through the presence or absence of friends. Each afternoon, I observed how children's departures changed the social environment at Banksia Gully. The departure of children was one way of marking the passing of time. From shortly after 4.00pm, the first parents arrived to collect their children. Children who were outside could see their parents approach and often abandoned play to collect their bag and leave. A smaller number continued playing and resisted leaving to scratch out a few more minutes of play with their friends.

The departure of children affected whom the participants played with. Earlier I described how Kevin, usually the last basketball boy to leave, preferred solitary play and acting bored in preference to playing with younger children. Not all participants responded to the departure of friends in the same way as Kevin. Some were willing to play with children outside their usual peer groups. On one afternoon, I noted that Kevin's best friend, Klay was in the unusual position of being the last basketball boy left at SAC. I was intrigued to see that rather than reject other children Klay sought play with Seamus, an outsider and often rejected by Kevin and Klay. Klay's sortie into Seamus's game of handball did not last long. Whilst Klay was happy to accord Seamus the status of 'next best' play companion, Seamus was already engaged in play with his 'first choices' and did not need a 'next best' play companion. Whilst this story might make an interesting exploration of social capital, I am interested in Kevin and Klay's contrasting performances of older boy.

Foucault (1977) says that the possibility of being watched is internalised and acts as a form of power over people's bodies. People do not have to be able to see the prison guards for them to influence their conduct. When his friends had left, Kevin refused to associate with any child outside his usual friendship group lest it compromise his

desired subject position of athletically skilful older child. In comparison, Klay risked being seen with other older children outside his friendship group. After abandoning play with Seamus, Klay returned to solitary play and did not pursue play with younger children. This might suggest that Klay organised other children into a friendship hierarchy. Whilst there were some children that he considered playing with later in the day when his best friends have gone, there were others, such as very young children, who represented too great a threat to his subject position.

Some participants were able to name friendship hierarchies.

*Bruce. Is there like an order to who you prefer to play with? ...*

*Apple. Kind of (laughs).*

*Bruce. ... So who's top of the order?*

*Apple. Tiger and Sky. Then Penelope and Elinor... and then I guess Michael... and then the bottom, I kind of just like to go off on my own and stuff.*

*Bruce. So you'd prefer to be on your own...*

*Apple. But if Missy was here, she'd be at the top... Cos she's my BEST friend at school...*

*Bruce. ... So your OSHC friends aren't always the same as school friends?*

*Apple. No. Tiger was my best friend in Grade 2...*

*Bruce. So let me get my order straight. You've got Missy, Tiger and Sky are top of the order.*

*Apple. Yep*

*Bruce. Um Penelope and Elinor second.*

*Apple. Yep*

*Bruce. Um and then third on your own?*

*Apple. Um it was supposed to be Michael*

**Bruce.** *Oh no, third you go Michael*

**Apple.** *Penny, and I guess even the boys maybe.*

**Bruce.** *Maybe. I don't think I've ever seen you play with those boys.*

**Apple.** *Only when eating. We normally like to just all chat together and talk about stuff.*

**Bruce.** *I know. I've been crashing those chats for a couple of months now. Um so if you had a choice between being on your own, or hanging out with the preps, 1's and 2's... what's the order there?*

**Apple.** *On my own.*

**Bruce.** *On your own? Yep. Finger knitting and origami?*

**Apple.** *I'd rather go with the teacher people...*

**Bruce.** *And this is important, cos I've talked to a lot of people about this, but being on your own and being with one of the teachers, what is your preference there?*

**Apple.** *Teacher.*

**Bruce.** *Okay. And what would you do with a teacher if you hang out with a teacher?*

**Apple.** *Well, I think they kind of find it comfortable to talk with me. So I just kind of talk about everyday stuff.*

Apple provides a detailed account of her friendship hierarchy. Her first choice friends were Tiger and Sky, but she also expressed a desire for her best friend outside SAC. It is a statement that highlights the contextual nature of children's friendships at SAC. When I was immersed in the SAC setting, these three girls gave the impression of being the best of friends. However, they were really only the best available friends. Apple stated that she had better friends outside SAC. Other participants also identified that they had better friends outside SAC whom they would prefer to spend time with. Apple also believed she would be happy to play with Penelope and Elinor, two girls

from Grade 4. However, she was clear that she would not consider playing with the youngest children in Prep and Grades 1 and 2. Apple was also happy to socialise with practitioners. In Apple's hierarchy and those of the other participants who named them, age and gender were primary factors. The importance of same age friends is governed by the categorisation and grouping according to age within schools (Jenks, 2001). The ages of desired play companions are also determined by context, which is often related to time. If your preferred friends have left, it might be acceptable to play with children who are slightly younger, or adults, who are much older. The youngest children though were not considered suitable. Only Cleo spoke of a willingness to consider the youngest children as play companions.

These friendship hierarchies are acts of category maintenance. In refusing play with very young children regardless of context, the participants bound who belongs outside the category of older child. Considering play with much older adults supports my assertion from earlier in this thesis, that their performances express a desire to claim maturity. However, I have to consider that stating her hierarchy during an interview is a performance different to the one Apple gives during play. As I explored in Chapter Nine, Apple's performance of older child intersected with her performance of good girl. In stating that she is willing to play with younger children like Penelope and Elinor, Apple may be hoping to appear as somebody helpful and nurturing of younger children, qualities that are valued in good girls (Walkerdine, 1990). Despite expressing a willingness to play with slightly younger children, there was no occasion during my immersion where I observed Apple doing so. When her best friends had left, her preferred activities were solitary play or talking to adults. The reasons for the mismatch between word and act are unclear. Apple may have sought to please me as an adult and reflect the school and SAC values that position her as a role model, nurturing and helpful. It is also possible that I represented a different type of audience to her peers. In telling me that she was happy to play with younger children, there is less risk of disrupting her membership of the category of older child. I am the only witness to the act. However, if she were to physically enact play with younger children, the possibility of being seen by her peers increases.

During their interviews, seven of the nine participants spoke of having friendship hierarchies. Although their hierarchies differed, all of those participants discriminated

on the basis of age, gender and time. I found similarly in my earlier research that many older children consider younger children unsuitable play companions (Hurst, 2013). The role time plays in these hierarchies is important. Who participants are willing to be seen with changes with the passing of time. As time passes at SAC, friends go home. Once those friends have gone, and the old boundaries between older and younger child go with them. The ongoing departure of friends requires participants to contemplate different friendship arrangements that reflect those constantly changing social contexts and audiences.

## **SCHOOL AGE CARE CURRICULUM AND TIME**

### **Making time go faster**

The research questions for this thesis require me to consider the programming implications of emotional labour and identity work performed by children. In Chapter Ten, I argued that the identity work performed by the participants introduced a work-like element to older children's leisure in SAC. Emotional labour also makes leisure more work-like (Rojek, 2010). Late SAC has been prominent in this analysis based on time. Instead of engaging in play that is 'free and timeless', the participants who attend late SAC instead engaged in identity work and self-surveillance. Whilst SAC exists primarily to provide care and leisure, in a context where there are community concerns about the cost of childcare, perhaps it is not possible to provide much more than a care service late in the afternoon when venues need to be cleaned and few children remain. However, industrial constraints should not justify SAC settings that ignore children's entitlements to pursue leisure experiences in their free time late in the day. Article 31 of the UNCRC promotes the right of children to be able to engage in leisure and play (United Nations, 1989). The sorts of experiences that practitioners provide can make waiting at the end of the day less laboured and more restful.

In their interviews, some of the participants suggested how to improve late SAC. As well as their suggestions, the ways that participants occupied their time late in the day also provide insights into the sorts of things that can make SAC better for those children who are there last. In the final section of this chapter, I look at possible ways to improve SAC late in the day.



One observation I made about Banksia Gully was how time seemed to pass more slowly late in the day. Although I was present as an observer and outsider, and not somebody waiting for parents, I too felt the slow passing of time. During early SAC, there were more children and more play. Play is often credited with helping time to pass quickly (Eberle, 2014). For me, time flew during early SAC. I was often invited to join the participants in play, or at the very least, there was plenty to observe. However, once 5.00pm came around, time seemed to progress more slowly. There was less activity, and children spent more time quietly and alone waiting for their parents to collect them. It is possible that late SAC may have passed even more slowly for the participants. Time passes more slowly for children (Adam, 2004). The time I spent observing late SAC led me to consider whether the activities provided late in the day could help time to pass more quickly and make waiting for parents less laboured.

The ways in which the participants who stayed late spent their time varied. Seamus usually played video games or watched whatever movie was playing. Similarly, Tiger sometimes watched television, unless she was drawing, which she also liked to do. Both of these participants also like to play a card game called Spit. Spit was fast-paced, competitive, and required a reasonable amount of concentration to distract from waiting. They only played with an adult and never played Spit together. Apple liked finger knitting. On one afternoon, she produced metres of finger knitting whilst waiting for her mother.

These activities had characteristics in common. They were usually solitary and repetitive. Apple's finger knitting was comprised of short iterations, each stitch taking less than a minute. The length of time between her friends leaving and parent arriving could be measured by the length of knitting she produced. Similarly, each round of Spit or iteration of a video game only lasted a few minutes. Such activities could be abandoned at short notice in order to go home. Seamus spoke of the efficacy of repetition as a way of passing time in his interview.

*Bruce. Why did you put trampolines in there?*

*Seamus. Cos it's fun... and it's a continuous thing.*

*Bruce. It's a continuous thing? What do you mean by that?*

***Seamus.** Cos like with car ramps, you have to pick up a car, drop it on top, and it just goes down (there is a car ramp some children made in the room)... And then you have to do that all again... With trampolines, you can bounce for like, you just need like (simulates bouncing) yeah, and then you can do different things*

***Bruce.** Why is that good though?*

***Seamus.** Because you don't have to... do anything sort of... it doesn't feel like you're doing anything.*

***Bruce.** What, it just sort of happens?*

***Seamus.** Yeah*

***Bruce.** Like once you're on it, it just goes?*

***Seamus.** ... just like telly, and you can just sit back like and enjoy instead of having to (motions repeated use of the car ramp)*

***Bruce.** Ah so physically start and stop and go all the time? Okay*

To paraphrase Seamus, he suggests that you can get on a trampoline, start bouncing and it “doesn't feel like you're doing anything”. He intimates that trampolining is an activity where, with minimal effort, time just passes. He contrasts this with playing with a car ramp that the children made and was in the interview room. He believes the car activity is more work-like. There is work in placing the car at the top of the ramp each time you use it. By contrast, the trampoline is almost effortless in launching the user up for each successive bounce. There is a rhythm to trampolining, just as there was in finger knitting, video games and Spit. Once these activities build some momentum, it is easy to keep them going. Seamus also likens trampolining to watching television. He speaks about watching television as something you can also “just sit back like and enjoy”. His statement indicates a desire for activities that are ‘easy’, require little investment, and make time pass quickly.

Children have their own ways of controlling the impacts of time (Balldin, 2005).

Christensen et al. (2001) argue that play gives children more control over how their

time is used. It allows them to resist clock time's influence on their lives and reclaim time lost to adult clocked practices. For this reason, the child-directed structure employed at Banksia Gully and more broadly in SAC is important. Gasparini (1995) talks about 'equipped waiting' where social spaces are organised in ways that ease waiting. Perhaps practitioners could conceptualise late SAC more as a waiting space rather than a leisure space. SAC spaces could be equipped for waiting with resources that help time to pass quickly. Additionally, giving children the ability to choose activities provides them with some control over how their time is used. It enables them to select activities that make time feel like it passes more quickly. In being able to control how they experience time, children can ease waiting for parents and reduce the impact of emotional labour at the end of SAC.

## **SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I have added to my analysis in "Eat" and "Play" to discuss the role time plays in SAC for older children. As in previous chapters, my analysis shows that children experience SAC in multiple ways. Time affects them differently and they respond to time in individual ways.

Previously I demonstrated how aligning themselves with same-age peers was one way the participants maintained their membership of the category of older child. However, as time passed in SAC, the number of children diminished and therefore the possibility of accessing same-age peers. Consequently, as time passed at Banksia Gully, the acts of aged category maintenance that children engaged in changed. Some participants implemented friendship hierarchies, seeking engagement with other children outside their peer group. Others engaged in solitary play separate from younger children, and some withdrew from activity altogether.

I also discussed children's waiting at the end of the day. SAC is an in-between space where participants occupy themselves in the space between school and home. Despite practitioners' efforts to enact the FSAC and make SAC a productive space, for most children SAC remains a place where they wait to go home. They demonstrated multiple acts of waiting that included acts of resistance and category maintenance, and performances of age. For most participants, waiting was triggered by the departure of friends or a reduction in activity options at the end of the day. For Cleo,

waiting commenced as soon as she arrived. The observations and narratives I have shared demonstrate that time can govern how children use their bodies. It influences their postures, activities, demeanours, and how they move within the program. In previous chapters, I argued that their category maintenance and performances of age add a work-like element to children's play. Finally, I have also described how participants engage in emotional labour during waiting. This emotional labour adds to the identity work I discussed in Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten, contributing additional work to their play.

I have used this analysis to argue that services should consider programming for children's waiting, something that I explore in more depth in the final chapter. In doing so, I draw on the perspectives of those participants who seem to do the most waiting. Their accounts provide suggestions for the types of activities that make waiting less laboured. In the next, and final chapter, I revisit the analysis I have conducted in "Eat", "Play" and "Go" and move this thesis to a conclusion. I produce a series of findings that harness the views expressed by the ten participants and me, and have implications for improved ways to provide SAC for older children.

## CHAPTER TWELVE – CONCLUSION

This research was concerned with the oldest children who attend School Age Care; those aged 9 to 12 years. Older children have long been a topic of discussion in SAC. I investigated how to provide SAC for older children from an older child's perspective. I hoped to gain insight into what older children wanted from SAC and what sort of understandings they drew upon in forming those perspectives. I therefore sought to address the following questions:

What do children aged 9 to 12 years consider important in the provision of School Age Care?

What conceptualisations of childhood and care are evident in older children's understandings of ways to provide School Age Care?

The ways in which I have addressed these questions were guided by a poststructural ontology, in particular Foucault's theories of power and knowledge. Foucault (1977, 1980) argues that knowledge or 'truth' is socially produced through complex networks of disciplinary power distributed throughout societies. The social production of knowledge proposed by Foucault has implications for the type of knowledge this project has produced.

In conceptualising truth as a social process, Foucault (1980) sees truth as an expression of the culture or setting that produced it. Truth therefore is not singular or absolute, but multiple, contextual and contingent. What is held to be true can change across time, setting and location. However, the production of truth is not something that 'happens to' people. Both Foucault (1988b) and Butler (1990, 1993) argue that individuals are active in the production of truth and construction of their identities.

The findings described in this final chapter therefore reflect these aspects of the social production of knowledge argued by Foucault and assumed in this research. I do not presume to have produced a single 'answer' that can be applied to all older children in all SAC settings. I have instead produced an alternative reading of the research topic that accounts for the complex, shifting, contingent nature of SAC for older children. My findings acknowledge not just that SAC can change across settings, but also that any one SAC setting can shift and change. The SAC setting described in this research

performed multiple, shifting purposes that were contingent on complex factors, including the weather, the time of day, and changes in personnel. The knowledge outlined in these findings also recognises that each child engaged differently with SAC and in multiple ways. These findings are therefore interconnected and inexorably bound to the shifting complexities of the research setting and the individuals who inhabit it. They recognise that the participants, practitioners, government, culture and I were all active in producing that knowledge.

This conclusion also recognises the limitations of the study. Irrespective of the poststructural orientation of the research, it would be a conceit to claim to have produced ‘the answer’ to the problem of older children in SAC on the basis of a sample of ten children from one SAC program in suburban Melbourne. Although not universal, the findings have implications for how services work with and think about older children in SAC. The implications also have relevance for other types of work with children, including participatory research.

## **METHODOLOGICAL FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

This research project employed a combination of participatory methods, ethnography and a poststructural methodology during a long immersion in a single SAC setting. In adopting these approaches, I sought to locate and disrupt dominant discourses about older children in SAC. In this section, I discuss the effectiveness of the project methodology and any implications for future research projects.

### ***A combination of participatory and ethnographic methods was an effective way to learn more about children’s opinions and experiences of SAC***

The combination of participatory and ethnographic methods produced rich, descriptive data. A range of participatory methods including focus group activities, group projects and semi-structured interviews, was effective in supporting children to form and express their opinion about what SAC provides.

The addition of ethnographic data played an important role in contextualising, testing and adding depth to children’s views. Ethnography drew my attention to aspects of SAC that seemed important theoretically but did not appear in participants’ projects. It meant that I was theorising about the research setting throughout the project, rather

than just during interviews and data analysis. This ensured that a poststructural ontology informed the ongoing research, which added to the integrity of the findings. Ethnography was also an effective way to capture embodied performances of age and gender. The prominence and intersection of both participatory and ethnographic data in the analysis is a testament to how important both methodological approaches were in producing the findings.

***Long immersion in the research setting supports poststructural analysis of complex social settings***

A sustained immersion of 6 months was important in enabling poststructural analysis of a complex social setting. Long immersion allowed me to experience and observe the complexity and multiplicity of life at Banksia Gully. As I spent more time in the research setting, I gained a deeper understanding of how operations and experiences could change in response to a range of complexities including the passing of time, changing weather and seasons, changing personnel, and important social events. Similarly, it enabled me to observe the repeated, multiple and shifting ways the participants engaged in aged and gendered category maintenance and performances of identity. Long immersion also enabled the detection and analysis of patterns and routines in the setting and their effects on the children.

***Self-guided projects are a flexible and effective way for children to form and express their views***

One of the important elements of the method was the research project each child completed. In their interviews, a number of the participants indicated that the projects supported them to think about the research question and form and express their emerging ideas.

*Apple. Well I reckon doing this we had a lot of time to think about it, and think oh what questions is he going to ask and how can I answer them?*

I allowed four months for participants to complete projects and form their views. The allocated time gave the participants time to decide upon a method, and complete their project whilst balancing their involvement in play, leisure and other SAC activities. The long period of time also allowed for the complexities of a SAC setting, including

illnesses, weather, special occasions and children's external commitments. Extra time also facilitated my development of deeper, more trustful relationships with the participants, and a detailed understanding of the research setting.

The flexibility built into the method also allowed for other differences. Participants were allowed to determine their own mediums for their projects, so that they could work in ways that felt comfortable (Clark & Moss, 2001). That ten participants employed six different methods is evidence of the need for children to work in different ways. The flexibility to work individually or in groups was regarded favourably by the participants. Working alone was particularly important for participants who were 'outsiders' and were concerned about the judgmental gaze of other participants. The flexible approach was very effective for Michael, who had a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. It allowed Michael to trial a number of methods and seek support with tasks she found difficult. It is likely that Michael would have participated less successfully with a more prescriptive method.

### ***Children are capable co-researchers***

This research demonstrated that upper primary-age children are capable co-researchers. Once briefed, the participants were able to understand the purpose of the research, decide on a method for their projects, and work independently with little or no assistance. The participants managed project timelines in ways that accounted for their leisure needs and individual circumstances.

### ***Research settings are sites where power is exercised and identities contested***

The poststructural methodology adopted in this project provided insight into the operation of power relations during research with children. The research demonstrated the contestable nature of researcher and participant identities. It showed that child participants do not passively accept the identities adult researchers create for themselves. Despite the greater power available to me as an adult, the participants engaged in acts of resistance when the identity/ies I had assigned myself seemed unrealistic or undesirable.

This research also demonstrated that even though adult researchers can work hard to prepare child participants for participation in research, children can still experience



stress and uncertainty. In this project, despite careful preparations, one participant experienced significant distress during their interview, and others expressed experiencing nervousness. It is a finding that highlights the power imbalance between adult researcher and child participant, and how, despite our best efforts, children can still feel compelled to submit themselves to situations that cause them great distress.

### ***Project limitations***

This project was not without limitations. Being PhD research placed limitations on both the size and duration of the study. My commitment to producing rich data through a long immersion in the setting necessitated a small sample of ten children from one SAC, therefore resulting in findings that are not generalisable. Member checks could not be conducted, which also limited the credibility of the research. Additionally, the late addition of ethnography to the method was a lost opportunity. Earlier collection of ethnographic data may have contributed other data to support that already included in the analysis.

## **FINDINGS RELATING TO OLDER CHILDREN IN SCHOOL AGE CARE**

### ***Older children want programming strategies that recognise their categorisation as older.***

When I briefed the research participants on this project, I instructed them that I wanted to know what was important to older children in providing SAC. The responses they provided in their projects were mostly activity-focused. Most often, they desired separate spaces for older children, challenging physical play, age-coded equipment and games, more mature visual media, and same-age peers to share them. The participants' interviews provided further insight into why these activities were important, indicating a desire for programming elements that recognised their difference as older children. The participants considered themselves more physically and cognitively capable than younger children, and therefore desired programming strategies that reflected those differences.

This finding is a very literal presentation of the research data and has limited transferability given the small sample size. However, it is important that I represent

the participants' opinions as they were communicated to me. By engaging these children as my research partners, I feel an obligation to honour our 'pact' and present their views in a form they will recognise.

However, poststructural analysis provides a deeper insight into why these programming elements were important to the participants. The other findings that follow provide a poststructural theorisation of their responses and my observations. Whilst these findings go beyond a literal reporting of what participants desired, I have remained close to the central argument of their contributions, that being older matters to older children.

***Older children engage with developmental discourses to understand themselves as more mature and capable than younger children.***

I have described how the participants desired programming strategies that acknowledge their older age. Previous SAC texts conceptualise these desires as an expression of biological processes. My poststructural analysis permits a different reading of these desires, instead seeing them as an active engagement with developmental discourses embedded in Australian culture.

Biological realities mean that both children's and adults' bodies are always in states of change. Western cultures make sense of the changes in children through developmental psychology. The knowledge produced by developmental psychology has been internalised so that children's development is seen as not just change but also a series of universal stages shared by all children (Cannella, 2008). Staged development is a discourse that Western cultures have come to accept as axiomatic (Burman, 2008; Cannella, 2008; Jenks, 2001).

The production and recirculation of discourse is a social process where people have an active relationship with those discourses (Davies, 2006). Children are therefore not separate from discourse, but also participate in it. This research showed that children are able to access and engage with discourses of development and maturity. Sky and Kevin provide examples of how the participants used developmental language to describe themselves as more mature and sophisticated.

***Bruce. So what makes an older kid different?***

*Sky. Well they're more mature hopefully. And they're like, they see things differently because... I haven't explained it but um they see things differently I reckon.*

*Bruce. So are there any other ways you think you're different from younger kids?*

*Kevin. Um well bigger I guess. But and we have more muscle... We build muscle. We build bone. We get stronger and stronger by the second. And that increases our power.*

The participants also described how they accessed developmental knowledge via SAC programming practices and broader social practices. Practices like separate rooms for older children, mentoring programs and media guidelines enabled older children to see themselves as older and a separate category of child distinct from younger children.

***Older children engage in category maintenance to construct themselves as a separate group distinct from younger children***

The participants went beyond seeing themselves as a separate category of child. Applying Foucault's theories of power and knowledge showed that older children were active in categorising themselves as different to other children. Foucault (1977) argues that applications of disciplinary power makes possible the categorisation of people and that everybody, including children, participate in the exercise of power.

In the Grade 5/6 room, a space reserved for older children, the participants policed the actions of each other and younger children, erected signs and manipulated artworks to maintain a physical and discursive separation between them and younger children. The participants did not necessarily require adult-driven programming strategies like the 5/6 room to engage in category maintenance. Outside the 5/6 room the participants still found ways to engage in boundary work and construct themselves as separate.

The acts of category maintenance that took place around the Grade 5/6 room were sometimes problematic. During meal times, the room was a space to socialise with same-age peers and produced enjoyment and laughter. However, the actions of some participants were unkind, excluding younger children and outsiders like Seamus. Other participants were silent witnesses to those unkindnesses. These multiple acts of category maintenance demonstrate that older children's engagements with developmental discourses are complex and contradictory.

Early in this thesis, I investigated how the problematised older child is a construction particular to SAC. This research provides insight into how that category is formed and maintained. Whilst programming strategies like separate rooms and mentoring programs help to create the category of older child, older children actively engage with these strategies to participate in the creation and maintenance of the category.

***As well as biologically driven, development is something that is performed by older children***

This research shows that the participants also engaged physically and behaviourally with developmental discourses. Butler (1990, 1993) argues that gender is constructed performatively because when we conduct ourselves; we do so with one eye fixed on dominant cultural understandings that regard heterosexuality as normal. I have described a similar process in which older children's conduct is influenced by cultural understandings of 'normal' behaviours for children aged 9 to 12 years. This research shows that the participants engaged actively with developmental discourses to perform acts of category maintenance that positioned themselves as a separate category of child, more mature and adult than younger children. This finding is provocative and runs counter to the rarely questioned position that changes in children's behaviours are natural and biological. This finding provides alternative ways of conceptualising children's developmental behaviours. Aged behaviours are not just a product of biology, but are also a function of how Western cultures of speak about, and live within, dominant storylines about age, stage and development.

The performances of age described in this research were not uniform or universal. They were instead multiple and intersected with other complexities. Each participant performed 'older child' differently. Kevin and Klay's performances intersected with

normative masculine gender displays of autonomy, sporting prowess and physical mastery. Apple, Sky, Tiger and Cleo's performances intersected with the role of good girl, displaying compliant qualities that are valued in girls (Walkerdine, 1990). Not all performances of age were normative. Seamus experienced difficulty socialising with same-age peers and instead preferred play with younger children. Consequently, he often found himself positioned as outsider. Each participant's performances of age and gender shifted as time passed and contexts changed.

***Play is not always natural, free and joyful. It can also be work***

This research also unsettles common beliefs about SAC as a site of children's leisure and play. In Chapter Three, I discussed how play is an activity that is discursively welded to cultural understandings of childhood. Children's play is commonly viewed romantically as something that is natural, fun, innocent and free (Eberle, 2014; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). Play can also be unfair, socially produced and hard work (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). Rojek (1995, 2010) argues similarly that the freedom often associated with play and leisure can be compromised by work-like acts of identity construction. I have employed Rojek's poststructural critique of leisure to complicate romanticised assumptions about children's play and leisure in SAC.

The participants engaged in numerous and varied work-like acts of category maintenance and performances of age and gender. Kevin's participation in basketball was never entirely liberated because he was constantly at work excluding younger children, and performing his physical mastery. 'Good girls' like Apple, Sky and Tiger were constrained in their play to appear compliant and docile. During snack times, participants engaged in work-like acts of category maintenance to maintain the 5/6 room as an older child's space.

Identity work was not the only type of work the participants engaged in. Late in the day, when their friends had departed, the few remaining participants engaged in acts of emotional labour. When presented with limited activity options, participants like Kevin and Tiger managed their emotions and concealed their boredom whilst rarely engaging in play. These performances created the impression of contentment for practitioners who were limited in the programming options they could provide.

The participants' play also incorporated the negotiation of surveillance. Some discussed and demonstrated their desire for risky play that was physically challenging or socially disruptive. In order to negotiate surveillance practices that discouraged risk, these participants engaged in secret activities. Some set up their own monitoring systems to allow risky or disruptive play out of sight of adults. Others disguised risky play to make it appear accidental and avoid the scrutiny of practitioners.

Identity work, emotional labour and responding to surveillance are some of the multiple ways that work-like elements complicated the participants' leisure and play.

*In addition to play and leisure, waiting is also a feature of School Age Care*

In Chapter Three, I explored how understandings of the purpose of SAC differ across time and location. Australia's current curriculum framework, the FSAC conceptualises SAC as a singular and cohesive setting where the primary activities are play and leisure (DEEWR, 2011). When I first commenced research at Banksia Gully, I perceived SAC much in that way.

Theorising poststructurally allowed me to see SAC as more complex. As I spent more time in the setting, I began to see SAC too was a social space that shifts and changes, and has multiple purposes and phases. As well as a place of leisure and play, SAC was also place where children waited or were bored. These phases were not universal and were different for each child. Some participants were only at SAC for a brief time that was a flurry of play with friends. When those children departed, they left their friends behind. Older children have fewer same age peers, which often made the departure of friends an important marker.

*Bruce. When do you get bored?*

*Kevin. Probably when I'm one of the last here. Nothing to do...I've played everything... and you can't go outside.*

For those remaining older children like Kevin it was often the beginning of the time when play ended and waiting commenced. Each participant responded to the departure of friends differently. Some sought activity with 'second or third choice' play companions. Others engaged in solitary activity or withdrew from activity

altogether and waited for parents. One participant, Cleo rarely engaged in play at all. Cleo usually began wandering the program space and waiting for her parent from the moment she arrived.

This research troubles dominant and idealised perceptions of SAC as just a place of leisure and play. This research demonstrates, perhaps uncomfortably, that SAC is also a place where children also perform emotional labour and wait.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The findings described in this chapter have important implications for programming in SAC. Each of the findings emerges from conceptualising SAC as a space with complicated power relationships, and where children engage with developmental discourses in multiple ways. This complexity suggests that programming in SAC is more than just a simple matter of providing children with things they like to do. In the discussion that follows, I will explore how these findings can be applied to re-think SAC programming for older children.

***This research provides no certainty about whether older children need their own spaces separate from those for younger children.***

One question I have contemplated often during this research was whether older children need their own spaces in SAC, separate to those for younger children. In discussions I have had with other practitioners, separate spaces are often discussed as a possible ‘answer’ to the problem of older children. All nine participants identified having their own space as important.

***Bruce:** What would you do to make OSHC more attractive to 5’s and 6’s?*

***Penny:** Probably have a separate area where just 5’s and 6’s can be and they can do their own things... and I think that would be good having just a place where just 5’s and 6’s can hang out by their selves with other people who know like sort of have the same hobbies and interests as they do cos they’re the same age.*

Separate spaces are also common practice in Swedish SAC (Boström et al., 2015; Haglund & Anderson, 2009).

Prior to commencing this PhD, I had long believed that older children needed separate spaces. In other areas of Australian culture older children are accustomed to having access to age-specific activities and resources. Initially, I thought it unfair that when older children had access to these age-based privileges elsewhere that they should lose them in SAC.

I am now less sure of my belief that older children need their own space. Other forms of segregation in society are considered problematic. It seems unthinkable that many people would advocate for segregated spaces on the basis of race, class or gender, yet the organisation of children by age is rarely questioned.

I am beginning to think that separate spaces for older children might be similarly problematic. Implicit in the practice of separate spaces for older children is the discourse unique to SAC that I have spent much of this thesis questioning; that older children are near adolescent and problematic. In arguing for separate spaces, would I be reinforcing the same socially constructed truths I have troubled in this research? As I have demonstrated, older children are able to recognise developmental discourses in programming practices. The provision of separate spaces just for older children communicates to all children that adult is the most desired subject position.

In questioning whether separate spaces are problematic, my intent is not to argue against their use in SAC programming. Following Foucault's argument that applications of power can have both positive and negative effects, I am instead suggesting that separate spaces cannot be considered universally 'good' or 'bad'.

***Practitioners should consider providing a range of different spaces for use by all children***

Given the importance of separate space to the participants, I feel compelled to offer alternative programming strategies that may satisfy those desires.

One alternative may be to have a familial care structure with no age categorisations. My experience is that this is already the practice in the majority of Australian SAC settings. Given that older children have been problematised in services with mostly familial structures for at least 25 years, it seems unlikely that having a familial structure is a universal solution.



Another possibility might be to make available multiple separate spaces for any children who desire them, regardless of age. Rather than just provide one separate space for older children, practitioners could provide a number of different spaces that could be used by any group of children without designating them as a privilege belonging to any particular category of child. This would satisfy older children's desires for private spaces, but would disrupt discourses that universalise older children as the only group with an innate need for private spaces. Making more separate spaces available allows for the possibility that groups of younger and mixed-aged children might also want to use them, or even individual children.

This suggestion is not without complications. Finding sufficient space is difficult for most Australian SAC programs. SAC programs often operate in shared or makeshift spaces of limited size, which reflects the low status SAC is accorded (Cartmel, 2007). Providing SAC settings large enough to support multiple spaces would require a re-imagining of the sorts of spaces made available to SAC. This would only be possible if SAC is afforded recognition as an important social institution. It is a matter that should be considered by those with the capacity to make strategic decisions, in particular policy-makers, schools and management.

***Practitioners should be aware of developmental discourses and the ways they may re-enact them in their programming practices***

My earlier findings, that older children draw on developmental discourses to engage in category maintenance and perform their stage of development has programming implications beyond the practice of separate spaces for older children. The participants spoke of, and I observed, other programming practices that universalised children on the basis of age, such as mentoring programs and graduation ceremonies. These practices were selective and contradictory in the sort of maturity they sanctioned, privileging roles like carer and role model, whilst also discouraging acts of physical prowess and risk-taking.

As I argued previously, discourses can be enacted in multiple ways that are not universally 'good' or 'bad'. In these examples, the universal application of aged categories was sometimes problematic for those who fell outside the categories. One possible response to programming practices that enact discourses in problematic ways

might be for practitioners to be aware of how they enact developmental norms in their programming and reflect on the possible effects. Being aware of developmental discourses could include thinking about how developmental norms can advantage, disadvantage, problematise, exclude and silence.

This suggestion draws on the thinking of MacNaughton (2005), who argues that to act poststructurally practitioners need to reflect on power and its operations. In making developmental discourses visible, practitioners can understand more deeply how they enact them and the lived effects for children. This will be different in every context, requiring practitioners to engage in ongoing reflection as circumstances shift and change.

MacNaughton (2005) provides suggestions for questions practitioners can ask themselves when thinking poststructurally about discourse and its effects. I have adapted MacNaughton's work to develop the following questions that practitioners could use as a framework or guide for thinking critically about practices that enact aged discourses:

- Whose voices are privileged or silenced by this practice?
- What practices can I use to bring forward the voices of those who are currently silenced?
- How am I enacting aged discourses in my practice?
- How is power exercised around aged discourses and what are its effects?
- Who is advantaged or disadvantaged by the exercise of power?

Suggesting these questions is consistent with the poststructural stance taken in this research, that there is no universal solution to the 'problem' of the difficult older child. However, they do provide a framework for thinking about the equity effects of individual practices.

I am not suggesting that there is no place for mentoring and leadership programs, or children assuming 'adult' responsibilities. There can be a place in SAC programs for children who want to assume caring and organisational tasks, but it is a socially constructed assumption that only the oldest children are capable of, or interested in those tasks. It is possible that younger children might also want to perform those

tasks. Similarly, there might be older children who do not want to assume a more adult position.

It is important to recognise that none of these suggestions ‘solve’ the problem of the difficult older child. Whilst practitioners can question how they use developmental discourse in SAC programming, they cannot dismantle the discourse or isolate SAC programs from it. In a culture that rewards maturity and privileges the adult, it must be expected that many older children will arrive at SAC with a desire to claim the aged privileges they experience elsewhere. Outside SAC, children will still participate in aged hierarchies such as grading in schools, and classification of children’s cinema, toys and games. However, subjects are free to resist discourses and with that create the possibility of disrupting a discourse and its effects (Foucault, 1988a). Being aware of developmental discourses and changing how they are embedded in programming practices is one way to disrupt their effects.

***Practitioners should think about SAC practices and whether they add work to children’s leisure and play***

This research complicated romantic perceptions of children’s play by demonstrating that work is an inevitable component of that play. SAC is never free of developmental and other discourses, and therefore never free of identity, emotional, categorisation and surveillance work. Whilst some of the work detailed in this research produced enjoyment and new forms of play, other work seemed unnecessary and avoidable, in particular some of the work done negotiating surveillance. Some practitioners at Banksia Gully were particularly sensitive to risk in ways that constrained physical play.

If practitioners were to acknowledge the work present in children’s play, it would allow them to contemplate the amount and type of work their programming practices add to children’s play. Practitioners could then reflect on whether that work is necessary and if there are actions they can take to support play that is less constrained and more enjoyable.

### *Waiting needs to be programmed for in the same way as other types of activity*

My earlier finding that waiting is an inescapable feature of SAC has important implications for how SAC is conceptualised and provided. If SAC is necessary for some families, then it is important to become more comfortable with children's waiting. Accepting children's waiting is a disruptive idea, particularly in neoliberal societies where non-productive use of time is pathologised. SAC practitioners need to plan for waiting just as they plan for play and leisure. Consideration needs to be given to what sort of programming might help time pass more quickly for children.

This research offers no universal suggestions for how to program children's waiting. Each participant in this project waited differently in ways that were dependant on time, context and individual preferences. However, my commitment to representing the participants' views compels me to draw attention to the movies and television programs made available to older children who are waiting. Having access to 'mature' content on television during waiting was important to the participants. Most of those participants who spent long hours at SAC bemoaned the lack of 'mature' content, particularly late in the day.

My findings also prompt a re-examination of when we think it is okay for children to engage in waiting. I suspect most SAC programs accept and allow for children's waiting later in the day when numbers diminish. Cleo's story demonstrated that some children commence waiting as soon as they arrive at SAC. Whilst difficult to accept, practitioners should consider the provision of waiting spaces for children for the entirety of a session, and not just late in the day.

This finding also has implications for government and policy-makers. The current FSAC ascribes SAC a productivity function that sits uncomfortably besides the notion of 'down time'. Future curriculum documents need to acknowledge that waiting is an integral part of SAC and should be programmed for.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research project has produced new knowledge about older children in SAC. However, the findings are not conclusive. There is an opportunity for further research into older children in SAC that addresses some of the limitations of this study.

Research could be conducted over a larger sample that takes into account more children and more SAC programs. Whilst this research focused on older children's and my views, attention also needs to be given to other perspectives, including those of practitioners, younger children and families. I am also conscious of one of Foucault's central theories, that truth is socially constructed and that no truth is absolute. As such, the findings from this research are only one set of truths, which invites a call for more research, both poststructural and from other disciplines.

In this conclusion, I have suggested that practices like separate spaces and mentoring programs can be provided without limiting them to just older children. I have also argued that practitioners program for children's waiting, and become more aware of surveillance practices and how they enact developmental discourses in their programming. More research needs to be done in a range of contexts to test these claims and their possible effectiveness.

This research is also one of the few that investigates the possibility that age or development can be socially constructed. More research is needed to explore the performative construction of aged categories in a variety of settings, including SAC. Exploring the topic in different settings would provide insights into whether aged categories and the ways they are performed differ between settings. There should also be research into the performative construction of other aged categories. I was drawn to older children in SAC because of the way they are marked as deviant. However, age categories do not have to be deviant to be performed. Silent and normative categories like younger children might also be performed.

That this thesis is only one of a small number of research projects investigating SAC makes obvious the need for more research generally into SAC. There are likely many other issues that occupy practitioners, children, policy-makers and families. The number of children who attend SAC is large and increasing annually. This highlights the pressing need for more research to understand better the complexities that distinguish SAC from other children's settings.

## **GOING BACK**

Towards the end of this project, I planned a return to Banksia Gully to conduct member checks with the participants. I was excited to share the emerging findings and

implications with the participants and celebrate the result of their contributions. It was disappointing but unsurprising when none of the participants accepted the invitation to participate in member checks. There were likely multiple reasons for not wanting or being able to meet. It was then twelve months since we had completed data collection. Nine of the ten participants had left Banksia Gully. The three oldest girls were now attending high school. Of the remaining seven children most had left SAC. Shortly after the project, three of the boys left SAC after being judged old enough to go home alone after school. Another boy had moved to a different school, and it's unclear if he attended another SAC. Two other girls had also ceased to attend. That left only one of the participants still at Banksia Gully. She would likely be the only Grade 6 child at SAC. I have often wondered what SAC was now like for her. After the departure of her friends would she now spend her time at SAC waiting as Cleo had done? Would she form a new group of second or third choice friends?

This list of departures demonstrates that being an older child in SAC is temporary. Most participants were only older children in SAC for no more than eleven months. One group of boys were only members of the category for about eight months. The reality is that most individuals will be at SAC as older children for no more than 2 years. That older childhood in SAC only lasts a relatively short time does not make the issue any less important.

During this project, the participants did not feel like temporary members of this unique social category. There was a feeling of permanence about older children's lives in Banksia Gully. Kevin, Klay and Stephen seemed like they had been and would be friends forever. So too did Sky and Tiger. There was a sameness and routine to the days that also contributed to the feeling of permanence. Butler (1990, 1993) says that iteration gives a performance its believability. Perhaps it was this repetition of the days at Banksia Gully that made them feel more permanent than they really were. As an observer and outsider, it felt as though this group of children had been repeating "eat", "play" and "go" for years. As short as their time as older children in SAC was, SAC was an important part of their lives.

Whilst the programming of SAC is no longer important for these older children, for many others it still is. Every year, there will likely be in excess of 105,600 older children in SAC (ABS, 2015). Some will only be in SAC for a few months, whilst

others may be there for 2 years. Although brief, those months and years are important to those older children who experience them.

Adults have been talking about the ‘problem’ of older children in SAC for over 25 years. This is an interesting contrast with the experiences of the older children themselves, for whom the ‘problem’ only exists for a much shorter time. The participants in this project were part of an ever-changing cast of performers in the category of older child. These participants have shown that they each perform the role in their own way. When they move on, other older children who will perform the role differently will replace them. Each year, other older children will in turn replace them. However, each replacement will draw on developmental and maturational discourses to produce their multiple performances. In doing so, they will continue to reproduce the socially constructed category of older child. Whilst the performers and their performances continue to change, the category will likely exist for much longer.

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

This research invites a re-thinking of SAC. Using poststructural theories of leisure, the performances of age, negotiation of surveillance and emotional labour described in this research complicate how we see children’s play and leisure, making it seem less playful and more work-like. It contrasts with traditional views, which see children’s play as free, natural and joyful. This research has also revealed how waiting is an important part of SAC for many children. It is a finding that some may find troubling, particularly if they hold romantic notions of SAC as a place of pure play and a space free of work. The research also demonstrates that SAC is not unitary. The purposes of SAC can change across perspectives and time.

Each of the findings presented in this final chapter have important implications for SAC programming, the primary focus of this thesis. They invite practitioners and other adults involved in the provision of SAC to consider the ways in which they use developmental discourses in their programming and how children engage with those discourses. This positions SAC programming as an act more complex than just than just ‘finding fun things for children to do after school’. SAC programming also plays a role in creating truths about the ‘difficult older child’ and therefore generating aged roles for children to perform. This research also invites practitioners to think about

whether their programming adds labour to children's leisure and play. If waiting, emotional labour, navigating surveillance and identity work all make children's play more laboured, then there is an imperative for practitioners to at least consider if it possible to program in ways that make play less work-like.

Of course, I am beholden to remind any readers and myself that this was only a small study that produced non-conclusive, non-generalisable findings. Despite this, it has produced knowledge that allows for a different reading of SAC and older children and with that, the possibility of new pedagogies. I hope that this research will make some contribution to a wider reassessment of both how practitioners think about older children in SAC, and also how they program for them.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: SCHOOL AGE CARE SERVICE QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Service information questionnaire.

**What does good School Age Care look like? Seeking the perspectives of children aged 9 to 12 years.**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. Please complete this form, which will provide us with basic information on your service.

1.	Service name	
2.	Number of registered places for Before School Care, After School Care and Vacation Care	BSC ASC VC
3.	Hours of operation for Before School Care, After School Care and Vacation Care	BSC ASC VC

4.	Average daily utilisation for Before School Care	M TU W TH F
5.	Average daily utilisation for After School Care	M TU W TH F
6.	Average daily utilisation for Vacation Care	M TU W TH F
7.	The total number of males and females who currently attend your service	Males Females

8.	The total number of males and females aged 5-6 years who currently attend your service	Males  Females
9.	The total number of males and females aged 7-8 years who currently attend your service	Males  Females
10.	The total number of males and females aged 9-10 years who currently attend your service	Males  Females
11.	The total number of males and females aged 11-12 years who currently attend your service	Males  Females
12.	Briefly describe how you currently plan for children aged 9 to 12 years in your service	
13.	Briefly describe how you currently involve children aged 9 to 12 years in curriculum decision-making.	

14.	Briefly, do you employ any strategies in your work with older children that differ from the strategies you employ with younger children?	
15.	Briefly describe what you enjoy about working with children aged 9 to 12 years.	
16.	The total number of males and females aged 9-10 years who currently attend your service	Males Females
17.	The total number of males and females aged 11-12 years who currently attend your service	Males Females
18.	Briefly describe how you currently plan for children aged 9 to 12 years in your service	
19.	Briefly describe any factors that you think make your work with children aged 9 to 12 years more difficult.	

20.	Can you think of anything that would make your work with children aged 9 to 12 years easier?	
21.	Is there any other information you would like to share about how you work with children aged 9 to 12 years in your service?	

## **APPENDIX B: CHILDREN'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**What does good School Age Care look like? Seeking the perspectives of children aged 9 to 12 years.**

### **Post project Interview Questions.**

1. Thank you for conducting this research with me. Can you tell me what you thought about conducting your own investigation of the research question?
2. Can you tell me what you thought about the four workshops we did at the beginning of the project?
3. Did you encounter any difficulties in conducting your investigation that you would like to tell me about?
4. Can you explain to me what you learnt about SAC for older children from your investigation?
5. Can you tell me more about this part of your investigation?
6. What is it that you like most or like least about your SAC program?
7. Can you tell me what you thought about this as a way to find out about SAC for older children?

## **APPENDIX C: RESEARCH PROTOCOLS**

**What does good School Age Care look like? Seeking the perspectives of children aged 9 to 12 years.**

### **Research protocol.**

The following people involved in the research project will be asked to complete the following tasks.

Researcher:

1. Remind participants each session that they are able to withdraw from the project at any time
2. Be responsive to participants' needs and accept that there are some days when they may not want to participate
3. Ensure that the research project doesn't disrupt day to day activities in the SAC service
4. Suspend the activities of the research project if required by the SAC Coordinator or representative
5. Check with the SAC Coordinator or service representative if it okay to attend the SAC service prior to each visit
6. Follow all policies and protocols of SAC service and host school whilst visiting the SAC service

Service representative:

1. Completing a questionnaire which provides basic information on the SAC service

Child participants:

7. Attend a 25 minute briefing session
  - a. Explain the purpose of the research project
  - b. Explain the proposed method
  - c. Explain their commitments
  - d. Explore early ideas on the research question
8. Conduct an inquiry into the research question of up to 30 minutes

- a. Researcher will provide support and supervision of participants
9. Participate in an individual interview of up to 30 minutes about the findings of their inquiry
10. Attend one meeting for 20 minutes to review the progress of the research



## **APPENDIX D: CHILDREN'S CONSENT FORM**

### **Consent form**

**(Middle years: For the child/young person to complete if parent consent form has been signed)**

Researchers from the University of Melbourne would like to know from you what you think about Outside School Hours Care.

You can talk about your ideas, write, take photographs, do artwork or share you ideas in any other way you would like to. Your ideas will then help us to tell people about what children think about Outside School Hours Care and make a list of suggestions and guidelines for the people who work in Outside School Hours Care about how to make it better for kids.

We will be putting these suggestions and guidelines in reports, books, articles and on the Internet so people all over the world can read about how to make Outside School Hours Care better for children.

We are asking you to share some of your ideas to help make these suggestions and guidelines. If you decide to take part a person doing research at The University of Melbourne will come and ask you some questions and you will choose ways to give your ideas.

Would you like to share your ideas?

Yes 😊

No 😞

Please write your name here:

If you say yes and then decide you don't want to talk any more you can say no or stop whenever you like and we will stop asking you.

We will not show or talk about your individual work with your family, teachers or school unless we are worried about your safety or wellbeing because of something you have shared with us. If we are worried we will let you know that we are going to talk to someone that can help.

As part of this research, we are also asking you to help with doing the research. A person doing research at The University of Melbourne will come and teach you how to help with the research. They will help you choose how you want to help with the research.

Would you like to help the person from The University of Melbourne do the research?

Yes 😊                      No 😐

Would you like to learn about how to help with the research?

Yes 😊                      No 😐

As part of this research, we would like to video some of the activities that you will do with the researcher. We would also like to make an audio recording of your interview with the researcher. The researcher will be the only person to see the videos or listen to the audio recordings.

Can we take video recordings of your group activities?

Yes 😊                      No 😐

Can we make an audio recording of your interview and group activities?

Yes 😊                      No 😐

When you are finished you can look over what you said and you can tell us if you are happy for us to use your ideas. If you have completed any writing or artwork, or taken photographs or video, we will ask you if we can use this work and then make copies.

Can we take photographs or make copies of your work?

Yes 😊

No 😐

Can we use your ideas to write about what children say for people to read and look at?

Yes 😊

No 😐

Can we put your work on the Internet for people to read and look at?

Yes 😊

No 😐

When we write about the ideas you have shared with us we won't use your name. Do you have a name or word you would like us to use (as a pseudonym) when we talk about your work?

Yes 😊

No 😐

Name to be used:

Even though we won't use your name and will try to keep your identity a secret, this is a small research project and we can not promise that other people who read the research will not be able to identify you.

Would you still like to help with the research even if there is a chance that somebody else can identify you?

Yes 😊

No 😐

If you have any questions about what is written in this letter or anything else, please talk to the researcher or your parent/guardian.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Kylie Smith, Equity and Childhood Program, Youth Research Centre,  
Melbourne Graduate School of Education

For the research team

## APPENDIX E: PARENT CONSENT FORM

### Consent Form (Parent/guardian on behalf of child)

I,.....(Name)

of.....

.....(Address)

**hereby consent** for my  
child.....(Child's name)

to be a participant of a human research study to be undertaken by Dr Kylie Smith, Associate Professor Helen Cahill and Bruce Hurst. I understand that the purpose of the research is to contribute to the following project:

#### **What does good School Age Care look like?**

#### **Seeking the perspectives of children aged 9 to 12 years.**

#### **I acknowledge that:**

- (1) The aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the research study have been explained to me to my satisfaction – including:
  - i. My child attending a 25 minute briefing session on the purpose of the research project and to explore their early ideas on the research question
  - ii. My child conducting their own inquiry into the research question over a period of 30 minutes with the assistance of Mr Hurst
  - iii. My child participating in an individual interview of up to 30 minutes
  - iv. My child attending one meeting for 20 minutes to review the progress of the research.
- (2) Individual interviews may be audio-taped, transcribed and the transcriptions used for data analysis.
- (3) The briefing session may be video-taped, transcribed and the transcriptions used for data analysis.
- (4) The information your child provides will be coded and kept separately from their name and address.
- (5) Results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in academic and professional journals.
- (6) Individual results will not be released to any person except at the individual's request and on the individual's authorisation.

- (7) Your child can choose to be named or referred to by pseudonym in any reports or publications arising from the study.
- (8) My child and I are free to withdraw our consent at any time during the study and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied, in which event my child's participation in the research study will immediately cease.
- (9) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information my child provides will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements.

Signature

Date

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(Parent/Guardian)

## APPENDIX F: SCHOOL AGE CARE SERVICE CONSENT FORM

### Consent Form (Outside School Hours Care service)

I,..... (Name)

of.....

..... (Address)

**hereby consent** for my Outside School Hours Care service

.....(Service name)  
to participate in a human research study to be undertaken by Dr Kylie Smith,  
Associate Professor Helen Cahill and Bruce Hurst. I understand that the purpose of  
the research is to contribute to the following project:

#### **What does good School Age Care look like?**

**Seeking the perspectives of children aged 9 to 12 years.**

#### **I acknowledge that:**

- (1) The aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks/hazards of the research study have been explained to me to my satisfaction – including:
  - i. Completing a questionnaire which provides basic information on your OSHC service
  - ii. Allowing nine children aged 9 to 12 years who attend your service to:
    1. Attend a 25 minute briefing session on the purpose of the research project and explore their early ideas on the research question
    2. With Mr Hurst's support, conduct their own inquiry into the research question over a period of up to 30 minutes
    3. Participate in an individual interview of up to 30 minutes
    4. Attend one meeting for 20 minutes to review the progress of the research.
- (2) Individual interviews may be audio-taped, transcribed and the transcriptions used for data analysis.
- (3) The briefing session may be video-taped, transcribed and the transcriptions used for data analysis
- (4) The information you and the children provide will be coded and kept separately from their name and address.

- (5) Results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in academic and professional journals.
- (6) Individual results will not be released to any person except at the individual's request and on the individual's authorisation.
- (7) Your service or the children can choose to be named or referred to by pseudonym in any reports or publications arising from the study.
- (8) The children and I are free to withdraw our consent at any time during the study and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied, in which event the child's or service's participation in the research study will immediately cease.
- (9) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information the children or I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements.

Signature

Date

---

(Service Representative)



## **APPENDIX G: PARENT PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT**

### **Plain Language Statement (Parent/guardian of child participant)**

This letter invites you to provide permission for your child to participate in the research project that is being run by Dr Kylie Smith, Associate Professor Helen Cahill and Bruce Hurst from the University of Melbourne. This research project is part of Bruce Hurst's PhD study.

The title of the project is: **What does good School Age Care look like? Seeking the perspectives of children aged 9 to 12 years.**

The project aims to:

- To increase knowledge about what older children think is important in the provision of School Age Care
- To increase knowledge about what informs older children's opinions about School Age Care
- To provide knowledge to guide the practices of School Age Care practitioners
- To improve the lives of older children in School Age Care

We would like your child to participate in this project in the following ways:

- My child attending a 25 minute briefing session on the purpose of the research project and to explore their early ideas on the research question
- My child conducting their own inquiry into the research question over a period of 30 minutes with the assistance of Mr Hurst
- My child participating in an individual interview of up to 30 minutes
- My child attending one meeting for 20 minutes to review the progress of the research.

This project has received clearance by The University of Melbourne's, Human Research Ethics Committee. To protect your child's privacy, responses and notes will be recorded in the form of coded categories, avoiding the need to use respondents' names and addresses. Participants have a choice to be named or referred to by pseudonym in any reports or publications arising from the study. The data generated by the project will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in Mr. Hurst's office, which is locked when not in use. Confidentiality will be protected subject to any legal requirements. This is a project with only a small number of participants, which increases the likelihood that your child's contributions could be identified in publications attached to this research. The findings and data from this project may be

made available to a public audience in the form of a PhD thesis, conference presentations, journal articles and book chapters.

Involvement in the project is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied. There will be no effect to ongoing assessment, grades or management of participants in a dependent relationship with any researchers or contractors involved in this project.

All data will be destroyed after five years in accordance with the University of Melbourne's guidelines.

If you have any concerns arising from the conduct of this research project, please contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, the University of Melbourne, Victoria, 3101, Australia. Phone: 8344 2073, Fax: 9347 6883

Yours sincerely,

Dr Kylie Smith,

Equity and Childhood Program, Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education

For the research team

## **APPENDIX H: SCHOOL AGE CARE SERVICE PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT**

### **Plain Language Statement (Outside School Hours Care service)**

This letter invites you to provide permission for your Outside School Hours Care service to participate in the research project that is being run by Dr Kylie Smith, Associate Professor Helen Cahill and Bruce Hurst from the University of Melbourne. This research project is part of Bruce Hurst's PhD study.

The title of the project is: **What does good School Age Care look like? Seeking the perspectives of children aged 9 to 12 years.**

The project aims to:

- To increase knowledge about what older children think is important in the provision of School Age Care
- To increase knowledge about what informs older children's opinions about School Age Care
- To provide knowledge to guide the practices of School Age Care practitioners
- To improve the lives of older children in School Age Care

We would like your service to participate in this project in the following ways:

- Completing a questionnaire which provides basic information on your service
- Allowing up to 15 children aged 9 to 12 years who attend your service to:
  - Attend a 25 minute briefing session on the purpose of the research project and explore their early ideas on the research question
  - With Mr Hurst's support, conduct their own inquiry into the research question over a period of up to 30 minutes
  - Participate in an individual interview of up to 30 minutes
  - Attend one meeting for 20 minutes to review the progress of the research.

This project has received clearance by The University of Melbourne's, Human Research Ethics Committee. To protect the privacy of the participants, responses and notes will be recorded in the form of coded categories, avoiding the need to use respondents' names and addresses. Participants have a choice to be named or referred to by pseudonym in any reports or publications arising from the study. The data generated by the project will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in Mr. Hurst's office, which is locked when not in use. Confidentiality will be protected subject to any legal requirements. The findings and data from this project may be made

available to a public audience in the form of a PhD thesis, conference presentations, journal articles and book chapters.

Involvement in the project is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied. There will be no effect to ongoing assessment, grades or management of participants in a dependent relationship with any researchers or contractors involved in this project. All data will be destroyed after five years in accordance with the University of Melbourne's guidelines.

If you have any concerns arising from the conduct of this research project, please contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, the University of Melbourne, Victoria, 3101, Australia. Phone: 8344 2073, Fax: 9347 6883

Yours sincerely,

Dr Kylie Smith,

Equity and Childhood Program, Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education

For the research team



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**Author/s:**

Hurst, Ian Bruce

**Title:**

“Eat, play, go, repeat”: Researching with older primary-age children to re-theorise School Age Care

**Date:**

2017

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