Discourses of childhood safety: what do children say?

Kylie Smith

Discourses of childhood safety: what do children say?

Kylie Smith*

Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, Australia

ABSTRACT: This article will report on a project, which consulted children about their understandings of safety in relation to the people and places in their lives. Thirty-nine children aged between three and five years attending preschool and long day-care services reflected on their experiences of what is safe and unsafe in their world through dialogue, artwork and construction. The services were based in an inner city in Australia. The article will then examine discourses of safety to explore how children limit their own capacity and willingness to actively and independently engage with the world outside their family and home due to concerns of safety. This examination raises questions for educators, researchers, policymakers and families about how the effects of how adults observe, monitor and restrict children's play and movement to keep them in close proximity in order to keep them safe.

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article rapporte une étude dans laquelle des enfants ont été consultés sur leur compréhension de la sûreté en relation avec les personnes et les endroits où ils vivent. Trente neuf enfants âgés entre 3 et 5 ans, fréquentant des structures d'accueil et d'éducation de la petite enfance, ont réfléchi à leur expérience de ce qui est sûr et pas sûr dans leur environnement, à travers des dialogues, des dessins et des constructions. Les structures sont situées dans le centre d'une ville d'Australie. Cet article analyse ensuite les discours sur la sécurité afin d'explorer la manière dont les enfants limitent, pour des raisons de sécurité, leur propre capacité et envie de s'engager, activement et de manière indépendante, avec le monde en dehors du cercle familial. Cette étude pose des questions pour les éducateurs, les chercheurs, les législateurs et les familles sur les effets liés au fait que les adultes observent, surveillent et restreignent les jeux et les mouvements des enfants afin de les garder à proximité pour garantir leur sécurité.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Dieser Artikel berichtet von einem Projekt, in dem Kinder zu ihrem Verständnis von Sicherheit in Bezug auf Personen und Orte ihres Lebens befragt wurden. 39 Kinder im Alter von drei bis fünf Jahren aus Vorschule und Ganztagesbetreuung reflektierten durch Dialoge, Kunst und Bauwerke ihre Erfahrungen damit, was in ihrer Welt sicher und unsicher ist. Die Tageseinrichtungen hatten ihren Sitz in einer australischen Innenstadt. Der Beitrag untersucht Diskurse zu Sicherheit, um zu erforschen, wie Kinder aufgrund von Sicherheitsbedenken ihre eigene Fähigkeit und Bereitschaft begrenzen, sich aktiv und unabhängig in der Welt außerhalb ihrer Familie und ihres Zuhauses zu bewegen. Diese Untersuchung wirft Fragen für Pädagogen, Forscher, Politiker und Familien auf, inwieweit Erwachsene das Spiel und die Bewegung von Kindern überwachen, kontrollieren und einschränken, um sie zu deren Schutz in naher Umgebung zu halten.

*Email: kylieas@unimelb.edu.au

RESUMEN: Este artículo es un reporte de un proyecto en el cual un grupo de niños fueron entrevistados respecto a su comprensión de la seguridad en relación a las personas y los lugares en sus vidas. Treinta y nueve niños con edades entre 3 y 5 años y que atendían pre-escolar y servicios de cuidado diario reflexionaron sobre sus experiencias respecto a qué es seguro e inseguro en su mondo mediante diálogos, trabajos artísticos y construcciones. Los servicios escolares y de cuidado estaban localizados próximos al centro de una ciudad en Australia. Este artículo examina discursos sobre seguridad para explorar cómo los niños limitan su propia capacidad e intenciones de involucrarse activa e independientemente con el mundo fuera de sus familias y hogares, debido a sus preocupaciones por la seguridad. Los análisis conducidos presentan interrogantes para educadores, investigadores, personas que desarrollan políticas sociales y familias sobre los efectos de las formas en que los adultos observan, monitorean y restringen el juego y movimiento de los niños para mantenerlos cerca con la intención de mantenerlos a salvo.

Keywords: safety; discourse; participation; consultation; risk; capacity

Background

Adults are increasingly 'governing' children's interactions with their world to protect children from 'risk' and maintain their safety. Within Australia, children's safety and risk is increasingly discussed and debated by parents, educators, policymakers, politicians and the media. The focus within these debates is predominately on children's safety within public life, related to issues such as playground safety, bullying, child abductions and stranger danger (Harden 2000). The result of this is that adults are increasingly controlling, limiting and monitoring children's interactions and participation with people and the environment for the protection and 'best interest' of children. However, there is limited definition and evidence on what is constituted as 'safe' and 'risk'. Of the literature that does exist, safety and risk are argued to be social constructions that reflect social values (Giddens 1991; Gill 2007; Saltmarch 2010; Tovey 2007; Wyver et al. 2010). This limited definitional work and research is juxtaposed with an increasing call within Australia to support and strengthen children's sense of identity, well-being and connection to community (Commonwealth of Australia 2009; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009; Wyver et al., 2010). Further, there is a growing body of literature that explores children's emotions when participating in risky play (Apter, 2007; Sandseter 2010, 2007a, 2007b). This work explores children's mixed emotions such as excitement, pleasure, and fear when engaging in thrill-seeking activities that may involve the risk of physical injury. Another body of literature on children's safety and risk that has develop over the past 15 years has been in the urban planning field with an exploration of barriers and enablers for children's independent mobility. Much of this work has been undertaken with a focus on primary school aged children and adolescence (Prezza et al. 2005; Timperio et al. 2004; Whitzman and Pike 2007) and not on pre-school children.

Research has shown that young children can tell adults about their lives, experiences and the concerns that they have for people close to them and for their immediate environment (e.g. Alderson 2008; Diaz Soto 2005; Lundy and McEvoy 2009; Mac-Naughton and Smith 2008; Perry and Dockett 2011). Not only do young children have the capacity to enter into dialogue about their lives verbally and/or through visual representation and illustration but they also have a human right, to participate in matters that affect them, under the United Nations Convention of the Rights of

the Child (UNCRC) (UNESCO 2006). This rights discourse recognises children as having expertise in relation to their lives and as competent meaning makers. This has influenced early childhood research and education with growing advocacy and increased attention to listening to young children and acknowledging them as active agents in their communities (Clark and Moss 2001; Dockett, Einarstottir, and Perry 2009; Fargas-Malet et al. 2010; Sumsion 2003). Little research has been undertaken where children five years and under have been asked specifically about their ideas on safety (Smith, MacNaughton, and Alexander 2008).

Discourses of childhood safety

This article will explore discourses of childhood safety to begin to make visible the conscious and unconscious ways in which children interact with their worlds and how this might limit or support engagement with places and people based on notions of safety and risk. MacNaughton (2005), drawing on Michel Foucault's work, describes discourse as 'a body of thinking and writing that uses shared language for talking about a topic, shared concepts for understanding it and shared methods for examining it' (MacNaughton 2005, 20). Language, that is words and concepts, change their meaning and definition when they are used in different discourses. For example, in the case of safety this is highlighted with the use of the word and concept 'stranger'. Within current discourses of safety the word stranger is understood as a threat, dangerous, harmful and to avoid. Within different discourses a stranger could be defined as an exciting new person to meet and get to know with the possibility of learning new knowledge. Discourses contain multiple ideas and thoughts and position a person in a discourse as a subject that is rational, conscious, non-agentic, fixed and coherent (Weedon 1987). Within discourses of childhood safety, the adult is able to make rational and coherent decisions about the people, places and practices that a child can engage with and remain safe. For the child, she learns and takes up practices of safety unconsciously. These discourses of childhood safety draw on Western ideas of childhood that depict the singular image of the child as innocent, at 'risk' of being hurt by people and/or the environment and in need of protection from these risks (Jenks 1996; Smith, Alexander, and MacNaughton 2008).

Drawing from poststructuralist definitions of discourse creates opportunities to explore how power and knowledge are embedded and circulate to create socially, politically and historically constructed and binding truths of childhood safety. Gore (1995), argued that power is productive, circulating rather than being possessed and existing in action. Further power, functions at the level of the body and operates through technologies of self' (Foucault 1977; Gore 1995). This means that power operates *through* the subject (in this case the young child) rather than upon them. Edwards argues that:

> … discourses of power knowledge formations produce 'subjects' who become 'subject' to systems of regulation aimed at governance. (93)

By examining what truths are constituted and reconstituted in discourses of safety it is possible to gain insight into why children speak and act in the way they do about what is safe and unsafe. Foucault called these truths 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1977). He argued that 'regimes' exist within all societies. These 'regimes' circulate to establish and support rules and regulations that define and depict the truth about how the

individual should act and speak. Through these safety truths the child is placed under surveillance and is regulated and normalised using techniques of measurement, classification, categorisation and assessment to 'protect' the child (Cannella 1997). Further, the child will perform self-surveillance, self-regulate and self-normalise (Foucault 1977; Smith 2004).

This article reports on a project, which shows that young children can provide significant insights into how they perceive risk in relation to safe and unsafe people and environments in their worlds. The project was conducted in an inner-city municipality in Victoria, Australia. The data set reported on is housed within a larger study entitled *Respecting Children as Citizens in Local Government: Participation in Policies and Services Project*.

The *Respecting Children as Citizens in Local Government: Participation in Policies and Services Project*

In Australia in 2003, Victorian local governments entered into an agreement with the state government to develop Municipal Early Years Plans (MEYP) for each local government authority. This was in response to a growing interest in the early years arising from powerful new national and international research that demonstrated the importance of early childhood experiences on health and development outcomes and a recognition that the diversity and fragmentation of the current early childhood sector was creating difficulties for families as they tried to access an incoherent and uncoordinated service system (Smith and Smale 2007).

A MEYP was defined as 'a local area plan designed to provide a strategic direction for the development and coordination of early years programs, activities and other local community development processes that impact on children 0–8 years in a municipality' (Municipal Association of Victoria & Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2011, 12).

The City of Port Phillip, when developing their MEYP in 2004, realised that a broader approach was required; one that promoted new ways of thinking about children and challenged the ways Council policies and services were traditionally developed and delivered so that children's rights, interests and needs were afforded greater attention (Smith and Smale 2007).

In developing the MEYP framework, the City of Port Phillip researched and consulted widely. Families, service providers, council staff, councillors and community members who lived, worked, learned or visited the City of Port Phillip were asked the following questions:

- What is good about Port Phillip for children and their families?
- What could make it even better?
- What role could Council play in making this happen?

Views were sought via written survey, community and service provider forums, focus groups and face-to-face interviews (Smith and Smale 2007). The resulting MEYP presented a long-term, common vision for the City of Port Phillip and for clarity of purpose. It identified priority areas and specific actions to be achieved over a three-year time frame. Five principles were identified to underpin the council's actions: honouring childhood; valuing play; respecting children as active citizens; a child's right to grow in healthy and supportive community environments; and the importance of

family. Five goals were developed to direct the work of the council into the future: promote a whole child approach; increase children's participation; improve child development, health and well-being; work in partnership to achieve a fully integrated approach; and build on research evidence. A three-year action plan was also developed that involved all council departments.

Children were not consulted as part of the MEYP development. The City of Port Phillip acknowledged the importance of children having a voice in this process but believed that many City of Port Phillip staff lacked the skills and knowledge at that time to ethically engage with children for this purpose. While the City of Port Phillip had been consulting with young people for many years, consultation with children under eight years of age to develop public policy and practice had not happened before. The City of Port Phillip was unsure about what participation tools and strategies would work to engage young children, particularly children under five years of age. The City of Port Phillip recognised that by developing a MEYP without genuine input from children they had created a plan that was *for and about* children rather than *with* children. The City therefore made consulting with children one of the first actions in the implementation phase. This resulted in the funding of an action research project called *Respecting Children as Citizens in Local Government: Participation in Policies and Services*.

Research approach

Methodology

The methodology for this project was ethically, strategically and politically constructed to recognise children as active citizens with valid and important knowledge about their world (MacNaughton and Smith 2008). In line with this, children were invited to be co-researchers in recognition that most discussion and debate on children's safety and risk has been generated by adults or youth. Young children have had limited opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas on safety and risk-taking (see Beate Hansen Sandseter 2009; Harden 2000; Kelley, Mayall, and Hood 1997; Skar and Krogh 2009; Smith, Alexander, and MacNaughton 2008; Stephenson 2003). In traditional images of the child, the child needs adults to make decisions for them in their 'best interest' (Rolfe 2008). The child is seen as innocent, in need of protection and not yet a citizen. Those traditional developmental views of the child exclude children from decisions that affect them. Within this image, the child would not be asked about their understandings of what is safe and unsafe for them and the world around them as children would be constituted as too young to understand. Further, concerns would be raised as to how young children might lose their 'innocence' if they were 'introduced' to ideas of risk and safety. In contrast, sociology of the child regards children as social actors with agency, rather than as objects needing adults to make decisions on their behalf (Kotsanas 2009; MacNaughton and Smith 2009; Smith 2008; Woodhead and Faulkner 2008). Within this image of the child, it is recognised that children may have different, not inferior knowledge to adults and that this knowledge is important in providing different insights within this context of childhood safety.

Methods

Thirty-five adults (27 were in the employment of the City of Port Phillip and eight were employed by community organisations providing services within the Port Phillip area)

participated in the action research project. Action research was chosen as a methodology because it is a collaborative process that supports people to work together to bring about meaningful social change (MacNaughton and Hughes 2009; Smith 2004; Taylor 2010). It is action orientated and contextual to participants' day-to-day work life (see Campbell 2001; Smith 2004; Taylor 2007). Participants individually or in pairs developed a research question to explore children's participation in their working area. These questions supported the development of mini action research projects. Twenty-one mini action research projects were completed. Through 11 of these projects 152 children had an opportunity to express their ideas, views and concerns about living in, studying within or visiting the City of Port Phillip. This article is based on a small data set exploring young children's understandings of safety which was one of the 21 mini action research projects. Two participants working in children's services invited children attending long day-care centres and preschools to be co-researchers to explore safety. The long day-care centres provided care and education for children from three months to five years of age. The centres were open from 7.00 a.m. until 6.00 p.m. from Monday to Friday and children attended or used the service on a part- or full-time basis. The preschools provided care and education to children aged four and five years of age for 10-hours per week in the year before children entered school.

Individual semi-formal interviews with 39 children aged between three and five years were carried out by the teachers who worked directly with the children. Children were asked who (people) made them feel safe and where (places) they felt safe. These children were invited to talk about and/or illustrate their ideas through drawing, artwork or block construction. The research was undertaken during Child Protection Week within the day-to-day activities in the services. Child Protection Week is coordinated in Australia by the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) and promotes the right of the child to live in a safe and supportive community. This week was chosen by the educators as on reflection they discovered that previously they had talked about safety with children during this period but rarely, and in some services, never consulted children on their views and opinions. Some children were not interested in the topic of safety and did not participate in the project. For other children this topic was of interest. Safety had been talked about in their classroom at other times but this usually occurred in response to when an activity or a child's behaviour was assessed as risky or unsafe. In these cases the teachers explained what spaces, equipment and behaviours were safe and how to engage with the environment in safe ways in conformance with the rules. In these moments rather than being invited to share their views and opinions, the children learnt rules and behaviours to remember and with which to comply.

Ethical engagement with children

Concepts of ethical engagement with children were explored with participants during the action research meetings (MacNaughton and Smith 2008). There was a particular focus on three key principles for ethical engagement with children. Firstly, designing the consultation with ethical intent, secondly, choosing tools and strategies that support children with diverse abilities and interests, and finally creating an ethical environment for the consultation to take place (MacNaughton and Smith 2008). For the 'safety project' the teachers planned:

(1) Ethical timelines – While the consultation was planned to occur in a specific week the children had opportunities any time across the week to talk about their ideas. There was no one fixed time or day. It was reported that conversations continued after the initial planned week.

(2) Strategies and tools – The teachers used strategies and tools that were familiar to the children in their everyday classroom which included dialogue, construction and artwork.

(3) Ethical environments – The consultation occurred in the classroom that were familiar everyday spaces and places for the children, such as the block corner, the drawing table and art area. This was done with the intention that a familiar environment would be a safe space for children to share their thoughts and ideas. For example, the teachers introduced their ideas about wanting to talk about safety with the children at a group time session, which was a common meeting space for the children. During this meeting the teachers talked about their idea for the project and invited the children to share their views and opinions about who made them feel safe and where they felt safe. They asked the children to have a think about if they would like to participate and how they might participate, for example talk with the teachers or visually depict their ideas. This meant that children had time to think and consider their involvement and were not expected to come up with ideas or consent to participate on the spot.

The teachers obtained informed consent from the children's parents for the children to participate. This however, this was not seen as children's assent to participate. Children were also asked for their verbal assent. Further, after children shared their ideas they were asked if the information could be used to share with the class and with the local government. Where children agreed copies of their artwork or photographs of their constructions were made so that the child retained their original work (see Smith, Alexander, and MacNaughton 2008). Where children did not want information to be used the children placed their work in their bag to take home without it being copied, which was the common practice in their classroom. Children have a right to decide if and when their ideas and work is used in research (MacNaughton and Smith 2005).

Discussion

Two safety discourses were in operation through children's conversations about who and what made them feel safe. Firstly, home as a safe place and secondly, safety being behind lock and key.

Home as a safe place

One of the truths that circulates within and through the discourses of childhood safety is that home is a safe place. Home is seen as a safe place that provides physical and moral protection creating the perceived understanding that there is a known and monitored environment and people (Harden 2000; Hood et al. 1996). In this study 10 children discussed feeling safe at home and 15 children talked about feeling safe with family and people known to them such as teachers and friends. For example, one of the children Sing All The Time (child participants' choose their own pseudonyms) said: 'I feel safe at my house.'

Golden Shine said: 'I feel safe when my mum and dad are around.' Flower discussed the feeling of safety when her teachers were present: 'I feel safe when there are teachers around.'

Analysing these children's statements from within a developmental discourse of children's safety, the children's understandings of safety connected to home and family could be interpreted as reflecting children's strong and secure attachment through the development of 'physical', 'cognitive' and 'emotional' development (Rolfe 2004). It could be argued that children are safe because adults have supported the vulnerable and innocent child in need of protection to progressively develop or learn knowledge about their safety. These statements could be connected to children's well-being, identity and connection with community.

This truth could also be seen as problematic as it maps and remaps the externalisation of safety, is safe within the private domain of the home and family, where known adults can and will keep the child safe in contrast to the external world which is unsafe. Drawing on this singular truth results in a singular universal understanding that implies that all children are safe at home and with family and that the adult is always the person responsible for the child's safety. The adult as the gatekeeper of safety is embedded in Western middle class understandings of family and reinforces the adult–child dichotomy with the adult in a position of power and the child as powerless. This truth also remaps stranger danger discourses and silences issues such as domestic violence and sexual abuse by family and friends (Cheal 1991; Harden 2000). Questions are being raised about whether stranger-danger is a perceived or real threat to children's safety. For example, Moran et al. (1997) reported within the context of the United Kingdom that between 1984 and 1994 less than six children under the age of 14 years were killed annually by strangers. Andrews, Gould, and Corry (2002), reported that in an Australian survey of seven child abuse studies in 40% of cases the abuser was a family member, and in 75% of cases the abuser was known to the child. This highlights how unsafe it can be to rely on single truths results in relation to safety and childhood. Such reticence can result in marginalising and silencing other safety discourses which in turn can increase children's vulnerability and deny them opportunities to be responsible for their own safety which is unquestioningly accredited to adults. Deconstructing safety discourses can begin to raise questions about the singular adult responsibility for child safety.

Deconstructing childhood safety discourses, creates opportunities to explore the regimes of truth within children's understandings of home and family as safe places. Questions can be raised as to whether children always feel safe at home and or with family and people they know or if the language used by adults creates rules and regulations that silence children from speaking about safety in alternative ways. Foucault argued that surveillance is the act of a person physically watching, looking at or on an individual (Foucault 1977; Gore 1995, 1998). Surveillance is also the threat of observing or being observed. This threat may come from a person physically in the area, vicinity or classroom, or from the structural arrangements of the building or area that imply that a person is being or can be watched. Foucault (1977) while not writing specifically about childhood and safety, argued that surveillance through language and the physical act of observing children as they play or interact with others can result in children's (a subject's) self-surveillance. The subject understands the expectations of society and is able to undertake self-surveillance as a result of an unspoken understanding of the consequences of not following that expectation and potentially being reprimanded by an adult or having a 'bad' event occurring such as

being hurt by a stranger (Foucault 1977). For example, Will, one of the children in the study stated: 'Not scared with mummy or daddy would be scared by myself because of bad people.'

Does Will speak about safety as a result of the effects of disciplinary power within a discourse of safety where he has learnt how to speak and act? Has Will learnt how to speak and act through adult surveillance or the threat of surveillance? Does his statement provide a glimpse of self-surveillance where the 'threat' of 'bad' people ensures that Will speaks and acts within this singular discourse where he stays within the confines and gaze of his parents and other adults? How does this limit his capacity to speak about when it is unsafe at home or when he feels unsafe with his family? Through self-surveillance does Will restrict his interactions with people outside the family with the threat of the person being unknown and 'bad'? Can Will articulate who a 'bad' person is? Does he have space and time to engage with concepts outside the dominant discourse of safety? To attempt this will he be assessed as in need of learning the rules and regulations of safety and have his interactions and movements further governed and restricted? How might different language be used to enter into dialogue with children to support them to interact with people and spaces that are unknown to them? This raises issues about how early childhood teachers and families talk with children about safety and how the language they use reinforces how children take up and understand these discourses consciously and unconsciously. By having conversations *with* children about safety rather than *telling* children about safety, there may be different opportunities to unpack ideas such as 'bad people' and encourage risk-taking.

Another child, Tinkerbell, also talked about safety in places where there are not any strangers: 'I feel safe in the big long flowers, pretending I'm a fairy, because there are no strangers. I have really long hair.' Questions of self-surveillance can also be raised through Golden Shine's comment: 'I don't feel safe when there are no teachers around. You can only play outside when there's a teacher.'

The discourses of safety within the early childhood classroom are embedded and enforced within institutional disciplinary power through regulations that govern practice. Within childcare centres and preschools in Melbourne (Victoria, Australia) mandatory rules and regulations state that no child is to be left unsupervised and that teachers must have visual access to the children at all times. Foucault acknowledged the embeddedness of surveillance in education when he said:

> … a relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency. (1977, 176).

This understanding of surveillance helps us to consider how Golden Shine learnt to speak and act within this discourse through self-surveillance under the threat of 'punishment' or being in trouble if playing outside without a teacher. Has Golden Shine heard the teachers saying that you cannot play outside without a teacher? It is important for adults to consider the effects for children where the rules are you cannot play without supervision. How does this limit children's capacity to explore environments independently? Through regimes of truth that are mapped, remapped and embedded through surveillance and self-surveillance the scope of children's autonomy is restricted.

Behind lock and key

Another safety truth identified through deconstructing safety discourses is that children are safe to live and play if they are behind locked doors and gates or if fences surround their space. Seven children discussed their sense of safety with environments that restricted public access. For example, Bob said: 'I feel safe in my upstairs back veranda cause there's a fence around it, a fence bamboo, yeah we've got two verandas upstairs one's got a sandpit and the other one hasn't.' When asked what places were safe for him, Bob also identified his playgroup as safe as it had a fence around the space. He noted: 'Playgroup because there's a fence there.' Rainbow commented on the importance of not just a door but a locked door for safety: 'I feel safe when the door is locked.' Further, in the conversation Rainbow also talked about a fence as a safety artefact: 'I don't feel safe when there's not a fence.' Crystal talked about gates when discussing her sense of safety. She said: 'I feel safe when there are gates around … I feel unsafe when there's no gates around.' Four of the children in the study discussed an inability to go outside on their own. For example, Darcy said: 'Not without mummy and daddy.' Castle stated: 'No, just with mummy and daddy or my brother.' Fashion Fairy explained: 'Someone is always with me.' Pink noted: 'I feel unsafe when I'm on my own.'

The truths of the child being safe behind lock and key continues to operate with the private–public dichotomy where disciplinary power restricts children's independent mobility within the boundaries of home as a closed and limited space. These safety truths limit children's independent mobility and connection to community and neighbourhoods. The results can include a disconnection with society through isolation as well as limited possibilities for identity construction and a sense of belonging. Gill (2007) argues that restricting or denying children opportunities to explore their environment and take risks creates current and future citizens who are risk-averse. This can result in a lack of skills to manage stressful situations, poor social skills and raises concerns about children's health, well-being and resilience (Ball 1990; Harden 2000). Playing behind fences or guarded spaces becomes 'normal'. Foucault argues that normalisation is a set of regulations or rules that define what is normal. It involves the individual in requesting, demanding, setting or conforming to a set of standards or 'norms' that are outlined within particular discourses (Foucault 1977; Gore 1995, 1998). In this case Bob, Rainbow and Crystal understand fenced or gated play space as the normal safe place and space to play. Abnormal or unsafe spaces are not gated meaning that Bob, Rainbow and Crystal may be unwilling to explore natural, unplanned and unstructured environments. How can Bob, Rainbow and Crystal learn skills that will support their capacity to manage risky play? Can Darcy, Castle, Fashion Fairy and Pink explore their identities outside of their family and teachers? How can Darcy, Castle, Fashion Fairy and Pink experiment with or practice new skills and competencies in developing new relationships and a sense of belonging to their community? Further, conversations between adults and children need to occur so that adults can gain greater insight into how children take up and enact the safety language that is used. In doing this adults can rethink how and why they talk about safety and the effects on children's willingness to step out of the dominant discourses and explore their world.

Conclusion

There is a difficult tension for families, teachers and policymakers in balancing ways to create opportunities for children to meet new people, explore new environments and

engage with activities that are challenging, adventurous and risky. The media with its global communication networks has greater capacity than ever to report on the situations of 'risk' that children are placed in and judge the 'good' parent and the 'good' teacher through their actions. The reporting of litigation adds weight to these pressures for teachers and policymakers. However, not resisting the 'truths' of safety will result in the very thing that families, teachers and policymakers are trying to stop – that is placing children at 'risk'. For in perpetuating singular 'home/stranger danger; safety discourse, adults create greater risk for children– risk of isolation, dependency, lack of resilience, loss of identity, delays in development, health and well-being.

This article does not provide answers on how to keep children safe or provide evidence on whether childhood safety and risk is a perception or a reality. What instead I have offered is the space/opportunity to raise multiple questions about the truths embedded in discourses of childhood safety and the effects of these for children's interactions with the world. The article opens up this questioning to attend to an idea that the home and the playground within an Australian context has become a panopticon where adults can observe, monitor and restrict children's play and movement to keep them in close proximity in order to keep them safe. Engaging with discourses of childhood safety created opportunities to illuminate how knowledge and power creates rules and regulations about being safe where surveillance and self-surveillance constituted and reconstituted how children can speak and act for safety. Identifying this knowledge and power is essential in order to create other possible ways to speak and act about safety and to resist the current truths. This is necessary so that there are different possible ways for children to take up or share some of the responsibilities *with* adults and develop ways to negotiate how to explore their identities and the world they operate through and within. This raises challenging questions for families, teachers and policymakers about how to resist current discourses of safety and use different language to enter into dialogue with children and other adults to deconstruct the binaries of adult–child and private–public. For as Usher and Edwards (1994) argued:

> … where there is power, there is also resistance. Thus there is always scope for learners, and education and training practitioners, to create a space where … conception of competence can be challenged and made more open. (117)

References

Alderson, A. 2008. "Children as Researchers: Participation Rights and Research Methods." In *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*, edited by P. Christensen and A. James, 276–290. Milton Park: Routledge.

Andrews, G., B. Gould, and J. Corry. 2002. "Child Sexual Abuse Revisited." *The Medical Journal of Australia* 176 (10): 458–459.

Apter, M. J. 2007. *Danger: Our Quest for Excitement*. Oxford: One world.

Ball, S. 1990. "Introducing Monsieur Foucault." In *Foucault and Education, Discipline and Knowledge*, edited by S. Ball. London: Routledge.

Beate Hansen Sandseter, E. 2009. "Children's Expressions of Exhilaration and Fear in Risky Play." *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 10 (1): 92–106.

Campbell, S. 2001. *A Social Justice Disposition in Young Children*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Melbourne.

Cannella, G. 1997. *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*. New York: Peter Lang.

Cheal, D. 1991. *Family and the State of Theory*. New York: Harvester Whaetsheaf.

Clark, A., and Moss, P. 2001. *Listening to Young Children. The Mosaic Approach*. London: National Children's Bureau and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Commonwealth of Australia. 2009. *Belonging, Being & Becoming*. Barton: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. 2009. *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*. East Melbourne: Early Childhood Strategy Division Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

Diaz Soto, L. 2005. "Children make the Best Theorists." In *Power and Voice in Research with Children*, edited by L. Diaz Soto and B. Swadener, 9–20. New York: Peter Lang.

Dockett, S., Einarstottir, J., and Perry, B. 2009. "Researching with Children: Ethical Tensions." *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 7 (3): 283–298.

Fargas-Malet, M., McSherry, D., Larkin, E. and Robinson, C. 2010. "Research with Children: Methodological Issues and Innovative Techniques." *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 8 (2): 175–192.

Foucault, M. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin. Books.

Giddens, A. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gill, T. 2007. *No Fear: Growing up in a Risk Adverse Society*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Gore, J. 1995. "Foucault's Poststructulism and Observational Education Research: A Study of Power Relations." In *After Postmodernism: Education, Politics and Identity*, edited by R. Smith and P. Wexler, 77–89. London: Falmer Press.

Gore, J. 1998. "Dicipline Bodies: On the Continuity of Power Relations in Pedagogy." In *Foucault's Challenge: Discourse, Knowledge and Power in Education*, edited by T. S. Popkewitz and M. Brennan, 231–251. New York: Teachers College Press.

Government of Victoria. 2009. *Children's Services Regulation 2009*. Melbourne: Government of Victoria.

Harden, J. 2000. "There's No Place Like Home: The Public/private Distinction in Children's Theorizing of Risk and Safety." *Childhood* 7 (1): 43–59.

Hood, S., P. Kelley, B. Mayall, and A. Oakley. 1996. *Children, Parents and Risk*. London: Social Science Unit, Institute of Education.

Jenks, C. 1996. *Childhood*. London: Routledge.

Kelley, P., B. Mayall, and S. Hood. 1997. "Children's Accounts of Risk." *Childhood* 4 (3): 305–324.

Kotsanas, C. M. 2009. Sustaining Children's Participation in Early Childhood Settings? Discourse, Power and the 'Danger' of Participation Practices. Masters Thesis, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia.

Lundy, L., and L. McEvoy. 2009. "Developing Outcomes for Educational Services: A Children's Rights-Based Approach." *Effective Education* 1 (1): 43–60.

MacNaughton, G. 2005. *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies*. Milton Park: Routledge.

MacNaughton, G. and Smith, K. 2005. "Exploring Ethics and Difference: The Choices and Challenges of Researching with Children." In *Exploring Ethical Research with Children*, edited by A. Farrell, 112–123. Buckingham: Open University Press.

MacNaughton, G., and P. Hughes. 2009. *Doing Action Research in Early Childhood Studies: A Step by Step Guide*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

MacNaughton, G., and K. Smith. 2008. "Engaging Ethically with Young Children: Principles and Practices for Listening and Responding with Care." In *Young Children as Active Citizens: Principles, Policies and Pedagogies*, edited by G. MacNaughton, P. Hughes and K. Smith, 31–43. London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

MacNaughton, G., and K. Smith. 2009. "Children's Rights in Early Childhood." In *Introduction to Early Childhood Studies*, edited by M. J. Kehily, 161–176. Open University Press/ McGraw Hill.

Moran, E., D. Warde, L. Macleod, G. Mayes, and J. Gillies. 1997. "Stranger Danger: What do Children Know?." *Child Abuse Review* 6: 11–23.

Municipal Association of Victoria. and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. 2011. *Municipal Early Years Planning Framework and Practical Resource Guide*. Melbourne: Municipal Association of Victoria and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Perry, B., and S. Dockett. 2011. "'How 'Bout we have a Celebration!' Advice from Children on Starting School." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 19 (3): 373–386.

Prezza, M., Alparone, F., Cristallo, C., and Luigi, S. 2005. "Parental Perception of Social Risk and Positive Potentiality of Outdoor Autonomy for Children: The Development of Two Instruments." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 25: 437–453.

Rolfe, S. 2004. *Rethinking Attachment for Early Childhood Practice Promoting Security, Autonomy and Resilience in Young Children*. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.

Rolfe, S. 2008. "Children's Voices in the Shere of Decision-Making about their Best Interests: The Case of the Child Protection System." In *Young Children as Active Citizens: Principles, Policies and Pedagogies*, edited by G. MacNaughton, P. Hughes and K. Smith, 77–91. London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Saltmarch, S. 2010. "Lessons in Safety: Cultural Politics and Safety Education in a Multiracial, Multiethnic Early Childhood Education Setting." *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 11 (3): 288–297.

Sandseter, E. B. H. 2007a. "Categorising Risky Play – How can we Identify Risk-taking in Children's Play?." *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 15 (2): 237–252.

Sandseter, E. B. H. 2007b. "Risky Play among Four and Five-year-old Children in Preschool." In *Visions into Practice: Making Quality a Reality in the Lives of Young Children, conference proceedings*, edited by S. O'Brien, P. Cassidy and H. Shonfeld, 248–257. Dublin: Centre for early childhood development and education.

Skar, M., and E. Krogh. 2009. "Changes in Children's Nature-Based Experiences Near Home: From Spontaneous Play to Adult-controlled, Planned and Organised Activities." *Children's Geographies* 7 (3): 339–354.

Smith, K. 2004. *Reconceptualising Observation in the Early Childhood Curriculum*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia.

Smith, K. 2008. Uncovering the hierarchies of citizenship when implementing child participation in local government. Paper read at 18th EECERA Annual Conference, Reconsidering the Basics in Early Childhood Education, 3–6 September, at Stavanger, Norway.

Smith, K., K. Alexander, and G. MacNaughton. 2008. Respecting Children as Citizens in Local Government: Participation in Policies and Services Project. City of Port Phillip, Victoria.

Smith, K., and J. Smale. 2007. Listening to Children: Local Government Respecting Children's Rights to Citizenship. Paper Read at Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training (DECET) Conference "Foundations for Equal Opportunities for All in Early Childhood and Education", 18–20 October, at Brussels, Belgium.

Stephenson, A. 2003. "Physical Risk-taking: Dangerous or Endangered?." *Early Years* 23 (1): 35–43.

Sumsion, J. 2003. "Researching with Children: Lessons in Humility, Reciprocity, and Community." *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* 28 (1): 18–23.

Taylor, L. 2007. *Rethinking Professional Learning in Early Childhood*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia.

Taylor, L. 2010. "Action Research." In *Doing Early Childhood Research: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*, edited by G. MacNaughton, S. A. Rolfe and I. Siraj-Blatchford, 291–308. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.

Timperio, A., Crawford, D., Telford, A., and Salmon, J. 2004. "Perceptions about the Locl Neighbourhood and Walking and Cycling among Children." *Preventive Medicine* 38: 39–47.

Tovey, H. 2007. *Playing Outdoors: Spaces and Places, Risks and Challenge*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

UNESCO. 2006. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 2005 [cited 22 August 2006]. Available from www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm.

Usher, R., and R. Edwards. 1994. *Postmodernism and Education*. Chatham: Routledge.

Weedon, C. 1987. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Basil.

Whitzman, C., and Pike, L. 2007. *From Battery-reared to Free Range Children*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.

Woodhead, M., and D. Faulkner. 2008. "Subjects, Objects or Participants?." In *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*, edited by P. Christensen and A. James, 10–39. London and New York: Falmer Press.

Wyver, S., Tranter, P., Naughton, G., Little, H., Sandseter, E. B. H., and Bundy, A. 2010. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 11 (3): 263–277.