Teacher Aides' Definitions of Reading: What Understandings of Reading Underpin Their Work With Students?

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Abstract

While teacher aides often provide individual and group reading instruction, research suggests these interventions may not always bring about reading gains. This study investigated the definitions of reading teacher aides take to their work with students. Examining spoken and written definitions, it identified six categories classifying participant understandings: Translating, Making sense, Contextualising meaning, Generating an affective response, Using texts for practical purposes, and Growing as a person. While the latter three categories better reflect reading purposes rather than definitions, within the first three categories, Making sense was most prevalent actual definition. The study identifies that teacher aides require better conceptual understandings of the tasks they implement with students; more training is required to effectively undertake instructional roles.

support for this project.

Introduction

Referred to by many titles, including teacher aides, classroom assistants, teacher assistants, paraprofessionals, and school officers, globally teacher aides are increasingly working with students one on one or in small groups to try to improve their academic outcomes, especially in the core subjects like reading and mathematics (Wallace, 2004). Giangreco (2010, p. 341) notes that over time, teacher aide "roles have expanded instructionally despite lacking both a theoretically defensible foundation and a substantive evidence base." Teacher aides may be chosen to provide this help for financial motives (i.e., more affordable than teacher time) or due to limited specialist teacher availability (Miller, 2009). Research has begun to question whether teacher aide support actually improves student outcomes with multiple studies in the United Kingdom finding that students receiving teacher aide support reported lower levels of academic progress than similar students who received less teacher aide assistance (Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown, & Martin, 2007; Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, Russell, & Webster, 2011). These findings align with other studies showing few to no positive academic effects attributed to teacher aide work (Farrell, Alborz, Howes, & Pearson, 2010; Gerber, Finn, Achilles, Boyd-Zaharias, 2001; Muijs & Reynolds, 2003). It has been suggested that teacher aide ineffectiveness may be related to their training, understandings, or ways of working with students (e.g., Radford, Blatchford, & Webster, 2011). There is evidence that most operate discursively differently to teachers, especially in relation to how they guide discussion during teaching and learning (Radford et al., 2011; Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou, & Bassett, 2010).

In studies showing positive teacher aide effects, teacher aides were usually trained and supported in delivering a focused intervention (e.g., Alborz, Pearson, Farrell, Howes, 2009; Farrell, Alborz, Howes, and Pearson, 2010; Fried, Konza, & Mulcahy, 2012; Graham,

Bellert, Thomas, & Pegg, 2007; Miller, 2009). Within literacy contexts, Causton-Theoharris, Giangreco, Doyle, and Vadasy (2007) suggest that teacher aides are most effective when they: operate in a supplementary role, use a research-based reading approach in which they have been effectively trained, are able to manage student behaviour, and are provided with ongoing monitoring and feedback. Unfortunately, these characteristics are seldom realised in actual practice (Lewis, 2005; Russell, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, & Martin, 2005).

In Australia, like in most industrialised countries, teacher aides commonly undertake instructional roles. Reading intervention has been given increasing priority since the mid-1990s, with all Australian states now committed to national literacy testing and efforts to improve outcomes for underachieving individuals and groups. Hence, it is important to examine how to improve the effectiveness of teacher aides working in instructional roles. While previous research has begun to explore teacher aides' actual instructional practices (e.g., Radford et al., 2011; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010), it has seldom examined the professional pedagogic and content knowledge they bring to their work with children. In line with theories of planned or reasoned behavior (Azjen, 2005), the reasons, intentions, and beliefs educational stakeholders have about key educational concepts are thought to influence or shape their actions within school environments. Hence, teacher aide understandings of reading are likely to affect how they enact such practices with their students and are important to consider when evaluating their potential to effectively help students. The study which is the focus of this paper addressed the research question:

How do teacher aides in Bundaberg, Queensland primary schools define reading?

While there are many diverse definitions of reading, we adopt a perspective that grounds literacy in culturally, socially and historically situated practices (Freebody and Luke, 1995). Here, the meaning of the diverse range of texts used in everyday life is not static but is

constructed and acquired by individuals as they interact with these texts in natural, meaningful, and functional social settings (Gee, 1991). Hence, reading is defined as a complex process of "literate thinking" where the meaning derived by individual readers is dependent on the contexts in which they read, the features and purpose of specific texts selected for reading, and the skills and knowledge required to interpret, analyse, and evaluate their meanings (Winch, Johnston, March, Ljungdahl, & Holliday, 2010).

Reading perspective and practises in Queensland: Influences on teacher aide work

As they have limited formal training, teacher aides likely create their understandings of reading by bringing together professional development learning; their own observations of teachers, vocabulary, and practices embedded in classroom materials; and their own life experiences. Traditionally in Queensland, teacher aides have limited access to professional development and while some employers may request particular qualifications (e.g., First Aide Certificate, Certificate or Diploma in Educational Support), there are no formal educational prerequisites required to become a teacher aide. They may choose to complete Certificate courses offered through the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector (e.g., Certificate III, Certificate IV, or Diploma in Educational Support), but these are not required for initial employment, with many hired based on previous voluntary work within the school. Most are paid hourly for their contact time with students and professional development opportunities (paid or unpaid) are at the individual school's discretion. In relation to reading professional development, Queensland teacher aides may have completed training relating to the most commonly implemented reading intervention programs [i.e., Support-a-Reader (Department of Education, Queensland, 1991) and First Steps (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994), both drawing heavily on Clay (1991, 1993) and psycholinguistic perspectives on reading (Holdaway, 1980)] or participated alongside teachers in whatever

professional development they were offered; it is relatively rare for formal professional development sessions to be designed specifically for teacher aides.

Within the classroom, teacher aides are likely to have observed teaching influenced by the theories traditionally underpinning the Queensland reading curriculum including: a functional approach (Derewianka, 1990; Martin, 1993) informed by the social semiotic theory of Halliday (1975; 1985); the Four Resources Model (Freebody and Luke, 1990), and, more recently, balanced instruction. (Harris, Mckenzie, Fitzsimmons, & Turbill, 2001). However, in the last decade, the Teaching Reading Report (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005), based on the finding from an Australian national inquiry, has significantly influenced reading instruction. It defined literacy and reading as "skills", describing students without these as likely suffering negative impacts on their "psychosocial wellbeing", behaviour, and chances to succeed in school-based learning or further education and training (Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005, p.11). This skills based approach contrasted with the more balanced view of literacy previously adopted in Queensland, where aspects of both autonomous skills-based approaches and ideological views (i.e., perspectives that situate literacy practices within social, historical, and cultural contexts of language use) were seen as necessary for preparing students for the literacy demands of modern life. This report presented the acquisition of a fixed set of skills mainly based on systematic phonics instruction as the solution to student reading problems; this push for the explicit teaching of phonics would have a strong influence on the classroom teaching practices teacher aides have observed and on the types of tasks they are asked to conduct with students needing reading support.

More recently, a major influence has been the implementation of the Australian National Curriculum, which shifted curriculum content control from a state to a federal level. The Australian Curriculum for the English learning area, which has been in use in most

Queensland schools since the beginning of 2012, defines reading within a broader understanding of literacy and receptive language use:

> Literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills students need to access, understand, analyse and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school. (Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority, 2013, p.1)

This definition and its corresponding curriculum responds to the recommendations of the Teaching Reading Report with a focus on the explicit teaching of skills but also make clear that the process of becoming literate also includes the development of "behaviours and dispositions" (ACARA, 2013, p. 1). These behaviours and dispositions include, among other things:

> learning to be self-sufficient; working harmoniously with others; being open to ideas, opinions and texts from and about diverse cultures; … and being prepared to question the meanings and assumptions in texts. (ACARA, 2013, p.1)

Texts are further defined as language used in "written, spoken, visual or multimodal, and in print or digital/online forms" (ACARA, 2013, p. 6). The definition underpinning the national curriculum corresponds with a view of literacy as a socially situated practice (Gee, 2008), reflecting a return to a more balanced view of literacy and aligned with theories of literacy historically underpinning the Queensland curriculum [e.g., a functional approach (Derewianka, 1990; Martin, 1993), the Four Resources Model (Freebody and Luke, 1990), balanced instruction (Harris, Mckenzie, Fitzsimmons, & Turbill, 2001)]. However, the document does not prescribe approaches to teaching, leaving those decisions to individual

schools or teachers; therefore, it is likely schools are adopting varied approaches to implementing this curriculum and its underpinning principles.

Hence, teacher aides are likely to have observed a wide range of reading instructional practices, grounded in differing definitions of reading, especially if they have been working in schools over a period of time. However, the implementation of a mandated curriculum accompanied by the support of planning documents such as Education Queensland's Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) that favour teacher direct instructional methods could mean that their recent experiences with reading instruction are often confined to observation of whole-class skill development lessons and completion of the instructional worksheets or activities provided in the C2C literacy program or other commercial packages (Seeley Flint, Kitson, Lowe & Shaw, 2013, p. 136).

Additionally, National Curriculum implementation has been strongly influenced by the National Assessment Program: Literacy & Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing (established in 2008, with data reported in leagues tables on the My School website from 2010). NAPLAN performance targets encourage teachers (and hence teacher aides) to teach test taking procedures, focus on minimum standards, and privilege content likely to appear on the test, a much narrower range of knowledge and skills than that found in the actual curriculum (Klenowski, 2011; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Luke, 2010). Hence teacher aides may find conflicting perspectives embedded within tasks they use with students (e.g., NAPLAN-style practice worksheets versus activities focusing on producing and using diverse texts).

While Queensland teacher aides have traditionally worked in an environment where reading practices were underpinned by a focus on meaning making and contextualised decoding, the ongoing influence of the Teaching Reading Report (Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2005), coupled with the new accountability pressures from NAPLAN

testing, may be encouraging a focus on learning the more basic skills which it is hoped will improve student performance on these exams. It is likely that teacher aides may have quite diverse perspectives on reading given the changing landscape of the teaching of reading within the last few decades, with some remaining aligned to a more holistic approach and others adopting a more skills-based perspective.

Methods

Participants

This study recruited Bundaberg region teacher aides who were about to participate in a program focused on helping students develop and monitor their comprehension behaviours through two weekly sessions with a trained teacher aide. All Education Queensland (state schools) and Catholic Education primary schools within the region were informed of the project and invited to participate on a voluntary basis and by the beginning of Term 4, 8 schools had tentatively agreed to participate during the following school year (6 state schools, 2 Catholic schools). In each school, the principal or another school leader provided the research team with names of current teacher aides who might be interested in participating in the study and these people were contacted and invited to participate in an initial interview. In all, 15 participated in the initial interview and the subsequent member checking exercise early the following year (see Table 1 for participant demographic details). All 15 participants were female and none had completed university, with TAFE (Technical and Further Education College) training the highest level of education present in this sample.

Table 1: Participant demographic data

Pseudonym	Age group	School	Years of experience	Highest level of education	Ethnicity	Hours per week
Alison	46-55	State	11-15	Year 12	Caucasian	14
Bethany	36-45	State	6-10	Diploma (TAFE)	Caucasian	26
Betty	46-55	State	Less than 5	TAFE Certificate III	Caucasian	20
Charisse	46-55	State	11-15	Year 10	Caucasian	18
Desiree	36-45	State	6-10	TAFE Certificate III	Caucasian	20
Jennifer	46-55	Catholic	11-15	Year 12	Caucasian	15
Lucy	46-55	State	21-25	Year 10	Caucasian	30
Marilyn	55+	Catholic	16-20	TAFE Certificate III	Caucasian	19
Reyna	36-45	State	6-10	TAFE Certificate III	Caucasian	30
Rose	55+	State	25+	TAFE Certificate III	Caucasian	24
Selena	36-45	State	11-15	TAFE Certificate IV	Caucasian	29
Shelley	36-45	State	16-20	Associate Diploma (TAFE)	Caucasian	25
Tessa	36-45	State	6-10	TAFE Certificate III	Caucasian	25
Ursula	46-55	State	6-10	TAFE Certificate III	Caucasian	25
Veronica	36-45	Catholic	Less than 5	Year 12	Caucasian	15

Data sources

In this study, the third author initially conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 volunteer teacher aides, focusing on their current school duties, understandings of and approaches to working with students in reading, and perceptions of effective professional development (November-December 2012). As part of this interview, they were asked to answer the question "How would you define reading?" and these data were transcribed verbatim. Later, 31 teacher aides participated in the program's first 2 day professional development workshop (March, 2013) conducted by the first and third authors. At the beginning of this workshop, teacher aides wrote down their definitions of reading and these definitions were collected; this activity was used in part as a member checking exercise to establish consistency of definitions. The analysis in this paper focuses on the responses of the 15 participants who participated in both the interview and the member checking exercise, although the definitions of the additional participants (i.e., five interviewees who did not continue in the program and sixteen teacher aides who were not interviewed before the program began) were coded to the categories to make sure final categories were able to classify all participant definitions.

Data analysis

As there is not a framework designed to classify teacher aide definitions of reading, the inductive process of categorical analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) was used to develop categories which described the data's variations. Initially, the first and second authors independently developed categories to describe the data from the initial interview. They then applied these categories to all data from the member checking exercise, adjusting and refining categories when required to fit the data. For example, data in member checking exercise featured far more utterances relating to the Contextualising meaning category, which cemented the researchers' decision to differentiate this concept from category Making sense.

Once both authors had constructed categories describing all data, they shared the independently created categories, which were found to be very similar. Small differences in category names and definitions were discussed and the two sets of categories were merged to form one cohesive set of non-hierarchical categories which were then applied to the data. Independent codings were shared and consensus was reached about the appropriate coding for each utterance, with the third author independently reviewing the final categorisations and data classifications.

Results

This study found that teacher aide definitions of reading were able to be classified into six categories: Translating, Making sense, Contextualising meaning, Generating an affective response, Using texts for practical purposes, and Growing as a person. Table 2 contains definitions and examples for each category. Most participants identified more than one category within their definitions; half of the participant definitions included two categories (n=15), with a maximum of four categories represented within a single definition (n=2).

While in four cases, the definitions were classified differently, in the majority of cases, similar categories were used to code the definitions provided in both the interview and member checking data. In the interview, many teacher aides expressed difficulty in defining reading, with responses charactered by long initial pauses and phrases like "I don't know" (Ursula) and "that's a bit of a difficult one" (Shelley). Generally, teacher aide definitions were more developed in the member checking exercise, likely influenced by the different data collection techniques (i.e., in the member checking exercise, participants had more time to think and compose a response) or perhaps due to many participants' attendance a month and a half before at a workshop by educational consultant and author Sheena Cameron (2009) about reading comprehension strategies. In the four cases where alignment was not found

Table 2: Teacher aide definitions of reading categories and examples

Category	Translating	Making sense	Contextualising meaning	Generating an affective response	Using texts for practical purposes	Growing as a person
Definition	Reading is something you physically do to translate/transfer written text on the page into oral language or something intelligible within the brain. The reader is a conduit for the text.	Reading occurs when you understand or comprehend the written words or texts that you are reading. The reader makes sense of what is already there on the page.	Reading is the process where you make meaning by interpreting the text drawing on your own prior knowledge, analytical, or interpretive skills. The reader creates knowledge by combining the text with their own background knowledge and interpretations.	Reading is a process that produces an emotive reaction (e.g., enjoyment). The reader can escape reality and enjoy him or herself (or may not find reading enjoyable).	Reading is life skill necessary to function in school and society. The reader reads to accomplish basic learning and social tasks (e.g., learning words, gaining information, completing school tasks, filling in forms).	Reading is a process which allows people to grow, enriching their lives and enhancing their knowledge and understanding of the world. The reader can find personal fulfilment and growth through their reading.
Examples	"Obtaining information from text to brain." (**Bethany**) "Just you read with your eyes and your brain computes it." (**Rose**) "Vocalising the written word, I suppose and or vocalising a story, vocalising any written text." (**Veronica**)	"Understanding the written word. Understanding and comprehending the written word." (**Alison**) "Yeah, being able to understand what is in front of them, like whether it be a sheet or a book. Yeah, being able to understand what the words mean, yeah." (**Betty**) "Being able to look at text/words/letters/numbers and having understanding of what they mean." (**Selena**)	"Um, I think to be a good reader, I think prior knowledge is quite important. Um, otherwise you do not really get the understanding of what you've read. I've read books before when I've had no prior knowledge and I get to parts and I think 'oh gosh, that was a bit. I don't really understand what that was about.' Um so yeah, prior knowledge" (**Lucy**) "Reading is the mental process of the written word. It involves prior knowledge/experiences & visualising of information to make sense of texts. It also includes predicting, inferencing and synthesis of new ideas (learning)." (**Shelley**)	"Enjoyment. Imagination. Escapism. A lot of them they can get into a book and become a character and their life can change for a few moments." (**Bethany**) "And to enjoy. Just the printed page, just to um, lose yourself doing." (**Marilyn**) "I also think that reading should be fun than having to sit down and it's 'alright, we have to read.' It should be fun for them to read then, cause some kids just don't like reading." (**Tessa**)	"One of the things we teach down here it is the most important thing that they will learn because everything balances on reading. All the, you know, comprehending, the maths, everything they're going to do in life comes back to reading something and understanding what you're reading. Filling in documents." (**Charisse**) "To learn and understand about different (everyday) things. To find out information." (**Desiree**)	"Mm.. and it's for your knowledge. It's so you can grow as a person. It's a good thing and get different ideas and it's knowledge." (**Jennifer**) "Learning, growing, experiencing new things throughout life via text." (**Reyna**) "Reading is learning.". (**Ursula**)

between the two definitions, it appeared that the participant approached the question differently on the two distinct occasions. For example, in the interview, Marilyn defined reading as "It's using the opportunity to use text to learn. And to enjoy. Just the printed page, just to um, lose yourself doing," aligning with Generating an affective response and Using texts for practical purposes, while in the written definition, she described reading as, "Making sense of text in front of you. Visual and non-visual. Using strategies to make sense of text," reflecting the category Making sense.

Many participant definitions were not actually 'definitions' per se, instead focusing on practical or personal benefits reading may provide. It remains unknown whether these 'definitions' occurred because teacher aides see reading and its purposes as irrevocably intertwined or because participants were unable to define reading. Within the first three categories, which more closely reflected actual definitions, most responses fell into the 'Making sense' category; however, Contextualisng meaning definitions became more prevalent in the written responses (i.e., 10 out of 15 definitions contained some element of this definition), despite being relatively absent (i.e. only 2 occurrences) in the spoken responses. It remains unclear whether this difference is a methodological artefact or if it occurred because of further participant training or reflection. Additionally, lack of explanation or discussion of key terms in these definitions makes it unknown how much participants understand about the concepts they name; it remains unclear if these are actually embedded in their understandings and practices of reading or if they were included because they are terms teacher aides know they should associate with reading. For example, when discussing 'activating prior knowledge', some of the teacher aides referred to general discussions they might have with students before reading about the broad topic of the reading. Some of the examples given suggest that these teacher aides may not fully understand the purpose of activating a student's prior knowledge as a means of aiding

comprehension and creating a purpose for the reading, seeing it instead as a way of engaging socially with students.

In the final three categories, while some teacher aides did suggests reading leads to personal growth (i.e., Growing as a person), the majority described it as a basic, functional skill (i.e., Using texts for practical purposes), discussing how students need to read to perform tasks like filling out forms, applying for jobs, and school learning. While it is positive that they see purposes for reading, adopting a narrow, skills-based focus for reading may not encourage students to view reading as a powerful social practice.

There were also some interesting omissions from the teacher aides' definitions. Critical reading practices were absent, despite its importance within the Australian Curriculum (e.g., analysing and evaluating within the literacy strand; examining literature within the literature strand). Also, despite policy focus, participants did not discuss 'reading' digital texts or multi-modal reading practices (Serafini, 2012), suggesting they associate reading with traditional print-based texts. Additionally, the concept of literacy as a social practice (Gee, 2001) appears to have been omitted. While it is unclear why these important aspects of reading were absent from the definitions, it may reflect the continued influence on teacher aides and their classroom environments of the skills based approach promoted by the Teaching Reading Report (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005) which is reinforced in some ways by current NAPLAN testing.

Discussion

Six categories were used to classify the definitions of reading teacher aides shared within this study. While some teacher aides were able to provide definitions of reading that suggested they understood reading as a meaning making practice, there were substantial issues with the group's definitions. First, there wasn't any evidence of a shared or coherent understanding of

reading, even from those working in the same school. Teacher aides in this study did not produce definitions of reading that they related to a specific reading approach or reading intervention program. While we could infer that teacher assistants had received exposure to particular reading practices and strategies, and that these might be *related to* reading approaches employed in classrooms, or advice provided by teachers, their definitions were certainly fragmented and incomplete when compared to the current definition of reading endorsed by the National Curriculum document. It is unclear if these omissions have resulted due to lack of education and training or if they are a reflection of the environments in which they work. At present, despite the more prescribed, direct instruction based curriculum (at least in Queensland state schools), it remains unclear if the teachers they work with are systematically implementing the particular reading approaches, vocabulary, and strategies advised or if these teachers would hold a shared and consistent approach to reading.

Second, there appeared to be a mismatch between the teacher aides' understanding of reading and what they are being asked to do with students. When teacher aides work with readers experiencing difficulties, these students actually need to progress at a faster rate than their peers if they are to 'catch up'. Within an upper primary context, like that of participants in our study, teacher aides need understandings of reading and reading development that move beyond decoding skills if they are to support older at-risk readers who have not yet learned to read proficiently enough to independently read to learn. The noticeable absence of references in their definitions to critical reading practices or to the situated nature of reading, alongside frequent references to basic functional skills (such as filling out forms), suggests that teacher aides' expectations do not encompass notions of what competent reading in upper primary entails; hence, it is unlikely that these will support adequate, let alone accelerated progress. While the definitions shared in this study may be sufficient to support certain types of lower primary school reading practices (e.g., memorisation of sight words,

learning to 'sound out' basic words using phonics), they do appear to be lacking the complexity required to properly support upper primary school readers.

Also, contemporary perspectives on what reading entails, including those found in the Australian National Curriculum, now encompass reading of digital texts whereby readers encounter new textual forms and new social practices with texts (McTavish, 2010) that frequently involve "varied reading pathways and processes" (Bearne, 2009, p. 156). However, this study's definitions appeared bound to reading of print-based texts. Although this finding might reflect the more general lack of uptake of digital literacies practices in schools (Davidson, 2012), it does suggest that the importance of learning to read digital texts may be being overlooked during work with at-risk learners, and that students' out-of-school experiences with digital technologies may not be being used as a resource for developing effective reading practices. We would argue that the work of teacher aides with older readers needs to take account of contemporary literacy practices including reading (and producing) digital texts as well as the socially situated nature of such practices.

The two issues raised above prompt the need for discussion about just what knowledge is required to facilitate the reading instruction and practices commonly expected of teacher aides. It is well established that within Queensland and many other educational jurisdictions, teacher aides "are being deployed most of the time to provide support to pupils with educational needs of one kind or another, which requires particular pedagogical skills and knowledge" (Russell et al., 2005, p. 185). While it may be unrealistic to expect teacher aides to have the theoretical knowledge of reading expected of teachers, surely some of this knowledge is required if teacher aides are to be able to identify student weaknesses and provide appropriate instruction and feedback to help students improve. Reflection is required around the question of what roles teacher aides could and should be undertaking within reading lessons. Since some research supports the view that teacher aides are effective when

they implement a specific reading intervention program for which they have received training (Fried, Konza & Mulcahy, 2012; O'Shaughnessy & Swanson, 2000; Savage & Carless, 2005), perhaps tying teacher aide instructional roles to specific training requirements may provide a suitable way forwards, in contrast to the current expectations in many schools that they can act as a 'jack of all trades' (Harris & April, under review).

Definitions of reading provided in our study reflected a view of reading as the cognitive activity of individuals rather than understandings of its socially situated nature and accomplishment (Gee, 2001). Teacher aides also seemed to lack understandings of the role of interaction in learning to read and in reading instruction. We would suggest that knowledge of the ways that interaction with expert others (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) supports reading development should be integral to the work of any teacher aide who is attempting to develop learners capacity to reading independently. Since previous research (e.g., Radford et al., 2011) shows discursive differences between teacher and teacher aide interactions with students, we propose that teacher aides need understandings of the ways that their talk and interactions effectively promote reading.

Conclusions

This study raises important implications for how teacher aides are employed to support reading. Within this study, many struggled to define a practice they enact daily with students, with descriptions often focusing on reading's purposes. While this study did rely on a relatively small sample of teacher aides, the categories devised were able to be used to classify data from 36 different individual teacher aides who provided written definitions, spoken definitions, or both and these aides did work in diverse regional schools. However, further larger scale research is needed to identify how generalizable these data are, especially to determine if these teacher aide definitions are similar to those generated by ones working

in other policy or cultural contexts. Additionally, it would be beneficial for future studies to examine the level of alignment between teacher aide definitions and those of the teachers they work with; clearly students would benefit from more consistency in reading understandings and approaches.

This study also raises the question of how important it is to be able to define what you are doing; we would argue that it is concerning that teacher aides are being asked to instruct and facilitate reading without a sound personal understanding of what it is that they're trying to teach. It is likely that teacher aides who view reading as a process of translation will overemphasise decoding skills with their students and potentially neglect important aspects of comprehension. As all definitions lacked evidence of a critical perspective on reading, further research needs to investigate if teacher aides are, in fact, facilitating student learning of analysis and evaluation as part of their reading practices. Likewise, it is important to examine their use of digital literacy practices with students alongside ways they might create socially situated reading lessons.

However, it must be acknowledged that teacher aides would seldom be expected to define aspects of their academic work with children in this way, meaning many may not have thought much about their own views of reading prior to participating in our study. It is possible that the definitions shared in this study were linked to what they perceive teachers are telling them to do with children, rather than their own personal definitions or beliefs about reading. As teacher aides are often given explicit instructions by the teachers supervising their work, they may seldom be given the opportunity to reflect on and develop their own professional knowledge and practices; in instances where teacher aides have received training to better equip them to make educational decisions within their work, there have been reported mismatches between the teacher aides' desires for some level of autonomy within their work and teachers' limited expectations of their role (Rose & Forlin, 2010). Hence,

more consideration is needed as to what professional knowledge and practices should be expected from teacher aides if they are to effectively help students learn, while at the same time considering how this may change their current professional roles, work expectations, and employment conditions.

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